

DECEMBER 2018



COP24 & RULEBOOK

**NRC & ITS IMPACT ON INDIA'S
FOREIGN RELATIONS**

AGRARIAN DISTRESS & FARM LOAN WAIVERS

**INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY FOR REGIONAL
INTEGRATION**

IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

With the present shift in examination pattern of UPSC Civil Services Examination, 'General Studies – II and General Studies III' can safely be replaced with 'Current Affairs'. Moreover, following the recent trend of UPSC, almost all the questions are issue-based rather than news-based. Therefore, the right approach to preparation is to prepare issues, rather than just reading news.

Taking this into account, our website www.iasbaba.com will cover current affairs focusing more on 'issues' on a daily basis. This will help you pick up relevant news items of the day from various national dailies such as The Hindu, Indian Express, Business Standard, LiveMint, Business Line and other important Online sources. Over time, some of these news items will become important issues.

UPSC has the knack of picking such issues and asking general opinion based questions. Answering such questions will require general awareness and an overall understanding of the issue. Therefore, we intend to create the right understanding among aspirants – 'How to cover these issues?

This is the **43rd edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **DECEMBER 2018** which can be accessed from <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

VALUE ADDITIONS FROM IASBABA

- **Must Read and Connecting the dots.**
- **Also, we have introduced Prelim and mains focused snippets and Test Your Knowledge (Prelims MCQs based on daily current affairs) which shall guide you for better revision.**
- **'Must Read' section**, will give you important links to be read from exam perspective. This will make sure that, you don't miss out on any important news/editorials from various newspapers on daily basis.
- Under each news article, **'Connecting the dots'** facilitates your thinking to connect and ponder over various aspects of an issue. Basically, it helps you in understanding an issue from multi-dimensional view-point. You will understand its importance while giving Mains or Interview.

Must Read Articles: We have not included them in the magazine. Those following DNA on daily basis may follow it- <https://iasbaba.com/current-affairs-for-ias-upsc-exams/>

"Tell my mistakes to me not to others, because these are to be corrected by me, not by them."

CONTENTS

HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY	9
Sri Brihadeeswarar temple, Thanjavur	9
Pak. issues visas to visit Shiva temple	9
Vishwanath Precinct Development Project	10
Odisha celebrates its traditional lac doll marriage	10
Paika Rebellion	11
PM to open Buddhist site museum at Lalitgiri in Odisha	12
“Adopt a Heritage” programme	12
Symbol of a lost order: On George H.W. Bush	13
Tsunami kills 200+ people in Indonesia	14
POLITY/GOVERNANCE	16
The debate on Ethical aspect of Capital Punishment	16
SC bats for rights of death row convicts	17
Citizens to get option to opt out of Aadhaar	18
India gets first witness protection scheme	19
Shielding witnesses: on protection scheme	20
Centre amends Citizenship Rules, 2009	21
Unimplementable orders	22
Need for an effective ‘Legal Culture’ to maintain judicial independence	24
Independence of Judiciary	24
Implementing NOTA in the right spirit	27
Mekedatu project	28
President’s Rule in J&K	28
Andhra Pradesh, Telangana to have separate High Courts	29
States get greater say over coastal regions	29
SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE PROGRAMMES	32
‘No Road No Vote Central Committee’ (NRNCC)	32
SNEHA Suicide Prevention Centre	32
Disabilities Act	33
Lack of basic rights for the aged a concern: SC	35
Dalit struggle and sacrifice	36
Person in news	36
Transgender Persons Bill, 2018: Rights, revised	37
Why 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill is seriously flawed?	39

No rise in working women despite high literacy levels	41
Development - 'bone of contention' between govt and Maoists	42
WOMEN/CHILDREN ISSUE.....	43
Don't reveal identity of rape victims: SC.....	43
Jammu & Kashmir legislation to stop 'sextortion' of women.....	43
Child protection policy	44
Commercial surrogacy to be banned?	45
Anti-trafficking	46
Changes to POCSO Act	46
HEALTH ISSUE	48
Stunted, wasted: on Global Nutrition Report 2018	48
Providing health for all; About Universal Health Coverage	49
10 die after taking temple 'prasadam'	51
Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)	52
30 mn newborns cry out for help	52
GOVERNMENT SCHEMES	54
National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)	54
JICA project faces land acquisition issues	54
Land acquisition law challenged in court.....	56
An invitation to corruption? On Electoral Bonds.....	57
Avoid loan waivers	58
Ujjwala Yojana expansion: LPG scheme to cover poor people.....	60
Aspirational Districts Programme	60
Improving quality of life and achieving sustainable development goals (SDG).....	61
Draft National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2018.....	63
Ujjwala Sanitary Napkins initiative	63
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS	65
G20 summit and trilateral meetings JAI and RIC	65
China and the United States to halt additional tariffs	66
Qatar to quit OPEC.....	67
Gilets Jaunes movement/Yellow Vest movement	67
Sri Lanka political crisis	68
US confirms pull out from INF treaty	69
Russia successfully tests hypersonic missile	69
Controversial exit: U.S troops withdrawal from Syria	70
INDIA AND THE WORLD	73

Neighbourhood First: Foreign policy shift in 2018.....	73
India and Bhutan Ties.....	75
India's Bhutan 750 megawatt Mangdechhu hydropower project.....	75
India-Bhutan: golden jubilee of the diplomatic relations	75
India-Bhutan ties: ₹4,500-cr. assistance for Bhutan	76
Together in an uncertain world: On Indi-EU relations.....	76
Pak. issues visas to visit Shiva temple	79
NRC and its implications for India's ties with its neighbours.....	80
India-Maldives: \$1.4 bn aid package to Maldives.....	82
India-Maldives ties: Restoring the balance	82
Why India needs dedicated Techplomacy?	84
India and Pakistan: Row over ownership of the Jinnah House.....	85
India should strengthen its Indian Ocean outreach.....	86
Bangladesh-India relationship	87
Chabahar tidings: Benefits and Upcoming Challenges	88
India's foreign policy: For more regional integration	90
Bogibeel: A bridge across the Brahmaputra	92
ECONOMY.....	95
Make planning fashionable again	95
International Labour Organisation's Global Wage Report.....	97
Wage drag: on ILO's Global Wage Report.....	97
Questions being raised about the new GDP back series	99
China and the United States to halt additional tariffs	101
In a spirit of accommodation	102
A valid pause: on RBI holding rates.....	103
AgustaWestland helicopter deal bribery case	105
Resignation of RBI Governor and its impact on Indian Economy	106
MSMEs: Changing the Indian state from bully to ally.....	107
Simplification of the Goods and Services Tax	109
'Strategy for New India @75'	110
Analysis of NITI Aayog's 'Strategy for New India'	111
Centre seeks ₹41,000 crore more to recapitalise banks.....	114
NITI Aayog SDG index.....	116
State startup Ranking Report, 2018.....	118
Foreign fund outflows highest since 2008.....	119
Bimal Jalan to head six-member panel on RBI's economic capital framework	120
The safety net of the future	121
New FDI guidelines on e-commerce	122
AGRICULTURE	125

Job creation at the farmer's doorstep	125
Agriculture Export Policy: Policy to double agri exports.....	126
Are GM crops a failure?	127
Don't believe the anti-GMO campaign?	128
Impact of Global warming on Agriculture: Farming in a warming world	130
Need of the hour: structured and stable income support policy for farmers	132

ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION 135

Climate talks set to begin in Katowice, Poland.....	135
Cool it: Health and labour loss due to heatwave.....	135
'CO2 levels poised for record high'	137
Cutting through the smog: Air pollution in North India.....	138
Beach pollution	140
'Air pollution cause of 1 in 8 deaths'	141
Death in the air: On Air Pollution.....	142
NGT order: Karnataka must set aside ₹500 cr. for Bengaluru lakes	143
Bioplastics may not be a viable alternative to plastic.....	144
Groundwater extraction will invite a fee	145
Role of NGT over illegal extraction of groundwater	145
COP24 Katowice climate summit.....	146
COP24 Katowice conference and the rulebook.....	146
Norway witness a boom in electric cars	148
Ganga rejuvenation.....	149
Hefty fines if States fail to give plans to clean up rivers: NGT	151

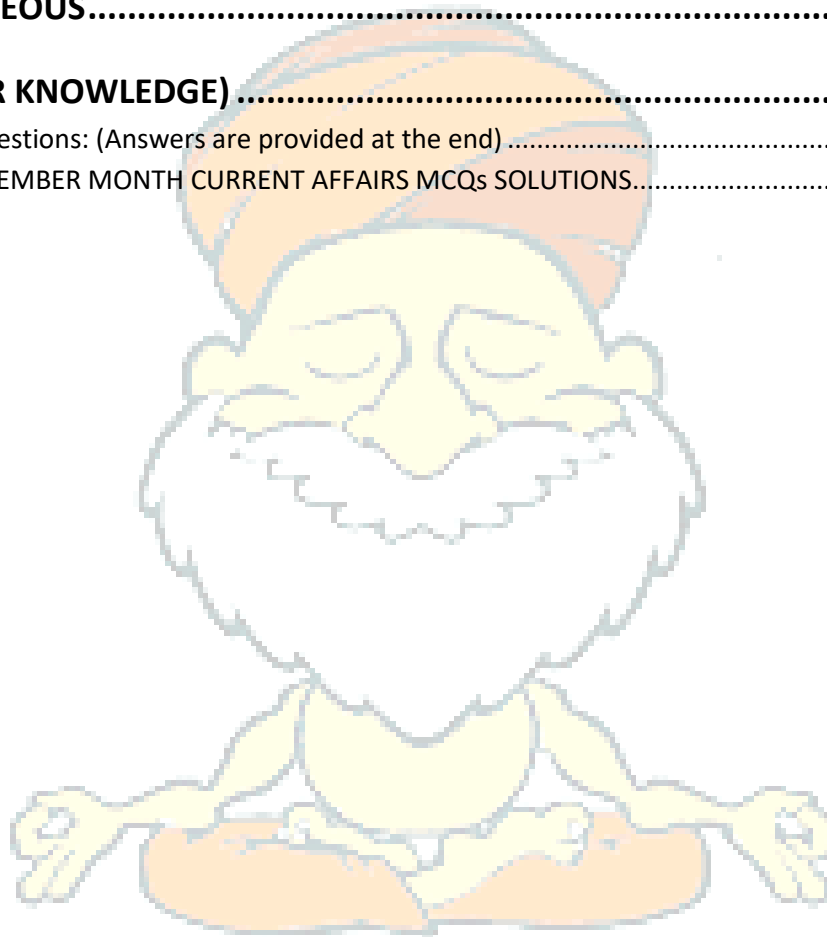
ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS..... 152

Bird sanctuary in news: Mangalajodi bird sanctuary.....	152
House sparrow conservation through artificial nests.....	152
SC directs Centre to declare 10 km area around national parks as eco-sensitive.....	152
Punganur cow	154
Migratory birds at Chilika face flu threat.....	154
Animal in news: Pangolin.....	155
Animal in news: Great Indian Bustard	155
Tiger Conservation	156
Animal in news: 260 leopards poached since 2015	157
Animal in news: olive ridley turtles.....	158
Animal in news: Ganges River Dolphins.....	159
Animal in news: Hangul.....	160
Role of technology in fighting poaching	161

INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY 162

On tackling chaotic traffic	162
Train 18 – India’s first engine-less train	163
Kaiga n-power unit creates world record	164
Bogibeel: A bridge across the Brahmaputra	164
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	167
Are GM crops a failure?	167
Don’t believe the anti-GMO campaign?	168
Technology as an agent of social change	170
ISRO’s 5.8-tonne GSAT-11 ready for launch	172
ISRO’s GSAT-7A to add muscle to Air Force	173
Gaganyaan: Indian into space by 2022	174
Water traces found on asteroid Bennu	175
The safety and ethics of gene editing	175
Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (or SSLV)	177
DEFENCE	179
Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (PCCoSC)	179
Grigorovich-class frigates in 3 years	179
India, Russia to boost joint production in defence	180
India gets submarine rescue system	180
Information Fusion Centre (IFC)	182
‘NSG must have its own air wing’	182
Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)	183
DISASTER MANAGEMENT	185
Global lessons from natural calamities: Disaster Risk Insurance	185
Tsunami kills 200+ people in Indonesia	187
INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY	188
Cow vigilantism: Cop and villager killed in Bulandshahr clashes	188
NSCN(K) faction asks Centre to revive ceasefire	189
All computers now under govt. watch	190
Allowing 10 different Central agencies to snoop challenges SC verdict on privacy	190
DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018	191
Need for strong Data Protection Law	193
Bid to prevent fake news	195
Privacy-Security trade-off: Requires reform of the surveillance framework	196
1984 anti-Sikh riots case and dealing with Genocide	198
India needs ‘individual acts of bravery’: Growing Vigilantism on Communal Lines	200

ETHICS/ESSAY	204
The debate on Ethical aspect of Capital Punishment	204
Is social media polarising society?	205
Technology as an agent of social change.....	208
For a more equitable future.....	209
PERSON IN NEWS.....	211
MISCELLANEOUS.....	214
(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)	219
Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)	219
2018 DECEMBER MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS.....	238



HISTORY/CULTURE/GEOGRAPHY

Sri Brihadeeswarar temple, Thanjavur

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Art and architecture; Conservation of Heritage and Monuments

In news:

- HC stays Art of Living event at Sri Brihadeeswarar temple in Thanjavur, a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- The iconic Great temple was over 1,000 years old and by allowing private parties to put up temporary structures within its premises, the authorities were showing no regard for heritage.

About Sri Brihadeeswarar temple

- It is a Hindu temple dedicated to Shiva located in Thanjavur in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.
- It is also known as Periya Kovil (Great Temple), RajaRajeswara Temple and Rajarajeswaram.
- It is one of the largest temples in India and is an example of Dravidian architecture during the Chola period.
- Built by emperor **Raja Raja Chola I** and completed in 1010 AD, the temple turned 1000 years old in 2010.
- The temple is part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site known as the “Great Living Chola Temples”, with the other two being the Brihadeeswarar Temple, Gangaikonda Cholapuram and Airavatesvara temple.

Pak. issues visas to visit Shiva temple

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours; International Relations

In news:

- Going ahead with a people-oriented diplomacy, Pakistan has issued a large number of visas for Indian pilgrims who are expected to visit the famed Shiva temple at Katas Raj Dham, near the city of Lahore.

Do you know?

- **Katas Raj** is a complex of ancient temples that is among the most important Hindu pilgrimage centres in Pakistan.

- The temple complex consisting of seven shrines, is located around the Katas lake, considered sacred by pilgrims of multiple faiths.
- Apart from the temples, the area is renowned for its Buddhist remains and architecture.
- Pakistan had earlier granted 3,800 visas for Sikh pilgrims visiting **Nankana Sahib Gurdwara** in Pakistan's Punjab for the celebration of the 549th birth anniversary of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak.
- It had also issued 220 visas for the **Shadani Darbar temple** in Sukkur where a centuries-old festival is continuing.
- Pakistan also formally inaugurated the project for **building the corridor** that will allow Sikh pilgrims to visit the holy temple at **Kartarpur** across the border.

The High Commission said Pakistan remains committed to the **bilateral understanding of 1974** with India that allows pilgrims to travel freely.

Vishwanath Precinct Development Project

Part of: GS Mains I: Conservation-restoration of cultural heritage

In news:

- Beautification plan destroys oldest neighbourhoods in Varanasi.
- Around the temple of Lord Vishwanath, destruction is taking place on a scale this ancient city hasn't witnessed in modern times.
- A strip of land — measuring 43,636 sq m — between the 18th century shrine and the River Ganga — is being cleared of all construction, many perhaps as old as the temple itself, so that pilgrims have an easier access through a wide and beautified corridor that has been planned under the Kashi Vishwanath Precinct Development Project.

Odisha celebrates its traditional lac doll marriage

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains – Art and Culture; Indian tradition and heritage; Folk dances

In news:

- **Odisha** celebrated its traditional **lac doll marriage** — the bride and the groom were beautiful dolls made of lac.
- The marriage was organised in conformity with the **Odia tradition** of 'jau kandhei bahaghara (lac doll marriage)'
- The aim of this unique marriage ceremony was to **promote traditional folk and tribal art forms** and create awareness against social evils like dowry and child marriage.

- The marriage procession included performers of **several folk dance forms** such as - **Bagha Nacha** (tiger dance), **Ghoda Nacha** (horse dance), **Sakhi Nacha**.

Paika Rebellion

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Indian History; significant events, personalities, issues

In news:

- PM Modi to issue Paika Rebellion Commemorative Stamp and Paika Rebellion Commemorative Coin

About Paika Rebellion

- The **Paika Rebellion**, also called the **Paika Bidroha**, was an **armed rebellion against the British East India Company's rule in Odisha in 1817**.
- The Paikas rose in rebellion under their leader **Bakshi Jagabandhu** and, projecting Jagannath as the symbol of Odia unity, the rebellion quickly spread across most of Odisha before being ruthlessly put down by the company's forces.
- The Paikas were the traditional militia of Odisha. They served as warriors and were charged with policing functions during peacetime. The Paikas were organised into three ranks distinguished by their occupation and the weapons they wielded. These were the Paharis, the bearers of shields and the khanda sword, the Banuas who led distant expeditions and used matchlocks and the Dhenkiyas - archers who also performed different duties in Odisha armies.
- With the conquest of Odisha by the East India Company in 1803 and the dethronement of the Raja of Khurda began the fall of the power and prestige of the Paikas.

Causes of Rebellion:

- The Paika rebellion had several social, economic and political reasons.
- The Paiks were alienated by the British regime, who took over the hereditary rent-free lands granted to them after the conquest of Khurda.
- They were also subjected to extortion and oppression at the hands of the company government and its servants.
- Had conciliatory measures been adopted towards the Paiks from the beginning, it is possible that they would have become a source of strength to the company rule in Odisha.
- The extortionist land revenue policy of the company affected the peasants and the zamindars alike.
- A source of much consternation for the common people was the rise in prices of salt due to taxes imposed on it by the new government.

- The company also abolished the system of cowrie currency that had existed in Odisha prior to its conquest and required that taxes be paid in silver. This caused much popular hardship and discontent.
- In 1804 the Raja of Khurda planned a rebellion against the British in alliance with the Paiks, but the plot was soon discovered and the Raja's territory was confiscated.

Do you know?

- The 'Paika Bidroha' (Paika rebellion) of 1817 will find a place in the history books as 'the First War of Independence' from the next academic session. Till now the Revolt of 1857 was called the First war of Independence.

PM to open Buddhist site museum at Lalitgiri in Odisha

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Indian Heritage and Culture, History

In news:

- **Lalitgiri** – considered one of the earliest Buddhist settlements in Odisha
- After excavations, ancient seals and inscriptions, relic caskets, stone pathways were found, which has been converted into a museum.
- Excavations at Lalitgiri have yielded the remains of four monasteries, showing cultural continuity from the post-Mauryan period till the 13th century CE.

“Adopt a Heritage” programme

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and II – Conservation of India's Heritage and Culture; Government schemes and programmes

About the Adopt a Heritage programme:

- The scheme is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and State/UTs Governments.
- It was launched in September 2017 on World Tourism Day by President Ram Nath Kovind.
- The Project aims to develop synergy among all partners to effectively promote “responsible tourism”.
- It aims to involve public sector companies, private sector companies and corporate citizens/individuals to take up the responsibility for making our heritage and tourism

more sustainable through development, operation and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities at ASI/ State heritage sites and other important tourist sites in India.

In news:

- Soon, tourists visiting Amer Fort (Rajasthan), Kaziranga (Assam), Colva Beach (Goa), Kumarakom (Kerala) and Mahabodhi temple (Bihar) will be able to avail themselves of an audio guide through a mobile application.
- Ministry of Culture signed an agreement with a private entity for the initiative (under “Adopt a Heritage” programme).
- The Ministry also awarded a Letter of Intent to seven agencies under its “Adopt a Heritage” programme which allows public and private sector companies to operate, maintain and develop amenities at heritage sites.
- These iconic tourist attractions include monuments of Khajuraho (Madhya Pradesh) and Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu), awarded to Dalmia Bharat Private Limited, as well as Bhimbetka rock shelters (Madhya Pradesh) and Aalampur Temple (Telangana), among others.
- Earlier this year, the Dalmia group was awarded an agreement to develop and maintain Red Fort in Delhi for a period of five years.

WORLD HISTORY/INTERNATIONAL

TOPIC

General studies 1&2

- *World History*
- *Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests*

Symbol of a lost order: On George H.W. Bush

Introduction

The passing of George H.W. Bush, the 41st President of the United States, from 1989 to 1993, is an occasion to contextualise the current turbulence in the world, especially in liberal democracies.

America's pursuit of global dominance

- It was his (H. W. Bush's) predecessor, Ronald Reagan, who gave a rhetorical flourish to America's pursuit of global dominance in the 1980s with his depiction of the Soviet Union as the “evil empire”, and his call to “break that wall”.

- H.W Bush was his Vice President and then successor. One phrase he coined, a “new world order”, turned out to be defining, initially for its triumph, and now for its decline.

Do you know; what is new World Order?

- It refers to any period in history which experiences a dramatic change in balance of power and global governance.
- Such changes occurred after World War II with the formation of United Nations and such other events.

New World order from 1989 onwards

There was a formation of a New World Order from 1989 onwards with respect to changes in international world. Those changes were -

- Cause of breakup of USSR
- Effect of US hegemony
- First Gulf War
- Fall of Berlin Wall

Conclusion

- Bush lived to see the unravelling of the world order and the concomitant turmoil. It is no coincidence that nationalists such as President Donald Trump define their politics as a rejection of the order that led their societies for the “last 30 years”.
- The new Trade war and rise of multi-polar world marks the decline of 1980’s New World Order and beginning of yet another.

Connecting the dots:

- A New World Order which was established in late 1980s is now declining. Do you agree?

(Note: For more on US hegemony, read the Third Chapter from Class XII NCERT: Contemporary world politics)

Tsunami kills 200+ people in Indonesia

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and III – Geography; Natural Hazards; Disaster and disaster management

In news:

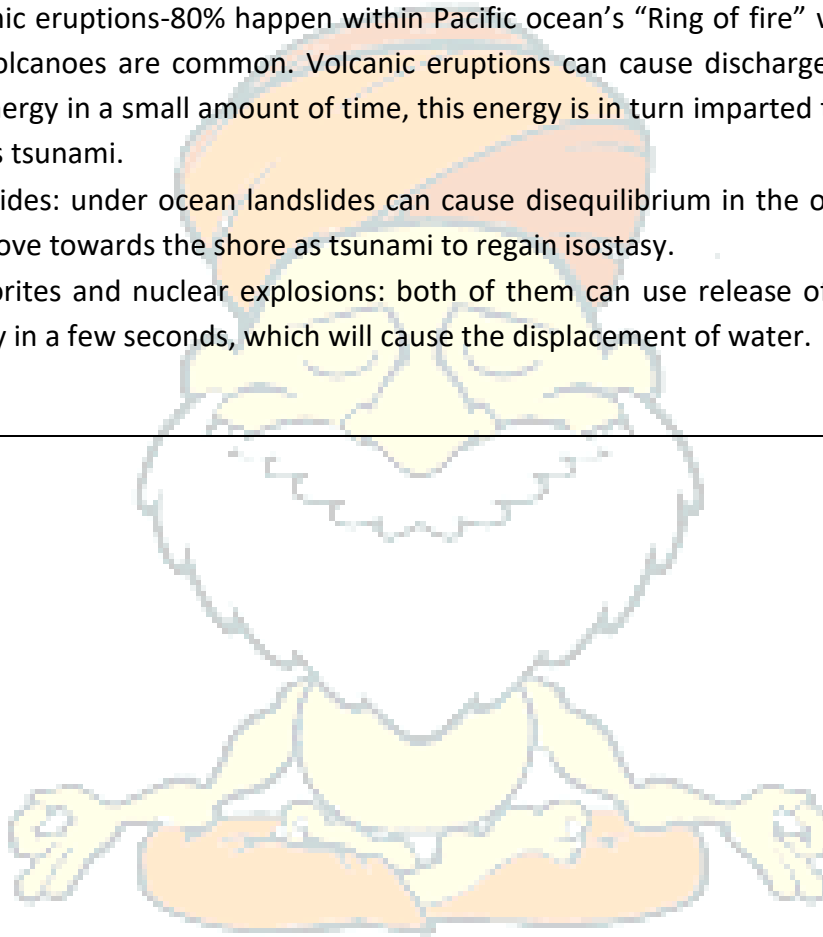
- Tsunami struck the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra following a underwater landslide, believed to have been caused by the erupting Anak Krakatoa volcano.
- Anak Krakatoa, an active volcano roughly halfway between Java and Sumatra, has been spewing ash and lava for months.

Important Value Additions

Tsunami is harbor wave which consists of a series of seismic waves which rise as high as 10m or more. They move inland, several hundred miles causing untold disaster.

Factors that lead to tsunami-genesis:

- Earthquakes: Earthquake occurring beneath the sea-when thrust faults associated with convergent or destructive plate boundaries move abruptly, resulting in vertical water displacement.
- Volcanic eruptions-80% happen within Pacific ocean's "Ring of fire" where earthquakes and volcanoes are common. Volcanic eruptions can cause discharge of large amounts not energy in a small amount of time, this energy is in turn imparted to the water which causes tsunami.
- Landslides: under ocean landslides can cause disequilibrium in the ocean water, which will move towards the shore as tsunami to regain isostasy.
- Meteorites and nuclear explosions: both of them can use release of huge amounts of energy in a few seconds, which will cause the displacement of water.



POLITY/GOVERNANCE

NATIONAL/ETHICS

TOPIC

General studies 2, 4 and Essay

- *Constitution and Justice delivery system in India*
- *Ethical aspects of capital punishment*
- *Essay*

The debate on Ethical aspect of Capital Punishment

Introduction

- In questioning the merits of retaining the death penalty, Justice Kurian Joseph has re-ignited a debate that is important and requires serious thought.
- Justice Joseph holds a view that the time has come to review the death penalty, its purpose and practice.
- It is impossible to ignore the ethical and practical dimensions of the debate in a world that is increasingly questioning the wisdom of capital punishment.

Constitutionality of death penalty

- The unconstitutionality of death penalty was raised in the case of **Bachhan Singh v State of Punjab**. The Supreme Court in that case said that **death penalty is constitutional but should be given only in the rarest of rare cases**.

Questions raised on decision making in capital punishment

- The moot question raised here is the **decision-making process of a Judge** in a case of capital punishment as the **life of the person depends on the reasons articulated by such honorable Justices**.
- In this aspect, concerns over **judge-centric variations of arguments** have been raised in the past.
- The Supreme Court itself spoke of the **“extremely uneven application” of the norms** laid down in Bachhan Singh.
- Even **the Law Commission, in its Report in 2015**, said that the constitutional regulation of capital punishment attempted in that case has failed to prevent death sentences from being **“arbitrarily and freakishly imposed”**.
- Justice Joseph has highlighted Law Commission’s **concern that there exists no principled method to remove such arbitrariness from capital sentencing**.

Public outrage and capital punishment

- In recent times, **public outrage**, the need for deterrence, and the clamor for a befitting punishment to render substantial justice have dominated the general discourse.
- In **cases of heinous crimes** (eg: Nirbhaya case), it becomes **less important for the public to understand the reason of punishment than the imposition of punishment** itself.
- Thus, whether the punishment has been given **to reform the person or to punish the person or for retribution** becomes less significant.
- The **quantum of punishment** becomes more important (whether the punishment is capital punishment or life imprisonment) as **only the quantum of it seems to serve ends of justice in the eyes of the public at large.**

Checks and balances to avoid arbitrariness

- The Supreme Court has narrowed the scope of giving capital punishment by laying down **the norms of rarest of rare cases in Bachhan Singh v State of Punjab.**
- **Reviews and petitions** are routinely admitted by the Supreme Court and Review Petitions are heard **in open Courts on capital punishments.**
- **The treatment of prisoners serving death sentence has been humanized**, and there is scope for **judicial review even against** a sovereign decision **denying clemency.**

Conclusion

- Thus, the question of capital punishment needs to be debated away from the general public discourse and on a higher moral plane where there shall be no death penalty in law, regardless of the nature, circumstances and consequences of an offence.
- The views of the Law Commission and Justice Joseph on abolishing capital punishment should not be ignored and must be debated.

Connecting the dots:

- It is not the just the execution but the method that questions capital punishment. Comment.

SC bats for rights of death row convicts

Part of: GS Mains II – Social issue; Fundamental Rights

In news:

According to a recent judgment by the Supreme Court –

- **Death row convicts should be allowed to meet with family, friends, lawyers and mental health professionals** for a “reasonable period of time with reasonable frequency” like any other prisoner.
- It is part of their fundamental right to **dignity and equality**.
- The court said prison manuals or laws depriving condemned prisoners of their basic rights should be nixed.
- The court banked on generalities, referring to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and reiterated that **right to life includes the “right to live with human dignity.”**

Citizens to get option to opt out of Aadhaar

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Right to Privacy; Security issues

In news:

- Government is finalising a proposal to amend the Aadhaar Act to give all citizens an **option to withdraw their Aadhaar number**, including biometrics and the data.
- This follows the **Supreme Court judgment in September** that upheld the validity of Aadhaar.
- In line with the court order, the proposal also seeks to **appoint an adjudicating officer** to decide whether a person’s Aadhaar-related data need to be disclosed in the interest of national security.

Key outcomes of Supreme Court Judgment

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court had **struck down Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act** that allows private entities to use the unique number for verification.
- The Bench also declared that seeking to link it with bank accounts and SIM cards was unconstitutional.
- The court had also **struck down Section 33(2)**, which allowed disclosure of Aadhaar information for national security reasons on the orders of an officer not below Joint Secretary.
- It had said an officer above Joint Secretary should consult a judicial officer and together take a call.

India gets first witness protection scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Polity and Governance; Government policies and schemes

In news:

- The Supreme Court has put in place a witness protection regime in the country.
- The scheme aims to promote law enforcement by facilitating the protection of persons who are involved directly or indirectly in providing assistance to criminal law enforcement agencies and overall administration of Justice.
- SC noted that one of the main reasons for witnesses turning hostile was that they were not given security by the State.

Do you know?

- Under the witness protection scheme – witness protection may be as simple as providing a police escort to the witness up to the courtroom or, in more complex cases involving an organised criminal group, taking extraordinary measures such as offering temporary residence in a safe house, giving a new identity, and relocation to an undisclosed place.
- The issue of witness protection scheme had cropped up earlier when the top court was hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking protection for witnesses in rape cases involving self-styled preacher Asaram Bapu.

Need for such scheme

- Jeremy Bentham has said that *“Witnesses are the eyes and ears of justice.”*
- In a society governed by a Rule of Law, it is imperative to ensure that investigation, prosecution and trial of criminal offences is not prejudiced because of threats or intimidation to witnesses.
- In cases involving influential people, witnesses turn hostile because of threat to life and property. Witnesses find that there is no legal obligation by the state for extending any security.

As such witnesses should be entitled to the following rights:

1. Right to give evidence anonymously
2. Right to protection from intimidation and harm
3. Right to be treated with dignity and compassion and respect of privacy
4. Right to information of the status of the investigation and prosecution of the crime
5. Right to secure waiting place while at Court proceedings
6. Right to transportation and lodging arrangements

Shielding witnesses: on protection scheme

Introduction

- The Supreme Court of India has ordered all states and union territories to implement the Draft Witness Protection Scheme, 2018 framed by the Centre in consultation with the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA).
- The scheme intends to protect witnesses in criminal trials from threat, intimidation and undue influence. Witnesses turning hostile are a major reason for most acquittals in criminal cases.
- In the present system, there is little incentive for witnesses to turn up in court and testify against criminals. Threats to their lives, hostility and harassment while attending courts makes extremely difficult for the witness to give evidence in Court of law.
- Moreover, the need to protect witnesses has been emphasised by Law Commission reports and court judgments for years.

About Scheme

- It broadly classifies witnesses in need of protection into three types based on the threat assessment.
- A witness protection order will be passed by a competent authority.
- The scheme is to be funded by budgetary support from State governments and donations. This is at variance with the Law Commission's recommendation in 2006 that the Centre and the States share the cost equally.

Basic Features & Challenges

- The Basic features such as in camera trial, proximate physical protection and removing identity details of testimony and references to witnesses in the records can be easily implemented.
- However, advanced forms of identity protection: giving witnesses a new identity, address and even 'parentage', with matching documents will be the real challenge in terms of witness protection.
- The implementation of the Witness Protection Scheme will face logistical and financial challenge which both the Centre and states need to fix together.

Aims and Objectives of Draft Witness Protection Scheme, 2018

- The ability of a witness to give testimony in a judicial setting or to cooperate with law enforcement and investigations without fear of intimidation or reprisal is essential in maintaining the rule of law.

- The objective of this Scheme is to ensure that the investigation, prosecution and trial of criminal offences is not prejudiced because witnesses are intimidated or frightened to give evidence without protection from violent or other criminal recrimination.
- It aims to promote law enforcement by facilitating the protection of persons who are involved directly or indirectly in providing assistance to criminal law enforcement agencies and overall administration of Justice.
- Witnesses need to be given the confidence to come forward to assist law enforcement and Judicial Authorities with full assurance of safety.
- It is aimed to identify series of measures that may be adopted to safeguard witnesses and their family members from intimidation and threats against their lives, reputation and property.
- **As such witnesses should be entitled to the following rights:**
 - Right to give evidence anonymously
 - Right to protection from intimidation and harm
 - Right to be treated with dignity and compassion and respect of privacy
 - Right to information of the status of the investigation and prosecution of the crime.
 - Right to secure waiting place while at Court proceedings
 - Right to transportation and lodging arrangements.

Steps taken to protect witnesses and way forward

- There have been ad hoc steps such as those outlined for concealing the identity of witnesses in anti-terrorism and child-centric laws.
- A few dedicated courtrooms for vulnerable witnesses, mostly child victims, are also functional. However, expanding such facilities and implementing a comprehensive and credible witness protection programme will pose logistical and financial challenges.
- It will be well worth the effort, as the scheme could help strengthen India's tottering criminal justice system.

Connecting the dots:

- A robust witness protection scheme will strengthen the criminal justice system.
Comment.

[Centre amends Citizenship Rules, 2009](#)

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Indian Polity; Internal Security and Security issues

In news:

- Union Home Ministry has notified amendments to the **Citizenship Rules, 2009**.

What are those amendments?

- Now Citizenship Rules to include a **separate column** in the citizenship form for applicants belonging to **six minority communities** from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh.
- In other words, a separate entry in the form will ask the applicant: “Do you belong to one of the minority communities from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan — Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Parsis, Sikhs and Christians?”
- The Centre has made the changes under **Section 18 of the Citizenship Act, 1955**.

Do you know?

- A parliamentary committee has been examining the **Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016**, that **proposes citizenship to above six persecuted minorities** from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh, who came to India before 2014.
- However, the above proposed provision has run into strong resistance in the BJP-ruled Assam because it will **pave the way for giving citizenship mostly to illegal Hindu migrants** from Bangladesh in Assam, who came after March 1971, in **violation of the 1985 Assam Accord**.

Unimplementable orders

About:

The below article deals with some of the recent Supreme Court verdicts and orders, which seem too tough to be implemented and may remain just on papers

1. Supreme verdict on the entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala temple.
2. The order fixing timings for bursting of firecrackers during Diwali.
3. Speedy disposal of pending cases against legislators and lawmakers (former and sitting).
4. Witness Protection Scheme of 2018.

Among above, this article focuses more on recent orders provided in (3) and (4)

Speedy disposal of pending cases against legislators and lawmakers

- In its verdict on speedy disposal of pending cases against legislators and lawmakers, the court has asked each High Court to designate as many sessions and magistrate courts in the concerned States to try criminal cases against sitting and former MPs and MLAs.
- The government informed the court that there are 4,122 criminal cases pending against MPs and MLAs in 440 districts across the country.

Why the verdict on speedy disposal of criminal cases pending against MPs and MLAs will remain failure or on papers?

- **One, because a case takes time to decide.** The cumbersome Code of Criminal Procedure must be followed. Charges must be framed, witnesses must be examined and cross-examined, documents must be adduced in evidence, and arguments must be heard. Only then can a well-considered judgment be delivered. Moreover, the witnesses and even the investigating authorities may turn hostile.
- **Two, overburdened courts.** The existing number of courts in India are already overburdened with 33 million pending cases. To implement SC order, means a section of them should give up dealing with the cases before them and only deal with these cases relating to MPs and MLAs. Then their cases will have to be handed over to other judges, who are similarly overburdened.

Why Witness Protection Scheme of 2018 will be an unimplementable order?

- Nowadays it is nearly impossible to get independent witnesses in criminal cases. If someone sees a crime, the tendency is to avoid getting into trouble by deposing about it to the police or the court, which may invite reprisal/retaliation by the party against whom the witness gives evidence. Therefore, the scheme proposes giving witnesses a new identity.
- There are over 28.4 million cases pending in subordinate courts in India, of which perhaps 70% are criminal cases. If on an average there are half a dozen witnesses in each case, this may require change of identity for millions of people. (which may not be feasible, financially or logistically)
- The scheme also mentions providing police escort to the courtroom, temporary safe houses and relocation of the witness. However, it is not so simple to relocate an individual whose job requires him to be at a fixed location. For how long and to how many will the police provide protection?

Therefore, the above proposals appear unrealistic. Unless orders factor in these considerations, they may go the way of the Doshipura graveyard.

Do you know?

- In 1981, the Supreme Court passed an order directing the shifting of some graves in Doshipura in Varanasi from a Muslim graveyard, but the order is yet to be implemented.

Connecting the dots:

- The Supreme Court order on Witness Protection Scheme of 2018 seems too tough to be implemented and may remain just on papers. Do you agree?
- The result of never-ending pending cases is a crisis of faith in the legal system. Do you agree? Discuss.

Need for an effective 'Legal Culture' to maintain judicial independence

Introduction:

- The below article deals with assessment of **whether Indian Judiciary is really free from political influence?**
- According to the author there are series of instances where judges outright favour particular political affiliations.
- Therefore, the author stresses for the **need for an effective 'Legal Culture'** to maintain Judicial independence (free from political influence).
- Once a Judge takes an oath to uphold the Constitution, his/her past connections or inclinations, should not weigh in their decision making process.

Independence of Judiciary

We know that our Constitution is designed to ensure that **judges can do their work "independent" of government influence:**

- fixed salaries
- security of tenure and
- an appointments process that is insulated from executive control

Independence, however, means something more. It also requires that judges perform their constitutional role **independent of personal biases, political and moral beliefs, and partisan ideologies.**

While adjudicating, a judge should not turn into a politician.

At all times, he/she is **bound to maintain primary fidelity to the law and the Constitution:**

- to the text of legal instruments,
- to the canons of legal interpretation, and
- to the body of judicial precedent that holds the field

– These are crucial checks upon judicial power.

'Role of Legal Culture'

Judicial independence depends on judges recognising that law and adjudication must remain autonomous from partisan politics in important ways.

Judges need to be insulated from any external control; they should be accountable only to themselves, and their own sense of the limits of their constitutional role.

However, accountability only to oneself is a very weak form of constraint. The temptation to overstep is always immense, more so when such immense power has been placed in one's own hands.

Therefore, it is here that "legal culture" plays a critical role in establishing judicial accountability.

- A Legal Culture – which has a set of unwritten, but clearly established, norms that determine what is or is not acceptable in the process of adjudication.
- A Legal Culture – which has not sprung up out of a vacuum, but created and nurtured by judges, lawyers, legal academics, the press and the citizenry.

The roots of the crisis and where the legal culture got exactly failed?

Post Independence

- During the first 17 years of India's republic, by and large, the Supreme Court reposed faith in Parliament. Most MPs were freedom fighters, and the court trusted them.
- But as amendment after amendment was used to undo the core values of the Constitution, the court had to apply the brakes in 1967.
- The court refused to trust elected representatives with the amendment process, and ruled that fundamental rights could not be curtailed except by the Constituent Assembly.

1980s

- In the 1980s, there was a **rapid expansion of judicial power**. Supreme Court began to dispense with procedural checks upon its power.
- Some of these steps were important and necessary, such as allowing "public interest" cases to be filed on behalf of those who were unable to access the courts.
- However, other steps were double-edged swords, such as diluting the evidentiary standards required to prove disputed facts, and vastly expanding the courts' discretion to shape and fashion remedies. (for complete justice)

The 1980s Supreme Court was highly praised for this. **Judges were painted as crusading heroes.**

1990s and 2000s

- **By the 1990s and the 2000s**, under the misleading label of "**judicial activism**", the court was beginning to **engage in a host of administrative activities**, from managing welfare schemes to "beautifying cities" to overseeing anti-corruption initiatives.
- The constitutional court had become a **Supreme 'Administrative' Court**.

- This, too, was justified on the altar of necessity: politicians were corrupt, bureaucrats were inefficient, and things didn't move. Someone had to come and clean it all up.
- **Judiciary was viewed as an infallible solution to all social problems.**
- In other words, the **Judiciary was considered to be flawless**, incapable of making mistakes or being wrong.

Is Indian Judiciary really flawless? Is it free from political influence?

Some of the judgments show that Judiciary has failed to maintain its legal culture and has many times sided with government's agenda –

- Recent Meghalaya High Court Judge Justice S.R. Sen's ill-advised and ill-judged remarks (had some sort of biasness towards current government or political posturing)
- A judge, who wrapped up in patriotic zeal, did not stop to think whether he is authorised to compel all cinema halls in the nation to play the national anthem.
- Another did not consider whether he has the power to mandate that every student in Tamil Nadu must study the Tirukkural.
- Judiciary taking over the entire process of preparing a National Register of Citizens (NRC).
- The record of the courts in protecting civil rights has also been a mixed one. In far too many cases, courts have tended to defer to the executive and the government.

Courts simply missed the thought whether the Constitution ever contemplated a task such as this to fall within the judicial domain.

Conclusion

Above judgments like the national anthem order, the Tirukkural order, the NRC process, and Justice Sen's recent foray – raise an altogether more frightening prospect: that of an **"executive court"**.

****An "executive court"** – is a court whose moral and political compass finds itself in alignment with the government of the day, and one that has no compunctions in navigating only according to that compass.

Instead of checking and limiting government power, an executive court finds itself marching in lockstep with the government, and being used to set the seal of its prestige upon more controversial parts of the government's agenda.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think Indian Judiciary is really free from political influence? Is it really independent and flawless? Critically analyze.
- "Legal culture" plays a critical role in establishing judicial accountability and judicial independence. Substantiate.

Implementing NOTA in the right spirit

Important pointers:

2013 People's Union for Civil Liberties v. Union Of India Case:

- Supreme Court ruled that a None of the Above (NOTA) option “may be provided in EVMs” so that voters are able to exercise their “right not to vote while maintaining their right of secrecy”.

Excerpt of SC judgment – (Understanding the spirit of the judgment)

- *“For democracy to survive, it is essential that the best available men should be chosen as people’s representatives... This can be best achieved through men of high moral and ethical values, who win the elections on a positive vote. Thus, in a vibrant democracy, the voter must be given an opportunity to choose NOTA..., which will... compel the political parties to nominate a sound candidate.*
- *By providing NOTA button in the EVMs, it will accelerate effective political participation and the voters will be empowered.*
- *When large numbers of people are expressing their disapproval with the candidates, the political parties will realize and accept the will of the people. There will be a systemic change and the political parties will field candidates who are known for their integrity.*

What happens if a situation arose where the number of NOTA votes exceeded the number of votes polled by any of the candidates?

- According to the Election Commission of India (ECI), the candidate with the highest number of votes would be declared winner.
- This was in accordance with Rule 64 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961.

Concerns:

- The above provision made the NOTA option almost redundant.
- In other words, a NOTA vote would not have any impact on the election result and the spirit of judgment has failed.
- Candidates have begun campaigning against NOTA, telling voters that choosing the option meant wasting a vote.

The way ahead:

Democracy is all about choice. This choice can be better expressed if voters are given an opportunity to verbalize themselves unreservedly and by imposing least restrictions on their ability to make such a choice.

If NOTA has received highest number of valid votes, then the said election for that particular seat should be countermanded and fresh elections should be held for such post.

There should also be a provision that same candidates should not contest the new election, because the result could be the same as earlier.

All such contesting candidates who secured less votes than NOTA should not be eligible to re-file the nomination/contest the re-election.

Such provisions can compell political parties to nominate sound candidates and are forced to accept the will of the people.

Mekedatu project

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Centre State Relations; Inter-State Relations; Inter-state river dispute

In news:

- Tamil Nadu has expressed its concern over the unilateral approval granted by the Central Water Commission (CWC) to Karnataka to proceed with the preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) for the **Mekedatu project**.
- TN alleges that the approval is in violation of the decisions of the tribunal and apex court for **equitable apportionment of Cauvery water**. (therefore, contempt of court)
- According to TN, the proposed construction of any new dam by Karnataka would result in impounding the flows in the intermediate catchment below KRS and Kabini reservoirs and Billigundulu, which is located in the common border of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

President's Rule in J&K

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian Polity; Centre and State Relations

- We know that J&K has separate Constitution.
- According to its Constitution, Governor's rule is imposed under Section 92 for six months after an approval by the President.
- Under the Governor's rule, the State Assembly is either kept in suspended animation or dissolved. If it is not possible to restore the state machinery before the expiry of the six-month period, the provision is extended.
- In current case since the Assembly was not dissolved within six months, President's rule under Article 356 is extended to the State.

Do you know?

- In all states of India, the state government's failure results in President's rule. Only in J&K Governor's rule is imposed for six months, but only after the consent of the President of India.
- Matters related to defence, foreign relations, communication and finance of Jammu and Kashmir are under jurisdiction of the Constitution of India.

Andhra Pradesh, Telangana to have separate High Courts

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian Polity; High Courts

In news:

- President Ram Nath Kovind ordered the separation of the “common” Hyderabad High Court into the separate High Courts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
- Both will function separately from January 1, 2019.

Do you know?

- **Article 214** of the Constitution **provides for a High Court for each State.**
- The principal seat of the Andhra Pradesh High Court is Amaravati, the capital of the State.
- The High Court in Hyderabad will function separately as the High Court of the State of Telangana.
- The Constitution of India provides for a high court for each state, but the **Seventh Amendment Act of 1956** authorized the Parliament to establish a common high court for two or more states or for two or more states and a union territory.
- The territorial jurisdiction of a high court is co-terminus with the territory of a state. Similarly, the territorial jurisdiction of a common high court is co-terminus with the territories of the concerned states and union territory.

States get greater say over coastal regions

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian Polity; Centre-State Relations

In news:

- Union Cabinet approved the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification 2018 (after comprehensive review of the provisions of the CRZ Notification, 2011).

- The 2018 notification is aimed at streamlining of Coastal Regulation Zone clearances, enhancing activities in the coastal regions and promoting economic growth while keeping in mind conservation principles of coastal regions.

According to the new notification –

- Only such projects which are located in CRZ-I (Ecologically Sensitive Areas) and IV (area covered between Low Tide Line and 12 nautical miles seaward) will require the necessary clearance from the Union Ministry.
- The powers for clearances with respect to CRZ-II (the areas that have been developed up to or close to the shoreline) and III (areas that are relatively undisturbed) have been delegated to the State level.
- The construction norms on Floor Space Index (FSI) or the Floor Area Ratio (FAR), which was frozen at 1991 Development Control Regulation (DCR) levels, have been relaxed and will now be based on laws which are in vogue.
- The new notification also relaxed the No Development Zone (NDZ) criteria.
- Densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2,161 per square kilometre, falling under CRZ-III A, now have NDZ of 50 metres from the High Tide Line (HTL) as against 200 metres stipulated in the CRZ Notification, 2011.
- For islands close to the mainland coast and for all backwater islands in the mainland, the new norms stipulate an NDZ of 20 metres.
- The notification also permits temporary tourism facilities such as shacks, toilet blocks, change rooms, drinking water facilities etc. in beaches. Such temporary tourism facilities are also now permissible in NDZ of the CRZ-III areas.
- The new notification may “boost tourism in terms of more activities, more infrastructure and more opportunities and will certainly go a long way in creating employment opportunities in various aspects of tourism”.
- Also, in order to address pollution in coastal areas, setting up of treatment facilities have been made permissible activities in CRZ—I B area subject to necessary safeguards.
- Defence and strategic projects have been accorded necessary dispensation, the order said.

Sea change

Differences between CRZ Notification 2011 and the CRZ Notification, 2018

Floor area ratio: For CRZ II (urban areas) according to the 2011 rules, the Floor Area Ratio was frozen as per 1991 Development Control Regulation levels. Now, it has been de-frozen

No Development Zone: A No Development Zone (NDZ) of 20 m is stipulated for all islands close to the mainland

CRZ clearances: Only projects/activities located in the CRZ-I (ecologically sensitive areas) and CRZ IV (water area) shall be cleared by the Ministry of Environment

Kovalam beach near Thiruvananthapuram.
■ C. RATHEESH KUMAR

Tourism: Temporary facilities like shacks, toilets & change rooms have been permitted on beaches, but at 10m from the high tide line

Ecologically sensitive areas: All such areas have been accorded importance in the new draft, with norms on their conservation

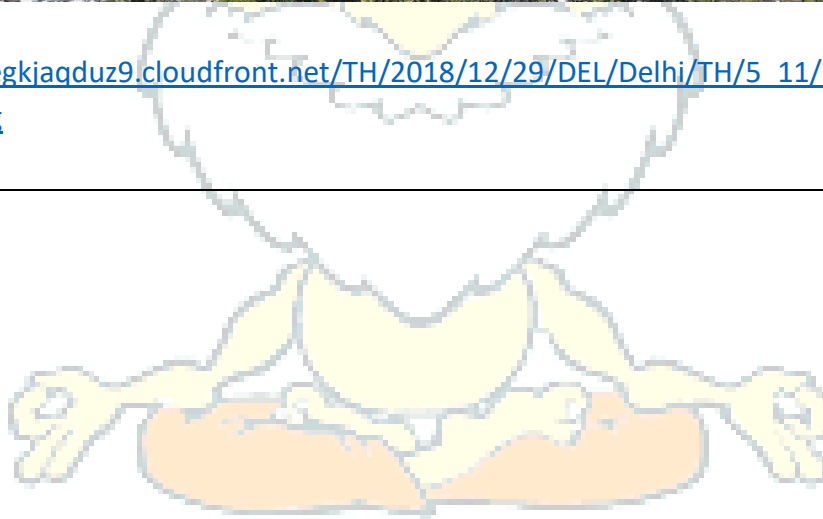
Delegation of powers: The authority for clearances with respect to CRZ-II and III (rural areas) have been delegated to the States with necessary guidance

CRZ limit: Under the 2011 rules, CRZ applied to the area between High Tide Line to 200 m or width of the creek, whichever is less. Now, the CRZ limit is reduced to 50 m from the High Tide Line



Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/29/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_11/db99b0f5_2625945_101_mr.jpg



SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE PROGRAMMES

'No Road No Vote Central Committee' (NRNCC)

Part of: GS Mains – Role of Pressure Groups

In news:

- More than 4,000 people in 24 remote villages in Arunachal Pradesh would get a proper road connectivity for the first time.
- Thanks to 'No Road No Vote Central Committee' (NRNCC) – an organisation which is spearheading the campaign for the construction of the road.
- Not a single vote was cast at five of the nine polling stations
- After the locals threatened to launch a civil disobedience movement to surrender their voter identity cards to the State government if their demand was not met, Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister assured to look into the grievances.
- The road has been sanctioned under the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Sadak Yojana (PMGSY).

SNEHA Suicide Prevention Centre

Part of: GS Mains – Role of NGOs or Civil Society Organizations

In news:

- Chennai-based Sneha, Tamil Nadu's sole suicide prevention centre, has helped over one lakh callers contemplating suicide to court life once again.
- Sneha's suicide-prevention hotline (8115050) has received over one lakh calls since its inception in 1986.

Suicide status in India

- There has been a rapid escalation in the suicide rate in the country, particularly among people of the 15-29 age group, which is considered one of the most productive periods in one's life.
- According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), one in three suicides committed in India is by a youth. While a suicide was attempted every 7.6 minutes in 1989, today it occurs every five minutes.
- Although more women than men attempt suicide, more men than women actually succumb. In India, men account for 58 per cent of the suicides.

With a suicide being committed every fifth minute and about 15 attempts being made for every suicide committed, India faces a major crisis.

Chennai-based SNEHA suicide prevention centre has been flooded with calls and emails from persons seeking help, not just from Tamil Nadu but from all over the country.

Disabilities Act

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social issue; Vulnerable section – Persons with Disabilities

In news:

A study conducted by the Disability Rights India Foundation (DRIF) highlighted that – Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPWD) Act is very poor and ineffective.

- Only 10 States have notified rules under Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act.
- The Act which was passed in December 2016 should have been notified by all States within six months.
- Nearly 80% of the States had not constituted the funds for implementation of the RPWD Act.
- Only Tamil Nadu has taken some action with regard to providing an increased quantum of assistance for people with disabilities in social security schemes.
- Though 62% of the States have appointed Commissioners for Persons with Disabilities, the progress has not been substantial.
- Only three States have constituted Advisory Committees, comprising of experts, to assist the State Commissioners.
- While 58% of the States have not notified Special Courts in the districts for trying offences under the Act, 87% have not appointed a Special Public Prosecutors as mandated by the law.

Report card

A look at the status of implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RWPDP) Act, 2016, two years after it came into force:

Number of States and UTs that have responded: **24 (67%)**

States that have not notified State rules: **58%**

States and UTs without State Advisory Boards: **50%**

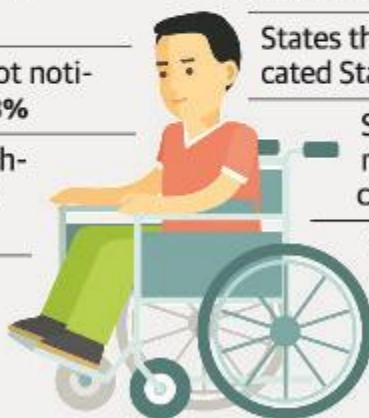
States and UTs without State Commissioners

for Persons with Disabilities: **37%**

States that have not allocated State funds: **79%**

States without notified special courts: **58%**

States without Special Public Prosecutors: **87%**



Source: DRIF, NCPEDP & NCRPD

Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/05/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/843c0c39_2572113_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016

- The Act replaced the Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995.
- It fulfills the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.
- The Act came into force during December 2016.

Salient Features:

- Disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept.
- The types of disabilities have been increased from existing 7 to 21. It includes Speech and Language Disability, Specific Learning Disability, Acid Attack Victims, Dwarfism, muscular dystrophy. It also included three blood disorders: Thalassemia, Hemophilia and Sickle Cell disease have been added for the first time.
- Reservation in vacancies in government establishments has been increased from 3% to 4% for certain persons or class of persons with benchmark disability.
- In addition benefits such as reservation in higher education, government jobs, reservation in allocation of land, poverty alleviation schemes etc. have been provided for disabilities.

- The Act claims that every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the right to free education. The government will fund educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions to provide inclusive education to the children with reasonable accommodation to disables.
- Special Courts will be designated in each district to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs.
- The Act provides for penalties for offences (imprisonment of 6 months to 2 years along with fine of 10000 to 5 lakh) committed against persons with disabilities and also violation of the provisions of the new law.
- The Act provides power to government to notify additional disabilities, a clear recognition of the need to factor in conditions that may arise as a result of an ageing population, an inevitable part of the demographic transition.
- The new law will not only enhance the Rights and Entitlements of Divyang-Jan but also provide effective mechanism for ensuring their empowerment and true inclusion into the Society in a satisfactory manner.

Lack of basic rights for the aged a concern: SC

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social issue; Government schemes and policies; Fundamental Rights

In news:

- Supreme Court has expressed its disappointment over lack of basic rights and inadequate welfare provided to senior citizens and the aged.
- The court said it was a statutory right of every aged person under the **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act of 2007** to be provided dignity, health and shelter.
- All the three are important components which make the fundamental right to life under Article 21.

Do you know?

- The **Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act** makes it obligatory for children or relatives to provide maintenance to senior citizens and parents.
- It also provides for the setting up of old age homes by State governments.
- Lack of knowledge of rights, the inherent inability of the elderly to approach a tribunal for recourse under the law, and poor implementation of the Act by various State governments are other concerns

- [The increase in the number of elderly people in the country calls for responsible policies and programmes for their protection and care.](#)

Indian Scenario

- India is expected to be home to 300 million elderly people by 2050
- 18 per cent of the population is going to be over 60 years of age by 2050
- In India, about 50 per cent of the elderly are being financially dependent on others
- Most of the elderly have been turned out from their homes, or have lost a partner, or just can't manage to live on their own anymore
- [Elderly Population need to thrive not just survive](#)

It is time India pay heed to the problems of those who are old, else the country will be faced with a large incidence of degenerative diseases, accompanied with serious gaps in the geriatric medical ecosystem, a changing joint family structure, the lack of 'grey-friendliness' in public spaces, transport, housing, and a virtually non-existing policy framework to tackle these issues. The court directed that the Centre should prepare a plan of action for giving publicity to the provisions of 2007 Act and ensure that the State governments carry out and execute the provisions of the law.

[Dalit struggle and sacrifice](#)

[Person in news](#)

Part of: GS Mains II and IV – Social/Dalit issue; Essay and Ethics

In news:

- There are many stories of Dalit struggle and sacrifice — largely unheard in mainstream media and literature.
- Below are few examples and personalities who made an impact on their surroundings and society. (can be used in GS Mains - Social issue answers; Essay and Ethics)
- These are people who have largely worked in interior Tamil Nadu taking on oppression of Dalits on basic issues like rights to a graveyard, or water, and other civil rights problems. Some of them were killed fighting for these rights.

1. Kandan, a dalit from small village of Vanjinagaram, near Melur in Tamil Nadu

- **He took on caste oppression** in the village and spearheaded a movement to **draw water from public well** and **press for rights**.
- In 1987, Kandan was hacked to death.
- He sacrificed his life seeking equality and basic civil rights.

2. Veerammal

- She founded the Annai Ashram.
- Veerammal started a school for Dalit girls in the 1950s near Tiruchi. This school grew to run classes up to the 12th standard.
- She then started an ITI, and a children's home but there is no mention of her in the mainstream.

3. Meenammal

- She led an anti-Hindi agitation in Chennai.

4. James Tremmond Heer

- He was a foreigner and the Collector of Chengalpattu in 1892.
- He recommended to the government that 12 lakh acres of Depressed Class land be given to the Dalits.

Transgender Persons Bill, 2018: Rights, revised

In news:

- Lok Sabha has passed a new Bill to protect transgender persons.
- The current Bill is an improved version of the legislation introduced two years ago, but concerns remain.

The below article assesses whether the current Bill is a progressive step towards extending constitutional protection to the highly marginalised community.

Positives in new Bill

Addresses some of the shortcomings of earlier draft

- The Bill seeks to address the shortcomings of earlier draft, which was widely perceived as **falling short of the expectations of stakeholders** and **not adequately rights-based**.
- This was also envisaged by the Supreme Court in its landmark decision on transgender rights in 2014.
- Standing Committee of Parliament on Social Justice and Empowerment and other experts had also criticised the original definition of 'transgender persons' for violating the right to self-determined identity.

Revised definition

- The current Bill provides a revised definition that **omits the reference to a 'neither male nor female' formulation**, and covers any person whose gender does not match the

gender assigned at birth, as well as transmen, transwomen, those with intersex variations, the gender-queer, and those who designate themselves based on socio-cultural identities such as hijra, aravani, kinner and jogta.

No need to go through screening committee after sex reassignment surgery

- The earlier draft had a provision of mandatory certificate from a district screening committee to prevent misuse (i.e., no provision for self-identification)
- The current Bill omits the need to go through the district screening committee to get a revised certificate after a transgender has sex reassignment surgery, but the medical certification requirement remains.

Concerns in the revised Bill

There are legitimate concerns in the revised Bill –

- One refers to the **bar on forcible separation of transgender persons** from their families, except through court orders.
- It has been revised to cover transgender children.
- Earlier it covered adults as well, but the committee had noted that it was within the family that many transgender persons faced harassment and abuse, and often felt driven to flee their homes.
- Another concern is that the Bill criminalises begging by making it an offence for someone to compel or entice a transgender person into seeking alms.
- When begging itself is no more seen as an offence, it may harm the community if such a means of livelihood in the absence of employment is criminalised.

Way forward

- The Bill, unfortunately, does not give effect to the far-reaching directive of the Supreme Court to grant backward class reservation to the transgender community.
- The Standing Committee's concerns about recognising civil rights in marriage, divorce and adoption among them has not been addressed.
- There is much good intention behind the welfare provisions, but social legislation is much more than high-minded clauses.
- It needs to be followed up with zealous implementation and framing of deadlines to achieve specific objectives.

Connecting the dots:

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2018 is a step in the right direction and was much due in the Indian social context. Discuss.

Why 2018 Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill is seriously flawed?

Introduction:

- We had earlier covered about Transgender Persons Bill, 2018, whether the current Bill is a progressive step towards extending constitutional protection to the highly marginalised community. (For more - [Transgender Persons Bill, 2018: Rights, revised](#))
- We came across what were the positives in new bill and concerns in the revised Bill.

Today's editorial covers the major short comings in the revised bill –

- Lack of proper definition for transgenders
- No provision for self-determination of gender
- No reservations
- Criminalises begging
- Sexual Harassment not addressed
- Civil rights ignored

Concerns:

1. No provision for self-determination of gender

In the landmark **NALSA v. Union of India judgment**, Supreme Court laid down that –

- Transgender and intersex persons have the **constitutional right to self-identify their gender** as male, female or transgender even without medical intervention.
- **No one should be forced to undergo medical procedures**, including SRS, sterilization or hormonal therapy, as a requirement for legal recognition of their gender identity.
- In other words, medical procedures should not be required as a pre-condition for any identity documents for transgender and intersex persons, nor should there be any requirement of a mental health assessment.
- Requiring a person to submit proof of medical treatment or mental health assessment of their gender identity **violates one's right to dignity**, the right to be free from unwanted medical treatment and the **right to be free from discrimination**.

However, the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2018 which was passed by the Lok Sabha recently, has caused great alarm.

The 2018 Bill in Section 6 **establishes a District Screening Committee for the purpose of recognition of transgender persons**.

- The District Screening Committee includes a chief medical officer and a psychologist/psychiatrist, which goes to show that medical and psychological tests would be required for grant of change of gender identity.

- The Bill also does not allow for recognition of gender identity as male or female. It only allows for an identity certificate as 'transgender'.
- This goes against the above decision of the Supreme Court, which recognised the right to self-identify oneself as male, female or transgender and **would also be forcing intersex persons to get a gender identity as "transgender"**.

No reservations

- The Supreme Court, in the landmark April 2014 NALSA judgment, had issued a directive "to extend all kinds of reservations in cases of admission in educational institutions and for public appointments" by treating transgender persons as socially and educationally backward classes.
- However, the 2018 Bill has failed to provide for any reservation for transgender and intersex persons in educational institutions and in public employment.

Criminalises begging

- The Bill also makes it a criminal offence for anyone to compel a transgender person into begging. However, a large number of people from the trans and intersex community are engaged in begging and sex work due to discrimination and not having any other opportunities.
- This provision would lead to members of the trans community being criminalised.

Civil rights ignored

- The Bill does not have a whole gamut of positive rights such as the rights of trans and intersex persons to inheritance of property, rights within the family such as adoption and to be free from domestic violence, rights of political participation such as the right to vote and hold public office, and the right to health to include free sex reassignment treatments.

Sexual Harassment not addressed

- It also does not make sexual violence against transgender and intersex persons a criminal offence.
- The current law on rape is gender specific and transgender persons have no recourse under criminal law for sexual assault.

Do you know?

- U.K.'s Gender Recognition Act 2004 was the first law in the world allowing people to change gender without surgery.
- Since then other countries, including Argentina, Ireland and Denmark, have passed laws that allow people to 'self-declare' their gender, rather than seek approval from a panel of medical experts.

The way ahead:

- The Transgender Bill omits positive rights and ignores the protections of the 'NALSA' judgment.
- District Screening Committee needs to be removed from the 2018 Bill.
- The Bill needs to state explicitly that no medical or mental health examination will be required and applicants will simply need to submit an affidavit attesting the request for a change of gender identity.
- There should be horizontal reservation in education and employment provided to them. (crucial for their social inclusion)
- The policy makers should ensure that the constitutional rights of transgender and intersex persons are realised.

Connecting the dots:

- Can the new Bill passed for the Transgenders community prove to be an ally for them or just one more element in their exploitation? Discuss.

No rise in working women despite high literacy levels

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Social issue; Indian Economy and related issues

In news:

- A rise in literacy levels among women has failed to translate into an increase in the number of working women due to a combination of socio-economic factors.
- There is a rise in the percentage of women out of labour force between 2011-2012 and 2015-2016 across all levels of education and age-cohorts.
- At the same time, the percentage of illiterate women out of the labour force too increased.
- Despite one's educational attainment there has been a decline in the incentive for women to participate in the labour force.

Do you know?

- The gross enrolment ratio shows that there are equal numbers of boys and girls at secondary level and women remain in education longer.

Socio-economic factors that has led women out of the labour force

- role education plays in marriage markets (importance of education for improving marital prospects)

- social norms – higher prestige or social status is associated with families which keep their women out of the workforce
- poor condition for educated women
- quality of education

Government policies should focus on behavioural changes that make female employment more acceptable in the society, communication programmes on gender equality in secondary education to help students imbibe equitable gender norms as well as programmes that acknowledge child care as the responsibility of both parents.

Development - 'bone of contention' between govt and Maoists

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Development issues; Gove schemes and policies in vulnerable areas; Security issues

In news:

- Development has been the 'bone of contention' between the government agencies, including the security forces, and the banned CPI (Maoists).
- While security agencies and the authorities claim that development would ease the hardship of the tribal people in the under-developed region, the Maoists feel that it would bring in multi-national companies into the forest to exploit the resources that belong to the tribal population under the Schedule 5 of the Constitution.

Do you know?

- Government's strategy to contain Maoists is through building cell towers and better road connectivity. As towers would enable the tribal people to access information on climate, agriculture, health and education.
- Central government has sanctioned huge funds under the Road Connectivity Project in Left Wing Extremist Area project.
- However, the Maoists have strongly opposed against it.

WOMEN/CHILDREN ISSUE

Don't reveal identity of rape victims: SC

Part of: GS Mains – Social/Welfare issue; Women and Child issue

In news:

- Supreme Court prohibited the media from publishing or airing the names or any material which may even remotely reveal the identity of victims of sexual crimes.
- No person can print or publish in print, electronic, social media, etc. the name of the victim or even in a remote manner disclose any facts which can lead to the victim being identified and which should make her identity known to the public at large.
- The intention of the law makers was that the victim of such offences should not be identifiable so that they do not face any hostile discrimination or harassment in the future.
- SC also barred the police from putting in public domain FIRs under Sections 376 to 376E (the range of sexual offences under IPC) and those under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Jammu & Kashmir legislation to stop 'sextortion' of women

Part of: GS Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Women violence issue

In news:

- J&K has become the first State in the country to bring a law to prevent people in power from exploiting subordinates sexually.
- Governor Satya Pal Malik's administration in Jammu & Kashmir approved an amendment to the Ranbir Penal Code (RPC), to insert a section to provide for the **offence of "sextortion."**
- The new law explicitly bans sexual exploitation of women by those in positions of authority, having a fiduciary relationship, or a public servant.
- Terming the offence as "Sextortion", the amendments will "bring sextortion at par with similar offences prescribed under the Ranbir Penal Code and amendment is being made in the Prevention of Corruption Act to amend the definition of misconduct and to provide that demand for sexual favours would also constitute misconduct within the meaning of Section 5."

Child protection policy

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Government policies and interventions and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

In news:

- Ministry of Women and Child Development has drafted child protection policy
- Move comes in the wake of Muzaffarpur home case

Do you know?

- The Supreme Court had directed the CBI to **investigate allegations involving 17 shelter homes for children, destitute women, beggars and senior citizens** in Bihar following the case of sexual abuse of more than 30 girls in a shelter home in Muzaffarpur in the State.
- The Supreme Court had also asked the Centre to consider **framing a national policy on protection of children.**

The draft Child protection policy contains the following important provisions –

1. It recommends that all organisations must have a **code of conduct based on “zero tolerance of child abuse and exploitation”**.
2. It requires organisations to lay down that **employees don’t use language or behaviour that is “inappropriate, harassing, abusive, sexually provocative, demeaning or culturally inappropriate”**.
3. Recommends employees of all organisations to **sign a declaration agreeing to ensure the safety of children.**
4. Institutions should also **designate a staff member to ensure that procedures are in place** to ensure the protection of children as well as to report any abuse. Any individual who suspects physical, sexual or emotional abuse must report it to the **helpline number 1098, police or a child welfare committee.**

How is this Policy different from National Child Policy, 2013?

- Child Protection Policy will be the first policy **dedicated to the protection of children**, an area that until now was only a part of the broader National Child Policy, 2013.
- Unlike the National Child Policy, 2013, the latest document **doesn’t talk about children who may need special protection**: including those affected by migration, communal or sectarian violence, children forced into begging or in conflict with the law, and those infected with HIV/AIDS.
- It also **doesn’t talk about the role of the State** for ensuring the protection of child rights or addressing local grievances.

Commercial surrogacy to be banned?

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Health issue; Women issue

In news:

- Lok Sabha passed the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016, which **bans commercial surrogacy** in India.
- In 2009, **Law Commission of India in its 229th report** recommended a prohibition on commercial surrogacy.
- Commercial surrogacy is a procedure by which a woman accepts a fee to carry an embryo to term for another couple.

Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016

- India has become a hub for commercial surrogacy and several incidents of women being exploited had come to light.
- The law seeks to end such exploitation and regulate non-commercial or “altruistic surrogacy”.
- The law bans women from accepting payment to become surrogates.
- The Bill says no money can be paid except “the medical expenses incurred on surrogate mother and the insurance coverage for the surrogate mother”.
- The Bill states that an Indian infertile couple, married for five years or more, can go in for ‘altruistic surrogacy’.
- The Bill allows only close relatives to be surrogate mothers.
- **Bioethical problems** of allowing commercial surrogacy – woman body is treated as a commodity in the marketplace.

Limitations banning Commercial Surrogacy:

- The Bill fails to consider same- sex couples or LGBT community (who are now accepted to be a part of the mainstream after Supreme Court decriminalised Section 377).
- In a country like India, an outright prohibition of commercial surrogacy will only push the business underground, into the black market. This may lead to women being exploited even more.

Do you know?

- Commercial surrogacy in India was legalized in India in 2002.
- The availability of medical infrastructure and potential surrogates, combined with international demand, has fueled the growth of the industry.

- The economic scale of surrogacy in India is unknown, but study backed by the United Nations in July 2012 estimated the business at more than \$400 million a year, with over 3,000 fertility clinics across India.

Anti-trafficking

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and policies for vulnerable section; Women and Children issue; Welfare/Social issue

About:

Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA), 1986 –

- It is the **primary law on trafficking** for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- It punishes offences including procuring a person for the purpose of prostitution, living on the earnings of prostitution of another person and keeping or using a brothel.

Do you know?

- **Voluntary adult sex work is not illegal in India** under certain circumstances, such as when a woman provides the service in her own home without any solicitation.
- The **United Nations (UN) World Day against Trafficking** in Persons is observed every year to raise awareness of the plight of human trafficking victims, and promote and protect their rights. It is observed on **30th July**.

Concern: Currently, there is absence of a clear distinction between the victims of sexual exploitation or human trafficking and persons who voluntarily opt to provide sex to make a living.

Changes to POCSO Act

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Children issue; Sexual Assault

In news:

- Cabinet approved changes to Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 to **protect all children under 12**.
- In other words, the amendment will bring punishments for sexual assaults on boys on a par with those against girls.
- These include the provision of death penalty when the child is under 12 years and when a penetrative sexual assault is committed by a relative.



Crime & punishment

The Cabinet has made the POCSO Act much more stringent:

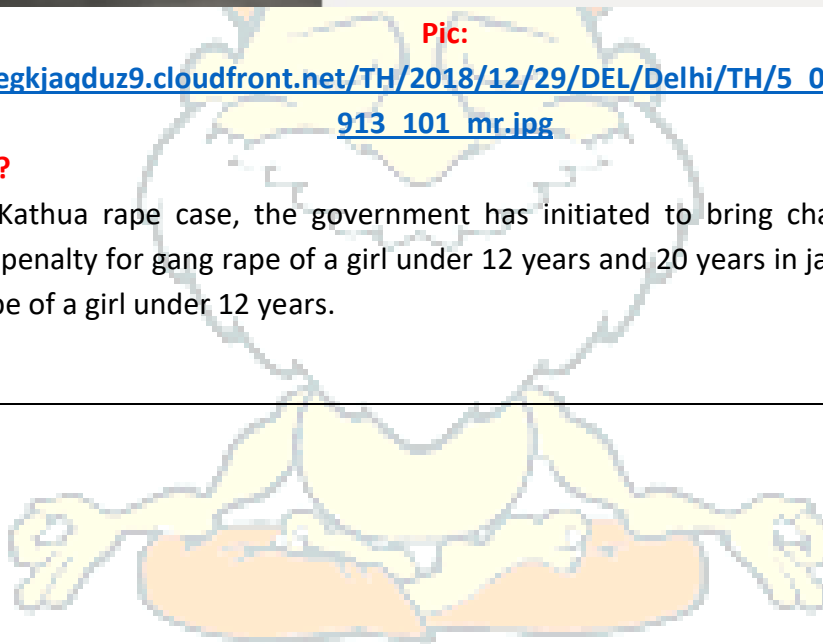
- Aggravated sexual assault on a child under 12 years: **20 years in jail/life term/death penalty**
- Minimum jail term for aggravated sexual assault enhanced from **7 years to 10 years**
- Aggravated sexual assault on a child below 16: **20 years in jail**
- Use of children for porn/possession of child porn: **5/3 years in jail**
- Storing child porn: **₹1,000 fine**

Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/29/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/2d221946_2625913_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

- After Kathua rape case, the government has initiated to bring changes that include death penalty for gang rape of a girl under 12 years and 20 years in jail or death penalty for rape of a girl under 12 years.



HEALTH ISSUE

Stunted, wasted: on Global Nutrition Report 2018

Introduction

- The health, longevity and well-being of Indians improved since Independence, and the high levels of economic growth over the past two-and-half-decades have made more funds available to spend on the social sector.
- Yet, the real health conditions of children in India present a grim situation according to Global Nutrition Report 2018.

Findings of the report

- **The Global Nutrition Index, 2018 has shown that 1/3 of World's stunted children and 1/4 of World's children displaying wasting are in India.**
- As the Global Nutrition Report 2018 points out, this finding masks the wide variation in stunting levels in different parts of the country.
- While, **70% of the figures for India are localized to North and Central India, South India is having only 20%.**

Causes of grim nutritional conditions in India

- Food and freedom go together, and the availability of one strongly influences access to the other.
- The North South divide of Nutritional map of India shows the important **role played by political commitment, administrative efficiency, literacy and women's empowerment** in ensuring children's health.
- Among the factors affecting the quantity and quality of nutrition are **maternal education, age at marriage, antenatal care, children's diet and household size.**
- Another issue is that of the quality of **nutrition in packaged foods** available to children. Going by the report, only 21% of these foods in India were rated as being healthy, based on overall energy, salt, sugar and saturated fat on the negative side, and vegetable, fruit, protein, fibre and calcium as positive factors.
- The Economic Survey 2017-18 put **social services spending** at 6.6% of GDP, an insignificant rise after a marginal decline from the 6% band during the previous year to 5.8%.

Way forward

- **Social institutions** can work to improve nutrition and children's welfare in free societies, and the absence of hunger enables people to develop their capabilities.
- **Governments** should acknowledge the linkages and commit themselves to improved nutritional policies.
- The national framework to improve nutrition already exists. The Anganwadi Services scheme, which incorporates the Integrated Child Development Services, caters to children up to age six, and to pregnant and lactating women.
- If it has not worked well in several States, it must be subjected to a rigorous review and targeted interventions for supplementary nutrition made.
- Now that mapping of malnutrition at the district level is available, as in the Global Nutrition Report, it is incumbent on **State governments** to address these determining factors.
- **Public awareness:** The fact that the global average of processed foods scored only 31% and a peak of 37% in New Zealand indicates that whole foods and cooked meals emerge superior.

Conclusion

- The latest report on stunting and wasting should convince the Centre that it needs to understand the problem better and work with the States to give India's children a healthy future.
- India should invest more of its economic prosperity in its welfare system, without binding itself in restrictive budgetary formulations.

Connecting the dots:

- Despite being one of the fastest growing trillion dollar economy, India is home to a third of the world's stunted children under five and a quarter of the children display wasting. Analyse the causes and suggest some measures.

Providing health for all; About Universal Health Coverage

Introduction

December 12 is **Universal Health Coverage (UHC) Day**. According to the **World Health Organisation**, UHC means "ensuring that everyone, everywhere can access essential quality health services without facing financial hardship". It sounds basic, yet the basics often pose a major challenge.

Case Study of Japan

- Japan has been leading the international efforts towards UHC, including its inclusion in the sustainable development goals and G20 agenda under our chairmanship next year, because health is one of our fundamental rights.
- Japan created national health insurance coverage in 1961, when it was yet to take off economically. A major political decision was required to expand national health insurance and establish medical schools all over Japan.
- The implementation of UHC could only have been possible through an early and vast national investment, and through a comprehensive government effort, with the Ministries of Health, Finance and Education, as well as local governments, working together.
- This investment has paid off. UHC has increased the number of healthy people and healthy workers in Japan. It has contributed to the economic miracle of Japan.
- UHC has also ensured social equity by functioning as a mechanism for redistribution of incomes. Even in the remotest of places in Japan, one do not have to worry about healthcare.
- The peace of mind which UHC ensures to the Japanese is an indispensable ingredient of overall well-being.

UHC in India and Indo-Japanese efforts & collaborations

- India has taken the vital first step towards UHC through Ayushman Bharat. This challenge is in resemblance of the path that Japan took more than half a century ago.
- Japan is also partnering with India in wide-ranging projects for better healthcare. It has previously worked with India to eradicate polio in India.
- Today, Japanese and Indian doctors are exchanging ideas and expertise at a research and control centre on diarrhoea established by Japan in Kolkata, and precious lives of newborns are being saved daily in a children's hospital constructed in Chennai.
- In 17 cities across Tamil Nadu, urban healthcare systems are being strengthened with cooperation of both the countries.
- India and Japan signed a new Memorandum of Cooperation on healthcare to pursue the synergies between Ayushman Bharat and Japan's Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative.

Conclusion

- Both the countries aim to pursue their cooperation in various fields, such as honing skills of doctors in surgery of trauma as well as providing technical training for Indian nurses studying in Japanese caregiving facilities.
- These efforts will lead to a better health ecosystem and the promotion of UHC in India as well as Japan.

- Both the countries can share their experiences in health sector, for example, Ayurveda can bring a new dimension to Japan's healthcare system.

Connecting the dots:

- Briefly analyse the Indo-Japanese cooperation in Universal Health coverage efforts.

10 die after taking temple 'prasadam'

Part of: GS prelims and Mains II – Health and social issue

In news:

- At least 10 people died and over 60 were hospitalised after consuming 'prasadam' distributed at a temple in Karnataka.

Do you know?

- The FSSAI had set a deadline of September 1, 2019 for temples to start following the regulations under the Food Safety and Standards Act of India 2006, as well as the Food Safety (Licensing and Registration) Rules. ([Food safety @Temples](#))
- The food safety commissioner said that every temple has to secure a licence or registration in order to sell 'prasadam' through temple counters.
- Temple authorities have to ensure that the storerooms and temple areas where food is cooked maintain hygiene standards under Food Safety and Standards Act.
- Also the water used for cooking it should be safe and must be tested periodically and the certificate on water safety kept for perusal.

How Food Safety Management System can ensure quality Prasad?

- By Standardizing prasad ingredients and manufacturing process to improve its shelf-life and safety
- Vendors to be trained in food safety, hygiene; persuaded to apply for licence
- By encouraging self-audit to ensure that ingredients used in prasad are safe
- Food handlers to be trained in good manufacturing practices; to be educated about personal hygiene and using protective clothing, such as aprons, gloves
- By introducing rotational system for food stock to ensure first-expired-first-out; strengthening documentation and record keeping so that the stock can be traced
- Mandating management of wastes, such as flowers, fruits and vegetables, in such a way that they do not affect food safety

Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)

Part of: Prelims and Mains GS Paper II- Health/Social issue; Government interventions and schemes

In news:

- Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY) – is a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme for nutritional support to Tuberculosis (TB) patients.
- It was rolled out from April this year and has made very slow progress.
- Of the 18 lakh registered TB patients across the country, barely 26% of the beneficiary pool, have received cash transfer so far.
- This is because many of the rural poor either do not have a bank account or are migrant patients, whose bank accounts are difficult to be captured. However, the incentives can be distributed in Cash (but implementation is poor)

Do you know?

- All notified TB patients are beneficiaries of the scheme.
- Financial incentive of Rs.500/- per month for each notified TB patient for duration for which the patient is on anti-TB treatment.
- The scheme is registered under Direct Benefit Transfer. The incentives can be distributed in Cash (only via DBT preferably through Aadhaar enabled bank accounts) or in-kind.
- The scheme is a centrally sponsored scheme under National Health Mission (NHM). Financial norms of NHM in terms of cost sharing, are applicable to the scheme.

30 mn newborns cry out for help

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue; Social/Child issue

In news:

According to a study, 'Survive and thrive: Transforming care for every small and sick newborn' –

- 30 million newborns require specialised care in hospital every year
- urges countries to invest in healthcare to prevent neonatal deaths
- India witnesses 25.4 newborn deaths per 1,000 births and .64 million annually.

Do you know?

- The Sustainable Development Goal for neonatal deaths requires all countries to bring down the figure to 12 deaths or less per 1,000 births by 2030.

- Universal access to quality care could prevent 1.7 million neonatal deaths or 68% of the deaths that will otherwise occur in 2030.



GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and policies

In news:

- Union Cabinet approved the launching of the **National Mission on Interdisciplinary Cyber-Physical Systems (NM-ICPS)**.
- The Mission is to be implemented by the Department of Science & Technology at a total outlay of ₹3,660 crore over five years.
- The Mission targets the **establishment of 15 Technology Innovation Hubs (TIH)**, six **Application Innovation Hubs** and four **Technology Translation Research Parks (TTRP)**.

Details of the Mission:

The Mission addresses the ever increasing technological requirements of the society, and takes into account the international trends and road maps of leading countries for the next generation technologies. The mission implementation would develop and bring:

- Cyber Physical Systems (CPS) and associated technologies within reach in the country,
- adoption of CPS technologies to address India specific National / Regional issues,
- produce Next Generation skilled manpower in CPS,
- catalyze Translational Research,
- accelerate entrepreneurship and start-up ecosystem development in CPS,
- give impetus to advanced research in CPS, Technology development and higher education in Science, Technology and Engineering disciplines, and
- place India at par with other advanced countries and derive several direct and indirect benefits.

The Mission will feed the Central Ministries/ Departments and State Govts and also the Industry to effectively use the CPS technologies in their projects and schemes for the benefit of the society.

JICA project faces land acquisition issues

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Social Issue; Land acquisition and Land Reforms; Governance; Government schemes and policies

In news:

- The government acquired land from private parties have long been the subject of heated dispute, often resulting in violent conflict.
- Recently, **Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)** held meetings with farmers, their representatives and activists opposing land acquisition for the **Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project**. The JICA funds the project.
- The meeting was to understand their concerns and demands for parting with their land.

Do you know?

- Over 1,000 farmers have filed affidavits, contending that the process violates the guidelines of the JICA.
- They had demanded for a fresh environment impact assessment and a social impact assessment.
- Farmers allege that - As per JICA guidelines, there must be fair compensation for those whose land is acquired for any project funded by it; but in the case of the bullet train project, the Gujarat government has diluted the provisions so that compensation comes down.
- In other words, the State has diluted the Land Acquisition Act, 2013, after Japan entered into a contract in September 2015 with the Indian government to build the country's first bullet train corridor between Mumbai to Ahmedabad.

The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (LARR Act):

- The number of safeguards that the law legislates has made the process of acquisition manifestly fairer.
- For instance, it **compels a social and environmental impact assessment as a precondition** for any acquisition.
- Besides, it also acknowledges a need for a system of rehabilitation and resettlement for those whose livelihoods are likely to be affected by the transfer of land.
- The law provided for greatly enhanced compensation, consent of those whose land was sought to be acquired, and detailed rehabilitation and resettlement provisions (including employment, land for land, and other beneficial schemes). In other words, it changed the relationship between the state and the individual by empowering the latter against the former.
- It also included a retrospective clause. Section 24 of the new Act provided that under certain circumstances, acquired land could be returned to affected families.

Land acquisition law challenged in court

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Social Issue; Land acquisition and Land Reforms; Governance; Government schemes and policies

In news:

- The Supreme Court decided to examine a plea challenging the **legality of amendments** brought in by Tamil Nadu and four other States (Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Jharkhand), **which allow authorities to bypass the need to take farmers' consent** before their land is acquired for large infrastructure projects.
- The petition filed by activist Medha Patkar said the **States allow land acquisition without participation of representative local bodies** like gram sabha in social impact assessment studies, **without expert appraisal processes, public hearings, objections,** and safeguard provisions to ensure food security. (violates the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013)

In yesterday's article we read few provisions under LAAR Act 2013

- It **compels a social and environmental impact assessment as a precondition** for any acquisition.
- It also acknowledges a **need for a system of rehabilitation and resettlement** for those whose livelihoods are likely to be affected by the transfer of land.
- The law provided for **greatly enhanced compensation, consent of those whose land was sought** to be acquired, and detailed rehabilitation and resettlement provisions (including employment, land for land, and other beneficial schemes). In other words, it changed the relationship between the state and the individual by empowering the latter against the former.
- It mandates that **70% of the affected land owners should consent** to the acquisition of land for a public private participation project.
- It also included a retrospective clause. **Section 24** of the new Act provided that under certain circumstances, **acquired land could be returned to affected families.**

Do you know?

- The 2013 Act replaced its colonial predecessor of 1894 and was intended to uphold the farmers' right to dignity and life.
- The **amendments** brought in by above mentioned states **violate the "core spirit"** of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013. (LAAR Act)

An invitation to corruption? On Electoral Bonds

Introduction

The concept of electoral bond was introduced in the Budget of 2017-18 for political funding. Electoral Bond is a bearer Banking Instrument to be used for funding eligible Political Parties.

Do you know?

Features of Electoral Bond:

- Electoral Bonds may be purchased by a person, who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India. A person being an individual can buy Electoral Bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- The purchaser would be allowed to buy Electoral Bonds only on fulfillment of all KYC norms and by making payment from a bank account. It will not carry the name of payee.
- Only the Political Parties registered under Representation of the People Act, 1951 and which secured not less than 1% of the votes polled in the last General or State Election, will be eligible for such donations.
- The Electoral Bond(s) shall be cashed by an eligible political party only through a designated bank account with the authorized bank.
- Bond(s) would be issued/purchased for any value, in multiples of Rs.1,000, Rs.10,000, Rs.1,00,000, Rs.10,00,000 and Rs.1,00,00,000 from the Specified Branches of the State Bank of India (SBI). Electoral Bonds shall be valid for fifteen days from the date of issue.

Criticism of Electoral bonds

Security threats:

- The Election Commission cannot monitor the funding through Electoral Bonds as there is secrecy of donor, therefore it becomes difficult to know what is coming in is black money or not.
- Electoral Bonds can be misused for routing foreign money and thereby increase ability of other countries to influence Indian elections.

Corporate sponsorship without oversight:

- Anonymity promotes unnecessary secrecy in corporate funding whereby the shareholders of a corporation be unaware of the company's contributions.
- The programme removes an existing condition that had prohibited companies from donating anything more than 7.5% of their average net-profit over the previous three years. This now means that even loss-making entities can make unlimited contributions.

- The requirement that a corporation ought to have been in existence for at least three years before it could make donations — a system that was meant to stop shell concerns from being created with a view to syphoning money into politics — has also been removed.
- Electoral Bonds can be misused to bribe the Government of the day, to induce policies that will help the company in its business.

Voters' right to know is silenced

- Voters will have no idea of how, and through whom, a political party has been funded and for free and fair elections, voters require free and complete access to information about the parties for which they were going to vote.

Conclusion

- Electoral Bonds has been criticised that they violate an essential condition of political equality.
- Whereby, the absence of complete knowledge about the identities of those funding the various different parties is against the voters' right to informed decision.
- It can be concluded that Electoral Bonds' Scheme prioritizes the donor over a voter.

Connecting the dots:

- Critically analyse the concept of electoral bonds; introduced in the Budget of 2017-18 for political funding.

Avoid loan waivers

Introduction:

- The below article assesses why farm loan waivers are not a suitable option to address the rural distress.
- With 'rural distress' likely being the single most important poll issue in the coming general election, the political response to it is may be to announce a holistic or selective farm loan waivers.

Why farm loan waivers worst solution for rural crisis?

According to RBI data –

- The share of loans (of less than ₹2 lakh), typically taken by small farmers, accounts for less than 40 per cent of total farm credit.
- About 13 per cent of total agri credit was made up by loans of ₹1 crore or more.

- Crop loans disbursed to agriculturists leave out tenant farmers. The rise of tenant farming among small and marginal farmers also coincides with growing fragmentation of land.
- In addition, most of these cheap loans, taken at 4 per cent interest rate, are availed of by owners of warehouses, food processors and manufacturers of fertiliser and farm equipment.
- Categories under 'Priority sector lending' have been relaxed over the years to include a range of above mentioned sundry commercial activities. *(thanks to the powerful interest groups in rural India who tend to ensure that such loans are categorised under 'priority sector' lending)*

Crux – Loan waivers will merely end up aiding these interest groups.

We all know that,

- In India's hierarchical rural order, the disadvantaged are unable to access insurance, welfare and loan schemes managed by multiple agencies.
- Most of these schemes are manipulated by landed interests in collusion with government and bank officials.
- Therefore, given it makes sense to shift to direct income support for farmers as a major form of agrarian intervention (rather than loan waivers).
- Bankers and the Reserve Bank (RBI) have often expressed concern that **debt waivers can wreck credit culture.**

Do you know?

- Telangana has shown the way with its **Rythu Bandhu scheme**, and reaped handsome political dividends.
- The State has allocated ₹12,000 crore this financial year for the transfer of ₹8,000 per acre over two crop seasons to an estimated 58.33 lakh farmers.
- Under this scheme, farmers will directly get financial support twice every year to maximise agricultural production and productivity. They will get investment support of Rs 8,000 per acre every year (Rs. 4000 each for monsoon and Rabi season) as crop investment support.

Conclusion:

- The farmers' agitation and other political forces must take a cue from this development.
- Rural India needs better markets and market access, infrastructure and, above all, policies that recognise socio-economic inequities.

Connecting the dots:

- Are farm loan waivers justifiable for betterment of farmers? Analyse.

- Loan waivers for the farms isn't a good strategy to address the rural distress. Comment. ([TLP Answer](#))
- Loan waivers have become a political tool which is inimical to the Indian economy. Critically comment.

[Ujjwala Yojana expansion: LPG scheme to cover poor people](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social/Welfare Issue; Vulnerable section; Government schemes and policies

In news:

- Union Cabinet approved the expansion of the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, which aims to provide deposit-free LPG connections to all poor households.
- So far, the scheme targeted the poor and underprivileged so listed in the Socio-Economic and Caste Census, 2011.
- The mandate of the scheme was to provide LPG connections to eight crore households.

[Aspirational Districts Programme](#)

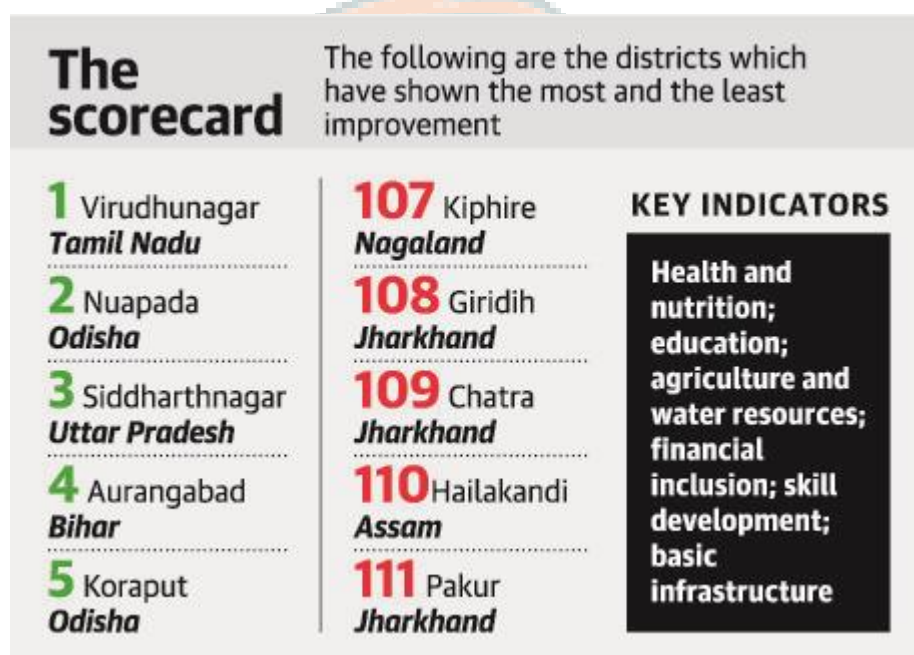
Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Social/Developmental issue; Government schemes and programmes; Inclusive growth

In news:

- NITI Aayog released Second Delta Ranking under the Aspirational Districts Programme.
- The ranking will measure the incremental progress made by districts between June 1, 2018 and October 31, 2018.
- The districts have been ranked in a transparent basis on parameters across Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure through key performance indicators.
- The first Delta ranking for the Aspirational Districts was released in June 2018. It ranked the Aspirational Districts on improved performance across five developmental areas of Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure, over the months of April and May 2018, on the basis of self-reported data.

Highlights:

- T.N. district Virudhunagar shows most improvement among country's 111 underdeveloped areas.
- Jharkhand's Pakur reflected the least improvement.
- Virudhunagar is followed by Nuapada in Odisha, Siddharthnagar in Uttar Pradesh, Aurangabad in Bihar and Koraput in Odisha.
- Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara topped the list for 'fast movers' for showing initiative and displaying a qualitative jump in scores between June and October 2018. In the first delta ranking, Kupwara had topped the list for 'least improved aspirational districts'.



https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/28/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/615b9700_2623835_101_mr.jpg

About Aspirational Districts Programme

- It was launched by PM Modi in January
- The 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aims to quickly and effectively transform most-underdeveloped districts.
- In line with government's commitment to raising the living standards of its citizens and ensuring inclusive growth for all – "Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas".

Improving quality of life and achieving sustainable development goals (SDG)

Introduction:

Two-thirds of India's 112 backward districts are in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. The remaining are scattered across the country with a few in the Northeast.

These districts identified in January 2018 for fast-track development represent the part of rural India that lags behind in basic services such as health, education and infrastructure, and have rightly come under the focus of policymakers.

Do you know?

- Under the “aspirational districts” programme, central and state officials are working closely to identify the strength of each district and use it to catalyse growth.
- NITI Aayog, which anchors the programme, has ranked these districts on their performance in key development areas of health and nutrition, education, farming, water resources, financial inclusion, skill development and access to basic infrastructure such as road, potable water and power.

NITI Aayog survey and ranking shows that –

- Under the “aspirational districts” programme, several backward districts had reported improvement in elementary education over the 2017 national average.
- Five districts have particularly made rapid progress—Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir, Ranchi in Jharkhand, Siddharthnagar and Fatehpur in Uttar Pradesh, and Jamui in Bihar.
- Virudhunagar in Tamil Nadu has the best overall score among all the backward districts.
- The incremental progress made by the five districts offer hope that with a focused approach, a quick course correction in the development trajectory could be achieved.

Achieving SDG goals

- Plugging the development gaps and improving the quality of life of people in these backward areas is important to achieve SDG goals.
- India has crossed only the halfway mark in achieving sustainable development goals (SDG) such as removal of poverty and inequality, which it had adopted in 2015 along with 192 other nations.
- Improving basic services and ensuring livelihood of people in backward districts is of tremendous importance, considering that people are forced to migrate in search of a better life.

Two key initiatives: Ayushman Bharat scheme and BharatNet project

Apart from the “aspirational districts” programme, two key initiatives: Ayushman Bharat scheme and BharatNet project - will go a long way in achieving the SDG goal.

- **Ayushman Bharat scheme** – offers health cover to 100 million vulnerable families, and

- **BharatNet project** – digitally connects all gram panchayats. Digital connectivity will link people in rural areas with urban centres, improving employment opportunities.

In a nation that is set to be the fifth largest economy in the world, bridging the development gap is vital to social and political stability.

Connecting the dots:

- [The Aspirational Districts Programme \(ADP\) is a radical departure from the country's previous development strategies in its scale, scope and ownership. Analyse.](#)
- [Development is a multifaceted process. Does India's developmental discourse resonate with the SDGs? Critically examine.](#)
- Discuss what measures have been taken by the government to bridge the development gap and improve the quality of life of people in backward areas.

Draft National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2018

Part of: GS Mains II – Government schemes and policies

In news:

- Union Cabinet has approved the draft National Commission for Indian System of Medicine Bill, 2018.
- National Commission for Indian System (NCIM) will promote availability of affordable healthcare services in all parts of the country.

Do you know?

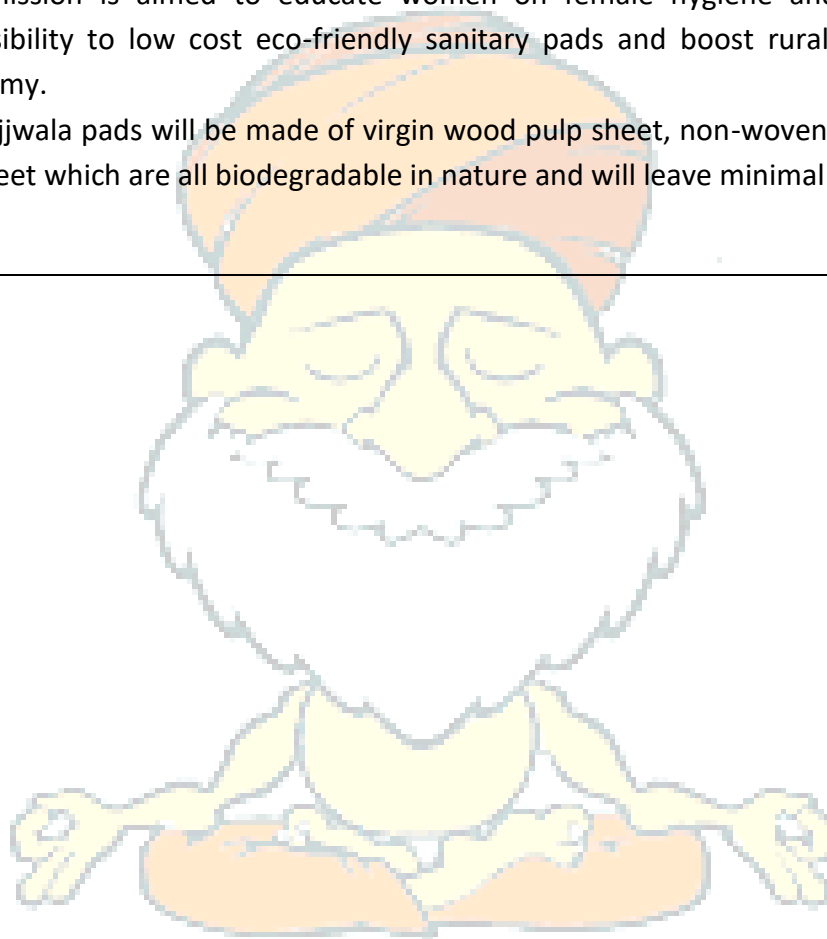
- The draft Bill will enable the constitution of a National Commission with four autonomous boards for the purpose of conducting overall education in Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha and Sowaigpa.
- To assess the standard of teachers before appointment and promotions, the Bill proposes an entrance and an exit exam that all graduates need to clear to get practising licenses.

Ujjwala Sanitary Napkins initiative

Part of: GS Mains II – Role of CSOs/NGOs; CSR Initiatives; Welfare/Social programmes

In news:

- Ujjwala Sanitary Napkins initiative – a sanitary pad-making initiative by three oil marketing companies – IOCL, BPCL and HPCL
- The three companies will set up 100 manufacturing units at the Common Service Centres (CSC) covering 93 Blocks across 30 districts of Odisha at an estimated cost of ₹2.94 crore.
- The initiative is a part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) of Oil Marketing Companies.
- The mission is aimed to educate women on female hygiene and health, improve accessibility to low cost eco-friendly sanitary pads and boost rural employment and economy.
- The Ujjwala pads will be made of virgin wood pulp sheet, non-woven white sheet and a gel sheet which are all biodegradable in nature and will leave minimal carbon footprint.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

G20 summit and trilateral meetings JAI and RIC

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International Relations; Multilateral organization or ties

In news:

- India held its first trilateral meeting with US and Japan, Modi; named partnership as 'JAI'.
- "JAI" (Hindi for success or victory) – name for the triumvirate of Japan, America (the United States) and India.
- Leaders of JAI exchanged views on Indo Pacific, maritime and connectivity issues.
- The three leaders reaffirmed the importance of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision for global stability and prosperity, and pledged to deepen trilateral cooperation.

Do you know?

- The second Russia-India-China 'RIC' Trilateral Summit took place in Buenos Aires after a gap of 12 years.
- The leaders discussed cooperation and coordination in various areas which could contribute to global peace and stability.
- India has emerged common factor in two G-20 trilaterals

G20 summit, Buenos Aires, Argentina

- The G20 is the premier forum for its members' international economic cooperation and decision-making. Its membership comprises 19 countries plus the European Union.
- The G20 started in 1999 as a meeting of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis.
- In 2008, the first G20 Leaders' Summit was held, and the group played a key role in responding to the global financial crisis.
- G20 leaders have met nine times since 2008.
- Over the past six years, the G20 has framed the world's efforts to restore growth and build the resilience of financial institutions and national economies.
- The G20 is supported by international organisations, including the Financial Stability Board, the International Labour Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the United Nations, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. These and several other organisations are invited to attend key G20 meetings.

- In Argentina's G20 summit many issues will be discussed such as global economy, sustainable development, climate change, and fugitive economic offenders.
- India is a member of G20.

China and the United States to halt additional tariffs

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Indian Economy; International Affairs

In news:

- China and the United States decide to hold off fresh tariffs for 90 days.
- Washington keeps the rate at 10%; Beijing agrees to buy American farm products.
- Both sides are trying again to bridge their differences with fresh talks aimed at reaching an agreement within 90 days.
- The two sides will also launch new trade talks to address issues, including technology transfer, intellectual property, non-tariff barriers, and agriculture.
- If no deal is reached within 90 days, both parties agreed that the 10% tariffs will be raised to 25%.

How US-China trade war will affect India?

- In trade conflicts, there are no winners. Too much protectionism ultimately constricts global growth.
- The effects of a trade war are unlikely to be restricted to merely these two countries. Due to this, India too could find some changing dynamics in its economy.
- The basic principles of economics, i.e., demand and supply, will once again come into play. The shortage of supply of a good, either finished material or raw material, will increase the final consumption price for the consumer.
- Moreover, the burden of increased tax from the duties will also be borne by the final user.

The following are some ways the Indian economy may be affected:

- The **value of the Rupee** has dropped to an all-time low. Weakening of the US dollar will automatically create negative impact on the trade deficit of India, causing a chain reaction of sorts. Moreover, a trade war would slowdown global growth overall, worsening India's already dismal export numbers.
- **Poor investors' confidence** - key indices in the Indian share market dropped due to the cautious approach of the investors. BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty performance fell. Reduces investment flows into India.

- **India-US duties** - As the United States of America imposed duties on steel and aluminium, India now has to pay approximately \$241 million worth of tax to the US. India, on the other hand, as a counter-measure has proposed imposing duties on 30 different types of goods. This will ensure that the US has to pay about \$238 million as duties to India. However, this will make life more difficult for the end consumers as everything that falls under the tariff scanner is expected to become more expensive.

[Qatar to quit OPEC](#)

Part of: Prelims and Mains II – International

In news:

- Qatar will leave the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) next month in order to focus on gas production.
- Qatar has been a member of OPEC since 1961, and the decision to pull out after all these decades comes at a turbulent time in Gulf politics, with Doha under a boycott by former neighbouring allies, including Saudi Arabia, for 18 months.

About OPEC

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) was founded in Baghdad, Iraq, with the signing of an agreement in September 1960 by five countries namely Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela. They were to become the Founder Members of the Organization.

These countries were later joined by Qatar (1961), Indonesia (1962), Libya (1962), the United Arab Emirates (1967), Algeria (1969), Nigeria (1971), Ecuador (1973), Gabon (1975), Angola (2007), Equatorial Guinea (2017) and Congo (2018).

[Gilets Jaunes movement/Yellow Vest movement](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International Affairs

In news:

- The yellow vests movement (Gilets Jaunes movement) is a **citizens' protest movement** began in early November 2018 **against a planned rise in the tax on diesel and petrol**, which French President Emmanuel Macron insisted would aid the country's transition to green energy.

- The movement was named “gilets jaunes” (yellow vests) because protesters wear the fluorescent yellow high-vis jackets that all motorists must by law carry in their cars.
- But what **began as a fuel tax protest** has now morphed into a **wider anti-government movement**.

Do you know?

- Unlike previous French protest movements, it **sprang up online** through petitions and was **organised by ordinary working people** posting videos on social media, without a set leader, trade union or political party behind it.

Who are the protesters and what are their grievances?

- Protesters have largely come from peripheral towns, cities and rural areas across France and include many women and single mothers.
- Most of the protesters have jobs, including as secretaries, IT workers, factory workers, delivery workers and care workers.
- All say their low incomes mean they cannot make ends meet at the end of the month.

The movement is predominantly **against a tax system perceived as unfair and unjust**, but there are numerous grievances and differences of opinion.

Most want to scrap the fuel taxes, hold a **review of the tax system**, **raise the minimum wage** and **roll back Macron’s tax cuts** for the wealthy and his **pro-business economic programme**. But some also **want parliament dissolved and Macron to resign**.

Sri Lanka political crisis

Part of: GS Mains II – International Affairs

In news:

- We know that a constitutional crisis began in Sri Lanka when President Maithripala Sirisena abruptly sacked then Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe and replaced him with Rajapaksa.
- Sirisena appointed Mahinda Rajapaksa as prime minister before formally dismissing the incumbent Ranil Wickremesinghe, resulting in two concurrent prime ministers.
- Wickremesinghe and the United National Party (UNP) viewed the appointment as illegal, and he refused to resign.

Role of Judiciary

- Political crisis in the island nation ended.

- Mahinda Rajapaksa decided to “step down” after the Supreme Court refused to stay an earlier appeal court order restraining him and his purported Cabinet from functioning in office.
- Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court took firm stand and ruled dissolution of Parliament unconstitutional.
- Mr. Rajapaksa’s resignation may pave the way for the installation of a government that enjoys a majority in Parliament.

[US confirms pull out from INF treaty](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International affairs; Security concerns

In news:

- US President Donald Trump, in October this year, had announced the US’ decision to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.
- Russia announced that it would take retaliatory measures if the US were to station missiles in Europe that threatened their security.

Do you know?

- INF treaty was signed by then Soviet Union Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev and US President Ronald Reagan in 1987.
- The agreement is deterrent in nature and was largely designed to prevent prospects of a full-scale nuclear war in Europe.

[Russia successfully tests hypersonic missile](#)

Part of: GS Prelims – International affairs; Defence/Security

In news:

- Russia has a new type of strategic weapon which would render existing missile systems obsolete.
- Intercontinental “**Avangard**” system would be ready for use from 2019.
- The hypersonic missile could fly at 20 times the speed of sound and manoeuvre up and down, meaning that it could breach defence systems.

Do you know?

- The final test was conducted after U.S. President Donald Trump announced plans to pull out of a key Cold War-era nuclear weapons pact, the three-decade-old Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF).

Controversial exit: U.S troops withdrawal from Syria

Introduction:

- President Donald Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops out of Syria has predictably upset both the Washington establishment and America's global allies.
- Earlier this year he had wanted to exit Syria but delayed the decision amid resistance within his cabinet.
- Now he claims that the physical infrastructure of the IS caliphate is destroyed and the U.S. can leave the war against the remnants of the jihadist group to the Syrian government and its main backers, Russia and Iran.

Do you know?

- The caliphate is actually destroyed — the IS has lost 95% of the territory it once controlled and is now confined to narrow pockets on the Iraqi-Syrian border.
- The U.S. would also not like to get stuck in Syria forever. It is basically Russia's war.
- The U.S. is already stranded in Afghanistan (for 17 years) and Iraq (over 15 years) without a way out.
- Barack Obama had pulled back most U.S. troops from Iraq and Afghanistan. Mr. Trump wants to get out of the Syrian theatre. But the ground reality is too complex and requires Mr. Trump to be more patient and strategic in his policymaking.

Risk Factors:

Syrian Kurds will be left at the mercy of Turkish troops

- The 2000 U.S. troops were not directly involved in the ground battle and were supporting the Syrian Democratic Forces, a rebel group led by Kurdish rebels who were in the forefront of the fight against the IS.
- The U.S. support for the Kurdish rebels has irked Turkey, which sees them as an extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party, the rebels on the Turkish side who have been fighting Turkish troops for decades.
- Turkey considers the military consolidation of Kurds as a strategic threat. When Mr. Trump pulls out American troops, he would in effect be leaving the Syrian Kurds at the mercy of Turkish troops.

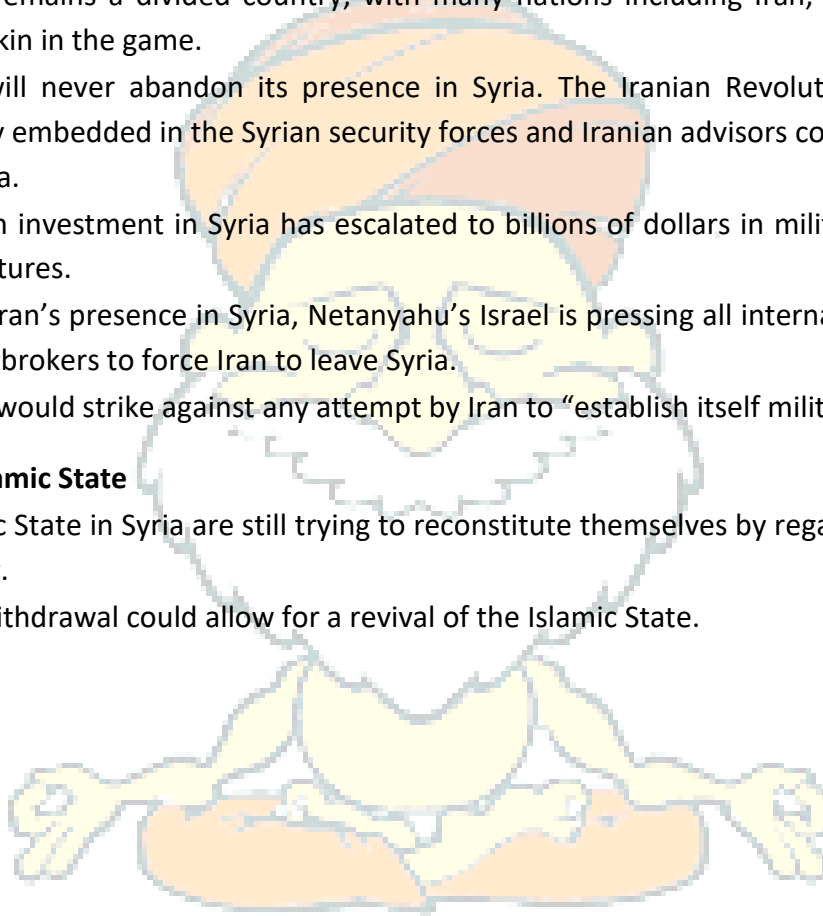
- Turkey may launch attack on the Kurdish militants, which President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has vowed to do.
- The Kurds will then have to re-channel their resources to fight Turkish soldiers. This will weaken the ground resistance against the remaining IS militants on the southern side of the border.

May Fuel Greater Tension Between Israel, Iran

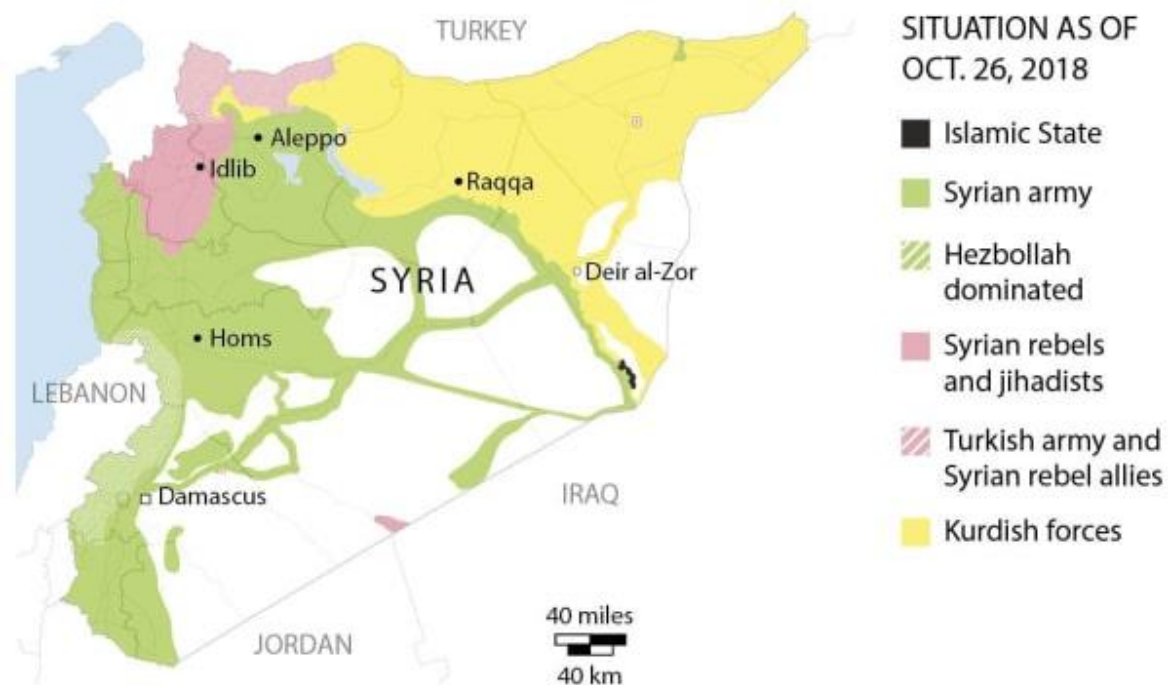
- The Syrian conflict still represents multiple dangers for the security of the world.
- Syria remains a divided country, with many nations including Iran, Turkey and Russia with skin in the game.
- Iran will never abandon its presence in Syria. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards are deeply embedded in the Syrian security forces and Iranian advisors continue to be active in Syria.
- Iranian investment in Syria has escalated to billions of dollars in military and economic adventures.
- With Iran's presence in Syria, Netanyahu's Israel is pressing all international players and powerbrokers to force Iran to leave Syria.
- Israel would strike against any attempt by Iran to "establish itself militarily" in Syria.

Revival of Islamic State

- Islamic State in Syria are still trying to reconstitute themselves by regaining territory and power.
- The withdrawal could allow for a revival of the Islamic State.



Syria areas of control



Note: Al Qaeda control in Western Syria not depicted

Source: Institute for the Study of

M. Ovaska, 29/10/2018

REUTERS

https://images.haarets.co.il/image/upload/w_640,q_auto,c_fill,f_auto/fl_any_format.preserve_transparency.progressive:none/v1545228047/1.6763017.59111700.JPG

Conclusion:

The sudden withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria that Trump has called for would pose severe humanitarian risks.

The power vacuum created by an abrupt U.S. disengagement could spark a new round of fighting, which in turn will disrupt and displace communities. The result could be an even worse humanitarian crisis in a country where some 11 million people have fled their homes and more than half a million people in the northeast alone are already receiving some form of humanitarian assistance.

Before any withdrawal goes forward, plans must be in place to minimize the humanitarian consequences of the ensuing instability.

Connecting the dots:

- Critically evaluate the Donald Trump's decision to pull U.S. troops out of Syria.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

Neighbourhood First: Foreign policy shift in 2018

Introduction

- The current year, 2018, has marked a year of reaching out in the region by the current government in general, with a view to dialling down disagreements that otherwise marked ties with major powers such as Russia and China.
- But while “Wuhan summit” with Chinese President and the “Sochi retreat” with Russian President merited much attention, it is important to take stock of attempts at rapprochement in the immediate neighbourhood.

Recent events of change in posture by Indian government to neighbours:

Maldives

- PM Narendra Modi recently made his first visit to Maldives during the swearing in ceremony of the newly elected President Ibrahim Solih. The visit acted as means of support and acceptance of the new government of Maldives after having a conflicted relationship with the previous government of President Yameen.

China

- PM Modi indulged in the 'Wuhan Summit' with Chinese President Xi Jinping that led to the process of consultation for a peaceful resolution of boundary dispute, after having been in cross-fire over the Doklam issue in 2017.

Nepal

- India government was accused of fuelling the blockade of Nepal in 2015, apart from opposing the earlier government of K.P. Oli in Nepal.
- However, the re- election of K.P. Oli as PM of Nepal in 2018 led to the Indian government continuously engaging with the new government through multiple visits.

Afghanistan

- Indian government refused to share a common regional platform with the ousted Taliban government of Afghanistan after 9/11.
- However, the Moscow Format held by Russia became the first regional platform that India has shared in an un-official manner with the Taliban.

Pakistan

- India had refused to engage with the government of Pakistan after the Uri attack in 2016 and refused to also engage with the new government under Imran Khan that was elected in 2018.
- However, during the recent opening of the Kartarpur Corridor, India was represented by two Central Ministers in Pakistan.

Bangladesh, Bhutan & Sri Lanka

- Indian official have always shown an inclination in support of the Sheikh Hasina political party Awami League in Bangladeshi elections as being pro- India, in comparison to the pro-Pakistan party of Khaleda Zia.
- However in the up-coming election in Bangladesh in December 2018, India has maintained a silenced role.
- Similarly with elections in Bhutan as well as the ongoing political crisis in Sri Lanka, India has chosen to make no public political statement that could be construed as interference or preference for one side over the other.

Speculated causes of this Change:

- Sustained backlash from government in Nepal especially with support of Nepalese electorate led to a need to follow an accommodative policy.
- Positive changes in circumstances such as the new President in Maldives or opening of Kartarpur corridor needed to be positively accommodated rather than dismissed
- Pursuing both competition and cooperation with neighbours based on national interest such as seen with China.
- India's aggression under the Big Brother policy enhanced the attractiveness of China as a balancer in South Asia and therefore a change in posture was necessary.

Conclusion

- A retreat to the original policy imperative of the current government; Neighbourhood First, whereby a balanced approach of both aggression and accommodation will be followed with neighbours.
- However, it is yet to be seen whether the change in posture is a temporary foreign policy imperative or a permanent fixture.

Connecting the dots:

- Critically analyse the shift in India's foreign policy with regard to neighbouring countries over last few years.

India and Bhutan Ties

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours; International Relations

In news:

- Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering is expected to visit India.
- He reiterated that India remains the cornerstone of Bhutan's foreign policy.
- Bhutan aims to graduate from an LDC (least developed country) to a middle-income country by 2023.

Area of focus will be –

- India's revised policy on **cross-border trade of electricity (CBTE)** – which is expected to impact Bhutan's ability to sell power to India.
- Revising **BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) Motor Vehicles Agreement** – which was opposed by Bhutanese Parliament.
- Bhutan's new Foreign Minister reiterated the country's policy of not having full relations with any permanent member of the UN Security Council, including China.

India's Bhutan 750 megawatt Mangdechhu hydropower project

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours; International Relations

In news:

- India is expected to commission a major hydropower project in Bhutan.
- Cooperation in the hydropower sector was a sign of strength of the time-tested ties between the two countries.

Do you know?

- The Mangdechhu project was bagged by the Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd. (BHEL) and it will be implemented on a bilateral basis.

India-Bhutan: golden jubilee of the diplomatic relations

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours relations; International Relations

In news:

- India to host newly elected Bhutan PM (Dr. Lotay Tshering)

- His visit will take place to mark the golden jubilee of the diplomatic relations between India and Bhutan

India-Bhutan ties

- likely to witness sealing of important power projects to be implemented by both sides.
- Bhutan assured that it will continue to have special ties with India and avoid establishing diplomatic ties with any of the permanent members of the UN Security Council.
- Bhutan hopes to finalise India's assistance for the 12th Five-Year Plan.

India-Bhutan ties: ₹4,500-cr. assistance for Bhutan

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours; International Relations

In news:

- India to support Bhutan's development needs by providing ₹4,500 crore. (For Bhutan's 12th five-year plan)
- Bhutan Prime Minister Lotay Tshering who visited India assured his government's commitment to maintain warm ties with India.
- India to continue to be a reliable partner in development assistance.

Do you know?

- Bhutan remains one of the key recipients of development assistance from India.
- According to the Ministry of External Affairs, India provided ₹4,500 crore for the 11th five year plan that lasted between 2013 and 2018.
- Now, India is committed to **supporting Bhutan's next five-year plan** to begin shortly.
- On **sharing South Asian Satellite** - Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is moving ahead with plans to set up a ground station in Bhutan that will help in telemedicine, disaster relief and climate trends.
- **Mangdechhu hydro power project** to be completed soon.
- Hydroelectricity is the main source of revenue for Bhutan and negotiations to fix the tariff rates on major projects continue.

Together in an uncertain world: On Indi-EU relations

Introduction

- European Union released its strategy on India after 14 years. This road map replaces 2004 EU-India Declaration on building bilateral strategic partnership.
- The European Union and India have upgraded their long-standing relationship to a strategic partnership in 2004, acknowledging their common goals and principles.
- Nowadays, in a challenging international environment, the EU and India share the same values of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and support the rules-based global order centred on multilateralism.
- The European Union has unveiled a sweeping new vision to significantly scale up ties with India, including closer coordination to forge a multilateral rules-based world order and enhanced military-to-military relations and joint exercises.

Background:

- India was one of the first countries to develop relations with the European Union. The Joint Political Statement of 1993 and the 1994 Co-operation Agreement were the foundational agreements for the bilateral partnership.
- In 2004, India and European Union became “Strategic Partners”. A Joint Action Plan was agreed upon in 2005 and updated in 2008.
- The EU is India’s largest trading partner with 12.5% of India’s overall trade between 2015 and 2016, ahead of China (10.8%) and the United States (9.3%).
- India is the EU’s 9th largest trading partner with 2.4% of the EU’s overall trade. Bilateral trade (in both goods & services) reached €115 billion in 2017.

India is rapidly integrating with the global economy:

- At 1.25 billion, India is the second most populous state and largest democracy in the world. With an annual GDP growth rate in excess of 7.5 % for over a decade it is now in the world’s top ten largest economies (4th by PPP).
- As such, India is an important trade and investment partner for the EU, combining a sizable and growing market with one of the fastest growing economies in the world arguably the fastest among the big economies.
- Although it is far from the closed market that it was twenty years ago, India still maintains substantial tariff and non-tariff barriers that hinder trade with the EU.
- The new strategy makes EU trade policy more responsible by basing it on three key principles:
- Effectiveness: Making sure trade actually delivers on its promise of new economic opportunities. That means addressing the issues that affect today’s economy, including services and digital trade.
- Transparency: Opening up negotiations to more public scrutiny by publishing key negotiating texts from all negotiations, as has been done in the TTIP negotiations.

- Values: Safeguarding the European social and regulatory model at home. Using trade agreements and preference programmes as levers to for the worldwide promotion of European values such as sustainable development, human rights, fair and ethical trade and the fight against corruption.
- These three principles ensure that trade policy benefits as many people as possible.

Transformative shift:

- The new document is sweeping in its scope and lays out a road map for strengthening the EU-India partnership.
- The new strategy underscores a transformative shift in Brussels vis-à-vis India and talks of key focus areas: such as the need to conclude a broader Strategic Partnership Agreement, intensifying dialogue on Afghanistan and Central Asia, strengthening technical cooperation on fighting terrorism, and countering radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorist financing.
- More significant from the perspective of the EU, is a recognition of the need to develop defence and security cooperation with India.
- Despite sharing a congruence of values and democratic ideals, India and the EU have both struggled to build a partnership that can be instrumental in shaping the geopolitics and geo-economics of the 21st century.
- But where India's relations with individual EU nations have progressed dramatically over the last few years and the EU's focus on India has grown, it has become imperative for the two to give each other a serious look.

India; a natural choice for EU

- As the wider EU political landscape evolves after Brexit, and India seeks to manage the turbulent geopolitics in Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, both recognise the importance of engaging each other.
There is a new push in Brussels to emerge as a geopolitical actor of some significance and India is a natural partner in many respects.
- There is widespread disappointment with the trajectory of China's evolution and the Trump administration's disdain for its Western allies is highly disruptive.
- At a time when India's horizons are widening beyond South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, Brussels is also being forced to look beyond its periphery.
- The EU will be part of the International Solar Alliance, and has invited India to escort World Food Programme vessels to transport food to Somalia.
- The two have been coordinating closely on regional issues.

Way forward:

- The new India strategy document unveiled by the EU, therefore, comes at an appropriate time when both have to seriously recalibrate their partnership.
- Merely reiterating that India and the EU are “natural partners” is not enough, and the areas outlined in the document, from security sector cooperation to countering terrorism and regional security, need to be focused on.
- India needs resources and expertise from the EU for its various priority areas, such as cybersecurity, urbanisation, environmental regeneration, and skill development.
- As the EU shifts its focus to India, New Delhi should heartily reciprocate this outreach.

Connecting the dots:

- India and EU are "natural partners". Discuss India-EU relationship in various spheres.

Pak. issues visas to visit Shiva temple

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours; International Relations

In news:

- Going ahead with a people-oriented diplomacy, Pakistan has issued a large number of visas for Indian pilgrims who are expected to visit the famed Shiva temple at Katas Raj Dham, near the city of Lahore.

Do you know?

- **Katas Raj** is a complex of ancient temples that is among the most important Hindu pilgrimage centres in Pakistan.
- The temple complex consisting of seven shrines, is located around the Katas lake, considered sacred by pilgrims of multiple faiths.
- Apart from the temples, the area is renowned for its Buddhist remains and architecture.
- Pakistan had earlier granted 3,800 visas for Sikh pilgrims visiting **Nankana Sahib Gurdwara** in Pakistan's Punjab for the celebration of the 549th birth anniversary of the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak.
- It had also issued 220 visas for the **Shadani Darbar temple** in Sukkur where a centuries-old festival is continuing.
- Pakistan also formally inaugurated the project for **building the corridor** that will allow Sikh pilgrims to visit the holy temple at **Kartarpur** across the border.

The High Commission said Pakistan remains committed to the **bilateral understanding of 1974** with India that allows pilgrims to travel freely.

NRC and its implications for India's ties with its neighbours

In news:

- The last date for filing claims and objections for Assam's National Register of Citizens (NRC) has been extended by the Supreme Court to December 31, from December 15.

About NRC

We have already read about NRC from previous articles/monthly magazine that –

- It is the register containing names of Indian Citizens. It was prepared first in 1951 after the conduct of the Census of 1951.
- It is used to identify who is a bona fide Indian citizen and those who fail to enlist in the register will be deemed illegal migrants.

Drawbacks:

- **Political, economic and humanitarian consequences.**
- **Implications for India's ties with its neighbours**, particularly Bangladesh.
- The ruling establishment in India maintains that the NRC is an **administrative task overseen by the Supreme Court**, and not a political gambit. However, some members of the ruling party have been making **hateful anti-migration and anti-Bangladeshi comments** that reflect poorly on the prevalent positive relationship between Bangladesh and India.

Significance of NRC:

- Those settled in Indian territory without legal jurisdiction pose a threat to national security. Therefore, it is an important milestone in dealing with the influx of illegal migrants from Bangladesh into that state.
- It puts to rest wild speculations about the extent of the illegal migrant population in Assam and the resulting polarization that political parties have been exploiting to make electoral gains.

Indians in Bangladesh

- There are legal as well as illegal Indian immigrants in Bangladesh too.
- According to 2009 estimates, more than 500,000 Indians were working in Bangladesh.
- More recently, Bangladesh was reported to be among the highest source of remittances to India, behind the United Arab Emirates, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the U.K.
- However, most of the Indians are employed in advantageous jobs in Bangladesh while Bangladeshis in India are largely employed in low-paying jobs.

Why India should play safe with Bangladesh?

- Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina has addressed all of India's security and connectivity concerns, from driving out the Northeastern rebels to providing India transit facilities.
- On the security front, it has cooperated in India's crackdown on insurgents.
- Bangladesh is crucial to the success of India's Look East (now 'Act East') policy.
- Annual bilateral trade is set to cross the \$9 billion mark, making it India's biggest trading partner in South Asia.
- In addition, Bangladesh has facilitated connectivity with the Northeast by allowing the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports.
- Bangladesh is already upset at India's failure to deliver on a promised settlement for sharing the waters of Teesta and about non-tariff barriers on Bangladeshi exports.
- Bangladesh accepted 52 illegals but there is no way it could accept lakhs and millions.
- Bangladesh has maintained its status quo that - "NRC was India's internal problem." Therefore, by pressuring Hasina on this issue, India cannot afford to drive a trusted ally into China's welcoming arms.

Neighbourhood first policy

The current government has proclaimed 'Neighbourhood First' policy. However, the reality speaks quite differently.

- Nepal, once a time-tested ally, has tilted towards China since the 2015 Nepal blockade barring the entry of fuel, medicine and other vital supplies and holding the state to a literal siege. Nepal now has been given access to four Chinese ports at Tianjin, Shenzhen, Lianyungang and Zhanjiang in addition to its dry (land) ports at Lanzhou, Lhasa and Xigatse, as well as roads to these facilities, ending India's monopoly to its trading routes.
- The India-Bhutan relationship has also been strained ever since India temporarily withdrew subsidies on cooking gas and kerosene in 2013, constraining bilateral ties. Bhutan aspires to affirm its sovereignty. It has, for instance, stepped out of India's diplomatic influence, as evidenced by its withdrawal from the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) motor vehicles agreement.
- The India-China power play has also cast its shadow over Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the last few years.

Against this backdrop of China making inroads into South Asia and India's backyard, Bangladesh has so far been the most trusted ally of India.

The NRC issue threatens to disturb the equilibrium in India-Bangladesh ties.

More importantly, it could also have a negative impact on present Bangladesh government chances in the impending general elections and add to the list of grievances voters have against

the Awami League government. That is the last thing the Indian leadership would want to happen in one of its closest allies in the neighbourhood.

Therefore, any plans for deportation of those not on the NRC list are not only politically imprudent but also risk inciting unrest across the region. Previous similar exercises have not been effective and only resulted in alienating individuals from their natural rights.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think the ongoing exercise of NRC can affect Indo-Bangladesh relations? Examine.

India-Maldives: \$1.4 bn aid package to Maldives

Part of: GS Mains II – India and its bilateral ties; International relations

In news:

- India offers \$1.4 bn aid package to Maldives to tackle financial crisis.
- Maldives is facing a debt of \$3.2 billion with China. It is expected to boost Male's global financial standing.
- Financial assistance will be in the form of budgetary support, currency swap and concessional lines of credit for development programmes.
- Both sides agree to coordinate maritime policing activities in the Indian Ocean region.
- Cooperation between both countries is necessary for maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean region.
- India to support the Maldives in its human-centric development plans.

India-Maldives ties: Restoring the balance

Introduction:

- India-Maldives ties strengthened after the Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's three-day visit to India this week.
- This is Mr. Solih's first overseas visit after becoming the President of the Indian Ocean nation of 400,000 people.

Do you know?

- India and Maldives ties were low during previous President (Abdulla Yameen) regime. Mr. Yameen had drawn the Maldives closer to China.
- Under Mr. Yameen, the Maldives welcomed Chinese money for major infrastructure projects and signed a controversial free trade agreement (FTA). India's entreaties for political moderation and closer security ties were summarily ignored.
- President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih surprise victory in the Maldivian presidential elections has **recalibrated his country's ties with India**.
- Solih's victory **represents the collective aspirations of the people for democracy, the rule of law and a prosperous future.**

Recent ties

1. Prime Minister Narendra **Modi had attended the swearing-in ceremony** of Mr. Solih as the President of Maldives in November. (His first visit to the nation as Prime Minister and the first by an Indian head of state since 2011).
2. India desires "to see a **stable, democratic, prosperous and peaceful Republic of Maldives**".
3. Mr. Solih called India the island nation's "**closest friend**" and "reaffirmed his government's '**India-First Policy**', committing to working together closely with India.
4. India announced a **financial assistance package of \$1.4 billion** for the Maldives in the form of budgetary support, currency swap agreements and concessional lines of credit.
5. On security front, both the countries consolidated cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). They have **agreed to strengthen maritime security cooperation** in the IOR through coordinated patrol and aerial surveillance.
6. Both the nations to **attempt to boost trade ties**. Areas such fisheries development, tourism, transportation, connectivity, health, education, information technology, new and renewable energy and communications were earmarked for enhancing bilateral cooperation.

Conclusion:

- India's patient handling of the Maldives crisis over the last few years has positioned it well.
- Maldives would need the support of India as its challenges remain acute. Challenges such as growing threat of Islamist extremism, Governance issues, growing concerns about the money the Maldives owes to China for infrastructure projects etc.
- The more India invest in strengthening democratic institutions in its neighbourhood, the better returns it will get in its foreign policy.

Connecting the dots:

- What are India's interests in the Maldives? Examine the emerging challenges that the small island country is facing and their implications for India.
- What significance Maldives hold for India? Discuss. Also enumerate the irritants in Indo-Maldives relations. How do you assess the present status of relationship?

Why India needs dedicated Techplomacy?

Introduction:

- There were allegations that the technological advances in mid-19th century (especially with the advent of cable) will lead to end of diplomacy. However, it did not end diplomacy; but they forever changed the way it was conducted.
- Today, with the world witnessing more sweeping technological revolution, governments are finding new ways to adapt. New technology requires new approaches, encapsulated by the phrase 'Digital Diplomacy'.
- Whether it is in using the social media to influence public opinion at home and abroad, conducting espionage on other states, securing one's critical infrastructure against foreign interference, setting terms for cross-border data flows, governing the internet, countering terrorism, or preventing the militarisation of Artificial Intelligence, all major governments are reorganising their diplomatic mechanisms.

Do you know?

- To enhance the effectiveness of its voice in the new domain, **France appointed a full time "digital ambassador" in 2017.**
- Denmark has **set up offices of "TechPlomacy"** in Silicon Valley, Copenhagen and Beijing.
- The French and Danish digital ambassadors deal with other governments, also technology giants like Google, Facebook and Alibaba and Huawei.

Why India should review and reorganise its technology diplomacy?

- Technology has now become a driving force shaping the world. For instance, the influence of companies such as Google, IBM, Apple and Microsoft is now so great that their economic strength and impact exceeds that of many nation states.
- Increasing global complexity has led to nation states holding less importance, and private sector giants becoming more high-profile.
- TechPlomacy is needed to build strong ties with these tech giants as these firms open doors to new jobs; they collect a lot of data, and they can also help nations in their fight against terror by "taking down accounts as soon as possible."

- It will help to check the power of technology giants and to engage in traditional diplomatic work with such companies and other key tech stakeholders.
- TechPlomacy will help government support and create the best conditions for the digital era.
- A tech ambassador will reconcile his/her country's national interests.

Conclusion:

Diplomacy today is fast changing due to an increasingly globalised and complex world.

First, social media is acting as a powerful tool that is helping to “influence on a massive scale” and enabling more open, democratic and inclusive diplomacy. Further, technology is creating more informal lines of communication, and enabling a new generation of ‘citizen diplomats’.

Second, diplomats need to consider the implications of artificial intelligence and automation. TechPlomacy will help create the right global institutions to realise the potential, and manage the threats.

Connecting the dots:

- World needs TechPlomacy alongside diplomacy. Do you agree? Elucidate.

India and Pakistan: Row over ownership of the Jinnah House

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and its neighbours; International relations

In news:

- India rejected Pakistan’s claim of ownership of the Jinnah House in Mumbai. The Jinnah House on Malabar Hill in Mumbai was designed by architect Claude Batley in European style and Pakistan’s founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah lived there in the late 1930s.
- Pakistan has been demanding that the property be handed over to it for housing its Mumbai consulate.
- India’s MEA decides to use it for official events.

Pakistan and China ties draws more irk

- A Chinese-built seaport and special economic zone in the Pakistani town of Gwadar, gives Beijing a strategic card to play against India and the U.S. if tensions worsen to the point of naval blockades as the two powers increasingly confront each other at sea.

- Pakistan is the only other country that has been granted access to the China's Beidou satellite navigation system. It allows more precise guidance for missiles, ships and aircraft.
- China had agreed in 2015 to sell eight submarines to Pakistan in a deal worth up to \$6 billion.
- An SEZ under the CPEC would be created in Pakistan to produce a new generation of fighter jets. For the first time, navigation systems, radar systems and onboard weapons would be built jointly by the countries at factories in Pakistan.
- The Chinese-designed JF-17 fighter jets have given Pakistan an alternative to the U.S.-built F-16 fighters.

India should strengthen its Indian Ocean outreach

Introduction

- We recently read that Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih began his trip to India declaring his country's commitment for trade with foreign partners.
- He had assured India that the Maldives is pivoting to the 'India First' policy.

Do you know?

- The five-year-long tenure of his predecessor, Abdulla Yameen, was marked by a serious deterioration in ties with India.
- Abdulla Yameen steadily took his nation towards authoritarianism and into a close embrace with China.
- However, Mohamed Solih's government has adopted a different vision — one anchored in decentralised and people-centric governance.

Fast recap: India-Maldives Ties

- India has worked out a generous \$1.4 billion assistance package to help Maldives address its budget deficit and development challenges.
- Much of the funding may be utilised for people-friendly projects in four domains: health care, education, water and sanitation.
- India has offered visa facilitation that will allow Maldivians to visit India easily (with reciprocal facilities for Indian visitors to the Maldives).
- 1,000 "additional" training slots for the next five years
- Close cooperation on political and diplomatic issues

- Support to the Maldives as it seeks to rejoin the Commonwealth and its entry into the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
- Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih's recent visit to India resulted in the conclusion of four agreements - relating to cooperation for information technology, culture, agri-business, and visa arrangements.
- His government has also given assurances to be fully sensitive to India's security and strategic concerns, in the light of reports that China has gained access to one or more islands for military purposes.
- The two governments now plan "to enhance maritime security" in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Intelligence agencies hope to revert to nurturing better collaboration in combating terrorism, radicalisation and other non-traditional security challenges.

Why India should strengthen its Indian Ocean outreach?

1. China's footprint in South Asia has increased in recent years.
2. India has its own advantages, assets and friends.
3. Maintaining balance in their (Indian Ocean countries') external relations.
4. India enjoys close relations with Mauritius and the Seychelles. A new grouping of India, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and the Seychelles, focussed on maritime security and economic development, looks attainable in the short term.
5. Implementation of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) in IOR
6. Address its neighbours' concerns on security challenges; and harness enticing opportunities for the Blue Economy.

Connecting the dots:

- India's relation with Maldives has got a lifeline as a result of the recent visit of Maldives President. Do you agree? Also discuss why India should strengthen its Indian Ocean outreach?

Bangladesh-India relationship

Part of: GS Mains II – India and its neighbours relations; International Relations

Positive areas:

- Bangladesh-India relationship has taken a giant leap forward.
- In the last decade, the relationship has reached new heights — almost all outstanding issues have been amicably settled, including the **demarcation of boundaries, resolution of adverse territorial possessions and cross-border purchase of electricity.**

- Bus, railway and waterways connectivity
- Connectivity is fostering sub-regional cooperation and bringing benefits to India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan.

Concern areas:

- It is often argued in Bangladesh that India has not done enough.
- Unresolved issues - Teesta water agreement
- India is concerned about unchecked foreign donations received by the Bangladesh. (Funding of about 550 mosques and madrasas by Saudi Arabia)
- China factor – Bangladesh has ensured that it will not allow its territory to be used by any foreign power against any other country.
- On the Rohingya issue, since the signing of the initial agreement, not one refugee has gone back to Myanmar. India is committed not to repatriate the Rohingya unless Myanmar is safe for the return of the refugees.

Chabahar tidings: Benefits and Upcoming Challenges

Introduction:

- The below editorial provides possibilities and challenges for India as the country takes over the port operations in Iran.
- The opening of the first office of Indian Ports Global Limited at Iran's Chabahar and the takeover of operations of the Shahid Beheshti port is a milestone in India's regional connectivity and trade boost.

Importance of Chabahar:

- Chabahar port opens up a permanent alternative route for trade with Afghanistan and Central Asia, given the hurdles in the direct route through Pakistan.
- It facilitates India's role in Afghanistan's development through infrastructure and education projects.
- It further cements India's bilateral ties with Iran, a major oil supplier and potential trade market for India.

To transform Chabahar as regional hub for transit and trade:

- To promote Chabahar and to study ways to make the route more attractive and decrease logistic costs, **an international event in February 2019 will be held** with partnership of India, Afghanistan and Iran.
- About 500 companies have registered with the **Free Trade Zone authority** there.

- **Keeping timelines and delivery of New Delhi's commitments will be key** to the port becoming a regional hub for transit trade, steel and petrochemicals.
- It will be necessary to encourage Afghan companies to use the route more, in line with President Ashraf Ghani's desire to have a commercial fleet under the Afghan flag setting sail from Chabahar.

Geopolitical Challenges to the game-changer vision of Chabahar:

- **US Sanction on Iran** – The Chabahar port has received a waiver from the U.S. sanctions on Iran for the moment, but these concessions could be withdrawn any time, given the constant upheaval in the administration.
- **Security concerns associated with US withdrawal from Afghanistan** – The possibility of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, after the pullout from Syria, will add to security concerns for Afghanistan and impact on the Chabahar route as well.
- **Importance of Geostrategic Location of Pakistan** – The reconciliation process with the Afghan-Taliban is likely to see the regional powers, the U.S. and Russia engaging Pakistan more. This could give Islamabad space to play spoiler in Chabahar, which is seen as a rival warm water port to Pakistan's Gwadar.
- **Opening up of Special Cargo Corridor** – Afghanistan government is hedging its bets on trade via Chabahar. In recent months, special cargo corridors have been opened with China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Europe, Russia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, with more trade diverted through them than with traditional partners Pakistan and India.

Way Ahead:

- For India, it will be important to operationalise the port quickly and smoothen the route to Afghanistan.
- Till now, India has done well to keep a place in the intricate connectivity network of the region.
- Given all the competing interests that criss-cross over Chabahar, it will require sustained and nuanced diplomacy to address the geopolitical challenges.

Connecting the dots:

- Development of Chabahar port is a significant step towards securing India's strategic and economic interests. Comment.
- Despite the strategic importance of Chabahar for India, there has been very little progress on it. Discuss the challenges faced by India in this regard and suggest some strategies for the same?

India's foreign policy: For more regional integration

Context:

- If South Asia is one of the world's least integrated regions, India is considered to be one of the world's least regionally-integrated major powers.

Structural impediments (posed by both India and its neighbours) in fostering regional integration:

1. India's ideational disinclination towards its neighbourhood

- Successive regimes have considered the neighbourhood as an irritant and challenge, not an opportunity.
- India's policies have failed to display a sense of belonging to the region or a desire to work with the neighbourhood for greater integration and cooperation.
- Relations and ties have become more transactional, impatient and small-minded towards our neighbourhood which has, as a result, restricted our space for manoeuvre in the regional geopolitical scheme of things.

2. Absence of a coherent and well-planned regional policy

- India's past policies have ensured a steady decline in its influence and goodwill in the region.
- There is a persistent absence of a coherent and well-planned regional policy.
- India's foreign policy planners therefore need to reimagine the country's neighbourhood policy before it is too late.

3. India's faltering diplomacy

- India has failed to build strong friendships with its neighbours.
- One of the major reasons for India's growing unpopularity in the regional capitals is its increasing tendency to interfere in the domestic affairs of its smaller neighbours, either citing security implications or to offset the target country's unfriendly strategic choices.
- Despite making an impressive start with its neighbourhood-first policy, the Modi government is increasingly battling resentment in the region.
- It tried to interfere with the Constitution-making process in Nepal and was accused of trying to influence electoral outcomes in Sri Lanka.
- While India's refugee policy went against its own traditional practices, it was found severely wanting on the Rohingya question, and seemed clueless on how to deal with the political crisis in the Maldives.

Current trend:

2018 seems to have brought some good news from the regional capitals –

- Arrival of an India-friendly Ibrahim Mohamed Solih regime in Male.
- Return of Ranil Wickremesinghe as Sri Lankan Prime Minister is to India's advantage too.
- Nepal has reached out to India to put an end to the acrimony that persisted through 2015 to 2017.
- Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh are also positively disposed towards India.
- Relationship with Pakistan continues to be testy and directionless.

Crux – New Delhi has a real opportunity today to recalibrate its neighbourhood relations.

What India should avoid while dealing with a sensitive neighbourhood?

1. India must shed its aggression and deal with tricky situations with far more diplomatic subtlety and finesse. The ability of diplomacy lies in subtly persuading the smaller neighbour to accept an argument rather than forcing it to, which is bound to backfire.
2. India should keep in mind that meddling in the domestic politics of neighbour countries is a recipe for disaster, even when invited to do so by one political faction or another. Preferring one faction or regime over another is unwise in the longer term.
3. New Delhi must not fail to follow up on its promises to its neighbours. It has a terrible track record in this regard.
4. There is no point in competing with China where China is at an advantage vis-à-vis India. India simply does not have the political, material or financial wherewithal to outdo China in building infrastructure. Hence India must invest where China falls short, especially at the level of institution-building and the use of soft power.

The way ahead: What India should do?

- India should invest a great deal more in soft power promotion. For example, India could expand the scope and work of the South Asian University (SAU) and ensure that its students get research visas to India without much hassle. If properly utilised, the SAU can become a point for regional integration.
- New Delhi must also look for convergence of interests with China in the Southern Asian region. There are several possible areas of convergence, including counter terrorism, regional trade and infrastructure development. For example, any non-military infrastructure constructed by China in the region can also be beneficial to India while it trades with those countries.
- India must shed its zero-sum style foreign policy-making, and work towards South Asian integration.

New Delhi must invest in three major policy areas –

1. Better regional trading arrangements: India should offer better terms of trade for the smaller neighbours, construct border infrastructure and ease restrictions on such border trade.

2. Forge effective multilateral arrangements: Preference should be to deal with neighbours on multilateral forums. For instance, resurrecting the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
3. India must have a coherent and long-term vision for the neighbourhood:

Connecting the dots:

- What are the roadblocks to greater economic and regional integration with India's neighbours?
- Lack of regional integration will affect the prospect of both economic growth and development of all the South Asian countries and particularly of India. Do you agree? Discuss.
- The current 'neighbourhood policy' of India with an overdose of bilateralism is one of the main roadblocks for South Asian integration. Critically comment.

Bogibeel: A bridge across the Brahmaputra

Introduction:

- Bogibeel, the **longest railroad bridge of India**, spanning nearly five-km across the Brahmaputra link Dibrugarh with North Lakhimpur district of Assam and parts of eastern Arunachal Pradesh.
- Sixty-eight years after being ravaged by a devastating earthquake and the ensuing floods, Dibrugarh is reclaiming its lost glory.
- It used to be a thriving centre of the plantation industry during the colonial times. For the people of the region, it remains a hub of higher education and medical treatment.
- However, for decades, the only recourse for people to cross the Brahmaputra would be to chug along for over an hour, in a diesel-propelled ferry, which would also carry their vehicles and goods, even cattle.
- Crossing the river could be a costlier proposition than flying between Mumbai and Goa.

Major significance behind this bridge construction

- Commissioning the bridge has reduced the journey time across the river to less than five minutes, bringing relief to people living in these remote parts.
- The single biggest factor which has shackled the development of the Northeast region is the absence of robust connectivity.
- It has the potential to infuse economic dynamism in the region and provide opportunities for the expansion of tourism, industrial development and trade. Bogibeel

must be viewed alongside other infrastructure developments in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh.

- The iconic **Bhupen Hazarika bridge** over the **Lohit river** was commissioned recently by the prime minister.
- A 7.5 km long bridge over the Dibang river was dedicated to the nation a few days ago.
- The Trans Arunachal Highway has seen considerable progress, especially in the eastern part of the state.
- An airport has been commissioned at Pasighat, barely two hours away from Dibrugarh.
- One of the most pristine parts of Arunachal Pradesh has now become accessible to the rest of the world.
- This could give a fillip to tourism, given that the region has abundant wildlife and is ideal for river rafting and angling.
- However, an imaginative roadmap of tourism development, promotion and branding needs to be crafted, centred around the region's tribal ethos.
- Dibrugarh lies at the heart of a crucial oil and gas axis in Assam, given its proximity to Digboi and Duliajan oilfields.
- Further east lie the Kharsang gas fields and Kumchai oilfields of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The district also has significant coal deposits.
- There are more than 200 tea factories in Dibrugarh.
- Commissioning of the bridge has raised the prospects of industrial development and opportunities for productive employment for the youth, especially in the mining and plantation sectors.

Improving geo-political relations and reaching to the natural resources

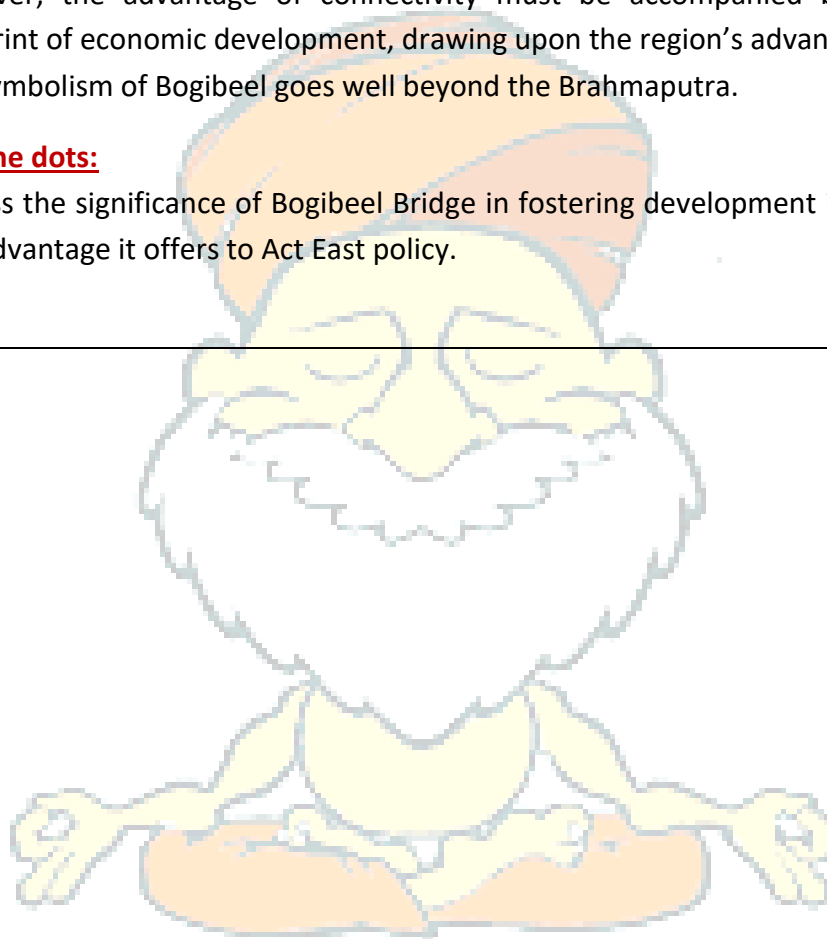
- Bogibeel is the gateway to the historic Stilwell Road, which connects Ledo in Assam to Kunming in China, passing through Myanmar's Kachin state, via Arunachal Pradesh.
- The 1,800 km long route was used for transporting arms to the Chinese by the Americans during World War II. Its revival for trade is well within grasp now.
- The route could well become the centrepiece of the ambitious Act East Policy.
- It would follow the Asian Highway (AH)14 and reach Kunming along AH3.
- The Chinese stretch has a six-lane highway, while the Indian side in Arunachal Pradesh has a two-lane highway.
- Infrastructure in Myanmar, of course, would need to be strengthened and the land customs station at Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh revived.
- Trade could revitalise economic activity, in what is otherwise one of the most backward parts of Arunachal Pradesh. From a strategic standpoint, movement of troops has become a much quicker, efficient and reliable proposition.

Conclusion:

- The road beyond Dibrugarh leads to the frontier parts of Arunachal Pradesh, with a fully functional advanced landing ground of Air Force at Walong, barely 100 km from the Chinese border.
- This was a theatre of armed incursion in 1962. Now access to one of the remotest border outposts in Anjaw has been made much easier.
- Bogibeel is poised to usher winds of change in this part of the world.
- However, the advantage of connectivity must be accompanied by an imaginative blueprint of economic development, drawing upon the region's advantages.
- The symbolism of Bogibeel goes well beyond the Brahmaputra.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the significance of Bogibeel Bridge in fostering development in North East India and advantage it offers to Act East policy.



ECONOMY

Make planning fashionable again

Introduction

- Economic planning is not considered fashionable today. Nevertheless, contemporary economic debates will have much to gain by revisiting the ideas on planning, championed in particular by Jawaharlal Nehru.
- The Planning in India, particularly in the initial stages of development has contributed to laying down of foundation of India's diversified economic base.
- However, the planning in India has received less emphasis post the LPG Reforms. Government has to once again bring back the focus on planning to further promote overall growth and development of the Indian Economy.

Beginning of planning in Independent India

- India under Nehru's leadership inaugurated a strategy for industrialisation of the country in the early 1950s.
- This involved the setting up of public sector units (PSUs) in diverse areas of manufacturing; research institutions in cutting-edge technologies of the time such as space and atomic energy; and centres of higher learning, including the Indian Institutes of Technologies (IITs).
- All of these by a poor country, which was still struggling to find its feet amidst the multiple blows it had to endure during the early years after Independence.

How Planning in India challenged the Traditional Models?

- The standard economic models proposed that the countries should develop industries based on their comparative advantage. According to this theory, countries such as India which have surplus labour should focus on Labour Intensive Industries such as Textiles, Leather etc.
- However, India challenged the then prevailing economic model by focusing on Heavy Industrialisation, Nuclear Research etc which needed comparatively more capital and technology. This has laid down strong foundation of diversified economic base.
- The success that India enjoys today in knowledge intensive sectors such as IT, Pharmaceutical etc can be attributed to the fact that India challenged the deeply held orthodoxy in the economic theory.
- This has now become the model for other developing and third world countries.

- Further, the debate around Indian planning has led to evolution of development economics as an important sub-discipline.

Planning post LPG Reforms

- Post the LPG Reforms, Planning has received less emphasis in India due to decrease in the role of the state and commensurate increase in role of Private sector.
- The PSUs are now viewed as commercial entities rather than creators of new knowledge and technologies.

Planning in a globalised world

- Planning is not incompatible with markets and globalisation. For a developing country trying hard to stay afloat amidst the turbulence of a global economy requires more guidance thorough industrial policies.
- The successes achieved by East Asian countries such as South Korea in manufacturing and Chinese achievements, owe much to the careful planning and investments made by government, particularly in the area of science and technology.

The greatest challenge before India

- The employment challenge that India faces — close to 15 million waiting to be absorbed in the industrial and services sectors every year — is possibly bigger than that faced by any other country (except China) in the world.
- It cannot be resolved with the technologies that foreign companies bring into India, which tend to be labour saving.

Way forward: What should India do then?

- India has to realise that planning is compatible with LPG reforms and Globalization.
- India needs technological advances that create new economic opportunities and absorb the surplus labour in India.
- For example, breakthroughs in biotechnology may find new commercial applications for our agricultural products, or electric vehicles and renewable energy solutions that depend less on imported material.
- Planning should be brought back to the centre of our economic discussions.

Connecting the dots:

- Considering the jobless growth in Indian economy and almost stagnant Industrial and agricultural growth, there is need to bring back Planning in India. Critically analyse.

International Labour Organisation's Global Wage Report

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Gender pay gaps; Labour/Wage inequality issues; Economy

In news:

According to ILO's Global Wage Report –

- Global wage growth, adjusted for inflation, slowed to 1.8% in 2017 (lowest rate since 2008).
- During the financial crisis in 2008, Global wage growth stood at 3.4 per cent.
- 2017 Global wage growth would fall further to 1.1 per cent if China, which made a significant contribution to this growth, were to be excluded from the list.
- Among all regions, workers in Asia and the Pacific got the highest real wage growth over the period 2006-17 with countries like China, India, Thailand and Vietnam remaining on top, the report revealed.

Real wage growth

- Real wage growth is calculated using gross monthly wages, rather than hourly wage rates, which are less frequently available, and fluctuations, therefore, reflect both hourly wages and the average number of hours worked.

What Global Wage Report says about India?

- India registered highest average real wage growth during 2008-2017 in south Asia.
- India and Pakistan has the highest gap of 34.5 per cent and 34 per cent respectively between what men and women earn. This wage gap was the worst among all the 73 countries for which data was compiled.
- Women continued to be paid around 20 per cent less than men globally and the gap was lowest in high-income countries and highest in low and middle income countries.

Wage drag: on ILO's Global Wage Report

Introduction

- **The International Labour Organisation's Global Wage Report** has put into sharp relief one of the biggest drags on **global economic momentum: slowing wage growth**.
- The ILO's report underlines the need for wage expansion that is robust and also equitable.

Key observations

- Global wage growth, adjusted for inflation, slowed to 1.8% in 2017, from 2.4% in 2016, this is the lowest rate since 2008.
- Excluding China (given its high population and rapid wage growth it tends to skew the mean), the average was even lower (1.1% in 2017 against 1.8% in 2016).
- Across a majority of geographies and economic groupings, wage expansions were noticeably tepid last year.
- In the advanced G20 countries the pace eased to 0.4%, with the U.S. posting an unchanged 0.7% growth and Europe (excluding Eastern Europe) stalling at about zero.
- The emerging and developing economies in the G20 were not spared a deceleration, with the growth in wages slowing to 4.3%, from 4.9% in 2016.
- In the Asia and Pacific nations, where workers had enjoyed the biggest real wage growth worldwide between 2006 and 2017, it slid to 3.5% from the previous year's 4.8%.

Causes and effects of low wage growth

- The obvious impact of this low pace has been on global economic growth with **consumption demand hurt** by restrained spending by wage-earners.
- The ILO report observes that the **acceleration of economic growth in high-income countries in 2017 was led mainly by higher investment** spending rather than by private consumption.
- Real wages almost tripled in the developing and emerging countries of the G20 between 1999 and 2017, while in the advanced economies the increase over the same period aggregated to a far lower 9%.
- In many **low- and middle-income economies** the average wage, in absolute terms, was so low it was **still inadequate to cover the bare needs of workers**.
- The **intensification of competition in the wake of globalisation**, accompanied by a worldwide **decline in the bargaining power of workers** has resulted in a decoupling between wages and labour productivity.
- Share of **labour compensation in GDP** across many countries that remains substantially below those of the early 1990s.

Do you know?

- **For the first time**, the ILO report also **focuses on the global gender pay gap**, using data from 70 countries and some 80 per cent of employees worldwide.
- Its findings indicate that despite some significant regional differences, **men continue to be paid around 20 per cent more than women**.
- **In high-income countries the gender pay gap is at its biggest in top-salaried positions.**
- **In low and middle-income countries the gap is widest among lower-paid workers.**

- Its data also suggests that traditional explanations for this - such as differences in the levels of education between men and women who work - play only a "limited" role in explaining gender pay gaps.
- **In many countries women are more highly educated than men but earn lower wages,** even when they work in the same occupational categories.
- **The wages of both men and women also tend to be lower in enterprises and occupations with a predominantly female workforce.**

Conclusion

- **The widening inequality is slowing demand and growth** by shifting larger shares of income to rich households that save rather than spend.
- **For India; to reap the demographic dividend we need not only jobs, but wage expansion** that is robust and equitable.
- To **reduce gender pay gaps** more emphasis should be placed on ensuring equal pay for women and men, and on **addressing the lower value placed on women's work.**

Connecting the dots:

- Critically analyse the wage growth in India and the world. Briefly explain the impacts of low wage growth on economy.

Questions being raised about the new GDP back series

Introduction:

- Three years after the shift to the new base year of 2011-12, the **CSO** and **NITI Aayog**, in a joint press conference, **released the back series** detailing growth numbers for 2005-06 to 2011-12.
- In its new GDP back series data, average growth during UPA regime is down from previous estimates while growth during NDA is pegged higher than during UPA.

Do you know?

- **Mundle expert panel**, which was constituted to prepare the back series under the revised methodology, had not come up with the counter-intuitive estimates that have just been released.
- They estimated the average GDP growth at market prices at 8.37% (2004-05 to 2008-09), and then 7.69% (2009-10 to 2013-014).

Three changes occurred in the revision that was first announced in 2015:

1. Base Year
2. Methodology from GDP at factor cost to GDP at market price (this is the international norm and the basis of the current government's claim that this is what CSO has followed)
3. Method of estimating company output/revenue - which has been done in a much more detailed manner using new data collected by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA 21).

Questions are being raised from experts

- If most important indicators (*provided below*) of the Indian economy were better in 2004-2014, how is the GDP growth rate higher in estimates just released (7.4% per annum since 2014 and only 6.7% per annum in 2005-2014)?

Questions arise over the new GDP series for the following substantive reasons:

1. **Agricultural growth rates at constant prices were much higher** from 2004-05 to 2013-14 than since then.
2. **Two back-to-back drought years (2014 and 2015)** notwithstanding, policies have not been exactly supportive. (Also farmers agitation year after year has increased)
3. The **Index of Agricultural Production**, with a base of 100 for the triennium ending 2007-08, had risen to 129.8 in 2013-14. But after falling, it **barely recovered** to 130 in 2017-18.
4. **Agriculture**, like the **non-agricultural informal sector**, **collapsed** first after demonetisation and then after a poorly implemented Goods and Services Tax. Both measures affected output as well as jobs, especially in the unorganised sector which constitutes nearly half of GDP and half of all exports.
5. **Exports have performed much worse** in the last four years than over the preceding 10 years. Exports were only \$50 billion in 2002-03, but had risen to \$250 billion in 2010-11, and reached \$315 billion in 2013-14. They have not recovered to that level even in 2017-18.
6. In 2003-04, **India's savings rate had risen** from 9.5% of GDP in 1950-51, and stood at 25.9%. It **rose sharply** thereafter to peak at 36.8% — precisely because of a rise in per capita income growth — to a **level unprecedented in India's economic history**, and not achieved since.
7. This rising savings rate contributed to an unprecedented **increase in the investment to GDP ratio**. Then the investment to GDP fell in the wake of the global economic crisis. It is investment that mainly drives growth. (Investment to GDP rise peaked at 36.8% in 2007-08 → 31.3% in 2013-14 → 30.4% in 2014-15 → 29.3% in 2015-16 → 26.4% in 2017-18)
8. Index of Industrial Production (IIP, which consists of manufacturing, mining, electricity) also rose sharply during 2004-05 to 2013-14.

In crux, the entire exercise casts doubt on the credibility of India's growth numbers.

Connecting the dots:

- ["A double digit growth for Indian economy in near future is difficult." Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.](#)

China and the United States to halt additional tariffs

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Indian Economy; International Affairs

In news:

- China and the United States decide to hold off fresh tariffs for 90 days.
- Washington keeps the rate at 10%; Beijing agrees to buy American farm products.
- Both sides are trying again to bridge their differences with fresh talks aimed at reaching an agreement within 90 days.
- The two sides will also launch new trade talks to address issues, including technology transfer, intellectual property, non-tariff barriers, and agriculture.
- If no deal is reached within 90 days, both parties agreed that the 10% tariffs will be raised to 25%.

How US-China trade war will affect India?

- In trade conflicts, there are no winners. Too much protectionism ultimately constricts global growth.
- The effects of a trade war are unlikely to be restricted to merely these two countries. Due to this, India too could find some changing dynamics in its economy.
- The basic principles of economics, i.e., demand and supply, will once again come into play. The shortage of supply of a good, either finished material or raw material, will increase the final consumption price for the consumer.
- Moreover, the burden of increased tax from the duties will also be borne by the final user.

The following are some ways the Indian economy may be affected:

- The **value of the Rupee** has dropped to an all-time low. Weakening of the US dollar will automatically create negative impact on the trade deficit of India, causing a chain reaction of sorts. Moreover, a trade war would slowdown global growth overall, worsening India's already dismal export numbers.

- **Poor investors' confidence** - key indices in the Indian share market dropped due to the cautious approach of the investors. BSE Sensex and NSE Nifty performance fell. Reduces investment flows into India.
- **India-US duties** - As the United States of America imposed duties on steel and aluminium, India now has to pay approximately \$241 million worth of tax to the US. India, on the other hand, as a counter-measure has proposed imposing duties on 30 different types of goods. This will ensure that the US has to pay about \$238 million as duties to India. However, this will make life more difficult for the end consumers as everything that falls under the tariff scanner is expected to become more expensive.

NATIONAL/ECONOMY

TOPIC

General studies 2 & 3

- *Various government institutions; their regulation and autonomy*
- *Banking, Monetary policy and RBI*

In a spirit of accommodation

Introduction

- In the wake of ongoing spat between central government and RBI, some important questions have arisen.
- These questions relate to the relationship between the RBI and the government and between the RBI management and its board. Even if one cannot come to definitive conclusions, it is important to note the ramifications of the issues raised.

Two aspects of RBI's Autonomy

- The RBI must enjoy autonomy which can be seen in two aspects- autonomy as monetary authority and autonomy as a regulator.
- The recent change in the monetary policy framework setting up the Monetary Policy Committee and giving it full freedom to determine the policy rate is a giant step forward in terms of giving the RBI autonomy.
- However, since the mandate of the RBI as a regulator is broad and vague, the autonomy of the RBI as a regulator is blurred.

Relationship between RBI and Government

- The Section 7 of the RBI act provides for a legal framework for the nature of relationship between RBI and Government.

- This section enables the government to issue directions to the RBI in public interest. In spite of this enabling provision, the government has not issued directions so far.
- For example; Benegal Rama Rau resigned as RBI Governor in 1957 on an issue on which he differed from the government. The government clearly stated that monetary policies must necessarily depend upon the larger policies which a government pursues.
- During the recent controversy, the fact that the Government desisted from invoking section 7 was a wise move since it would have impinged on the RBI's autonomy and sent out wrong signals both at home and abroad.

Relationship between RBI Management and its Board

- According to the interpretation of the RBI act, both the Central Board and RBI Governor enjoy concurrent powers in almost all the matters.
- However, some of the members of the central board are nominated by the Government from various fields including the private sector. This can create a conflict of interest as the decisions taken by the RBI could directly affect their interest as well. Hence, as per the tradition, the Board has so far functioned as an adviser.
- The Federal Reserve System in US takes decision through the voting of the board, if it finds necessary.

However, the nature of relationship which has evolved over a period of time in India between the Board and Governor is a good one, where in the Board has by and large played an advisory role.

Conclusion

- It can be concluded that while the Governor can act on his own, he must listen to what the members feel and the sense of the board must be fully reflected in his actions.
- The crux of the problem is that the RBI, the board and the government must understand the limits to which they can push. A spirit of accommodation must prevail.

Connecting the dots:

- The nature of relationship between the Government and RBI, and between RBI management and its board must be based on spirit of accommodation, mutual trust and respect. Comment.

A valid pause: on RBI holding rates

Introduction

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) has decided to keep the policy repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) unchanged at 6.5 per cent.
- This decision of the MPC is consistent with the stance of calibrated tightening of monetary policy in consonance with the objective of achieving the medium-term target for consumer price index (CPI) inflation of 4 per cent.
- It is to be noted that in the last policy review, the RBI had changed its policy stance to "Calibrated tightening" from "neutral", implying that cut in the policy rates was ruled out.

Reasons for keeping the Policy rates unchanged

- The RBI expects that the retail inflation in India would stay below the legally mandated 4 per cent mark for the coming 12 months. It has cut its inflation forecast for the second half of the current fiscal year from 3.9-4.5 per cent to 2.7-3.2 per cent.
- The inflation forecast has been reduced by the RBI mainly on account of decline in food and fuel prices. The Crude oil prices have reduced by almost 30% in the last one month.
- Further, the food inflation has been lower on account of decline in the prices of sugar, pulses, fruits and vegetables.

Do you know?

RBI's various policy stances with regard to policy rates

Accommodative Stance

- Accommodative stance means RBI may reduce the policy rates to increase the money supply in the economy.
- Under this stance, policy rates normally decrease.
- Usually, this policy is adopted when there is slowdown in the economy.

Neutral stance

- Neutral stance means the RBI would have the flexibility to either increase or decrease the policy rates by taking into account the macroeconomic conditions.
- Under this stance, key policy rates would move in either direction.
- Usually, this policy is adopted when the inflation rate is stable.

Calibrated Tightening stance

- Calibrated Tightening stance means the RBI would either keep the rates constant or increase the rates.
- Under this stance, key policy rates either remain unchanged or increase. Decrease in policy rates is ruled out.
- Usually, this policy is adopted when there are concerns of higher rate of inflation.

Changes in SLR rate

- In order to boost credit flows, the RBI has decided to reduce the SLR from 19.5% to 18% over the next 6 quarters by reducing SLR by 25 bps each in every quarter.
- The SLR is one of the monetary policy tools used by the RBI to control money supply in the economy. SLR is the ratio of net demand and time deposits that the banks have to maintain with themselves in the form of cash, G-Secs and Gold.
- Increase in SLR rate leads to increase in rate of interest on loans leading to decrease in money supply. Similarly, decrease in SLR rate leads to increase in supply in the economy.

Future challenges

- There has been divergence between CPI Core Inflation and Headline Inflation. The CPI core inflation has remained higher at 6.2% while the headline inflation has remained at 3.3%. This means that decline in Food prices and crude oil has so far had moderating effect on Inflation.
- However, since both food and crude oil are volatile commodities, one cannot expect that the rate of inflation would continue to remain lower.
- Further, the RBI is worried about the impact of increase in minimum support prices, possible fiscal slippages and a sudden increase in oil prices in case the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries decides on production cuts.

Conclusion

The central bank has once again raised a cautionary signal to governments, both at the Centre and in the States. Fiscal slippages risk impacting the inflation outlook, heightening market volatility and crowding out private investment. Instead, this may be an opportune time to bolster macroeconomic fundamentals through fiscal prudence.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the various policy stances which monetary policy committee(MPC) can take while deciding the policy rates.

AgustaWestland helicopter deal bribery case

Part of: GS Mains III – Indian Economy; Corruption/ Bribe; Parallel Economy

In news:

- Agusta middleman extradited to India from the United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- British national **Christian James Michel** is wanted in the alleged ₹3,700 crore AgustaWestland helicopter deal bribery case.

About the AgustaWestland scandal:

- In early 2013, an Indian national parliamentary investigation began into allegations of bribery and corruption involving several senior officials and helicopter manufacturer AgustaWestland surrounding the purchase of a new fleet of helicopters. The scandal has been referred to as the **Chopper scam**, or **Choppergate**.
- Several Indian politicians and military officials have been accused of accepting bribes from Agusta Westland in order to win the Rs 36 Billion(US\$530 million) Indian contract for the supply of 12 Agusta Westland AW101 helicopters; these helicopters are intended to perform VVIP duties for the President of India and other important state officials.
- The AgustaWestland scandal broke in 2013 and the former Air Force Chief S P Tyagi and two other key accused have been arrested on criminal conspiracy and illegal gratification charges by the CBI (in July 2018).

Resignation of RBI Governor and its impact on Indian Economy

Introduction:

- In a surprising move, Reserve Bank of India's Governor **Urjit Patel** resigned citing personal reasons.
- His resignation comes against the backdrop of increasing tensions between the Finance ministry and the Reserve Bank of India.
- **N.S. Vishwanathan** (senior most among the four Deputy Governors) gets interim charge.
- Mr. Vishwanathan was appointed as Deputy Governor in July 2016.
- In recent months, the government and the RBI have been at loggerheads over whether the RBI has been too hawkish in its stance towards lenders and the economy given a drop in the inflation rate and signs of slower growth, as well as in the face of defaults by a major lender.

Patel is fifth RBI Governor in free India to resign

- Urjit Patel is the fifth RBI Governor in independent India to have resigned from his post before his term was over.
- The first RBI Governor to do so was **Benegal Rama Rau** who was Governor from 1949 to 1957.
- Experts say Rau resigned because of his differences with then Finance Minister T.T. Krishnamachari.

- **KR Puri, RN Malhotra and Bimal Jalan** were the other RBI Governors who resigned from their post.
- However, the precedent for an RBI Governor resigning was set before Independence, when the first Governor, **Sir Osborn Smith** resigned in 1937 due to differences with the Finance Member of the Viceroy's Council.

How does his resignation impact the Economy?

- Economists have cautioned that it **will cause jitters in the stock market and uncertainty over the central bank's policies** regarding non-monetary policy issues such as Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) norms, and diluting the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code rules for power sector companies.
- **India's currency and stocks are set to slide. Market to fall quite significantly.**
- Indian market is being driven more by global factors than what's been happening here. Economists suspect things may get pretty bad in future.
- Economists also say that there is uncertainty on the other issues that come under the RBI Governor's purview. (macroprudential regulations, liquidity infusions etc)
- Investors, especially institutional, would look at the development as a corroboration of the growing rift between the central bank and the government — a sign **not healthy to the financial markets**.
- It will raise concerns of not only **foreign investors**, but also **domestic investors**, especially at a time **when liquidity remains tight**.
- **Ratings agency Moody's Investors Service** reacted to the resignation of Reserve Bank of India Governor Urjit Patel, saying that any government attempt to curtail the central bank's independence **will be credit negative**.
- The ratings agency said independence of central bank is an important consideration of its assessment of a country's institutional strength.

Connecting the dots:

- An independent central bank augurs well for a democratic politico-economy. However, there should be a mechanism to make RBI and its governor accountable to the Parliament. Do you agree? Critically examine.

MSMEs: Changing the Indian state from bully to ally

Introduction

- Policy makers often romanticize MSMEs over large employers because it believes that **MSMEs** are a **source of massive job creation**, are the **salvation of less-skilled job seekers**, and **embody solid middle-class values**.
- However, MSMEs view the Indian state as a bully rather than an ally, because of its 60,000-plus employer compliance universe that changes 5,000-plus times a year and 3,300-plus possible filings for enterprises.
- Therefore, there is a need for massive regulatory rationalization, simplification and digitalization because no MSME can possibly keep track of 60,000 plus regulatory compliances.

The toxic regulatory cholesterol

Changing regulations frequently makes life miserable for MSMEs and breeds informality

	Possible annual compliances	Possible filings every year	Changes last year
Labour/HR	27,191	1,890	288
Finance	9,871	797	3,725
Environment, health & safety	2,534	86	10
Corporate laws	1,490	44	168
Commercial laws	5,530	355	293
Sebi	3,043	18	326
RBI	1,545	64	62
FSSAI	1,647	8	72
Other regulators	7,891	120	87
TOTAL	60,472	3,382	5,031

Source: Avantis Regtech database

Pic:

<https://www.livemint.com/r/LiveMint/Period2/2018/12/14/Photos/Processed/opinionchart.jpg>

India's next wave of Ease of Doing Business (EODB) should have three vectors—

1. **rationalization** (cutting down the number of laws),
2. **simplification** (cutting down the number of compliances and filings) and
3. **digitization** (architecting for true paperless, presence-less and cashless).

Rationalization could start with clustering the 44 labour laws into a single labour code.

Simplification would include replacing our 25-plus different numbers issued by various government arms to every employer with a unique enterprise number (an Aadhaar for enterprises).

Finally, we must move away from the current approach to digitization as a website and shift to open architecture-based API frameworks, where multiple players compete in providing services to employers.

Other concerns:

- MSMEs remain, by their predominantly informal nature, vulnerable to structural and cyclical shocks, at times with persistent effects.
- Some of the critical issues that hamper their development were absence of access to easy finance and credit instruments, serious regulatory constraints, lack of access to modern and affordable technology, lack of basic infrastructure, lack of access to modern marketing and distribution networks, shortage of skilled labour and inflexible and archaic labour laws.
- The micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) have been impacted adversely by the twin shocks of demonetisation and goods and services tax (GST).

Conclusion:

India is expected to emerge as one of the leading economies in the world over the next decade and the Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) segment is expected to play a significant role.

The development of this segment is extremely critical to meet the national imperatives of financial inclusion and generation of significant levels of employment across urban, rural and rural areas across the country. Further, it can nurture and support development of new age entrepreneurs who have the potential to create globally competitive businesses from India.

Connecting the dots:

- Explain in brief the significance of MSMEs in Indian economy. Also discuss the challenges faced by the MSME sector in India.

Simplification of the Goods and Services Tax

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and related issues

In news:

- PM Modi has hinted at further simplification of the Goods and Services Tax.
- The current government wants to ensure that 99% items attract sub-18% GST slab.
- According to the PM, GST implementation has removed contradictions in the trade market and efficiency of system is improving. The economy is also getting transparent.

'Strategy for New India @75'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Government policies and interventions and issues arising out of their design and implementation; Indian economy and related issues

In news:

- NITI Aayog released a vision document – 'Strategy for New India @75'
- It contains comprehensive national strategy **to build New India by 2022** and propel India towards a **USD 5 trillion economy by 2030**.
- Niti Aayog through this vision document attempts to **bring innovation, technology, enterprise and efficient management together**, at the core of policy formulation and implementation.
- 'Strategy for New India @ 75' has identified 41 different areas that require either a sharper focus on implementing the flagship schemes already in place or a new design and initiative to achieve India's true potential.
- The forty-one chapters in the document have been disaggregated under four sections: **Drivers, Infrastructure, Inclusion and Governance**.

To download, visit – http://niti.gov.in/writereaddata/files/Strategy_for_New_India.pdf

Some of the key recommendations –

According to the vision document,

- A growth rate of 9% is essential to generate enough jobs and achieve universal prosperity.
- In order to the economy's size in real terms from \$2.7 trillion in 2017-18 to nearly \$4 trillion by 2022-23, India should target 8% growth over the period 2018-23.
- In order to boost economic growth, the document identified few key steps – increase the country's investment rate, increase the tax-GDP ratio, boost both private and public investment.
- Recommends to rationalise direct taxes for both corporate tax and personal income tax.
- There is a need to ease the tax compliance burden and eliminate direct interface between taxpayers and tax officials using technology.

In Agriculture sector,

- Emphasis must shift to converting farmers to 'agripreneurs' by further expanding e-National Agriculture Markets (e-NAMs) and replacing the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act with the Agricultural Produce and Livestock Marketing (APLM) Act.
- The creation of a unified national market, a freer export regime and abolition of the Essential Commodities Act are essential for boosting agricultural growth.
- The document also called for a strong push towards 'Zero Budget Natural Farming' (ZBNF) techniques that reduce costs, improve land quality, and increase farmers' incomes.

Mission 2022-23

The government think tank NITI Aayog unveiled a strategy document on Wednesday. Excerpts from the document:



- Target is to raise the investment rate from about 29% in 2017-18 to about 36% of GDP by 2022-23

- The tax-GDP ratio to be raised from 17% to 22%

- The share of

- waterways in freight transport to be doubled

- All villages to be digitally connected

- The size of the economy to be increased to \$4 trillion

Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/20/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/6697186c_2606335_101_mr.jpg

Analysis of NITI Aayog's 'Strategy for New India'

Context:

- Recently the government think tank NITI Aayog had unveiled the 'Strategy for New India @ 75' which defines clear objectives for 2022-23.
- While there are many refreshing improvements in NITI Aayog's 'Strategy for New India @ 75' from the erstwhile Planning Commission's plans, there are also concerns about some of the strategies recommended.

Analysis of the Recommendations:

Participatory Approach in policy making based on ground realities –

- The intent to change the approach from preparations of plans and budgets to the creation of a mass movement for development in which “every Indian recognises her role and experiences the tangible benefits” is laudable.
- However, it will be worthwhile for NITI Aayog to get feedback from quality stakeholders on whether it has improved the process of consultation substantially or not. **Corporate Feedback Initiative** will make it more dynamic.

Focus on improvement of policies based on 2nd ARC Report –

- The NITI Aayog strategy emphasizes the need to improve implementation of policies and service delivery on the ground, which is what matters to citizens.
- Its resurrection of the 15 reports of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission and recommendation that they must be implemented vigorously are welcome.

The shape of the overall growth –

- NITI Aayog’s vision document emphasizes on achieving rapid growth (9-10 per cent by 2022-23).
- It also talks about making growth to be inclusive, sustained, clean and formalised.
- However, it is the shape of growth that matters more than size. The employment-generating capacity of the economy is what matters more to citizens than the overall GDP growth rate.

Manufacturing Sector –

- Vision document aims to improve manufacturing sector growth from 16% to 25% of the GDP.
- It emphasizes on more capital-intensive industries and overall goal is size of sector. However, it should lay more emphasis and target labour intensive industries.
- The growth of industry and manufacturing is essential to create more employment, and to provide bigger opportunities to Indians who have been too dependent on agriculture so far. Thus labour-intensive industries are required for job creation.
- The strategy does say labour-intensive industries must be promoted, but the overall goal remains the size of the sector.
- Indian statistical systems must be improved quickly to measure employment in various forms, formal as well as informal.

Cluster Approach for Small Enterprise for Competitive Industrial Sector--

- A big weakness in the Indian economy's industrial infrastructure is that middle-level institutions are missing due to labour laws, as if enterprise have more than 10

employees, it should be formalized and follow labour laws to provide social security and others benefit, thus enterprise remains small, or too large.

- Rather than formalising small enterprises excessively, clusters and associations of small enterprises should be formalised.
- Small enterprises cannot bear the burden of excessive formalisation, which the state and the banking system need to make the informal sector 'legible' to them.
- Professionally managed formal clusters will connect the informal side of the economy with its formal side, i.e. government and large enterprises' supply chains.
- NITI Aayog's plan for industrial growth has very rightly highlighted the need for strong clusters of small enterprises as a principal strategy for the growth of a more competitive industrial sector.

Managing Trade-off between Human development and Capital Investment –

- The strategy highlights the urgency of increasing the tax base to provide more resources for human development. It also says financial investments must be increased to strengthen India's production base.
- However, managing this trade-off will not be easy.
- If tax incentives must be given, they should favour employment creation over capital investment.
- Means capital investment is needed but it should not get priority over human development.

Labour Laws –

- Document recommends complete codification of central labour laws into four codes by 2019.
- While this will enable easier navigation for investors and employers through the Indian regulatory maze, what is required is a fundamental reorientation of the laws and regulations — they must fit emerging social and economic realities.

Universal Social Security –

- The nature of work and employment is changing, even in more developed economies. It is moving towards more informal employment, through contract work and self-employment, even in formal enterprises.
- In such a scenario, social security systems must provide for all citizens, not only those in formal employment.
- Indeed, if employers want more flexibility to improve competitiveness of their enterprises, the state will have to provide citizens the fairness they expect from the economy.

- The NITI Aayog strategy suggests some contours of a universal social security system. These must be sharpened.

Strengthening Worker Unions with More Flexibility to Employee –

- Workers negotiation power is weak than the employer thus they must have associations to aggregate themselves to have more weight in the economic debate with owners of capital.
- Rather than weakening unions to give employers more flexibility, laws must strengthen unions to ensure more fairness.
- Indeed, many international studies point out that one of the principal causes of the vulgar inequalities that has emerged around the world is due to the weakening of unions.
- The NITI Aayog strategy mentions the need for social security for domestic workers too. This will not be enforceable unless domestic workers, scattered across millions of homes, have the means to collectively assert their rights.

Treat worker as an Assets –

- All employers in India should realise that workers must be their source of competitive advantage.
- India has an abundance of labour as a resource, whereas capital is relatively scarce. Human beings can learn new skills and be productive if employers invest in them.
- Employers must treat their workers, whether on their rolls or on contract, as assets and sources of competitive advantage, not as costs.

Conclusion:

The shape of the development process matters more to people than the size of the GDP. True development must be by the people (more participative), of the people (health, education, skills), and for the people (growth of their incomes, well-being, and happiness).

Centre seeks ₹41,000 crore more to recapitalise banks

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and related issues

In news:

- The government moved a proposal in Parliament for an additional ₹41,000 crore to **recapitalise public sector banks**, over and above the already budgeted ₹65,000 crore.

- If approved by the House, this would take the **total recapitalisation package** for the current financial year to **₹1,06,000 crore**, of which the government plans to utilise ₹83,000 crore over the remaining portion of the year.

According to the government,

- recognition of loans that are non-performing assets (NPAs) was nearly complete
- recovery process is progressing strongly
- ₹60,726 crore recovered in the first half of this financial year

The government fund infusion will have four express objectives:

- 1) To **help banks meet regulatory capital norms**
- 2) Enable better performing PCA (prompt corrective action) **banks to get capital**
- 3) Infuse funds into non-PCA banks that are closer to the red line and
- 4) **Give regulatory and growth capital** to banks that are being amalgamated

Funding the banks

Govt. has sought approval to give ₹41,000 cr. more to PSU banks

- Demand will take the recap amount to ₹1,06,000 cr. this year

- Of this, govt. plans to spend ₹83,000 cr. over next few months

- Funds will be used to help banks meet capital requirements, come out of PCA* framework and merged banks to grow



- They will also be used to prevent borderline banks from slipping into PCA framework

- Non-performing assets are declining and recoveries in the first half of this year were at ₹60,726 cr.

- Most PSU banks will get funds, except stronger ones such as SBI

- Govt. had announced ₹2.11 lakh cr. capitalisation plan in October 2017, of which ₹1.35 lakh crore was to be raised through recapitalisation bonds

- The rest was to be raised by banks from the market or via sale of non-core assets

*Prompt corrective action

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NITI Aayog SDG index

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Development issues; Gove schemes and interventions; Indian Economy and related issues

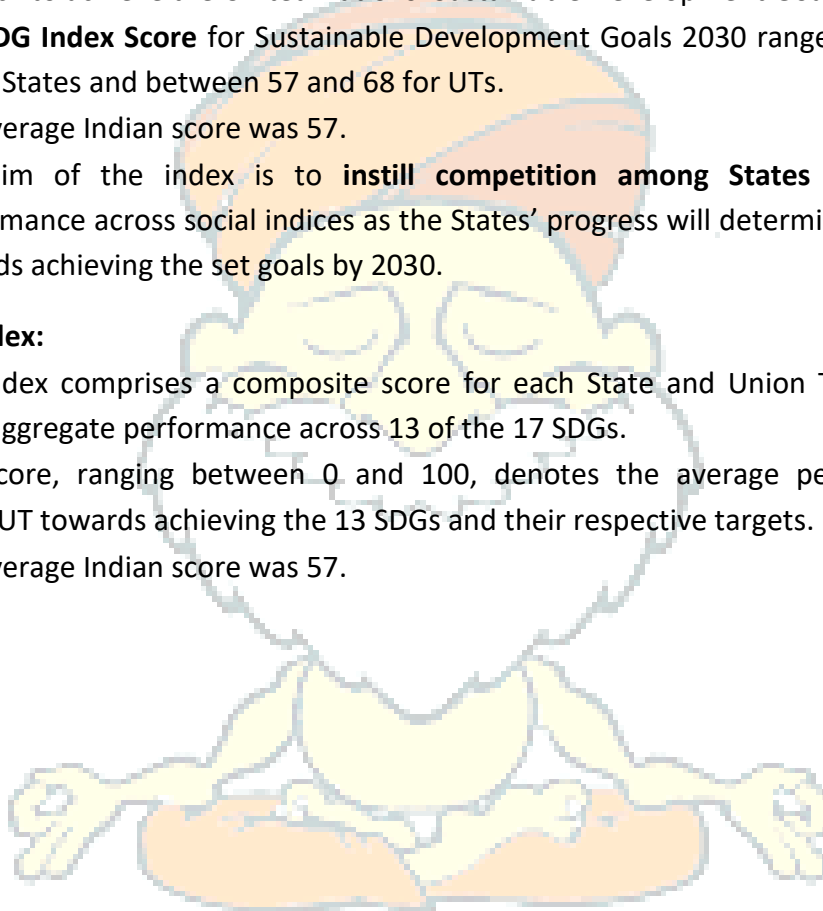
In news:

According to a first-of-its-kind sustainable development index released by NITI Aayog –

- **Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu** have been ranked highest in terms of being on track to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- The **SDG Index Score** for Sustainable Development Goals 2030 ranges between 42 and 69 for States and between 57 and 68 for UTs.
- The average Indian score was 57.
- The aim of the index is to **instill competition among States** to improve their performance across social indices as the States' progress will determine India's progress towards achieving the set goals by 2030.

About the Index:

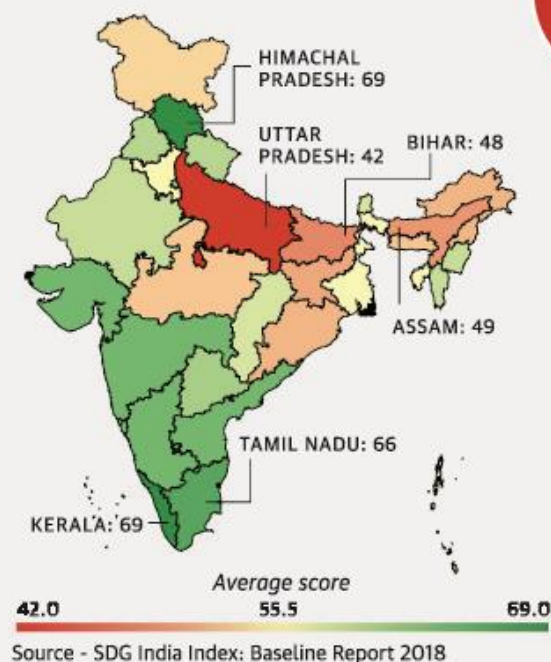
- The index comprises a composite score for each State and Union Territory based on their aggregate performance across 13 of the 17 SDGs.
- The score, ranging between 0 and 100, denotes the average performance of the State/UT towards achieving the 13 SDGs and their respective targets.
- The average Indian score was 57.



Quantifying **development**

Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are progressing at a faster rate towards the Sustainable Development Goals set for 2030, a NITI Aayog report said on Friday

The progress was measured using a score based on each aggregate performance across 13 SGDs



57/100
India's
overall score



WHAT THE SCORES MEAN
They reflect a State's progress in goals, such as ending poverty, ensuring healthy lives, gender equality and sustainable water management, among others

- U.P., Bihar and Assam are progressing at a slower rate
- The score ranges between 0 and 100. If a State's score is 100, it means that it has achieved the national target set for 2030
- If the score is 0, it means that the State's progress is the worst among all

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Do you know?

- Among the States, Kerala and Himachal Pradesh are the front runners, with an SDG India Index score of 69. Among the UTs, Chandigarh is the front runner with a score of 68.
- Tamil Nadu has a score 66, and is the top scorer on the goals to do with eradicating poverty and also providing clean and affordable energy.
- Kerala's top rank is attributed to its superior performance in providing good health, reducing hunger, achieving gender equality and providing quality education.
- Himachal Pradesh ranks high on providing clean water and sanitation, in reducing inequalities and preserving the mountain ecosystem.

Report card

NITI Aayog has ranked every State based on its performance on 13 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The index score used for measurement ranges between 0 and 100. A score of 100 signifies that the national target set for 2030 has been achieved while 0 denotes it was the worst performer. A look at what the SDGs mean and where the States stand:

PROGRESS METER

Table shows India's progress in each goal: Good progress (■), average progress (■), & slow progress (■)

SDG	Score
SD5	36
SD11	39
SD9	44
SD2	48
SD7	51
SD3	52
SD1	54
SD4	58
SD6	63
SD8	65
SD10	71
SD16	71
SD15	90

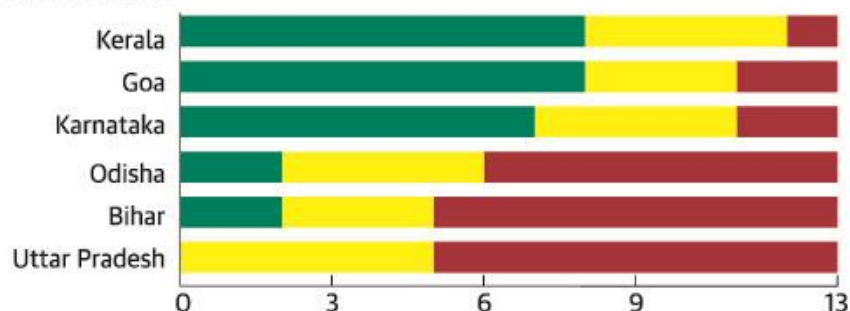
WHAT THE GOALS MEAN?

SD1: End poverty; **SD2:** End hunger; **SD3:** Ensure healthy lives & promote well-being; **SD4:** Ensure quality education; **SD5:** Achieve gender equality; **SD6:** Ensure sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; **SD7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy; **SD8:** Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth; **SD9:** Build resilient infrastructure; **SD10:** Reduce inequality; **SD11:** Make cities and settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; **SD12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; **SD13:** Combat climate change; **SD14:** Conserve marine resources; **SD15:** Protect terrestrial ecosystems; **SD16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies



TOP THREE AND BOTTOM THREE PERFORMERS

Graph shows the state of progress of all the 13 goals in the top 3 and bottom 3 States



Pic:

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State startup Ranking Report, 2018

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and related issues; Development issues

In news:

According to the Central government's **State startup Ranking Report, 2018** –

- Maharashtra is placed in 25-50 percentile 'emerging' category (i.e., the State has ranked in the bottom half).

- Gujarat claimed the top spot

Reasons for Maharashtra's poor ranking –

- Maharashtra announced its startup policy only in 2018. Andhra Pradesh was the first State in the country to announce a startup policy in 2014, following directions from the Centre to all States.
- Maharashtra's industrial growth rate is falling continuously, from 7.2% in 2015-16 to 6.5% in 2017-18.
- Maharashtra's ease-of-doing-business rank has come down from eight in 2015 to 13 in 2018.

The State-wise story

	States	Percentile
Best performer	Gujarat	100
Top performers	Karnataka, Kerala, Odisha and Rajasthan	85 to 100
Leaders	Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana	70 to 85
Aspiring leaders	Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal	50 to 70
Emerging states	Assam, Delhi, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra , Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand	25 to 50
Beginners	Chandigarh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Puducherry, Sikkim and Tripura	More or less equal to 25

SOURCE: STATE STARTUP RANKING REPORT, 2018 RELEASED BY DIPP

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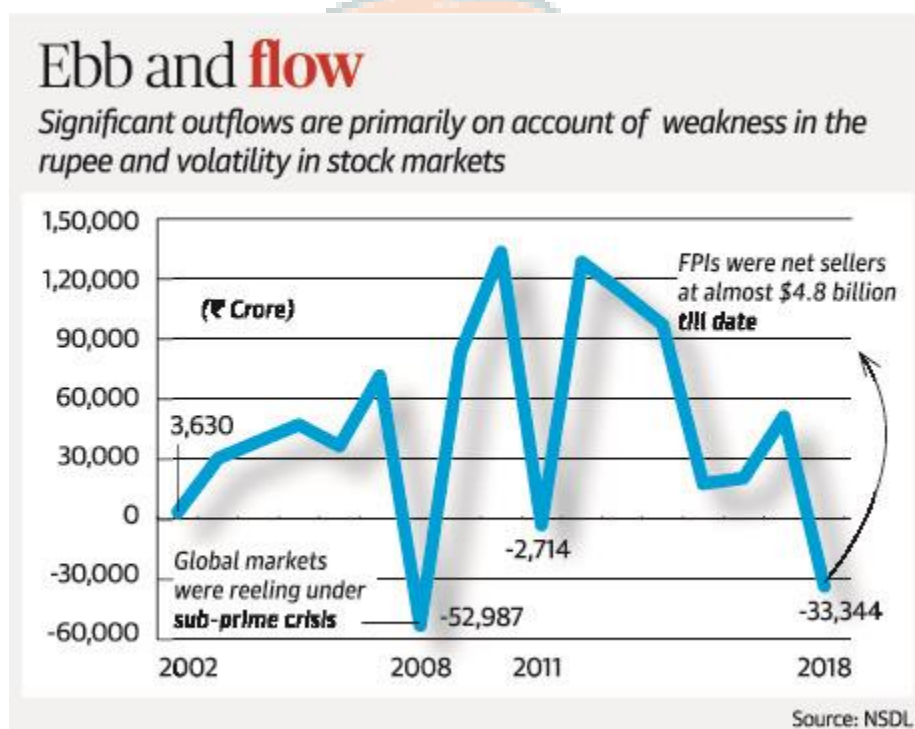
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Foreign fund outflows highest since 2008

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and issues associated with it.

In news:

- For the Indian equity markets, year 2018 will end as the worst in terms of foreign money outflows since 2008 when markets across the globe were reeling under the sub-prime crisis and Lehman Brothers filed for the largest bankruptcy in history.
- Reasons – weakness in the rupee, trade war between U.S. and China and the volatility of the stock markets
- The biggest factor that spooked everyone, especially foreign investors, was the fall in the rupee that moved from around 64 level to 74 against the dollar during the year.



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Bimal Jalan to head six-member panel on RBI's economic capital framework

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy and issues related to it

In news:

- RBI constituted a Skilled Committee on Financial Money Framework.
- The Committee will be headed by Bimal Jalan.
- The panel will come to a decision on the suitable measurement of reserves that the RBI ought to preserve and the dividend it ought to give to the governing administration.

- The committee will also review best practices followed by the central banks globally in making assessment and provisions for risks, to which central bank balance sheets are subjected.

The safety net of the future

Introduction:

- Social inequality is the most acutely felt social problem in India, insecurity, more than poverty, is the most acutely felt economic problem.
- While most measures suggest that only one-fifth of the population today is under the official poverty line, large sections of those even much above that line are subject to brutal economic insecurities of various kinds (due to weather or health risks, market fluctuations, job losses).

Background of the loan waivers

- A bad idea plays havoc with the banking culture (just as that of loan waivers for corporate defaulters does), but most of it goes to help the middle and large farmers (more than two-thirds of our farmers are marginal farmers with less than 1 hectare of land, who take only 20 per cent of institutional loans, and owe the rest to private lenders, which the waiver programme will not touch).
- So some politicians are now paying attention to the politically successful Rythu Bandhu example of income support to Telangana farmers (at about Rs 10,000 per hectare).
- All this distress arises directly or indirectly from India's singular failure in creating enough secure jobs.
- The farm distress is ultimately because of low productivity (due to lack of enough irrigation, cold storage and extension services, apart from the effects of climate change), and the low-earning farmers themselves want to move to non-farm jobs.
- This has been a failure of all political parties over many decades.
- The absence of secure jobs is also behind agitations on job reservations even by dominant castes (Marathas, Patidars, Jats, Kapus) and various incidents of hateful violence and minority lynchings.
- Task of creating a sufficient number of secure jobs a long-term project.
- One idea is that of a **Universal Basic Income Supplement (UBIS)**, which avoids some of the problems for loan waivers and farm income support per hectare, and also some of the administrative and perverse incentive problems of most insurance schemes.

What about the fiscal cost of the UBIS?

- We know that the highly defective loan waiver programme, if applied to all states in India, will easily cost more than Rs 4 trillion.
- The feasibility of UBIS, depends on the political will to increase the tax-GDP ratio, and (assuming that none of the existing major anti-poverty programmes will be significantly scaled down) to cut down on various subsidies largely enjoyed by the better-off sections of the population.

Way forward

- It has been estimated that the latter subsidies (for the central and state governments together) currently come to about 6 per cent of GDP; another 6 per cent of GDP is in the form of “revenues foregone” in the central budget.
- All this adds to about 10 per cent of GDP.
- But at least a quarter of these resources can pay for a decent UBIS for everybody to start with, give it only to women, which will halve the cost.
- The potential is there to tax (and reduce the subsidies for) the better-off and address India’s staggering problem of economic insecurity.

Connecting the dots:

- Will a universal basic income work in India? Discuss the pros and cons, and challenges of implementing universal basic income (UBI) in India.

New FDI guidelines on e-commerce

In news:

- Government recently reviewed the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy in e-commerce.
- Under the new norms, online marketplaces like Flipkart and Amazon India can no longer sell products of the companies in which they have a stake.
- The new policy also prohibits these e-commerce companies from entering into an agreement for the exclusive sale of products.

What are the changes to the FDI norms covering e-commerce?

- The new norms **bar exclusive tie-ups** between e-commerce firms that follow the ‘marketplace model’ and vendors using their platform.
- In a marketplace model, the e-commerce firm is not allowed to directly or indirectly influence the sale price of goods or services, and is required to offer a level playing field to all vendors.

- The new norms said cashback or services, such as quick delivery, offered by e-tailers have to be applicable to all vendors on their platforms.
- According to the FDI policy on e-commerce sector, while 100 per cent FDI under automatic route is permitted in the marketplace model of e-commerce, FDI is not permitted in inventory-based model of e-commerce.
- Sales through one vendor not to exceed 25% in market place model.

Why the new norms?

The new norms are brought in by the government to plug-in some loopholes:

- Offline traders have been complaining that e-commerce platforms with access to FDI are able to give deep discounts and other incentives through related-party vendors, which they cannot match.
- The new norms aim to tackle the anti-competitive behaviour by e-commerce entities and to ensure that there is no wrong subsidization and the marketplace remains neutral to all vendors.
- Small traders believe the latest policy change will create a level playing field by placing curbs on discounts by Amazon and Flipkart, and price competition from the e-commerce giants was also hitting conventional shopkeepers.
- Both online and offline traders in the country will now be able to sell their goods on online platforms in a transparent manner.
- The move is aimed at checking predatory pricing and deep discounting.
- An e-commerce marketplace can only act as a facilitator between seller and buyer. It cannot exercise ownership or control over the goods to be sold.

How do the new norms impact e-commerce firms?

- E-commerce companies, such as Amazon and Flipkart, have been luring customers with deep discounts and exclusive offerings. The bar on such firms 'influencing' pricing and mandating vendors to sell exclusively on their platforms may have a major impact on customer behaviour.
- This will, in turn, have an impact on the revenue and growth of e-commerce companies in India.
- This clause will also have an impact on private labels/in-house brands being sold by e-commerce companies.
- The bar on e-commerce companies from selling products from entities they have a stake in, could affect Amazon because it has a stake in its two major seller entities, Cloudtail and Appario.
- Even Flipkart has exclusive partnerships with top smartphone brands such as Xiaomi and Oppo. The new norms will adversely impact their business models.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss how the recent draft FDI guidelines on e-commerce impact online as well as brick and mortar retail?
- The advent of e-commerce companies and the exponential rise in their reach require effective regulation in order to not only protect consumer interests but also support their own growth. Elucidate.



AGRICULTURE

Job creation at the farmer's doorstep

Introduction

- The government's initiative to double the farmers' income is a welcome move. However, it would benefit only the 48% of the population who are dependent on the agriculture and would not cater to non-agricultural households.
- Hence, in order to promote inclusive growth, we need to look at generating alternative sources of income which would benefit both the agricultural as well as non-agricultural households.

Findings of NABARD

- Rural India's economic situation continues to worsen. According to All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey carried out by NABARD, the agricultural households derive only 43% of their income directly from agriculture.
- Further, it highlights that the agricultural households have accumulated a higher share of debt as compared to non-agricultural households.
- There is need to think for no-agricultural solution for doubling the farmers income by 2022.

How can it be done?

- There is a need to promote farm diversification since it would provide additional source of income to both marginal farmers as well as landless labourers and hence more inclusive.
- Further, it has added benefits in terms of overcoming land constraint while enabling the farmers to withstand exogenous shock through additional income.
- In this regard, there is need to undertake appropriate reforms in two key areas- Livestock Sector and Migrant Population.
- The government has to focus on the livestock sector through national breeding policy to upgrade the best performing indigenous breeds. The feed supply, which is currently inadequate, needs to be mitigated through greater imports.
- There should be greater investment in preventive health care of the animals.
- We must also take into consideration the fact that agricultural labourers routinely seek construction-related daily wage labour to bolster their income and hence improvement in the conditions of migrant workers in the construction sector requires a multi-pronged approach.

- The migrant workers have to get access to government schemes and programmes.
- In spite of existence of multiple laws for the welfare of construction workers, the compliance is poor and hence penalties for non-compliance have to be increased.
- Crèche facilities at construction sites should be provided to also ensure that children are not neglected.

Conclusion

- Hence, overall our policies must focus on creating long term, sustainable, non-farm employment options that would aid in promoting inclusive growth in India.
- We have so far focused on development model which required people to move away from agriculture towards cities, we now need to create jobs at their doorstep.

Connecting the dots:

- In order to double the farmers' income, relying only on agriculture will not be sufficient. Critically examine and suggest some non-farm measures to bolster the income enhancing capabilities for farmers and agriculture labourers.

Agriculture Export Policy: Policy to double agri exports

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy; Agriculture; Government schemes and policies

In news:

- Cabinet approved the **Agriculture Export Policy**, aimed at increasing India's exports to **\$60 billion by 2022** from the current \$37 billion.
- This is in line with the Prime Minister's vision of **doubling farmers' income**.

Objectives:

- To **double farmers' income**.
- To **diversify the export basket** and destinations.
- To **boost high-value and value-added exports**, with a focus on perishables.
- To promote the export of "**novel, indigenous, organic, ethnic, traditional** and non-traditional" products.
- To provide an **institutional mechanism** for market access, tackling barriers, and dealing with sanitary and phytosanitary issues.
- To strive to **double India's share in world agri exports** by integrating with global value chain at the earliest.
- **Enable farmers to get benefit of export opportunities** in overseas market.

Are GM crops a failure?

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Agriculture; Environment and Biodiversity; Science and Technology

In news:

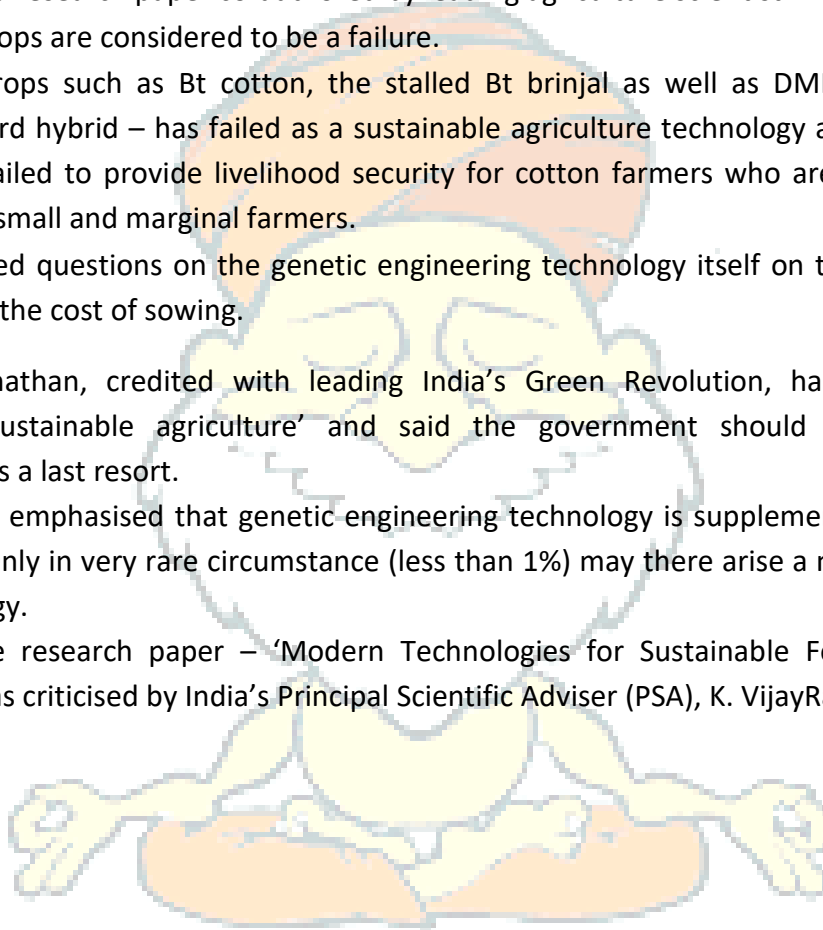
According to a research paper co-authored by leading agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan –

- GM crops are considered to be a failure.
- GM crops such as Bt cotton, the stalled Bt brinjal as well as DMH-11, a transgenic mustard hybrid – has failed as a sustainable agriculture technology and has, therefore, also failed to provide livelihood security for cotton farmers who are mainly resource-poor, small and marginal farmers.
- It raised questions on the genetic engineering technology itself on the grounds that it raises the cost of sowing.

Prof. Swaminathan, credited with leading India's Green Revolution, has in recent years advocated 'sustainable agriculture' and said the government should only use genetic engineering as a last resort.

Swaminathan emphasised that genetic engineering technology is supplementary and must be needbased. Only in very rare circumstance (less than 1%) may there arise a need for the use of this technology.

However, the research paper – 'Modern Technologies for Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security' – was criticised by India's Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA), K. VijayRaghavan as 'deeply flawed'.



Not sustainable

Arguments raised by P.C. Kesavan and M. S. Swaminathan in their paper:

- Mutations and natural selection are the predominant evolutionary mechanisms to induce variations in flowering plants

- In r-DNA technology (Genetic Engineering or GE) all the molecular and cellular events which are triggered with the insertion of 'exogenous DNA', are not precisely understood

- Since cost of GE seeds and inputs as in Bt Cotton are exorbitant, small farmers are unable to withstand crop losses

- The site of a gene's insertion is not controllable, and health concerns from unintended effects



have been raised

- Precautionary principle has been done away with in India and no rigorous biosafety protocols and evaluation of GM crops are in place

- Bt cotton in India failed to live up to promises in 10 years, on high yields from

pest resistance and reduction in insecticide use

- Huge socio-economic cost is borne by farmers from hybrids in Bt cotton

- Bt cotton farmers are asked to revert to traditional pest management, displaying failure of Bollgard II cotton

THE CONTEXT

- Bt cotton occupies greater than 95% of India's cotton acreage

- Yields have stagnated at around 500 kg/ha (lower than yields in China and Egypt)

- Bt Brinjal was cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee but was put on a moratorium by the UPA government

- DMH-11, or GE mustard developed by Delhi University was cleared by the GEAC, but later it was withdrawn

Pic:

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Don't believe the anti-GMO campaign?

Introduction:

We recently read about few highlights on GM crops ([Fast Recap](#))

According to a research paper – “Modern technologies for sustainable food and nutrition security” – co-authored by geneticist P.C. Kesavan and leading agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan:

- [GM crops are considered to be a failure.](#)
- GM crops such as Bt cotton, the stalled Bt brinjal as well as DMH-11, a transgenic mustard hybrid – **has failed as a sustainable agriculture technology**
- It has also **failed to provide livelihood security** for cotton farmers who are mainly resource-poor, small and marginal farmers.

- It raised questions on the genetic engineering technology itself on the grounds that it **raises the cost of sowing.**

Swaminathan emphasised that genetic engineering technology is supplementary and must be needbased. Only in very rare circumstance (less than 1%) may there arise a need for the use of this technology.

However, the research paper was criticised by India's Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA), K. **VijayRaghavan** as 'deeply flawed'. According to him, it has the potential to mislead the public and the political system.

Proponents of GMO argue that –

- Anti-GMO campaign is scientifically baseless and potentially harmful to poor people in the developing world.
- Genetic modification is the technology of choice for solving abiotic problems like drought flood, salinity, etc.
- Genetic modification allows different parents to be combined easily, helping yields go up substantially.
- Major science academies of the world such as the U.S.'s National Academy of Sciences, the African Academy of Sciences and the Indian National Science Academy have supported GM technology.
- Data from a large number of peer-reviewed publications have shown that, on average, GM technology adoption has reduced pesticide use by 37%, increased crop yield by 22%, and increased farmer profits by 68%.
- Data from a billion animals fed on GM corn have not indicated any health hazards.
- Yield and profit gains are higher in developing countries than in developed countries.
- Those in the Americas and elsewhere consuming Bt corn or soybean for over 15 years have not reported any health issues.
- Reports on the probable carcinogenic potential of the herbicide have not been accepted by major science academies.

Bt cotton - Not a failure in India

- Bt cotton is not a failure in India
- The yields hovering around 300 kg/ha at the time of introduction of Bt cotton (2002) have increased to an average of over 500 kg/ha, converting India from a cotton-importing country to the largest exporter of raw cotton
- India has one of the strongest regulatory protocols for field trials of GM crops.
- It is unfortunate that farmer distress is being wrongly attributed to Bt cotton failure. Farmers continue to grow Bt cotton.

On Bt brinjal

- Bt brinjal trials were scuttled in India
- The moratorium on Bt brinjal is the most unfortunate step taken by the government in 2010 and has crippled the entire field of research and development with transgenic crops.
- Bangladesh has used India's data to successfully cultivate Bt brinjal, despite all the negative propaganda.
- Reports indicate that as many as 6,000 Bangladeshi farmers cultivated Bt brinjal in 2017.
- Proponents raised the question – *How long will it take for Bt brinjal to enter India from Bangladesh?*

Conclusion:

According to proponents of GM crops,

- The paper by Dr. Kesavan and Dr. Swaminathan seems to have got most things wrong.
- GM technology is not a magic bullet. It needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- There is definitely scope for improvement in terms of technology and regulatory protocols
- It is time to deregulate the Bt gene and lift the embargo on Bt brinjal.
- A negative review from opinion-makers can only mislead the country. In the end, it is India that will be the loser.

Connecting the dots:

- Genetic engineering technology is supplementary and must be need-based. Only in very rare circumstance (less than 1%) may there arise a need for the use of this technology. Do you agree? Critically analyze the benefits and risks associated with GM foods.

Impact of Global warming on Agriculture: Farming in a warming world

Introduction:

- The **impact of climatic change** and associated **socio-economic vulnerability** are now widely recognised and experienced across the globe.
- The **Sixth Assessment Report** by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on "Global Warming at 1.5°C" distinctly propagates the need to strengthen and enhance existing coping capacity and to remain committed to the objectives of the Paris Agreement.

IPCC 6th Assessment Report: Highlights

- World has become 1°C warmer because of human activities

- It has caused greater frequency of extremes and obstruction to the normal functioning of ecosystems.
- If world had become 2°C warmer, a catastrophic situation would have created.

Impact of Climate Change and Global Warming on Agriculture Sector

According to the report,

- India, with its diverse agro-climatic settings, is one of the most vulnerable countries.
- Indigenous populations and local communities dependent on agricultural or coastal livelihoods are very vulnerable to the climate impacts.
- Its agriculture ecosystem, distinguished by high monsoon dependence, and with 85% small and marginal landholdings, is highly sensitive to weather abnormalities.

The Nation has already witnessed less than normal rainfall during the last four years, with 2014 and 2015 declared as drought years.

Even the recent monsoon season ended with a rainfall deficit of 9%, which was just short of drought conditions.

Research is also confirming an escalation in heat waves, in turn affecting crops, aquatic systems and livestock. ([Lancet report warns about heatwave exposure surge](#))

The Economic Survey 2017-18 has estimated **farm income losses between 15% and 18%** on average, which could rise to 20%-25% for unirrigated areas without any policy interventions.

These projections underline the need for strategic change in dealing with climate change in agriculture.

Steps needed:

Foster the process of climate adaptation in agriculture which involves reshaping responses across both the micro- and macro-level decision-making culture.

At the micro-level,

1. By providing **effective climate assessments** and **promoting climate resilient technologies**.
2. Climate exposure can be reduced through **agronomic management practices** such as inter and multiple cropping and **crop-rotation; shift to non-farm activities; insurance covers**; up-scaling techniques such as solar pumps, drip irrigation and sprinklers.
3. Very small segment of agricultural households utilised crop insurance due to a lack of sufficient awareness and knowledge. Hence there is an urgent need to **educate farmers**,

reorient Krishi Vigyan Kendras and other **grass-root organisations** with specific and more funds about climate change and risk-coping measures.

At the macro-level,

1. Climate adaptation actions are to be mainstreamed in the current developmental framework and closely intertwined with rural developmental interventions.
2. Effective systematic adaptation planning and resource conservation practices.
3. Identification of several barriers that prevent up-scaling efforts and adaptation by farmers.

Key interventions

1. Expansion of extension facilities, improving irrigation efficiency, promotion of satellite-enabled agriculture risk management, creating micro-level agro-advisories, providing customised real time data, and capacity building of stakeholders are some initiatives towards building greater resilience in agriculture.
2. Interventions such as the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Soil Health Card, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, National Agriculture Market, or e-NAM, and other rural development programmes are positive interventions that can address the vulnerability of farmers and rural households.
3. Climate and adaptation schemes such as the National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA), the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), the National Adaptation Fund, and the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC).

Connecting the dots:

- How does climate change and global warming affect the agricultural sector in India? Also suggest some key interventions and steps to be taken in this regard.

Need of the hour: structured and stable income support policy for farmers

Introduction:

- In our previous articles we had dealt about why farm loan waivers are not a suitable option to address the rural distress. (For more, refer - [Avoid loan waivers](#))
- Newly elected chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan have all announced loan waivers within their promised time of 10 days. It may cost the state exchequers more than Rs 50,000 crore.
- Opposition leaders have also challenged the prime minister to waive off loans of all farmers.

Do you know - How much is a pan-India loan waiver likely to cost?

- Total outstanding credit to agriculture currently is likely to be around Rs 12-13 lakh crore.
- It is not feasible to waive off all these loans, it will simply blow up the budget.
- Therefore, considering just short-term crop loans (maximum limit of say Rs 2 lakh per farmer) and, only from nationalised banks and PACs, the total bill is not likely to settle below Rs 4 lakh crore, and may even touch around Rs 5 lakh crore.
- In other words, it will cost anywhere between Rs 4 and 5 lakh crore, including states that have waived farm loans since 2017.

Do you know?

- UPA government had announced mega loan waiver of Rs 71,680 crore in 2008.
- As per the report of the CAG on Implementation of Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme (2013), the 2008 Mega Loan Waiver amounted to 20 per cent of total outstanding loans to agriculture in 2008, and actual disbursement was just Rs 52,516 crore over a period of four years.
- Loan waiver is only a temporary relief, that too tilted towards larger farmers.
- Institutional credit comprises about 64 per cent of total credit taken by all farmers, the remaining 36 per cent coming from non-institutional sources.
- It is the large farmers who take a larger proportion of their credit from institutional sources.
- The marginal farmers with holdings of less than one hectare, who constitute 68.5 per cent of the peasantry, actually take more than half of their loans from non-institutional sources at interest rates that range from 24-36 per cent, and sometimes even higher.

Better Alternative

- Providing higher MSPs are market distorting.
- The alternative is to think of a structured and stable income/investment support policy for farmers.
- Improved version of Telangana's Rythu Bandhu scheme could serve as a starting point.

Telangana's Rythu Bandhu scheme

- Under this scheme, the government can give Rs 10,000/ha as investment support to cultivators.
- Payments under this scheme could be inversely related to the holding size, making it more pro-small holders.
- Farms can be geo-tagged to ensure that only those farmers get benefits who are cultivating land.
- Land records will have to be upgraded to include tenants.

Conclusion:

In any case, if this scheme is implemented in over 20 crore hectares of gross cropped area of the country, it will cost about Rs 2 lakh crore per annum, which could be equally distributed between the Centre and the states.

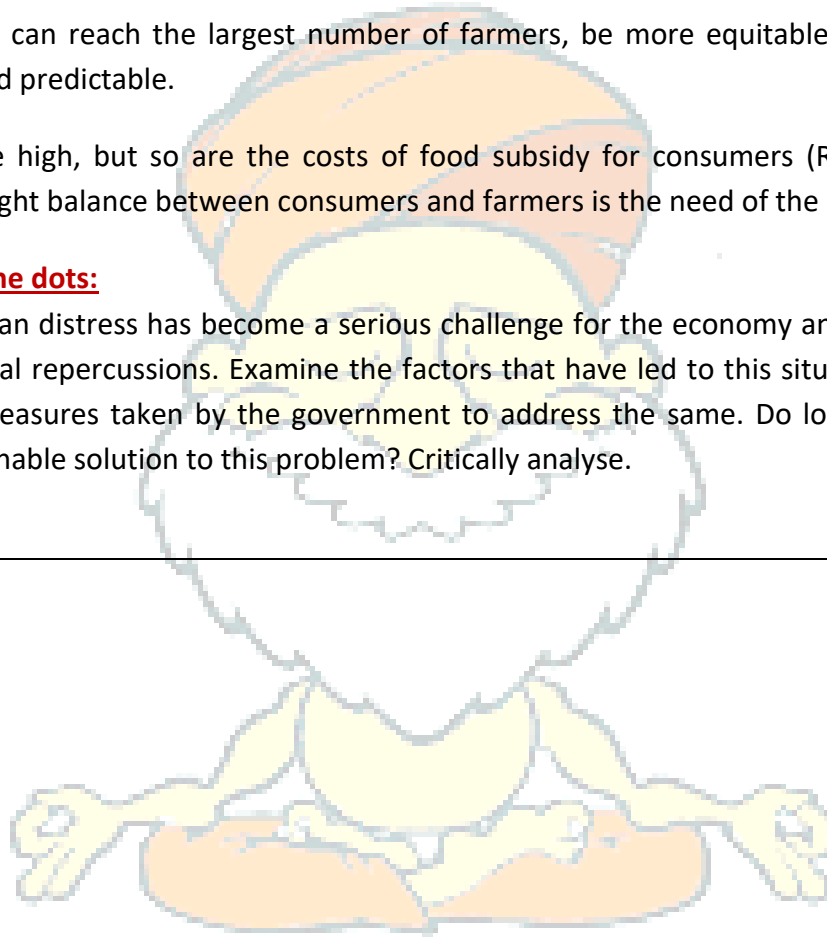
The Centre should also include fertiliser subsidy into this and encourage states to transfer their power subsidy through this platform based on per hectare basis.

Such a policy can reach the largest number of farmers, be more equitable, the least market distorting, and predictable.

The costs are high, but so are the costs of food subsidy for consumers (Rs 1,69,000 crore). Striking the right balance between consumers and farmers is the need of the hour.

Connecting the dots:

- Agrarian distress has become a serious challenge for the economy and has grave socio-political repercussions. Examine the factors that have led to this situation. Also discuss the measures taken by the government to address the same. Do loan waivers offer a sustainable solution to this problem? Critically analyse.



ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Climate talks set to begin in Katowice, Poland

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Climate Change;

In news:

- India to resist attempts by countries to renegotiate the Paris Agreement
- India wants CoP-24 to be balanced, inclusive and consistent with the Paris Agreement
- The landmark Paris Agreement deal agreed to in 2015 exhorts countries to take steps to avoid temperatures from rising beyond 2C of pre-industrial levels, and even 1.5 C as far as possible, by the end of the century.
- Currently global emissions are poised to warm the world by 3C by the end of the century.
- The United States opted out of the deal last year but continues to be part of discussions as a complete withdrawal — as per terms of the UN convention — takes up to four years.

CLIMATE CHANGE/HEALTH

TOPIC

General studies 3

- *Environment and climate change*
- *Workforce in Indian economy and Agriculture*

Cool it: Health and labour loss due to heatwave

Introduction

The Lancet countdown on health and climate report was released recently. Coming on the eve of the UN climate conference in Katowice, Poland, the report of the Lancet panel for 2018 brings clarity, placing connected issues in perspective for governmental action.

Adverse Health Impacts of Climate Change

- The world is facing the biggest health challenge of 21st century due to climate change amid rising global temperature.
- There has been increase in frequency, duration and intensity of heat waves in India which has resulted in increased deaths due to heat stroke, heart failure, acute kidney failure and frequent cases of dehydration.

- Because of heat waves, there has been loss of work hours and labour capacity. The maximum impact of heat wave has been in the agricultural sector – a large section of the population that depends on farming.
- This has resulted in decline in household income. As per World Bank estimate, in India there will be high socio-economic cost which may lead to erosion of 2.8% of GDP by 2050.
- The increase in heat wave may also result in pre-mature deaths, increase in vector borne disease, decrease in labour capacity and it will also adversely affect food production leading to food insecurity.

What should be India's response?

- Identification of heat spots by tracking meteorological data and promoting development of local Heat Action Plan.
- India should review occupational health standards and regulate safety of work force amid rising temperature.
- It is vital that India gets more ambitious about cutting back on carbon emissions, even as it presses for the fulfillment of the climate finance obligations of developed countries under the Paris Agreement of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- A further reduction in the share of coal in the energy mix through sustained support for renewable energy, particularly solar photovoltaics, must form the cornerstone of national policy.
- This must be matched by a shift away from use of fossil fuels for transport, and the induction of more electric vehicles.
- To address adverse weather events (like Kerala floods), India must be well prepared in their disaster management efforts and also force the global community to release adequate funds to combat the impact of climate change.
- The importance of funds for adaptation is underscored by Lancet's finding that 99% of losses from climate-related events in low-income countries were not insured.

Conclusion

- The consensus on climate change is that it has begun to affect the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events.
- India's approach to adaptation should prepare for catastrophes with a well-considered plan to provide relief and rehabilitation.
- The increased exposure to heatwaves needs a policy response at national and global fronts.

Connecting the dots:

- What are heatwaves? Increased exposure to heatwaves needs a policy response, nationally and globally. Comment.

'CO2 levels poised for record high'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Pollution

In news:

According to researchers at the University of East Anglia (UEA) and the **Global Carbon Project** –

- Global carbon emissions are set to hit an all-time high of 37.1 billion tonnes of CO2 in 2018.
- India, the third-highest contributor, is projected to see emissions rise by 6.3% from 2017.

The 2.7% projected global rise in 2018 has been driven due to –

- appreciable growth in coal use
- sustained growth in oil and gas use

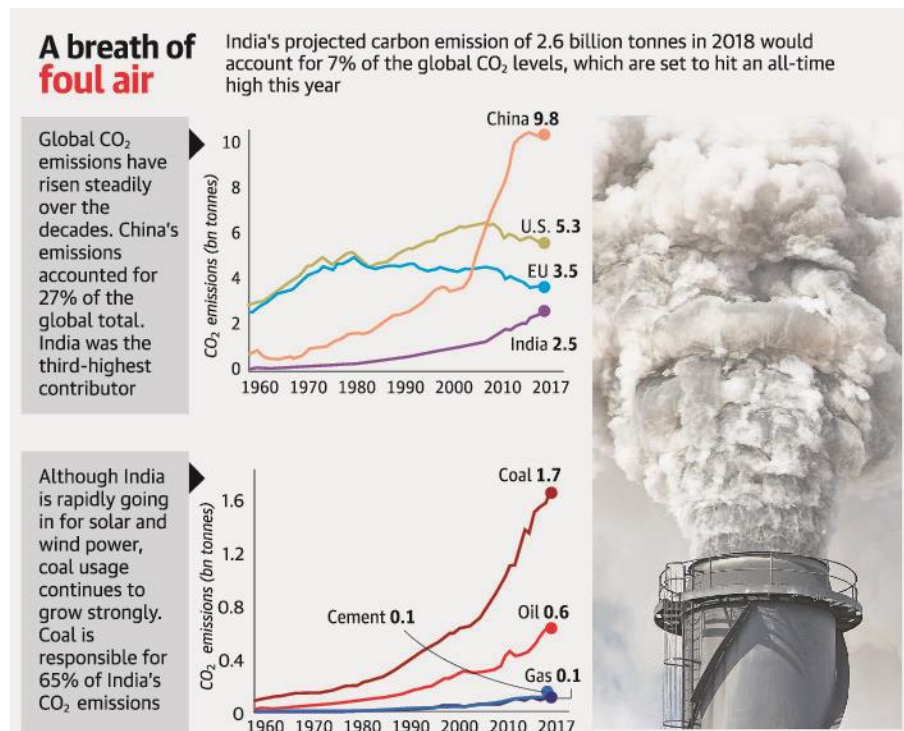
Do you know?

- The Global Carbon Project (GCP) was established in 2001. The organisation seeks to quantify global carbon emissions and their causes. GCP is a core project of IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme).
- Established by the GCP in 2013 the Global Carbon Atlas is a tool for the visualisation of data related to the global carbon cycle.
- U.N. Climate Change Conference (COP 24) Katowice, Poland will also focus on ways to equitably cut carbon emissions.

Concerns:

- The **10 biggest emitters in 2018** are China, U.S., India, Russia, Japan, Germany, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Canada.
- The EU as a region of countries ranks third.
- China's emissions accounted for 27% of the global total, having grown an estimated 4.7% in 2018 and reaching a new all-time high.
- Emissions in the U.S., which has withdrawn from its commitment to the Paris Agreement, account for 15% of the global total, and look set to have grown about 2.5% in 2018 after several years of decline.

- Limiting global warming to the 2015 Paris Agreement goal (keeping the global temperature increase to well below 2°C), would need carbon dioxide emissions to decline by 50% by 2030 and reach net zero by about 2050.



Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/06/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/119594cc_2573994_101_mr.jpg

Cutting through the smog: Air pollution in North India

Introduction

- Air pollution is a worry especially in north India. **Stubble burning** is said to be a key factor behind the formation of a dense cover of smog in this part of India though **its contribution is less than 20%**.
- Farmers are held responsible for the crisis but what is at fault are **the flawed and short-sighted policies of the Central and State governments**.
- Incidents of stubble burning — following the harvest of paddy crop in Punjab and Haryana — cannot be averted by imposing fines, or giving notice or giving farmers, capital subsidy. **Instead, the issue requires long-term vision and strategic policy interventions.**

Reasons for failure for current methods:

- **The sowing of paddy is incentivised in Punjab and Haryana** whereby the share of paddy (rice) in the gross cropped area in Punjab has increased from 6.8% in 1966-67 to almost 36.4 % in recent years, while it has increased from 4.97% to 20% in Haryana.
- **The policy of minimum support price for crops, in tandem with their assured procurement and input subsidy**, have left farmers with no option but to follow this wheat-paddy rotation which has caused the increase at the cost of other crops such as maize, cotton, oilseeds and sugarcane.
- **Punjab has enacted a water conservation law in 2009 which mandates paddy sowing within a notified period** (June instead of earlier practice of May) and a shorter period of sowing days prohibits transplantation before a notified date, which in turn limits the window available for harvesting paddy to between 15 and 20 days. As a result, farmers who are pressed for time to sow wheat and to maintain crop yield, farmers find stubble burning to be an easy and low-cost solution.
- Haryana and Punjab face **labor shortage for removal of stubble** and therefore find stubble burning an easier option.
- **The purchase of the 'happy seeder' which mechanically removes the paddy stubble adds to the cost** incurred by farmers, wherein stubble burning is a much cheaper option.

Way forward

- Government should encourage **crop diversification** for other crops than paddy and a policy of a '**price deficiency system**' — as initiated in Haryana and Madhya Pradesh— should be adopted to strengthen the production and marketing of alternative crops.
- Another option is to replicate the **Telangana model** of providing farmers **an investment support of ₹8,000 per acre** each year which can be used for compensating for manual removal or of other methods of removal of stubble.
- A feasible remedy could lie in the setting up of **custom hiring centres** or inviting companies to make **investments for rental purposes**. If the state provides **an app-based support system, to rent out tractors and farm implements and earn additional income** — there are examples of this in Nigeria and also in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar — it would be akin to the '**Uberisation of agriculture**'.
- **Paddy Straw can be used for biomass generation** through usage in **biomass power plants, paper and cardboard mills** and the government can use geospatial techniques to identify areas where stubble burning is severe and encourage installation of biomass plants at such locations.

Connecting the dots:

- What are the causes of air pollution in Delhi, during winter season? Do you think, further mechanisation of agriculture will reduce the problem caused by stubble burning?

Beach pollution

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Biodiversity; Pollution

In news:

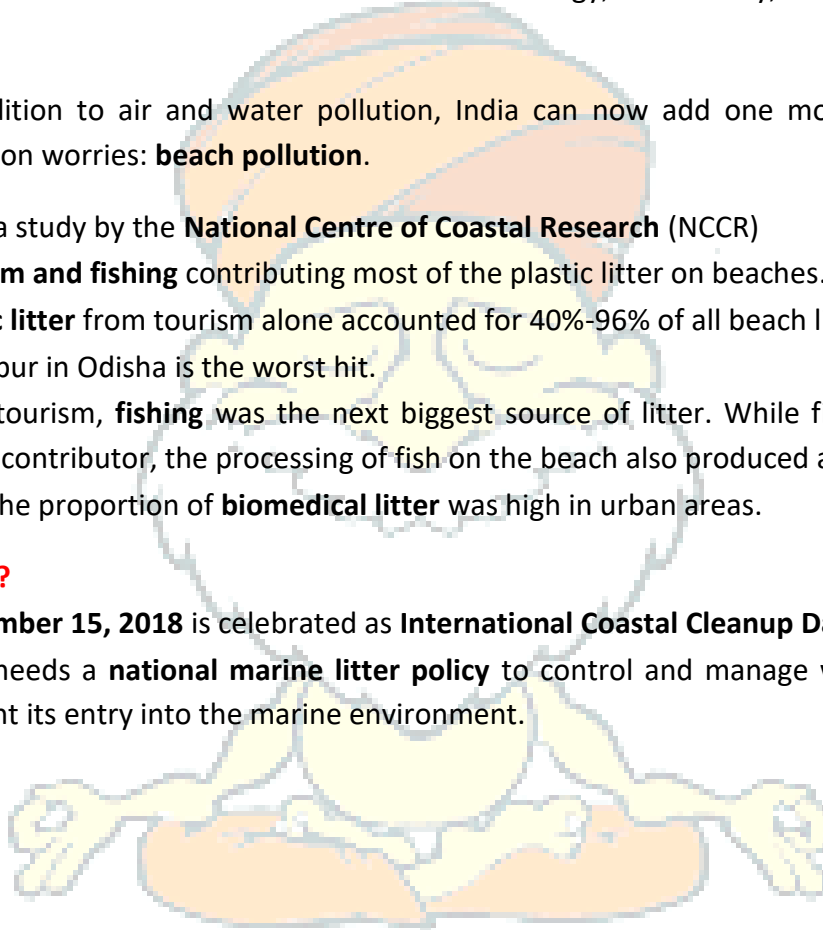
- In addition to air and water pollution, India can now add one more category to its pollution worries: **beach pollution**.

According to a study by the **National Centre of Coastal Research (NCCR)**

- **Tourism and fishing** contributing most of the plastic litter on beaches.
- **Plastic litter** from tourism alone accounted for 40%-96% of all beach litter.
- Gopalpur in Odisha is the worst hit.
- After tourism, **fishing** was the next biggest source of litter. While fishing nets were a major contributor, the processing of fish on the beach also produced a lot of litter.
- Also, the proportion of **biomedical litter** was high in urban areas.

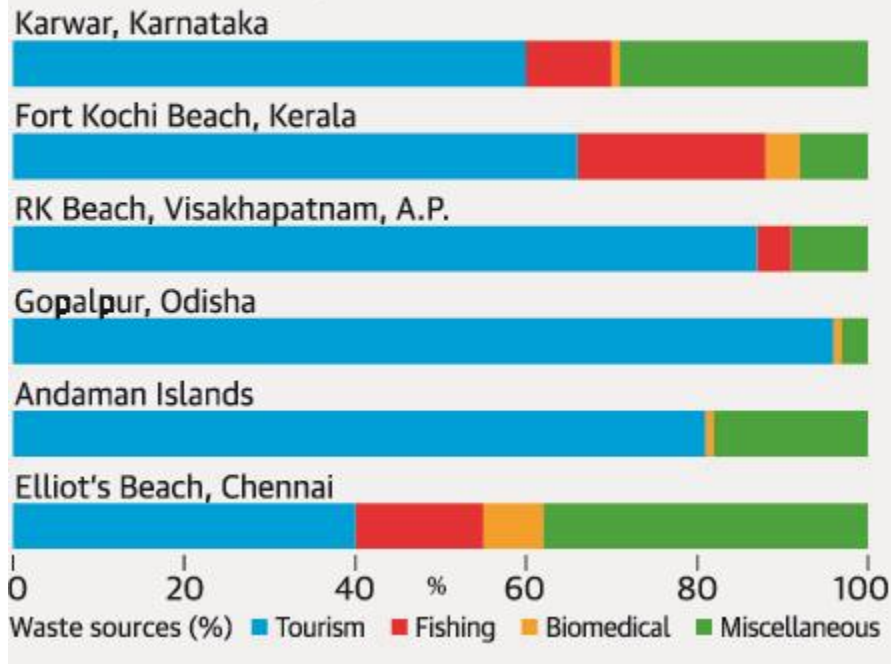
Do you know?

- **September 15, 2018** is celebrated as **International Coastal Cleanup Day**.
- India needs a **national marine litter policy** to control and manage waste on land and prevent its entry into the marine environment.



Cast away

The maximum amount of plastic waste across beaches in India is contributed by tourists



Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/07/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/fd379e02_2576765_101_mr.jpg

'Air pollution cause of 1 in 8 deaths'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Health; Environment and Ecology; Pollution

In news:

- India has a disproportionately high 26% of the global premature deaths and disease burden due to air pollution.
- One in eight deaths in India was attributable to air pollution in India in 2017, making it a leading risk factor for death. (reduction in life expectancy associated with air pollution)

Do you know?

- These research findings were published in The Lancet Planetary Health.
- 12.4 lakh deaths in India in 2017 were due to air pollution, which included 6.7 lakh deaths due to outdoor particulate matter air pollution and 4.8 lakh deaths due to household air pollution.

- In 2017, 77% population of India was exposed to ambient particulate matter PM2.5 above the recommended limit by the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.
- Highest PM2.5 exposure level was in Delhi, followed by the other north Indian States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana.

Death in the air: On Air Pollution

Introduction:

According to **Global Burden of Disease 2017** report on the impact of air pollution on deaths, disease burden, and life expectancy across the states of India –

- Air pollution should be among the highest policy priorities.
- It killed an estimated 1.24 million people in India in 2017. (Report by Greenpeace India also highlighted the same.)
- But the Centre and State governments have tended to treat it as a chronic malaise that defies a solution.

Another report has pointed out that Delhi and Patna are amongst the worst polluted cities in the world. However, GOI says that these exercises are good for academic purposes but may not necessarily reflect the truth. It also added that it will depend more on the studies done by Indian institutions.

Do you know?

- Global Burden of Disease 2017 report is published by The Lancet.
- Over the years, measures are taken to tackle the situation but pollution continues to threaten. Now large number of deaths are attributed to air pollution.
- GBD Report says - If the country paid greater attention to ambient air quality and household air pollution, the people living in the worst-affected States of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Jharkhand could add more than 1.7 years to their life expectancy.

Solution:

- Sustainable solutions must be found for stubble-burning and the use of solid fuels in households, the two major sources of pollution, and State governments must be made accountable for this.
- The Centre should work with Punjab and Haryana to ensure that the machinery already distributed to farmers and cooperatives to handle agricultural waste is in place and working. A mechanism for rapid collection of farm residues has to be instituted.

New approaches to recover value from biomass could be the way forward.

- A shift away from solid fuels to LPG
- The proposal from a furniture-maker to convert straw into useful products
- The potential of domestic biogas units, solar cookers and improved biomass cookstoves has to be explored
- Strong control over urban sources of pollution
- Sharp reduction in particulates from fossil fuel
- Better engineered vehicles
- Real-time measurement of pollution should be increased

Conclusion:

Urgent intervention is needed for implementing the National Clean Air Action Plan with a strong compliance strategy to meet the clean air standards in all cities. Real-time air quality monitoring, especially that of PM_{2.5}, will have to be expanded significantly to assess air quality in all cities with sizeable population.

India needs massive energy transition across industries and households, mobility transition to public transport, walking and cycling, and effective waste management to control this run-away pollution.

If Indian cities are to cut their own air pollution levels, the change and planning has to happen at the city level and state level, instead of depending on the overall climate control goals and programmes set at the union level. There should be a formation of holistic strategy in which Centre and states including UTs should have equitable involvement with same sense of commitment and accountability so that pollution levels are brought down with suggested a road map in place.

Rapid progress on clean air also depends on citizens making it a front-line political issue.

Connecting the dots:

- Air pollution should be among the highest policy priorities. Do you agree? What long term solutions are required to address this problem? Discuss.

[NGT order: Karnataka must set aside ₹500 cr. for Bengaluru lakes](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Biodiversity; Pollution

In news:

- NGT orders Karnataka to set aside ₹500 cr. for cleaning up water bodies in Bengaluru.
- Lakes under danger – Bellandur, Agara and Varthur lakes
- The amount is to be utilised for execution of action plans to clean the water bodies.

Do you know?

- Untreated sewage continued to flow into the water bodies “indiscriminately”.
- State government to deposit ₹50 crore to the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) as environmental compensation.

Bioplastics may not be a viable alternative to plastic

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Global warming; Climate Change

Do you know?

- Bioplastics — often promoted as a climate-friendly alternative to petroleum-based plastics — may lead to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions, according to a study.
- It may trigger cropland expansion, which will further increase greenhouse gas emissions.
- Plastics are usually made from petroleum, with the associated impacts in terms of fossil fuel depletion but also climate change.
- It is estimated that by 2050, plastics could already be responsible for 15% of the global CO₂ emissions.

Concerns:

- Bioplastics, on the other hand, are in principle climate-neutral since they are based on renewable raw materials such as maize, wheat and sugarcane. These plants get the CO₂ that they need from the air through their leaves.
- Producing bioplastics therefore consumes CO₂, which compensates for the amount that is later released at end-of-life. Overall, their net greenhouse gas balance is assumed to be zero.
- Bioplastics are thus often consumed as an environmentally friendly alternative. However, at least with the current level of technology, this issue is probably not as clear as often assumed.
- The production of bioplastics in large amounts would change land use globally. This could potentially lead to an increase in the conversion of forest areas to arable land. However, forests absorb considerably more CO₂ than maize or sugar cane annually, if only because of their larger biomass.

Groundwater extraction will invite a fee

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Conservation of Water; Government policies and schemes

In news:

- In a bid to promote conservation of groundwater, the Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has notified a **water conservation fee (WCF)**.
- Industries will need to pay on groundwater extraction starting from June 2019.

Do you know?

- As per the CGWA notification, industries extracting groundwater, including mining-dewatering units and those that use groundwater for packaged drinking water, will need to apply for a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the government.
- Individual households that draw groundwater using a delivery pipe of a greater than 1" diameter, too, will need to pay a WCF.
- However, the agriculture sector — the largest consumer of groundwater in the country — will be exempt from the fees.

Important facts:

- In India, **extracted groundwater is mainly used for irrigation** and accounts for about 228 BCM (billion cubic metre) — or **about 90%** of the annual groundwater extraction.
- The rest, 25 BCM, is drawn for drinking, domestic and industrial uses.
- India is the largest user of groundwater in the world, and accounts for about 25% of the global water extraction.

Role of NGT over illegal extraction of groundwater

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Role of Tribunal or NGT; Environment and Ecology

In news:

- NGT had rapped the Central Ground Water Authority for failing to curb illegal extraction of groundwater and directed the Ministry to notify a policy by December 18.
- Following which, the Union Water Resources Ministry issued a notification pertaining to groundwater extraction.
- However, NGT said the notification was against “national interest”.

Fast recap:

- We already read that - Central Ground Water Authority (CGWA) has notified a water conservation fee (WCF).
- Industries will need to pay on groundwater extraction starting from June 2019.
- Industries extracting groundwater, including mining-dewatering units and those that use groundwater for packaged drinking water, will need to apply for a no-objection certificate (NOC) from the government.
- Individual households that draw groundwater using a delivery pipe of a greater than 1" diameter, too, will need to pay a WCF.
- However, the agriculture sector — the largest consumer of groundwater in the country — will be exempt from the fees.

NGT views:

- According to NGT, merely imposing a cost is not enough to curb groundwater extraction.
- It added that a detailed order including the directions should be uploaded by January 11.

COP24 Katowice climate summit

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Climate Change

In news:

- Nations struck a deal to breathe life into the landmark **2015 Paris climate treaty** after marathon UN talks that failed to match the ambition the most vulnerable countries need to avert dangerous global warming.
- Delegates from nearly 200 states **finalised a common rule book** designed to deliver on the Paris goals of limiting global temperature rises to well below 2°Celsius.
- Rule book will help to track how countries are doing, whether they are actually doing what they say they are doing.

COP24 Katowice conference and the rulebook

Introduction

- In previous news articles, we read that 196 countries **finalised a rulebook** for the 2015 Paris Agreement during COP24 UN Climate Change Conference 2018 in Katowice, Poland.

- The finalisation paves the way for implementation of the Paris Agreement, which is supposed to **replace the existing Kyoto Protocol in 2020**.
- The creation of the rulebook has been hailed as an important step that has breathed life into the Paris Agreement.

The below article provides assessment – Whether the deal reached in Katowice is enough? Whether the rulebook is a flawed document?

COP24 Katowice conference outcomes:

It was primarily about the rulebook. Other important discussions were –

- About the need to **step up climate actions** in the light of several studies that pointed out that **current level of actions were insufficient** to hold the global average temperature within 2°C above pre-industrial levels.
- It was expected that the countries would give some indication of their willingness to do more than what they were currently committed to, and would agree to start a process towards that. But that did not happen.
- The **absence of any indication towards increasing “ambition” of climate actions** was one major disappointment of the Katowice conference.
- **Article 6 of the Paris Agreement** which talks about setting up a **market mechanism for trading of carbon emissions – (failed)**. It could not be agreed upon and had to be deferred for until next year.
- Developing countries argued that their unused carbon credits should be considered valid in the new market mechanism that was being created, something that the developed countries opposed strongly. The developed countries questioned the authenticity of the unused carbon credits, pointing to weak verification mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol that allowed dubious projects to claim carbon credits.
- The developed countries also argued that some of the proposals being put forward by Brazil for the carbon markets would lead to double-counting of emission reductions.
- With no side willing to concede ground, there was no option but to **defer the discussion over carbon markets to next year**, while allowing for the rest of the rulebook to be finalised.

What is in the rulebook?

- Steps (provided by Paris Agreement) that countries need to take in the fight against climate change, to keep the global average temperatures “well below” 2°C from pre-industrial times.
- The rulebook prescribes how to do those things, and how each of them would be measured and verified.

- **Article 4** of the 2015 Paris Agreement mandates **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** by countries. The rulebook seeks to address what should be in these pledges.
- The rulebook specifies what actions can be included in the action plan, how and when the member countries should submit them to the UN climate body.
- Further, the Paris Agreement asks every member nation to submit information about their greenhouse gas emissions every two years. The rulebook specifies which gases to measure, what methodologies and standards to apply while measuring them, and the kinds of information to be included in their submissions.
- The rulebook provides what kinds of financial flows — loans, concessions, grants — can be classified as ‘climate finance’, which developed countries are supposed to provide to developing countries to help them deal with climate change. It also specifies how they should be accounted for, and the kind of information about them needed to be submitted.
- The rulebook contains various other processes and guidelines needed for implementing the other provisions of the Paris Agreement. In short, it holds the operational details of the Paris Agreement.

Do you know?

- Paris Agreement is just 27 pages long while the rulebook is spread over 133 pages, and is not yet complete.
- The rulebook is a dynamic document, meaning new rules can be added, or existing rules amended.
- While welcoming the finalisation of the rulebook, India and many other developing countries rued the fact that the “balance” that they would have liked to see in the agreement was missing.
- Key issues of concern for the poorest and developing nations were diluted or postponed.
- The details on funding and building capacity have been postponed. References to “equity” in the draft rule book were erased by the U.S. delegation.

In spite of these problems, a single rulebook for all countries has been produced and will serve as a foundation for more detailed rules and structures.

[Norway witness a boom in electric cars](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Pollution

In news:

- In Norway approximately 30% of all new cars are electric cars, compared with 2% across Europe overall and 1-2% in the U.S.
- Norway's success has one key driver — the government.
- The government offered big subsidies and perks that it is now due to phase out, but only so long as electric cars remain attractive to buy compared with traditional ones.
- The move is towards the commitment to have **only sell zero-emissions cars sold** in Norway by 2025.
- The plan supports Norway's CO2 reduction targets under the 2015 Paris climate accord, which nations agreed to ensure emissions goals are met.
- To help sales, the Norwegian government waived hefty vehicle import duties and registration and sales taxes for buyers of electric cars. Owners don't have to pay road tolls, and get free use of ferries and bus lanes in congested city centres.

Ganga rejuvenation**About:**

- The government is simply focusing on Swachh Ganga (Clean Ganga) and has missed to aim for **uninterrupted flow** and **unpolluted flow**.
- The whole focus of the Clean Ganga project has been on setting up sewage treatments plants and cleaning ghats and banks. However, the main issue, which is that the **river does not have adequate flow of water**, has been ignored.
- In other words, river Ganga's uninterrupted flow is as important as making the river pollution free if the Ganga rejuvenation drive has to show desired results.

Major concerns: Fragile region

River Ganga is becoming increasingly fragile with severe pollution destroying the river, and more and more developmental projects (especially hydropower and irrigation projects) critically affecting its flow.

- Several hydropower projects are mushrooming at the source of the river, which is the Garhwal range of the Himalayas.
- Unlike other ranges, the Garhwal is narrow. It is from here that many rivers and tributaries of the Ganga basin emerge. These spring- or glacier-fed rivers join one another at different points to form an intricate riverine ecosystem in the Himalayas.

- The entire basin falls in the seismic zone 4-5, and is highly prone to landslides and land subsidence.

How developmental activities such as construction of hydropower projects affect the riverine ecosystem?

- As said earlier, several hydropower projects are mushrooming at the source of the river.
- To construct a hydropower project, large sections of **land are cleared** of forests. **Deforestation is taking place** in an already fragile mountain area.
- **Impacts** – loss of agriculture, drying of water sources as the water is diverted into tunnels, landslips, severe distress to aquatic life and the river bed is no longer even wet in certain stretches.
- The irony is that even after all this devastation, electricity is not generated as per the intended capacity.
- This is because there is **too much silt and flow of debris** during the monsoon and **reduced flow of water in winters**. And as glaciers continue to retreat, the silt in the rivers is only going to increase.
- Therefore, the flow of debris and silt was stopped by barrages constructed around these hydropower projects. (This also escalates the impact of disaster. For ex, 2013 disaster)
- As the reason for diminished output is natural and not technical, and therefore cannot be remedied, this is only going to cause more problems for future projects.
- In the case of the Ganga, these projects also prevent sediments from going downstream. This affects the fertility of the delta downstream and also destroys the unique self-purifying properties of the Ganga.

Reports of committees

- Twenty government committees and reports warn about the **anthropogenic activities in these fragile areas** and recommend conservation of these areas for food and water security.
- When the **late G.D. Agarwal, crusader of the Ganga**, fasted to invoke the government to act against these projects, the **government proposed an e-flow notification** for the Upper Ganga River Basin.
- It specified that during the dry season (November-March), 20% of monthly average flow has to be maintained, and during the monsoon season, 30% has to be maintained.
- The notification stated that existing hydel projects that do not meet e-flow norms must comply within three years.
- The 20% recommendation is less than the scientific recommendation of 50%.
- Also the E-flow implementation process is dubious.

Conclusion

- If the government intends to rejuvenate the river, it should have specified that 20% e-flows norms are only for existing projects, rather than extending it to several such new projects.
- Also the understanding that hydropower projects mean development needs to change.
- What is required is a credible roadmap to clean the Ganga and restore its flow.

Connecting the dots:

- River Ganga's uninterrupted flow is as important as making the river pollution free if the Ganga rejuvenation drive has to show desired results. Comment.

Hefty fines if States fail to give plans to clean up rivers: NGT

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Ecology; Pollution; Conservation of River Ecosystem

In news:

NGT noted that –

- 16 States have submitted “incomplete action plans” pertaining to the cleaning of 351 polluted river stretches in the country.
- It has extended the deadline for submitting the action plans to January 31.
- In case of non-compliance, hefty compensation will be levied on the States and the Union Territories.

Concern:

- States and UTs have not even taken the first requisite step of preparing an action plan, showing total insensitivity to such a serious matter and public issue.
- NGT said - for every delay, compensation for damage to the environment will be payable by each State or UT at the rate of ₹1 crore per month for each of the Priority-I and Priority II stretches, ₹50 lakh per month for stretches in Priority III and ₹25 lakh per month each for Priority IV and Priority V stretches.

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Bird sanctuary in news: Mangalajodi bird sanctuary

- Mangalajodi bird sanctuary is located in Odisha (on the banks of the Chilika Lake)
- Migratory birds - Pacific black duck – were spotted

House sparrow conservation through artificial nests

Part of: GS Prelims - Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- Odisha's Ganjam district to become the first house sparrow-friendly district of Odisha.
- Artificial nests will reach all the 22 blocks of Ganjam district by the end of 2018.

Do you know?

- As sparrows nest and lay eggs almost four times a year, an increase in their population at a particular village would encourage inhabitants of nearby villages to take up similar measures.
- Ganjam is the flag-bearer of sparrow conservation in the State.
- Apart from providing **protection to olive ridley turtles**, volunteers of the **Rushikulya Sea Turtle Protection Committee** had also started sparrow conservation through artificial nests at Purunabandha village in 2007.
- Sparrow conservation through artificial nests experiment has been replicated in 10 other Odisha districts and States including Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttarakhand as well.
- IUCN Status: Least Concern

SC directs Centre to declare 10 km area around national parks as eco-sensitive

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains - Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation ; Protected Areas

In news:

- Supreme Court directed the Union Environment Ministry to declare 10 km area around 21 national parks and wildlife sanctuaries across the country as 'eco-sensitive zones'.

We have already covered about 'eco-sensitive zones'

About Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) - Recap

Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) are areas **notified by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**, Government of India around Protected Areas , National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries.

- The purpose of declaring ESZs is to create some kind of **"shock absorbers"** to the protected areas by regulating and managing the activities around such areas.
- They also act as a **transition zone** from areas of high protection to areas involving lesser protection.
- The new ESZ guidelines include a broad list of activities that could be allowed, promoted, regulated or promoted.
- The guidelines said activities, including commercial mining, setting of saw mills and industries causing pollution, commercial use of firewood and major hydro-power projects, are prohibited in such areas.
- It also **prohibits tourism** activities like flying over protected areas in an aircraft or hot air balloon, and **discharge of effluents** and solid waste in natural water bodies or terrestrial areas.
- Felling of trees, drastic change in agriculture systems and commercial use of natural water resources, including groundwater harvesting and setting up of hotels and resorts, are the activities regulated in the areas.
- Activities permitted in the areas include ongoing agriculture and horticulture practices by local communities, rainwater harvesting, organic farming, adoption of green technology and use of renewable energy sources.
- The width of the ESZ and type of regulation may vary from protected area to area. However, as a general principle, the width of the ESZ could go up to **10 kms around the protected area**.

Do you know?

- The rules for the ESZ or the Eco-Fragile Zones are **based on the Environment Protection Act, 1986**. However, the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 does not mention the word "Eco-Sensitive Zones".

- The Act says that Central Government can restrict areas in which any industries, operations or processes or class of industries, operations or processes shall not be carried out or shall be carried out subject to certain safeguards.

Punganur cow

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Animal conservation; Agriculture/Livestock

In news:

- **Punganur cow** is considered **one of the world's smallest breeds of cattle**.
- The breed is on the **verge of extinction, due to cross-breeding** conducted by farmers.
- Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the Animal Genetic Resources list the breed as **facing extinction**.
- The Punganur cow is diminutive, with a height of 70 cm to 90 cm and weighing around 115 to 200 kg. In comparison, the famous **Ongole bull** stands tall at 1.70 metres and weighs 500 kg. Both breeds trace their **origins to Andhra Pradesh**.
- Animal genetics and breeding scientists are now engaged in efforts to save the unique breed from extinction.

Do you know?

- Gir - This breed is highest producer of milk among all breeds in India.
- Sahiwal - This cow is also called 'Red Gold' and identified by its prominent red colour.
- Rathi, Tharparkar, Dhanni, Deoni, Hariana, Ongole, Nimari, Hallikar, Vechur (smallest cattle in the world)
- Umblachery - The bulls are used in the sport of Jallikattu or bull-taming

Migratory birds at Chilika face flu threat

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Health issue; Animal conservation; Bird Sanctuary in news

In news:

- Lakhs of migratory birds at Chilika are facing a threat to their lives following the detection of **avian influenza virus** barely a few kilometres away from the **Nalabana Bird Sanctuary**.
- Samples have tested positive for **H5N1 virus**.

Avian influenza

- Avian influenza refers to the disease caused by infection with avian (bird) influenza (flu) Type A viruses.
- These viruses occur naturally among wild aquatic birds worldwide and can infect domestic poultry and other bird and animal species.
- Avian flu viruses do not normally infect humans. However, sporadic human infections with avian flu viruses have occurred.

Animal in news: Pangolin

Part of: Prelims - Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- The pangolin, which can be found all over India, seems doomed because of its scales, which are said to have medicinal value and are more expensive than gold, are sheared ruthlessly.
- Its meat too is in demand in China. Illegal trade continues not just in parts where there are tigers but also in parts where there are musk deer, otter, mongoose and other animals.
- It is an insectivore, feeding on ants and termites, digging them out of mounds and logs using its long claws, which are as long as its fore limbs. It is nocturnal and rests in deep burrows during the day.
- Pangolins are the most trafficked mammals in the world, despite an international ban on their trade. They are trafficked both for their meat, and the unfounded belief that their keratinous scales have medical properties used in traditional medicine.
- IUCN Conservation status: Endangered

Animal in news: Great Indian Bustard

Part of: Prelims - Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- One of the rarest species and undoubtedly one of the most endangered is the Great Indian Bustard, which is the State bird of Rajasthan.
- Endemic to Jaisalmer and Pokhran, its habitat was severely damaged by the nuclear tests in 1974 and 1998. Once widely spotted across 11 Indian states, but their numbers

now stand at 60 in Rajasthan and the world population of the bird may be just 80. In Gujarat, not a single adult male has been sighted. Power lines are pushing out the birds.

- Apart from power lines (high voltage ones, running above the ground), loss of grassland are the reasons behind the decline.
- IUCN Conservation status: Critically Endangered

About the GIB:

- The GIB is a heavy bird, weighing 15-16 kg.
- The GIB is a flagship species of the grassland; it determines the health of the grasslands, on which many other species of birds and animals, and even the dairy industry is dependent on.

Loss of grassland — the habitat of the GIB — is primary cause:

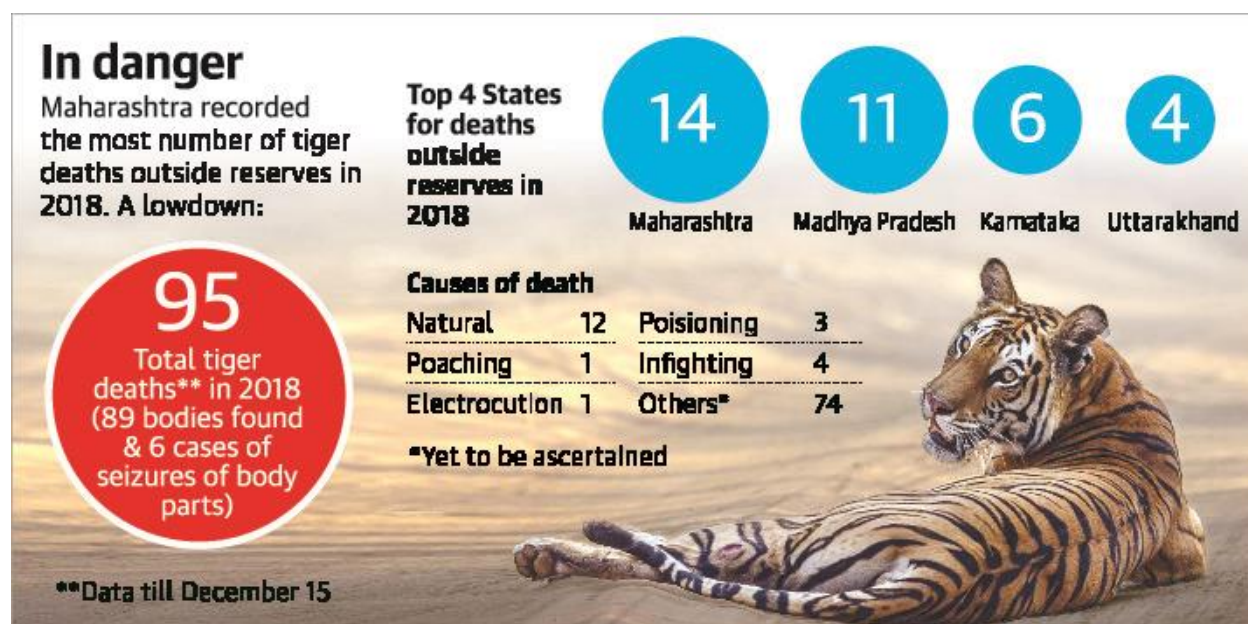
- There is unhindered grazing and installing of windmills and power stations on grasslands, thereby encroaching upon the breeding and wintering ground of the GIB.
- Large parcels of grassland are converted to agricultural land.
- The changing agricultural pattern that is moving away from traditional crops is another reason. With the disappearance of the traditional Bajra and Jowar crops, whose by-products served as fodder, their food has been on the decline.
- An increase in the use of pesticides has further depleted the population of insects like the beetle, which the GIB and other birds feed on.

[Tiger Conservation](#)

Part of: Prelims - Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- India recorded 95 tiger deaths in 2018, 41 outside reserves
- National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) chief says many animals venture into habitations, which increases the possibility of human-animal conflicts and results in deaths



Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/17/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/c330e616_2599668_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

- The NTCA maintains the official database of tiger mortality in the country, and compiles figures from reports sent by different States on the basis of recovery of bodies or seizure of body parts.

Animal in news: 260 leopards poached since 2015

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

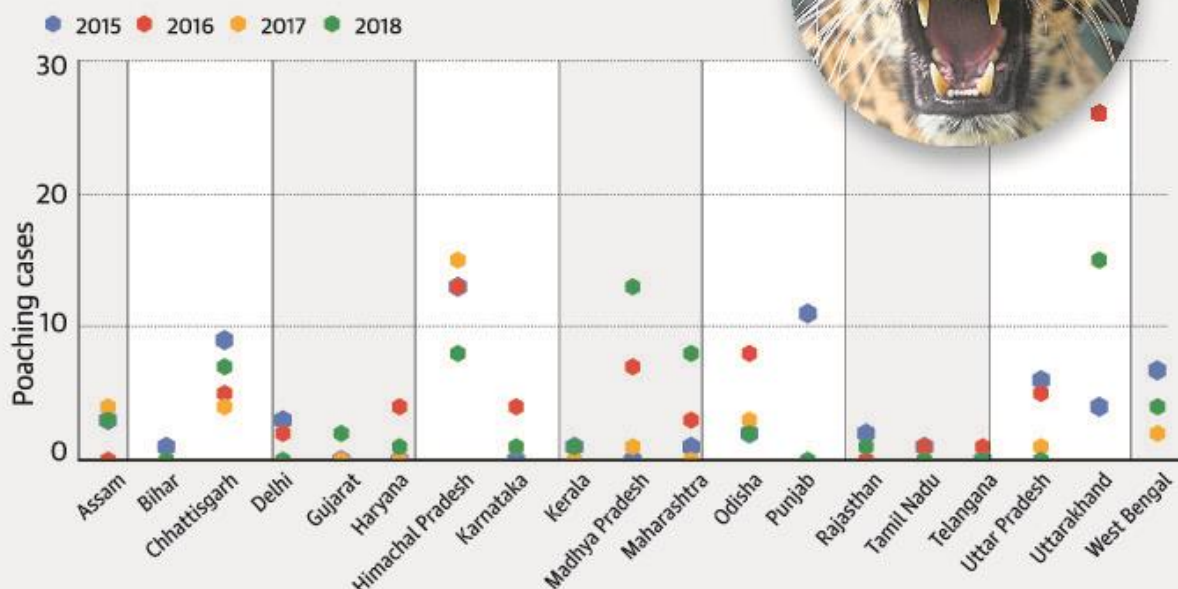
In news:

According to Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) –

- At least 260 leopards were poached in the country between 2015 and 2018.
- Uttarakhand accounted for 60 cases and Himachal Pradesh reported another 49.
- Central Indian States like Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh also recorded a high number of cases of leopard poaching in the past four years.
- There are also several incidents of leopard deaths on account of road kills, particularly in States such as Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Hunted down

64 cases of leopard poaching were recorded in 2015, 83 deaths in 2016, 47 cases in 2017 and 66 till October 2018



Source: Lok Sabha unstarred question no. 844

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/26/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/0b9ad402_2619660_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

- According to the Delhi based Wildlife Protection Society of India, 163 cases of poaching and seizures of body parts were recorded in 2018, an increase from 159 in 2017.
- Since leopards live in close proximity to human habitations and are found all across the country, the cases of poaching too are spread countrywide.
- IUCN status: Vulnerable

Animal in news: olive ridley turtles

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- Odisha forest department is all set to add another olive ridley mass nesting site to its wildlife map.
- **Bahuda rookery** is being developed as a possible olive ridley mass nesting site.

Do you know?

- **Rushikulya rookery** in Odisha is a major mass nesting site of olive ridleys on the Indian coastline.
- Olive ridley eggs incubate on their own by the heat of the sand under which they are buried.
- The hatchlings come out in 45 to 50 days and after that the covering of the eggs decompose and mix with the sand.

Important Value Addition**Unique mass nesting behavior**

- Only two species of marine turtles display a unique mass nesting behavior. This behavior is known as an 'arribada'.
- **Arribada**- Spanish term meaning arrival; a mass nesting behavior.
- An arribada is a unique nesting phenomenon common to both the Olive ridley and the Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

This reproductive phenomenon was first observed by the scientific community in 1961. By producing large numbers of offspring most organisms like sea turtles can insure their survival even after predation occurs.

- The Olive ridley is endemic to the Pacific coasts of Mexico, Central America, and India. It is known to be a nocturnal nester.
- The Kemp's ridley is endemic to the Gulf of Mexico. It ranges from Galveston, Texas to Tampico, Mexico. Kemp's ridley turtles display unique diurnal arribadas.
- Olive Ridley: IUCN Status-Vulnerable

Major nesting sites in Odisha:

- The Gahirmatha beach
- The mouth of the Debi river
- The Rushikulya rookery coast in the Ganjam district

The Gahirmatha beach is the largest mass nesting site for olive ridley turtles along the Indian coastline, followed by the rookery at the mouth of the Rushikulya river.

Animal in news: Ganges River Dolphins

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- In India, the Ganges River Dolphin is threatened by river water pollution and siltation, rise in salinity in the water system, accidental entanglement in fishing nets, and poaching for their oil.
- In addition, alterations to the rivers in the form of barrages and dams are separating populations.
- Various organizations, including the WWF-India in Uttar Pradesh, have initiated programs for conservation and re-introduction of the River Dolphin.

Important Value Additions:

- Ganges River Dolphins are considered as National aquatic animal
- IUCN status: Endangered

Animal in news: Hangul

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- Hangul is a sub-species of the European red deer, in Kashmir.
- It is **state animal of Jammu and Kashmir**.
- It is an endangered species. (IUCN Status: '**critically endangered**')
- Majorly confined to the **Dachigam National Park**.

Important Value Additions:

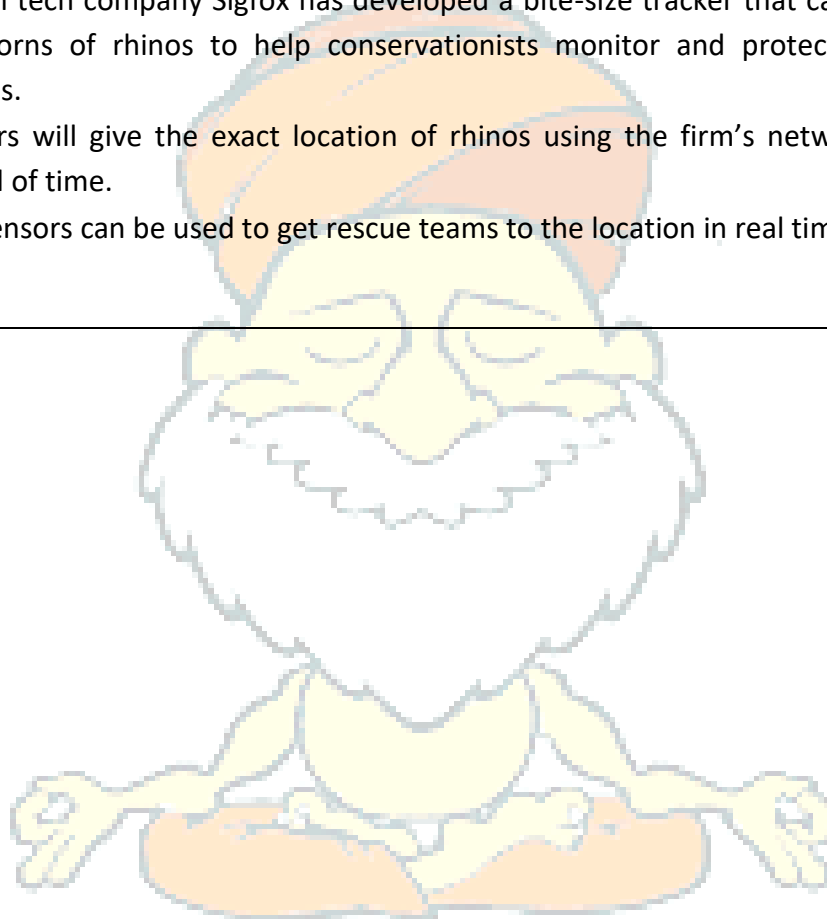
- Kashmiri Red Stag or Hangul is known for its giant antlers bearing 11 to 16 points.
- Only one viable population left today in the wild is largely confined to the Greater Dachigam Landscape (1,000 sq.km.), encompassing the Dachigam National Park (NP) and adjoining protected areas.
- It is one of three critically endangered species in Jammu and Kashmir. The other two are markhor, the Tibetan antelope or 'chiru'. It was designated as State Animal of Jammu & Kashmir in 1980's.
- It is listed under Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and J&K Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1978 and has also been listed among the top 15 species of high conservation priority by the Government of India.

Role of technology in fighting poaching

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation; Science and Technology

In news:

- Cameras, infrared and motion sensors, electronic bracelets and drones have been used over the years to protect endangered species.
- French tech company Sigfox has developed a bite-size tracker that can be inserted into the horns of rhinos to help conservationists monitor and protect the endangered species.
- Sensors will give the exact location of rhinos using the firm's network over a longer period of time.
- The sensors can be used to get rescue teams to the location in real time.



INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

On tackling chaotic traffic

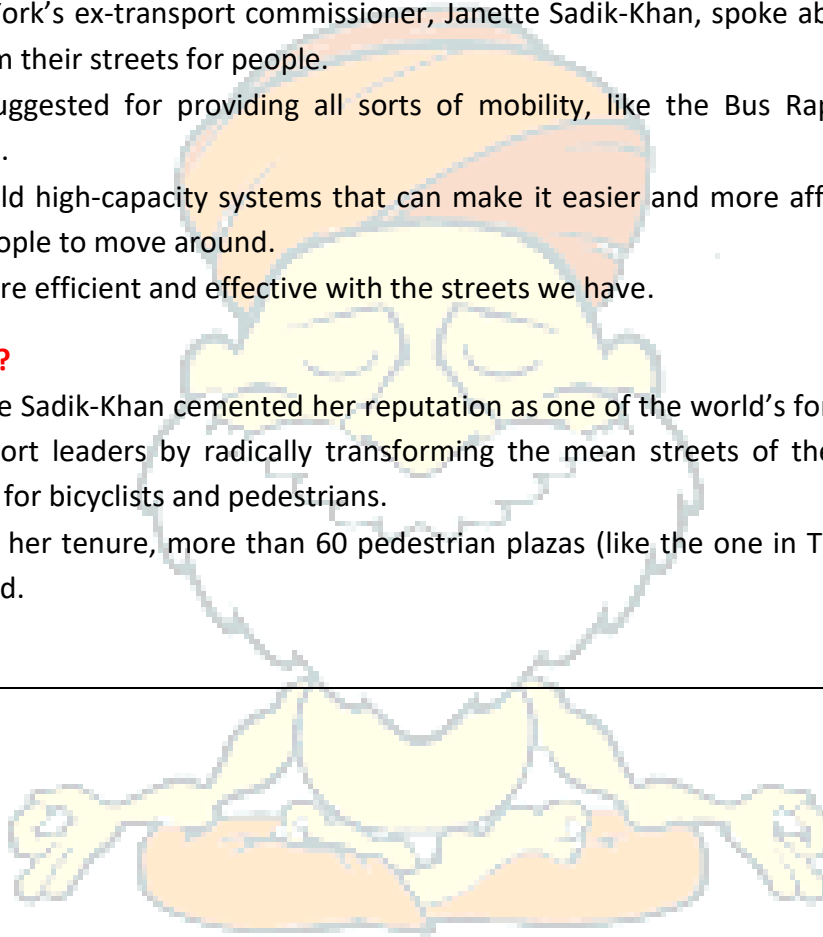
Part of: GS Mains III – Infrastructure; Transport

In news:

- New York's ex-transport commissioner, Janette Sadik-Khan, spoke about how India can reclaim their streets for people.
- She suggested for providing all sorts of mobility, like the Bus Rapid Transit system (BRTS).
- To build high-capacity systems that can make it easier and more affordable and faster for people to move around.
- Be more efficient and effective with the streets we have.

Do you know?

- Janette Sadik-Khan cemented her reputation as one of the world's foremost sustainable transport leaders by radically transforming the mean streets of the Big Apple into a haven for bicyclists and pedestrians.
- Under her tenure, more than 60 pedestrian plazas (like the one in Times Square) were created.



Train 18 – India's first engine-less train

Fast forward

Train 18 – India's first engine-less train – breached the 180 kmph speed threshold on Sunday during a test run in the Kota – Sawai Madhopur section, becoming the country's fastest train. If trials go well it may replace the Shatabdi Express soon

FEATURES AND FACILITIES

- Aerodynamically designed driver cabins at both ends for quicker turn-around at destinations
- Alternate coaches are motorised to ensure even distribution of power and faster acceleration or deceleration
- Regenerative braking system to save power
- Inter-connected, fully sealed gangways
- Automatic doors with retractable footsteps
- Onboard Wi-Fi and infotainment
- GPS-based passenger information system
- Modular toilets with bio-vacuum systems
- Rotational seats which can be aligned in the direction of travel (executive class)
- Roller blinds and diffused LED lighting
- Disabled-friendly toilets
- Emergency talk-back units to contact train crew
- CCTVs in all coaches for safe and secure travel

₹100 crore

Approximate cost of train

200 kmph

Possible peak speed

Jan. 2019

Expected commencement of commercial run

5 more
Train 18s in the pipeline

16 Number of coaches (same as Shatabdi)

18 months
The time reportedly taken to conceive, design and develop the train

Train 18 exceeds 180 kmph... The stability of water bottles (inside the train) at this speed is testament to the quality of workmanship and design of our engineers

PIYUSH GOYAL
Minister of Railways



https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/03/CNI/Chennai/TH/5_07/82176249_9ac25d44_101_mr.jpg

[Kaiga n-power unit creates world record](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Infrastructure; Energy

In news:

- The **Kaiga nuclear power plant**, which is located in western **Karnataka**, has created a world record for the **longest uninterrupted operation of 941 days**.
- It broke the earlier record of **940 days** by the **Heysham plant** in the **United Kingdom**.
- While the Kaiga (KGS-1) is a Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR), Heysham-2 Unit-8 is an Advanced Gas Cooled Reactor (AGR).
- The achievement demonstrates that the nation's capability in nuclear power generation technology of PHWR had fully matured and proved the excellence in design, construction, safety, quality and operation and maintenance practices of the Corporation.

About Kaiga nuclear power plant

- The KGS-1, located 56 km from **Karwar**, has been generating electricity continuously since May 13, 2016.
- It is an **indigenously-built PHWR** run by **domestic fuel (uranium)**. It began commercial operations on November 16, 2000, and has produced 500 cr. units of power so far.
- In June this year, KGS-1 had set a national record for continuous operation of 766 days.
- According to official sources, KGS-1 will be shutdown for maintenance on December 30.

Nuclear reactors undergo mandatory checks and have to get clearance from the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board to continue operations.

[Bogibeel: A bridge across the Brahmaputra](#)

Introduction:

- Bogibeel, the **longest railroad bridge of India**, spanning nearly five-km across the Brahmaputra link Dibrugarh with North Lakhimpur district of Assam and parts of eastern Arunachal Pradesh.
- Sixty-eight years after being ravaged by a devastating earthquake and the ensuing floods, Dibrugarh is reclaiming its lost glory.
- It used to be a thriving centre of the plantation industry during the colonial times. For the people of the region, it remains a hub of higher education and medical treatment.

- However, for decades, the only recourse for people to cross the Brahmaputra would be to chug along for over an hour, in a diesel-propelled ferry, which would also carry their vehicles and goods, even cattle.
- Crossing the river could be a costlier proposition than flying between Mumbai and Goa.

Major significance behind this bridge construction

- Commissioning the bridge has reduced the journey time across the river to less than five minutes, bringing relief to people living in these remote parts.
- The single biggest factor which has shackled the development of the Northeast region is the absence of robust connectivity.
- It has the potential to infuse economic dynamism in the region and provide opportunities for the expansion of tourism, industrial development and trade. Bogibeel must be viewed alongside other infrastructure developments in neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh.
- The iconic **Bhupen Hazarika bridge** over the **Lohit river** was commissioned recently by the prime minister.
- A 7.5 km long bridge over the Dibang river was dedicated to the nation a few days ago.
- The Trans Arunachal Highway has seen considerable progress, especially in the eastern part of the state.
- An airport has been commissioned at Pasighat, barely two hours away from Dibrugarh.
- One of the most pristine parts of Arunachal Pradesh has now become accessible to the rest of the world.
- This could give a fillip to tourism, given that the region has abundant wildlife and is ideal for river rafting and angling.
- However, an imaginative roadmap of tourism development, promotion and branding needs to be crafted, centred around the region's tribal ethos.
- Dibrugarh lies at the heart of a crucial oil and gas axis in Assam, given its proximity to Digboi and Duliajan oilfields.
- Further east lie the Kharsang gas fields and Kumchai oilfields of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The district also has significant coal deposits.
- There are more than 200 tea factories in Dibrugarh.
- Commissioning of the bridge has raised the prospects of industrial development and opportunities for productive employment for the youth, especially in the mining and plantation sectors.

Improving geo-political relations and reaching to the natural resources

- Bogibeel is the gateway to the historic Stilwell Road, which connects Ledo in Assam to Kunming in China, passing through Myanmar's Kachin state, via Arunachal Pradesh.

- The 1,800 km long route was used for transporting arms to the Chinese by the Americans during World War II. Its revival for trade is well within grasp now.
- The route could well become the centrepiece of the ambitious Act East Policy.
- It would follow the Asian Highway (AH)14 and reach Kunming along AH3.
- The Chinese stretch has a six-lane highway, while the Indian side in Arunachal Pradesh has a two-lane highway.
- Infrastructure in Myanmar, of course, would need to be strengthened and the land customs station at Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh revived.
- Trade could revitalise economic activity, in what is otherwise one of the most backward parts of Arunachal Pradesh. From a strategic standpoint, movement of troops has become a much quicker, efficient and reliable proposition.

Conclusion:

- The road beyond Dibrugarh leads to the frontier parts of Arunachal Pradesh, with a fully functional advanced landing ground of Air Force at Walong, barely 100 km from the Chinese border.
- This was a theatre of armed incursion in 1962. Now access to one of the remotest border outposts in Anjaw has been made much easier.
- Bogibeel is poised to usher winds of change in this part of the world.
- However, the advantage of connectivity must be accompanied by an imaginative blueprint of economic development, drawing upon the region's advantages.
- The symbolism of Bogibeel goes well beyond the Brahmaputra.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss the significance of Bogibeel Bridge in fostering development in North East India and advantage it offers to Act East policy.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Are GM crops a failure?

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Agriculture; Environment and Biodiversity; Science and Technology

In news:

According to a research paper co-authored by leading agriculture scientist M.S. Swaminathan –

- GM crops are considered to be a failure.
- GM crops such as Bt cotton, the stalled Bt brinjal as well as DMH-11, a transgenic mustard hybrid – has failed as a sustainable agriculture technology and has, therefore, also failed to provide livelihood security for cotton farmers who are mainly resource-poor, small and marginal farmers.
- It raised questions on the genetic engineering technology itself on the grounds that it raises the cost of sowing.

Prof. Swaminathan, credited with leading India's Green Revolution, has in recent years advocated 'sustainable agriculture' and said the government should only use genetic engineering as a last resort.

Swaminathan emphasised that genetic engineering technology is supplementary and must be needbased. Only in very rare circumstance (less than 1%) may there arise a need for the use of this technology.

However, the research paper – 'Modern Technologies for Sustainable Food and Nutrition Security' – was criticised by India's Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA), K. VijayRaghavan as 'deeply flawed'.

Not sustainable

*Arguments raised by
P.C. Kesavan and M. S.
Swaminathan in their paper:*

- Mutations and natural selection are the predominant evolutionary mechanisms to induce variations in flowering plants

- In r-DNA technology (Genetic Engineering or GE) all the molecular and cellular events which are triggered with the insertion of 'exogenous DNA', are not precisely understood

- Since cost of GE seeds and inputs as in Bt Cotton are exorbitant, small farmers are unable to withstand crop losses

- The site of a gene's insertion is not controllable, and health concerns from unintended effects



have been raised

- Precautionary principle has been done away with in India and no rigorous biosafety protocols and evaluation of GM crops are in place

- Bt cotton in India failed to live up to promises in 10 years, on high yields from

pest resistance and reduction in insecticide use

- Huge socio-economic cost is borne by farmers from hybrids in Bt cotton

- Bt cotton farmers are asked to revert to traditional pest management, displaying failure of Bollgard II cotton

THE CONTEXT

- Bt cotton occupies greater than 95% of India's cotton acreage

- Yields have stagnated at around 500 kg/ha (lower than yields in China and Egypt)

- Bt Brinjal was cleared by the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee but was put on a moratorium by the UPA government

- DMH-11, or GE mustard developed by Delhi University was cleared by the GEAC, but later it was withdrawn

Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/08/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_05/9728cd03_2579296_101_mr.jpg

Don't believe the anti-GMO campaign?

Introduction:

We recently read about few highlights on GM crops ([Fast Recap](#))

According to a research paper – “Modern technologies for sustainable food and nutrition security” – co-authored by geneticist **P.C. Kesavan** and leading agriculture scientist **M.S. Swaminathan**:

- [GM crops are considered to be a failure.](#)
- GM crops such as Bt cotton, the stalled Bt brinjal as well as DMH-11, a transgenic mustard hybrid – **has failed as a sustainable agriculture technology**
- It has also **failed to provide livelihood security** for cotton farmers who are mainly resource-poor, small and marginal farmers.

- It raised questions on the genetic engineering technology itself on the grounds that it **raises the cost of sowing.**

Swaminathan emphasised that genetic engineering technology is supplementary and must be needbased. Only in very rare circumstance (less than 1%) may there arise a need for the use of this technology.

However, the research paper was criticised by India's Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA), K. **VijayRaghavan** as 'deeply flawed'. According to him, it has the potential to mislead the public and the political system.

Proponents of GMO argue that –

- Anti-GMO campaign is scientifically baseless and potentially harmful to poor people in the developing world.
- Genetic modification is the technology of choice for solving abiotic problems like drought flood, salinity, etc.
- Genetic modification allows different parents to be combined easily, helping yields go up substantially.
- Major science academies of the world such as the U.S.'s National Academy of Sciences, the African Academy of Sciences and the Indian National Science Academy have supported GM technology.
- Data from a large number of peer-reviewed publications have shown that, on average, GM technology adoption has reduced pesticide use by 37%, increased crop yield by 22%, and increased farmer profits by 68%.
- Data from a billion animals fed on GM corn have not indicated any health hazards.
- Yield and profit gains are higher in developing countries than in developed countries.
- Those in the Americas and elsewhere consuming Bt corn or soybean for over 15 years have not reported any health issues.
- Reports on the probable carcinogenic potential of the herbicide have not been accepted by major science academies.

Bt cotton - Not a failure in India

- Bt cotton is not a failure in India
- The yields hovering around 300 kg/ha at the time of introduction of Bt cotton (2002) have increased to an average of over 500 kg/ha, converting India from a cotton-importing country to the largest exporter of raw cotton
- India has one of the strongest regulatory protocols for field trials of GM crops.

- It is unfortunate that farmer distress is being wrongly attributed to Bt cotton failure. Farmers continue to grow Bt cotton.

On Bt brinjal

- Bt brinjal trials were scuttled in India
- The moratorium on Bt brinjal is the most unfortunate step taken by the government in 2010 and has crippled the entire field of research and development with transgenic crops.
- Bangladesh has used India's data to successfully cultivate Bt brinjal, despite all the negative propaganda.
- Reports indicate that as many as 6,000 Bangladeshi farmers cultivated Bt brinjal in 2017.
- Proponents raised the question – *How long will it take for Bt brinjal to enter India from Bangladesh?*

Conclusion:

According to proponents of GM crops,

- The paper by Dr. Kesavan and Dr. Swaminathan seems to have got most things wrong.
- GM technology is not a magic bullet. It needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- There is definitely scope for improvement in terms of technology and regulatory protocols
- It is time to deregulate the Bt gene and lift the embargo on Bt brinjal.
- A negative review from opinion-makers can only mislead the country. In the end, it is India that will be the loser.

Connecting the dots:

- Genetic engineering technology is supplementary and must be need-based. Only in very rare circumstance (less than 1%) may there arise a need for the use of this technology. Do you agree? Critically analyze the benefits and risks associated with GM foods.

Technology as an agent of social change

Context:

- If there is one thing that has defined the past 10 years, it has been the unprecedented growth of technology, especially use of mobiles.
- Technology is all-over and has become the source of fundamental transformation in our society. It is creating inclusivity for many, instead of exclusivity for the few.

Role of Technology

1. Technological developments driving inclusive growth

- Thanks to a series of policy initiatives and landmark judicial decisions, there has been a significant push towards inclusive growth.
- From opening bank accounts to financial health, from school enrolment to learning outcomes, technology has played an important role.
- However, issues like ease and affordability of owning a home, right to privacy and data protection have taken centre stage.

2. Technological developments are driving entrepreneurship in a big way

- A new wave of purpose-driven entrepreneurs is bringing innovative business models to improve the lives of the aspiring middle and lower-income Indians.
- They will define the future of Indian entrepreneurship over the next few decades.

3. Biggest drivers of social impact

- Mobile phone is one of the biggest drivers of social impact in India.
- With more mobile phone penetration and declining data costs, both businesses and governments can easily reach populations that they could not before.
- Today entrepreneurs can provide a range of services (access to information, education, healthcare, financial services, transportation, jobs and government services etc) via the mobile phone to the people who were previously been excluded or underserved.

Conclusion:

- Despite India's major strides over the last decade, a young and aspiring India wants even more rapid change.
- Increasingly, people from different walks of life are now confidently stepping up to tackle some of India's most difficult challenges. They believe that India's growth and prosperity should benefit not just the "top of the pyramid" but all Indians.
- Their focus is on the underserved, excluded and disempowered in an India that is becoming increasingly digital.
- Over the next five years, 500 million Indians are going to come online for the first time through their mobile phones, a population we refer to as the Next Half Billion.
- Coming decade will offer an even bigger opportunity and technology entrepreneurs should focus on helping every Indian create a better life.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss how technology is an agent of social change. Discuss its positive and negative aspects.

ISRO's 5.8-tonne GSAT-11 ready for launch

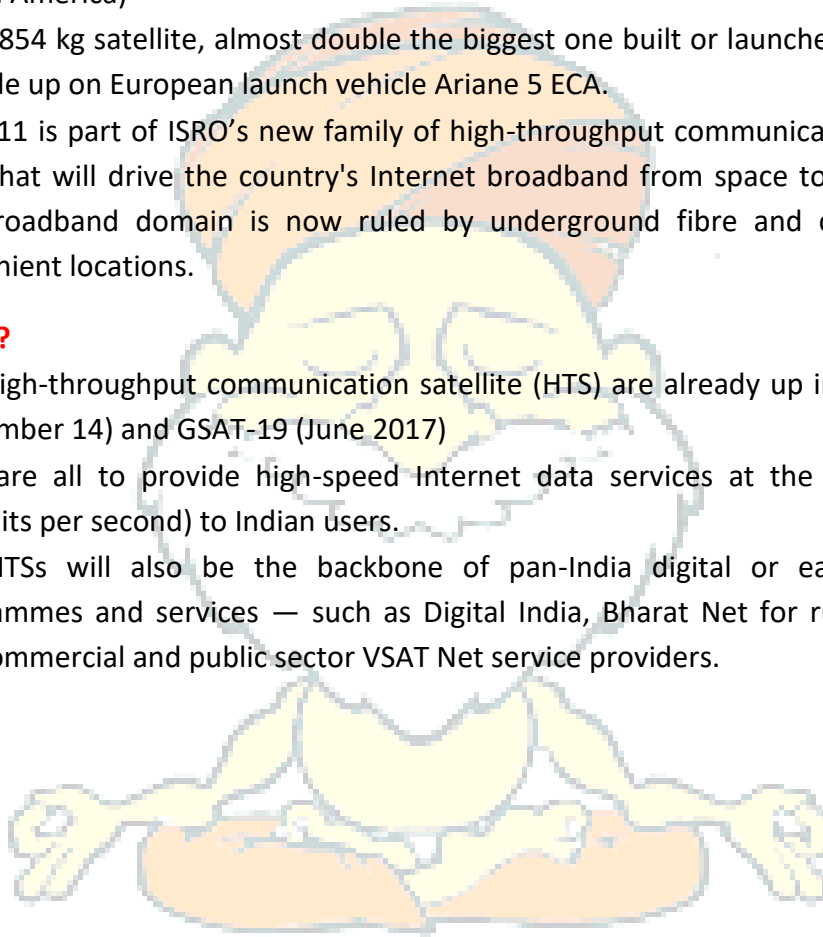
Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology

In news:

- GSAT-11, heaviest Indian communication satellite, to take off from French Guiana (South America)
- The 5,854 kg satellite, almost double the biggest one built or launched by ISRO to date, will ride up on European launch vehicle Ariane 5 ECA.
- GSAT-11 is part of ISRO's new family of high-throughput communication satellite (HTS) fleet that will drive the country's Internet broadband from space to untouched areas; the broadband domain is now ruled by underground fibre and covers partial and convenient locations.

Do you know?

- Two high-throughput communication satellite (HTS) are already up in space – GSAT-29 (November 14) and GSAT-19 (June 2017)
- They are all to provide high-speed Internet data services at the rate of 100 Gbps (Gigabits per second) to Indian users.
- The HTSs will also be the backbone of pan-India digital or easy Internet-based programmes and services — such as Digital India, Bharat Net for rural e-governance, and commercial and public sector VSAT Net service providers.



Big push for communication

GSAT-11 will play a vital role in providing broadband services across the country. It will also provide a platform to demonstrate new generation applications

■ Launching from French Guiana between **2 a.m. & 3 a.m.** IST on Dec. 5

■ Will be lifted to space on a **European Ariane 5 rocket**

■ Mass 5,854 kg, cost **₹1,200 crore**, including the foreign launch

■ Will rest in over the 74°E longitude, nearly **36,000 km** away



■ Will carry **40 transponders** in the Ku /Ka bands

■ Built to provide throughput data rate of **16 gbps**

■ Expected to work for **15 years**

APPLICATIONS:

To meet unprecedented data demands: Greater capacity and high data rates over regions due to use of the spot beam technology

Supporting Bharat Net connectivity: Substantial bandwidth coverage to gram panchayats for supporting e-governance and other platforms

VSAT terminals: Capacity platform to support a huge subscriber base

Unlock new applications: Reaching out to different strata of society through Digital India platform

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/04/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/47720869_2571067_101_mr.jpg

ISRO's GSAT-7A to add muscle to Air Force

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence; Science and Technology

In news:

- **Military communication satellite GSAT-7A** to be launched on Dec. 19 from Sriharikota
- It is expected to add a new space-based dimension to the way Indian Air Force interlinks, operates and communicates with its aircraft.
- Although all Indian communication satellites offer capacity to the armed forces, GSAT-7A will be the **first one built primarily for the IAF** to qualitatively unify its assets and improve combined, common intelligence during operations.

Eye in the sky

GSAT-7A - a communication satellite designed specifically for military operations - will be launched from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota on December 19. Some facts about the launch:



- This is the 13th flight of the Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV)
- The satellite GSAT-7A is the 35th Indian communication satellite. It weighs 2,250 kg.
- The satellite is built to provide communication capability to users in the Ku-band over the Indian region
- Ku-band will enable superior real time aircraft-to-aircraft communication

Pic:

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2018/12/17/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/c330e616_259966_9_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

- Since August 2013, the Navy has a satellite largely for its use, the GSAT-7, for similarly linking its ships to command on land.

Gaganyaan: Indian into space by 2022

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space Missions

In news:

- The Union Cabinet approved the ambitious Gaganyaan programme, which will send three Indian astronauts to space for up to seven days by 2022 at a cost of ₹10,000 crore.
- As part of the programme, two unmanned flights and one manned flight will be undertaken.
- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has developed the launch vehicle GSLV MK-III, which has the necessary payload capability to launch a three-member crew module in low earth orbit.

Do you know?

- Escape system tested – The ISRO has also tested the crew escape system, an essential technology for human space flight. Elements of the life support system and the space suit have also been realised and tested

Water traces found on asteroid Bennu

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Tech; Space programmes

In news:

- NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft has discovered ingredients for water on asteroid Bennu.
- The discovery may hold clues to the origins of life on the earth.
- OSIRIS-REx found traces of hydrogen and oxygen molecules — part of the recipe for water and thus the potential for life — embedded in the asteroid's rocky surface.

Do you know?

- The probe was launched in 2016.
- Bennu orbits the Sun at roughly the same distance as the earth.
- The spacecraft will later fly back to the earth, return samples from the asteroid to earth for study. (in September 2023)

OSIRIS-REx

- The OSIRIS-REx (Origins, Spectral Interpretation, Resource Identification, Security, Regolith Explorer) is a NASA asteroid study and sample-return mission.
- The mission's main goal is to obtain a sample of about 60 grams (2.1 oz) from 101955 Bennu, a carbonaceous near-Earth asteroid, and return the sample to Earth for a detailed analysis.

The safety and ethics of gene editing

In news:

- Recently, a Chinese scientist triggered alarm and confusion across the scientific community with the claim that he had **edited the DNA of human embryos** to create twin baby girls.
- He also said – the twin baby girls had been born “crying into the world as healthy as any other babies”.

- The controversial experiment, publicized through the media and videos posted online by **He Jiankui** of Southern University of Science and Technology of China, was criticized by many scientists worldwide as premature and called “rogue human experimentation.”

He Jiankui’s controversial claims

- **He** claimed that his experiments produced the first genetically altered babies **using gene editing technology**.
- The scientist claims to have **used CRISPR/Cas9 technology** to alter the DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) of embryos before implanting them into the mother’s womb to make the twin babies resistant to HIV.
- The unverified claim by **He** has stoked public fears and renewed apprehensions that babies might one day be “designed”.
- It raises an urgent need for sound governance and greater public dialogue on gene editing.

(For basics on Gene Editing, refer the link - [Editing our genes](#))

Potential of gene editing

Gene editing has got incredible potential. These technologies hold the promise of curing any human genetic disease.

- Switzerland-based CRISPR Therapeutics and Switzerland-based CRISPR Therapeutics, with labs in Massachusetts, and Boston-based Vertex Pharmaceuticals have recently launched human trials of an experimental **CRISPR-Cas9 therapy for b-thalassemia**, a blood disorder that decreases the production of haemoglobin, an iron-containing protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen.
- An oncologist at China’s Sichuan University was the first to edit human cells to **treat lung cancer** in 2016.
- China is also attempting to halt disease progression in patients with **oesophageal cancer** by manipulating a piece of DNA in white blood cells.

Possible pitfalls of gene editing

The unverified claim by He came on the eve of an international summit dedicated to discussing the **emerging science and ethics around powerful tools** that give scientists unprecedented potential to tweak traits and eliminate genetic diseases — but that have raised fears of “designer babies.” **By editing the DNA of human embryos, scientists change not just the genes in a single person, but also their potential offspring** — in effect, altering the human species.

While it is **illegal to deliberately alter the genes of human embryos** in India, in the US, and many other countries, the legal position on gene editing in China is less clear.

The broader scientific community condemned the lack of transparency in the development, review, and conduct of clinical procedures for He’s experiment.

Do you know?**Difference between genome editing (GE) and genetic modification (GM)**

- Many are not aware of how genome editing (GE) is different from the genetic modification (GM)
- While **GM involves permanent integration of a foreign gene into the host genome**, **GE only involves manipulating the endogenous gene without inserting a foreign DNA.**

Conclusion

Two notable failings of He Jiankui's experiment were the **inability to obtain consent from the participants of the trial**, and the highly questionable **ethical standards implemented to protect the welfare and rights of the research subjects.**

Gene editing experiments may prove to be a blessing for parents carrying disease-causing mutations to have their own children, yet these interventions **raise crucial safety and efficiency concerns** leading to what scientists and doctors call **off-target mutations** and **mosaicism.**

Since the results of He's experiment have not been published or peer reviewed, some experts fear that his effort might not have been screened for off-target effects and mosaicism, therefore putting the twins' health at risk.

Crucial questions need to be asked with regards to **fragmented legal frameworks, unclear regulatory practices, ambiguous policy advances** and voluntary measures governing gene-editing technologies at national and international levels. Considering the rapid pace of genome editing, the existing overarching governance frameworks in India and elsewhere need urgent examination and development.

Connecting the dots:

- Considering the rapid pace of genome editing, the existing overarching governance frameworks in India and elsewhere need urgent examination and development. Examine.
- "Gene Therapy offers a wide range of prospects for humans." Comment.
- What is gene editing? Elaborate in the light of Crisper cas9 and respective examples of application of gene editing technology.

Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (or SSLV)

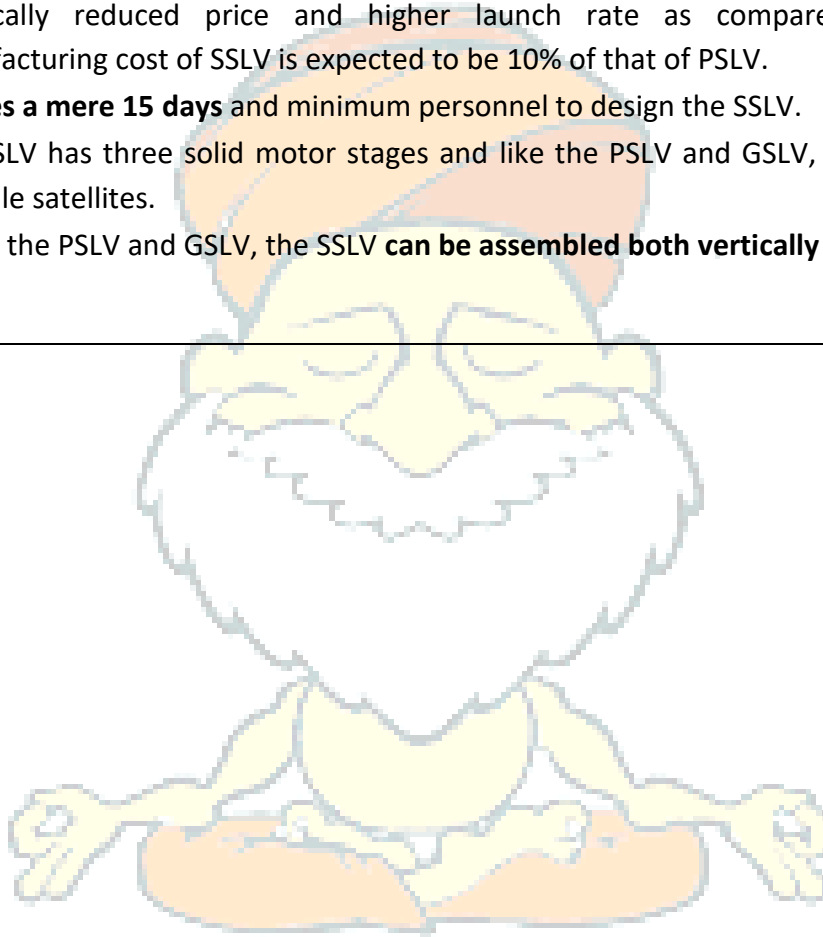
Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; India's achievements; Indigenous technology

In news:

- ISRO's **Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC), Kerala** has completed the design for the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle (SSLV).
- SSLV is a '**baby rocket**' designed **to launch small satellites** (payload capacity of 500 kg to Low Earth orbit or 300 kg to Sun synchronous orbit) in quickest way to the space.

Do you know?

- SSLV was developed with the aim of launching small satellites commercially at drastically reduced price and higher launch rate as compared to PSLV. The manufacturing cost of SSLV is expected to be 10% of that of PSLV.
- **It takes a mere 15 days** and minimum personnel to design the SSLV.
- The SSLV has three solid motor stages and like the PSLV and GSLV, can accommodate multiple satellites.
- Unlike the PSLV and GSLV, the SSLV **can be assembled both vertically and horizontally**.



DEFENCE

Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (PCCoSC)

Part of: GS Mains III – Defence and Security

In news:

- The three services – Army, Navy and Air Force – are taking steps to improve 'jointmanship' and have agreed on the appointment of a Permanent Chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee.
- The PCCoSC is envisaged as a single-point military adviser to the government.

Do you know?

- The permanent chairman, CoSC will be a four-star officer, who will be equivalent to chiefs of army, airforce and navy.
- He would look into joint issues of the services like training of troops, acquisition of weapon systems and joint operations of the services.
- The officer would also be in-charge of the tri-services command at Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the strategic command of nuclear weapons along with the upcoming cyber and space command.
- The Naresh Chandra Task Force, formed in May 2011 to review the national security management system, recommended the creation of permanent post of chairman, chiefs of staff committee (CoSC).

Grigorovich-class frigates in 3 years

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Defence; International relations

In news:

- The first of the four **Admiral Grigorovich-class guided missile stealth frigates** is likely to be inducted into the Indian Navy in the next three years.
- Rear Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi says two will be built in Russia and two in Goa.
- The 4,000-odd tonne frigates can be armed with Brahmos cruise missile system, array of weapon system that include artillery guns, strike missile and radar-controlled air defence systems with provisions for torpedo tubes.

Do you know?

Russia-India defence cooperation

- **INDRA-NAVY-18** – bilateral maritime exercise between Indian Navy and Russian Federation Navy.
- **Two Sindhughosh-class submarines**, reportedly **Sindhukesari** and **Sindhuraj**, are undergoing medium refit at a shipyard in Russia.
- A second **Akula-class nuclear-powered attack submarine (SSN)** may be leased to India by the Russian Federation Navy.
- India already operates a leased **Akula-class SSN, INS Chakra**, which is based at Eastern Naval Command.

We read recently about 'Cope India 2018'

- **'Cope India 2018'** - U.S. and India joint air exercises

[India, Russia to boost joint production in defence](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – India and Russia; International Relations; Defence

In news:

- 18th meeting of the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) took place recently.
- India and Russia have agreed on ways to **simplify export clearances** to take forward **joint manufacturing in defence**.
- Focus – expanding military-to-military and defence industrial engagement.
- Both Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSU) and private sector to manufacture spares for Russian systems in India.

[India gets submarine rescue system](#)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence; Security; Defence partnership

In news:

- Indian Navy joined a select group of naval forces in the world when it inducted its **first non-tethered [Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle \(DSRV\) system](#)** at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai.

- In March 2016, the Indian Navy had signed a ₹2,000 crore contract with the **U.K.-based James Fisher Defence (JFD)** for two submarine rescue systems as well as maintenance for 25 years.
- This project is yet another milestone in the **defence partnership between India and the United Kingdom**.

Do you know?

- The DSRV is used to **rescue crew members from submarines** stranded under water in the high seas.
- The DSRV can be operated at a **depth of 650 metres** and can **rescue 14 people at a time**.
- The **DSRV can also be transported by air**, enabling it to conduct rescue operations across the globe.
- The Indian Navy currently operates five different classes of submarines.

Rough and tough

The flyaway Deep Sea Submarine Rescue System can be operated in very rough conditions with wave height of 4 to 6 metres

Maximum operating depth:

650 metres

12-18 hours

Endurance time

17 Total
passenger capacity

3 No. of crew members

14 No. of persons that
can be rescued at a time

₹1,000 crore
cost of one system



Deep dive: The Submarine Rescue System being launched in Mumbai on Wednesday. ■PTI

Submarine strength

Indian Navy has five classes of submarines now and more are in the process of being inducted

• Scorpene
Class - **1**

• Russian Kilo
Class - **9**

• German
HDW - **4**

• Nuclear attack
submarine from
Russia - **1**

• Indigenous
nuclear ballistic
missile submarine
INS Arihant - **1**

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Information Fusion Centre (IFC)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence and Security

In news:

- Navy to formally inaugurate the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Through this Centre, information on “white shipping”, or commercial shipping, will be exchanged with countries in the region to improve maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
- IFC-IOR is established with the vision of strengthening maritime security in the region and beyond and act as a maritime information hub.
- IFC has been established at the Navy’s Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) in Gurugram.

Do you know?

- Navy’s Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) is the single point centre linking all the coastal radar chains to generate a seamless real-time picture of the nearly 7,500-km coastline.
- Around 21 countries that have already signed white shipping information exchange agreements are IFC partners.

Trans Regional Maritime Network (T-RMN)

- In a related development, India has signed the ascension agreement to the Trans Regional Maritime Network (T-RMN) which facilitates information exchange on the movement of commercial traffic on the high seas.
- The multilateral construct comprises of 30 countries and is steered by Italy.

‘NSG must have its own air wing’

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence; Security

In news:

- A Parliamentary panel has recommended that the Centre urgently take steps to ensure that the National Security Guard (NSG) is equipped with its own dedicated air wing.
- Currently, the two Mi-17 helicopters procured by the NSG in 1988-99, were grounded and unavailable.

- Ministry of Home Affairs should make urgent and sincere efforts to commission a dedicated Air Wing of NSG and provide requisite types and number of air assets to strengthen the aviation capability of the force.

About National Security Guard (NSG)

- National Security Guard (NSG) — is the country's premier counter-terrorist and contingency force.
- The NSG was raised in 1986 following the assassination of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Operation Blue Star.
- The force, which is trained to operate as an elite urban anti-terrorist and anti-hijack force, doesn't have a cadre of its own or direct recruitment and is instead dependent on personnel sent on deputation from the army and the central armed police forces.

INS Sunayna

- INS Sunayna, Navy's offshore patrol vessel, has been deployed in the Gulf of Aden to carry out anti-piracy patrols.
- The vigilance exercised by the Navy ships reiterates "India's commitment towards ensuring safe seas for Indian as well as international seafarers in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)".
- International effort to combat piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the East Coast of Somalia involves participation of many countries such as India, China, Japan, United States, Russia and Pakistan and the European Union nations.

Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; India's achievements; Indigenous technology; Defence/Security

In news:

- User-assisted trials of the Advanced Towed Artillery Gun are likely to start soon.

About ATAGS –

- indigenously-designed **heavy artillery gun**
- **developed by** the Defence Research and Development Organisation (**DRDO**)
- The gun has several significant features including an all-electric drive, high mobility, quick deployability, auxiliary power mode, advanced communications system, automated command and control system.
- It also sports a six-round magazine instead of the standard three-round magazine.

Do you know?

- The Army, which has been seeking to modernise its weaponry, recently inducted its first modern pieces of artillery in 30 years: the **M777 Ultra-Light Howitzer from the U.S.** and the **K9 Vajra-T self-propelled artillery gun from South Korea.**

Firing on all cylinders



▪ Advanced Towed Artillery Gun System (ATAGS) is a 155mm, 52 calibre gun, developed by Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) in a consortium model

- One prototype has been built in partnership with Tata Power (Strategic Engineering Division) and another with Bharat Forge
- Two guns from each company

are undergoing trials; two more guns to join trials later

- There is a sanction for production of 10 guns as part of the development process
- The gun currently weighs about 18 tonnes while the ideal weight is 14-15 tonnes

▪ The defence Ministry has approved purchase of 150 guns at an approximate cost of ₹3,365 crore

▪ The Army is in the process of finalising the Preliminary Specifications Qualitative Requirements (PSQR) which details the essential parameters, which should be ready by July 2019

▪ The gun is presently undergoing development trials. User assisted trials will begin from May-June 2019

▪ KEY FEATURES

Electric drive

High mobility

Quick deployability

Auxiliary power mode

Advanced communication system

Automated command and control system

Six round magazine instead of a standard three round magazine

Pic:

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Global lessons from natural calamities: Disaster Risk Insurance

Introduction:

As India is vulnerable to natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, tsunamis and cyclones, DISASTER RISK INSURANCE programme can play a key role.

The real cost of floods across Kerala in August may never be really known.

- Hundreds dead, thousands displaced, millions lost.
- The scale of damage from any natural disaster can never really be measured because of the long-term ecological and psychological effects.
- The spread of diseases, such as cholera, malaria, and leptospirosis, may impact flood-hit communities beyond the crisis for years to come.
- Tourism has been hit.

We react every time there is a disaster. We band together and raise funds, help victims and volunteer time to clean up and rebuild.

However, the task before us should be to **move from a reactive stance to proactively prepare for natural disasters (through Disaster Risk Insurance).**

Concerns:

- Impact of disaster has increased **due to large urban migration**.
- India alone is projected to have seven megacities—defined by a population of more than 10 million—by 2030, according to World Economic Forum.
- This confluence of climate change, natural disasters, and human density could lead to more Kerala-like images.
- It becomes very difficult to rebuild societies in the event of any natural catastrophe and to minimize any long-term impact by reducing the **gap between economic losses and available funding**, known as the **protection gap**.

Do you know?

- The cost of recovery and reconstruction in Kerala has been put at **₹31,000 crore**, according to a UN report.
- However, the **annual allocation by both state and central authorities** to Kerala's disaster relief fund is a mere **₹214 crore**.
- Taking into consideration of additional funds from the central government's National Disaster Response Fund; commercial and private insurance claims – the current estimate is believed to be **no more than ₹2,500 crore**.

- That means, in this scenario, the **protection gap is upwards of ₹25,000 crore.**

Solution:

- The GST Council has now been asked to examine the feasibility of a disaster levy to finance disaster-related reconstruction. But it is not sure whether a state levy will sufficiently incentivize states to improve their disaster risk management.
- **Therefore the way ahead is to transfer disaster risks over to the insurers or reinsurers.**

Disaster Risk Insurance Benefits:

- **Immediate payouts can be made** through parametric solutions based on the amount of rainfall or the intensity of a drought, for example.
- Governments would be **transparency over funding.**
- **Immediate payouts** to citizens.

There are numerous examples for Kerala—and India—to follow. For example,

- America's National Flood Insurance Program
- the Caribbean's 16-country hurricane, earthquake and rainfall risk insurance fund
- Mexico's FONDEN programme
- China's provincial Guangdong and Heilongjiang governments have purchased insurance against natural disasters as a means of fiscal budget protection—the idea being that a disaster will hit multiple areas of a budget beyond the core.

All these are comprehensive disaster-risk financing strategy comprising **reserve funding, reinsurance and catastrophe bonds.**

Several of these programmes have responded with **timely payouts** following recent natural disasters.

Conclusion:

Disaster Insurance Programmes are especially relevant in India's developing environment of **competitive federalism**, where state governments are expected to **rely less on federal assistance**, especially when it comes to funding post-disaster reconstruction.

Insurance purchased on the government account will serve to **plug the gap in reconstruction financing. (immediate relief, rehabilitation, restoration and rebuilding of infrastructure)**

States can pay for insurance premiums from the disaster relief fund allocations. This will not only promote greater financial autonomy at the state level, but also has the advantage of requiring no additional budgeting by New Delhi.

Connecting the dots:

- Examine the significance of State-sponsored Disaster Risk Insurance programmes in disaster management. Take suitable examples.

Tsunami kills 200+ people in Indonesia

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I and III – Geography; Natural Hazards; Disaster and disaster management

In news:

- Tsunami struck the Indonesian islands of Java and Sumatra following a underwater landslide, believed to have been caused by the erupting Anak Krakatoa volcano.
- Anak Krakatoa, an active volcano roughly halfway between Java and Sumatra, has been spewing ash and lava for months.

Important Value Additions

Tsunami is harbor wave which consists of a series of seismic waves which rise as high as 10m or more. They move inland, several hundred miles causing untold disaster.

Factors that lead to tsunami-genesis:

- Earthquakes: Earthquake occurring beneath the sea-when thrust faults associated with convergent or destructive plate boundaries move abruptly, resulting in vertical water displacement.
- Volcanic eruptions-80% happen within Pacific ocean's "Ring of fire" where earthquakes and volcanoes are common. Volcanic eruptions can cause discharge of large amounts not energy in a small amount of time, this energy is in turn imparted to the water which causes tsunami.
- Landslides: under ocean landslides can cause disequilibrium in the ocean water, which will move towards the shore as tsunami to regain isostasy.
- Meteorites and nuclear explosions: both of them can use release of huge amounts of energy in a few seconds, which will cause the displacement of water.

INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

Cow vigilantism: Cop and villager killed in Bulandshahr clashes

Part of: GS Mains II and III – National; Issues affecting secular character and integrity

In news:

- Protesters, including members of right-wing groups, clashed with security men and set their vehicles and a police post on fire in the three-hour rampage after reports of cow slaughter at UP's Bulandshahr.
- Cow slaughter is banned in many Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, because Hindus consider it a sacred animal.
- There have been multiple cases of lynchings over alleged cow slaughter and illegal cow transportation reported over the past few years from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, and other parts of North India.
- Over the past two years or so we have seen a rising tide of violence, mainly in northern India, against Dalits and Muslims. This has revolved around the treatment of the cow. Indians have been physically attacked by rampaging mobs accusing them of storing beef or transporting cows for slaughter.

Issues:

- From last two years, incidents of mob justice have come to light time and again.
- The state response has been conspicuously lacking more often than not. The situation is deplorable both for the cumulative effect on the moral life of the nation. It sends a troubling message about the state's abilities and prerogatives.
- The majoritarian nature of many of the lynchings, perpetrated by self-styled gau rakshaks. Cow protection has been a symbol in these incidents—a means of acting against the victims for reasons that have to do either with religion or caste. Muslims and Dalits have been targeted repeatedly on the flimsiest of pretexts.

Do you know?

- Rule 3 of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Establishment & Regulation of Societies for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) Rules, 2001, empowers “civil society groups” to protect animals.
- According to Rule 3(5) of PCA Rules, 2001 – a State can confer powers upon “any society” in district to prevent cruelty against animals.
- Rule 3 is providing State accreditation to cow vigilantism.

- Rule also providing police powers to civil society groups to stop vehicles, search premises and seize animals.
- Supreme Court has expressed shock over this Rule.

NSCN(K) faction asks Centre to revive ceasefire

Part of: GS Mains III – Internal Security and Security issues

In news:

- A breakaway faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Khaplang), led by Khango Konyak asks Centre to revive ceasefire.
- Recently NSCN(IM) cadre was killed – A hardcore cadre of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muivah) was killed in an encounter with security forces in Arunachal Pradesh.

About National Socialist Council of Nagaland

- NSCN is a Greater Naga Revolutionist, Christian Naga nationalist insurgent group operating mainly in Northeast India, with minor activities in northwest Myanmar until 2012.
- The main goal of the organisation is to establish a sovereign Naga state, "Nagalim", which would consist of all the areas inhabited by the Naga people in Northeast India and Northwest Myanmar.
- According to the NSCN manifesto, their slogan is "Nagaland for Christ".
- The group is accused of kidnapping, assassination, forced conversion and committing terrorist activities.

Do you know?

- Two major factions of NSCN include NSCN (K), led by Khaplang; and NSCN (I-M), led by Isak Chishi Swu and Thuingaleng Muviah.
- On November 6, 2015 in response to an attack on an army convoy in Manipur India designated The NSCN (K) a terrorist organization under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.
- India's Ministry of Home Affairs labeled NSCN a major insurgent group.

[All computers now under govt. watch](#)

Part of: GS Mains III – Defence/Security issues; Cyber Security

In news:

- Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt “any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer.”
- According to the order, the subscriber or service provider or any person in charge of the computer resource will be bound to extend all facilities and technical assistance to the agencies and failing to do will invite seven-year imprisonment and fine.

Do you know?

- The MHA gave the authorisation under **69 (1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000** which says that the Central government can direct any agency after it is satisfied that it is necessary or expedient to do so in the “interest of the sovereignty or integrity of India, defence of India, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to the commission of any cognizable offence relating to above or for investigation of any offence.”

[Allowing 10 different Central agencies to snoop challenges SC verdict on privacy](#)

Part of: GS Mains III – Defence/Security issues; Cyber Security

In news:

In previous day’s article we read that –

- Ministry of Home Affairs issued an order authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt “any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer.”
- However, experts said that the MHA order challenges the SC verdict on privacy.
- The government order is based on **Section 69(1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000**, and **Rule 4 of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Interception, Monitoring and Decryption of Information) Rules, 2009**.

Do you know?

- Nine-judge Constitution Bench judgment of the Supreme Court had directed the government to **protect informational privacy of every individual**.

- In its 2017 judgment, the court had asked the government always to balance individual privacy and the legitimate concerns of the state carefully and sensitively, **even if national security was at stake.**

New list, old rules

A look at what the fuss over the Home Ministry's order authorising 10 agencies to intercept computer-based information is all about



- Provision for interception of information from computer resources exists since 2000. Sec.69(1) of the Information Technology Act, 2000 allowed this in the interest of the country's sovereignty and integrity, security of the state, friendly relations with foreign States, or public order or incitement to offence

- Section 69 was amended in 2008 to enable the Centre and the State governments to "intercept, monitor or decrypt" any information transmitted through, received or stored in a computer

RULES

- Rules were framed in 2009 setting out the procedure and safeguards. Rule 3 says 'the competent authority' (the Home Secretary in the Centre and the States) alone can issue an order for interceptioning

- Rule 4 says the competent

authority may authorise a government agency to carry out the task

- The present order naming 10 agencies has been issued under Rule 4. It does not introduce any new surveillance norm or rule

PROCEDURE

- The agencies also must go only by procedure laid down in the same 2009 Rules for carrying out these tasks.

- Any direction for interception shall contain reasons, and a copy should be to a 'Review

Committee' within seven days. The authority, before issuing the order, should also consider getting the required information by other means

- An interception order will be in force only for a maximum of 60 days. Rules have also been framed outlining the intermediary's responsibilities

- The Review Committee should meet once in two months. It has the power to set aside interception orders and direct the destruction of records if procedure is not followed

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Concerns:

Experts have argued that –

- It is a serious invasion of individual privacy recognised in the **K.S. Puttuswamy (privacy) judgment**
- Balance tilts heavily in favour of the government
- A wide range of government bodies have been given blanket powers. There is no common thread among these agencies. For example, why should the Central Board of Direct Taxes get access to the encrypted material of its citizens?

DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018

Introduction

- The draft [DNA Technology \(Use and Application\) Regulation Bill](#) has been by the Union Cabinet.
- It **aims to create a national DNA database** for solving crimes (offences under the Indian Penal Code) and also civil matters such as parentage disputes, emigration or immigration, and transplantation of human organs etc.

- It aims for **expanding the application of DNA-based forensic technologies** to support and **strengthen the justice delivery system** of the country.
- The Bill seeks to ensure that **DNA test results are reliable and the data remain protected from misuse or abuse** in terms of the privacy rights of our citizens.

The below editorial assesses whether the draft Bill is better in present form or it requires changes.

Do you know?

- The utility of DNA based technologies for solving crimes, and to identify missing persons, is well recognized across the world.
- The genes encoded in deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which can be collected from blood, hair, skin cells and other such bodily substances, have undoubtedly proven to be an **important tool in forensic science**.
- Much like fingerprints, a **person's DNA profile is unique** (except in the case of identical twins) and can, therefore, help in establishing the identity of, say, a suspect.
- Across the world, the use of DNA evidence **has helped exonerate a number of innocent people from wrongful conviction**, and has also **helped find the guilty party** in complex investigations.
- **Code of Criminal Procedure in 2005** authorises investigating officers of a crime to collect a DNA sample from an accused with the help of a medical practitioner.

Concerns with the draft Bill

- The draft statute not only **disregards the serious ethical dilemmas** that are attendant to the creation of a national DNA database, but also, contrary to established wisdom, virtually **treats DNA as infallible**, and as a solution to the many problems that ail the criminal justice system.
- Any **infringement of civil liberties**, caused by an almost indiscriminate collection of DNA, is seen as a legitimate trade-off made in the interests of ensuring superior justice delivery.
- Creating large databases is often not a cost-effective way to solve more crimes, and limited resources must be targeted effectively.
- Bill fatally ignores the **disproportionality of the DNA bank** that it seeks to create, and the invasiveness of its purport and reach, **imposes a Faustian bargain on the citizen**.

***Faustian bargain** – Faust, in the legend, traded his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge. To “strike a Faustian bargain” is to be willing to sacrifice anything to satisfy a limitless desire for knowledge or power.

- The proposed law is not only decidedly **vague on how it intends to maintain this DNA Bank**, but it also conflates its objectives by allowing the **collection of DNA evidence** not only in aid of **criminal investigations** but also to aid the determination of **civil disputes**.
- Moreover, while consent is not required before bodily substances are drawn from a person accused and arrested for an offence punishable with either death or imprisonment for a term exceeding seven years, in all other cases a person refusing to part with genetic material can be compelled to do so if a Magistrate has reasonable cause to believe that such evidence would help establish a person's guilt. Therefore, there's **no end to the state's power in coercing a person to part with her DNA**.

The way ahead:

- The proposed Bill should provide a constitutionally sustainable model.
- Any meaningful right to privacy should include protection over the physical body. (Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd) v. Union of India Judgment)
- In India, even illegally obtained evidence is admissible in a court of law, so long as the relevance and genuineness of such material can be established.
- The Bill's failure to place sufficient checks on the use of DNA evidence collected in breach of the law makes the process altogether more frightening.
- It's been reported previously that the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics, whose director will occupy an ex officio place in the DNA Regulatory Board, already seeks information on a person's caste during the collection of genetic material. One hardly needs to spell out the dangers inherent in gathering such data.

To enact the law in its present form, therefore, would only add a new, menacing weapon to the state's rapidly expanding surveillance mechanism.

Connecting the dots:

- The DNA technology (use and application) Bill, 2018 can establish a balance between right to privacy and right to justice. Evaluate with suggestions.

Need for strong Data Protection Law

About:

- Some of the social networking platforms have come under tough scanner and are in news often for **privacy breaches** and **misinformation campaigns** (interfering in the election processes of major democracies etc).

- The latest in this torrent of disclosures is the investigation by The New York Times documenting a **range of private deals struck by Facebook** for reciprocal sharing of user data with the knowledge of top management. (Example - *Cambridge Analytica exposé*)
- Some deals permitted access even to private chats. (**Violation of user trust** by Facebook and **Right to Privacy**)

Do you know?

- In India, there is **lack of institutional capacity** to respond to such challenges.
- There is **no data protection authority** or an **office of a privacy commissioner** to investigate and independently audit social networking platforms.

WhatsApp-Facebook case

- Facebook changed its privacy policy after acquiring WhatsApp. It allowed sharing a user's metadata between WhatsApp and Facebook, without clearly explaining what was being shared and how it was being used.
- Earlier, Facebook was not clearly stating how it would use the personal data of users on the Free Basics platform.
- Changes to these terms of service were challenged in a public interest petition in the Court.
- The WhatsApp-Facebook case is still pending in the Supreme Court.

Many of these problems go much beyond Facebook, to the entire wave of digitisation from the big building blocks down to a fine grain of Indian society.

All these triggered Union government to constitute a **data protection committee** headed by retired Supreme Court judge, **Justice B.N. Srikrishna**.

Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee

- Srikrishna panel had submitted a **draft "The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018"**
- It recommended that critical personal data of Indian citizens be processed in centres located within the country.
- The government should notify categories of personal data that will be considered critical.
- The draft bill also provided for penalties for the data processor as well as compensation to the data principal to be imposed for violations of the data protection law.
- The Committee has made specific mention of the need for separate and more stringent norms for protecting the data of children
- It recommended that companies be barred from certain types of data processing such as behavioural monitoring, tracking, targeted advertising and any other type of processing which is not in the best interest of the child.

The way ahead:

Need of the hour is such a law to safeguard privacy. However, the draft Personal Data Protection Bill is not listed for the ongoing winter session of Parliament. The government must act with urgency.

To properly harness digitisation, we now have the challenge of developing and prioritising institutions of governance to protect users. This must start immediately with a strong, rights-protecting, comprehensive privacy law.

At present, despite having the second highest number of Internet users in the world, India has little to show as a country in investigatory outcomes, measured regulatory responses or parliamentary processes which safeguard users.

Connecting the dots:

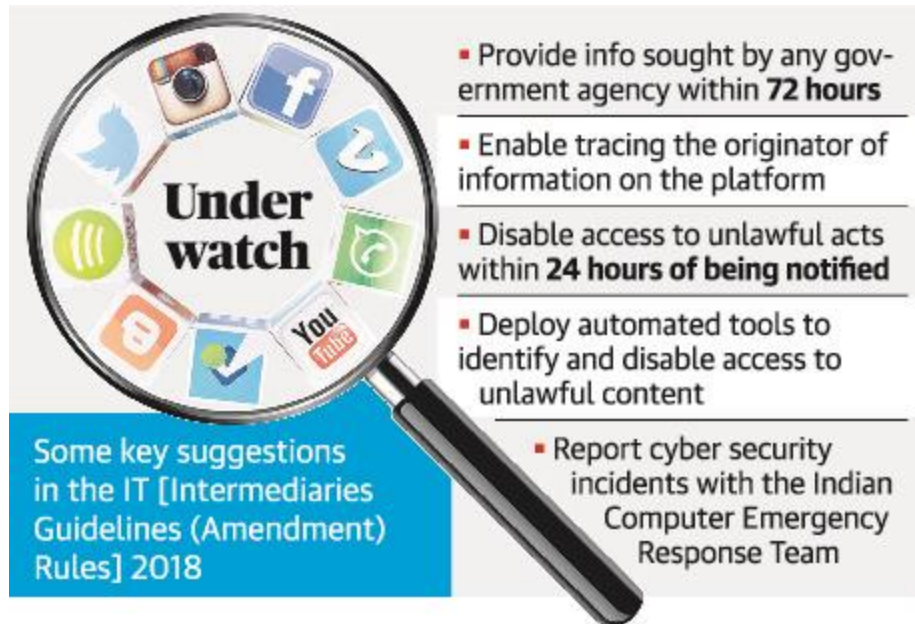
- The dawn of the information age has opened up great opportunities for the beneficial use of data. However, it has also enhanced the perils of unregulated and arbitrary use of personal data. Discuss. Also, examine the need of framing a robust law to protect individual data.

Bid to prevent fake news

Part of: GS Mains III – Internal Security; Security issues; Cyber security

In news:

- The government has proposed amendments to the Information Technology (IT) Act.
- The amendment seeks to make it mandatory for platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter to **trace “originator” of “unlawful” information**, while also **removing such content within 24 hours** after being notified.
- As per the draft ‘The Information Technology [Intermediaries Guidelines (Amendment) Rules] 2018’, the intermediary after being notified by the appropriate authority should remove or disable access to unlawful content within 24 hours in the “interests of the sovereignty and integrity of India, the security of the state, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence, on its computer resource without vitiating the evidence in any manner...”
- The intermediary is also expected to preserve such information and associated records for at least 180 days for investigation purposes as against 90 days now.



Pic:

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Do you know?

- Number of lynching incidents were reported in 2018 mostly owing to fake news being circulated through WhatsApp and other social media sites.

Privacy-Security trade-off: Requires reform of the surveillance framework

Introduction

- We read about Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notification authorising 10 Central agencies to intercept, monitor, and decrypt “any information generated, transmitted, received or stored in any computer.”
- The MHA order has caused a furore in both Parliament and the wider civil society.
- MHA notification lays bare the lopsided character of the surveillance framework in India, and highlights an urgent need for comprehensive reform.

The problem

The existing surveillance framework is complex and confusing.

Currently, two statutes control the field:

- 1) **telephone surveillance** is sanctioned under the **1885 Telegraph Act (and its rules)**,

- 2) while **electronic surveillance** is authorised under the **2000 Information Technology Act (and its rules)**.

1997 Supreme Court judgment had ordered that surveillance requests have to be signed off by an official who is at least at the **level of a Joint Secretary**.

There are three features about the current regime.

- 1) **It is bureaucratised** – Decisions about surveillance are **taken by the executive branch**, with no parliamentary or judicial supervision. (Flaw - an individual will almost never know that he/she is being surveilled and then challenging it before a court, is a near-impossibility.)
- 2) The **surveillance regime is vague and ambiguous** – very wide phrases such as “friendly relations with foreign States” or “sovereignty and integrity of India” have been directly copy pasted from Article 19(2) of the Constitution into Section 69 of the IT Act.
- 3) **Current regime is opaque** – There is almost no information available about the bases on which surveillance decisions are taken, and how the legal standards are applied.

Surveillance is essential to ensure national security and pre-empt terrorist threats. However, a heavily bureaucratised and minimally accountable regime of surveillance does nothing to enhance security, but does have significant privacy costs.

In the famous ‘privacy-security trade-off’, it is exceedingly important to assess the balance on the basis of constitutional principles and fundamental rights, rather than blindly accepting the government’s rhetoric of national security.

The way ahead:

- The law should specify clearly ‘how, when, and what kind of surveillance’.
- Any impingement upon the right to privacy must be proportionate and stated goal should be achieved.
- For instance, if the goal is protecting national security and if it can be achieved by a smaller infringement upon fundamental rights, then the government is constitutionally bound to adopt the method that does, indeed, involve minimal infringement.
- The law should fix the above mentioned three parameters – its bureaucratic character, its vagueness, and its opacity – as the existing surveillance framework is unconstitutional, and must be reconsidered.
- There must be parliamentary oversight over the agencies that conduct surveillance. All surveillance requests must necessarily go before a judicial authority, which can apply an independent legal mind to the merits of the request.
- The broad and vaguely worded phrases should be specified clearly. This will help the process of judicial review.
- Evidence obtained through unconstitutional surveillance must be statutorily stipulated to be inadmissible in court.

It is crucial to acknowledge that every act of surveillance, whether justified or not, involves a serious violation of individual privacy.

To implement the suggestions above will require a comprehensive reform of the surveillance framework in India. Such a reform is long overdue.

Connecting the dots:

- Existing surveillance framework in India needs to be revisited and reconsidered. Do you agree? Critically examine. Also suggest some measures for better surveillance framework.

1984 anti-Sikh riots case and dealing with Genocide

In news:

- The Delhi High Court recently sentenced Congress leader Sajjan Kumar to life imprisonment in a case pertaining to the killing of five member of a Sikh family during the 1984 anti-Sikh riots.
- The judgment delivered by Justices S Muralidhar and Vinod Goel showed that “Neither ‘crimes against humanity’ nor ‘genocide’ is part of our domestic law of crime. This loophole needs to be addressed urgently.”

Dealing with mass killings

- India has witnessed many mass crimes since its partition to mass killings in Mumbai in 1993, in Gujarat in 2002, in Kandhamal, Odisha in 2008, in Muzaffarnagar in UP in 2013, to name a few.
- All these “mass crimes were the **targeting of minorities** and the **attacks spearheaded by the dominant political actors** being facilitated by the law enforcement agencies” and the “criminals responsible for the mass crimes have **enjoyed political patronage** and **managed to evade prosecution and punishment**”.

Preventing Genocide

- India signed the **Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide** on December 8, 1949 (ratified on August 27, 1959).
- The above international law binds Indian state to prevent, punish acts of genocide. As does **Article 21** of the Constitution.
- Article V of the Convention obligates all contracting parties “to enact, in accordance with their respective constitutions, the **necessary legislation to give effect to the**

provisions of the present Convention and to provide effective penalties for persons guilty of genocide.”

- And by Article 1 the “Contracting parties confirm that genocide, whether committed in time of peace or in time of war, is a crime under international law which they undertake to prevent and to punish”.

Genocide cannot be a lone wolf crime; it has to be the work of many hands and minds working in concert and with a clear and specific intention to physically annihilate a whole group of people. Yet, howsoever much human rights activists may wish for it, cultural genocide is not yet a category of the law of genocide.

- Upendra Baxi

Do you know?

- International Court of Justice (in 2007) ruled that states may also commit genocide.
- Acts of mass exodus or deportation, or measures of birth control by the state, may be regarded as genocidal acts and is a part of Genocide Convention.
- ICJ maintained that what distinguishes genocide from other crimes is the “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such”.
- John Heieck, author of book 'A Duty to Prevent Genocide: Due Diligence Obligations Among the P5' has argued that – If necessary the five permanent members of the UN Security Council may have a duty to intervene even by military means and the rule by veto may be suspended in situations of genocide.

Conclusion

- Article 51 [C] of the Indian Constitution casts a duty to “foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organised peoples with one another.”
- The duties to prevent and punish acts of genocide, reiterated by the ICJ, **are binding on India**, both as an aspect of conventional and customary international law; they are also an integral aspect of Article 21, the rights to life and liberty as interpreted and innovated by the apex court.
- State’s duty to prevent and punish crimes against humanity remains as great and grave.

Connecting the dots:

- Growing mass crimes against humanity or genocide needs reforms in our existing laws and legal procedures. Do you agree? Critically examine.
- What are the differences between the legal terms "crimes against humanity" and "genocide"?

Miscellaneous:

RTI activists living dangerously in Bihar – 2018 alone has seen the death of five Right to Information (RTI) activists

Targeting crusaders

Profiles of RTI activists killed in Bihar this year



He had recently complained against the manner of selection of Anganwadi workers

Jayant Kumar: A resident of Vaishali district, he was killed in April 2018. He was filing several RTI applications on the powerful liquor mafia

Bhola Sah: An activist from Banka district, he exposed financial irregularities in social welfare schemes

Valmiki Yadav: Hailing from Jamui district, he was known to file numerous RTIs on panchayat-level programmes

Rajendra Prasad Singh: The 63-year-old from Motihari had exposed several corruption cases in police recruitment, PDS, toilet scheme and health and education schemes through his RTI applications

Pic;

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India needs 'individual acts of bravery': Growing Vigilantism on Communal Lines

Context:

- Events over the past few years have prompted many to revisit the idea of individual freedom.
- Indeed, not just in India, but elsewhere too, the idea of individual freedom is under intense scrutiny.
- There are instances where governments across the world increasingly posing a threat to liberty.

For example, recent incidents in India –

- Killing of Police inspector Subodh Kumar over cow slaughter protest,
- Killing of Journalist like Gauri Lankesh,

- Protest over individual Freedom like Naeeruddin Shah, Carnatic Musical Vocalist T M Krishna

– highlight that we are at a juncture where fundamental notions of Modern India are under existential threat.

Secularism:

- **Western Model of Secularism-** western notion of secularism is complete separation of church/religion from state. India's secularism is not based on western notion of complete separation.
- **India's Secularism-** India is home to religious diversity; faith is so central, the constitution maker adopted the principled distanced, ethical sensitive and politically negotiated model of secularism.
- **Secularism and Personal Freedom-** Personal freedom is very often associated with secularism, which, as received from the Western canon, is the separation of church from state. One particular freedom that has come under fire is the freedom of practicing one's own religion.

Religion and Secularism:

Though secularism is complete separation of religion and state, but at its heart, true secularism would be driven by universal values of truth, compassion and equality, which are fundamental values that straddle all religions.

Because secularism is focus on freedom so as adhering of these values too, which are complementary and originated from religion.

- Truth, not to be confused with belief, has no sole custodian. Truth is based on observation, evidence, and inference, and is accessible to all.
- Compassion comes from an understanding of suffering: a compassionate person does not kill not because their faith tells them not to, but because they know that killing causes immense suffering.
- And the universal value of equality comes from recognition of both truth and compassion, empowering people to never substitute "uniqueness" with "superiority". Everyone may be unique in their own way, but they are all still equally unique — no one being more specially so than the other.

Ultimately, we cannot find truth, or learn compassion, or appreciate equality if we have no freedom to think, to question, to seek, to find these for ourselves. These freedoms are, ultimately, the most valuable.

Religion and Communalism:

Having faith on one's religion is not bad, but feeling of superiority of one's religion over other religions with communal colour is bad.

Reasons for Growth in Communalism-

- Religious heads for the sake of their interest created myths and enforce the religion as the prime identity over others identity. And moreover there has been emphasis on religious superiority of one over other by religious leaders.
- Political leaders instead evolving national identity and containing religion as one of the identity, used it for mobilisation of masses and further obstruct the path of nation building as India is still a poly-communal society.

Implication of Communalism-

- Communalism curb the value of tolerance, freedom and liberal thinking.
- And rise of communalism in extreme form can give rise to Fascism as both communalism and Fascism is based on myths and propaganda used for mobilisation of Masses.

Tenants of Fascism

- **Myths-** Fascism always promises to return us to a mythic past. Similarly, fascist politicians use propaganda, for example, about portraying racial superiority of Germans and inferiority of Jews (Myth by Hitler).
- **Hyper Nationalism-** Dissent, particularly in universities and public spaces, is being curbed. Sloganeering and flag raising have become tests for nationalism. Journalists, political activists and intellectuals, who are trying to reveal the myths and propagate their views were blown out of proportion, and misunderstood as an expression of disloyalty to the country.
- **Anti-intellectualism-** For the "enemy of fascism is equality," and the target of such anti-intellectual campaigns are places of learning, like universities. Only the mythical "common man" can know what is right. (Note the emphasis on "man", which includes no women, or racial and sexual minorities.)
- **Unquestionable domination of Majority-** Unlike liberal democracies, based on freedom and equality, fascist regimes posit the dominant group's interests as the ultimate, unquestionable truth. The dominant group is also always the victim of the situation. They rely on conspiracy theories to justify calls to power. And most tellingly, fascist politicians promise a law and order regime designed not to seek out offenders, but to criminalise outliers, who are usually ethnic, religious or sexual minorities.

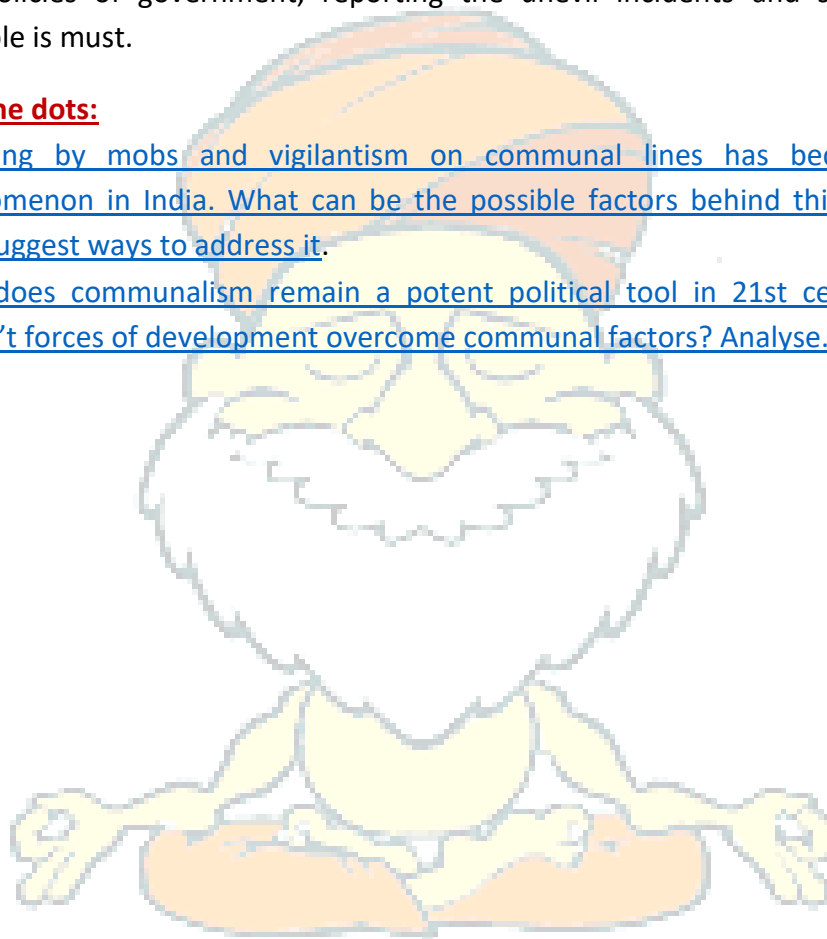
Way ahead:

- India's nearly 70-year-old liberal manifesto - The Constitution - contains all the declarations essential to a nation that preserves individual liberties. It is for us to protect it from neglect and disrepair.

- According to B.R. Ambedkar, “The assertion by the individual of his own opinions and beliefs, his own independence and interest as over and against group standards... is the beginning of all reform.”
- The ordinary citizen [must] stand up and loudly confront people who engage in... fascist rhetoric and not be afraid. Those millions of acts of individual bravery, if we can stitch together, will save us.
- Thus active public participation in political sphere, practicing right to vote, in scrutinizing the policies of government, reporting the unevl incidents and stopping wherever possible is must.

Connecting the dots:

- Lynching by mobs and vigilantism on communal lines has become a recurring phenomenon in India. What can be the possible factors behind this trend? Examine. Also suggest ways to address it.
- Why does communalism remain a potent political tool in 21st century India? Why haven't forces of development overcome communal factors? Analyse.



ETHICS/ESSAY

NATIONAL/ETHICS

TOPIC

General studies 2, 4 and Essay

- *Constitution and Justice delivery system in India*
- *Ethical aspects of capital punishment*
- *Essay*

The debate on Ethical aspect of Capital Punishment

Introduction

- In questioning the merits of retaining the death penalty, Justice Kurian Joseph has re-ignited a debate that is important and requires serious thought.
- Justice Joseph holds a view that the time has come to review the death penalty, its purpose and practice.
- It is impossible to ignore the ethical and practical dimensions of the debate in a world that is increasingly questioning the wisdom of capital punishment.

Constitutionality of death penalty

- The unconstitutionality of death penalty was raised in the case of **Bachhan Singh v State of Punjab**. The Supreme Court in that case said that **death penalty is constitutional but should be given only in the rarest of rare cases**.

Questions raised on decision making in capital punishment

- The moot question raised here is the **decision-making process of a Judge** in a case of capital punishment as the **life of the person depends on the reasons articulated by such honorable Justices**.
- In this aspect, concerns over **judge-centric variations of arguments** have been raised in the past.
- The Supreme Court itself spoke of the **“extremely uneven application” of the norms** laid down in Bachhan Singh.
- Even **the Law Commission, in its Report in 2015**, said that the constitutional regulation of capital punishment attempted in that case has failed to prevent death sentences from being **“arbitrarily and freakishly imposed”**.
- Justice Joseph has highlighted Law Commission’s **concern that there exists no principled method to remove such arbitrariness from capital sentencing**.

Public outrage and capital punishment

- In recent times, **public outrage**, the need for deterrence, and the clamor for a befitting punishment to render substantial justice have dominated the general discourse.
- In **cases of heinous crimes** (eg: Nirbhaya case), it becomes **less important for the public to understand the reason of punishment than the imposition of punishment** itself.
- Thus, whether the punishment has been given **to reform the person or to punish the person or for retribution** becomes less significant.
- The **quantum of punishment** becomes more important (whether the punishment is capital punishment or life imprisonment) as **only the quantum of it seems to serve ends of justice in the eyes of the public at large.**

Checks and balances to avoid arbitrariness

- The Supreme Court has narrowed the scope of giving capital punishment by laying down **the norms of rarest of rare cases in Bachhan Singh v State of Punjab.**
- **Reviews and petitions** are routinely admitted by the Supreme Court and Review Petitions are heard **in open Courts on capital punishments.**
- **The treatment of prisoners serving death sentence has been humanized**, and there is scope for **judicial review even against** a sovereign decision **denying clemency.**

Conclusion

- Thus, the question of capital punishment needs to be debated away from the general public discourse and on a higher moral plane where there shall be no death penalty in law, regardless of the nature, circumstances and consequences of an offence.
- The views of the Law Commission and Justice Joseph on abolishing capital punishment should not be ignored and must be debated.

Connecting the dots:

- It is not the just the execution but the method that questions capital punishment. Comment.

Is social media polarising society?

Introduction

- Due to advancement in information and technology, there has been rapid growth in social media platforms such as facebook, twitter, whatsapp etc. This becomes extremely important for India because India has now become the second most populated country in terms of access to internet.

- Access to internet helps in gathering information, express personal views on various social media sites, mass mobilisation of current issues (Arab Spring) increases engagement with the government.
- However, the social media is also used to spread fake news which further increases hatred among communities.
- This rapid growth of social media has proved to be very controversial because of which there is an ongoing debate; whether the social media is a boon or bane?

ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AS A POLARISING AGENT

Ideal Purpose of Social Media

- To promote 3Ds: discussion, debate and dissent among members of societies. It helps in making an informed society.
- It should help in reducing inherent bias among people on various issues.
- It should make people more receptive to others' viewpoints, beliefs and opinions.
- Thus, effectively it should promote harmony, brotherhood and tolerance in the society.

What has social media done?

- Rather than achieving the above mentioned goals, social media has hardened people's belief's views and opinion and has made people more conservative in their outlook.
- This process of moulding people's opinion has been achieved by social media through a concept known as "Echo chamber Phenomena".
- Social Media uses algorithms where; it suggests whom to follow, posts and comments consistent with our views and Filter news based on views and opinions.
- These algorithms when used repeatedly by social media companies creates a cyclical rhythm of views which when bombarded regularly, helps in creating an effect similar to echo of a sound.
- This "Echo chamber Phenomena" has been used by various agencies to fulfill their interest which has further helped in hardening of people's beliefs, views and opinions.
- Apart from this, the social media also impacts the individual behaviour which could be understood by Asch conformity experiment.

Dou you know?

Asch Conformity Experiment

- As per the Asch Conformity Experiment people gave wrong answers (knowingly) to confirm their alignment with the majority because according to them the majority viewpoint is correct.
- This phenomenon of confirming with majority has helped in increasing acceptance of fake news to be as true.

SOCIAL MEDIA AS AN ENABLER

Inclusive and participative tool of governance

- Social media is inclusive, participative and Disruptive in a positive way.
- Inclusive: as it provides equal opportunity to all without discrimination or bias. It provides for a inclusive framework for all the people to to express their viewpoints and opinions.
- Participative: It promotes good governance in India, because it enables the government to engage with its citizens. At the same time it enables the citizens to put forward their concerns before the government. Thus it leads to strengthening of Democracy in India.
- Disruptive: The social media has also been used for mass mobilisation campaigns, for example, during the Arab Spring, #MeToo campaign and disaster management.
- Social media if used effectively, can further good governance initiatives of the government through people's participation.

Tool of persuasion

- Aristotle gave three modes of persuasion: Ethos(Credibility), Pathos(emotional appeal) and Logos(logic).
- People believe credible person or medium or they would believe if theres an emotional appeal or they will believe if there is logic and rationality in an argument.
- Thus, ability to persuade people depends on these three factors, and social media can play utmost a persuasive tool.
- It is wrong to blame the mushrooming growth of social media as it is the people who feed information as per their beliefs and opinion.

Conclusion

- Improper use of social media has dented our secular fabric. It is now our duty to use social media in responsible manner.
- In order to make social media more effective, it's the people who must understand their responsibility towards society rather than believing and spreading fake news which can cause hatred and promote divisiveness in the society.
- And on part of government; it should enact laws for data privacy and protection so that no other Cambridge Analytica will ever happen.

Connecting the dots:

- Write an Essay; "Social media: An Enabler or Polarizer".

Technology as an agent of social change

Context:

- If there is one thing that has defined the past 10 years, it has been the unprecedented growth of technology, especially use of mobiles.
- Technology is all-over and has become the source of fundamental transformation in our society. It is creating inclusivity for many, instead of exclusivity for the few.

Role of Technology

1. Technological developments driving inclusive growth

- Thanks to a series of policy initiatives and landmark judicial decisions, there has been a significant push towards inclusive growth.
- From opening bank accounts to financial health, from school enrolment to learning outcomes, technology has played an important role.
- However, issues like ease and affordability of owning a home, right to privacy and data protection have taken centre stage.

2. Technological developments are driving entrepreneurship in a big way

- A new wave of purpose-driven entrepreneurs is bringing innovative business models to improve the lives of the aspiring middle and lower-income Indians.
- They will define the future of Indian entrepreneurship over the next few decades.

3. Biggest drivers of social impact

- Mobile phone is one of the biggest drivers of social impact in India.
- With more mobile phone penetration and declining data costs, both businesses and governments can easily reach populations that they could not before.
- Today entrepreneurs can provide a range of services (access to information, education, healthcare, financial services, transportation, jobs and government services etc) via the mobile phone to the people who were previously been excluded or underserved.

Conclusion:

- Despite India's major strides over the last decade, a young and aspiring India wants even more rapid change.
- Increasingly, people from different walks of life are now confidently stepping up to tackle some of India's most difficult challenges. They believe that India's growth and prosperity should benefit not just the "top of the pyramid" but all Indians.
- Their focus is on the underserved, excluded and disempowered in an India that is becoming increasingly digital.

- Over the next five years, 500 million Indians are going to come online for the first time through their mobile phones, a population we refer to as the Next Half Billion.
- Coming decade will offer an even bigger opportunity and technology entrepreneurs should focus on helping every Indian create a better life.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss how technology is an agent of social change. Discuss its positive and negative aspects.

For a more equitable future

About:

- **René Cassin**, the French legal scholar, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts in drafting the final version of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** in 1948.
- However, **René Cassin** was inspired by the **core idea** of French philosopher **Jacques Maritain's optimistic philosophy** (which helped him to draft the final version)

French philosopher **Jacques Maritain** is well-known for his most influential writings on the topic of **universal human rights**.

- In his famous book, ***Man and the State***, Jacques Maritain drew attention to the universal essence of human rights above ideologies.
- Maritain was deeply concerned with the political and philosophical situations of Europe and the world post World War II and during the Cold War.
- Maritain played a central role in **providing philosophical and religious foundations** to the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed by the UN General Assembly in December 1948.
- He was right to underline that a **dignified life was based on the establishment of the basic needs and rights of every individual** independent of his or her race, language, culture, religion or nationality.
- He believed that states and peoples can discuss practical issues and arrive at mutual agreements despite ideological differences.

In his speech to the UNESCO General Council in 1947, Maritain asked the key question about the **challenge of overcoming obstacles posed by diverse cultures and ideological differences throughout human history**.

“How can we imagine an agreement of minds between men who come from the four corners of the globe and who not only belong to different cultures and civilisations, but are of antagonistic spiritual associations and schools of thought?”

Jacques Maritain and René Cassin were aware that it is through the **four foundational blocks of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** – *“dignity, liberty, equality, and brotherhood”*.

- By *“dignity”*, Cassin referred to all the values which were shared by individuals beyond their sex, race, creed and religion.
- As for *“liberty”*, he emphasised on rights related to individual life, liberty and personal security.
- Under *“equality”*, Cassin understood rights related to the public sphere and political participation.
- Under *“brotherhood”* were economic, social and cultural rights.

Do you know?

Out of then 58 members of the United Nations, only 48 ratified the universal declaration while Saudi Arabia, South Africa, the Soviet Union, Poland, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Byelorussia and Czechoslovakia abstained, because they were worried that the moral appeal of the document would endanger the sanctity of their domestic laws and regulations.

Consequently, despite **Maritain’s call for the universality of human rights** and **Cassin’s insistence on their indivisibility**, the Cold War rivalry between the two blocks and the admission of the newly independent states in the UN, **ended with the adoption of two covenants** in 1966 **on civil and political rights**, on the one hand, and, **economic and social rights**, on the other hand.

In crux, the **Universal Declaration is considered as a lantern of hope for a more equitable future**. The philosophy of human rights continues to propel humanity into the future.

Therefore, if the lessons of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are not learned, and if we do not consider the past 70 years, which separate us from the foundation of this monumental document as a positive journey; the future generations will have great difficulties in overcoming the challenges of the next 70 years.

Connecting the dots:

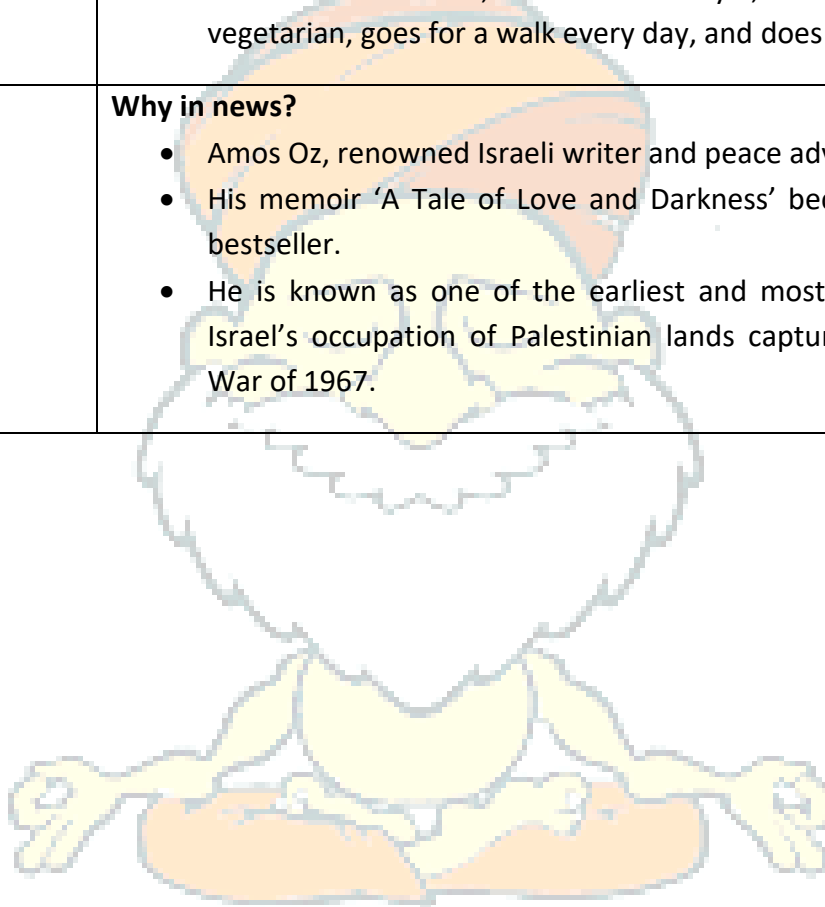
- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, holds lessons for a more equitable future. Elucidate.

PERSON IN NEWS

Person in news	Description
1. Sunil Arora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunil Arora, a retired 1980-batch IAS officer of the Rajasthan cadre, took over as Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).
2. Krishnamurthy Subramanian	<p>Why in news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New chief economic adviser Krishnamurthy Subramanian replaces Arvind Subramanian. Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has cleared the appointment of Krishnamurthy Subramanian as the Chief Economic Adviser for three years. The CEA in the finance ministry is a key contributor to the government's overall strategy in managing the economy and offers a critique of the hits and misses through the economic survey. <p>About CEA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) is the economic advisor to the Government of India. The CEA is the ex-officio cadre controlling authority of the Indian Economic Service. The CEA is under the direct charge of the Minister of Finance. CEA enjoys rank and pay equivalent to that of a Secretary to Government of India. The CEA heads the Economic Division under the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA).
3. Mushirul Hasan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mushirul Hasan, who passed away on December 10, was one of India's most distinguished historians and educationists. He served on a host of national bodies — including the UGC and the ICHR — as an articulate member — and worked with the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Fund. He was Vice-Chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia, where he was Professor of History for most of his professional life. And he was Director-General of the National Archives to which he lent distinction. Major work - history of India's Muslims under colonialism

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • He rescued Muslims from stereotypes. Hasan believed social, cultural ethos guided them along tolerant road unless forced by exigencies.
4. Shaktikanta Das	<p>In news:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the sudden resignation of Governor Urjit Patel, Shaktikanta Das was appointed as RBI Governor. (25th Governor) • The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of Shri Shaktikanta Das, IAS Retd., former Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, as Governor, Reserve Bank of India, for a period of three years. • Mr. Das is currently a member of the Fifteenth Finance Commission and represents India at the G-20 in the role of a sherpa. He is a 1980 batch IAS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre. <p>Do you know?</p> <p>Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is responsible for all appointments of higher ranks in the Central Secretariat, Public Enterprises, Public Enterprises and Financial Institutions. • The committee is composed of the Prime Minister of India (who is the Chairman), the Minister of Home Affairs.
5. Geeta S. Iyengar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Renowned yoga exponent, Geeta S. Iyengar passed away • She was the eldest daughter of legendary yoga guru B.K.S. Iyengar • She is described as the world's "leading female yoga exponent" and a "pioneer" who blazed a trail for women in yoga. • Her book, Yoga: A Gem For Women, became the primer for women across the world and was translated into half-a-dozen European languages.
6. Jyoti Randhawa and Mahesh Virajdar	<p>Why in news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International golfer Jyoti Randhawa was arrested for allegedly poaching variety of endangered species in a forest range in Uttar Pradesh. • National shooter Mahesh Virajdar was also arrested. • A dead fowl and hides of Sambhar deer and boar were seized. • They were charged under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, and the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

<p>7. Chitran Namboodirippad</p>	<p>Why in news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chitran Namboodirippad (who is aged 99) trekked in the Himalayas for the 29th time this month and aims to do it again next year. • He is a Kerala resident and former Additional Director of the Kerala Education Department. <p>What is the secret of his fitness and sharp memory?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Moderation in food, words and lifestyle,” he says. He is a strict vegetarian, goes for a walk every day, and does yoga.
<p>8. Amos Oz</p>	<p>Why in news?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amos Oz, renowned Israeli writer and peace advocate, expired. • His memoir ‘A Tale of Love and Darkness’ became a worldwide bestseller. • He is known as one of the earliest and most forceful critics of Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands captured in the Six-Day War of 1967.



MISCELLANEOUS

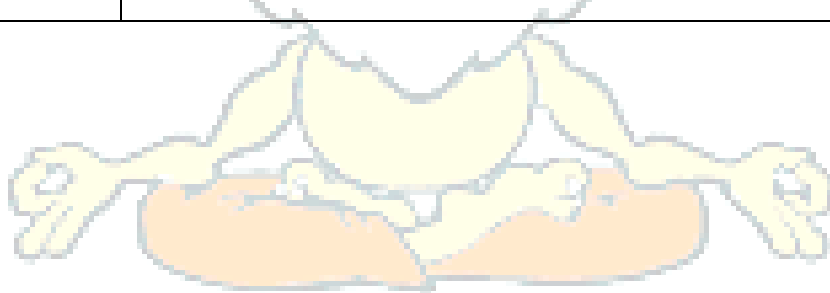
In News	Description
1. India's first international indigenous film festival:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It will take place in February 2019 in Odisha.
2. Kerala undertook its first-ever captive elephant census	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As many as 521 elephants were enumerated in the massive exercise undertaken by the Forests and Wildlife Department on the basis of a Supreme Court order.
3. Bachan Singh (1980) case	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Constitution Bench judgment of Supreme Court of India in Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980) made it very clear that Capital punishment in India can be given only in rarest of rare cases.
4. India to host G20 summit in 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the first time, India will host the annual G20 summit in 2022, when the country celebrates its 75th anniversary of Independence. Italy was to host the summit in 2022.
5. UNAIDS: '90-90-90'	<p>Do you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNAIDS has envisioned to achieve '90-90-90' target by 2020, which will result in controlling HIV infection to sustainable state by 2030. As per the '90-90-90' target, 90% of all HIV infected persons should get diagnosed and know their HIV positive status. Ninety % of these diagnosed HIV positive persons are to be provided regular Antiretroviral Therapy (ART). Ninety % of persons taking ART should show signs of viral suppression which reduces their scope of infection.
6. Hornbill Festival is held in Nagaland	
7. 'Ex Cope India-18'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilateral drills between the Indian Air Force and the U.S. Air Force. This is for the first time, the exercise is being held at two Air Force bases (Kalaikunda and Panagarh air bases in West Bengal). The U.S. has sent a fleet of F15 C/D and C-130 military aircraft. The IAF is participating with the Su-30 MKI, Jaguar, Mirage 2000, C-130J

	and AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) aircraft.
8. China rejects India's proposal to carry out bilateral trade in local currencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> China has not accepted India's proposal to carry out bilateral trade in local currencies, which was aimed at bridging the ballooning trade deficit with the neighbour. India had mooted renminbi-rupee trade with China to boost exports and tackle the widening trade deficit concern. India has also proposed trade in national currencies with other countries, including Russia, Iran and Venezuela with which New Delhi has a trade deficit.
9. Galapagos giant tortoises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Galapagos giant tortoises possess genetic variants linked to DNA repair, immune response and cancer suppression — providing clues into their longevity, according to a study. Giant tortoises, which can live for over 100 years in captivity, arrived in the Galapagos region three to four million years ago.
10. World Intellectual Property Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number of patents granted by India shot up by 50% in 2017 - according to the UN's World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO).
11. 'Air pollution kills 7 million every year'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> According to report released at the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP24) in Katowice, Poland.
12. NSCN(IM) cadre killed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A hardcore cadre of the Nationalist Socialist Council of Nagaland (Issac-Muivah) was killed in an encounter with security forces in Arunachal Pradesh.
13. Korean firm Kia Motors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Korean firm Kia Motors India signed an MoU with the Andhra Pradesh government for collaboration on future eco-mobility and electric vehicle infrastructure. (Plant is located in Anantapur)
14. Radhakrishnan Committee on Road Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Death of nearly 15,000 people in road accidents are caused by potholes in the last five years, according to report filed by the Supreme Court Committee on Road Safety, headed by former Supreme Court judge Justice K.S. Radhakrishnan.
15. Child porn videos to be removed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online giants like Google, Facebook, Microsoft and messaging platform WhatsApp have all agreed in the Supreme Court that "child pornography, rape and gang rape videos and objectionable material need to be stamped out."

<p>16. Centre rejects minority religion status to Lingayats</p>	<p>In news:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Union Ministry of Minority Affairs (MMA) reiterated its earlier stand that the Lingayat/Veerashaiva community is considered as “a religious sect of Hindus.” • It communicated to Karnataka that it was not possible to accede to the State’s recommendation to grant minority religion status to Lingayat/Veerashaiva community. • MMA noted that Lingayats have always been classified under Hindu sect ever since 1871 census. <p>Do you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Union Government set up the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992. • Five religious communities, viz; Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities by the Union Government.
<p>17. Japan picks ‘disaster’ as symbol for 2018</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Japan selected the Chinese character for ‘disaster’ as its ‘defining symbol’ for 2018. • 2018 saw the country hit by deadly floods, earthquakes and storms. It faced a series of natural calamities.
<p>18. Bt cotton seed probe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In India, Bt cotton seeds of Bollgard-I (since 2002) with Cry1Ac gene and Bollgard-II (since 2006) with Cry2Ab gene are approved for sale on a commercial scale. • A company needs the approval of the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) to commercially produce genetically modified seeds. • Bt cotton seeds with HTTG are not approved by the GEAC. • However, as per the report from the Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR), Nagpur, five branded Bt cotton seeds namely Jadu, ATM, Balbhadra, Arjun and Krishna-gold were found with HTTG. (The Maharashtra State government has requested a CBI probe.)
<p>19. Go green: blended bio-jet fuel</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India among countries which have developed, tested and certified the process of using blended bio-jet fuel (produced from Jatropha

	oil)
20. Cyclone Phethai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Severe cyclonic storm Phethai hit Andhra Pradesh coastal areas.
21. ISRO phones for fishermen in T.N.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ISRO has designed the NaVIC (Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System) receivers and 200 of them have been delivered to the State government. The satellite phones will help fishermen involved in deep sea fishing, to assist in their navigation while in the high seas.
22. India's Vijay Lakshmi Pandit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> She was the first woman president of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1953
23. India-US Defence ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India brought C-17 Globemaster heavy-lift and C-130J Hercules from the U.S.
24. Bogibeel bridge in Assam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's longest rail-road bridge to be inaugurated by PM Modi on Christmas Day.
25. Indigenous communities of Assam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ahoms, Chutias, Deuri and Mising (These communities were in news for their row over naming of Bogibeel bridge in Assam. Different communities want bridge to be named after their community leaders.)
26. U.S. military to have a 'Space Command'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. President Donald Trump ordered the creation of "Space Command", a new organisational structure within the Pentagon that will have overall control of military space operations. Mr. Trump's goal is to build an entirely new branch of the military called "Space Force".
27. Arunachal's tallest tree	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Atang Ane (<i>Ficus elastica</i>) means 'mother rubber tree'
28. UAE to deposit \$3 billion in Pakistan's central bank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to help "enhance liquidity" as Pakistan struggles with a balance of payments crisis.
29. Alba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> World's only known albino orangutan (in Borneo). The population of orangutans in Borneo has plummeted from about 2,88,500 in 1973 to about 1,00,000 today, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature. Do you know? Orangutans are three extant species of great apes native to Indonesia and Malaysia. Orangutans are currently only found in the rainforests of Borneo and Sumatra. Both Sumatran and

	Bornean orangutans are listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
30. Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Odisha announced ₹10,000-crore KALIA scheme to address the agrarian crisis. The Odisha government has now decided to procure oil seeds and pulses with increased minimum support price.
31. Bogibeel Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India's longest rail-road bridge Total expenditure - ₹5,920 crore to build 4.94 km Bogibeel is the fourth bridge across river Brahmaputra Located in Assam
32. Foxconn unit in Sriperumbudur (TN)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It will start manufacturing Apple iPhones. Sriperumbudur is located on the Chennai–Bengaluru Highway.
33. Ross Island is now Netaji Dweep	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prime Minister announced renaming of three islands of the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago, as a tribute to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose. The Ross Island was renamed Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Dweep, the Neil Island as Shaheed Dweep and the Havelock Island as Swaraj Dweep.



(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1) Global Wage Report is released by –

- a) World Bank
- b) World economic forum
- c) International Labour Organisation
- d) Amnesty Internattional

Q.2) Consider the following statements about G20

1. It is an international forum for the governments and central bank governors of 20 European countries
2. It operates without permanent secretariat or staff
3. The 2018 G20 summit is held at Buenos Aires, Argentina

Select the INCORRECT statements from options given below

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) 1 only

Q.3) Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980) deals with -

- a) Limited power of Parliament to amend the Constitution
- b) Harmony and balance between fundamental rights and directive principles
- c) Khalistan movement or Sikh separatist movement
- d) Capital punishment

Q.4) The theme of 2018's summit was 'Building consensus for fair and sustainable

development'. Which of the following organization's theme is this?

- a) World Economic Forum
- b) G-20
- c) World Entrepreneurship Summit
- d) ASEAN

Q.5) The Financial Stability Board (FSB) is an international body that monitors and makes recommendations about the global financial system. FSB has been established by

- a) World Bank
- b) IMF
- c) World Economic Forum
- d) G 20

Q.6) Government has recently announced National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and Sexually transmitted infections. Which of the following are the aims of this program?

1. To eliminate mother to child transmission of HIV and Syphilis by 2020
2. To eliminate HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination by 2020
3. To eradicate HIV/AIDS by 2030

Select the code from following:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.7) Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is concerned with

- a) AIDS/HIV Virus
- b) Tuberculosis
- c) Blood Cancer
- d) Leprosy

Q.8) Ex Cope India-18 is bilateral Air Force exercise between -

- a) India and the US
- b) India and Russia
- c) India and France
- d) India and UK

Q.9) Consider the following statements about Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

1. It is an intergovernmental organisation of Central and Western Asian Countries
2. The OPEC Secretariat is located in Vienna
3. World Oil Outlook (WOO) is published by OPEC

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) 2 Only

Q.10) Consider the following statements with respect to Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

1. All the founding members were from Asia
2. It is headquartered in Baghdad

Select the correct statement(s)

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.11) Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is an example of

- a) Monopoly
- b) Oligopoly
- c) Perfect Competition
- d) None of the above

Q.12) Consider the following statements about GSAT-11

1. It is a communication satellite operated by INSAT system
2. It will be launched from Sriharikota by PSLV C34
3. It will be India's heaviest satellite till date

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) 1 and 3
- c) 1 and 2
- d) All of the above

Q.13) Consider the following statements about Andaman and Nicobar Command

1. It is India's only operational tri-services command
2. It was created in 2001 to safeguard India's strategic interests in Southeast Asia and the Strait of Malacca

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.14) "Accessible India Campaign" (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) aims to

- a) Enable persons with disabilities to gain universal access, independent living and participation in all aspects of life.
- b) Enable Senior Citizens to gain universal access, equal opportunity for development, independent living and participation in all aspects of life.
- c) Enable Vulnerable groups (Women, Children, SCs/STs) to gain universal access, equal opportunity for development, independent living and participation in all aspects of life.
- d) None of the above.

Q.15) Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act was passed in India in 2016. Which of the following statements are correct regarding the Act?

1. It fulfills the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory.
2. The Act recognises 21 kinds of disabilities compared to the previous seven.
3. The Act also increased the quota for disability reservation in higher educational institutions from 3% to 5% and in government jobs from 3% to 4%.

Select the code from following:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.16) Mangdechhu hydropower project is associated with –

- a) India and Nepal
- b) India and Bangladesh
- c) India and Bhutan
- d) India and Tibet

Q.17) India is a signatory to

1. UN Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities
2. Biwako Millennium Framework

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.18) Consider the following statements about UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

1. India has signed the convention but not ratified
2. It is monitored by one of the UN human rights charter bodies

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.19) Google Tez is a new digital payment app based on UPI payment. Which of the

following statements are correct regarding Google Tez?

1. It permits user to transfer money without requiring the bank account details of recipient.
2. Aadhar verification for payment is mandatory.
3. It does not require money to be stored in app wallet for money transfer.

Select the code from following:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.20) Consider the following statements about 'Blue-coloured Aadhar card'

1. Biometric details are not required for this card
2. It will be given to children between 5-15 years of age
3. It will be linked with his/her parent's UID

Select the correct statement

- a) 1 Only
- b) 1 and 2
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.21) Consider the following statements regarding the features of Aadhaar Card

1. Biometric
2. Geography
3. Caste
4. Religion
5. Demographic
6. Health

7. Income

Which of the given details are not captured while enrolling for Aadhaar Card?

- a) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6
- b) 1, 4, 6, and 7
- c) 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7
- d) 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7

Q.22) Consider the following statements about Global Carbon Project (GCP)

1. GCP is a core project of IGBP (International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme).
2. Global Carbon Atlas was established by the GCP.

Select the correct statement(s)

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.23) Consider the below statements:

1. Agriculture is the main source of nitrogen pollution in India, followed by sewage and organic solid wastes.
2. Tourism and fishing contributing most of the plastic litter on beaches.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.24) Which of the following Acts make Environment Impact Assessment mandatory in India?

- a) Indian Forest Act

- b) Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act
- c) Wildlife Protection Act
- d) Environment (Protection) Act

Q.25) Which of the following are the correct examples of Pigovian Tax?

- a) Tax on pollution
- b) Tax on tobacco products
- c) Tax on alcoholic drinks
- d) Tax on Water supply

Select the code from following:

- a) 1,2 and 3
- b) 2,3 and 4
- c) 4 only
- d) All of the above

Q.26) The theme of Earth Day 2018 is –

- a) “End Plastic Pollution”
- b) “Wetlands for a Sustainable Urban Future”
- c) “Beat Plastic Pollution”
- d) ‘Nature for Water’ – exploring nature-based solutions to the water challenges we face in the 21st century.

Q.27) Bellandur, Agara and Varthur lakes are often in news. They are associated with which state?

- a) Karnataka
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Kerala
- d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.28) Justice Radhakrishnan Committee is associated with

- a) Teacher Reforms
- b) Pension Reforms

- c) Labour Reforms
- d) Road Safety Reforms

Q.29) Consider the following statements about Brihadeeswarar Temple:

1. The great temple of Brihadeeswarar Temple is dedicated to the Lord Vishnu.
2. It was built by Rajaraja Chola's son Rajendra I.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.30) With regard to Gangaikonda Cholapuram consider the following statements:

1. The city was founded by Rajendra Chola I to commemorate his victory over the Pala Dynasty.
2. The great temple of Brihadeeswarar Temple at this place is dedicated to the Lord Vishnu.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) None

Q.31) Which of the following organization is responsible for the preparation of economic survey in India?

- a) Department of revenue
- b) Department of economic affairs

- c) Department of revenue
- d) Department of financial services

Q.32) The power to grant Indian citizenship lies with the

- a) Ministry of Home Affairs
- b) Cabinet Secretariat
- c) President
- d) Prime Minister's Office

Q.33) An Indian citizen can be deprived of the citizenship under which of the following circumstances?

1. The citizen has shown disloyalty to the Constitution of India.
2. The citizen has insulted the national symbols.
3. The citizen has obtained the citizenship by fraud.

Select the correct answer using code below

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) 1,2 and 3

Q.34) Consider the following statements regarding citizenship in India:

1. Children of Foreign delegates born in India get Indian citizenship.
2. A child born in 2018 outside India will get Indian citizenship automatically by descent if both its parents are Indians.

Which of the above statements are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2

- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.35) Global Burden of Disease 2017 report is published by –

- a) World Health Organization
- b) United Nations
- c) The Lancet
- d) Ministry of Health and Family Welfare

Q.36) Katas Raj is a pilgrimage site of Hindus. It has a pond which is believed to have been formed by tears of Lord Shiva when he cried at the death of his wife Sati. Where is this located?

- a) Pakistan
- b) Cambodia
- c) Sri Lanka
- d) Tibet

Q.37) Shadani Darbar temple as in news recently. Where is it located?

- a) Uttarakhand
- b) Punjab
- c) Haryana
- d) None of the above

Q.38) Gilets Jaunes movement or Yellow Vest movement is associated with which among the following country –

- a) Russia
- b) France
- c) Crimea
- d) Turkey

Q.39) Consider the following exercises and choose the correct pair/s:

1. INDRA-NAVY : : India-Russia
2. Cope India : : India-China
3. Yudh Abhyas : : India-US

Choose correct answer:

- a) 1 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 2 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.40) Kaiga nuclear power plant, which recently created a world record for the longest uninterrupted operation of 941 days is located in –

- a) Tamil Nadu
- b) Karnataka
- c) Kerala
- d) Maharashtra

Q.41) 'OSIRIS-REx mission' is concerned with

- a) Saturn
- b) Bennu
- c) Trojan asteroids
- d) Pluto

Q.42) Which of the following is true about spacecraft OSIRIS-REx?

- a) (OSIRIS-REx) is NASA's first unmanned asteroid sampling mission.
- b) (OSIRIS-REx) is NASA's first manned asteroid sampling mission.
- c) (OSIRIS-REx) is NASA's first unmanned meteoroid sampling mission.
- d) None of the above.

Q.43) Which Cabinet committee is often described as a 'Super Cabinet'?

- a) Appointment committee
- b) Parliamentary affairs committee
- c) Economic affairs committee
- d) Political affairs committee

Q.44) Appointments Committee of the Cabinet is chaired by –

- a) Home Minister
- b) Prime Minister
- c) Parliamentary affairs Minister
- d) Finance Minister

Q.45) Consider the following statements about 'Rushikulya river'

1. It flows through three states
2. The Rushikulya river mouth beach is a major nesting site of the endangered olive ridley turtles

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.46) Which of the following species is the State bird of Delhi?

- a) Peacock
- b) Wood Pigeon
- c) House Sparrow
- d) Indian Jungle Fowl

Q.47) The traditional lac doll marriage - 'jau kandhei bahaghara' – is celebrated in which state?

- a) Jharkhand
- b) Odisha
- c) West Bengal
- d) Chhattisgarh

Q.48) Mekedatu project is often in news. It has become a bone of contention between –

- a) Kerala and Tamil Nadu
- b) Karnataka and Tamil Nadu

- c) Andhra Pradesh and Telangana
- d) Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu

Q.49) Which among the following is considered as queen of the Arabian Sea?

- a) Kochi
- b) Kanyakumari
- c) Panambur Port
- d) Meenakshi

Q.50) India has achieved the milestone of induction of its first non-tethered Deep Submergence Rescue Vehicle (DSRV) system, with the help of –

- a) Defence partnership with Russia
- b) Defence partnership with US
- c) Defence partnership with UK
- d) Defence partnership with France

Q.51) Consider the following statements about National Security Guard (NSG)

1. It is a branch of the Indian Army under the authority of the Indian Ministry of Defence.
2. It is a counter-insurgency force made up of soldiers deputed from other parts of the Indian Army and is currently deployed in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.52) Consider the following regarding National Security Guard (NSG)

1. It is one of the security forces under Central Armed Police Force (CAPF)

2. It is a Federal Contingency Deployment Force under Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA)

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both
- d) None

Q.53) H5N1 is often in news. It is concerned with which of the following diseases?

- a) Avian Influenza
- b) Swine Flu
- c) Tuberculosis
- d) Pneumonia

Q.54) Famous breeds – Punganur, Ongole, Nimari, Hallikar, Vechur relates to –

- a) Cow
- b) Buffalo
- c) Sheep
- d) Goat

Q.55) The practice of mating of animals of the same breed, having no common ancestors, is called

- a) In-breeding
- b) Cross-breeding
- c) Out-crossing
- d) Interspecific hybridization

Q.56) The spread of Avian Influenza in Odisha is in news. Consider the following statements with respect to Avian Influenza:

1. It is a viral infection spread from bird to bird.

2. A particular strain of H5N1 virus is believed to cause avian influenza.
3. Human beings catch bird flu by close contact with birds or bird droppings.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, and 3

Q.57) Mangalajodi, the second largest hotspot for birds is on the banks of

- a) Chilika Lake
- b) Pangong lake
- c) Dal Lake
- d) Pulikat Lake

Q.58) It is said that the one issue which highlights the need to unify the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board is the drying up of peninsular rivers, the single most important cause of which is

- a) Climate Change
- b) Over-extraction of groundwater
- c) Construction of excessive number of dams
- d) Excess population in the peninsular region

Q.59) Consider the following statements with respect to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)

1. It is established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006
2. Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution is

administrative ministry for the implementation of FSSAI

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) None of the above

Q.60) The Gulf of Aden, the extension of the Indian Ocean located between Africa and Asia forms a natural sea link between:

- a) Red Sea and Suez Canal
- b) Red Sea and Arabian Sea
- c) Suez Canal and Arabian Sea
- d) Persian Gulf and Red Sea

Q.61) Consider the following statements about Gulf of Aden

1. It is located between Yemen and Somalia
2. Bab-el-Mandeb connects the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.62) The 'Horn of Africa' is bordered with which of the following water bodies?

1. Red Sea
2. Gulf of Guinea
3. Gulf of Aden

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.63) Despite strict laws, the illegal trade of 'Pangolin' is threatening the very existence of the species. What is the status of India Pangolin under IUCN?

- a) Near Threatened
- b) Least Concern
- c) Endangered
- d) Extinct in the Wild

Q.64) Wildlife Protection Act 1972, gives varying degrees of protection. Under this regard which animals are prohibited for Poaching, smuggling and illegal trade by any person as per provisions provided by law?

- 1. Great Indian Bustard
- 2. Himalayan Brown Bear
- 3. Flying fox

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 only
- d) 3 only

Q.65) Consider the following statements with respect to Nikshay Poshan Yojana (NPY)

- 1. It is established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006
- 2. It is jointly funded by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO)

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) None of the above

Q.66) Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) and Information Fusion Centre (IFC) for the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is located in -

- a) Greater Noida
- b) Goa
- c) Hyderabad
- d) Gurugram

Q.67) Consider the following statements about 'Pangolins'

- 1. Their bodies are covered in hard, keratin scales.
- 2. They are now extinct in India
- 3. They are nocturnal in nature

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.68) Cultivation of HT cotton (Herbicide Tolerant) has been recently banned in four states by Supreme Court. Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding it?

- 1. HT cotton is also known as BG III cotton.
- 2. It contains Round – up Ready and Round – up Flux (RRF) gene.
- 3. The herbicide-resistant gene in HT cotton can spread through pollen into biodiversity system leading to

transformation of weeds into super weeds.

Select the code from following:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

1. It is aimed at providing Satellite-based Navigation services with accuracy and integrity required for civil aviation applications and to provide better Air Traffic Management over Indian Airspace
2. It is based on the Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System (IRNSS)

Q.69) The CRISPR-Cas system often in news is related to?

- a) Rice Intensification
- b) Gene Editing
- c) Space Research
- d) Cyber Attack

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.70) Maldives has FTA with which of the following countries?

1. India
2. China
3. Singapore

Q.73) India has brought C-17 Globemaster from the US. What is C-17 Globemaster?

- a) It is a large military transport aircraft
- b) It is a largest military helicopter
- c) It is a missile launch system
- d) It is an aircraft carrier

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 Only
- c) 2 and 3
- d) 1 and 3

Q.74) Consider the following statements with reference to the Goods and Services Tax

1. It is an umbrella tax which will subsume all the direct taxes.
2. GST will eliminate the cascading of taxes and will make taxation simpler

Q.71) Maldives is a member of

1. Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
2. Commonwealth of Nations

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

Select the correct code:

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 or 2

Q.72) Consider the following statements about "NavIC"

Q.75) Consider the following statements about 'C-17 Globemaster'

1. It is an aircraft by Lockheed Martin

2. It is used to perform strategic airlift missions, transporting troops and cargo throughout the world
3. It is inducted in the Indian Air Force and Indian Navy

d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Select the INCORRECT statements

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.76) Bogibeel bridge, India's longest rail-road bridge to be inaugurated by PM Modi on Christmas Day is over -

- a) Ganga river
- b) Brahmaputra river
- c) Sabarmati river
- d) Subansiri river

Q.77) Ahoms, Chutias, Deuri and Mising were in news recently. They are –

- a) Indigenous communities of Assam
- b) Indigenous communities of North-East India
- c) Tribal communities of West Bengal
- d) Particularly vulnerable tribal group of North-East India

Q.78) Which of the following are the features of Zero Budget Natural Farming?

1. Inter-cropping
2. Mulching
3. Seed treatment
4. Replenishment of water bodies

Select the correct answer using code below

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 1, 2 and 3
- c) 3 and 4

Q.79) Consider the following statements regarding the features Jammu and Kashmir Constitution

1. It declares the State of J&K to be an integral part of India
2. It provides for Governor's rule as appointed by President of India
3. It clarifies that the permanent residents of the state are entitled to all rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.80) Consider the following statements:

1. Governor's rule is imposed on Jammu and Kashmir only, while the President rule on the rest of India.
2. President Rule is not extended to Jammu And Kashmir State as Governor's rule is imposed if the constitutional machinery fails in the state.

Choose the correct code from below:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.81) Which among the following are the objectives behind government fund infusion in public sector banks?

1. To help banks meet regulatory capital norms
2. Enable better performing PCA (prompt corrective action) banks to get capital
3. Infuse funds into non-PCA banks that are closer to the red line and
4. Give regulatory and growth capital to banks that are being amalgamated

Choose the correct answer:

- a) 1 and 4 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.82) Consider the following with regard to ISRO's Small Satellite Launch Vehicles (SSLV):

1. It offers affordable launch options for smaller satellites.
2. SSLV is expected to reduce launch time as well as cost less to launch small satellites.
3. SSLV has three solid motor stages like the PSLV and GSLV; however it cannot accommodate multiple satellites.
4. Unlike the PSLV and GSLV, the SSLV can be assembled both vertically and horizontally.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.83) What is the full form of ASLV?

- a) Automatic Satellite Launch Vehicle
- b) Augmented Satellite Launch Vehicle
- c) Aero Space Launch Vehicle
- d) Area Satellite Launch Vehicle

Q.84) 'Karamay Declaration' is associated with which of the following?

- a) INSTC
- b) CPEC
- c) TAPI
- d) SCO

Q.85) Which of the following countries is developing BeiDou Navigation Satellite system to rival USA's GPS?

- a) Russia
- b) Japan
- c) China
- d) North Korea

Q.86) Strategy 2030 is a long-term strategy, of which among the following commitments -

1. Sustainable Development Goals
2. Paris Agreement on climate change
3. New Development Bank
4. Asian Development Bank

Choose the correct answer:

- a) 1 and 4 only
- b) 1, 2 and 4
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.87) 'Affordable and Clean Energy' is in sync with which of the following 'Goals of the Sustainable Development Goal'?

- a) Goal 1
- b) Goal 3

- c) Goal 7
- d) Goal 6

Q.88) Orangutans are found in

- 1. CLMV countries
- 2. Malaysia
- 3. Indonesia

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.89) The Kurds are scattered mainly over which of the following countries?

- a) Iraq
- b) Iran
- c) Turkey
- d) All of the above

Q.90) Consider the following statements about 'Paika Rebellion'

- 1. It was led by Bakshi Jagabandhu Bidyadhar.
- 2. It took place when the British East India company wrested the rent-free land that had been given to the Paiks for their military service to the Kingdom of Khurda.

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 Only
- b) 2 Only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.91) Consider the following statements about landslide:

- 1. Landslide is mass movement of rock, debris or earth down a slope

- 2. Reasons for landslides are steep slope, earthquake, volcanic disturbances, rainfall etc
- 3. Landslides can generate tsunamis.

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 and 3
- b) 2 and 3
- c) None of the above
- d) All of the above

Q.92) Consider the following statements about Tsunami

- 1. The speed of tsunami waves depends on ocean depth rather than the distance from the source of the wave.
- 2. These are generated by high magnitude earthquakes in the ocean floors or violent under sea volcanic eruptions or by massive undersea landslides.

Select the correct answer using the codes below:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.93) Which one of the following statements regarding Tsunami is NOT correct?

- a) It often generates strong waves.
- b) The Pacific coasts are most vulnerable to Tsunami waves.
- c) Tsunami waves are also called high-energy tidal waves or seismic sea waves.
- d) Tsunami is a Latin word.

Q.94) Lalitgiri – considered one of the earliest Buddhist settlements is located in –

- a) West Bengal
- b) Tamil Nadu
- c) Karnataka
- d) Odisha

Q.95) Which term refers to a specialized firm that finances young, start-up companies

- a) Venture Capital Firm
- b) Finance Company
- c) Small-Business Finance Company
- d) Capital-Creation Company

Q.96) Which of the following statements is/are correct regarding India's National Informatics Centers – Computer Emergency Response Team (NIC – CERT)?

1. It is an initiative of Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
2. NIC-CERT has been setup with the objective of creating a comprehensive framework that integrates world class security components and inbuilt threat intelligence for detection, prevention and incident response.

Select the code from below:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.97) Consider the following statements with reference to National Critical

Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC)

1. It has been created under the Information Technology Act, 2000.
2. It identifies banking, financial services and insurance as one of the 'critical sectors'.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.98) With reference to the 'None of The Above' (NOTA) option, consider the following statements:

1. It gives the citizens to exercise their right to reject.
2. NOTA are counted, but are considered 'invalid votes'

Select the correct statements

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.99) Which of the following statements is/are correct about RajyaSabha elections?

1. Unlike use of secret ballots in Lok Sabha elections, open ballots are used in RajyaSabha elections.
2. Similar to Lok Sabha elections, the use of NOTA (None of the above) option is allowed in RajyaSabha elections too.

Select the correct code

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) 1 and 2
- d) None

Q.100) The Project leopard is aimed at conserving the leopard by improving its prey base, mitigating conflicts with humans and controlling poaching. Which state was the first to launch India's First Leopard Conservation Project?

- a) Rajasthan
- b) Uttarakhand
- c) Maharashtra
- d) Karnataka

Q.101) Imagine that you are a multi-millionaire based in the U.S. and are looking for your next investment opportunity. You have decided to buy a large stake in a company or companies that makes industrial machinery in India.

This is an example of -

- a) Foreign direct investment
- b) Foreign portfolio investment
- c) Mergers and Acquisitions
- d) Acquisitions only

Q.102) Consider the following statements with reference to the Foreign Direct Investment

1. FDI inflows are highly volatile as the capital can leave the country overnight
2. FDI is preferable over debt financing as it does not create interest obligations

Which of the following statements is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.103) Decline in interest rates:

- a) Will lead to large outflow of foreign portfolio investment
- b) Will lead to large inflow of foreign portfolio investment
- c) Will not affect foreign portfolio investment
- d) May affect or not affect portfolio investment

Q.104) Chabahar Port, recently in news is located in the

- a) Persian Gulf
- b) Gulf of Oman
- c) Gulf of Aden
- d) Red Sea

Q.105) India recently took over the operations of the Shahid Beheshti port. The port is located in –

- a) Iran
- b) Yemen
- c) Oman
- d) Israel

Q.106) Consider the following statements

1. Olive ridley and Kemp ridley are the only two species of marine turtles that display a unique mass nesting behaviour 'arribada'.
2. They are endemic to the Pacific coasts of Mexico, Central America, and India.

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.107) Which of the following statements are correct regarding Ujjawala scheme?

1. It is a comprehensive scheme to prevent trafficking of women and children for commercial/sexual exploitation.
2. The aim is to facilitate the rescue of victims and place them in safe custody.
3. To facilitate the repatriation of cross border trafficking victims.

Select the code from following:

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) All of the above
- d) None of the above

Q.108) Consider the following statements regarding High Courts of India

1. In India, every state has a High Court in its territory.
2. The Constitution of India provides for a High Court for each state.

Which of the following statement(s) is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.109) The United Nations (UN) World Day against Trafficking in Persons is observed every year to raise awareness of the plight

of human trafficking victims, and promote and protect their rights. It is observed on

- a) 28th December
- b) 29th December
- c) 30th July
- d) 31st January

Q.110) Consider the following pairs and select the correct pair/s from the code given below:

Heritage Site : : Associated State

1. Mahabalipuram : : Tamil Nadu
2. Aalampur Temple : : Andhra Pradesh
3. Bhimbetka rock shelters : : Madhya Pradesh
4. Khajuraho : : Maharashtra

Code:

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 1 and 3 only
- c) 1, 2 and 3
- d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.111) Consider the following with regard to "Adopt a Heritage" programme:

1. The scheme is a collaborative effort between the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and State/UTs Governments.
2. It aims to involve public sector companies, private sector companies and corporate citizens/individuals to adopt the sites.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 only

- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.112) Other than poaching, what are the possible reasons for the decline in the population of Ganges River Dolphins?

1. Construction of dams and barrages on rivers
2. Getting trapped in fishing nets accidentally
3. Use of synthetic fertilizers and other agricultural chemicals in crop-fields in the vicinity of rivers

Select the correct answer using the code given below

- a) 1 and 2 only
- b) 2 and 3 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) All of the above

Q.113) Which of the following statements are correct regarding recently launched 'Adopt a Heritage scheme'?

1. The scheme has been launched by Ministry of Tourism.
2. Indian tourists visiting a heritage site are promoted to adopt that site and contribute for the development and maintenance of the site.
3. Tourists adopting one site will have to keep the picture of that site as their social media display picture in order to promote tourism in the region.

Select the code from following:

- a) 1 only
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3

- d) All of the above

Q.114) 'Monument Mitras' refers to:

- a) An NGO which works closely with Archaeological Survey Of India for the protection of Historical Monuments.
- b) Public or private or Individual who adopts the heritage sites / monuments via bidding.
- c) A battalion of territorial army raised for protection of heritage sites / monuments.
- d) Government appointed tourist guides in heritage sites.

Q.115) Consider the following statements about Hangul

1. It is listed as 'critically endangered' under IUCN Red List
2. It is the state animal of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir
3. It is listed under Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and J&K Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1978

Select the correct statements

- a) 1 and 2
- b) 2 and 3
- c) 1 and 3
- d) All of the above

Q.116) Dachigam National Park is located in -

- a) Arunachal Pradesh
- b) Jammu and Kashmir
- c) Assam
- d) Meghalaya

Q.117) Consider the following about the Dhola–Sadiya Bridge, also referred to as the Bhupen Hazarika Setu:

1. The bridge connects the northeast states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
2. The bridge spans the Lohit River, a major tributary of the Brahmaputra River.
3. It is the longest bridge in India.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a) 2 and 3 only
- b) 1 and 2 only
- c) 1 and 3 only
- d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.118) The river serves as an international border dividing India and Bhutan. It is a major tributary of Brahmaputra river. It is the main river flowing within a famous national park.

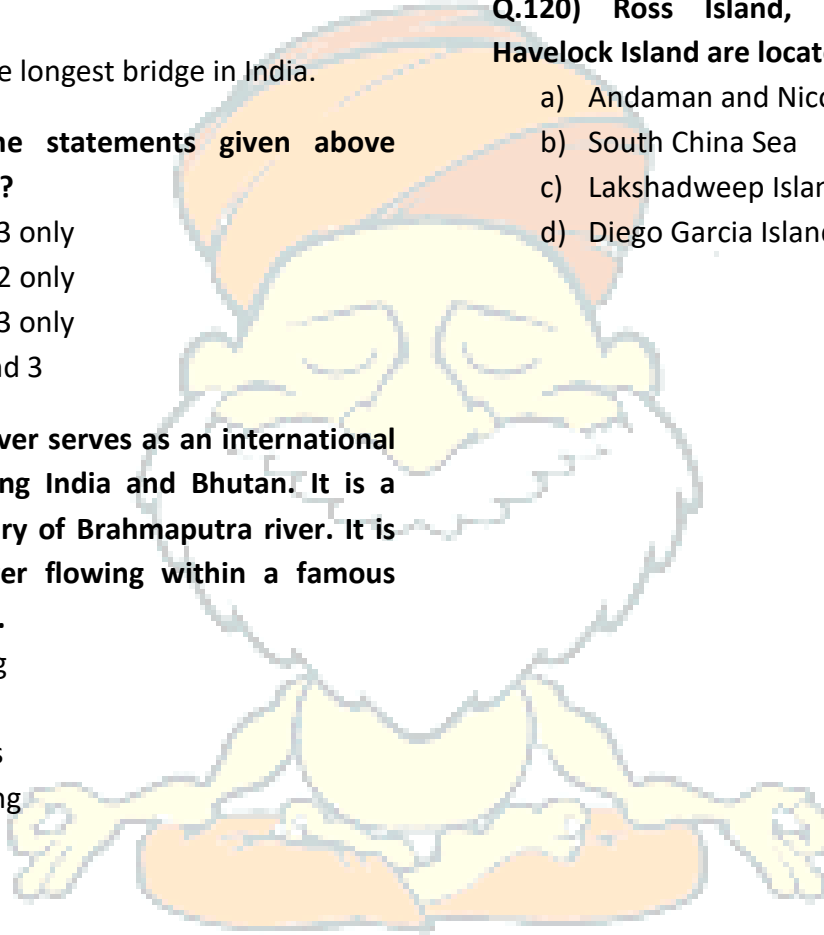
- a) Dibang
- b) Lohit
- c) Manas
- d) Kameng

Q.119) The term M-STrIPES is sometimes seen in the news in the context of

- a) Captive breeding of Wild Fauna
- b) Maintenance of Tiger Reserves
- c) Indigenous Satellite Navigation System
- d) Security of National Highways

Q.120) Ross Island, Neil Island and Havelock Island are located in –

- a) Andaman and Nicobar Islands
- b) South China Sea
- c) Lakshadweep Islands
- d) Diego Garcia Islands



2018 DECEMBER MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

1 c	31 b	61 c	91 d
2 d	32 a	62 c	92 c
3 d	33 c	63 c	93 d
4 b	34 d	64 a	94 d
5 d	35 c	65 d	95 a
6 d	36 a	66 d	96 c
7 a	37 d	67 c	97 c
8 a	38 b	68 d	98 b
9 b	39 b	69 b	99 a
10 d	40 b	70 b	100 a
11 b	41 b	71 a	101 b
12 b	42 a	72 b	102 b
13 c	43 d	73 a	103 a
14 a	44 b	74 b	104 b
15 d	45 b	75 c	105 a
16 c	46 c	76 b	106 a
17 c	47 b	77 a	107 c
18 b	48 b	78 d	108 b
19 c	49 a	79 d	109 c
20 c	50 c	80 a	110 b
21 c	51 d	81 d	111 c
22 c	52 b	82 b	112 d
23 c	53 a	83 b	113 a
24 d	54 a	84 b	114 b
25 a	55 c	85 c	115 c
26 a	56 d	86 b	116 b
27 a	57 a	87 c	117 d
28 d	58 b	88 b	118 c
29 d	59 a	89 d	119 b
30 a	60 b	90 c	120 a