IASBABA'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE

10% QUOTA FOR ECONOMICALLY WEAKER SECTIONS

INDIA-SOUTH AFRICA TIES

ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA FOR 2019

VOTE ON ACCOUNT

ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT (ASER) 2018

JANUARY - 2019

PREFACE

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 **44**th **edition** of IASbaba's Monthly Magazine. This edition covers all important issues that were in news in the month of **JANUARY 2019** 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

Monuments of national importance

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Conservation of Heritage, Monuments and Culture

In news:

ASI declared 6 monuments of national importance in 2018.

1. 125-year-old Old High Court Building in Nagpur, Maharashtra
2. Mughal-era monument in Agra — Haveli of Agha Khan
3. Mughal-era monument in Agra — Hathi Khana
4. The ancient Neemrana Baori in Rajasthan's Alwar district
5. The Group of Temples at Ranipur Jharail in Odisha's Bolangir; and
6. The Vishnu Temple in Kotali, Pithoragarh district, Uttarkhand,

Do you know?
- In 2016 and 2017, no new monument was included in the list of sites of national importance.
- The last monument to be included in the list, in 2015, was the Vishnu Temple in Nadavayal in Kerala's Wayanad district.
- There were 3,686 centrally protected monuments/sites under the ASI in the country; the number has now increased to 3,693.
- Uttar Pradesh (745 monuments/sites), Karnataka (506) and Tamil Nadu (413) have the highest number of ASI-maintained sites.
- According to information available with the Ministry of Culture, about 321 of these centrally protected monuments/sites have been encroached upon.

A.P. recently unveiled second largest petroglyph site

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains I – Indian Art and Heritage; Culture

In news:
- Petroglyphs are images created by removing part of a rock surface by incising, picking, carving, or abrading, as a form of rock art.
- A.P. recently unveiled second largest petroglyph site at Mekala Benchi, in Kurnool district.

- These petroglyphs, or rock carvings, underscore Kurnool's importance as a major site of Neolithic settlements in south India.
- The term Neolithic Period refers to the last stage of the Stone Age.

POLITY/GOVERNANCE

Federal polity and national agencies in India

Background

- CBI has had its roots as an anti-corruption wing of the British Indian government known as the Delhi Special Police Establishment.
- Due to its competence and professionalism that from such humble origins it rose to national eminence and in 1963 it became the CBI.
- In the past some States occasionally blocked the CBI probe in specific cases.
- Now, the situation changed that hereafter a State's refusal to allow the CBI probe in its territory is likely to be based not so much on the merits of a case but on political equations between that State and the ruling party at the Centre.

Impacts on credibility of CBI

- Previously, people use to demand a CBI probe into any crime or scam involving influential persons. But now civil society's lack of confidence in the agency's competence and neutrality is very much evident.
- Giving credence to the doubts about the CBI's integrity, the families of Govind Pansare and Gauri Lankesh have determined to oppose a combined CBI investigation into their killings as well as that of Narendra Dabholkar and M.M. Kalburgi.

Centre-State implications

- Under the Constitution, the State governments have exclusive jurisdiction in matters related to law and order.
- The Centre can claim its jurisdiction over its departments located in States, such as railway property, and on matters like terrorism, sedition, counterfeit currency, etc.
- Even in these cases the Central agencies cannot discharge their duties without active cooperation from the State government concerned.
- Raising the concerns over integrity of CBI, the governments of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal withdrew 'general consent' to the CBI to register fresh cases under its purview.
- Now CBI will have to obtain the State's consent case by case; this will give a State government the opportunity to both ensure that the CBI is not acting at the behest of the ruling party at the Centre, or insert its own politics into investigations.
- The agency may technically go ahead with cases it already registered in these States, but that logic holds only on paper.

- Without a State government's active cooperation, the CBI or any Central agency cannot carry out its operations in that State.

Impact on other agencies
- It is not the CBI alone that will be caught in the cross hairs of Centre-State feuds in future.
- Other agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate, the National Investigation Agency (NIA), etc. may find it hard to smoothly carry out their operations in States that are not politically aligned with the ruling party at the Centre.
- For example: unlike the CBI act (the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act) which mandates States' consent, the NIA Act does not place such a restraint on the NIA.
- However, the NIA would be no more effective than the CBI when a State refuses to cooperate, whether that refusal is de jure or de facto.

Way forward
- There is urgent need to define and delineate 'federal crimes' as recommended by the Malimath Committee in 2003.
- The task should be to bring in States as partners in solving a national problem,rather than declaring them as federal problems.
- There is need to calibrate different tiers of government and bring about political consensus so as to ensure India's constitutional scheme delivers on its promise.
- A first step in this direction has to be the willingness of political parties to recognise the danger they pose to each other as well as to the entire polity. And then arrive at a modus vivendi.
- Elected executive must refrain from 'monitoring' investigations; a provision for more effective judicial oversight at all stages of criminal investigations; and the resolve to ensure bureaucratic neutrality.

Conclusion
- Institutional collapse is like a disease and it has entered a critical phase. If not tackled in time, it may inflict system-wide damage.
- The task of restoring the credibility of investigative agencies cannot be rocket science. Moreover, it is now in the self-interest of all political parties.
- The time is ripe for ideas to strengthen our federalism. Ideas for reforms will spring up and fructify only if elite consensus creates conducive environment.

Connecting the dots:
- Bureaucratic professionalism and neutrality of national investigative and regulatory agencies, is key to success for constitutional federal polity in India. Comment.

Centre okays Citizenship Bill

Part of: GS Mains II – Indian Polity and Governance

In news:

- Union Cabinet cleared the redrafted Citizenship Amendment Bill.
- The Bill paves the way to grant citizenship to six religious minorities — Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists — from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who came to India before 2014.
- However, there has been a strong resistance to the Bill (especially in Assam) as it would pave the way for giving citizenship, mostly to illegal Hindu migrants from Bangladesh, in Assam who came after March 1971, in violation of the **Assam Accord of 1985**.

Right to information: A tool to strengthen democracy

Introduction:

- Right to Information (RTI) is usually used as a synonym for democracy. This is a tool to strengthen citizens' sovereignty.
- The words of Sir Francis Bacon — "Knowledge is power" — aptly bring out the essence of the Right to Information Act (RTI).
- Knowledge, gained through access to correct information, has the **ability to upturn the power dynamic**: It places a person at a formidable position to fight for their rights and enables them to ask vital questions.

Significance of RTI Act

- The introduction of RTI Act has **strengthened the principles of democracy**, which in Abraham Lincoln's words is "of the people, by the people and for the people", by facilitating people's participation in governance.
- It has helped to keep a check on arbitrary decision making by public institutions.
- RTI was not just limited to the urban elites; it gave voice to the poor sections of the society by providing them with a tool of information to hold the government accountable.
- The RTI is all about making citizens informed. Informed societies mean a lively and functioning democracy.
- RTI promotes transparency and accountability.

- RTI laws can play a crucial role in combating corruption.
- RTI also is important in promoting and upholding human rights.

However, lack of information may prevent citizens from realising their aspirations, because it leaves them without the basis to participate in any debate, discussion and question-answer session regarding the decision-making process.

Concerns:
- In October 2018, the RTI completed 13 years of its inception. For the last few years, it has faced constant onslaught by the current regime.
- The latest **Global Right to Information Rating** has ranked India at the sixth position, a rank lower than last year. While under the UPA government, India positioned itself at second place, under the BJP-led government the ranking has successively dropped.
- **Callous attitude of Central Information Commission and Information Commissioners (ICs):** Findings of a study revealed that Central Information Commission took an average of 319 days to hear and give an order on an appeal from the date it was filed before the commission, with the maximum number of days taken by the CIC reaching to 862 days.
- An average of 56 per cent of orders recorded violations of Section 20 of the RTI, but a penalty was imposed in only 4 per cent of the cases.
- **Poor strength of CIC:** Only seven ICs working at present along with CIC. Now, fours ICs are to retire by the end of this year.
- A fresh attempt to indirectly amend the RTI has also been made through the Personal Data Protection Bill that makes the wordings of Section 8(j) of the RTI vague, not specifying the extent of harm or differentiation between personal information and personal data.

Connecting the dots:
- Has RTI been successful in bringing transparency into governance? Critically evaluate.
- The RTI Act, 2005 is truly heralded as one of the most advanced right to information legislations in the world. However, recent amendments proposed by the government is a regressive step. Discuss.

CIC selection arbitrary

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Governance issues

In news:

- RTI activists have termed the recent appointment of former Law Secretary Suresh Chandra as a Central Information Commissioner an "arbitrary process" as he had not applied for the position.
- According to files recently made public by the Department of Personnel and Training, he was not on the list of 280 applicants. But he was among the 14 short-listed.
- Shortlisting has been done outside the list of applicants, in violation of procedure laid out by the department in their own affidavit to the Supreme Court.

About Central Information Commission
- Central Information Commission (CIC) is set up under the Right to Information Act.
- It is a quasi judicial body and designated statutory authority to receive and inquire into complaint from any person.
- CIC hears appeals from information-seekers who have not been satisfied by the public authority, and also addresses major issues concerning the RTI Act.
- It is plays important role in maintaining transparency in system of governance essential for healthy democracy.
- Such kind of transparency check aims to curb corruption, nepotism, oppression and misuse or abuse of the authority.

How a CBI Director is appointed?

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian Polity; Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies

In news:
- After the high-power committee ousted Alok Verma as CBI Director, now the committee is set to select the agency's Director.
- The CBI draws its legality from the 1946-Delhi Special Police Establishment Act (DSPE). Before the Lokpal Act was legislated, the CBI director was appointed by the DSPE Act.
- Now, the Lokpal Act governs the appointment of the CBI director.

Centre appoints the CBI
- The CBI director is appointed by the Centre on the basis of the recommendation of a search committee comprising of the Prime Minister as the chairperson, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of Opposition.
- Above Selection committee was constituted under The Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

- The process of selecting the CBI director begins in the Home Ministry, which prepares a list of IPS officers, who are eligible for the post on the basis of their seniority and experience in the field of probe.
- The MHA list goes to the Department of Personnel, which prepares the final list on the basis of "seniority, integrity and experience in the investigation of ant-corruption cases".
- The search committee examines the names and sends its recommendation to the government for the appointment of CBI director.
- Earlier, under the DSPE Act, the CBI director was appointed on the basis of the recommendation by a panel comprising the Central Vigilance Commission as chairperson, other vigilance commissioners, Home Secretary and Secretary (Co-ordination and Public Grievances the Cabinet Secretariat).

Do you know?

- The Chief Justice of India can nominate a Supreme Court judge if he does not attend the search committee meeting.
- In the absence of a formal Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, the leader of the floor of the largest opposition party takes part in the search committee meetings.

Bill to allow voluntary use of Aadhaar ID introduced

Part of: GS Mains II – National issue; Right to Privacy

In news:

- Bill to allow voluntary use of Aadhaar ID was introduced that will provide legal backing for voluntary seeding of biometric Aadhaar ID with mobile numbers and bank accounts after the Supreme Court barred mandatory use of the 12-digit unique identifier by private firms.
- The proposed amendment Bill is said to be in compliance with the Supreme Court's judgment and there would be no infringement of privacy.

Do you know?

Aadhaar and driving licence may be linked

In news:

- Government may soon make it mandatory for linking Aadhaar with driving licences.
- Aadhaar linkage will help to catch the guilty person who causes an accident.

- At present, the guilty person who causes an accident flees the scene and gets a duplicate licence. This helps him go scot-free. However, with the Aadhaar linkage one can change his/her name but cannot change their biometrics, neither iris nor fingerprints. Therefore makes it easy to hold the culprit.

Why Supreme Court shouldn't adjudicate quotas, good or bad?

Context:

Today's editorial provides different/unique perspective why the judiciary should refrain itself from entering into some administrative and executive areas (except in extreme cases).

- The recently-legislated **124th constitutional amendment to create a 10% quota** in jobs and education based on economic backwardness can be opposed on many grounds.
- But on one ground critics are very much sure that it will fail is the **test of constitutionality**.
- The constitutional test involves two hurdles, one relating to the **50% limit set on quotas in the Indra Sawhney judgement of 1993**, and the second to the fact that **so far only social and educational backwardness have been recognized** as valid justifications for quotas.

In this article, author argues that quota case is not something the courts should meddle with. The author questions whether courts should get into such areas?

Do you know?

- Recently, Madras high court struck down the state government's decision to gift ₹1,000 along with other things to all ration-card holders on the occasion of Pongal. The court ordered that the money should be given only to those who are below the poverty line, and that richer people need not receive this dole since the money can be put to better use.

According to the author, the issue is not whether these decisions are right or wrong, but whether the courts should even get into such areas.

Why the Courts should avoid getting into such areas?
1. It is the right of elected representatives of the people, at the centre or states, to decide what is the right thing to do.
2. Unaccountable courts should not—except in extreme cases—weigh in on economic priorities, especially when they themselves have caused much economic disruption and

damage through their judgements. (Examples of the disruptions caused by judicial orders include the wholesale cancellation of spectrum and coal mine licences, the 2017 ban on highway liquor bars, which the Supreme Court itself had to modify later when it was unimplementable, and the 2015 registration ban and subsequent cess imposed on luxury diesel vehicles in Delhi.)

3. Basic feature not defined clearly by the Judiciary. (Consider the Sabarimala judgement, two basic features are clashing – question of gender equality against the right to religious practices)

10% quota to EWS: Enabling a different approach to affirmative action

With regard to quotas, however bad the idea may be, at the end of the day it is a constitutional amendment enabling a different approach to affirmative action that looks beyond caste.

Author raises few questions –

- Why should the courts be deciding that caste should be the only way to decide on quotas, or that 50% is the right limit to set on it? Why not 40% or 60%, when one state (Tamil Nadu) has already legislated 69% and the law has been put into the Ninth Schedule where the courts can't touch it?
- For a Constitution that ultimately **hopes to make caste irrelevant**, can we view the idea of income-based criteria for quotas as somehow unconstitutional or violative of basic feature of Constitution?
- Is it right to make caste (also couched as social and economic backwardness) the sole criterion for quotas?
- Considering the Madras high court order in the Pongal-gift case, one wonders how the court will decide if a government were to adopt universal basic income as a policy response to joblessness. Will the Court rule that Ratan Tata and Mukesh Ambani should be excluded, since they are not below the poverty line?
- Why offer subsidized fertilizers to all farmers, when the money should only go to poor farmers?

The courts are in no way empowered to decide such issues. There is no basic feature to defend in the case of economically determined quotas, however bad the idea of 10% quota to EWS is.

Do you know?

There were some recent Supreme Court verdicts and orders, which seem too tough to be implemented and may remain just on papers
- Supreme verdict on the entry of women of all ages into the Sabarimala temple.

- The order fixing timings for bursting of firecrackers during Diwali.
- Speedy disposal of pending cases against legislators and lawmakers (former and sitting).
- Witness Protection Scheme of 2018.

(For further reading on this topic, visit the link - Unimplementable orders)

States cannot pick police chiefs on their own: SC

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Role of Judiciary; Centre State Relations

In news:
- Supreme Court rejected the pleas made by five States to implement their own local laws for selection and appointment of their State police chiefs.
- Some states had requested for modification in the Supreme Court orders in the procedure to be followed for appointment of Director Generals of Police (DGP).
- The court said its directions were issued in larger public interest and to protect the police officials from political interference.

Do you know?
- In July 2018, the Supreme Court restrained State governments from appointing DGPs without first consulting the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).
- The State government concerned has to send UPSC the names of the probables three months before the incumbent DGP is to retire.
- The UPSC will prepare a panel of three officers fit to be DGP and send it back.
- The UPSC shall, as far as practicable, choose the people within the zone of consideration who have got a clear two years of service and must give due weightage to merit and seniority.
- The State shall "immediately" appoint one of the persons shortlisted by the UPSC.

Collegium controversy: The danger of reciprocity

Context:

- The controversial collegium system of judicial appointments is under public scrutiny once again.

- Collegium's unusual action of revisiting decisions made at an earlier meeting, and recommending the elevation of two junior judges to the Supreme Court instead of two judges whose names had been considered earlier – show how opaque the collegium system still is.
- No one has any doubts about the competence or integrity of Judges but the manner in which it was carried out puts the spotlight once again on the controversial collegium system of judicial appointments.
- This controversy has reminded everyone of the need to reform the collegium system itself.

Do you know?

- The right to select judges to the Supreme Court was taken upon itself by the apex court in 1993 and revalidated in a 1998 judgment (Third Judges case).
- The current government tried to change that with the passage of a law on the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), but the law was shot down — again by the Supreme Court.
- NJAC was struck down by the SC because it would have compromised the independence of the CJI and given a role to the government in the appointment of judges.
- Unlike in the U.S. where judges are appointed by the President and are known to be leaning towards the Democrats or Republicans, Indian judges are not supposed to have any political affiliation.

Why do we need to reform the collegium system?

- **Credibility of the SC:** Controversial collegium system of judicial appointments undermines the independence of judges and raises unnecessary doubts about the credibility of the highest court.
- **Politicization of appointment:** Government is not only the biggest litigator but also the greatest threat to the abuse of power. Judicial review as a concept is supposed to control the government and keep it in check.

Is it possible to completely insulate judges from governmental influence?

- According to **George Orwell**, it is impossible to completely insulate judges from governmental influence.
- Orwell pointed out in 1984, the government is everywhere, and judges as fellow human beings do get influenced by it.
- The judiciary asserts its position only when the government is weak.
- This collegium system was asserted when we had weak Central governments in the 1990s.

"Norm of reciprocity"

- According to the **American sociologist, Alvin Ward Gouldner**, the universal norm in human societies is that individuals are obligated to reciprocate favours received.
- "People should help those who have helped them" and "people should not injure those who have helped them".

Succession to the Chief Justiceship

- Each judges, in line of succession to the Chief Justiceship, eyed the other with suspicion and tried to outdo him in proclaiming his loyalty to the Government either in their judgments or even on public platforms.

In his NJAC judgment (2015), Justice J.S. Khehar discussed the issue of reciprocity at length in striking down the commission.

- Justice Khehar preferred exclusion of the political executive from the appointment of judges as a **feeling of gratitude towards the government impacts the independence of the judiciary.**
- It was for this very reason that even **B.R. Ambedkar** wanted to insulate the judiciary from political pressures.

Most governments prefer pliable judges but many of our judges remain wedded to their oath and decide cases without fear or favour.

True reciprocity affects humans but since our judges are addressed as 'Lords', they should not have any feeling of gratitude towards anyone.

Connecting the dots:

- Do you think Indian Judiciary is really free from political influence? Is it really independent and flawless? Critically analyze.
- The issue of judicial appointments and elevation is a long pending one. The judiciary and the executive need to come to a common ground and also, reforms to ensure transparency must come from within the judiciary. Comment.

Supreme Court sets deadline for names to select a Lokpal

Introduction:

- The Supreme Court "requested" the Lokpal search committee, constituted to suggest names for appointment of the country's first anti-corruption ombudsman, to complete its task and submit a panel of names by February-end.

- The Supreme Court said the government's stand on completing the appointment of a Lokpal, an ombudsman to protect the common man from corruption in public service and power centres, was "wholly unsatisfactory."

Do you know?

- It has taken five years since the **Lokpal Act, 2013**, received the President's assent on January 1, 2014, for a Search Committee to even begin its work.
- The Search Committee was formed only on September 27, 2018, after **Common Cause, an NGO**, filed a contempt petition against the government over the delay in constituting the authority despite a Supreme Court verdict in April 2017.
- Even after it was formed, the Search Committee has been handicapped because of lack of office space, manpower, infrastructure and a secretariat.
- Therefore, the Court directed the government to provide all infrastructure and facilities that the panel requires to complete its job.
- In the past too (April 2017 verdict), the court had reprimanded the Centre for the delay in creating the institution.

A long-drawn debate

A short history of the Lokpal Bill from the 1960s to the present

1963: The idea of an Ombudsman first came up in Parliament during a discussion on budget allocation for the Law Ministry

1966: The First Administrative Reforms Commission recommended two independent authorities — one at the Centre and one at the

State level — to probe complaints against public functionaries, including MPs

1968: Lokpal Bill introduced in Parliament, but was not passed. Eight attempts were made till 2011 to pass the Bill, but all in vain

2002: The Constitution review commission headed by M.N. Venkatachaliah recommended appointment of the Lokpal and the Lokayuktas. It also recommended that the Prime Minister be kept out of the Lokpal's ambit

2005: The second ARC recommended that a Lokpal be established without delay

2013: Lokpal Act, 2013, passed in Parliament

2016: Lok Sabha agreed to amend the 2013 Act

2017: The SC on April 27 clarified that the Lokpal appointment process need not be stalled merely due to the absence of the Leader of the Opposition, who is a member of the Lokpal selection committee as per the 2013 Act

Pic: https://www.thehindu.com/news/fg1cl7/article24507336.ece/alternates/FREE_615/vbk-lokpal%20graphic%20city

Lack of political will

- Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act came into force on January 16, 2014. But before the UPA could appoint a Lokpal, it was unseated by the current NDA in the general election four months later.
- The NDA is now six months away from completing its own term, but there is still no Lokpal.
- It's not just this government, even previous governments did not want a Lokpal because it's a revolutionary law.
- The 2014 act also called upon states to appoint a Lokayukta within a year of its coming to force. But now 13 states do not have a Lokayukta — while some have temporary vacancies, seven states haven't ever had a Lokayukta.
- The Administrative Reforms Commission headed by Morarji Desai in 1966 recommended the setting up of a Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayuktas in states. There were nine failed attempts between 1968 and 2011 to pass a Lokpal and Lokayuktas bill.

Just as the Centre has dragged its feet on appointing a Lokpal, several states have done the same with the Lokayukta, with the apex court asking them to expedite the process.

Why the delay in appointing Lokpal?
- One of the members on the selection committee for appointing the Lokpal is the leader of the opposition. Since the post is vacant (no opposition party won the requisite 10% of Lok Sabha seats in 2014), the government has said it cannot appoint a Lokpal till the law is amended to include the leader of the single largest opposition party. The apex court said this should not delay the appointment.
- Nothing except the lack of political will to establish the Lokpal can explain years of delay.

Connecting the dots:
- What is an ombudsman? Discuss its efficacy as an institutional measure to curb corruption.

Need for strong judiciary in a market economy like India

Introduction

- Since the 1991 economic reforms, India has improved tremendously in almost all economic indicators, and is now one of the fastest growing nations in the world.
- Various economic policies of the current government have enabled the economy to move faster than ever before.

- These include tax reforms leading to the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax, reforms making India more competitive in the 'Ease of Doing Business' index, and implementation of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.
- But it has never been more important to also strengthen the quality of the material which makes up the engine of the economy, i.e. India's institutions.

An inefficient Judiciary

- As a democracy, India has an advantage: the roots of all its institutions are strong.
- However, they have simply failed to grow with the growing population and with increasing demands. (An inefficient judiciary)
- The judicial system, in particular, is far from reaching the pace required for efficient functioning.

Importance of the judiciary in a market economy

Three things are crucial for the market economy to function efficiently:

(1) transparency in information,

(2) efficient dispute settlements, and

(3) contract enforcement in a time-bound manner powered by an effective judiciary.

In a market economy, the **government has little role to play in transactions among players**. However, it plays an effective role by setting up efficient dispute settlement mechanisms, so that the costs of transactions are minimal.

In such an economy, the **judiciary plays the pivotal role** by enforcing contracts in the case of disputes through minimal costs.

Concerns:

- Over the years, and with the advent of the Internet, India has taken a leap towards transparency of information. However, little progress has been made in the case of dispute settlement mechanisms due to an inefficient judiciary.
- Economic Survey of 2017-18 had also pitched for the need for 'Timely Justice'.
- Poor working capacity of Supreme Court and High Courts; Huge numbers of pending cases; Poor GDP expenditure on administration of justice are some of the major issues.

Conclusion:

- The focus on the judiciary should increase for better.
- If the official dispute settlement mechanism does not deliver justice in a time-bound manner, the market players try to bypass the system by paying rents to government officials, a system that became customary in the License Raj.
- Strong institutions are the key to move India up the economic ladder. Otherwise, India will remain a land of crony capitalists.

Connecting the dots:
- Critically analyse the reasons behind justice delivery being delayed in India and the associated effects on a market economy like India.
- The judicial system has simply failed to grow with the growing population and with increasing demands. Do you agree? What can be the practical solutions to this problem? Discuss.

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 proposed construction of the Mekedatu reservoir on Cauvery river by Karnataka.
- TN claimed that 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 violates Supreme Court verdict.
- 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.

SOCIAL ISSUE/WELFARE PROGRAMMES

Reservation to the economically backward sections

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Reservation issue; Polity

In news:

- Centre plans 10% reservation to the economically backward sections in the general category.
- Those who have an annual salary of less than ₹8 lakh per year and possess less than 5 acres of land will be able to avail themselves of reservation in educational institutions and jobs.
- A Constitution Amendment Bill was approved by the Cabinet in this regard.
- The Bill will also cover those from the Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and other minority communities.
- The quota will be over and above the existing 50% reservation to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes (OBC).
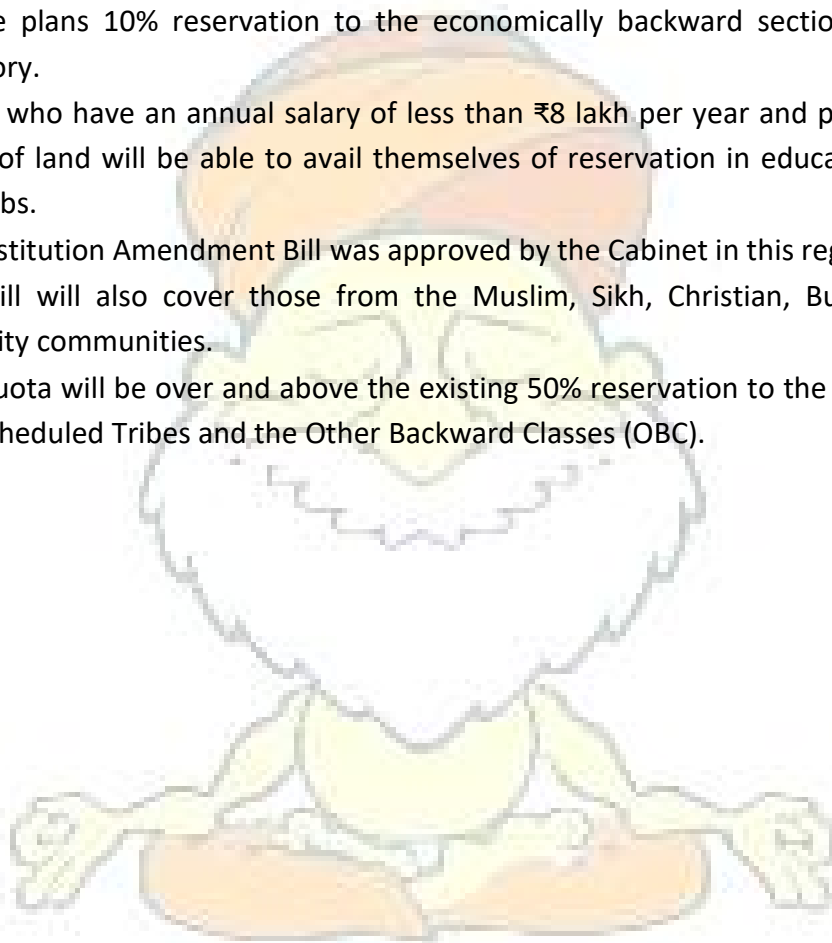
Reserved category

A look at the details of the **10%** quota and its ramifications

ELIGIBILITY

■ People earning less than **₹8 lakh** annually

■ People who own farm land below **5 acres**

■ People who own a house measuring less than **1,000 sq ft**

BACKGROUND

■ In its famous Indra Sawhney judgment, the Supreme Court had set a cap of **50%** on quotas

■ Hence, a Constitution Amendment Bill would be required as the Constitution does not provide for reservation on the basis of economic criteria
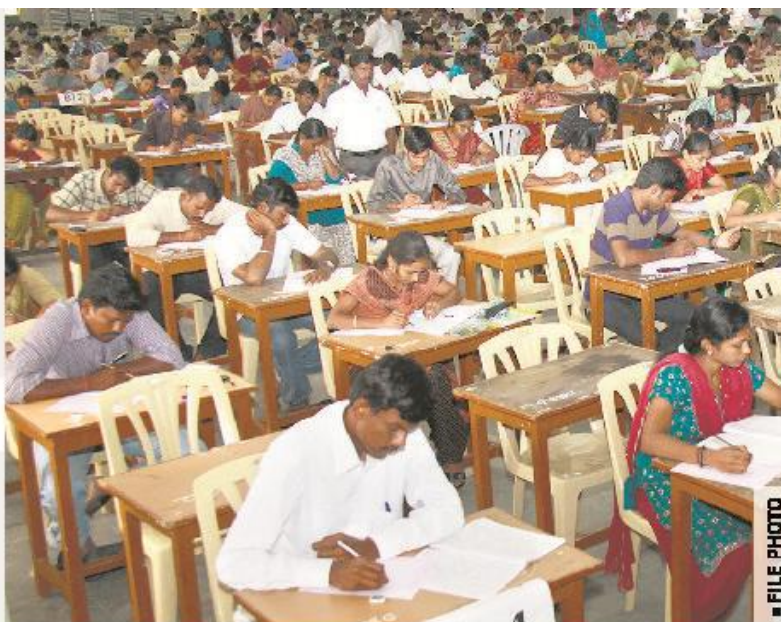
■ FILE PHOTO

PARLIAMENT PROCEDURE

■ **NEED FOR AN AMENDMENT:** The proposed quota for the poor among the upper castes will be over and above the existing 50% reservation. The government is likely to amend Article 15(4), 16(4)

■ **ARTICLE 368:** The Bill must be passed in each House by an absolute majority (over 50% of the total membership) and a two-thirds majority of members present and voting

Pic:
**https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/08/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/23c0b880_2651
798_101_mr.jpg**

Do you know?

- Indira Sawhney case – In this case, Supreme Court had capped reservation at 50%.
- The judgment also held that Economic backwardness cannot be the sole criterion.
- Why Constitution Amendment Bill?
- Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution will have to be amended for the implementation of the decision.
- The government proposes to bring the 10% over and above the 49% quota — 15% for Scheduled Castes, 7% for Scheduled Tribes and 27% for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes, including widows and orphans of any caste, which is permitted. But a total 59% (49%+10%) quota would leave other candidates with just 41% government jobs or seats. This may amount to "sacrifice of merit" and violate Article 14.

10% quota for economically weaker sections

Context:

- Union Cabinet has cleared a Bill to be brought in Parliament, seeking to provide **10% reservation** in government higher education institutions and government jobs **to the economically backward** among the 'general category'.
- This refers to non-Dalits, non-Other Backward Classes and non-tribals — essentially, the upper castes or so-called 'forwards'.

Who qualifies for the proposed quota?
- The quota is targeted at economically weaker sections among the upper castes.
- General category individuals, all members of whose family together earn less than Rs 8 lakh per annum, and who have less than five acres of agricultural land, will qualify.
- Individuals whose families own or possess more agricultural land, or a residential flat of area 1,000 sq ft or larger, or a residential plot of area 100 yards or more in notified municipalities and 200 yards or more in areas other than notified municipalities, will not qualify.

Article 340 of the Constitution
- Article 340 mandated that the government identify "classes" which were "socially and educationally backward", and implement measures "to remove such difficulties [so] as to improve their condition".
- Also Article 340 (1) provided for Appointment of a Commission to investigate the conditions of backward classes.

Kaka Saheb Kalelkar Committee
- The **first Backward Classes Commission** was appointed under Article 340(1) in 1953 under the Chairmanship of *Kaka Saheb Kalelkar*.
- The Commission was set up to **determine criteria to identify people as socially and educationally Backward Classes**, and to recommend steps to ameliorate their condition.
- In its report, the Commission interpreted the term "socially and educationally backward classes as relating primarily to social hierarchy based on caste".

B P Mandal Committee
- Second Backward Classes Commission was appointed in 1978 under B P Mandal to review the state of the Backward Classes.
- This report recommended 27.5% reservations in government jobs for OBCs, stirring a hornet's nest in North Indian politics, with ramifications that continue to be felt today.

What would it take for the quota to become reality?

- The quota prescribed for education extends even to private sector institutions. To implement this, it will need a Constitution Amendment to specifically include economic deprivation as a criterion for affirmative action.
- This is because under **Article 15** (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth) and **Article 16** (equality of opportunity in matters of public employment) of the Constitution, affirmative action is allowed to correct for social and educational backwardness.
- The **124th Constitution Amendment Bill** will have to be ratified in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, by at least **two thirds of members present and voting**, and **by the legislatures** of not less than half the states.
- **Article 15(4)** empowers the State to "make any provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4)** provides "for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens, which in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State".
- The term "backward class of citizens" has been generally understood to include the SCs, STs, and Socially and Educationally Backward Castes (SEdBCs).

Indira Sawhney case

- A nine-judge bench had struck down a provision that earmarked 10% for the economically backward on the ground that **economic criteria cannot be the sole basis to determine backwardness**.
- Any attempt to amend the Constitution to extend what is limited to the "socially and educationally backward" to those economically weak is problematic.

In violation of equality norm

- At present, the affirmative action is restricted to Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs)—cumulatively adding up to 50%. The additional reservation will mean upping the reservation quota to 60%.
- When quotas are increased by State governments that **exceeding the 50% limit, offends the equality norm**.
- In **Nagaraj (2006)**, a Constitution Bench ruled that **equality is part of the basic structure** of the Constitution.
- It said the 50% ceiling, among other things, was a constitutional requirement without which the structure of equality of opportunity would collapse.
- There has been a string of judgments against reservations that breach the 50% limit.

Do you know?
- Reservations have been traditionally provided to undo historical injustice and social exclusion suffered over a period of time.
- The original idea of reservation for SCs and STs was premised on correcting deprivation forced upon them by centuries of prejudice.
- Therefore, the present move (of providing 10% quota) can dilute the original idea of affirmative action.

Questions raised by critics –
- Can financial incapacity warrant special treatment?
- Can reservations be extended to those with social and educational capital solely on the basis of what they earn?
- Whether electoral behaviour continues to be defined in this country around religious and caste denominations?

Connecting the dots:
- Write a brief note on SC judgment in Indira Sawhney and Nagraj Case. What are your views on recent move of 10% reservation in government higher education institutions and government jobs to the economically backward among the 'general category'?

States' approval not needed for quota Bill

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian Polity – Constitution and Amendment; Fundamental Rights

In news:
- Constitution **124th Amendment** Bill, 2019 dealing with creating a 10% quota for the economically weaker sections (EWS) does not require ratification by Legislative Assemblies.
- As per the Article 368, an amendment to a **fundamental right coming under Part III of the Constitution need not be sent to the States' Legislative Assemblies for ratification.**

New clauses to Article 15 and 16
- 124th CA Bill adds new clauses to Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution.
- The **new clause (6) to Article 15** allows the government to carve reservation for the economically weaker sections of society in higher educational institutions, including private ones, whether they are aided or not by the State. Minority educational institutions are exempted.

- Likewise, the **new clause (6) to Article 16** provides for quota for economically deprived sections in the initial appointment in government services.

Open to judicial review
- As per the experts, economic reservation law is open for judicial review.
- The Constitution does not provide for economic reservation.
- The Indira Sawhney judgment has capped the reservation limit to 50%. Now, the new Bill increases reservation to 60%.
- In the judgment, the Court had held that economic backwardness cannot be the sole criterion for reservation.

10% quota for the economically weaker sections (EWS): Implications and Alternatives

Introduction:

In **previous editorial or Daily News Analysis (DNA)**, we read about –
- Who qualifies for the proposed quota?
- Article 340 of the Constitution
- Kaka Saheb Kalelkar Committee
- B P Mandal Committee
- What would it take for the quota to become reality?
- Indira Sawhney case
- Why current 10% quota for EWS is in violation of equality norm?

In today's article, we will understand –
- Why instead of addressing inequality, the 10% quota for economically weaker sections **creates huge anxieties**?
- Potential implications
- Alternatives

Fast recap:
- Constitution **124th Amendment Bill**, 2019 deals with creating a 10% quota for the economically weaker sections (EWS)
- **Article 340** mandates that the government identify "classes" which were "socially and educationally backward", and implement measures "to remove such difficulties [so] as to improve their condition".

- Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 16 (equality of opportunity) needs to be amended.
- **Article 15(4)** empowers the State to "make any provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
- **Article 16(4)** provides "for the reservation of appointments or posts in favour of any backward class of citizens, which in the opinion of the State, is not adequately represented in the services under the State".
- The term "backward class of citizens" has been generally understood to include the SCs, STs, and Socially and Educationally Backward Castes (SEdBCs).

Why reservation is needed?
- Due to deep inequalities prevalent in access to education and jobs based on caste and socio-economic status.
- In case of reservation for SCs and STs, to undo historical injustice and social exclusion suffered over a period of time
- Also to correct deprivation forced upon them by centuries of prejudice.

Therefore, affirmative action (or positive discrimination) makes a lot of sense.

Who qualifies for the proposed quota?
- The quota is targeted at economically weaker sections among the upper castes.
- General category individuals, all members of whose family together earn less than Rs 8 lakh per annum, and who have less than five acres of agricultural land, will qualify.
- Individuals whose families own or possess more agricultural land, or a residential flat of area 1,000 sq ft or larger, or a residential plot of area 100 yards or more in notified municipalities and 200 yards or more in areas other than notified municipalities, will not qualify.

Vague criteria –

Criteria 1: According to one criteria mentioned in the Bill, those that are currently applied to the definition of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) creamy layer are the ones to be used.

- We know that, OBC creamy layer has been created to exclude people who are clearly well off, however, the EWS quota, in contrast, is expected to focus on the poor. It is not clear how useful they would be.

Criteria 2: Income threshold of ₹8 lakh per annum

- According to National Sample Survey (NSS) of 2011-12, the annual per capita expenditure for 99% of households falls under this threshold, even when we take inflation into account.
- Even as per the India Human Development Survey (IHDS), the annual household incomes of 98% of households are less than ₹8 lakh.

Criteria 3: Amount of land owned and size of home

- Even after applying all these criteria for exclusion, the Bill would still cover over 95% of the households.
- Therefore, who are excluded from the reservation? Almost no one.

Implications:
While the benefits of the EWS quota are likely to be minimal, the cost may be higher than one anticipates.

First implication: It affects every category individuals

- We know that, the additional reservation will mean upping the reservation quota to 60%.
- It is important to remember that general category jobs are open to everyone, including Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST) and OBC individuals.
- Thus, by removing 10% jobs from the "open" category, it reduces the opportunities for currently reserved groups.

For instance, consider OBC individuals. OBC reservation is limited to 27% of the seats whereas the OBC population is more than 40% of the population. Now the remaining individuals have to compete with 40% open category instead of 50%.

Second implication: Getting caste certificates

- Actual implementation of the EWS quota could be challenging.
- Already, a large number of SC/ST/OBC households report difficulties in obtaining these certificates.
- Now large section of people would require caste certificates.

Third implication: Skill demand in specialised fields

- This is an era where skill demands are rapidly outpacing supply of candidates in specialised fields, therefore, the EWS quota increases the constraints.

The way ahead:

- There is a **need for an enhanced and more effective reservation policy** so that we can genuinely see an end to the entrenched inequalities in Indian society in the medium term.
- We need effective **solutions that would make reservations redundant in 50 years**.
- On one hand, **50% reservation** looks very large; however, in the grand scheme of India's population it is a **blunt and at times ineffective instrument**.

Ground realities:
- There has been increase in large number of SCs taking the civil services examination with the perception that it is easier for SCs to be recruited via the reserved quota.
- However, statistics from the Union Public Service Commission provide a sobering view of ground realities.
- In 2014, only 0.14% applicants to the UPSC were selected. Moreover, the **general category and OBCs have the highest success rate**, about 0.17%, and SCs have the lowest, about 0.08%.
- The % of SC candidates who made it past the preliminary examination is also less compared to other category candidates.
- One might say that many of these candidates are not qualified for these jobs.

This suggests that in spite of the grievances of upper castes, reserved category applicants are not hugely advantaged. (Statistics from other fields may tell a similar story.)

Alternatives:
1. **Spread the benefits of reservations** as widely as possible within the existing framework and ensure that individuals use their reserved category status only once in their lifetime. This would require that anyone using reservations to obtain a benefit such as college admission must register his/her Aadhaar number and she would be ineligible to use reservations for another benefit (e.g. a job) in the future.
2. **Focus on basic skills:** It is important to recognise that future economic growth in India is going to come from the private sector and entrepreneurship. In order to ensure that all Indians, regardless of caste, class and religion, are able to partake in economic growth, we must focus on basic skills. We need to focus on reducing inequalities where they first emerge, within primary schools.
3. **Bring reforms and modifications**: Reservation system was developed in a different era that we have not had the time or the inclination to think about its success or to examine possible modifications. The system deserves serious re-evaluation.

Connecting the dots:
- The Reservation system that was put in place during the early years of the Republic deserves serious re-evaluation in an era when technology has paved the way for

deploying a better equipped arsenal. Do you agree with this view? Give arguments in favour of your answer.

10% reservation in all admissions for 2019-20

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and programmes; Social/Welfare issue

In news:
- The 10% reservation for the economically weaker sections in the general category will be implemented in all colleges and universities, including private institutions, from 2019-20.
- This quota will be over and above the existing quotas for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes, which will also be implemented in private institutions.

Tribals of West Bengal battling food scarcity: study

Part of: GS Mains II – Health issue; vulnerable section; Social/Welfare issue

In news:

According to a survey report,

- About 31% of tribal households in West Bengal face food scarcity in varying degrees.
- West Bengal is home to a over five million tribals, with 6% of the India's tribal population of 100 million.
- But in many areas, tribals of the State are "far behind" in terms of human development.

KEY FINDINGS

66.6%	61%	8%	14%	12%	50%	53%
Adivasi households that do not have proper drainage systems	Adivasi patients seeking treatment from private practitioners	Children of respondents who walk more than 1 km to attend primary school	Population aware of their rights under the 'Recognition of Forests Rights Act, 2006'	Surveyed households found to be unable to afford food more than twice a day	Students pursuing elementary education reportedly taking private tuitions	Population involved in income generating work, including children

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Major factors:

- Poverty-born vices like alcoholism [and] the fragility of the public health system have resulted in a much lower life chances among the Adivasis.
- Degradation of forest and environmental degradation are cited as two more reasons for "reduced availability of natural nutrients" resulting in early deaths.
- The work participation rate [WPR] is higher among the Adivasis in Bengal "forcing the children of schoolgoing age to discontinue their studies in order to fend [for] themselves and support the families.

J&K IAS topper quits in protest against killings

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Human Rights Issue; Threat to Secularism, Unity and Diversity

In news:
- Shah Faesal, the Jammu & Kashmir resident who topped the Indian Administrative Service examination in 2010, resigned from service.
- He cited that the "marginalisation" of Muslims and the continued killings in the State as reason for his resignation.
- His resignation comes as a protest against the unabated killings in Kashmir, and lack of any sincere reach out from the Union Government.

Other concerns:
- Marginalisation and invisiblisation of around 200 million Indian Muslims at the hands of Hindutva forces.
- Reducing Indian Muslims to second-class citizens.
- Insidious attacks on the special identity of the J&K State.
- Growing culture of intolerance and hate in the mainland India.

Track record on human rights

Part of: GS Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Human Rights and Fundamental Rights Issue

In news:
- Recently, India's Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations expressed concern over the **"politicisation of human rights as a foreign policy tool"**, while addressing the work of the UN and the Human Rights Council.
- Within the country, many lawyers, activists, academics and human rights organisations have pointed to the deteriorating climate in relation to human rights.

Do you know?
- If India seeks to become a torchbearer of democracy and take on an increasingly significant mantle in the international realm, it should uphold international laws and standards pertaining to human rights.

Negative comments:
- First, there has been enhanced scrutiny by international experts of the deteriorating human rights environment in India, particularly in 2018.
- Second, the magnification of domestic rights violations in the international sphere is inevitable.
- Third, the metric of human rights and compliance with international law cannot be dismissed.
- UN experts have expressed concern about the "patterns of events", including arrest, detention and torture prior to summary executions of 59 individuals since March 2017.
- Experts had expressed concerns over Assam National Register of Citizens process (in photo), online hate speech, the killing of journalist Gauri Lankesh, jailing of human rights defenders, deportation of Rohingya refugees, and excessive police response to protests.

India's record of upholding human rights is abysmal; it must do better.

Centre proposes to hike pensions

Part of: GS Prelims II – Social/Welfare issue; Social Security Schemes; Govt policies and schemes

In news:
- Union Rural Development Ministry has proposed to increase the monthly pensions of the elderly poor, disabled and widows from ₹200 to ₹800.
- For those above the age of 80, the proposal is to increase the pension from ₹500 to ₹1,200 a month.
- If implemented, it would lead to additional annual cost implication of ₹18,000 crore to the Finance Ministry.

Poll sop

Existing Central scheme

- Covers more than **three crore** people
- Includes the elderly, the disabled and widows
- ₹**200**/month for those under 80 years and ₹**500**/month for those above 80 years
- Annual budget: ₹**9,975** crore

Rural Development Ministry's proposal

- For existing beneficiaries
- ₹**800**/month for those under 80 years and ₹**1,200**/month for those above 80 years
- Estimated annual budget: ₹**30,000** crore

Pic: https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/22/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/df6c754c_2681458_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

- Rural Development Ministry administers the National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP).
- A study has been launched to consider doubling the number of people covered by the scheme, a promise originally made in last year's Budget.
- Discussions are also being held with the State governments on a proposal to merge the Central and State pension schemes.

About National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP)

- It came into effect from 15th August,1995
- It represents a significant step towards the fulfillment of the Directive Principles in Article 41 of the Constitution.
- It is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.
- It provides financial assistance to the elderly, widows and persons with disabilities in the form of social pensions.
- It is a welfare programme being administered by the Ministry of Rural Development.
- However, this programme is being implemented in rural areas as well as urban areas.

- NSAP at present, comprises of Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS), Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS), Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS), National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS) and Annapurna.

Middle class, redefined

Context:

- The below article provides the definition of "middle class" and the current government's policies or measures taken towards them.
- Some critics have raised questions whether the government is doing enough for the middle class.

Definition of Middle Class:
- A formal definition of the term "Middle Class" does not exist, though some efforts to provide an outline have been made.
- One view considers individuals earning US $2 to $13 a day (i.e. an income of roughly Rs 50,000 to Rs 3.2 lakh per annum) as middle class.
- Another view takes into account consumption pattern to identify middle class. As per this, individuals/families who own basic lifestyle goods such as a fridge, two-wheeler, colour television, etc. can be called middle class.

A middle class family can therefore be envisioned as one where one or more members is gainfully employed and they may own some basic lifestyle goods such as those stated above.
Further, it is reasonable to consider that this class is liable to pay income taxes (that is, earns at least Rs 2.5 lakh per annum).
Has government failed to target this middle class?
Considering the above definition, one can notice that the Union government has rolled out a clear development strategy targeting the middle class.
Government's strategy has three broad components.
(1) The first involves **implementing measures that put more money into the pockets of the middle class, helping them save more**.
(2) The second relates to **creating an environment that reduces their day-to-day hassles** and stresses, thus simplifying their daily lives.
(3) And the last pertains to **empowering them and creating suitable development opportunities**.

1. Increased savings for the middle class

- **Inflation brought down:** The government has deftly brought down double-digit inflation (that persisted before May 2014) to around 3-5 per cent. This has reduced the day-to-day expenses incurred by the middle class, but has also reduced interest amounts paid by them for various loans.
- **Low interest rates:** Cost of most loans such as home loans, auto loans, education loans is less compared to that before May 2014.
- **Tax sops:** several changes were also made in the income tax structure –
  - o **tax exemption limit** was increased from Rs 2 lakh to Rs 2.5 lakh and from Rs 2.5 lakh to Rs 3 lakhs for senior citizens.
  - o increase in **deduction limit** under Section 80C from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 1.5 lakh
  - o **reduction in tax rate** (from 10 per cent to 5 per cent) for individuals earning less than Rs 5 lakh per annum.

Together, all these measures increased savings for the middle class to a substantial extent.

2. Making day-to-day life simple for the middle class

- **Physical connectivity:** On a daily basis, a majority of the middle class ends up spending hours on personal/office-related commute. To reduce this daily stress, faster and more comfortable transit modes such as metros are being provided. Besides intra-city/town connectivity, inter-city/town connectivity is also being augmented by expanding roads and highways, railways, aviation and waterway networks.
- **General services:** Government has taken measures to offer public services in a simple and cost-efficient manner. Today, it is considerably easier and faster to get a passport made or to get income tax issues resolved. Senior citizens can submit life certifications digitally.

3. Empowerment of Middle Class and create development opportunities

- **Increased credit flow:** A host of initiatives are being taken to simplify the regulatory environment for businesses and entrepreneurs. (Stand-Up India, MUDRA, etc)
- Impart necessary technical skills to youth.
- Capacities of higher educational institutes have been increased considerably.

Conclusion:

- Today's middle class is aspirational. It is financially prudent but at the same time willing to take risks. What it needs is an enabling ecosystem to realise its full potential.
- The current government has attempted to do this through its various initiatives.

Connecting the dots:

- Define the term "middle-class". Discuss the recent measures taken by the government which has enabled conducive ecosystem to realise its full potential.

WOMEN/CHILDREN ISSUE

Survey of childcare institutions

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

In news:
Research and survey of 9,589 shelters across nation found that –

- Most children at childcare institutions are not orphans, but belong to family structures that are unable to look after them.
- More than a lakh inmates are from single parent homes (unwed mothers, abandoned wives, widows and in some cases single fathers).
- In other words, children of single parents constituted a third of the total number of total children in homes.

Kerala records a rising graph of crimes against children

Part of: Mains II – Social/Welfare issue; Children Issue – Crimes against children

In news:

- There has been a steady increase in crimes committed against children in Kerala.
- Government officials are attributing this to increased reporting of crimes because of better awareness, but social workers contend that crimes against children have indeed increased.

Raging menace

Total number of crimes against children in Kerala during the period 2008-2018 (till October)

Year	Value
2008	549
2009	589
2010	596
2011	1,452
2012	1,324
2013	1,877
2014	2,391
2015	2,384
2016	2,881
2017	3,478
2018 (till October)	3,278
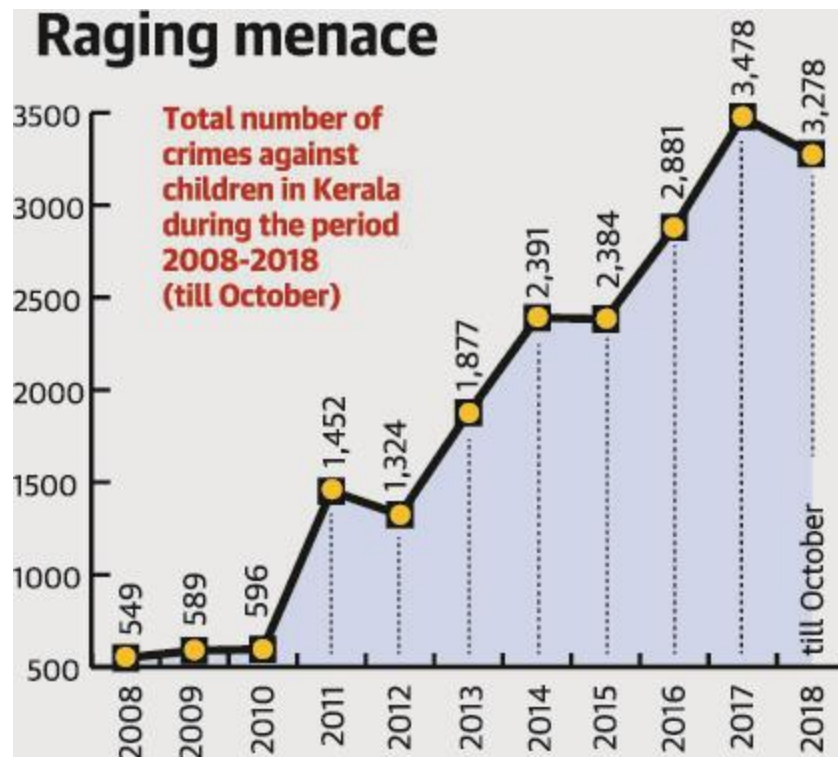
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Practice of devadasi custom still prevalent

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

In news:

- More than 36 years after the **Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act** of 1982 was passed, the State government is yet to issue the rules for administering the law.
- Devadasi custom - practice of dedicating young girls to temples as an offering to appease the gods
- Practice of devadasi custom is still prevalent in Karnataka and Goa (due to apathetic approach of the legislature and enforcement agencies)
- Girls from socio-economically marginalised communities and special children, with physical or mental disabilities, are more vulnerable to be dedicated as devadasis.
- The devadasi system continues to receive customary sanction from families and communities.

Other concerns:
- Reporting of cases pertaining to the custom is very low.
- Dedicated children are not explicitly recognised as children in need of care and protection under Juvenile Justice (JJ) Act of 2015.
- India's extant immoral trafficking prevention law or the proposed Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill 2018, also do not recognise these dedicated girls as victims of trafficking for sexual purposes.

Preventing student suicides

Introduction:

- There has been a considerable increase in number of cases of student suicides.
- More youths are taking their lives due to the fear of failing in examinations, constant flak from teachers, bullying from peers, family pressure and a loss of a sense of a decent future.
- There have been frequent news reports of suicides taking place in coaching centres that train students for medical and engineering entrance examinations.
- The deaths of 49 students in Navodaya Vidyalaya schools in the last five years; deaths of three students preparing for the IIT entrance examinations in Kota etc. has brought the issue of youth suicides to the fore again.

Do you know?
- According to the **National Crime Records Bureau**, between 2014 and 2016, **26,476 students committed suicide in India**. Of them, 7,462 committed suicide due to failure in various examinations.
- The rising number of these cases should provoke a serious discussion on **the way in which outcomes of education are perceived** in India.

Failure of education system to generate more jobs
- The instrumental value of education in India is its **potential in generating socio-economic and cultural capital through a promise of decent job opportunities** in the future. But the education system has not been successful in generating enough job options.
- For instance, the International Labour Organisation's World Employment and Social Outlook Trends Report of 2018 says that in 2019, the job status of nearly 77% of Indian workers would be vulnerable and that 18.9 million people would be unemployed.

- With their job future being so bleak, **students are put under constant pressure** to perform. They have failed to learn to enjoy the process of education.

Instead, the constant pressure and stress has generated social antipathy and detachment among them.

Psychological or emotional factors and social factors
- **Sociologist Emile Durkheim** had famously hypothesised that suicides are a result of not just psychological or emotional factors but **social factors** as well.
- With a loss of community and other social bonds, students in schools, colleges and coaching centres end up taking their lives.

Lack of trained counsellors
- According to a study, merely one or two training sessions are included to sensitise the teachers and principals regarding safety and security of the children and to prevent suicidal tendencies.
- Provisions under Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) recognise the role of guidance and counselling services to students.
- There has been significant decrease in providing guidance and counselling services as they are viewed as "non-productive" areas of education. (due to poor budgetary allocation)

The way forward:
- Only setting up of expert committees and counsellors in schools have not been able to solve the problem. The deep-rooted causes must be addressed.
- The government must undertake a comprehensive study on the reasons behind these suicides.
- The curriculum should be designed in ways that stress the importance of mental exercises and meditation. (The Delhi government's initiative on the 'Happiness Curriculum' may be a step in the right direction.)
- **Justice Roopanwal Commission** had recommended for 12 measures with regards to higher education.
- One of them stressed on **making Equal Opportunity Cells** with an anti-discrimination officer functional in universities and colleges.

Finally, it is high time to reinvent the educational ecosystem in ways that impregnate new meanings, new ideas of living, and renewed possibilities that could transform a life of precarity into a life worth living.

Connecting the dots:

- The so called education hubs that prepare students for entrance examinations are turning into suicide hotspots of the country? What reasons would you attribute for this trend? Are students too stressed today? What is the solution to this problem? Discuss the need of change in societal perception of success and failure in this regard.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II –Social/Welfare issue; Education reforms; Children issue

In news:
According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018 –
- There has been some improvement in the reading and arithmetic skills of lower primary students in rural India over the last decade.
- However, skills of Class VIII students have actually seen a decline.
- More than half of Class VIII students cannot correctly solve a numerical division problem and more than a quarter of them cannot read a primary level text.
- Enrolment is increasing and the percentage of children under 14 who are out of school is less than 4%.
- The gender gap is also shrinking.

Conclusion
- Without strong foundational skills, it is difficult for children to cope with what is expected of them in the upper primary grades.
- A majority of children need immediate help in acquiring foundational skills in literacy and numeracy.

Quantitative inaptitude

Basic math levels remain low. In Standard VIII, more than half of all children are struggling with division, as per the ASER rural survey

CLASS VI-VIII
% of rural children who can correctly solve numerical division problems in different grades

■ 2014 ■ 2016 ■ 2018

Conclusion: Hardly any increase in learning levels in upper primary

CLASS VIII
% of students who can read a textbook of Class II level

■ %

Conclusion: 1 out of 4 children is leaving Standard VIII without basic reading skills

'BEYOND BASICS': OLDER CHILDREN AND EVERYDAY CALCULATIONS
In the age group 14-16, there is a gender difference in basic math capability. All India, 50.1% of boys in the age group 14-16 can do division. For girls, the figure is 44.1%

% SOLVING CORRECTLY

■ BOYS ■ GIRLS
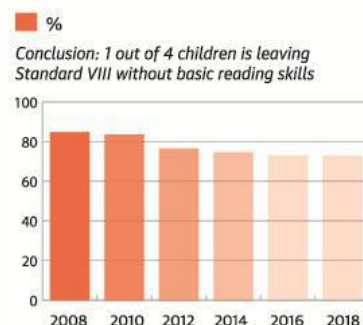
CLASS V: LEARNING LEVELS GRADUALLY IMPROVING SINCE 2016
Nationally, about half of all children can read, and less than a third can do basic arithmetic in rural schools

— % WHO CAN READ CLASS II LEVEL
— % WHO CAN DO DIVISION

SOURCE: ASER 2018

Representational use only
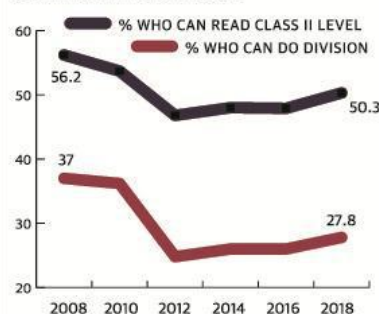
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About Annual Status of Education Report (ASER)

- It is a yearly survey that NGO Pratham has been carrying out since 2006.
- The ASER survey covered almost 5.5 lakh children between the ages of 3 and 16 in 596 rural districts across the country.

Learning little : No Remarkable progress in Rural Primary Education

Introduction:

We recently read about Annual Status of Education Report 2018. According to the report –

- There has been some improvement in the reading and arithmetic skills of lower primary students in rural India over the last decade.
- However, skills of Class VIII students have actually seen a decline.

- More than half of Class VIII students cannot correctly solve a numerical division problem and more than a quarter of them cannot read a primary level text.
- Enrolment is increasing and the percentage of children under 14 who are out of school is less than 4%.
- The gender gap is also shrinking.

Other concerns:
- **Underperformance of Hindi Heartland:** Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Kerala and Haryana did better on the arithmetic question with over 50% students clearing it, compared to Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and even Karnataka, which scored below 20%.
- A significant percentage of students were not even able to recognise letters appropriate for their class, highlighting a severe barrier to learning.

Crux:
- The report shows the prevalence of learning deficit and the poverty of basic reading and arithmetic skills among students in Indian schools.
- Without strong foundational skills, it is difficult for children to cope with what is expected of them in the upper primary grades.
- Hence India continues to stare at a crisis and hence need concerted efforts to be taken at the earliest.

Significance of such assessment:
Assessment provide the quality of learning levels, which can be utilized by the administrator for better policy, because of quality of learning level at early education is important due to –
- The quality of the learning level bears directly on India's future workforce, its competitiveness and the economy.
- India's demographic dividend depends on the learning level of students.
- Since children at the higher primary level is closest to joining the labour market or the next level of education, they need adequate foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy.

The way ahead:
1. An effective review mechanism: Centre should institute a review mechanism involving all stakeholders (both government and private institutions), covering elementary education and middle school.
2. A public consultation on activity-based learning outcomes, deficits in early childhood education, and innovations in better performing States can help.

3. Right to Education Act needs a supportive framework to cater to learners from different backgrounds who often cannot rely on parental support or coaching.
4. Improvement in Curriculum- There is concern that curricular expectations on literacy and numeracy have become too ambitious, requiring reform.
5. Encourage innovation in schools and incentivise good outcomes
6. Bonus pay offered to teachers led to better student scores (Example of Andhra Pradesh)

Connecting the dots:

- Low standards in education, lack of requisite skills and unemployment form a vicious cycle which is detrimental to India's demographic dividend. Comment.
- The need of a comprehensive national education policy is pressing. What in your opinion should be the model policy framework for education in India? Suggest.

Flaws in Early childhood education and Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan scheme

Key pointers:

- **Early childhood education, or ECE**, is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **SDG Target 4.2** states that **by 2030** countries should "ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education".
- **ECE** involves educating children of **0-8 years age group** (It is a critical period)
- During this time, the **foundations of life-long learning are built**, with 90 per cent of all **brain development taking place by age six**.

National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2013)

- Importance of early care and stimulation has been recognised in the National Policy on Early Childhood Care and Education (2013).
- The Policy **aims to provide "developmentally appropriate preschool education** for three to six-year-olds with a more structured and planned school readiness component for five to six-year-olds."

Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan scheme

- Samagra Shiksha – It is an Integrated Scheme to **ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels** of school education.
- The recently created scheme has also brought renewed focus and attention on ECE through the **Integrated Scheme on School Education** that **aims to treat school education "holistically without segmentation from pre-nursery to Class 12".**

There are currently two main avenues for accessing early childhood education in India.

1. **Widely spread 1.3 million anganwadi centres** – run by the Ministry of Women and Child Development across the country under the Integrated Child Development (ICDS) Scheme.
2. Burgeoning private sector – more than 40 per cent of privately managed primary schools offer pre-primary LKG and UKG classes as well.

*Some states in India offer a third possibility as well, in the form of preschool classes integrated within government primary schools, for example in Assam and Jammu & Kashmir.

Concerns:

- According to the RTE Act, enrolment in formal schools should begin at age six, with ECE exposure recommended for children between age three and six.
- However, 26 of India's 35 states and union territories allow children to enter Class 1 at age five.
- Annual Status of Education Report (ASER 2018) indicate that enrolment patterns broadly meet these policy prescriptions. There are major variations, both across the country as well as at different ages. (Some states follow national policy norms which recommends age 3 children be in an ECE programme, while in some states children of age 3 are not enrolled anywhere. There are children who are entering class 1 directly at age 5 or 7)
- These varied pathways in the early years have major consequences for what children experience and learn along the way. (Children in Class 1 are far from homogenous in terms of age.)
- These age-grade distributions have obvious implications for teaching and learning.

Conclusion:

ASER report has demonstrated that getting all children into school, while undoubtedly a major achievement, does not by itself ensure that children are able to learn at the expected level.

ASER data shows that gaps between what children can do and what is expected of them emerge very early in children's school trajectories and widen as they move through the system.

As implementation of the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan rolls out across the country, ASER data on young children suggests that a "one size fits all" solution is unlikely to be successful.

While helping children get a head start in the early years is important, it is critical to ensure that all stakeholders — parents, teachers, policymakers and textbook developers — understand that the **key words are "quality" and "developmentally appropriate"**.

Connecting the dots:

- Examine the factors behind poor learning outcomes in India. How can this be addressed? Discuss.

- The latest ASER survey has shown diminishing education outcomes in India. Discuss the importance of developmentally appropriate preschool education or Early Childhood Education.

The missing women

Introduction

According to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) India Index Baseline Report** by NITI Aayog –
- India's employment generation in the last five years has remained weak.
- 64 per 1,000 persons appear to be unemployed in the working age group of 15-59.
- The problem of unemployment has become more acute for youth and women.

According to the **International Labour Organisation (ILO) report of 2016**,
- Youth are three times as likely as adults to be unemployed.

Sustainable Development Goal 8 says –
- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- By 2020 there should be a substantial reduction in the proportion of youth in the category of Not in Education, Employment and Training.
- As per ILO estimates, 27.5% in India are in this category, of which 8% are men and 49.3% are women.

Status of women in India
- In India, majority of women work under the category of "housewives".
- Unfortunately, in India's economy, neither their contribution nor their presence gets counted in the GDP.
- Women have a low enrolment rate in secondary and higher education.
- The percentage of women not in education, employment and training in all age groups is low compared to men.

The way ahead:
- It is important to understand the causes and consequences of not being in education, employment and training and affirmative actions should follow.
- For example, to promote girls' education, the major schemes which function at the pan-India level are Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao and Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana. These schemes

should focus on recognising the contributions of the youth, particularly the younger cohort of women.

- The patriarchal mindset of the society needs to be changed. This leads to lack of inheritance rights, denial of participation in decision making, poor workforce participation, lack of empowerment and continued financial dependency on male members of the family.
- Policies have to focus on affirmative actions which could pave the way for genuine progress towards Sustainable Development Goals.

As the global community works toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — among them, SDG2, which aims to end hunger and malnutrition by 2030 — women can be the key agents of change in agriculture, nutrition and rural development. With better access to information, training, and technology, women can alter food production and consumption so that land and resources are used sustainably.

Connecting the dots:

- Real empowerment of women lies in ensuring their economic liberty. Do you agree? Substantiate.
- Examine the current employment scenario of women in India. Discuss why it is crucial to create more formal employment for women.
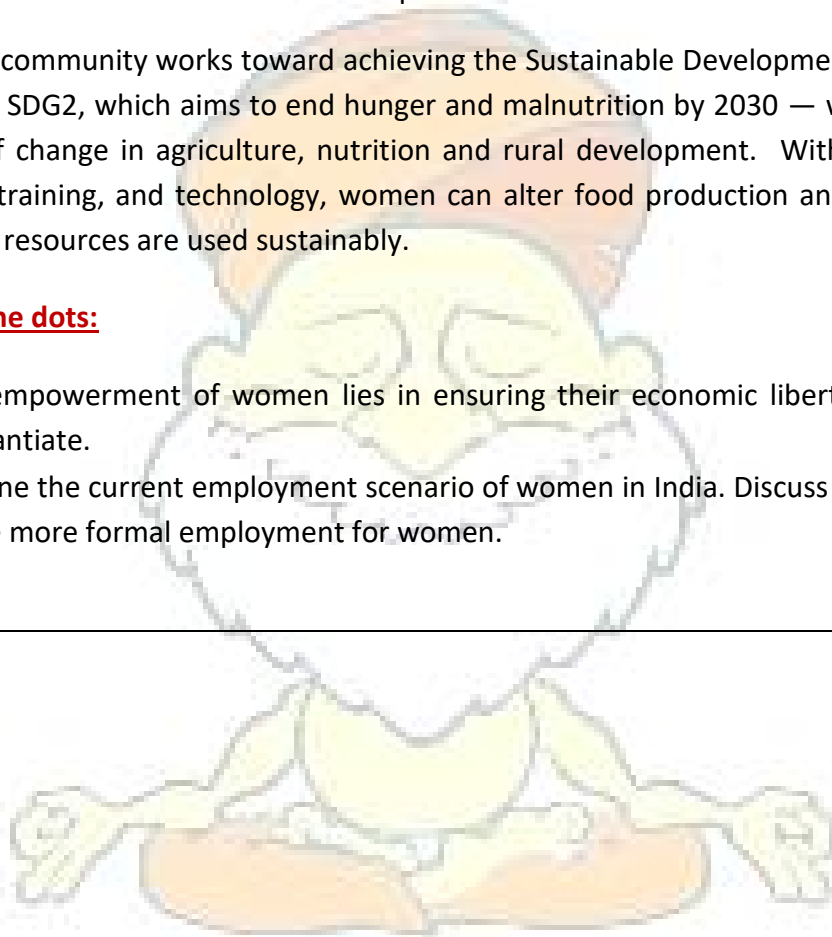
HEALTH ISSUE

Plain packaging of tobacco products: the logical next step for tobacco control policy in India

Introduction:

- In December 2012, Australia became the first country to introduce plain packaging following the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) guidelines.
- This year, Thailand and Saudi Arabia will join a growing club of nations introducing plain packaging of tobacco products.
- They are the first in the Asian and Arab regions, respectively, to adopt the tough measure in order to curb tobacco consumption.
- It has also been implemented in France and the United Kingdom (both 2016), Norway and Ireland (both 2017) and New Zealand and Hungary (both 2018). It will be implemented in Uruguay (2019) and Slovenia (2020). The move is under process or being considered in 14 more countries.
- World Trade Organisation (WTO), in June 2018, favoured plain packaging.

Indian context:

- In India, tobacco is the cause of about one million deaths annually.
- India implemented larger 85% pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products from 1 April 2016. However, to remove the last bit of glamour and attraction from the tobacco packs, it must now embrace plain packaging.
- Plain packaging prevents tobacco packs from carrying the tobacco industry brand imagery as mobile billboards. Other than brand and product names displayed in a standard colour and font style, it prohibits the use of logos, colours, brand images or promotional information.
- India has taken several preparatory steps implemented by other countries like Australia and the UK that have introduced plain packaging, for example, stronger smoke-free laws, ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, increase in taxes and a report from civil society task force on plain packaging.
- The trade and investment agreements signed by India are also within the international trade norms relating to public health.

Positive outcomes:

- The percentage of users in India who thought of quitting because of such warning labels increased sharply to 62% (cigarette), 54% (bidi) and 46% (smokeless tobacco users),

according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey 2016-2017, when compared with the survey results of 2009-2010.

- Likewise, tobacco use among those aged 15-24 years showed a six-percentage point reduction (18.4% in 2009-10 to 12.4% in 2016-17).
- The number of tobacco users dropped by eight million.

Conclusion:
- Along with higher taxes and large pictorial warnings, plain packaging can serve as a tool to deter new users and prompt existing users to quit.
- Plain packaging along with other measures led to 0.55 percentage point reduction in smoking prevalence in Australia, translating into at least 1,18,000 fewer smokers.

Connecting the dots:
- Do you think plain packaging of tobacco products and increasing excise duty can truly address the addiction of smoking and it's associated health hazards? Critically examine.

Tobacco companies are targeting children: study

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

In news:

According to a recent **report 'Tiny Targets'** – *(conducted by Consumer Voice and Voluntary Health Association of India)*
- Tobacco companies in India are systematically targeting children as young as eight by **selling tobacco products and placing tobacco advertisements near schools**.
- These tactics, happening all over the country, clearly **violate the Section 5 and 6 of Cigarettes & Other Tobacco Products Act**.
- Despite the prohibition on sales of tobacco products near educational institutions, numerous shops/vendors/points of sale sell and advertise tobacco products around schools.
- The tobacco industry must be held accountable for their aggressive advertising efforts around schools.

Important Value Additions:
- In India, tobacco is the cause of about one million deaths annually.

- India implemented larger 85% pictorial health warnings on all tobacco products from 1 April 2016. However, to remove the last bit of glamour and attraction from the tobacco packs, it must now embrace plain packaging.
- Plain packaging prevents tobacco packs from carrying the tobacco industry brand imagery as mobile billboards. Other than brand and product names displayed in a standard colour and font style, it prohibits the use of logos, colours, brand images or promotional information.
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- The trade and investment agreements signed by India are also within the international trade norms relating to public health.

Lessons from Kerala : Transforming Primary Care

Introduction:

- Primary health care is in crisis. It is underdeveloped in many countries, underfunded in others, and facing a severe workforce recruitment and retention challenge.
- Half the world's population has no access to the most essential health services.

Do you know?

- **1978 Declaration of Alma-Ata** – It united health leaders and highlighted the importance of primary health care as key to delivering better health for all, and to the value of social justice, health equity, and the social determinants of health.
- But even after 40 years later, this vision has not been realised.
- Hence, world leaders declared their **commitment to 'Primary Care'** in recently held (October 2018) **Declaration on Primary Health Care at Astana, Kazakhstan**.
- Now the **Sustainable Development Goals** also provide new impetus to reach universal health coverage via strengthened primary health care.
- The Astana Declaration would "aim to meet all people's health needs across the life course through comprehensive preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative services and palliative care".

List of primary care services
According to Astana Declaration, the following services are part of PHC services –
- vaccination;

- screenings;
- prevention, control and management of non-communicable and communicable diseases;
- care and services that promote, maintain and improve maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health; and
- mental health and sexual and reproductive health

Aardram mission of Kerala
- In 2016, Kerala attempted to re-design its primary care via **Aardram mission**.
- It aimed to transform health care, address the current and future epidemiological situation.
- In the revamped primary care, Kerala tried to provide the above provided PHC services.
- These services cannot be provided without adequate human resources. It is nearly impossible to provide them with the current Indian norm of one primary care team for a population of 30,000. Kerala tried to reduce the target population to 10,000. Even the reduced target turned out to be too high to be effective.

Kerala's experience suggests that providing comprehensive primary care would require at least one team for 5,000 populations.

Lessons learnt from Kerala's experience could provide insights into what needs to be done to ensure the objectives of the Astana Declaration do not remain a statement of pious intentions in India.

Providing the entire set of services is beyond the capacity of medical and nursing graduates without specialised training. Building the capacity of medical and nursing graduates will be even more of a challenge and time taking.

Hence, Kerala has tried to get over this through short courses in specific areas such as management of diabetes mellitus, hypertension, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and depression.

Conclusion:
- Primary Health Care is the most effective, efficient and equitable approach to enhance health, making it a necessary foundation to achieve universal health coverage (UHC).
- The primary care system will be effective only when the providers assume responsibility for the health of the population assigned to them and the population trusts them for their health needs.
- Both are linked to capacity, attitude and support from referral networks and the systemic framework.
- Involving private sector will help in providing good quality primary care.

- The private sector provides primary care in most countries though it is paid for from the budget or insurance. The private sector can provide good quality primary care if there are systems to finance care and if the private sector is prepared to invest in developing the needed capacities. (Therefore, efforts to include of Private Health Provider in Government Policy will help)
- Achieving Universal Health Coverage, one of the Sustainable Development Goals to which India is committed, is not possible without universal primary health care.
- The experience of Kerala in transforming primary care reveals the steepness of the path India will have to cover to reach the goals committed to in the Astana Declaration.

Connecting the dots:
- Achieving Universal Health Coverage, one of the Sustainable Development Goals to which India is committed, is not possible without universal primary health care. Do you agree? Examine.

Open defecation continues

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

In news:
Research and study on the impact of the Swachh Bharat Mission shows that –
- Toilet ownership has increased, however, percentage of people who owned toilets but continued to defecate in the open has remained unchanged between 2014 and 2018.
- Almost 60% of households covered by the survey which did not have a toilet in 2014 had one by 2018.
- Mission has been more successful at toilet construction than at driving behaviour change.
- Approximately 44% of people over two years old in rural Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh still defecate in the open.

Do you know?
- According to the Mission, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan are already open defecation free or ODF states.
- Bihar has achieved 98.97% coverage of toilets for every household, while Uttar Pradesh has achieved 100%, according to government data, although the state has yet to be declared ODF.

Crux – Open defecation levels are still above 40% in ODF States; Swachh Bharat has not brought behavioural change.

Out in the open Despite the construction of toilets, people in rural areas in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh continued the practice of open defecation, a research paper found. Behavioural change is key to achieving zero open defecation, the study argues

Despite the availabilty of a toilet at home, close to 25% defecated in the open in 2014. This proportion stayed the same even in 2018. Young women prefer to use toilets more while older men prefer defecating in the open

SOURCE: CHANGES IN OPEN DEFECATION IN RURAL NORTH INDIA: 2014 - 2018, AASHISH GUPTA ET AL.

Pic:

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Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban and ODF++ certification

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

In news:
According to the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban:
- Seven cities – all in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh – have been certified ODF++
- The certification, an extension of the ODF or Open Defecation Free protocol, means that all the faecal sludge and sewage in these cities is treated scientifically before discharge.

Do you know?
- These are the first cities to qualify under the government's new extended protocol to sustain gains made under the basic ODF protocol.
- Under new norms, cities and towns wanting to be declared ODF+ (Open Defecation Free Plus) must also be free of public urination and not just open defecation.

- The ODF+ and ODF++ protocols (released recently by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs) are the next step for the SBM-U and aim to ensure sustainability in sanitation outcomes.
- The Urban Affairs Ministry is setting up a sub-mission on faecal sludge management under its AMRUT scheme for 500 cities and towns.

Difference between ODF protocol, ODF+ and ODF++
- Original ODF protocol issued in March 2016, said – "A city/ward is notified as ODF city/ward if, at any point of the day, not a single person is found defecating in the open."
- The new ODF+ protocol, issued last week, says that a city, ward or work circle could be declared ODF+ if, "at any point of the day, not a single person is found defecating and/or urinating in the open, and all community and public toilets are functional and well-maintained."
- The ODF++ protocol adds the condition that "faecal sludge/septage and sewage is safely managed and treated, with no discharging and/or dumping of untreated faecal sludge/septage and sewage in drains, water bodies or open areas."

Lancet's diet plan for the world

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

In news:
According to Lancet,
- With the ideal diet, one's life would be less sweet but his/her lifespan would be longer.
- Consumption of sugar and red meat should be cut by 50%.
- Intake of fruits, vegetables, and nuts should increase.
- Such a diet would not only be healthier but also more environment-friendly.
- Unhealthy diets are the leading cause of ill-health worldwide, and following this healthy diet could avoid approximately 11 million premature deaths a year.
- It will help ensure that the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement [on Climate Change] are achieved.

Food	Macronutrient intake (gm/day)	Caloric intake (kcal/day)
Whole grains	232	811
Tubers	50	39
All vegetables	300	78
Fruits	200	126
Dairy foods	250	153
Beef, lamb, pork	14	30
Chicken	29	62
Eggs	13	19
Fish	28	40
Legumes	75	284
All sugars	31	120

What constitutes a healthy diet

Scientific targets for a planetary health diet for an intake of 2,500 Kcal/day

Pic:
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Swine flu cases spike across the country

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue

In news:
As per data released by the **Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)**

- 1694 Swine Flu cases and 49 deaths have been reported in first 2 weeks of January.
- Situation alarming in Rajasthan where 200 people died in 13 months.
- Several States are on alert.
- The high H1N1 flu toll points to a failure to put necessary systems and precautions in place.

State	2018	2019*
Andhra Pradesh	402	24
Delhi	205	168
Gujarat	2,164	210
Haryana	61	128
Maharashtra	2,593	17
Punjab	47	46
Rajasthan	2,375	789
Tamil Nadu	2,812	48
Telangana	1,007	107

Feeling the heat

In 2019, Rajasthan has recorded the maximum cases of swine flu, known for being a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease

SOURCE: INTEGRATED DISEASE SURVEILLANCE PROGRAMME

* till January 13
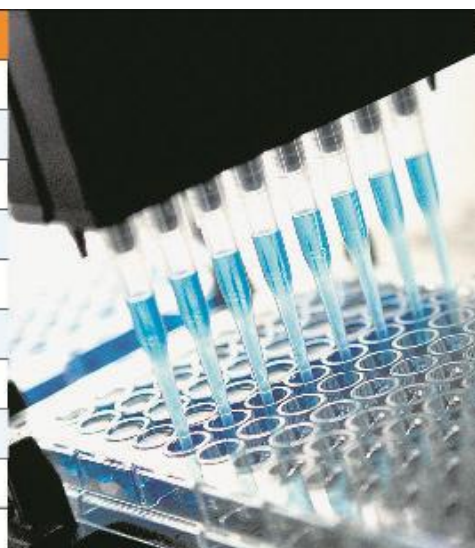
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https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/23/CNI/Chennai/TH/5_09/71e527d2_268 2817_101_mr.jpg

About H1N1 influenza (or swine flu)

- H1N1 virus is the subtype of influenza A virus that was the most common cause of human influenza in 2009. H1N1 flu is also known as swine flu caused by swine influenza virus that is endemic in pigs.
- The 'H' stands for **hemagglutinin** and 'N' for **neuraminidase** – both proteins on the outer layer of the virus.
- It is a **pandemic outbreak** - Means Disease outbreak occurs over a wide geographic area and affects a very high proportion of the population.
- Swine influenza is a **respiratory disease** that occurs in pigs that is caused by the Influenza A virus.
- It's a **highly contagious disease** that can easily spread from person to person.

About Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)

- IDSP was launched with World Bank assistance in November 2004 to detect and respond to disease outbreaks quickly, for a period up to March 2010.
- The project was restructured and extended up to March 2012.
- The project continues in the 12th Plan with domestic budget as Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme under NHM for all States with Budgetary allocation of 640 Cr.
- Under IDSP data is collected on epidemic prone diseases on weekly basis.

India's sluggish health spending: Moving away from 1%

Key pointers:

- **India's health achievements are very modest** compared to large and populous countries such as China, Indonesia or Brazil.
- **India's neighbours have better health indicators than India.** (Example - Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Bhutan). They have made great strides on the development front.

Important trend - "health financing transition"
- As countries become richer, they tend to invest more on health and share of health spending that is paid out of the pocket declines.
- Economic, political and technological factors move countries through this health financing transition.

Concerns:
- Unlike other countries India has not invested in health sufficiently, though its fiscal capacity to raise general revenues increased substantially from 5% of GDP in 1950-51 to 17% in 2016-17.
- India currently spends a little over 1% of GDP on health, far below Singapore which has the lowest public spend on health at 2.2% of GDP among countries with significant universal health coverage service.
- Out-of-pocket payments push millions of people into poverty and deter the poor from using health services.
- Besides low public spending, neither the Central nor the State governments have undertaken any significant policy intervention, except the National Health Mission, to redress the issue of widening socioeconomic inequalities in health.
- National Health Mission (with a budget of less than 0.2% of GDP) is far too less to make a major impact. And worryingly, the budgetary provision for the NHM has decreased by 2% in 2018-19 from the previous year.
- Only ₹2,000 crore was allocated to Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana which can be 'game-changer' initiative if implemented effectively.

Way ahead:
Public policies should focus on –
- Expanding pooled funding to provide health care.
- Redistribution of resources to the less advantaged.

- Pre-paid financing mechanisms – such as general tax revenue or social health insurance (not for profit), collect taxes or premium contributions from people based on their income.
- Achieve Universal Health Care (UHC)
- Total government spending should increase. National Health Policy 2017 envisaged raising public spending on health to 2.5% of GDP by 2025.
- The rise in government health spending also depends on health spending by States as they account for more than two-thirds of total spending.

Improving India's Healthcare

Concerns:

- Increase in population growth, along with rising life expectancy, provides the **burden of chronic diseases**.
- Contribution of Communicable Diseases to deaths in India is 27.5% and contribution of **Non-Communicable Diseases** is 61.8%.
- **Just 1.2% of GDP is spent on health sector**. Consecutive governments have failed to spend more on health sector.
- **Preventive health is not considered as important**. This is where government and policy makers have to come in and make it impossible for public to access junk food, high salted food, and sugar food.
- Nearly 60 million people are **pushed into poverty every year**. (Thanks to Out-of-Pocket Expenditure)
- **India's public health workforce comes from an estimated mere 51 colleges** that offer a graduate programme in public health. (compared to 238 universities in US)

Need of the hour:
- Tackling these concerns/issues **requires an interdisciplinary approach**.
- In other words, public health system should range from research, global health, health communication, urban planning, health policy, environmental science, behavioural sciences, healthcare management, financing, and behavioural economics.
- India also has a diversity problem**. A diverse student population** is necessary to create an interdisciplinary workforce.
- A well organised public health system with supporting infrastructure.
- Strong academic programmes.
- Investments in health and social services

- Health communication – Improve the health literacy of the population
- India certainly has a serious problem with health literacy and it is the responsibility of public health professionals to close this gap.
- A **dedicated council for public health** to synergistically work with **all agencies** such as the public works department, the narcotics bureau, water management, food safety, sanitation, urban and rural planning, housing and infrastructure to promote population-level health.
- Develop curriculum and provide license and accreditation to schools to promote interdisciplinary curriculum in public health.
- **Ayushman Bharat Scheme** – To make healthcare inclusive to all, Government launched this comprehensive insurance programme

Connecting the dots:
- "Only healthy people can build a strong and prosperous nation". Comment.
- Although the private sector can play a constructive role in the provisioning healthcare services, the overall health policy discourse must retain the 'public good' character of the health sector. Comment.

Kyasanoor Forest Disease (KFD) or Monkey Fever

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue

Key pointers:
- Kyasanoor Forest Disease (KFD) is **tick-borne viral hemorrhagic fever** endemic to South Asia. The **virus is transmitted to human beings** through parasitic ticks which latch on to monkeys.
- KFD was first detected in the Kyasanur forest in Karnataka in 1957. Since then, between 400 and 500 human cases are reported each year in South Asia, mainly India.
- The disease is caused by Kyasanur forest disease virus (KFDV), a member of the virus family Flaviviridae, which also cause yellow fever and dengue.
- Rodents, shrews, and monkeys are common hosts for KFDV after being bitten by an infected tick. KFDV kills most primates it infects.
- The symptoms in humans include fever for more than 12 days, accompanied by cough, headache, diarrhoea and vomiting. The fever is followed by mental disturbances, tremors and vision deficits.
- Vaccination against monkey fever is used in endemic areas of India.

- Additional preventative measures include using insect repellents and wearing protective clothes in areas where ticks are endemic.

Non-communicable diseases top killers: WHO

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue

In news:
- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) — mainly cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer — continue to be the top killers.
- **Containing the NCDs** has been listed by the WHO as its health goal for this year.
- The **four 'major' NCDs** are caused, to a large extent, by four modifiable behavioural risk factors: **tobacco use**, **unhealthy diet**, **insufficient physical activity** and **harmful use of alcohol.**
- The NCDs disproportionately affect the poor, impoverish families, and place a growing burden on health care systems.

Do you know?
- The Lancet indicates that eating fibre-rich foods reduces the incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer by 16% to 24%.
- A higher fibre intake is also associated with lower bodyweight, systolic blood pressure and total cholesterol when compared with lower intake.
- Doctors then recommend — eat less and enjoy your food by eating slowly, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, avoid oversized portions which causes weight gain, at least half of your grains should be whole grains, limit consumption of food high in trans fats.

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES

NITI Aayog's proposal for All India Judicial Service

Introduction

- The vision document titled 'Strategy for New India @ 75', released by the NITI Aayog proposes a spate of judicial reforms.
- The think-tank recommends for the creation of an All India Judicial Service, akin to the other central services like the IAS and the IPS.
- It believes that All-India Judicial Services (AIJS) will help promote federal governance.

Do you know?
- The idea of an All India Judicial Service (AIJS) has been deliberated since Independence.
- In fact, the first law commission — 14th Report on Reform of Judicial Administration — also suggested for the need for creating a separate all-India service for judicial officers.
- Subsequently, a crucial step towards formalising the process for setting up an AIJS was taken under the infamous 42nd Constitutional Amendment during the Emergency in 1976.
- The Constitution of India was amended in 1977 to provide for an All-India Judicial Services under Article 312.
- The Chief Justices conferences in 1961, 1963, and 1965 favoured creation of All-India Judicial Services and even the Law Commissions (1st, 8th and 11th, 116th) had suggested the creation of the service. However, each time it was faced with opposition.

Arguments in favour of All-India Judicial Services
- Efficiency and efficacy of judiciary would be increased.
- Transparent and efficient method of recruitment would be followed.
- The pendency and issue of delay of cases would be done away with.
- Corruption, nepotism etc would be strongly dealt with.
- Best legal talent across the country would be selected on the basis of merit.
- Public faith in the judiciary would be restored.
- The Supreme Court is not averse to the idea of AIJS as in its 2 judgments of 1991 and1993 it supported the idea of AIJS.

Arguments against All-India Judicial Services
- There will be an issue of local laws differences.
- Local languages and dialects would be a problem.
- Nine High courts are against this proposal and hence disapproving this proposal.

- The conflict between Centre and State would start.
- The status of legal education in India is very much mismanaged. Except for a few national law schools, others do not prioritize the legal education too much. Law is taken as the last report who do not get into medicine, IITs etc.
- Unremunerative pay is a big issue. Despite an effort by the Supreme Court to ensure uniformity in pay scales across States in the All India Judges' Association case, it is still very low.
- Also, the judiciary has fewer avenues for growth, promotion and limited avenues for career advancement.
- There is low district judge representation in the High Courts, as less than a third of seats in the High Courts are filled by judges from the district cadre. The rest are appointed directly from the Bar.
- It will be difficult for the less privileged background to enter the profession.
- Again coaching institutes etc would flourish and education would be commercialized.
- Currently, the judges of subordinate courts are appointed by the governor in consultation with the High Court which will not be so if AIJS is implemented. Hence it will be against the Independence of Judiciary as some other body will have a control in appointment and integration because in the judiciary, higher level controls and evaluates lower level.
- Both the decentralized approach of each High Court conducting its own appointment and a centralized one seem to have roughly the same efficacy in filling up the vacancy.

Connecting the dots:
- Analyze the merits and demerits of creation of an All India Judicial Services in India.

CAG on Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Government schemes and policies; Governance issues; Irrigation programme

In news:
According to a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG),
- **Tardy implementation of projects** under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) between 2008-2017 led to an almost **threefold jump in the cost** of these projects to ₹1.20 lakh crore.
- From 2008-2017, of the 201 major and medium projects approved, only 62 were completed.

- Of the 11,291 minor irrigation schemes sanctioned, only 8,014 were completed.
- Only about 35% of India's irrigation potential was utilised.
- Of the 118 major projects surveyed by the CAG, 105 suffered from a "time overrun" with some projects being delayed by more than 18 years.

About AIBP

- AIBP was **initiated in 1996** as a **Central scheme**.
- The Scheme provides central assistance in the form of loan to State Government to complete those ongoing irrigation projects which were costing Rs.1000 crore.
- Objective of the scheme is to **speed up the implementation of large irrigation projects** (includes dams and canals, especially those which were beyond the resource capability of the States).
- Ministry: Union Ministry of Water Resources is responsible for framing policy guidelines for implementation.
- State Governments are associated with planning and implementing irrigation projects and schemes.

Concerns:

CAG audit on AIBP revealed that —

- There were lacunae **in the planning, implementation and monitoring** of the programme.
- Projects and schemes were included under AIBP in **violation of the programme's guidelines**, resulting in **irregular release of ₹3,718.71 crore**.
- There were also **deficiencies in the preparation and processing of Detailed Project Reports** such as inadequate surveys, inaccurate assessment of water availability, Irrigation Potential and Command Area and the lack of activity-wise construction plans.
- There were "financial irregularities" such as diversion of funds, parking of funds, "fictitious and fraudulent expenditure".

Cabinet approves 3 new AIIMS in J&K, Gujarat

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Health issue; Government policies and programmes

In news:

- Cabinet approved setting up of 3 All India Institutes of Medical Sciences in Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat.
- These will be in Samba in Jammu at a cost of ₹1,661 crore, in Pulwama in Kashmir at a cost of ₹1,828 crore, and in Rajkot, Gujarat, at a cost of ₹1,195 crore.

- The institutes will be set up under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana.

Important Value Additions:

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

- The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) aims at **correcting the imbalances in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities** in the different parts of the country in general, and **augmenting facilities for quality medical education** in the under-served States in particular. The scheme was approved in March 2006.
- The first phase in the PMSSY has two components - setting up of six institutions in the line of AIIMS; and upgradation of 13 existing Government medical college institutions.
- In the second phase of PMSSY, the Government has approved the setting up of two more AIIMS-like institutions, one each in the States of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh and upgradation of six medical college institutions.
- In the third phase of PMSSY, it is proposed to upgrade the existing medical college institutions.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PMJAY)

About:

Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PMJAY) or Ayushman Bharat
- The scheme aims to **provide cashless treatment** to beneficiaries identified through the Central Socio-Economic Caste Census.
- The scheme **covers 1,350 medical conditions** ranging from caesarean section to coronary stenting and joint replacement.
- It is a government-sponsored health insurance scheme.
- It will provide free treatment for up to Rs.5 lakh a family a year in any government or empanelled private hospitals all over India.

Do you know?
- PMJAY has completed 100 days.
- The project is billed as the world's largest state-funded health scheme.
- The medical journal, Lancet, has praised the prime minister for prioritising universal healthcare through the PMJAY.

Key facts and concerns:

- India **ranks as low as 145th among 195 countries in healthcare quality and accessibility**, behind even Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.
- The country **spends only 1.3 per cent of its GDP on health**, way less than the global average of 6 per cent.
- Over 70 per cent of the total healthcare expenditure is accounted for by the private sector. (**Poor public healthcare infrastructure**)
- Health care bills are the **single biggest cause of debt in India**, with 39 million people being forced into poverty every year. (**High out-of-pocket expenditure**)
- **Poor doctor to patient ratio:** WHO recommends one doctor for a population of 1,000. (1:1000); India's doctor to patient ratio (1:11000).
- India falls woefully **short of number of hospital beds** compared to WHO standards.

Analysis: Is PMJAY successful?
- On paper, the scheme looks good but the ground reality is different.
- PMJAY can succeed only if the government increases its share of expenditure dramatically.
- Also without improving the **doctor to patient ratio and increasing the number of hospital beds** the treatment under the scheme cannot be done.

We read from yesterday article that government proposes to augment its share of hospitals by upgrading existing facilities and setting up of more institutions in the line of AIIMS. (**Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana**)

Through PMSSY, government aims at correcting the imbalances in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities in the different parts of the country in general, and augmenting facilities for quality medical education in the under-served States in particular.

Crux - PMJAY is one step towards Universal Health coverage. It is critical for reducing the disease burden of the country. India spends just 1.4% of GDP on healthcare which is less than even some developing countries. It should increase the funding and involve the private sector effectively.

Other drawbacks:
- The government has kept aside only Rs 3,000 crore for the PMJAY this year against the expected outflow of Rs 11,000 crore. It is difficult to expect adequate delivery of healthcare under PMJAY.
- Experts and Critics argue that PMJAY might fail too similar to the failure of previous government-run health insurance schemes like Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna.

- The intended beneficiaries of PMJAY are masons, contract workers and farm workers who cannot afford to take off much time for treatment at government or private PMJAY-recognised hospitals.
- OPD treatment is not covered under the scheme.
- Another issue is difficulty in locating beneficiaries.
- Secondary-level hospitals like district hospitals and medical colleges have poor infrastructure, inadequate equipment and lack specialist manpower.
- There is also a gross shortage of tertiary care hospitals in the public sector with PGI, AIIMS, SGPGI and NIMHANS being among the few that can be relied upon.
- These public hospitals are functioning beyond their capacity with waiting lists of one or two years for elective surgeries.

Realising the inadequacies of the public sector, PMJAY has relied heavily on the private sector.

Under the PMJAY, the private hospitals have to get registered and fulfill the minimum requirements. They are also expected to expand their facilities and add hospital beds.

Concerns with private sector

- Most consumers complain of rising costs, lack of transparency and unethical practices in the private sector.
- Private hospitals don't have adequate presence in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities and there is a trend towards super specialisation in Tier-1 cities.

Conclusion:
PMJAY has created an excellent opportunity for the country to improve its health care.

While the contribution of the private sector will be the key to its success, it's the will and zeal of the government to implement it that will make or break the scheme.

Today, nearly 80% of the healthcare in India is provided by the private healthcare system and to meet the burgeoning healthcare needs of Indian population through value-based medicine, the country needs a synchronised effort by both the private and public sectors.

Connecting the dots:

- Critically analyse why the contribution of the private sector will be the key to success of Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (PMJAY) or Ayushman Bharat?
- Can Ayushman Bharat prove to be a game changer? Discuss.

Universal Basic Income

Introduction:

According to the Economic Survey,
- The idea of Universal Basic Income is "conceptually appealing", a "radical new vision," and the "shortest path to eliminating poverty."
- A UPI has three key characteristics: every citizen receives cash payments, these payments are unconditional, and each individual is free to spend these funds as they wish.

UBI has also been hailed by both left-leaning thinkers as well as those on the right.
- John Kenneth Galbraith (Leftist) says UBI can foster social justice and equal opportunity.
- Milton Friedman (Right) says UBI restores individual choice and freedom and reigning in the influence of the state.

Key pointers:
- India has made considerable progress in bringing down poverty from about 70% of the population at the time of independence to about 22% in 2011-12 (Tendulkar Committee estimates).
- More can be achieved if targeted schemes run by central and state governments are effective. (Issues – Data manipulation, leakages, poor and vulnerable are left out, while rich reaping undeserved benefits, middlemen, corruption etc.)
- Therefore, 'targeting' seems both inefficient and inequitable.

Positives of UBI
- UBI envisages an uncompromised social safety net.
- It seeks to assure a dignified life for everyone.
- In a global economy buffeted by uncertainties on account of globalisation, technological change, and automation, UBI is expected to play a key role.

How UBI works?
- A basic income is a regular, periodic cash payment delivered unconditionally to all citizens on an individual basis, without requirement of work or willingness to work.
- The **five broad features** of such schemes are: **payments at periodic regular intervals** (not one-off grants), **payments in cash** (not food vouchers or service coupons), **payments to individuals**, **universality**, and **unconditionality.**
- Typically, UBI would require subsumption of other subsidies and allowances in order to free up resources so that a particular amount can be directed to people on a periodic basis.

- The differences among the several models being tried out across geographies relate mainly to the scale of the project, quantum of income, source of funding, and cuts in other transfers.

UBI policies in other countries:
- Finland recently concluded a two-year experiment on its effects on unemployed citizens, which commenced in January 2017.
- Government of Ontario, Canada, had announced a plan to test a kind of unconditional income guarantee, and enrolled participants in three areas of the province for a guaranteed income for up to three years.
- Some cities in the Netherlands have launched municipal-level trials.
- Barcelona in Spain has tested several potential changes to its anti-poverty programmes, including unconditional cash payments.

There are some non-governmental attempts to launch privately-funded basic income experiments on a large scale.

In news:
- Sikkim is set to become the first state in India to roll out Universal Basic Income (UBI). It aims to implement the scheme by 2022 and has already started the process to introduce the unconditional direct cash transfers.
- Sikkim appears to be the ideal testing ground for UBI.
- **Reasons:** It is a surplus power generating state, which exports nearly 90% of the 2,200 MW that its hydel projects produce — ensuring a steady revenue stream that other states typically lack. It has a literacy rate of 98% and a BPL population way below the national average.
- Sikkim has indicated that it will do away with most subsidies before launching its UBI scheme. (Though subsuming about 950 central sector and centrally sponsored sub-schemes in the country is a difficult task)

Do you know?
- About 950 central sector and centrally sponsored sub-schemes accounts for about 5% of GDP by Budget allocation.
- The top 11 schemes accounts for about 50% of the budgetary allocation — the food subsidy or Public Distribution System (PDS) is the largest programme, followed by the urea subsidy and the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).

The criticisms

- None of the places where UBI has been tried have levels of income disparity that exist in India. So, while the idea might work in Sikkim, it might not in, say, Bihar.
- According to some Economists, dismantling centrally sponsored and central sector schemes such as Mid-Day Meal, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, National Health Mission, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, MGNREGS, and PDS could be counterproductive.
- World Bank had suggested for reading the policy of basic income "through the lens of 'progressive universalism'".
- The reason for maintaining conditional social assistance was to "prioritize those at the bottom of the [income] distribution". However, UBI is contrary to it. It becomes very important to pinpoint those "who are the most vulnerable, where they live, and how vulnerable they are" if the program has to succeed.

Connecting the dots:
- Serious consideration must be given to the idea of a universal basic income as a more effective way of achieving Mahatma Gandhi's objectives of "wiping every tear from every eye." Comment.
- Do you think replacing the existing public distribution system and other benefits for the BPL families with a Universal Basic Income (UBI) will be a fiscally prudent decision? Critically analyse.
- The idea of a Universal Basic Income is gaining traction across the world. Do you think India is prepared to adopt this scheme? Critically evaluate.
- Discuss the merits and challenges associated with 'Universal Basic Income'.

Why Guaranteed basic income is not a solution to mass poverty?

Introduction:

- The idea of a universal basic income has caught the imagination of the Indian political system.
- The first serious attempt to figure out how to guarantee a minimum standard of living for every Indian was made way back in 1962.
- A group of economists at the Planning Commission, led by Pitambar Pant, wrote about how every citizen could be guaranteed a minimum standard of living by 1977, or 15 years later.

Idea of a universal basic income during 1960s
- India was too poor a country to depend primarily on redistribution.

- India needed to grow its economy more rapidly if living standards had to be raised.
- Planning Commission economists said that families in the top eight income deciles would benefit from accelerating growth, while those in the bottom two deciles would need some form of direct income support to maintain a minimum standard of living.
- So, **the idea of an income transfer was basically meant for the poorest fifth of the population**, which was not in a position to take advantage of the opportunities that would become available from economic expansion.

Idea of a universal basic income now
- Interestingly, the recent proposal by four economists—Josh Felman, Boban Paul, M.R. Sharan and Arvind Subramanian – are on same lines.
- They have recommended an income support scheme in which the bottom eight deciles in rural India (or the bottom four deciles in the country as a whole) will need income support.
- The merit of their scheme is that it is more progressive than a farm loan waiver or the Rythu Bandhu scheme in Telangana, which benefit landowners rather than tenants or farm workers.
- Fiscal cost will be manageable, since the income transfers will be funded by money released from the scrapping of schemes such as the Fasal Bima Yojana and the fertilizer subsidy.

However, there are a few issues that need to be highlighted –

1. First, the assumption that a basic income for the poorest four deciles in rural India could be fiscally neutral looks good on paper. However, there will be obvious fiscal consequences and income support will be offered by cutting back other schemes such as fertilizer subsidy etc. This will have effects like shift of spending from large farmers to the rural poor.

2. Second, growing support for a basic income in developed countries comes against the backdrop of stagnant median incomes over several decades. There is also the fear that the fourth industrial revolution will displace millions of workers. However, the current Indian context is quite different. Incomes have been rising across the spectrum even after taking into account higher levels of inequality. It will be wise to focus on basic services such as health and education, create fiscal space to boost spending on rural public goods.

3. Third, data on Indian poverty needs to be updated. It is quite likely that the new survey could show a further decline in poverty as defined by the Suresh Tendulkar committee. There will be a need to reassess what constitutes the minimum consumption basket used to define poverty in India. Much of the subsequent basic income calculations will have to be rejigged.

4. The current proposals for direct income support falls well short of the promise of an unconditional basic income for all citizens. The Indian direct income support is in contrast to the proposals in developed countries.

For instance, the proposed income support is promised for "every poor person", and not every Indian. Nor specified who should be considered poor or how the programme will be funded.

Conclusion:

As the Planning Commission economists pointed out in 1962, there can be no frontal attack on mass poverty without accelerating economic growth.

Let economic growth work for the top eight deciles, while the focus of government welfare spending should be on the bottom two deciles that are denied opportunities for various social or geographical reasons.

Connecting the dots:

- Serious consideration must be given to the idea of a universal basic income as a more effective way to address mass poverty concern. Comment.
- The idea of a Universal Basic Income is gaining traction across the world. Do you think India is prepared to adopt this scheme? Critically evaluate.

Why a simple universal basic income will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy?

Introduction:

- In previous day's editorial analysis we read about - Why Guaranteed basic income is not a solution to mass poverty?
- Today's editorial deals with why a simplistic universal basic income will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy?

Key pointers:
- We know that India's GDP is growing quite well. Despite its achievements on economic front, India failed to do much better to improve overall human development. (Its performance is poorer compared with countries in Sub-Saharan Africa)
- Even its poorer sub-continental neighbours are improving health and education faster.

- Benefits of India's economic growth must trickle down much faster to people at the bottom of the pyramid. (Poor farmers, landless rural labour, and hundreds of millions of workers living on the edge in low-paying, 'flexible' forms of employment with no social security)

Economists are offering universal basic income (UBI) as a solution to the economy's structural problems.

However, even these economists admit that a lot more must be done to improve education and health care, and to address the persistent informality and small scale of enterprises that are providing most of the employment in the country.

Disruption and basic income

- Structural forces within the global economy have been driving down wages and creating insecure employment.
- There has been increasing economic inequalities around the world.
- 'Industry 4.0', which has not yet spread too far, is expected to worsen these problems.
- Declining global wage income growth means reduction of consumption and there is no guarantee of success of automated Industry 4.0 production systems. (Who will buy all the material and services that these systems will produce?)

Therefore, the UBI has appeared as a silver bullet solution. It will be an income provided to everybody by the very state.

The beauty of a 'universal' basic income is that it avoids messy political questions about who deserves assistance.

It also side-steps the challenge of actually providing the services required: education, health, food, etc. Just give the people cash: let them buy what they need.

Therefore, the concern lies here.

Concerns:

- Providing cash alone will not provide citizens with good quality and affordable education and health, because neither the government nor the private sector is able or willing to, this will not solve the basic human development problems that must be solved.
- India's proposed UBI is diluted form. Economists have diluted their simplistic concept of UBI to make it financially and politically feasible.
- They propose a QUBRI (quasi-universal basic rural income), targeted only at poorer people in the rural areas. Their scheme is no longer universal.

As we discussed in previous day's editorial analysis –

- The proposed UBI fails to identify who to identify the poor to be included.
- It will not cover the masses of urban poor working for low and uncertain wages (as it is targeted only at poorer people in the rural areas).

- Also it is proposed to offer income support by cutting back other schemes which can have other consequences.

However, this still begs the question about how to provide good quality public services for people to buy.

Therefore, a simplistic UBI will not solve the fundamental problems of the economy.

Need of the hour:
1. Fix India's fundamental problems by **strengthening of institutions of the state** to deliver the services the state must (public safety, justice, and basic education and health)
2. Services provided by the state should be available to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay for them. (**Inclusive services**)
3. The institutions of the state should also regulate delivery of services by the private sector and ensure fair competition in the market.
4. The building of state institutions, to deliver and to regulate, will require stronger management, administrative, and political capabilities, not just better economists.
5. Reduce inequality - opportunities for progress should be made equal and accessible to create a more just society.

Concept of Universal Basic Capital

- A better solution to structural inequality than UBI is universal basic capital, or UBC, which has begun to pop up in international policy circles.
- In this alternative approach, people own the wealth they generate as shareholders of their collective enterprises. Amul, SEWA, Grameen, and others have shown a way.
- Some economists go further and also propose a 'dividend' for all citizens, by providing them a share of initial public offerings on the stock market, especially from companies that use 'public assets', such as publicly funded research, or environmental resources.

Conclusion/Crux

To conclude, three better solutions to create more equitable growth than the ones on offer are:
1. Focus on building state capacity beginning with implementation of the recommendations of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission.
2. Strengthen the state institutions and missing middle-level institutions for aggregation of tiny enterprises and representation of workers.
3. Creativity of economists could be better applied to developing ideas for UBC than UBI.

Connecting the dots:

- Serious consideration must be given to the idea of a universal basic income as a more effective way to address mass poverty concern. Comment.

- The idea of a Universal Basic Capital instead of Universal Basic Income is gaining traction across the world. Do you think UBC will be a better solution to structural inequality and more effective than UBI? Discuss.

NREGA gets additional ₹6,084 cr.

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II –Social/Welfare issue; Government schemes and programmes

In news:

- After exhausting 99% of its annual allocation three months ahead of time, the National Rural Employment Guarantee (NREGA) scheme has been given an additional allocation of ₹6,084 crore to tide over the next three months.

Do you know?

- Current total allocation to MGNREGA for 2018-19 is ₹61,084 crore (highest ever allocation)
- However, scheme's financial statement and balance sheet shows that 15 States have a total negative net balance of ₹4,064 crore, which includes payments due for unskilled wages for work that has already been done.
- If the current allocated money (₹6,084 cr.) is not used to pay off these committed liabilities, it will delay wage payments beyond the stipulated 15-day period, and further disincentivise people from seeking employment under the scheme.
- If this money is used to pay off the debts then there will be much less money left for fresh employment generation over the next three months.
- According to study done by Rajendran Narayanan committee which analyzed government data in 3,500 panchayats found that the employment provided during 2017-18 was 32% lower than the work demanded in that year.

Skill India: Learning to compete

Key Pointers:

- National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) was introduced in 2013.
- India's skill agenda got a push when NSQF was introduced.
- According to NSQF, all qualifications were to be organized according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude.

- For each trade/occupation or professional qualification, course content should be prepared that corresponds to higher and higher level of professional knowledge and practical experience.
- The framework was to be implemented by December 27, 2018.

To know more about National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF), visit - https://www.nsda.gov.in/nsqf.html (or) https://www.msde.gov.in/nsqf.html

Do you know?
- Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is a Ministry of Government of India set up on 9 November 2014 to coordinate all skill development efforts across the country.
- The Ministry mandated that all training/educational programmes/courses be **NSQF-compliant** by December 27, 2018.
- It also mandated that all training and educational institutions define eligibility criteria for admission to various courses in terms of NSQF levels, by December 27, 2018.

Note: *Below article deals with the implementation of National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)*

India Skills 2018:
- NSQF implementation can be understood through the prism of national skill competitions, or India Skills (initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship)
- 27 States participated in **India Skills 2018, held in Delhi**.
- Maharashtra led the medals tally, followed by Odisha and Delhi.
- Some teams will be selected to represent India at the **45th World Skills Competition**, **scheduled in Russia this year**.
- Abilympics was also included in India Skills 2018, for Persons with Disabilities.

Concerns:
- A majority of the participants in India Skills, 2018 were from corporates (offering enterprise-based training) and industrial training institutes.
- Neither industrial training institutes nor corporates' courses are aligned with the NSQF.
- Less than 20% participants were from the short-term courses of the NSDC which are NSQF compliant.
- If India Skills 2018 was only open for the NSQF-aligned institutions, it would have been a big failure.

Problems facing NSQF:

- Unlike general academic education, where certain level of certification is required before further progression is permitted, there is **no clear definition of the course curriculum within the NSQF** that enables upward mobility.
- There is no connection of the tertiary level vocational courses to prior real knowledge of theory or practical experience in a vocational field.
- Efforts to introduce new Bachelor of Vocation and Bachelor of Skills courses were made, but the alignment of these courses was not completed.
- Lack of alignment between the HRD Ministry (responsible for the school level and Bachelor of Vocation courses) and the Ministry of Skill Development (responsible for non-school/non-university-related vocational courses).
- There are too many Sector Skill Councils in India and each is not comprehensive, like we have four SSCs for manufacturing but they are treated as one in World Skills courses.

Do you know?

Five pillars of skill training in India:
- The secondary schools/polytechnics.
- Industrial training institutes.
- NSDC funded private training providers offering short-term training.
- 16 Ministries providing mostly short-term training.
- Employers offering enterprise-based training.

What needs to be done to improve skill framework in India?
1. There is a need for more holistic training and to re-examine the narrow, short-term NSQF-based NSDC courses.
2. NSDC should include skills in broader occupation groups, so that trainees are skilled enough to compete at the international level.
3. SSCs should be consolidated in line with the National Industrial Classification of India to improve quality, outcomes, and help in directly assessing the trainee's competence. It might also bring some coherence to our skills data collection system.
4. Vocational education must provide broader skills in broader occupational groups.
5. A re-alignment in skill programme would prepare India for representation at the 45th World Skills Competition, scheduled in Russia this year.

Connecting the dots:
- Despite several initiatives, skill development in India is not taking at a pace as expected. Why? Also suggest various measures that can improve the situation.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2019

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian Diaspora; India and the World;

About Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)
- PBD is celebrated once in every two years.
- Aims to **strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community** with the Government of India and reconnect them with their roots.
- The 15th PBD Convention was held on 21-23 January 2019 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- **Observed by:** Ministry of External Affairs
- **Significance:** To remember the favors and contributions made by Non Resident Indians to the welfare and development of the nation.
- It provides a forum to discuss issues and concerns of people of the diaspora.

Do you know?
- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (or Non-Resident Indian Day) is a celebratory day observed (starting in 2015) on **9 January** to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community towards the development of India.
- The **day commemorates the return of Mahatma Gandhi** from South Africa to Mumbai on 9 January 1915.

In news:
- At the 15th PBD event held in Varanasi, PM Modi highlighted **India's potential to lead the world in sustainable development**.
- In many respects, India can provide leadership in the world. The **International Solar Alliance**, or ISA, is one such platform. (One world, one sun and one grid)
- **Pilgrimage scheme for NRIs** being planned (people living abroad need to connect culturally with the homeland)

DAMaN initiative: Model for malaria control

Introduction:

According to the World Health Organisation's **World Malaria Report** of 2018 –
- India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that **saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden**.
- India saw a 24% decrease in 2017 compared to 2016.
- India has assumed a **leadership role in advancing global efforts to end malaria**.

- The country's success **provides hope to the other highest-burden countries** to tackle malaria head-on.

Reasons for India's success

1. Outcome of concerted efforts via **country-owned and country-led malaria programme**.
2. Malaria programmes were aligned with **globally accepted strategies**
3. During **2015 East Asia Summit**, India pledged to **eliminate the disease by 2030**.
4. Following this public declaration, India launched the **five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination**. (Shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination")
5. Five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination (2017-22) provides for target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.
6. The current Government has pledged to eliminate malaria by 2027 and urged the states for active cooperation.
7. Adequate investment combined with coordinated action between governments, civil society and philanthropic donors.
8. Health is a State subject. State governments across the country shoulder a special responsibility in tackling the disease.

Odisha Model for malaria control

- Among the States, Odisha has emerged as an inspiration in the fight against malaria.
- It has dramatically scaled-up efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria through its **Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative**
- It involved accredited social health activists (ASHAs), who helped distribute approximately 11 million bed nets in 2017, which was enough to protect all the residents in areas that were at highest risk.
- Odisha recorded a 80% decline in malaria cases and deaths in 2017.
- DAMaN aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State.

By prioritising malaria elimination, India, and especially Odisha, is showing the world the way.

"Institutions of Eminence"

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and programmes; Education reforms

In news:

- In a bid to improve the quality of education in India and provide better facility to students, the government had planned to set up 20 world-class "institutions of eminence" around the country.

- The plan was to have 20 world-class universities—10 private and 10 public—with each requiring an investment of at least Rs 5,000 crore over the next few years.
- However, an expert committee (headed by former Chief Election Commissioner N. **Gopalaswami**) which was set up to recommended the names of institutions to be granted the prestigious Institutes of Eminence has recommended 30 names, 15 in each category. (instead of 10 in each category)

About the "Institutions of Eminence" Scheme
- The scheme is aimed at developing world-class institutions which would put India on the global education map.
- Institutions will be offered greater autonomy and freedom to decide fees, course durations and structures.
- The 10 selected public institutions would also receive a grant of ₹1000 crore, while the 10 private institutions would not receive any financial assistance.

Centre hikes scholarships

Part of: GS Mains II and III – Government schemes and programmes; Science and Technology; Research and Development

In news:
- Centre hiked the research scholarship
- Junior Research Fellowship – scholarship hiked to ₹31,000 per month from the existing ₹25,000.
- Senior Research Fellowships (SRF) - scholarship hiked to ₹35,000 per month
- Stipends for Research Assistants would range from ₹47,000 to ₹54,000 per month.
- For months, research scholars across India have organised protests demanding that the scholarship be hiked as the stipend hadn't been revised since 2014.
- The hikes were recommended based on inflation.

However, in percentage terms, this is the lowest hike since 2010.
In spite of being a leading scientific power in terms of research publications, India spends only about 0.7% of its GDP on research and development, which is much lower than countries of comparable scientific prowess.

Money matters

The rise in monthly stipends for research scholars over the years

Year	2019	2014	2010
JRF	31,000*	25,000	16,000
SRF	35,000	28,000	18,000
RA-1	47,000	36,000	22,000
RA-2	49,000	38,000	23,000
RA-3	54,000	40,000	24,000

*Amount in ₹

JRF: Junior Research Fellowship, for qualified candidates beginning Ph.D
SRF: Senior Research Fellowhship, for qualified candidates after 2 years of Ph.D studies
RA: Research Assistantship provided to post-doctoral fellows   Source: CSIR, DST

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/31/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/49fe98e7_270083 7_101_mr.jpg

Revamped Khelo India Scheme

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II– Government schemes and programmes; Human Development

Key pointers:
- Under Khelo India Scheme, 1,000 selected athletes will receive an annual scholarship of Rs 500,000 each for eight years.
- The scheme, which would cost the government Rs 1,756 crore between 2017-18 and 2019-20, will also promote 20 universities across India as hubs of sporting excellence.
- The revamped Khelo India programme would impact the entire sports ecosystem, including infrastructure, community sports, talent identification, coaching for excellence, competition structure and sports economy.
- Until now, sports schemes were focused on building infrastructure such as stadiums. However, the new scheme will focus on nurturing talent and connecting rural India to global games.
- Companies could also fund the Khelo India scheme under corporate social responsibility.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Globalization at the crossroads

Year 2018 can be considered a historic turning point.

- One, because of poorly managed globalization which led to nationalist "take-back-control" movements and a rising wave of protectionism that has undermined the 70-year-old US-led international order.
- Two, the stage is set for China to develop its own parallel international institutions, which has resulted in a world which is divided between two competing global-governance systems.

2008-2018 decade marked an epochal shift in the balance of economic power.
- During 2008 global financial crisis, North America and Europe comprised around 15% of the world's population, but accounted for 57% of total economic activity, 61% of investment, around 50% of manufacturing, and 61% of global consumer spending.
- But the world's economic centre of gravity has shifted since then. Whereas around 40% of production, manufacturing, trade, and investment was located outside the West in 2008, over 60% is today.
- Asia will account for 50% of global economic output by 2050.
- China's per capita income might still be less than half that of the US in 2050; but the sheer size of the Chinese economy will nonetheless raise new questions about global governance and geopolitics.

For decades after its formation in the 1970s, the Group of Seven (G7)—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the US —essentially presided over the entire world economy. But by 2008, North American and European leaders were debating whether it was time to create a new premier forum for economic cooperation that would include emerging economies.

There were heated debates - On one side were those who wanted to keep the group small (one early US proposal envisioned a G7+5); on the other side were those who wanted the group to be as inclusive as possible.

Today, Nigeria, Thailand, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates' economies are each larger than the smallest G20 economy (South Africa), yet none of these countries is a member.

Do you know?

- When the original IMF Articles of Agreement were being negotiated in 1944, there was some disagreement over whether the new body should be headquartered in Europe or the US.
- Eventually, it was decided that it should be based in the capital city of the country with the largest share of voting rights (which tracks a country's share of the global economy).
- This means that, within a decade or two, China could demand that the IMF be headquartered in Beijing. (However, America may leave the IMF before the IMF leaves America)

Crux/Conclusion:
- World's economic centre of gravity has shifted since 2008.
- The world is experiencing an epochal rebalancing that is not just economic, but also geopolitical.
- Unless the West can find a way to uphold multilateralism in an increasingly multipolar world, China is expected to develop alternative financial and governance institutions, as it has with the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
- Globalization is at a crossroads. One way or another, international organizations and multilateral frameworks will need to accommodate the new "poles" of geopolitical power that are emerging.

Connecting the dots:
- Is globalisation retreating? (Essay)
- The world is experiencing an epochal rebalancing that is not just economic, but also geopolitical. Do you agree? Critically examine.

U.S. withdraw from Syria

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International affairs

In news:
- President Donald Trump's National Security Adviser said that U.S. will withdraw from Syria only after security of Kurds is ensured.
- US wants a guarantee from Turkey that Kurds in Syria would be protected.

Do you know?
- Kurdish-led forces control a large swathe of Syria's north and northeast, some of it seized from the Islamic State group.

- A U.S. withdrawal could leave them exposed to an attack by neighbouring Turkey and its Syrian proxies.

Lessons for Kashmir from the Kuriles

Introduction
- The Second World War left behind many problems inherited from history, some of them were in respect of multiple disputed territories.
- One of them concerns four islands in the Kurile chain, that are claimed by Japan but occupied by Russia as successor state of the Soviet Union.
- Despite the passage of over 70 years, this dispute has defied solution and prevented the conclusion of a Russo-Japanese peace treaty to draw a final curtain over the detritus of the war.

About Kuriles
- The Kuriles are an archipelago of some 56 islands. All of them are under Russian jurisdiction but Japan claims the two large southernmost islands, Etorofu and Kunashiri, and two others, Shikotan and Habomai, as its 'northern territories'.
- These islands were occupied by the Soviet Union in August 1945, after which the entire Japanese population, numbering less than 20,000, was evicted.
- The islands are now populated by the various ethnic groups of the former Soviet Union, but only eight of them are actually inhabited.
- The prime value of the islands, however, is strategic. The Russians have deployed missile systems, plan a submarine project there, and intend to rule out any American military use of the islands.

Opinions of; public and governments
- Public opinion in both countries is totally against any concession.
- Russians recalls the Japan-Russia war (1904-05) and the Japanese intervention with the U.S. and Europe during the early years of the Russian Revolution.
- Moscow's legal claim is based on the post-war settlements of Yalta and San Francisco, whereas the Japanese claim is founded on the Russia-Japan treaties of 1855 and 1875.
- Leaders in both Russia and Japan are aware that their domestic political positions would be severely at risk from right-wing and conservative circles were they to suggest even the slightest compromise.
- Among hyper-nationalist circles, territorial issues have always been questions of utmost sensitivity.

The Progress on Kurils

- In 2016, both countries embarked on some joint undertakings on the islands without calling in question the claims and legal positions of either side.
- They agreed to joint field surveys and joint economic activities with the identification of specific projects, the enterprises that would undertake them, and various levels of supervision.
- These proposals cover marine species and aquaculture, greenhouse strawberry and vegetable cultivation, development of package tourism, wind power generation, and the reduction and disposal of garbage.
- They also agreed to scheduled visits by Japanese families who sought to visit the graves of their ancestors.
- The Japanese have further proposed safe opportunities for fishing salmon and trout without using prohibited driftnet methodology, and cooperation in disaster prevention.
- These may seem small steps, but underlying them is a serious purpose: to build trust. Summits and Foreign Ministers' meetings have become commonplace.

Concerns of Russia

- Moscow is concerned about Tokyo amending Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, which disallows Japan from maintaining a military force or using force to settle international disputes
- Russia views with anxiety the fact that Japan is among the world's biggest spenders on defence and has a very powerful military.
- Japan plays host to American bases and missile systems, and plans to spend $240 billion up to 2024 on cruise missiles, missile interceptors, fighter jets and aircraft carriers.
- Responsible for this military build-up are apprehensions about threats from China and North Korea.
- Japan and South Korea seem to be inching towards a future of relative independence from the U.S. in wartime operations.

Causes Japanese engagements with Russia

- Japan's wish to engage with Russia stems from the rapid rise of China and the perceived threat from North Korea.
- Russia is now seen in Japan as the lesser enemy, and improving relations with Moscow might drive a wedge in the growing quasi-alliance between Russia and China, a break-up desired by the U.S.-led Western alliance.
- Russian far east is endowed with plentiful natural resources which are in need of investments, but is hampered by a small population, whereas China has 100 million citizens along that shared land border.

Japan has no territorial or demographic ambitions in Russia other than the Kuriles, and has the capacity to transform the vast contiguous areas of Russia.

- The two countries agreed to resolve the Kurile islands dispute by concluding a peace treaty without any further delay.

Conclusion: Lessons for India

- Although no two international problems are analogous, there are important lessons to be drawn from the manner in which traditionally hostile neighbours can identify common interests and explore unorthodox avenues along which to proceed in search of innovative solutions to apparently insoluble disputes.
- This requires strong leadership and a bold imagination. Neither India nor Pakistan lacks either attribute.
- Kashmir is essentially a territorial dispute of almost equal vintage as the Kuriles. But if both sides keep waiting for the most propitious time to make the first move, it will never come about.

Connecting the dots:

- India and Pakistan can learn from Japan and Russia on seeking innovative solutions to territorial disputes. Comment.

Free Indo-Pacific not against China: U.S. Admiral

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; international Relations

In news:

- Four countries of the Quad (India, US, Japan and Australia) stressed the need for improving interoperability and evolving a "common maritime awareness picture" in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Concern: Rapid expansion of the Chinese Navy
- US Admiral announced that - Free and open Indo-Pacific is not a containment strategy for China.

Do you know?

- U.S. has been conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, most of which is claimed by China.
- U.S. Admiral said that it was the responsibility of all our nations here to help the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) nations in their discussions for a Code of Conduct with China in the SCS.

- The four quad countries represent the open inclusive rule-based order.

U.S. imposes sanctions on Venezuelan oil firm

Part of: GS Mains II – International affairs

In news:
- US imposed sweeping sanctions on Venezuelan state-owned oil firm PDVSA, aimed at severely curbing the OPEC member's crude exports to the U.S. and at pressuring socialist President Nicolás Maduro to step down.
- Russia, a close ally of Venezuela, denounced the move as illegal interference in Venezuela's affairs.
- Venezuela would probably have problems servicing its $3.15 billion sovereign debt to Russia.

U.S. charges Huawei and its CFO Meng

Part of: GS Mains II – International affairs; US-China concerns

In news:
- Chinese company, Huawei is accused of stealing trade secrets and evading U.S. sanctions against Iran.
- Huawei is world's second largest smartphone manufacturer
- The Huawei indictments come on the eve of a round of U.S.-China talks to de-escalate the tariff war between the two countries.
- Trump said he could intervene in the case if it would be in the interest of national security or help a trade deal with China.
- The timing of the crackdown on Huawei has left some wondering whether U.S. concerns are purely based on security and fears of Huawei spying for the Chinese government, or have an element of the U.S. wanting to get a competitive edge in building the world's 5G networks.

INDIA AND THE WORLD

India to face difficult external situation in 2019

As India enters 2019, the world outlook looks gloomy.

Global Outlook:
1. **Global disorder is on the rise:** A **global leadership vacuum** is leading to chaos concerning rules governing the international order.
2. **Beginning of a new Cold War:** U.S. President Donald Trump's utterances and actions are provoking **strong counter-reactions**, especially from China and Russia. (U.S. Vice President Mike Pence's attack on China; Trump has threatened to pull out of a major arms control treaty with Russia)
3. **Rising political tensions, trade wars and protectionism** are indications of the world processes that threaten to destroy globalization.
4. A **decline in Britain's financial assets and of the pound sterling** following Brexit, as well as signs of increasing **fragility of China's economy**, are newer concerns.

Asian Outlook:

1. Rise of Russia:

- **Russia is vigorously pursuing its pivot to Asia** and for **greater influence in Eurasia**. It has deepened its partnership with China, and **enhanced relations with Japan and South Korea.**
- Growing tensions in the Sea of Azov (following Russia's seizure of Ukraine's ships) could well lead to a major conflagration between Russia and the West.

2. China's rising outreach:

- **China is consolidating its position in Asia**. In addition to its strategic partnership with Russia, **China has mended fences with Japan**.
- The strengthening of the Russia-China strategic relationship and the recent warmth in China-Japan relations could impact India's relations with both countries.
- Its Belt and Road Initiative has become the most potent weapon in China's armoury, with Vietnam and Japan endorsing this concept.
- In 2018, China had initiated certain moves to create a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor on the lines of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- The Chinese Navy is also poised to challenge India's position in the Indian Ocean. Chinese submarines already outnumber India's here.

- China is preparing to seek control f the Kyaukpyu Port on the Arakan Coast in Myanmar, and planning a canal (the Kra canal), connecting the Andaman Sea with the Gulf of Thailand.
- China has already control over the Gwadar (Pakistan) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka) Ports.
- 2019 could see a further consolidation of the 'all weather friendship' of China-Pakistan. (Pakistan facilitated China's involvement in Afghanistan; CPEC etc)

3. The prospects of India-Pakistan relations improving look extremely bleak
- Cross-border terror attacks are likely to continue
- Sponsorship of terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed
- India has been kept out of talks with the Afghan Taliban

4. The outlook for India in the rest of South Asia is also mixed
- Towards the end of 2018, India retrieved its position in the Maldives.
- India also succeeded in re-establishing its influence in Bhutan.
- The return of Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister after the general elections in Bangladesh has been a welcome relief.

The way ahead:
India cannot hope to remain insulated from the above trends.
- India will need to work harder in 2019 to check China from weaning away its neighbours, including Nepal as also Bangladesh, with offers of economic and military aid.
- India will also need to use all its resources to assist Bangladesh to limit the influence of radical Islamist groups there.
- India will need to use up a great deal of its diplomatic capital to ensure that relations with Russia and Japan do not decline to any considerable extent. At same time, managing relations with China should be India's top priority.
- On the diplomatic front, India will need to be more dexterous.

Connecting the dots:
- India needs to drive an independent foreign policy with its neighbours and Asian countries, rather than being massively influenced by China's activities in the region. Discuss.

India and Pakistan: Humanitarian Gesture

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

In news:

- In a peace overture, India has asked Pakistan to take back dozens of Pakistani nationals who have completed jail terms here.
- Both the countries exchanged lists of convicts who have completed terms.
- India handed over a list of 249 civilian Pakistani prisoners and 98 fishermen in its custody.
- Pakistan shared lists of 54 civilian prisoners and 483 fishermen in its jails, who it claims are Indian.

Humanitarian gesture

India and Pakistan exchanged lists of prisoners on January 1, 2019, as part of a 2008 agreement

Pakistan prisoners in India: 249 civilian prisoners and 98 fishermen

Imran Warsi

Indian prisoners in Pakistan: 54 civilian prisoners and 483 fishermen

- 80 Pakistani prisoners await repatriation
- India's Hamid Ansari and Pakistan's Imran Warsi were freed in December 2018
- Joint Judicial Committee and doctors team awaiting clearance to visit Pakistan

Hamid Ansari

Pic:
https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/02/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_01/1c0b2d6f_2637321_101_mr.jpg

China building 'advanced' warships for Pak.: report

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

In news:

- China is building the first of four "most advanced" naval warships for Pakistan as part of a major bilateral arms deal to ensure among other things "balance of power" in the strategic Indian Ocean.

- China, an "all-weather ally" of Islamabad, is the largest supplier of weapon system to Pakistan. Both countries also jointly manufacturing the JF-Thunder, a single engine multi-role combat aircraft.

India and Bangladesh: The bilateral transformation

Introduction:

- The coalition led by Bangladesh Prime Minster Sheikh Hasina's Awami League posted a landslide victory in the recent Bangladesh elections.

Bangladesh under Sheikh Hasina's regime
- Under Hasina, the country has undoubtedly done well for itself. She has an enviable record of delivering record economic growth.
- Bangladesh is one of the ten fastest growing economies in the developing world
- Bangladesh's GDP grew at a rate of 7.6% in the last quarter, making it one of the fastest growing economies in the world.
- World Bank's latest report states that the economy is likely to remain resilient over the near term, with strong domestic demand and structural transformation.

What Does Sheikh Hasina's Return Mean For India?
- Bangladesh is important for India's security, connectivity to its northeast region, and implementing its Act East Policy.
- India's plans to forge a viable alternative to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation rests on Bangladesh, given its location bridging South Asia and South-East Asia.
- Important for sub-regional groupings like BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) and the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) Initiative.
- Diplomatic relations between India and Bangladesh have grown strong steadily whenever the Awami League comes into power.
- India should work on strengthening its ties with Bangladesh and stress further on connecting with its people by understanding their aspirations and providing necessary support.
- It will be pragmatic for India to fulfill the promises made to Bangladesh – conclusion of the Teesta treaty and the pending water-sharing treaty.
- India should also lay emphasis on connectivity between the two countries and lend support to various infrastructure projects planned in Bangladesh.

- Cooperation between the two countries will contribute to the peace and prosperity of the South Asia region.

Do you know?

- Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia with an annual turnover of around $9 billion plus an estimated informal trade of around $8-9 billion, across the 4,100-km-long porous border.
- Cooperation in connectivity, energy, security and intelligence matters has intensified.
- The **Padma multipurpose bridge** and the **Akhaura-Agartala rail link** will dramatically change connectivity within Bangladesh and with India. Waterways are also being revived to reduce the cost of trade.
- Bangladesh has provided cyber connectivity between the international gateway at Cox's Bazar to Agartala for faster Internet connectivity in India's northeastern States.
- India has also become a partner in Bangladesh's nuclear power programme, with the beginning of construction at the Rooppur nuclear power plant.
- India is poised to export around 1100 MW of power to meet the energy deficit in Bangladesh. Power projects totalling more than 3600 MW are under implementation by Indian companies.
- In 2017, 13 agreements worth around $10 billion were signed in the power and energy sectors.
- To offset the economic asymmetry, India has granted Bangladesh generous lines of credit (LOCs) and grants, with commitments reaching $8 billion. While LOCs mainly cover infrastructure and connectivity projects, grants flow into social sector development.
- Capacity building under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme is an important strand in bilateral ties and people-to-people interaction.
- Bangladeshis are among the largest groups of tourists into India. The visa regime has been liberalised and over a million visas are issued to Bangladeshi citizens annually.

Challenges:

- There will be setbacks in India-Bangladesh ties, like the current Rohingya issue. India should carefully examine its role in the return of the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. Bangladesh's efforts in repatriation of the Rohingya have not been successful.
- Sharing of river waters will remain a challenge.
- With the rise of religious radicalism and terrorism, defence and security issues will require greater cooperation. Islamist organisations have been breeding grounds for religious radicals and extremist views. These forces will pose a considerable challenge for governance in Bangladesh in the future.

- China's security and economic footprint has grown in South Asia and managing this will remain a challenge for both countries.

Connecting the dots:

- Connectivity is the most vital component of Indo-Bangladesh bilateral ties. Comment. Also discuss the ongoing initiatives on this front and their potential in ensuring better regional trade and investment.
- Discuss all the realistic concerns that make it essential for the Indian government to provide a fair deal to Bangladesh.

Trump's remarks on India and India's response (with regard to role in Afghanistan)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; International Relations

In news:

- At a recently held cabinet meeting, U.S. President Donald Trump said countries which are near to Afghanistan (India, Russia and Pakistan) should be fighting the Taliban instead of U.S.
- Trump particularly took aim at India and mocked at PM Modi for funding a "library" in Afghanistan, saying it is of no use in the war-torn country as he criticised India and others for not doing enough for the nation's security.

India's response

- India rejected Trump's remark, said that **developmental assistance can play a major role** in transforming the war-ravaged country.
- India has been implementing a **range of mega infrastructure projects** (such as 218 km road from Zaranj to Delaram, the Salma Dam and the new Afghan Parliament building) as well as **carrying out community development programmes** in Afghanistan as per requirement of its people. Such assistance would go a long way in making the country economically empowered and stable.
- India has also been **supplying military equipment** to Afghanistan besides providing **training to hundreds of Afghan security personnel**.
- India plays a significant role in the country as its development partner and that the partnership is built on the specific needs and requirements worked out with the Afghan government.

- India seeks to **build capacities and capabilities of Afghan nationals** and its **institutions for governance and delivery of public service**, develop socio-economic infrastructure, secure lives and promote livelihood.
- Besides mega infrastructure projects, India is implementing **116 new 'High Impact Community Development Projects'** in 31 provinces of Afghanistan, including in the areas of education, health, agriculture, irrigation, drinking water, renewable energy, flood control, micro-hydropower, sports infrastructure, administrative infrastructure.
- India does not send its armed forces abroad except under the specific mandate of UN Peacekeeping Operations.

India's role in Afghanistan after the inevitable exit of US

India must be prepared for the potential consequences of withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan.

Recently, U.S. President Donald Trump suggested that regional players like Russia, India and Pakistan should be more involved in stabilising the situation, and mocked India for not doing enough.

As a result, the U.S. war in Afghanistan, that began as revenge for the 9/11 attacks, evolved into a mission for ensuring democracy and prosperity in Afghanistan.

Challenges:

- Resurgence of the Taliban: The Taliban has re-emerged as a formidable fighting force and are going from strength to strength.
- As Mr. Trump now moves to cutting American presence to a few well-guarded military bases, India must consider the consequences closely.

Do you know?

- Casualties of Afghan National and Defence Security Forces in May-September 2018 were the "greatest it has ever been" compared to corresponding periods since 2001, and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan "documented more civilian deaths in the first nine months of 2018 than they had during the same nine-month reporting period since 2014".

Shift in policy

It is also time to recognise that the U.S.'s South Asia Strategy for Afghanistan (announced by Mr. Trump in August 2017) has been discarded.

Mr. Trump had defined the strategy with three features:

1. that U.S. troops would remain involved in the country until "conditions" mandated their return;
2. that the U.S. would put Pakistan on notice for its support to the Taliban and a political settlement with the Taliban would only follow "after an effective military effort"; and
3. that the policy would hinge on further developing the strategic partnership with India

However, today, we can easily see that each element of the U.S.'s policy on the ground has shifted, if not been entirely reversed.

The appointment of special envoy Zalmay Khalilzad in September to lead talks with the Taliban shows that the U.S. is no longer waiting for military operations to take effect.

Mr. Trump wrote a letter to Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan thanking him for his efforts.

Mr. Khalilzad's direct talks with the Taliban didn't even have President Ashraf Ghani in the loop and the National Unity government (NUG) in Kabul was cut out. This reversed the previous U.S. position not to engage the Taliban until it engages the NUG.

Exit of Defence Secretary James Mattis is one more concern. Mr. Mattis had pushed most strenuously to keep India in the Afghan game by swinging a waiver for India on Chabahar and Iran oil purchases. It remains to be seen whether Mr. Trump will continue those waivers past May this year.

Conclusion:

- The internal situation in Afghanistan is aggravated now by the uncertainty of the democratic process.
- Doubts have been casted against Government's inability to conduct Parliamentary elections.
- Presidential elections have been postponed.

For India, these developments may appear discouraging. The removal or reduction of the U.S. presence from most theatres of action has created space for regional players: leaving Syria to Iran and its allies; Yemen to Saudi Arabia; Afghanistan to players like Russia, Pakistan and Iran; and Pakistan to China.

India's best course with Afghanistan remains its own regional strategy, not becoming a part of any other country's strategy. Close bilateral consultations has earned India immense popularity and goodwill.

Connecting the dots:

- New challenges confront India and Afghanistan in their bilateral relationship which requires India to tread cautiously. Examine.
- A stable Afghanistan is key to India's policy towards Central Asian countries. Comment. Also examine the associated challenges.

Shaping Afghanistan's Future

Context:

- There might be some **potential consequences due to withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan**. It can **result into instability in Afghanistan, South and Central Asia**.
- If this happens, security could hinge on efforts made by **regional powers to stabilise Afghanistan**.
- Therefore, there is a need for China to emerge as the power broker in Afghanistan and India should help enhance Afghanistan's security.

Why stability of Afghanistan is vital for China's development?
1. Sharing part of a border with Afghanistan, China has a great interest in its stability.
2. China would be adversely affected by war and chaos, which could spill over into north-western China, Pakistan, and Central Asia.
3. As all these areas are **vital in its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, peace in Afghanistan is critical.

Role played by China
Over the last decade, China has gained considerable economic and diplomatic influence in Afghanistan.

- China announced its intention to **build regional consensus on Afghanistan's security**, when Afghanistan's President, Ashraf Ghani, made China the destination of his first official trip abroad in October 2014.
- China has joined the U.S. and Russia in several **peace talks with the Taliban.**
- China is part of the **four-nation Quadrilateral Coordination Group** (with Afghanistan, Pakistan and the U.S.).

- It is giving military aid to Afghanistan, to help fight terrorism and increase security cooperation.
- China has used diplomacy and finance to appear influential and generous.
- China has invested in projects such as mining, roads and railways, and health.
- A rail link, completed in 2016, and running from far eastern China via Uzbekistan to the river port of Hairatan in northern Afghanistan, could reduce the time taken to make shipments, from six months by road, to just two weeks.
- In 2012, it brought Afghanistan into the regional diplomatic processes by giving it observer status in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).
- At the 18th SCO summit at Qingdao, China, in 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared China's readiness to train 2,000 law enforcement officers 'for all parties' in the next three years.
- The SCO's programme for 2019-21 also calls for combating terrorism, and generally enhancing security cooperation.

Do you know?

- If the U.S. withdrawal aggravates conflict, southern Russia will also face the threat of an extremist spillover. Therefore, Russia and other Central Asian countries would be willing to expand their cooperation with China to curb insecurity.
- However, question remains how China will deal with Pakistan, which trains and exports extremists across the Durand Line?
- Since 2011, China has continually blamed Pakistan for exporting extremists to Uighur in Xinjiang, and for extremist attacks on Chinese workers in the CPEC area.
- Could China have some leverage over Pakistan? Would China's strategic and economic interests prompt it to press Pakistan to stop exporting terrorists across the Durand Line?

India's role

- India **supports China's role** in international negotiations on Afghanistan.
- It had supported the activation of the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and other mechanisms of dialogue and cooperation for **restoration of peace and development** in Afghanistan.
- India has **contributed much 'soft power'** - ranging from telecommunications to education, Bollywood movies and pop music.
- India supports for Afghanistan's democracy. **National Assembly was built with Indian assistance.**
- India has been **implementing a range of mega infrastructure** projects and carrying out **community development programmes**.

- India has also been **supplying military equipment** to Afghanistan besides providing **training to hundreds of Afghan security personnel**.
- India seeks to **build capacities and capabilities of Afghan nationals** and its **institutions for governance and delivery of public service**, develop socio-economic infrastructure, secure lives and promote livelihood.
- India, which has been against holding talks with the Taliban for a long time, finally sent two retired diplomats, at the 'non-official level', to join them at the Moscow peace talks.

However, India's lengthy absence from regional diplomacy has resulted in its limited contribution to the negotiations that are necessary to stabilise Afghanistan.

Combined Role for Afghan's Future

- India and China should work together, bilaterally and in multilateral groupings, to build a secure Afghanistan.
- India-China economic cooperation in Afghanistan can boost progress and enhance human security.
- Last October, in a first, India and China started a joint training project for Afghan diplomats. They can expand cooperation by facilitating Afghanistan's full membership of the SCO.
- China's leadership role of the SCO and contacts with all parties (the U.S., the Taliban, the Afghan government, Pakistan, Russia and the five Central Asian states) can work together to craft a regional solution in Afghanistan.

Connecting the dots:

- U.S. has embraced the idea of seeking a regional solution to Afghanistan. Do you think it is a welcome move? Can regional countries play vital role for Afghan's secure future? Discuss.

A better solution for Afghanistan crisis: idea of enabling its neutrality and engaging Taliban

Context:

- The best way out for Afghanistan issue would be to **re-place Afghanistan in its traditional mode of neutrality**.
- For that, two things were essential. The Afghans themselves must declare unequivocally that they would follow strict neutrality in their relations with external powers, and the outside powers must commit themselves to respect Afghanistan's neutrality.

- In other words, **external powers must subscribe to a multilateral declaration not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan** together with an obligation on **Afghanistan not to seek outside intervention in its internal situation**.

The agreement on the Neutrality of Laos, concluded in 1962, could provide a model for the neutralisation of Afghanistan.

The U.S.'s plan to pull out of Afghanistan is an appropriate time to re-examine the idea of enabling its neutrality.

Engage with the Taliban
- One thing that should already have been done and must be done is to engage in dialogue with the Taliban.
- Taliban will definitely be a major player in the politics of Afghanistan in the coming months and years. They already control more than 50% of the country and are getting stronger and bolder by the day.
- They are also engaged in direct talks with China, Russia, the Central Asian states and others.
- The Americans, represented by former diplomat Zalmay Khalilzad, have begun sustained dialogue with the Taliban.

The Taliban have refused to talk to the Kabul government so far, but as and when the Americans pull out, they might agree to engage with the Ashraf Ghani government.

In future, Taliban are guaranteed to play an important, perhaps even a decisive role in the governing structures of the country.

Do you know?
- Security cooperation in Afghanistan is impossible without a political solution that involves reconciling various hostile elements. This would lead to a more inclusive national government which has representation from all groups.
- It is also argued that conflict within Afghanistan can be resolved by distribution of power among the major ethnic groups and the political factions and between the central afghan government and the provinces. Finding a right balance that would keep all of the players satisfied, is the most crucial part.
- India has so far refrained from establishing formal contacts with the Taliban. (No direct talks with Taliban as long as Taliban refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Kabul government).
- However, India must look after its own interests. In future, a Taliban-dominated government in Kabul may necessarily pose a serious security threat to India.

- Even Iran, a Shia regime, has established official dialogue with the Taliban, a staunchly Sunni movement. It would not be difficult for our agencies to establish contacts that would facilitate initiating an official dialogue with Taliban.

Role of Regional Players
- Regional players' role is crucial for Afghan peace process.
- It is important to promote a regional compact among all the neighbouring countries as well as relevant external powers, and with the endorsement of the UN Security Council, to commit themselves not to interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs.
- Pakistan should have no objection to formally agreeing to Afghanistan's neutrality. Pakistan should respect the **Bilateral Agreement on the Principles of Mutual Relations** (in particular on Non-interference and Non-intervention**), signed in Geneva in 1988** between Pakistan and Afghanistan.
- According to that agreement, the parties should respect the right of the other side to determine its political, social and culture system without interference in any form; to refrain from over throwing or changing the political system of the other side; to ensure that its territory was not used to violate the sovereignty, etc of the other side, to prevent within its territory the training, etc of mercenaries from whatever origin for the purpose of hostile activities against the other side.

The **Bonn Agreement of 2001**, which made Hamid Karzai the interim chief of Afghan government, contains a **request to the United Nations and the international community to 'guarantee' non-interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan**, a request not acted upon so far.

Conclusion:
- A regional pact on non-interference and non-intervention should be welcomed by all the regional states.
- After the exit of US and other western countries, no other country will offer to put boots on the ground, nor should they; certainly not India.
- The only alternative is to think of some neutrality arrangement.

Connecting the dots:
- Why have Afghanistan's continued peace efforts under the Kabul Process failed to bear fruit, despite international support? Discuss how can regional and international stakeholders in the Afghan peace process support the Afghan government in achieving the results Afghanistan seeks?
- Do you think India should fight the Taliban in Afghanistan? Examine its pros and cons.

Afghan Peace Process

Part of: GS Mains II – International Relations; Security issues

In news:

- U.S. declared it has agreed upon peace framework with Taliban
- Envoy said militants have vowed not to allow the use of Afghanistan for terrorism
- After nine years of halting efforts to reach a peace deal with the Taliban, the draft framework, though preliminary, is the biggest tangible step toward ending the two-decade war.
- The next set of contingencies would see the U.S. agreeing to withdraw combat troops from Afghanistan, but only in return for the Taliban's entering talks with the Afghan government and agreeing to a lasting ceasefire.

Raisina Dialogue 2019

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; international Relations

In news:

- **Raisina Dialogue 2019** is 4th edition multilateral dialogue organised by Ministry of External Affairs in partnership with Observer Research Foundation (ORF).
- This dialogue is **India's flagship** annual geopolitical and geo-strategic conference.
- The theme of the Dialogue is **"A World Reorder: New Geometries; Fluid Partnerships; Uncertain Outcomes"**.
- The discussions will seek to address issues arising from ongoing global transitions and changes to the world order, triggered by unique leaders, innovative partnerships and new technologies.

Raisina Dialogue: Outcomes

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; international Relations

Key focus areas:

- Terrorism, threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and climate change.
- Digital age and radicalization: In the digital age, the challenge is even greater, with a greater vulnerability to radicalization.

- Rules-based order: India reiterated its stand for a democratic and rules-based international order, in which all nations thrive as equals.

Do you know?
- As far back as 1996, India proposed a draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism at the UN, but it remained a draft because of a lack of consensus on a common definition.
- International Solar Alliance to tackle Climate Change - India jointly launched with France last year with the participation of 120 countries.

Persian Gulf Regional Dialogue Forum
- In order to address the lingering conflicts and mistrust in the Gulf region, Iran proposed a new platform for regional peace building.
- The announcement of Persian Gulf Regional Dialogue Forum is significant as it comes in the wake of **continued erosion of the Gulf Cooperation Council**, which in the recent years has been **divided between the Iranian and the Saudi spheres**.

India- Malaysia

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; international Relations

In news:
- **Dato' Seri Anwar bin Ibrahim**, president of the People's Justice Party and leader of the Pakatan Harapan coalition of Malaysia, has been elected back to Parliament 20 years after being imprisoned.
- Ibrahim is said to become next PM (as Dr. Mahathir bin Mohamad, currently serving as Prime Minister of Malaysia said he will step down before May 2020).
- Ibrahim said ties with India are well below potential and must be strengthened.
- On India-Myanmar and Rohingya issue, Ibrahim expressed his disappointment that Indian position is business first and human rights in the background. India could have been the voice of reason and champion the cause of justice.

Concern:
- One big issue between India and Malaysia ties is the presence of Zakir Naik, an Indian Islamic preacher, and the founder and president of the Islamic Research Foundation.
- Zakir Naik is accused of hate speech in India and of inciting terrorists to carry out an attack in Bangladesh.
- Malaysia has incurred a $250 billion debt.

India-US: 2+2 intercession

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II - International Relations; India and the world

In news:

- India and the U.S. reviewed the progress on finalising two key agreements during the recently held 2+2 intercession.
- The two key agreements are Industrial Security Annex (ISA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).
- The ISA is particularly essential as the Indian industry looks for a greater role in defence manufacturing. It allows sharing of classified information from the U.S. government and American companies with the Indian private sector, which is so far limited to the Indian government and the defence public sector undertakings.

Taking ties forward

Industrial Security Annex (ISA)

As the Indian industry looks for greater role in defence manufacturing, the agreement allows sharing of classified information from the U.S. government and companies with the Indian private sector

Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA)

The U.S. has already shared a draft of BECA, the last foundational agreement to be signed with India

Pic:
https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/14/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_11/d9d8c5e3_2665618_101_mr.jpg

India to grow crops for UAE, Saudi Arabia

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II - International Relations; India and the world

In news:

- UAE and Saudi Arabia has decided to use India as a base to address their food security concerns.

- Farm-to-port project: For the first time, India's export policy identifies the potential of agriculture along with horticulture, dairy, plantation and fisheries.
- The farm-to-port project will be similar to a special economic zone but in the style of a corporatised farm, where crops would be grown keeping a specific UAE market in mind.

India-South Africa: Addressing the issue of new migrants

Context:

- The close links between India and South Africa **from the perspective of migration** is well known.
- There is vast documentation of historical migrant streams — from the **arrival of indentured labourers in Natal in 1860** to **the arrival of Indian traders after 1880**.
- **Durban**, in particular, is known to **host one of the largest concentrations of the Indian diaspora.**
- Data from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) show the population of Overseas Indians in South Africa in December 2018 to be over 1.5 million: 60,000 Non-Resident Indians and 15,00,000 Persons of Indian Origin.
- The invitation to **South African President Cyril Ramaphosa** as **the chief guest for India's Republic Day celebrations** this year has put the spotlight on two important pillars of bilateral ties: Mahatma Gandhi's connection to South Africa, and a large Indian diaspora.

However, for India-South Africa relations to take shape, we need to move beyond Gandhi and the Indian diaspora. Focus should be on recognizing and harnessing the potential of new migratory flows.

Do you know?
2019 marks –

- 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi
- 100th birth anniversary of Nelson Mandela
- 125 years of the Pietermaritzburg train incident (On 7 June 1893, young Mahatma Gandhi was forcibly removed from the first class, whites-only carriage of a train in Pietermaritzburg.)
- Gandhi spent the night at the cold railway station, and pondered over protesting against discrimination which further gave rise to Satyagraha.

Focus on South Africa's new Indian migrants

- Post its democratic transition, South Africa witnessed an influx of migrants from developing countries such as Mozambique, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, India, and Lesotho, who came to the country **in the hope of social and economic success**.
- Indian migrants are driven to South Africa **because of cultural relatedness** and the presence of networks from the home country.
- These new migrants have set up businesses, they are critical drivers of businesses and employment generation.

However, on the other hand, not all is pleasant among the new Indian migrants and the South Africans of Indian origin.

- Idea of making South Africa as their 'home' has given **rise to antagonism** towards the new migrants.
- Indian and Chinese migrant traders have been at the receiving end of **xenophobic attacks and violence.** Their trading spaces have **witnessed violent burglaries and break-ins.**
- Much of this is driven by **hatred stemming from the perception** that migrants are taking away the jobs of local South Africans.

The real story, however, is that migrants have made positive contributions to South Africa's economy and society.

In fact, cities like Johannesburg are driven by migrants. Yet, this receives little attention in mainstream policy discourse or in bilateral/multilateral relationships.

Conclusion:

- President Ramaphosa (during African Union Summit in Kigali, Rwanda, in March 2018) urged South Africans to welcome and embrace foreign nationals from the [African] continent arguing that movement of people allows for new opportunities for business and learning.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi (during informal meeting of BRICS) spoke of the need for "smooth movement of labourers worldwide" in the context of managing labour relations in global value chains.
- Contemporary India and South Africa **need to recognise and harness the potential of new migratory flows**. Only then can we realise our true strength as allies in BRICS or IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa).
- The emphasis on skill development, South-South cooperation, and people-to-people contact cannot be delinked from cross-border flows of people, who are rapidly transforming the employment and migration landscape in both countries.

- At the same time, free labour mobility on its own is not enough; we need measures to safeguard and uphold labour standards globally.

India and South Africa relations: Red Fort Declaration

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – India and the World; International Relations

In news:
- India, South Africa to revise 22-year-old Strategic Partnership
- The Strategic Partnership between India and South Africa, called the **Red Fort Declaration**, was signed in March 1997 by the then South African President Nelson Mandela and former PM H.D. Deve Gowda.
- Three-year plan of action on security cooperation, trade and investment, tourism, harnessing the 'blue economy', maritime cooperation, agriculture, science and technology projects.
- South African defence firm Denel was barred from doing business in India since 2005. Denel was finally removed from the blacklist in September 2018 after the Central Bureau of Investigation filed a closure report and the Supreme Court subsequently dismissed corruption charges against the company.

India, South Africa strategic partnership agreement

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Indian and the World; International Relations
In news:
- We had earlier read that India, South Africa to revise 22-year-old Strategic Partnership.
- Three-year plan of action on security cooperation, trade and investment, tourism, harnessing the 'blue economy', maritime cooperation, agriculture, science and technology projects was signed recently.
- The three-year strategic partnership agreement is expected to boost relations.

Do you know?
- Both the countries have strong partnership in platforms such as the BRICS, the G-20, the Indian Ocean Region Association and the IBSA Dialogue Forum.
- India also invited South Africa to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and congratulated it on securing the non-permanent membership of the UN Security Council for 2019-20.

SAARC nations

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

In news:
- South Asia region's future lay in cooperation among the eight SAARC nations (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka).
- A panel of diplomats, essayists and foreign policy experts met recently.
- The panel felt the focus of South Asian discourse needed to shift away from the perception of India's dominance in the region.

About SAARC
- It was founded in Dhaka (1985)
- Secretariat is based in Kathmandu, Nepal
- SAARC is regional intergovernmental organization and geopolitical union in South Asia. It promotes development of economical and regional integration.

SAARC'S Stats:
- Region accounts for 2% of world trade and 1.7% of world FDI (foreign direct investment).
- Intra-regional trade is less than 6% of our global trade and intra-regional FDI accounts for only 3% of total FDI inflows
- In contrast, the share of intra-regional trade for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)—to which SAARC is often compared—is close to 25%. Intra-regional FDI accounts for 18% of the net FDI inflows in the ASEAN region.

India-Russia ties

In news:

- Russian envoy said the $5.2-billion deal for the S-400 missile defence system, (despite pressure from the U.S. and threats of sanctions), is a proof of the special nature of the partnership between the two countries.
- The S-400 is a highly advanced surface-to-air missile defence system that can shoot down hostile jets and missiles.

- Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu was being developed successfully (with assistance from Russia).

ECONOMY

For achieving sustained high growth

Context:

- 2018 has been a mixed bag, both globally and domestically.
- Globally, the growth rate in 2018 was high, particularly in the United States. But strong signs of a trade war emerged, dimming hopes of faster international trade. Britain is passing through the pangs of separation from the European Union.
- Domestically, the first quarter growth rate was high. But signs are not good for the balance of the year. (Fall in rupee, crude oil prices rose, agrarian distress accentuated)

Indian context

India's growth rate in 2018-19 is forecast at 7.4% by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). However, it looks like a touch-and-go situation. More likely, it will be slightly lower.

Reasons:

- Even though the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has stabilised, much will **depend on the pickup in the investment rate** and the productivity of capital or its inverse incremental capital-output ratio.
- The **international environment is not that conducive for growth** in our foreign trade; this will have an impact on our exports and, therefore, growth.
- High oil prices, emerging market stress as the era of easy money draws to a close, and policy paralysis ahead of elections.
- The impact of higher global oil prices compounded by sharp rupee depreciation raises the cost of households' consumption basket, and will weigh on households' capacity for other expenditures.
- Borrowing costs have already risen because of tightening monetary policy.
- Sluggish demand, possible state spending cut pose risk to growth.

Five issues that need to be addressed comprehensively if India is to achieve sustained high growth:

1. Raising the investment ratio
2. Putting the banking system back on the rails
3. Employment generation through better growth
4. Enhancing export growth to contain the CAD; and

5. Removing agrarian distress by increasing productivity and consolidation of small landholdings.

1. Raising the investment ratio

- The growth rate depends on the investment rate and the productivity of capital or its inverse incremental capital-output ratio.
- Productivity and ICOR depends upon a multiple number of factors such as quality of labour (education and skill development levels) and technology, which is constantly changing.

2. Putting the banking system back on the rails

- An important factor affecting economic growth is the condition of our banking system.
- Non-performing assets (NPAs) and stressed assets should be taken care.
- As many as 11 public sector banks are under Prompt Corrective Action (PCA), which will restrict the lending abilities of these banks.
- Added to this, the non banking financial company (NBFC) system is also under stress.
- Recapitalisation of public sector banks will partly solve the problem.
- Their inability to lend affects the availability of working capital as well as capital expenditures.
- The growth rate in the industrial sector will depend on how quickly the banking system comes back to normalcy.

3. Employment generation

- Employment in the informal sector is much larger.
- Jobless growth – Even though growth is around 7%, there is no corresponding growth in employment.
- It is growth which is led by new investment that leads to a significant increase in employment.
- Increase in employment seen in the period between 2004-05 and 2009-10 was because of the rapid growth of the information technology (IT) and financial sectors. The IT sector has slowed down. The financial sector is under stress.
- Thus, even from the point of view of employment, the key factor is the pickup in investment.

4. Enhancing export growth

- India's external sector has grown and is well integrated with the rest of the world.
- India's trade in goods and services as a percentage of GDP has grown to 42% of GDP. Therefore, what happens in the rest of the world affects India's growth very much.

- India's balance of payment situation has been comfortable since liberalisation. However, there are some vulnerabilities seen in September-October 2018, when the value of the rupee suddenly plummeted when crude oil prices rose. This also led to capital outflows.
- RBI intervention and the subsequent fall in crude prices have restored the value of the rupee. Thus, India's exports of goods grew by 11.6%.
- Strong growth in exports is a must if we have to keep the current account deficit (CAD) at a manageable level.
- The forecast for world trade and output is not encouraging. There are too many uncertainties – such as intensification in the trade war, protectionism etc.

5. Removing agrarian distress
- The future growth also depends on the performance of agriculture.
- Effective government procurement, improving financial capacity of the government to procure, adequate physical arrangements to procure and store will help.
- Increasing productivity and enabling farmers to achieve increased output and better prices should be the end goal. Loan waivers are at best short-term solutions.
- Consolidation of landholdings by small farmers, combined attack to increase productivity and improving marketing is needed to assure farmers of better income.

Connecting the dots:
- Can the Indian economy really achieve double digit growth? Discuss what measures are needed if India has to achieve sustained high growth.

India's GDP may grow at 7.3% in 2018-19, says World Bank

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

In news:
According to 2019 **Global Economic Prospects report released by the World Bank** –
- India's GDP is expected to grow at 7.3% in the fiscal year 2018-19 and 7.5% in the following two years.
- **Upswing in consumption and investment** to drive growth.
- The bank said India will continue to be the fastest growing major economy in the world.
- China's economic growth is projected to slow down to 6.2% each in 2019 and 2020 and 6% in 2021.
- In 2018, the Chinese economy is estimated to have grown by 6.5% as against India's 7.3%.

- In 2017, China with 6.9% growth was marginally ahead of India's 6.7%, mainly because of the slowdown in the Indian economy due to demonetisation and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST).

GST can boost direct, indirect tax collections

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy; Fiscal policy

In news:
- According to tax analysts, **GST can boost direct, indirect tax collections**.
- To meet its fiscal requirements, government is increasingly dependent on tax revenue and also trying to improve revenues via sources such as PSU dividends.
- The view among tax analysts is that the government cannot take the risk of increasing tax rates, whether direct or indirect, for fear of a backlash from the public. So, the only option it has to boost tax revenues is to **increase the tax base and stop evasion**, both of which the government has been trying to do.

Do you know?
- Government's dependence on tax revenue has steadily increased from last five years.
- However, the share of revenue from non-tax sources (such as dividends from PSUs and the RBI) and capital receipts (such as disinvestment proceeds) has been declining.

Measures taken to increase the tax base and stop evasion
- Analysing the business-wise monthly GST payments and ascertaining trends in State-wise movement of goods using the e-waybill data.
- Government plans to correlate GST data with information relevant from an income tax payment perspective so that incorrect tax filings can be corrected and revenues enhanced.

Therefore, the expansion of the GST taxpayer base, improving the return filings compliance and using the large amount of data available to detect tax evasion would become the cornerstone of the government's measures to enhance tax revenues.

Adam Smith and Laissez-faire

Basics:

- **Adam Smith** was an 18th century philosopher renowned as the **father of modern economics** and a **major proponent of laissez-faire economic policies**.
- **Laissez-faire** is an economic system in which transactions between **private parties are free from government intervention**.
- In other words, Laissez faire is the belief that economies and businesses function best when there is no interference by the government.
- It is one of the guiding principles of capitalism and a free market economy.

Tax, compliance burden eased for small businesses

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Government policies and programmes; Indian Economy and issues related to it.

In news:

- GST Council decided on a series of measures that will **ease the tax and compliance burden for small businesses**.
- Henceforth, **companies with annual turnover up to ₹40 lakh will stay out of the GST** net (₹20 lakh earlier).
- The annual turnover limit for eligibility for the Composition Scheme has also been raised to ₹1.5 crore from April 1.
- The increase in limit would allow about 10 lakh traders to be exempt from the GST compliance burden.

Kerala disaster cess of 1%

- The GST Council also decided to allow Kerala to levy a cess of up to 1% for up to two years on intra-State supplies to help finance the disaster relief efforts following the recent floods in the state.

Vote on account

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

In news:

- The Budget to be presented by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley on February 1, 2019 is likely to be a vote on account or an interim Budget.
- An outgoing government presents only an interim Budget or seeks a vote on account. It leaves it to the next government to present the full Budget.

Do you know?

- As per the Constitution, all the revenue received by the Union government and the loans raised by it are parked in the Consolidated Fund of India.
- The constitution says that no money can be withdrawn by the government from the Consolidated Fund of India except under appropriation made by law. For that an appropriation bill is passed during the Budget process.
- Since, the appropriation bill may take time to pass through the Parliament and become a law, the government would need permission to spend even a single penny from April 1 when the new financial year starts.
- Vote on account is the permission to withdraw money from the Consolidated Fund of India in that period, usually two months.

About Vote on Account

- Vote on account is the **interim permission of the parliament** to the government to spend money.
- It is just an interim permission to spend money as against a full Budget which is an elaborate financial statement of expenditure and receipts including changes in taxes and government policies.
- In the election year when the elections are scheduled a few months into the new financial year, the government prefers to seek a vote on account instead of presenting a full Budget because if the government changes after elections it is not fair to deny it the right to design its own Budget for the remaining part of the year.
- Though vote-on-account is a temporary measure, it does need the approval of Parliament and it is usually passed without much discussion.
- The vote on account typically does not seek funds for major projects or new initiatives. This usually awaits the presentation of the full Budget.
- One of the key features of a vote on account is that it usually does not contain any direct tax proposals that would impact people, as that requires amendments to the Finance Bill. (Therefore, any decrease/increase or exemption/inclusion related to income tax will be on hold if there's a vote on account.)

Final Crux:

- Vote on Account is a temporary measure which occurs in the run-up to every general election.
- The Parliament approves the outgoing government's budget and gives it spending rights till the end of the financial year
- By approving the interim budget, the Parliament passes a vote on account to help the government meet administration expenses till the next full budget

ILO urges universal labour guarantee

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate

Context:
International Labour Organisation (ILO) is an UN agency that sets international labour standards ILO urged heads of State and business leaders (who gathered in Davos for the World Economic Forum) to commit to –

- a **universal labour guarantee**,
- a **universal social protection** from birth to old age,
- an **international governance system** for the gig economy, and
- a **human-in-command approach to artificial intelligence**.

Do you know?

- **'Future of Work' report** is released by **International Labour Organisation** (ILO)
- ILO warned that "without decisive action we will be sleepwalking into a world that widens inequality, increases uncertainty and reinforces exclusion, with destructive political, social and economic repercussions."

According to the **'Future of Work' report** –

- 190 million people are unemployed around the world.
- Around the world, 300 million workers live in extreme poverty.
- Wage gaps are growing at a time of declining wage growth.
- Two-thirds of jobs in the developing world are susceptible to automation.
- Only 15% of households in emerging countries have Internet access.
- Implementing the Paris Climate Agenda could create 24 million new jobs. But around 6 million workers are expected to lose their jobs in the transition to a greener economy.

ILO asked all countries to "place people at the centre of economic and social policy", ensuring that final decisions are taken by human beings.

Important Value Additions:
Reports published by ILO –

- 'Future of Work' report
- World Social Protection Report
- World Employment and Social Outlook
- World of Work Report

- Global Wage Report

Gold turns red hot, price at a peak

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

In news:
Gold prices in India hovered near record levels
Factors responsible for such high prices –

- Increase in global demand (especially from central banks)
- Central banks of many countries like Russia and Turkey, along with a few other smaller economies that have seen currency issues, are buying gold, thereby pushing up the demand
- Fall in the quantum of mining of the precious metal

Do you know?

- Gold price now (30th Jan 2019) = ₹33,800 (highest ever for the yellow metal)
- Gold price during demonetization = ₹30,600

DIPP rechristened to include internal trade

In news:

- The government has notified changing the name of the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) to the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade**, and has enhanced its role.

Four new categories of responsibilities –

1. The renamed body will be in charge of promotion of internal trade (including retail trade),
2. The welfare of traders and their employees,
3. Matters relating to facilitating Ease of Doing Business, and
4. Matters relating to start-ups.

Do you know?
Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion is also responsible for Intellectual Property Rights relating to Patents, Designs, Trade Marks, Geographical Indication of Goods, Copyrights

and Semiconductor Integrated Circuits Layout Design and oversees the initiative relating to their promotion and protection.

BANKING/RBI RELATED ISSUES

Amalgamation of the three banks

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

In news:
- The Union Cabinet approved the amalgamation of the three banks, with Bank of Baroda as the transferee bank, and Vijaya and Dena as transferor banks.
- This would mean that the merged entity would be known as the Bank of Baroda.
- The amalgamation will help create a strong globally competitive bank with economies of scale and facilitate realisation of wide-ranging synergies.

Role of open market operations in easeing tight liquidity conditions

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy; monetary policy; open market operations

In news:
- We know that the issue of liquidity crunch is being faced by the banking system.
- The tight liquidity conditions had led to overnight call money rate breaching the monetary policy corridor on several occasions.
- Therefore, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) decided to scale up its open market operations (OMO).
- In other words, RBI to pump in more liquidity into the system through open market operations (OMOs).

About open market operations
- Open market operations are conducted by the RBI by way of sale or purchase of government securities (g-secs) to adjust money supply conditions.
- The central bank sells g-secs to suck out liquidity from the system and buys back g-secs to infuse liquidity into the system.
- These operations are often conducted on a day-to-day basis in a manner that balances inflation while helping banks continue to lend.
- The RBI uses OMO along with other monetary policy tools such as repo rate, cash reserve ratio and statutory liquidity ratio to adjust the quantum and price of money in the system.

Do you know?

- When RBI sells government security in the markets, the banks purchase them. When the banks purchase Government securities, they have a reduced ability to lend to the industrial houses or other commercial sectors. This reduced surplus cash, contracts the rupee liquidity and consequently credit creation / credit supply.
- When RBI purchases the securities, the commercial banks find them with more surplus cash and this would create more credit in the system. Thus, in the case of excess liquidity, RBI resorts to sale of G-secs to suck out rupee from system.
- Similarly, when there is a liquidity crunch in the economy, RBI buys securities from the market, thereby releasing liquidity.
- Its worth to note here that the market for government securities is not well developed in India but still OMO plays very important role.

Tokenisation may aid safe digital transactions

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

In news:
- RBI decides to allow card payment providers to offer tokenisation services.
- It believes the move will ensure the safety of digital transactions and reduce chances of fraud.
- Tokenisation involves a process in which a unique token masks sensitive card details like card and CVV number.
- The token is used to perform card transactions in contactless mode at Point Of Sale (POS) terminals, Quick Response (QR) code payments, etc.

How does tokenization work?
- The debit or credit card holder will create a code for a particular amount, say ₹500, through an app in the form of a number.
- That number will have the amount that can be spent, the merchant type where it can be spent as well as time within which the transaction needs to be completed.
- Then the number can be shared with the merchant who will enter it in the mobile, to get the payment for the items sold.
- There will be no need to enter card number, CVV, expiry date etc online. One can generate a token and make the payment. There is no risk at all for digital payments.

RBI makes changes in gold scheme

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

In news:
- RBI made some changes in the Gold Monetisation Scheme (GMS) by including charitable institutions and the Central government, among others.
- In other words, apart from individual and joint depositors, the scheme could now be availed by charitable institutions, the Central government, the State government or any other entity owned by the Central government or the State government

About GMS
- In 2015, the government launched the GMS to mobilise the gold held by households and institutions.
- GMS allows bank customers to deposit idle gold holdings for a fixed period in return for interest.

RBI eases norms for external commercial borrowing

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Indian Economy

In news:
- In a bid to improve ease of doing business, RBI has decided to liberalise external commercial borrowing (ECB) norms.
- The new norms allow all companies that are eligible for receiving foreign direct investment, to raise funds through the ECB route.

Do you know?
- External commercial borrowings (ECBs) are loans in India made by non-resident lenders in foreign currency to Indian borrowers.
- They are used widely in India to facilitate access to foreign money by Indian corporations and PSUs (public sector undertakings).
- ECBs include commercial bank loans, buyers' credit, suppliers' credit, securitised instruments such as floating rate notes and fixed rate bonds etc., credit from official export credit agencies and commercial borrowings from the private sector window of multilateral financial Institutions such as International Finance Corporation (Washington), ADB, AFIC, CDC, etc.

- ECBs cannot be used for investment in stock market or speculation in real estate. The DEA (Department of Economic Affairs), Ministry of Finance, Government of India along with Reserve Bank of India, monitors and regulates ECB guidelines and policies.
- External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) is governed by the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA).

SC upholds bankruptcy code

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

In news:
- Supreme Court recently upheld the constitutionality of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)
- The SC's stand sends a clear message that India is no longer "the defaulter's paradise."

Do you know?
- Insolvency is a situation where individuals or companies are unable to repay their outstanding debt.
- The term insolvency is used for both individuals and organizations. For individuals, it is known as bankruptcy and for corporate it is called corporate insolvency. Both refer to a situation when an individual or company are not able to pay the debt in present or near future and the value of assets held by them are less than liability.

Important Value Additions:
- Lack of an insolvency and bankruptcy code had proved costly for the creditors (mainly banks).
- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code seeks to create a unified framework to resolve insolvency and bankruptcy in India.
- The recent Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018 was promulgated on June 6, 2018. It amends the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.
- The Code provides a time-bound process for resolving insolvency in companies and among individuals.

AGRICULTURE

Examining farm loan waivers

Introduction:

- We had earlier dealt with editorial analysis on - why farm loan waivers are not a suitable option to address the rural distress. (Avoid Loan Waivers)

Fast recap:

According to previous articles and editorials, farm loan waivers are not a suitable option to address the rural distress because –

- 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.
- Crop loans disbursed to agriculturists leave out tenant farmers.
- 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.

Therefore, loan waivers will merely end up aiding big farmers, commercial interest groups etc rather than small and vulnerable farmers.

(Note: In today's article, author provides divided opinion on the topic)

Divided opinion

Economists and bankers are sharply divided on whether farm loan waivers are desirable.

Against Loan Waiver

1. Loan waivers have **"reputational consequences"**; that is, they adversely affect the repayment discipline of farmers, leading to a rise in defaults in future.
2. **Earlier debt waiver schemes have not led to increases in investment or productivity** in agriculture. (two nationwide loan waiver programmes in India after Independence: in 1990 and 2008)
3. After the implementation of debt waiver schemes, a farmer's access to formal sector lenders declines, leading to a **rise in his dependence on informal sector lenders**; in other words, waivers lead to the shrinkage of a farmer's future access to formal sector credit.

Do you know?

- Farmers are most disciplined in their repayment behaviour. In September 2018, agricultural NPAs (about 8%) were far lower than in industry (about 21%).
- Agricultural NPAs were on a continuous decline between 2001 and 2008.
- Agricultural NPAs began to rise after 2015. (Reasons - policy-induced and a direct consequence of acute agrarian distress that spread across rural India after 2015)
- Demonetisation of November 2016 aggravated already brewing agrarian distress by sucking cash out of the rural areas, crashing output prices and disrupting supply chains.
- After every waiver, banks become conservative in issuing fresh loans to beneficiaries, as they are perceived to be less creditworthy.

For loan waivers:
- Large agrarian distress demands urgent policy attention
- Need for carefully designed waiver schemes that can ensure universal coverage for small, marginal and medium-sized farmers while covering both the formal and informal sources of debt.

At the grass-roots

NPAs in agriculture fell after 2001. While they did not rise abnormally after the 2008 waiver, they have begun to rise after 2015.
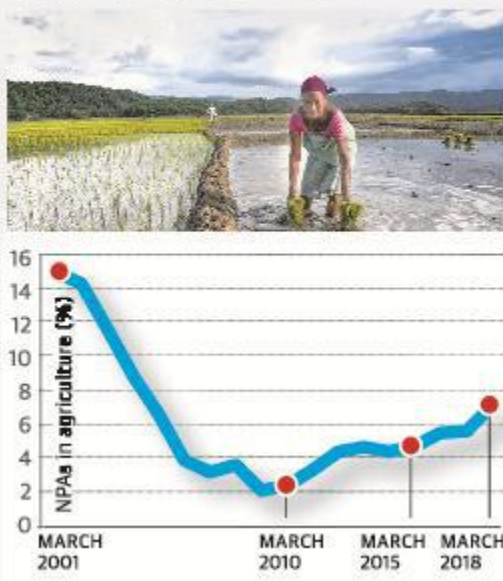
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Other alternatives needed

Unless there are steps 'to raise productivity, reduce costs of cultivation by providing quality inputs at subsidised rates, provide remunerative prices following the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission, ensure assured procurement of output, expand access to institutional credit, enhance public investment for infrastructural development, institute effective crop insurance systems and establish affordable scientific storage facilities and agro-processing industries for value addition', farmers will continue to be bonded to low income equilibrium and repeated debt traps.

Tackling Agrarian Distress

Introduction:

- Recently, there has been active discussion on the strategies addressing farm distress.
- 'Interim Budget' may also focus on the farm sector among other things.
- The below editorial highlights concerns and suggestions to Agrarian/Farmer Distress.

Why Agrarian distress?
- Low agricultural prices
- Poor farm incomes
- Low productivity and related supply side factors
- Declining average size of farm holdings
- Debt
- Declining output prices
- Poor irrigation
- Private money lenders
- Crop failure
- Neglect by the government or policy makers
- Absence of an effective price support policy, farmers are faced with a loss in income
- Farm incomes have been squeezed by slower output growth, higher costs and increased vulnerability to a changing climate
- Slew of new problems resulting directly from government policies

Do you know?
- Prices play a key role in affecting the incomes of farmers.
- In the last two years, inflation in agriculture was much lower than overall inflation.

- The consumer price index (CPI) also shows that the rise in prices for agriculture was much lower than general inflation in recent years.
- Market prices for several agricultural commodities have been lower than those of minimum support prices (MSP).

All these trends show that the terms of trade to be moving against agriculture in the last two years.

The way ahead:

Schemes to address the problem of managing declining output prices when output increases significantly.

- **'Price deficiency compensation'** – is one such mechanism which amounts to paying the difference between market price and the MSP.
- **'Open procurement system'** – has been in vogue quite effectively in the case of rice and wheat, where procurement is open ended at the MSP.

A 'price deficiency' scheme may compensate farmers when prices decrease below a certain specified level. However, market prices may continue to fall as supply exceeds 'normal demand'.

Therefore, alternative is the limited procurement scheme and income support schemes.

- **'Limited procurement scheme'** – Under this scheme, the government will procure the 'excess', leaving the normal production level to clear the market at a remunerative price. Thus, procurement will continue until the market price rises to touch the MSP.
- **'Income support schemes'** – Rythu Bandhu Scheme (Telangana) and the Krushak Assistance for Livelihood and Income Augmentation (KALIA) scheme (Odisha)

Raising the MSP, price deficiency payments or income support schemes can only be a partial solution to the problem of providing remunerative returns to farmers

- A sustainable solution is **market reforms** to enable better price discovery combined **with long-term trade policies favourable to exports**.
- Creation of a competitive, stable and unified national market is needed for farmers to get better prices.
- Agricultural markets need to be reformed. They are characterised by inefficient physical operations, excessive crowding of intermediaries, and fragmented market chains.
- Investment in infrastructure and research and development are needed.
- Efficiency in water management in both canal and groundwater is important.
- Technology can help to reduce 'yield gaps' and thus improve productivity.

- Land consolidation policies along with land development activities – to tackle the challenge of the low average size of holdings.

Conclusion:
- To conclude, farmers' distress is mainly due to low prices and low productivity.
- Suggestions are limited procurement, measures to improve low productivity, and consolidation of land holdings to gain the benefits of size, can help in reducing agrarian distress. We need a long-term policy to tackle the situation.

Connecting the dots:
- Examine the factors behind the ongoing agrarian crisis in India. What can be its remedy? Discuss.
- 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.
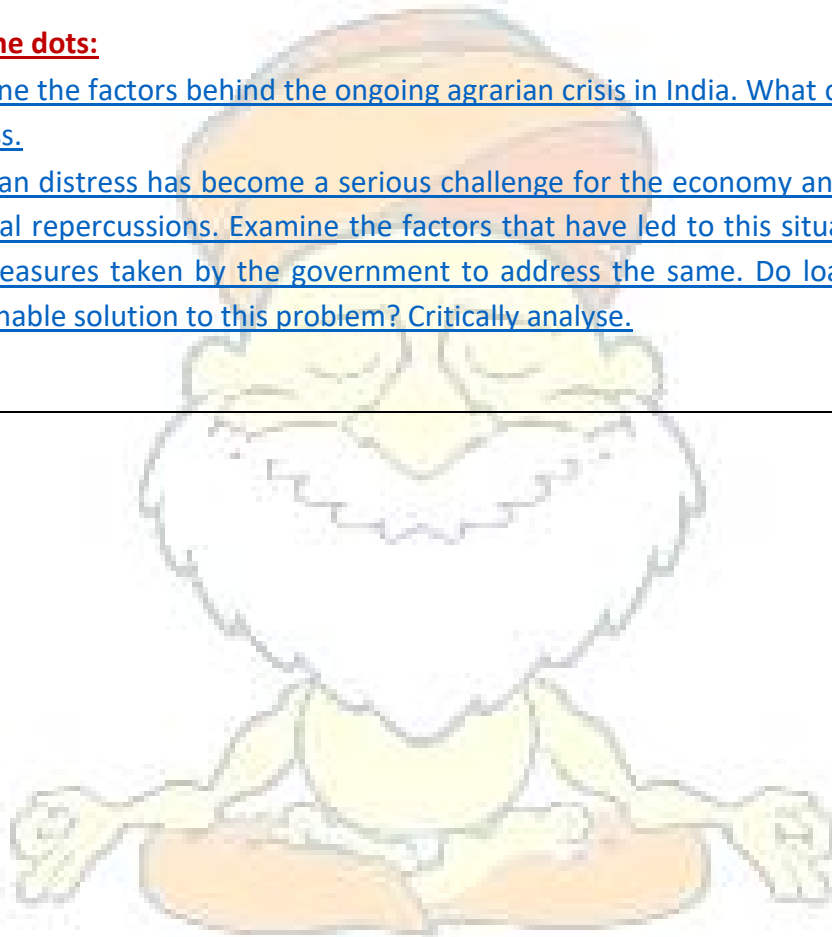
ENVIRONMENT/POLLUTION

Environmental Agenda for 2019

Introduction:
The year 2018 was full of declarations. Some major policies and programmes were launched to tackle issues ranging from air pollution to plastic pollution.
At the international level two major agreements got underway—

    (i) the **rulebook to implement the Paris Agreement was adopted** and

    (ii) the **Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol came into effect from January 1, 2019**.

India's agenda for 2019 should be:

1. Fulfil the international obligations

- Government should setup the institutional and regulatory framework to implement the major programmes announced in 2018 and **fulfil the international obligations**.

2. Implement the National Clear Air Programme:

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** was announced recently.
- It is the first ever national framework for air quality management with a target of **20-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by 2024**.
- NCAP has weak legal mandate and is not supported with adequate financial and institutional resources.
- Government has to strengthen NCAP and institutionalise it for effective enforcement. Without strict enforcement, all other measures will fail.

3. Ban single-use plastics:

- Government had pledged to ban all single-use plastics by 2022. It should be the single-most important environmental agenda and effective actions should start in 2019.
- A national definition along with a comprehensive action plan, including the promotion of alternatives, should be put in place in 2019.

4. Strengthen Swachh Bharat Mission:

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) is at a crucial juncture. Any laxity would jeopardise the gains made in the last four years.
- SBM should be further strengthened so that cities are capacitated to move beyond cleanliness to sustainable waste management.

5. National and State Action Plan on Climate Change:

- It has been a decade since India adopted its National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) and State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC). The outcome has been mixed.
- Few missions like National Solar Mission and the National Mission for Enhanced Energy Efficiency have done very well, while other missions under NAPCC have not progressed as expected.
- The SAPCC has not progressed beyond documentation.
- It is time the government revisits NAPCC and SAPCC and develops a comprehensive framework to decarbonise our economy and build resilience to adapt to the changing climate.

6. Implement National Action Plan on AMR:

- Antibiotic resistance is emerging as a major health threat.
- National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR) was adopted in April 2017 to reduce the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials.
- But the implementation has been very slow so far. Most states have not yet developed their action plans.
- Implementation of NAP-AMR must be a priority in 2019 as delays would mean jeopardising the lives of millions in the future.

7. Get the Forest Policy and Act right:

- The draft National Forest Policy, 2018 (NFP-2018) needs a serious relook.
- It has failed to address the core problems with the forestry sector.
- Environment ministry has also started the process of amending the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA), the bedrock of forestry-related regulations in the country.
- It is imperative that country gets both of them right.
- India needs a new forest policy and law that recognises the role and the potential of people to grow, manage, protect and use forests sustainably. This will create millions of jobs as well as protect forests better.

8. National River Revitalisation Plan:

- All major and minor rivers are in the grip of pollution because of unsustainable withdrawal of water and untreated disposal of wastes.
- From Cauvery to Godavari, and from Sutlej to Yamuna, most rivers in the country need a revitalisation plan.
- 'National River Revitalisation Plan' should be unveiled in 2019.

9. Ban all Class I pesticides:

- Every year, thousands of people die due to accidental intake of pesticides.

- Highly-toxic Class I pesticides are the biggest culprit.
- India should ban all Class I pesticides.
- Sri Lanka banned all Class I pesticides in the 1990s, which has prevented thousands of deaths, and has not led to any negative effect on agriculture productivity. We should learn from our neighbours.

10. Control desertification:
- In 2018, more than 50 dust storms affected as many as 16 states in northern and western India and killed more than 500 people.
- These dust storms are a symptom of increasing desertification in large parts of western and northern India.
- It is time that the State recognise this ecological disaster.
- It should initiate an ecological restoration programme focusing on land management, soil conservation and afforestation to halt and reverse desertification.

11. Strengthen Pollution Control Boards:
- Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) are ineffective, incapacitated and getting archaic with every passing year.
- They are not designed to manage the pollution challenges of the 21st century.
- It is time to reinvent PCBs and build their capacity for effective monitoring and enforcement.

Connecting the dots:
- What should be the government's agenda in 2019 to tackle issues ranging from air pollution to plastic pollution? Discuss.

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II – International affairs; Environment and Climate Change

In news:
- Morocco has been named the second best performing country after Sweden in the Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI).
- Morocco significantly increased the share of renewables over the past five years and increased new renewable energy capacity.
- The bottom five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., Iran, South Korea and Taiwan.
- With the connection of the world's largest solar plant to the grid, Morocco is on track for achieving its target of 42% installed renewable energy capacities by 2020.

National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Health issue; Environment and Pollution – Air Pollution; Government policies and programmes

In news:
- Centre launched a programme to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

About NCAP
- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** is scheme to provide the States and the Centre with a framework to combat air pollution.
- It is a five-year action plan with a tentative target of 20-30% reduction in concentrations of PM10 and PM2.5 by 2024, with 2017 as the base year.
- It is a ₹300-crore programme.

Do you know?

As per World Health Organisation's database on air pollution –
- In 2018, 14 of the world's 15 most polluted cities were in India.
- Tier I and Tier II Indian cities are some of the most polluted places in the world.

A study in the journal Lancet ranked India as No.1 on premature mortality and deaths from air pollution.

139 polluted cities not on clean air plan: report

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

In news:

According to Greenpeace report –
- There are 139 Indian cities that breach air pollution standards but are not included in the Centre's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)
- Greenpeace report analysed air pollution data of 313 cities and towns for the year 2017.
- Of these 313 cities, 241 (77%) had PM10 levels beyond the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).

- While 102 of these cities were included in the NCAP, the remaining 139 cities were left out.
- Even if the NCAP were to able to reduce pollution by 30% by 2024, 153 cities would still be left with pollution levels exceeding the NAAQS, the report added.

Do you know about National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)?
- National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is the latest initiative taken by the government of India to create strategies for reduction in air pollution levels at both regional and urban scale.
- The Goal of NACP is to meet the prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated timeframe.
- It is a five-year action plan with a tentative target of **20-30% reduction** in concentrations **of PM10 and PM2.5 by 2024**, with 2017 as the base year.
- The plan covers 102 non-attainment cities, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.

Non-attainment cities
- Cities are considered as Non-attainment cities, if they were consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.
- Cities included under the list of Non-attainment cities Delhi, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kolkata, Noida, Muzaffarpur, and Mumbai.

Objective of NACP
- To augment the capacity of air quality monitoring network across the country to provide reliable data on the state of air pollution.
- To solicit public participation in planning and mitigation of air quality issues through public outreach, transparency by disseminating data in public domain.
- To have realistic and measurable goals for prevention, mitigation and abetment of air pollution in a time-bound manner.

'Plastic waste imports to India go up'

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

In news:
- In spite of a ban on the import of plastic waste into India, the influx of PET bottles has quadrupled from 2017 to 2018 (due to legal loophole)

- Indian firms are importing plastic scraps from China, Italy, Japan and Malawi for recycling.
- To incentivise domestic plastic recycling units, the government had banned the import of plastic waste, particularly PET bottles in 2015.
- In 2016, an amendment allowed such imports as long as they were carried out by agencies situated in Special Economic Zones. It's this loophole that's been exploited.

Do you know?
- Government and industry estimates suggest that India consumes about 13 million tonnes of plastic and recycles only about 4 million tonnes.
- A lack of an efficient waste segregation system and inadequate collection is the root cause for this wide gap.

India stares at water scarcity

According to a report **'Composite Water Management Index' by NITI Aayog** –

- India is suffering from 'the worst water crisis' in its history with about 60 crore people facing high to **extreme water stress** and about two lakh people dying every year due to **inadequate access to safe water**.
- The crisis is only going to get worse.
- About three-fourth of the households in the country **do not have drinking water** at their premise.
- With nearly 70% of water being contaminated, India is placed at **120th amongst 122 countries in the water quality index**.
- 75% of households do not have drinking water on premise.
- 84% rural households do not have piped water access.

The situation of droughts has reached alarming levels in the country.
The central water commission has been serious over this issue and has formed numerous committees to look for various short, medium and long term solutions. The article deals with the issues associated with water, drought scarcity and its impact on livelihood & migration.

Rain deficit facts
- The actual deficit last monsoon was modest — barely 10%.
- But the post-monsoon rainfall (October to December, 2018) or PMR as it is called by meteorologists has registered a 44% national average deficit.
- In Marathwada, according to the IMD, the deficit is 84%, in Vidarbha, 88%.

According to India Meteorological Department (IMD) data –

- There is no guarantee that June will see the onset of a normal monsoon.
- Low-rain and no-rain situation is going to aggravate the water crisis.

Concerns:

- Years of policy-driven, corporate-driven water transfers from rural to urban, agriculture to industry, poor to rich and so on have made our country-side chronically water-scarce. Urban India does not realise this fast enough or well enough.
- The failure of rains this time is so serious that 'drought' now means not just a farm crisis but a national crisis that will affect towns and cities no less than villages.

Conclusion:

- Tackling drought must be the immediate priority for administrators across the country
- Absolute priority – Policies should focus on drought relief, water-use, food security and massive earth-related programmes.
- A dedicated Commission like the Farmers' Commission to advise Prime Minister on how water scarce India needs to face drought.
- Addressing the deepening drought, agrarian distress and water-management are critical not just for our governments to survive but for us to survive our governments.

Connecting the dots:

- Many parts of the country are facing severe water crisis and drought conditions. There are many traditional water harvesting and conservation practices in various parts of India which can be employed locally to fight the ongoing crisis. Can you identify few such practices? Also mention the states where they are more prevalant.
- Why has water become a stressed resource in many parts of the world? Analyse.

South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH)

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

In news:

- 18 Indian institutions is part of South Asian Nitrogen Hub to study nitrogen pollution.
- South Asian Nitrogen Hub (SANH) – group of 50 research institutions from United Kingdom and South Asia to assess and study the quantum and impact of "nitrogen pollution" in South Asia.
- SANH project has secured £20 million (about ₹200 crore) from the U.K. government.

Scare in the air

Nitrogen, when released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, is considered 'reactive' and may be polluting and causing greenhouse gas (heat trapping) effect

Some causes of nitrogen pollution

- Emission from chemical fertilisers
- Burning of fossil fuels
- Emission from livestock manure

Key threats due to nitrogen pollution

- Biodiversity loss
- Pollution of rivers and seas
- Ozone depletion
- Health, economy and livelihoods

India's nitrogen emissions grew at 52% from 1991 to 2001 and 69% from 2001 to 2011

Pic:
https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/25/BGL/Bangalore/TH/5_07/41f8b75c_4838b711_101_mr.jpg

Key Pointers:

- Nitrogen particles make up the largest fraction of PM2.5
- While Nitrogen is the **dominant gas** in the atmosphere, it is inert and doesn't react. However, when it is released as part of compounds from agriculture, sewage and biological waste, **nitrogen is considered "reactive", and may pollute and even exert a potent greenhouse gas (heat trapping) effect**.
- Agriculture remains the largest contributor to nitrogen emissions followed by sewage and organic solid wastes.
- **Nitrous oxide (N_2O) is 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide** but isn't as prevalent in the atmosphere. However, this is poised to grow.
- In the future, reactive nitrogen pollution will be a matter of significant global discussion.
- NOx emissions in India grew at 52% from 1991 to 2001 and 69% from 2001 to 2011.

An inside Problem: Tackling Household air pollution (HAP)

Context:

- The problem of air pollution and its ill-effects on people has gained significant traction in the media. However, single largest source of air pollution — the pollution from our homes – has not gained much attention.

Issues: (Outdoor air pollution)
- Abysmal air quality in many cities (especially in Delhi)
- Many Indian cities repeatedly topping global air pollution charts
- Emissions from transport, crop burning, road dust, burning of waste and industries large and small

Issues: (Indoor air pollution)
- Burning of solid fuels such as firewood and dung-cakes (mainly for cooking) results in emissions of fine particulate matter
- Household air pollution (HAP) - single largest source of ambient air pollution (AAP) in the country
- 11 lakh deaths were attributable to AAP in 2015. Of these, as many as 2.6 lakh were due to HAP.
- According to Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's website, about 26 per cent of particulate matter AAP was caused due to combustion of solid fuels in households.
- HAP is a major cause of mortality and morbidity in the country on its own.

Conclusion:
- In other words, the overall, total health impacts attributable to HAP are more than half the health impacts attributable to air pollution. Therefore, there is a strong case to be made for tackling HAP on a war footing.
- **Way ahead:** households should predominantly use fuels that burn cleanly.
- **Ujjwala scheme** which provides LPG connections recognises this challenge and represents an important first step to tackle the problem.
- However, addressing this challenge requires going beyond Ujjwala. In a country as large and diverse as India, LPG need not be the only solution to address this problem.
- **Consumers should be given a wider choice of clean-burning options**. This requires a coordinated strategy involving multiple government agencies and programmes.
- It also requires setting well-defined targets for HAP and its associated health impacts, and having systems to monitor and publish them.

Connecting the dots:

- Does there exist a direct relation of smokeless kitchens with economic development. Discuss.
- Controlling Household air pollution (HAP) needs to be a key strategic objective for India. Discuss in brief. Also suggest how Household air pollution (HAP) can be controlled by adopting a strategic roadmap.

Study says cow urine may be adding to global warming

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

In news:
As per study conducted by in Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Nicaragua, Trinidad and Tobago –

- Cow urine may also contribute to global warming
- The urine from the ruminant is a source of nitrous oxide emissions (N2O), a gas that is 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.
- That cattle and livestock are a significant source of methane, a greenhouse gas, and therefore a contributor to global warming, is well-known. However, the role of cow urine is less understood.
- Degraded pastures emitted significantly more N2O — sometimes up to three times as much.

Bovine twist

Ammonia: Cattle and buffaloes were the largest contributors for ammonia from manure, accounting for 56.1% and 23.6% of emissions respectively

Nitrous oxide: Cattle contributed the highest proportion (42.3%) of nitrous oxide emissions followed by buffalo (28.1%), goats (15.5%), sheep (9.5%) and other species (4.6%)

Degradation threat
30% of India's geographical area (or about 96.4 million hectares) is degraded, according to a 2012 satellite study by the Indian Space Research Organisation

Top ammonia-emitting States

Uttar Pradesh (12.7%)

Madhya Pradesh (8.7%)

West Bengal (8.4%)

Top nitrous oxide-emitting States

Uttar Pradesh (13.1%)

Madhya Pradesh (8%)

Maharashtra (7.5%)

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/31/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/49fe98e7_2700835_101_mr.jpg

Do you know?

- Dung and urine are commonly mixed together for manure in Indian fields.

- Since, India also hosts the world's largest livestock population, as well as significant tracts of degraded land, the findings may have a bearing on nitrogen emissions from Indian fields.
- As per 2012 ISRO satellite study, 30% of India's geographical area is degraded.
- Degraded grasslands emitted more N2O than healthy pastures because the vegetation in the latter took up some of the reactive nitrogen compounds and only the leftovers were emitted.

ANIMALS/NATIONAL PARKS IN NEWS

Animal in news: Cinereous vulture

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- Cinereous vulture was sighted in Jharkhand. Birdwatchers call it a rare sighting, as earlier records of this migratory bird have revealed that it comes to northern parts of India up to Rajasthan. Bird watchers and researchers were baffled to find it in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.
- IUCN Red List Status: Near Threatened

Do you know?

- India is home to nine species of vultures and with the population of these birds dwindling, the country has launched a species-recovery plan through conservation breeding centres in different parts of the country.

9 Species of Large Vultures Found Living in India

1. Indian Vulture -Gyps Indicus.
2. Himalayan Vulture -Gyps Himalayensis.
3. Bearded Vulture -Gypaetus Barbatus.
4. Slender-Billed Vulture -Gyps Tenuirostris.
5. White-Rumped Vulture -Gyps Bengalensis.
6. Cinereous Vulture -Aegypius Monachus.
7. Egyptian Vulture -Neophron Percnopterus.
8. Red-Headed Vulture -Sarcogyps Calvus.

National park/Wildlife Sanctuaries in news:

Some of the important National parks/Wildlife Sanctuaries in Karnataka

1. Bandipur National Park
2. Bannerghatta National Park
3. Kudremukh National Park
4. Anshi National Park
5. Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary

6. Pushpagiri Wildlife Sanctuary
7. Bhadra Wildlife Sanctuary
8. Brahmagiri wildlife sanctuary
9. Cauvery Wildlife Sanctuary

Some of the important National parks/Wildlife Sanctuaries in Tamil Nadu
1. Mudumalai WLS and NP
2. Annamalai / Indira Gandhi WLS and NP
3. Point Calimere WS
4. Satyamangalam WS
5. Pulicat Lake WLS

Ecosystem integration

Tribal forest-watchers constructing a temporary watchtower atop a huge tree at Muthanga in the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary to keep a tab on poaching and wildfire.

Pic:
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Asian Waterbird Census, Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs), Wetland International and Bombay Natural History Society

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Animal Conservation; Biodiversity; International Organizations

In news:
- A waterbird survey conducted as part of the annual **Asian Waterbird Census** (in the Upper Kuttanad region, Kerala) has spotted three new species — Greater flamingo, Grey-headed lapwing, and Blue-cheeked bee-eater.
- The survey however pointed that compared to the previous years, the number of winged visitors to the region has declined drastically.
- In 2017, the survey recorded 28,198 birds whereas 41,576 were spotted last year.
- **Reasons:** Severe floods that affected Kerala during August 2018 and subsequent delay in preparing paddy fields

Do you know?
- The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) is co-coordinated by **Wetlands International**- as part of global programme, the "International Waterbird Census".
- The survey would help understand the changes to wetland systems, change in migratory pattern of birds, and impact of climate change.
- The information would be used to promote the designation and management of protected areas, **Ramsar Sites**, **Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs)**, and so on.

Important Value Addition:

About Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs)
- IBA is an initiative by **BirdLife International.**
- It is a programme which aims to identify, monitor and protect a global network of IBAs for conservation of the world's birds and associated biodiversity.
- BirdLife's Important Bird and Biodiversity Area concept has been developed and applied for over 30 years.
- Initially, IBAs were identified only for terrestrial and freshwater environments, but over the past decade, the IBA process and method has been adapted and applied in the marine realm.
- In 2012, BirdLife published the first Marine IBA "e-atlas", with details of 3,000 IBAs in coastal and territorial waters as well as on the high seas.

According to Birdlife International, designation of IBAs is based on standardized criteria, namely
- (i) hold significant numbers of one or more globally threatened bird species,
- (ii) be one of a set of sites that together hold a suite of restricted-range species or biome-restricted species and
- (iii) have exceptionally large numbers of migratory or congregatory birds. The IBAs contain a range of habitats, such as wetlands, mudflats, microhabitats in biodiversity hotspots, grasslands and scrublands, making them excellent indicators of biodiversity richness.

About Wetland International

Wetlands International is a global organisation that works to sustain and restore wetlands and their resources for people and biodiversity. It is an independent, not-for-profit, global organisation, supported by government and NGO membership from around the world.

About Bombay Natural History Society

BNHS is a non government Organisation (NGO) founded in the year 1883. It engages itself in the conservation of nature and natural resources and also in the research and conservation of endangered species. Its mission is to conserve nature, primarily biological diversity through action based on research, education and public awareness.

Do you know?
- In India, the AWC is annually coordinated by the Bombay Natural history Society (BNHS) and Wetlands International.
- The Bombay Natural History Society and Birdlife International have identified 467 IBAs in India.

Human-animal conflicts

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Animal Conservation; Biodiversity

In news:
- In 2016, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MOEFCC) released 'Eco-friendly measures to mitigate impacts of linear infrastructure', an advisory document for mitigating human-animal conflicts.
- Despite this advisory, and many others issued by conservationists and organisations, deaths of wild animals in road and railway accidents have continued unabated.

Key facts/concerns:
- 49 elephants were killed in Railway accidents between 2016-18 (nine in 2015-16, 21 casualties in 2016-17 and 19 in 2017-18).
- In the same 3-year period, three tigers were killed in road accidents while eight tigers were mowed down by trains.
- 10 lions died in railway and road accidents between 2016-2018.
- West Bengal and Assam together accounted for 37 out of the 49 deaths of elephants on train tracks across the country.

- The number of elephants dying in railway accidents in Assam have increased year-by-year (3 deaths in 2015-16, 10 in 2016-17, 14 in 2017-18)

Fatal crossings

West Bengal and Assam, both put together have accounted for 37 out of the 49 deaths of elephants on train tracks across the country

ELEPHANT DEATHS IN TRAIN ACCIDENTS

9 — 2015-16   21 — 2016-17   19 — 2017-18

TIGER/LION DEATHS ■ Tiger ■ Lion

Year	Road accidents		Train accidents	
2015-16	2	0	3	0
2016-17	1	1	2	1
2017-18	0	3	3	0

Danger zone: A wild elephant entering railway track near Walayar in Kerala. ■K. K MUSTAFAH

Pic:
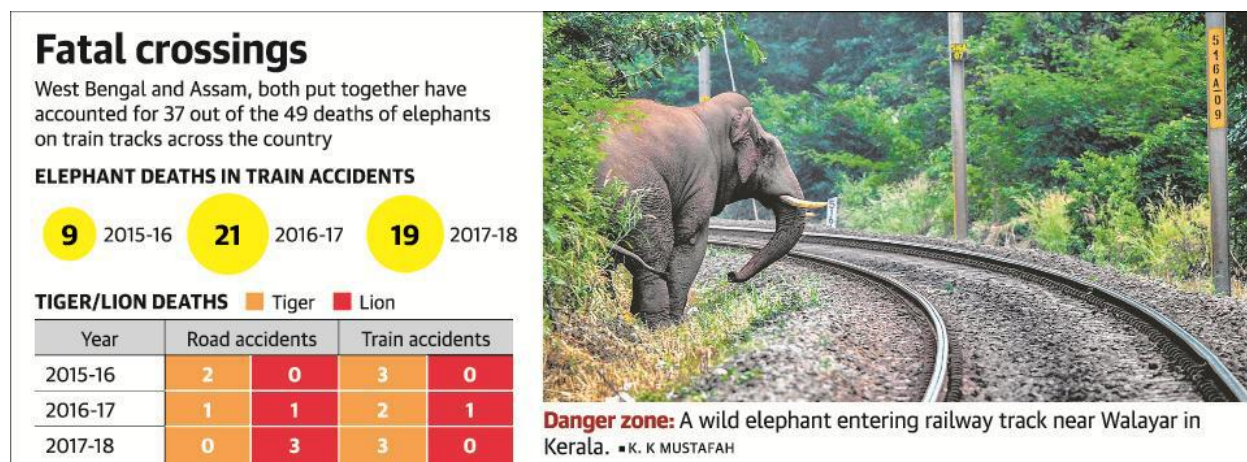
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Loopholes in New Coastal Regulation Zone Notification

Context:

We earlier had read about Centre proposing relaxation of coastal regulation zone norms (Dec 29, 2019 DNA - States get greater say over coastal regions)

Centre had proposed to –

- Make India's coasts to be more accessible to tourism and industrial infrastructure.
- Give individual States more leeway to decide how they should plan such development.
- Enhance activities in the coastal regions and promote economic growth.

According to the new CRZ notification (2018) –

- 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:
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Concerns:

- Critics argue that the latest developmental policies target areas that have retained some degree of ecological value and will turn them into sites for industrial production.
- Despite evidence of the damaging effects of such policies (CRZ 2011), the government has come up with new proposals (CRZ 2018), which can spell the death of the coasts.
- The changes in the 2018 CRZ notification can negate the coastal space entirely of its special socio-ecological uniqueness and open up this niche space that joins land and sea to mindless real estate development, mass scale tourism, and industry.
- Land grabbing by private and government actors has been the norm. These actors forget that this space is the common property of coastal villages, towns and cities, and public beaches.
- New CRZ notification spells a death knell to coastal communities. It might impact self-reliant fisher communities who reside along India's coast, park and repair their nets and boats and organise their economic and social activities here.

Government should avoid taking away the jobs of people engaged in this sector.

Do you know?

- With rapid urbanisation and industrialisation, coasts have become convenient dumping grounds.
- Sewage, garbage and sludge from industrial processes land up on the coastline and makes life for coastal dwellers a living hell.
- The new amendments legalise the setting up of common effluent treatment plants (CETPs), an impractical technology for cleaning up waste, on the most fragile parts of the coast. (These projects have made the coastal people of Saurashtra and south Gujarat more vulnerable to toxicity in their food, water and air.)

Conclusion:

India's coasts are already facing climate change events such as intensive, frequent and unpredictable cyclones and erosion.

States have adopted decentralized action: mangroves are being planted, sand dunes and coastal wetlands are being protected, and coastal communities and local governments are collaborating on disaster.

But the top-down policy of the Central government to encroach what's left of the coasts and increase activities that involve dredging, sand removal, and large-scale constructions contradict grass-roots and scientific wisdom.

Connecting the dots:
- Coastal Regulation Zone norms are an example of a top-down, heavy-handed, legislative diktat from Delhi that ignores local dynamics. Do you agree? Elucidate.
- Examine the factors behind the stressed ecosystems of the coastal zones in India. What steps have been taken to address it? Discuss.

Animal in news: Great Indian Bustard

Part of: Prelims – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:
- Rajasthan's State bird may be extinct soon. Only 50 Great Indian Bustards left in the wild, no action on plan to save them.
- The GIB's last remnant wild population of about 50 in Jaisalmer district accounts for 95% of its total world population.
- No progress has been made on the proposal for establishing a captive breeding centre.

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.
- IUCN Conservation status: Critically Endangered

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.

Flamingo festival held at Pulicat lake in Andhra Pradesh

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Conservation of animals and biodiversity; Tourism

In news:
- Three-day annual Flamingo Festival was held at Pulicat lake and Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Andhra Pradesh.
- Flamingo Festival is held every year to promote tourism.
- As over 90,000 birds have come from far away places to the lake this year.

About Pulicat lake
- The lake is the second largest brackish water ecosystem in the country after the Chilika lake in Odisha.
- It is located on border of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu with over 96% of it in Andhra Pradesh and 4% in Tamil Nadu situated on Coromandal Coast.
- The lake encompasses Pulicat Lake Bird Sanctuary.

19 amphibian species are critically endangered: ZSI list

In news:

According to an updated list of Indian amphibians (released by Zoological Survey of India) –
- 19 amphibian species are being treated as critically endangered and 33 species as endangered.
- The list prepared by ZSI notes whether the species are in danger, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- In 2009, the total number of species listed was 284. In 2010 it was 311, in 2011 it was 314, in 2012 and 2013 it was 342, in 2015 it was 384 and in 2017 it was 405 species.

IUCN Status
- The current list bears the names of 432 amphibian species from India, the year of discovery and their IUCN 'red list' conservation status.
- Among the amphibians listed, 19 species are treated as critically endangered and 33 species as endangered.

- The list describes 19% of amphibians as data deficient species and 39% as not assessed by the IUCN. Therefore, it is high time that IUCN status for the Indian 'not assessed' amphibians (169 species) are assessed.

National Park in news: Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park

Part of: GS Prelims III - Science and Technology; Space Mission

In news:

- Floods in August 2016 at Kaziranga National Park displaced many Rhinos.
- Kaziranga National Park and Manas National Park are in Assam.

Manas River and Manas National Park

- The Manas river flows thorough the west of the Manas National park and is the main river within it. It is a major tributary of Brahmaputra river and splits into two separate rivers, the Beki and Bholkaduba as it reaches the plains. The Manas river also serves as an international border dividing India and Bhutan.
- Manas National Park is a national park, **UNESCO Natural World Heritage site**, a Project Tiger reserve, an elephant reserve and a biosphere reserve in Assam, India.
- The park is well known for species of rare and endangered wildlife that are not found anywhere else in the world like the Assam roofed turtle, hispid hare, golden langur and pygmy hog.

Kaziranga National Park

- It is a national park in the Golaghat and Nagaon districts of Assam. The sanctuary, which hosts two-thirds of the world's great one-horned rhinoceroses, is a World Heritage Site.
- Kaziranga is recognized as an Important Bird Area by BirdLife International for conservation of avifaunal species.
- Kaziranga has the largest population of the Wild water buffalo anywhere accounting for about 57% of the world population.

Do you know?

- National park is an area which is strictly reserved for the betterment of the wildlife & biodiversity, and where activities like developmental, forestry, poaching, hunting and grazing on cultivation are not permitted. Their boundaries are well marked and circumscribed.

- Total number of National Parks in Assam is Five (5). Kaziranga National Park, Manas National park, Orang National Park, Dibru-Saikhowa National Park and Nameri National Park.

Odisha: Second National Bird Festival at Chilika

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

Key pointers:
- Second National Bird Festival was held at Chilika
- Aims to promote ecotourism and preservation of birds in the state
- It also aims to promote and raise awareness about Chilika being the largest repository of migratory birds in Asia

Do you know?
- Mangalajodi, situated in the North Eastern Part of Chilika, the largest brackish water lake of Asia, is known as the **"Birds Paradise of Asia"**
- Over one million migratory birds belonging to 181 different species were spotted in the brackish water lake this year
- Nalabana Bird Sanctuary is in Odisha
- The National Chilika Bird Festival Award was awarded to Mangalajodi Ecotourism Group for their active involvement in bird protection
- Chilika, which lies in the Central Asian Flyway for birds, is a major stopover for migratory birds from the the Arctic and the Sub-Arctic regions in the course of their onward and return migration along the east coast

Conservation of Tigers

Part of: GS Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:
- At a conference organized by National Tiger Conservation Authority, Global Tiger Forum and representatives from a group of countries signed a declaration **to double tiger numbers by 2022.**
- However, Global experts and officials in the government suggest that India must prepare for a **new challenge — of reaching the limits of its management capacity**.

- As habitats shrink, the country is nearing its capacity to manage its tigers. In other words, **India can't handle more big cats**.
- Officially, India had 2,226 tigers as of 2014. An ongoing census is expected to reveal an update to these numbers.
- Concerns – Habitat loss, low availability of prey

Golden langur breeding project in Assam

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Environment and Biodiversity; Animal Conservation

In news:

- **Golden Langur Conservation Breeding Programme** was undertaken at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati during the 2011-12 fiscal.
- The Project aimed to **create an isolated and undisturbed site within the zoo**, to provide a natural habitat for the primates with a golden coat **endemic to Assam**.
- It is believed to be a successful project, as a pair of golden langurs gave birth to a female infant.
- IUCN Status: The golden langur (Trachypithecus geei) is currently **endangered**.
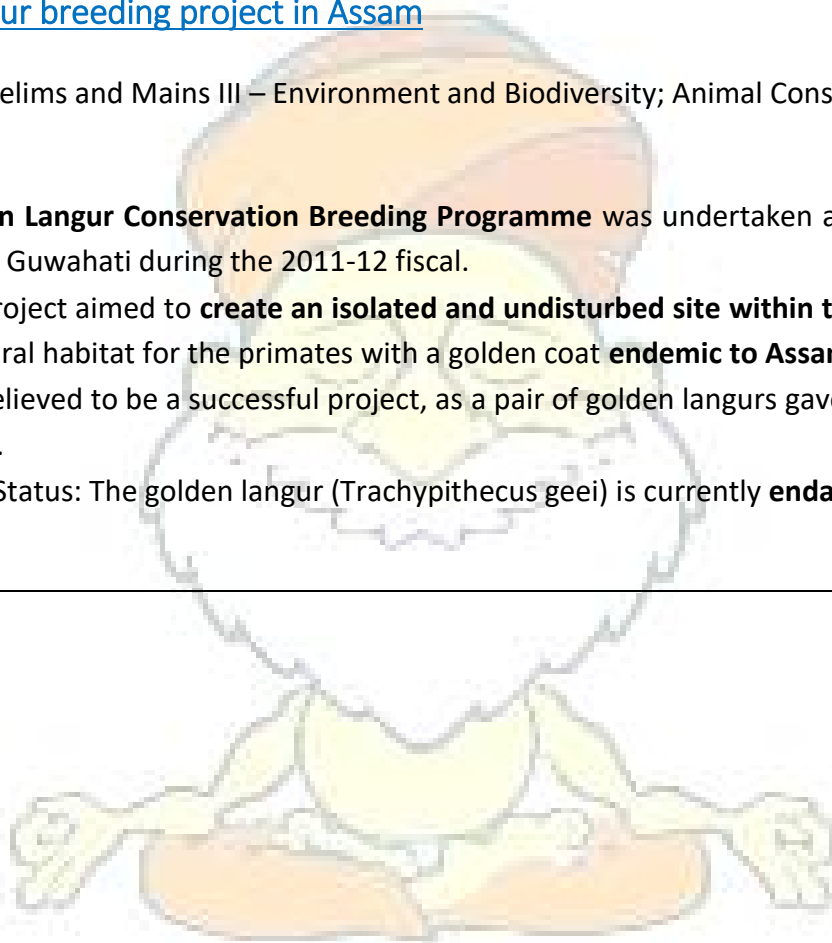
INFRASTRUCTURE/ENERGY

Global Housing Technology Challenge

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains II and III – Social/Welfare scheme; Technology; Infrastructure; Government schemes and programmes

In news:

- Centre to offer about **₹150 crore as a technology innovation grant** to build 6,000 homes — cheaper, faster and better — using alternative technologies and materials under the Global Housing Technology Challenge (which was launched recently).

- The pace of construction under the urban section of **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana** or **Housing for All** is too slow. It has completed just over 10% of its target as the scheme reaches its halfway point.

- Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs to invite bids and identify proven demonstrable technologies from around the world which are to be adapted and mainstreamed for use in the Indian context.

- Apart from state and Central assistance of ₹1.5 lakh each, the Centre will offer an additional technology innovation grant of ₹2.5 lakh for each house.

Home solution

The Global Housing Technology Challenge is aimed at introducing best technologies to construct houses quickly and at a lower cost

- 6 winners will design and build projects of 1,000 housing units each
- The State and the Centre each will provide assistance of ₹1.5 lakh
- The Centre will give an additional technology grant of ₹2.5 lakh for each house
- Incubation facilities will be provided to develop building technologies with support from four IITs
- The approved technologies will be displayed by Central Public Works Department along with the rates

Pic:
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Do you know?

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana:

- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), with two components: **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) (PMAY-U)** for the urban poor and **Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Gramin)** (PMAY-G and also PMAY-R) for the rural poor.
- It is an initiative by Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India in which affordable housing will be provided to the urban poor with a target of building 20 million affordable houses by 31 March 2022.
- In the first phase (from 2016 to 2018 – 19) One crore houses are targeted for construction under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna – Grameen.

The Mission will be implemented during 2015-2022 and will provide central assistance to Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and other implementing agencies through States/UTs for:

- In-situ Rehabilitation of existing slum dwellers using land as a resource through private participation
- Credit Linked Subsidy
- Affordable Housing in Partnership
- Subsidy for Beneficiary-led individual house construction/enhancement

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen) scheme: Rural housing achieves only 66% target

Part of: Prelims and Mains II – Government schemes and policies; Social/Welfare scheme; Rural Development

In news:

- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen) scheme, which provides for housing for the rural poor, has achieved only 66% of its target to complete one crore houses.
- The scheme has the objective of "Housing for All by 2022".
- 2.95 crore houses are set to be constructed by 2022.
- In the first phase the target is construction of one crore pucca houses by 31st March, 2019.
- However, only 66% target is achieved and only two and a half months is left.

Vision 2040 for aviation sector

Part of: GS Mains III – Infrastructure; Government schemes and programmes

In news:
- Union Ministry of Civil Aviation to unveil Vision 2040 for aviation sector at two-day global summit which will be held soon.
- It will shortly award new regional connectivity routes under UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagarik) III.

Important Value Additions:

Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik (UDAN) scheme

Key pointers:
- The Civil Aviation Ministry launched Regional Connectivity Scheme UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) in 2017.
- UDAN is an innovative scheme to develop the regional aviation market. It is a market-based mechanism in which airlines bid for seat subsidies.
- This first-of-its-kind scheme globally will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.

About the Scheme:
- The UDAN scheme seeks to provide connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.
- This first-of-its-kind scheme will ensure affordability, connectivity, growth and development.
- It aims to increase ticketing volume from 80 million to 300 million by 2022.
- Under it regional connectivity will be developed on market-based mechanism under which Airlines will bid for seat subsidies.
- It will create affordable yet economically viable and profitable flights on regional routes so that flying becomes affordable to the common man even in small towns.
- Under it, airlines will have complete freedom to enter into code sharing with larger airlines for connectivity and they will be exempted from various airport charges.
- Airlines will have exclusive rights for three years to fly on a particular regional route.
- On these routes for regional flights Airfares will be capped at 2500 rupees for an hour's flight.
- Central and State governments and airport operators will provide a financial stimulus in the form of concessions to airlines

- The mechanism of Viability Gap Funding (VGF) will be provided to interested airlines to kick-off operations from such airports so that the passenger fares are kept affordable
- Government will provide subsidy to airlines for first three years of operations when they will have exclusive flying rights on the selected routes.
- Once the market in these routes gets jump started, it will operate on a commercial basis as per market forces of supply and demand.
- The scheme has been launched by Ministry of Civil Aviation.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Science for Society: 'ease of living' through 'ease of doing science'

Context:

At the **102nd Indian Science Congress** held in Mumbai in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said –

- The arms of science, technology and innovation must reach the poorest, the remotest and the most vulnerable person.
- There should be pragmatic use of science and technology to aid growth and development in India.
- Promote 'ease of living' through 'ease of doing science'.

The key address by PM was an attempt at motivating scientists and researchers to direct their focus towards resolving the issues that disrupt the life of the common man.

Outcome:
The transformation in the last four-and-half years has been remarkable.

- From engaging with Nobel laureates to brainstorming with India's scientific community, from interacting with young minds engaged in Hackathons to posing questions for innovators and startup founders, the PM has **made science the fulcrum of New India**.
- In the last four years, the government has tried to **enhance collaboration between various scientific streams** to enhance the productivity of our research and development.
- Government procedures and approvals for scientists and researchers have been placed online and made transparent, thereby assuring **"Ease of Doing Science".**
- **Various schemes have been introduced** to improve the quality of research institutes, for the promotion of technology business incubators (**Atal Incubation Centres**) and research parks that promote innovative ideas until they become commercial ventures.
- This has **opened up new opportunities for tech start-ups**, propelling India to become the world's third-largest technology start-up hub with the incorporation of 1,000 new companies in 2017.
- The **popularisation of science** has been given a strong impetus. Platforms like **"Innovate India"** promote and recognise innovations happening across the nation by enabling citizens to share their innovation.
- **Atal Tinkering Labs** ensure that dedicated workspaces are created for students to innovate and develop ideas that will go on to transform India.

- Scholarship schemes have been revamped and new schemes introduced to inspire young researchers and students to become active members of India's growth story.
- The current government used **international visits to explore collaborations** in various fields like clean energy, agriculture, fintech, biotechnology, medicine, healthcare and futuristic technologies, such as AI and Blockchain.
- India's partnership with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Philippines was strengthened further with IRRI opening a regional centre in Varanasi.
- **India's collaboration with the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO)** in the US improved with our scientists participating in LIGO experiments.
- India's quest for clean energy was cemented with our instrumental role in forging the **International Solar Alliance**.
- The **quantum leap of 21 places in the Global Innovation Index** in two years, has also been noticed by the international community.
- The **Fourth Industrial Revolution**, comprising of artificial intelligence, machine learning and smart robotics will create multiple opportunities for Indian scientists to create new tools that are relevant to India and are environmentally sustainable.

Do you know?

The key achievements of Indian science this year (2018) were:

- the production of aviation grade biofuel;
- Divya Nayan — a reading machine for the visually impaired;
- devices for the diagnosis of cervical cancer, TB and dengue; and
- a real-time landslide warning system in the Sikkim-Darjeeling region.

Conclusion:

Science is a continuous journey. Ease of Doing Science will indeed be the cornerstone of Ease of Living. As more bright youngsters take to science, they shall endeavour to find solutions in areas such as nutrition, agriculture, clean energy and the environment. The results shall certainly augur well for India.

Connecting the dots:

- Discuss how India can become a global science & technology leader. Also examine why Ease of Doing Science is as vital as Ease of Doing Business.

"Innovate2Cultivate" programme

Part of: GS Mains III – Role of NGOs or CSOs; Science and Technology

In news:

- "Innovate2Cultivate" programme - organized by a non-profit organisation connects start-ups with farmers of specific crops so that innovations are nurtured and taken to the farms.
- The start-ups have developed or are working on technologies and solutions such as organic micro nutrients and alternatives to pest management and soil management.

China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS)

- China's BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS) is considered to rival the widely-used American GPS.
- China has now started providing global services. In other words, the BDS has expanded from a regional system to a global navigation system.
- The positioning accuracy of the system has reached 10 metres globally and five metres in the Asia-Pacific region. Its velocity accuracy is 0.2 metres per second, while its timing accuracy stands at 20 nanoseconds.
- China plans to provide navigation services with the BDS to the Belt and Road partner countries by the end of this year, marking a key step toward a global navigation service

Do you know?

- Pakistan has become the first country to use the BeiDou system ending its reliance on the Global Positioning System (GPS).
- The BeiDou system started serving China in 2000 and the Asia-Pacific region in 2012.
- It will be the fourth global satellite navigation system after the US GPS, Russia's GLONASS and the European Union's Galileo.
- India too is building its navigational system called the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), with an operational name of NAVIC.
- China plans to launch more BDS satellites o form a complete global network, which will further enhance the global service performance.
- The total number of satellite navigation patent applications in China has reached 54,000, ranking first in the world.

The War over GPS

Countries around the world are competing to build alternatives to GPS, which is operated by the United States Air Force.

Country	System Name	Satellites Deployed	Full Operational Date	2018 Launches	Cost?
USA	GPS	31 - 33	1978	---	$12B
Russia	GLONASS	24 - 26	1995	2	$4B - $11B
EU	Galileo	26	2019-20	4	10B Euro
China	Beidou	35 - 40+	2020	18	$8.98B - $10.6B
Japan	QZSS	4	2018	---	170B Yen
India	IRNSS	7	---	1	$313M
UK	Unconfirmed	---	---	---	Up to 5B GBP

As of December 21, 2018. Research by Arman Tabatabai.

Pic: https://techcrunch.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/gps-wars-2.png

Chang'e-4 lunar probe

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – International affairs; Science and Technology; Space Missions

In news:
- China's Chang-e'4 lunar probe lander-rover touched down on the lunar far side.
- The probe, which has a lander and a rover, touched down at a targeted area near the moon's south pole in the Von Karman Crater.
- The tasks of the Chang'e-4 include astronomical observation, surveying the moon's terrain, land form and mineral make-up, and measuring the neutron radiation and neutral atoms to study the environment of its far side.

Do you know?
- Chandrayaan-1 was India's first lunar probe. It was launched by the Indian Space Research Organisation in October 2008, and operated until August 2009. The mission included a lunar orbiter and an impactor. (Status: Partial success)
- Chandrayaan-2 will be India's second moon mission. Chandrayaan-2 is scheduled to be launched in Feb/March 2019.

The space race

Context:

- We read recently about China's Chang-e'4 lunar probe lander-rover touched down on the lunar far side (Von Karman Crater).
- The tasks of the Chang'e-4 include astronomical observation, surveying the moon's terrain, land form and mineral make-up, and measuring the neutron radiation and neutral atoms to study the environment of its far side.

This achievement of China could trigger yet another rivalry with the U.S., this time in outer space.

Reasons:
- Unlike the near side, the far side of the moon is shielded from radio transmissions from earth.
- The Chang'e-4 mission also got around the problem of lack of communication with those on earth by using a relay satellite.

- The data that China obtains on the moon's craters could help it acquire an edge over other countries, including the U.S., in the highly competitive domain of space research.
- U.S. fears that the Chinese could also steal a march over the Americans by launching advanced rockets, which would explore new frontiers in space.
- Unlike earth, the moon has an abundance of helium-3. In the far future, this can serve as the ideal fuel to power a new generation of spaceships, with the moon as the launchpad, instead of earth.
- U.S. believes that the Chinese may have also taken the lead over peers in exploring the possibilities of human habitation on the moon.

Do you know?

- The **Yutu-2**, the rover of the ongoing Chang'e-4 mission, is programmed to explore the **South Pole-Aitken Basin**.
- This vast impact region has copious reserves of ice. The promise of water has persuaded international space scientists to peg the site as suitable for a permanent lunar outpost, which is on China's radar.
- **Colonisation of moon:** Space exploration buffs have considered asteroids as lucrative sources of precious metals such as gold, platinum, silver and iridium in the future. But if the relatively more accessible surface of the moon could yield precious resources, the race for lunar colonisation would begin, providing China a substantial early-mover edge.

Outer space is becoming another arena of a budding Cold War between Washington and Beijing.

It becomes the responsibility of new generation of Chinese and American peace advocates, global citizens and cyber-activists to step up their game and prevent outer space race and rivalry.

Connecting the dots:

- Outer space is becoming another arena of a budding Cold War between Washington and Beijing. Elucidate or Discuss.
- India's space program needs techno-military orientation. Do you agree? Critically examine.

ISS crew could grow beans in 2021

Part of: GS Mains III – Science and Technology

In news:
- After cultivating lettuce in space three years ago, crew members aboard the International Space Station could be growing beans in 2021.
- Food grown in space could be crucial to sustain the astronauts in future deep space missions.

NASA's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space Missions

In news:
- Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) discovered third new exoplanet.
- The new planet HD 21749b is outside our solar system and orbits a dwarf star 53 light years away.
- It has the longest orbital period of all the three discoveries made by TESS.

Do you know?
- The other two discoveries made by the TESS probe are Pi Mensae b and LHS 3844b.

About TESS
- TESS aims to discover new exoplanets.
- An exoplanet is a planet that orbits a star outside our solar system.
- TESS to monitor more than 200,000 stars for temporary drops in brightness caused by planetary transits.

What will TESS do?
- According to NASA, TESS scientists expect the mission will catalog thousands of planet candidates and vastly increase the current number of known exoplanets.
- Of these, approximately 300 are expected to be Earth-sized and super-Earth-sized exoplanets, which are worlds no larger than twice the size of Earth.
- TESS will find the most promising exoplanets orbiting our nearest and brightest stars, giving future researchers a rich set of new targets for more comprehensive follow-up studies.

How does it plan to do this?
- Tess will look for dips in the visible light of stars, which requires that planets cross stars in our line of sight.
- Repetitive, periodic dips can reveal a planet or planets orbiting a star.
- Transit photometry, which looks at how much light an object puts out at any given time, can tell researchers a lot about a planet.

NASA's Cassini

Part of: GS Prelims III – Science and Technology and Space Missions

- Cassini–Huygens is an unmanned spacecraft sent to the planet Saturn. It is a Flagshipclass NASA–ESA (EU)–ASI (Italy) robotic spacecraft.
- Cassini is the fourth space probe to visit Saturn and the first to enter orbit. It has studied the planet and its many natural satellites.
- Cassini has revealed the existence of earth-like geographic features, great lakes of liquid nitrogen gas on Titan's surface.
- Cassini also found evidence for the existence of Underground Ocean on the moon Enceladus.
- NASA announced that the spacecraft has found evidence that the underground ocean could sustain some form of life. Cassini has generated a rich volume of data that will fuel scientific study for decades to come.

India ranks third in research papers on artificial intelligence

In news:

- India ranks third in the world in terms of high quality research publications in artificial intelligence (AI)
- China stands first, with 37, 918 documents and the United States with 32,421 documents. (India - 12,135 documents)
- India's national think-tank, the NITI Ayog, last June released a discussion paper on the transformative potential of AI in India that said the country could add $1 trillion to its economy through integrating AI into its economy.

Google's virtual assistant to serve as real-time language translator

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology

In news:

- Google has unveiled a new feature: the 'interpreter mode' in Google Assistant, its voice-based Artificial Intelligence (AI).

- This would enable Google's virtual assistant to serve as a real-time language translator between two people.
- Currently, this feature supports 27 languages, including English, Hindi, Polish, Indonesian, Swedish, Thai, German and Korean.

Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC) and Gaganyaan

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Science and Technology; Space missions; India's achievements

In news:
- ISRO to start its work on 'Gaganyaan' soon at the newly created Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC) based in Bengaluru.
- 'Gaganyaan' is the project which aims to send a manned mission to space by 2022.

Person in news: Unnikrishnan Nair (named ISRO director)
- **K. Sivan, ISRO Chairman** and Secretary, Department of Space, announced the appointment of **Unnikrishnan Nair** — who led ISRO's Advanced Space Transportation Programme at the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) and has already worked in the area as the **director of the Human Space Flight Project** — as the director of the new centre.

Do you know?
- The actual flight with crew is targeted to happen by December 2021 — to meet the Prime Minister's goal of August 2022, India's 75th Independence anniversary.
- Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) - is popularly dubbed as ISRO's trusted workhorse

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ISRO set to launch military satellite

Part of: GS Prelims III - Science and Technology; Space Mission

In news:
- ISRO's first mission of 2019 - military imaging satellite, Microsat-R.
- Microsat-R is put together by a handful of DRDO laboratories; PSLV-C44 will lift off from Sriharikota
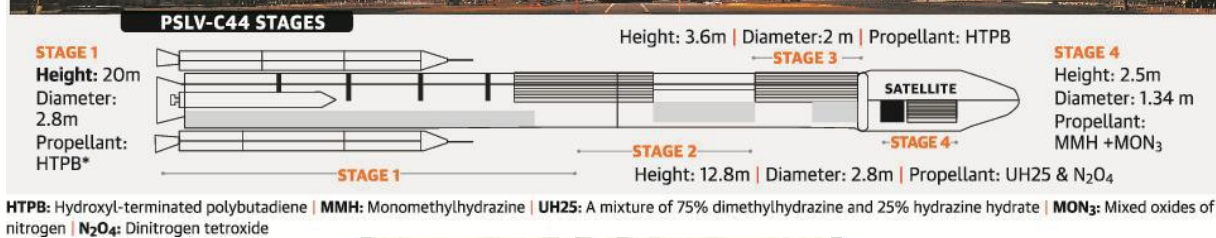
Pic: https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/24/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_07/d8d930e7_26
86000_101_mr.jpg

Antibiotic resistance genes in High Arctic region

In news:

- A new study has found traces of antibiotic resistance genes in the High Arctic region, including the **'superbug' or the New Delhi** metallo-beta-lactamase-1 protein (coded by blaNDM-1 gene), which was first detected in urban India in 2008.
- Researchers who took soil samples in 2013 from the Kongsfjorden region of Svalbard – a Norwegian archipelago in the Arctic Ocean – found "comparatively localised" levels of blaNDM-1, which poses no health threat.
- However, they say the "detection reinforces how rapidly AR (antibiotic resistance) can globalise", the study states.

DEFENCE

Defence manufacturing rules eased

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence/Security; Government policies and schemes

In news:

- Government has **simplified the process for approval of manufacturing** of a range of defence and aerospace equipment and components by private industry, by bringing them under the licensing authority of the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).
- Licensing process made simpler for private industry to build a range of equipment.
- Earlier DIPP used to segregate defence items in two categories covered by two different Acts — the **Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951**, and the **Arms Act, 1959**. Now, items are listed in three categories — defence aircraft, warships of all kinds, and allied items of defence equipment.
- This move is also expected to help foreign **Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM)** looking for partnerships with the private sector.

'Operation Kabaddi'

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – National; Defence and Security challenges

In news:

- 'Operation Kabaddi' was aimed at preventing cross-border infiltration, in the post-Kargil scenario.
- The objective [of Operation Kabaddi] was to change the geography of the LoC with access to tactical points there, which would then help the Army tackle the infiltration of militants by the Pakistani side.

Exercise Sea Vigil

Part of: GS Prelims and Mains III – Defence; Security

In news:

- Ten years after the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, India conducted its largest coastal defence drill, Exercise Sea Vigil.
- The Exercise is aimed to test India's preparedness along the entire 7,516.6 km-long-coastline and exclusive economic zone of the country.
- It aims to simultaneously activate the coastal security mechanism across all 13 coastal States and Union Territories.

Do you know?

- Post 26/11, the Navy was designated as the agency responsible for overall maritime security, including offshore and coastal security, while the Coast Guard was designated as the agency responsible for coastal security in territorial waters.
- A multi-tiered patrol and surveillance mechanism with focus on technical surveillance and augmenting Maritime Domain Awareness through the coastal radar chain was adopted.
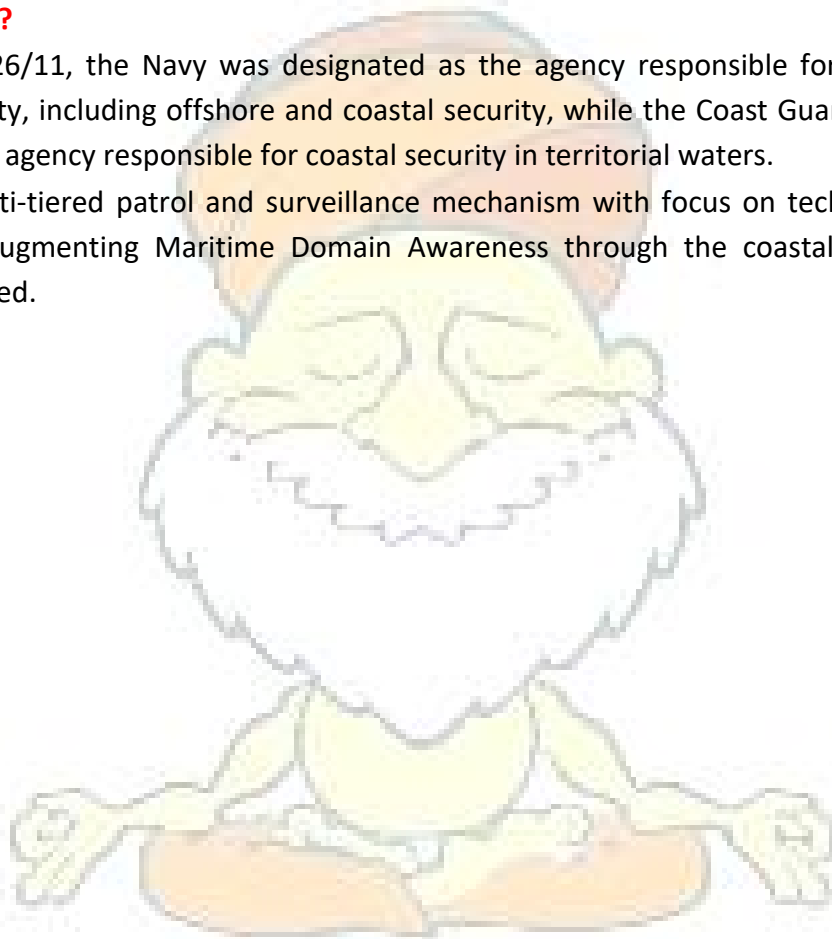
DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Jaitapur Nuclear Power Plant issue

The Jaitapur nuclear power project issue is back in news after French company Électricité de France (EDF) submitted a "techno-commercial proposal" to the Indian government (in Decemeber 2018) for the Jaitapur nuclear power project in Maharashtra.

Do you know?
- India and France had on March 10 inked an agreement to expedite the Jaitapur nuclear power plant project, with the aim of commencing work at the site around the year-end.
- Once installed, the Jaitapur project will be the largest nuclear power plant in the world, with a collective capacity of 9,900 MW.
- The Indo-French nuclear agreement was signed in 2008 and it was decided to build a nuclear power plant in Jaitapur, some 600 km south of Mumbai. The power plant will have six nuclear European Pressurised Reactors (EPRs) with a capacity of 1,650 MW each.
- In March 2018, EDF and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) signed an "industrial way forward" agreement in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Concerns:
- Locals of Jaitapur and some organisations have been opposing the project in the area citing safety and environmental concerns (especially due to EPRs).
- Earlier questions about costs and safety remain unanswered.
- With the Indian power sector facing surplus capacity and a crisis of non-performing assets (NPAs), a large investment in the Jaitapur project is particularly risky.
- Electricity from the Jaitapur project to be more expensive (₹15 per kilowatt-hour or even more) than many other sources of electricity, including solar and wind power.
- Across the world, EPRs have experienced delays and cost increases. The first EPR entered commercial operation in December 2018 at the Taishan site in China, five years later than originally projected (with final capital cost increasing over 40% over the original estimate). The story in Europe is more dramatic.
- Safety problems – Safety problems with the reactor design and construction have emerged in several EPRs (especially pertained to the pressure vessel, which is the key barrier that prevents the spread of radioactive materials from the reactor).

- EPRs at Flamanville (France) and Taishan (China), Olkiluoto in Finland - encountered problems.
- These safety concerns are exacerbated by India's flawed nuclear liability law.

Alternative sources of energy
- While nuclear costs have been rising, other low-carbon sources of electricity, especially solar energy, have become cheaper.
- In 2010-11, tariffs for solar photovoltaic (PV) projects under the National Solar Mission were between ₹10.95 and ₹12.76 per unit. Today it is below ₹5 per unit.
- In recent auctions for solar PV projects, winning tariff bids in the range of ₹2 to ₹2.50 per unit have become routine.

Do you know?
- In March 2018, the parliamentary standing committee on energy listed 34 "stressed" projects, including NPAs and "those which have the potential to become NPAs".
- It estimated an outstanding debt of ₹1.74 lakh crore.
- If the Jaitapur project encounters financial difficulties, the costs would fall on Indian taxpayers.

Connecting the dots:
- Nuclear reactors are yet to find acceptance in the minds of people, especially after post Fukushima disaster. Is nuclear energy a feasible option for high energy demanding and consuming India?
- Critically analyse the need for making India independent in nuclear energy capabilities. Also, throw light on the recent progress of nuclear development in India.

Meghalaya tragedy: show how little the lives of the poor matter in India

Context:

- 15 workers were trapped inside in a rat-hole coal mine since mid-December (who are feared to be dead by now due to delayed rescue operations).
- A second disaster had struck Meghalaya's illegal coal mines in less than a month, claiming the lives of two miners.
- Similar mine-flooding accident had claimed 15 lives in 2012 in South Garo Hills.
- India recorded 377 mine deaths in 3 years

Much like the Meghalaya tragedy, other disasters—some driven by policy and others where policymakers look away—show how little the lives of the poor matter in India.

Reasons:
- The tardy response of the Centre and the State of Meghalaya has exposed the extraordinary indifference in government to labour welfare and the law.
- The primary responsibility for the operation of illegal mines lies with the State government. It should be called to account for ignoring the directions of the National Green Tribunal to close them and levy punitive royalties on those that extracted the coal.
- Also violation of rules under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, the responsibility lies with the State government.
- Justice B.P. Katoki committee appointed by the NGT had warned about the continued operation of the illegal mines. However, Meghalaya government failed to act and take appropriate actions.
- Mineral resources should have been treated as state property.

The utter indifference of the state government to find a permanent solution to this recurrent tragedy is significant for two reasons.
- First, it appears that the lives of poor mine workers who are often migrants from Assam or illegal entrants from neighbouring Bangladesh matter little.
- Second, the state is seemingly complicit in the tragedy by not only allowing a banned enterprise but also collecting taxes from the transport of illegally harvested coal, bringing into scrutiny the elites' disregard for the rule of law.

Public policy disasters

Other disasters and tragedies due to poor policies and actions by the State
- Over the past year, at least 17 people are likely to have succumbed to hunger in Jharkhand, which is among the poorest states in India, as they failed to link their biometric identification or Aadhaar number with their ration cards, which guarantee highly subsidised food under the National Food Security Act.
- Because of demonetization, more than a 100 people are estimated to have died either while standing in queues for long hours or for failing to provide new banknotes while getting treated in hospitals.
- An uncounted number of labourers die because of silicosis after inhaling stone dust while working in quarries in states such as Rajasthan and Gujarat.

These deaths can be prevented by using face masks and goggles and by using wet drilling, but mine owners continue to ignore occupational health regulations.

Rich consumers who extensively use stones as construction material in their homes remain unaware of the human costs involved.

The same holds true of the recurrent deaths of sanitation workers.
In the national capital alone, more than 20 labourers have died in the past year inhaling poisonous gases while cleaning sewers and sewage treatment tanks, despite the federal government's thrust on sanitation and cleanliness.

Conclusion:
- State government has done little to implement reforms and diversify employment away from dirty mining under primitive conditions over the years, in spite of judicial orders.
- It is the responsibility of the Centre and the State to rehabilitate the workers from impoverished communities, reportedly including some child labourers, who are ready to undertake the risky labour because of the higher-than-average wages paid.

Connecting the dots:
- Recent deaths and tragedies at illegal mines and rat-hole mines highlight the need for urgent policy reforms. Discuss. What strategies would you suggest to prevent and mitigate the effects of such accidents?

Illegal mining and related concerns

Context:

- Official statistics indicate that there were more than **82,000 instances of illegal mining in 2010** alone.
- About 30 per cent of the 374 candidates who contested the elections were either owners of mines or have stakes in the largely unregulated coal mining and transportation industry.
- Key Indian public institutions have broadly **failed to oversee and regulate mining firms**.
- International law obliges India's government to **protect the human rights** of its citizens from abuses by mining firms and other companies.
- India has laws on the books that are designed to do just that, but some are so **poorly designed** that they seem set up to fail.
- Others have been largely neutralized by **shoddy implementation** and enforcement or by **corruption** involving elected officials or civil servants.

- The result is that key government watchdogs stand by as spectators while out-of-control mining operations threaten the health, livelihoods and environments of entire communities.

Concerns:
- **Indiscriminate mining** of coal persists (especially in Meghalaya) despite April 2014 **National Green Tribunal ban**
- Ruinous effects on the **environment and human life**
- Primitive and hazardous method of mining for coal
- **Unethical practices** in private sector (lack empathy and humanity)
- Ecological impact: **acidic discharge from the mines pollute nearby rivers** (examples - three rivers in the Jaintia hills: the Myntdu, Lunar and Lukha); leaching of heavy metals; **impacts drinking water and irrigation** (traces of iron, manganese and aluminium)
- Dangerous mix of **bad policies**, **weak institutions**, and **corruption**
- **Government oversight and regulation** of India's mining industry is largely ineffectual
- Even legal mine operators do not comply with the law and **respect human rights**
- **Poor disaster preparedness**: Delay in rescue operations; no one person or agency to coordinate the rescue mission

Examples:
- Case studies of iron mining in Goa and Karnataka illustrate failed regulation, alleged corruption and community harm.
- Mines operating with the approval of government regulators are able to violate the law with complete impunity.

The way ahead:
- Strict implementation of environmental laws
- Afforest the abandoned mines
- Corporate social responsibility – Construction of hospitals and schools by mine owners
- Regular raids/ checks by security personnel, armed guards, law and order authorities of the concerned State Government.
- Strict environmental clearance process by Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) reports
- Ministry of Coal has launched the Coal Mine Surveillance & Management System (CMSMS) and 'Khan Prahari' mobile application – for reporting, monitoring and taking suitable action on unauthorised coal mining activities.

Connecting the dots:

- Despite NGT Ban, indiscriminate mining of coal still persists. Why? Discuss its impacts and shortcomings.

Centre's nod to ₹7,214 cr. disaster relief

Part of: GS Mains III – Disaster and Disaster Management; Role of State

In news:
- The Home Ministry approved the release of ₹7,214 crore to six States and a Union Territory for damage caused by natural calamities during the kharif season 2018-19.
- Among the sanctioned amount, ₹4,714.28 crore will be given to Maharashtra (drought), ₹949.49 crore to Karnataka (drought), ₹900.4 crore to Andhra Pradesh (drought), ₹317.44 crore to Himachal Pradesh (flood and landslips), ₹191.73 crore to Uttar Pradesh (flood), ₹127.60 crore to Gujarat (drought) and ₹13.09 crore to the Union Territory of Puducherry (cyclone).
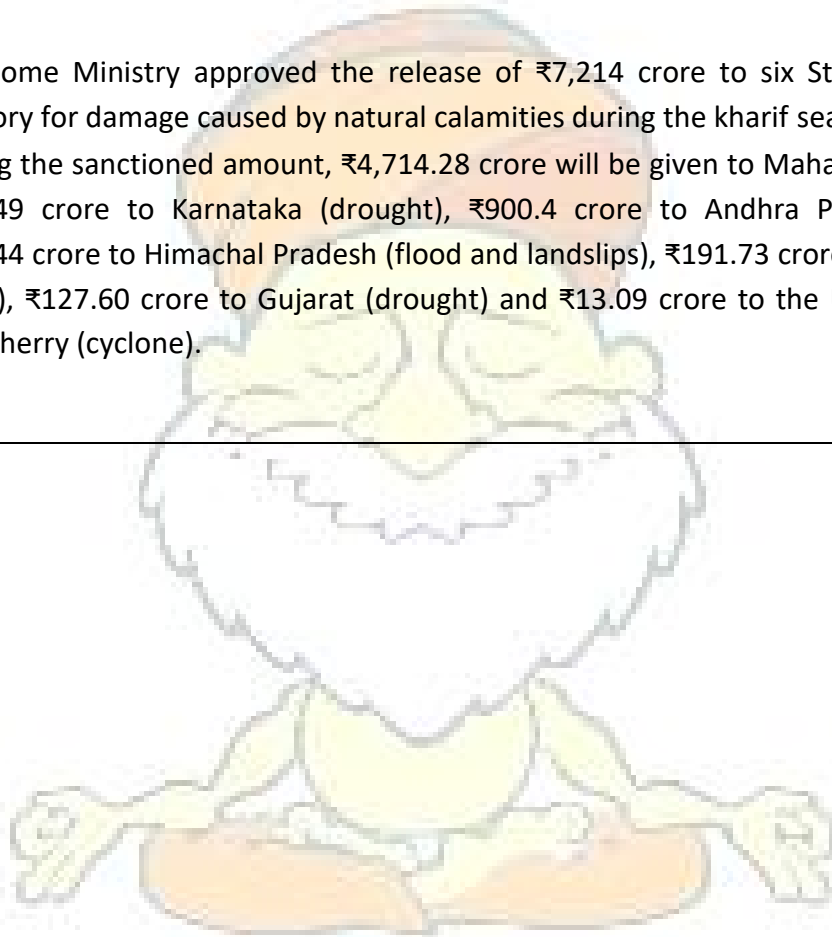
INTERNAL SECURITY/SECURITY

Deterrence or danger?

Context:

- It has been universally recognised that the sole justification for having nuclear weapons is their deterrence value.
- The initiation of a nuclear attack would mean utter destruction, not just for the two parties involved but also for regions far beyond.
- If nuclear weapons fail to deter the outbreak of war involving use of such weapons, they have disastrously failed in their deterrence mission.

Second strike capability theory

- The theory is that if country A initiates a nuclear attack on country B in a first strike, country B must be in a position, even after absorbing the nuclear strike, to retaliate with a massive nuclear attack on the enemy country. This is called second strike capability.

Concept of nuclear triad

- A country which is equipped with land-based, air-based and sea-based nuclear delivery systems is considered to be a nuclear triad.
- In the event that country A manages to destroy the land and air-based nukes of country B, country B will still have its third leg in the shape of sea-based nuclear-tipped missiles, called SLBMs or submarine-launched ballistic missiles, for use against country A because the sea-based missiles, launched from nuclear-powered submarines, would have remained undetected and hence safe from enemy attack.
- Thus, the rationale for the naval leg of the triad is its survivability for retaliation, rather than deterrence.

Do you know?

- On December 5, 2018, India announced that it had achieved its nuclear triad, after the completion of its first indigenous ship submersible ballistic nuclear (SSBN) maiden deterrence patrol.

The author argues that India does not gain anything by escalating the nuclear arms race in the region (especially with INS Arihant)

- One, because the main purpose of naval leg of the triad is its survivability for retaliation, rather than deterrence. Therefore, acquiring SSBNs or a nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine will not make our deterrent more credible.

- Two, if the hostilities reach the threshold where a country may consider using nuclear weapons, it would be preceded by a period of conventional warfare.
- Three, any conventional conflict itself will not start before several days of negotiations, including possible mediation by external powers and the UN Security Council. Even a small incident involving India and Pakistan would immediately invite big powers to rush in and mediate pull-back of forces, etc.
- Four, whether the external interventions succeed or not in preventing a major war, the target country would have ample time to disperse its land and air-based nuclear assets. The naval leg does not seem indispensable.

Manipur shows the way : New Anti-Lynching Law

Context:

- On July 17, a Supreme Court bench termed incidents of mob-lynching in India as 'horrendous acts of mobocracy'.
- It had directed the Parliament to draft a new legislation to effectively deal with incidents of mob lynching.
- It had issued a slew of directions to the Union and State governments to protect India's 'pluralist social fabric' from mob violence.
- However, the Union and most State governments have done little to comply with the directions of India's highest court.

Do you know?
Supreme Court's prescriptions –
- It had directed for creation of nodal officer in every State to control such crimes.
- SC had held that 'lynching' should be dealt as a "special and separate offense and provide adequate punishment."
- It also recommended that cases of lynchings be heard in a fast track court with trials to be concluded within six months and the highest possible sentences to be awarded.

Manipur shows the way
- Manipur became the first to pass a remarkable law against lynching, late last year.
- It did this after a single horrific video-taped lynching of a Muslim youth with an MBA degree stirred the public conscience.

Positives:
1. Comprehensive in definition:

- The definition of lynching in Manipur law is very comprehensive, covering many forms of hate crimes.
- These are "any act or series of acts of violence or aiding, abetting such act/acts thereof, whether spontaneous or planned, by a mob on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, dietary practices, sexual orientation, political affiliation, ethnicity or any other related grounds …."

2. In line with Supreme Court directions:
- The Manipur law closely follows the Supreme Court's prescriptions, creating a nodal officer to control such crimes in every State, special courts and enhanced punishments.

3. Public officials are held accountable
- It is the first in the country dealing with the protection and rights of vulnerable populations which creates a new crime of dereliction (failure/negligence) of duty of public officials.
- It lays down that "any police officer directly in charge of maintaining law and order in an area, omits to exercise lawful authority vested in them under the law, without reasonable cause, and thereby fails to prevent lynching shall be guilty of dereliction of duty" and will be liable "to punishment of imprisonment of one year, which may extend to three years, and with fine that may extend to fifty thousand rupees".

4. Registering hate crime doesn't require prior state sanction
- At present, protection is provided to public officials charged with any offence committed while acting in their discharge of official duty.
- No court can take cognisance of such an offence except with the previous sanction of the State government.
- However, according to Manipur Law, now no prior sanction is required to register crimes against public officials who fail in their duties to prevent hate crimes such as lynching.
- Therefore, the law makes acting against hate crimes far more effective and non-partisan.

5. Enables protection of victims and witnesses
- Law clearly lays down the duty and responsibility of the State government to make arrangements for the protection of victims and witnesses.
- It also prescribes the duty of State officials to prevent a hostile environment against people of the community who have been lynched, which includes economic and social boycott, and humiliation through excluding them from public services such as education, health and transport, threats and evictions.

6. Better Rehabilitation and Compensation

- The Law requires the state to formulate a scheme for relief camps and rehabilitation in case of displacement of victims, and death compensation.

Conclusion:

- The Manipur government has broken new ground, being the first government in the country to make much desirable law to prevent mob lynching.
- It has taken the leadership in creating new India, where every citizen should claim– of safety, fairness and fraternity.

Connecting the dots:

- Lynching by mobs has become a recurring phenomenon in India. What can be the possible factors behind this trend? Examine. Also suggest ways to address it.
- A draft anti-lynching law has been proposed. Discuss the need of such a law and apprehensions associated with the provisions of the draft law. Further also analyze how making law would not be enough, an effective enforcement machinery is the need of the hour.

Naroda Patiya case

Do you know?

- The Naroda Patiya massacre took place on 28 February 2002 at Naroda, in Ahmedabad during the 2002 Gujarat riots.
- 97 Muslims were killed by a mob of approximately 5,000 people, organised by the Bajrang Dal, a wing of the Vishva Hindu Parishad.
- The massacre at Naroda occurred during the bandh (strike) called by Vishwa Hindu Parishad a day after the Godhra train burning.
- The communal violence at Naroda was deemed "the largest single case of mass murder" during the 2002 Gujarat riots; it accounted for the greatest number of deaths during a single event.

Report on AQIS's growing influence

In news:

U.S.-based think tank report has pointed that -

- **Growing incidents of violence against Muslims** in India and attacks in the name of "cow vigilantism", help Al Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) to **recruit cadres**.
- The report titled 'AQIS — The Nucleus of Jihad in South Asia' asserts that the **rise in inter-religious clashes in India due to a changing political discourse** had resulted in further divisions between Hindus and Muslims.

Terror trail

al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) is being backed by the Pakistan establishment to carry out attacks in India, according to a U.S. think tank

2014: The AQIS was created and led by Maulana Asim Umar, who was later identified as Uttar Pradesh resident Sanaul Haq

2015: The CIA helped Delhi police arrest three AQIS members, Mohammad Asif, Zafar Masood and Rehman

2017: The AQIS released a video where its self-styled spokesperson Usama Mahmoud asked Muslims to support the Rohingya in Myanmar

2018: The Union Ministry of Home Affairs bans theAQIS

▪ ISTOCK

https://d39gegkjaqduz9.cloudfront.net/TH/2019/01/25/DEL/Delhi/TH/5_13/0c2a4f8a_2689489_101_mr.jpg

2008 Assam bombings: NDFB founder, nine others get life term

Part of: GS Mains II – Internal Security and North East Security issues

Key pointers:

- NDFB stands for National Democratic Front of Bodoland
- NDFB is an armed separatist outfit which seeks to obtain a sovereign Bodoland for the Bodo people.
- It is designated as a terrorist organisation by the Government of India.
- The group has carried out several attacks in Assam, targeting non-Bodo civilians as well as the security forces.

- NDFB founder - Ranjan Daimary
- 2008 serial blasts in Assam had killed at least 88 people and injured more than 500.
- NDFB has a ceasefire agreement with the Indian government

Role of Bangladesh

- NDFB founder Ranjan Daimary was arrested in Bangladesh in December 2009
- Daimary was handed over to the Indian authorities in 2010

ETHICS/ESSAY

Scientific Temper in India

Context:

- There were disgraceful remarks and controversies regarding the Indian Science Congress (ISC) sessions recently.
- Bizarre and unscientific claims are not gone very well with scientific community.
- There are demands for policy change, which will include stipulating a process of selection of speakers and scrutinizing the content of their speech.
- Questions are raised - **Whether the nation is undermining its scientific temper?**

Do you know?
- ISC has traditionally been a forum where research that is grounded in rationality has always been given a hearing.
- In a country where vast majority of Indian educational institutes actively discourage learning and research, ISC is the only venue where scientists meet their peers and get affirmation of their work.
- Scientific temper, a term first used by Nehru in 1946, is a way of life which uses the scientific method to question, observe physical reality, test, analyse and communicate.

Scientific Temper @Independence
- After independence, the need for scientific temper was considered to be important. For Jawaharlal Nehru, scientific temper did not mean that everyone had to study science; rather, it was a way of thinking, a way to break the hold of superstitions by applying rationality and thought.
- Therefore, the Constitution framers even felt that scientific temper should be protected as a fundamental duty. Well-being of the common man is vested in scientific temper.
- The onus was on Educational structures to spearhead the transition of the nation from a people stifled by the medieval darkness of the British to a people united in the pursuit of knowledge and a search that would bring prosperity in its wake.

Scientific Temper @Now
Unfortunately, that vision of the giants of our freedom struggle is not being met today.
- Even those educated in the best institutes in the country never lost their superstitions. They studied modern science, used modern devices, achieved material prosperity and yet held the most regressive views.

- 'God-men' catering to the educated middle class have used the power of the media and social media to spread their superstitions and broadcast messages that should have been laughed at by those at the kindergarten level.
- Funding for science is inadequate, management of science is problematic, and the university system has failed.
- Teaching has become a political game in schools, with facts changing according to the government of the day.

Emphasis on Science may not show immediate results, but will finally result in the upliftment of the country.

India needs not only "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan (hail the soldier, hail the farmer)", but also "Jai Vigyan (hail science) and Jai Anusandhan (hail research)".

India's journey so far:

- India is among the top 10 countries for scientific research.
- There have been many indigenous programmes in scientific research. In space missions, India is counted among the top six in the world.
- India's performance in science and technology has been impressive. The establishment of a chain of institutes and organisations such as Indian Institute of Science Education and Research and ISRO is a major indicator.
- Indian participation in mega projects like Large Hadron Collider and gravitational wave observatories under LIGO is noteworthy. However, India is lagging behind when it comes to investments in science proportionate to its GDP. We fare poorly when compared with developed economies.

The way ahead:

- Science has always been universal and neutral.
- Pseudo-intellectuals and people with unscientific beliefs should avoid looking at science through the prism of religion and beliefs.
- Role of media – Media should focus on important papers rather than on unimportant issues.
- Revamping the education system to include more stress on science application and to develop scientific temper in children.
- Encouraging students to research and write scientific articles and conduct experiments and reading in their field of competence to develop their scientific abilities and increase the scientific desire to know the cause and effect of different phenomena.

Connecting the dots:

- **Essay** - India needs not only "Jai Jawan Jai Kisan (hail the soldier, hail the farmer)", but also "Jai Vigyan (hail science) and Jai Anusandhan (hail research)".

- Discuss why developing a scientific temper is essential for Indian democracy to flourish?
- Do you think our society lack scientific temper? Examine why blind faith and superstition are so prevalent. Discuss what needs to be done to enhance the scientific temper and knowledge among citizens.

Success and Capable even if Blind

Context:

- In **V. Surendra Mohan v. Union of India,** Supreme Court upheld the legality of the Tamil Nadu government's policy of **reserving the post of civil judge only for people whose percentage of blindness does not exceed 40-50%,** resulting in the exclusion of the applicant who are blind more than 50%.
- It ruled that a judicial officer has to possess a reasonable amount of sight and hearing to discharge his/her functions. Therefore, the apex held that the government's decision was rational and reasonable.
- It accepted the claim that impaired vision makes it impossible to perform the functions required of judicial officers.
- It also accepted that asking a blind judicial officer to perform such administrative functions as – recording dying declarations and conducting inquiries – can result in avoidable complications.

The below article provides – Why the above SC ruling has to be regarded as one of the darkest in India's disability rights movement.

1. The **view that a totally blind person cannot thrive as a judge contradict with several examples of successful judges** who are blind.

Examples –

- Former South African Constitutional Court judge **Zak Yacoob** refused to accept the notion that one needs to be sighted to assess a witness's attitude or appearance as being nonsensical.
- According to U.S. Court of Appeals DC Circuit judge **David S. Tatel**, it is neither fair nor accurate to impose low expectations on what blind lawyers can do.
- 'View that a blind person lacks the wherewithal to become a judge is an unfair characterisation' - Former San Diego County Court judge **David Szumowski**
- **Yousaf Saleem** - became Pakistan's first blind civil judge last year

2. Court's unreasoned assertion is an outcome of their **ignorance about the capabilities of the disabled.**

Blind people have proved their capacity in different walks of life.

Blind persons have able to become successful writer, study computer science, successful civil servant.

- Beno Zephine - first 100% visually challenged Indian Foreign Service Officer
- Yousaf Saleem - Blind civil Judge
- Derek Rabelo - The Blind Surfer
- Christopher Downey - Blind Architect
- Pete Ecker - Blind Photographer

(Link: **Blind, Bold And IFS: The Incredible Story of Beno Zaphine**)

Conclusion:

Supreme Court itself had noted in 2017 that - "A lawyer can be just as effective in a wheelchair, as long as he/she has access to the courtroom and the legal library, as well as to whatever other places and material or equipment that are necessary for her to do her job well."

Supreme Court Judgment in this case (V. Surendra Mohan v. Union of India) appear simply not to have bothered to notice the competence of the millions of disabled people who inhabit this world.

Institutional display of pure and simple discrimination dressed up as legal reasoning will be reflective of what kind of a society we hope to be. Thus there should be no discrimination to disabled particularly from State Institution.

Also such ill conceived judgment is in violation of India's commitment to SDG goal and Article 41 of Indian Constitution (Article 41 directs to the State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want.)

Connecting the dots:
- Do you agree with the recent Supreme Court's ruling that people who are blind more than 50% should be excluded from becoming a judicial officer? Comment.
- Disability is a matter of perspective. Comment. What measures have been taken by the government to create a conducive ecosystem for the disabled community.

- Essay - Disability is not an obstacle to success.

Gandhian philosophy: Art of dying

Context:

- Jan 30th, 2019 marked 71st anniversary of Gandhi's death.
- His assassination was a great shock. But, strangely, **his death unified those in India who had lost faith in non-violent co-existence**.
- As a matter of fact, **Gandhi's death taught everyone about the worth of civic friendship and social solidarity**.

Greatness of Gandhi

- Gandhi is known for his rise as the non-violent leader of the Indian independence movement.
- Gandhi knew that he might have to meet death at the hands of his own countrymen and if that happens it will unite the Hindus and Mussalmans.
- Gandhi had written that – "The enemies of the community are constantly making efforts against such a unity. In such a great endeavour, someone will have to sacrifice his life."
- Gandhi, all through his life, talked about his death with a great deal of openness and with no sanctimony. For him the fundamental philosophical question — 'should I live or die; to be or not to be'? — had already found its answer in the idea of self-sacrifice.

https://images.indianexpress.com/2019/01/parliament-1.jpg

Lessons what we can learn from Gandhi and Socrates

- In the **Gandhian philosophy of resistance**, we can find the **intertwining of non-violence and exemplary suffering**.
- For Gandhi, the **practice of non-violence** began with an **act of self-sacrifice** and the **courage of dying for truth**.
- Gandhi believed that when fighting injustice, the actor must not only have the courage of his/her opinions but also be ready to give his/her life for the cause.
- He had always held that **satyagraha implied the willingness to accept not only suffering but also death** for the sake of a principle. (Gandhi's mantra "Do or Die")
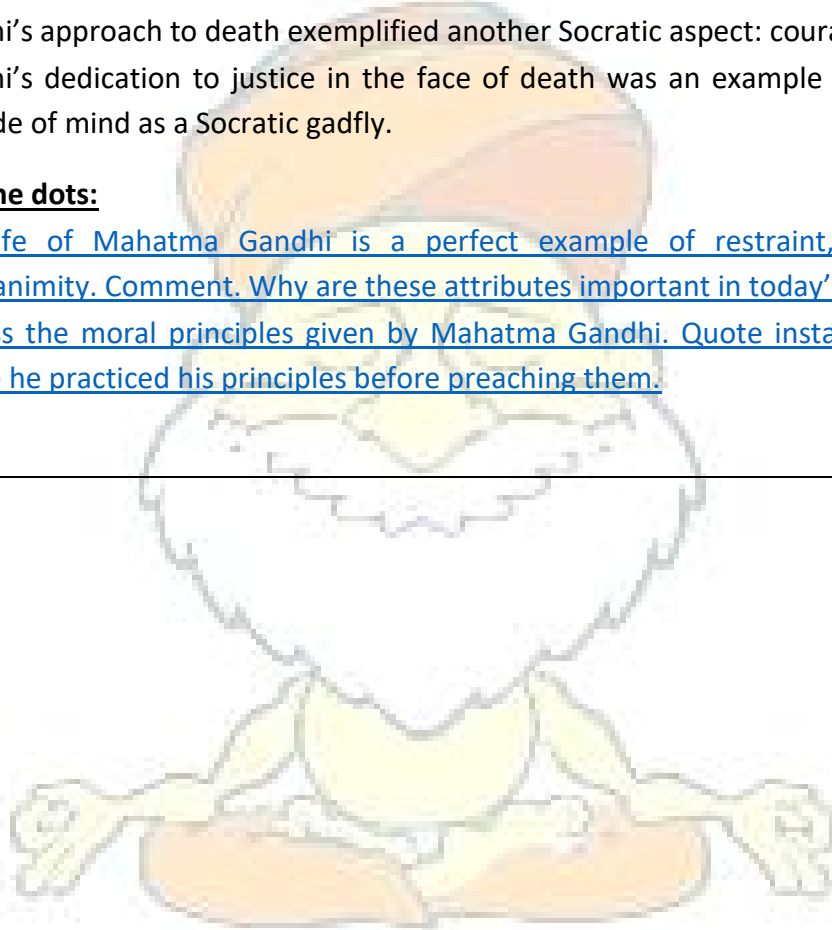
Do you know?

- Socrates inspired Gandhi on the importance of self-sacrifice and the art of dying at a time when the latter was developing his idea of satyagraha in South Africa.

- Gandhi referred to Socrates as a "Soldier of Truth" (satyavir) who had the willingness to fight unto death for his cause.
- Consequently, for Gandhi, there was a close link between the use of non-violence and the art of dying, in the same manner that cowardice was sharply related to the practice of violence.
- Gandhi remained a Socratic dissenter all his life. (This can be viewed from his further commitment to struggle for the truth)
- Gandhi considered Socrates' civic action as a source of virtue and moral strength.
- Gandhi's approach to death exemplified another Socratic aspect: courage.
- Gandhi's dedication to justice in the face of death was an example of his courageous attitude of mind as a Socratic gadfly.

Connecting the dots:
- The life of Mahatma Gandhi is a perfect example of restraint, forgiveness and magnanimity. Comment. Why are these attributes important in today's world? Discuss.
- Discuss the moral principles given by Mahatma Gandhi. Quote instances from his life where he practiced his principles before preaching them.

PERSON IN NEWS

Person in news	Description
1. U.K. Sinha Committee	• The RBI has appointed an eight member expert committee headed by **former SEBI chairman U.K. Sinha** to comprehensively review and propose long-term solutions for **revival of the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector**. • The MSME sector has been facing stress due to the demonetisation exercise and implementation of GST.
2. Tahawwur Rana	• Tahawwur Rana is a key accused in the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack case. • Rana was arrested in 2009 and is serving a 14-year prison term in the U.S. for providing material support to terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), which planned and executed the attacks. • Rana, a Chicago-based businessman, helped David Coleman Headley open an immigration firm in Mumbai, which was a cover to conduct reconnaissance on targets that were attacked on November 26, 2008. • The NIA also has registered a forgery case against Rana for opening the immigration centre based on fake documents. **India-U.S. Extradition Treaty of 1997** • Government of India had engaged with U.S. authorities under this treaty for custody of U.S.-based individuals for their role in the November 26, 2008, terrorist attacks in Mumbai.
3. Nilekani Committee on digital payments	• Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up a five-member committee headed by Infosys chairman **Nandan Nilekani**. • The Committee will suggest a **strategy for deepening of digital payments** in the country. • The panel will review the existing status of digitisation of payments in the country, identify the current gaps in the ecosystem, and suggest ways to bridge them. • The panel will also suggest measures to strengthen the safety and security of digital payments and provide a roadmap for increasing customer confidence while accessing financial services through digital

	modes.
4. Gita Gopinath	• **Mysore-born Gita Gopinath** has joined International Monetary Fund as its chief economist, becoming the **first woman to occupy the top IMF post**. • Gita Gopinath believes the world is experiencing a retreat from globalisation, posing challenges to multilateral institutions.
5. Shivakumara Swami	**Why in news?** • Shivakumara Swami, the 111-year-old seer of Siddaganga Mutt, Karnataka passed away. • He was popularly known as "Nadedaduva Devaru" (Walking God). • The Lingayat seer was known for his humanitarian work in education. • A Padma Bhushan awardee, the seer founded over 125 institutions and was a follower of the Virakta Lingayat tradition. • He had followers across caste and religious barriers. • He became a seer of the mutt in 1941, had a long stint of 78 years.
6. Lance Naik Nazir Ahmad Wani	**In news:** • **Lance Naik Nazir Ahmad Wani** - has been posthumously awarded 'Ashok Chakra', India's highest peace time gallantry award for his role in a counter-insurgency operation in Kashmir last year. • He is Kashmir's first Ashok Chakra awardee and was also awarded Sena Medal for gallantry twice in 2007 and 2018 for his acts of valour. • The award to be **presented by President Ram Nath Kovind** to Lance

		Naik Wani's wife Mahajabeen at the Republic Day parade.
7.	Pranab, Deshmukh, Hazarika	President Ramnath Kovind conferred the Bharat Ratna, the nation's highest civilian honour, on – 1. Former President Pranab Mukherjee 2. Social activist Nanaji Deshmukh (posthumous) and 3. Assamese musician Bhupen Hazarika (posthumous)
8.	Bipin Rawat	• In a rare gesture, the Chief of the Army Staff, General Bipin Rawat, has been awarded the **Param Vishisht Seva Medal (PVSM)** for distinguished service on the eve of the 70th Republic Day.
9.	George Fernandes	• George Fernandes, former Defence Minister and one of the most prominent leaders of the socialist movement in the 1970s, died. • George Fernandes had set out to be a priest but instead became a trade union leader, socialist and finally Defence Minister of India.
10.	Suman Kumari	**Why in news?** • Suman Kumari is **Pakistan's first Hindu woman judge**. • She aims to give legal help to Sindh's poor people. **Do you know?** • **Pakistan's first judge from the Hindu community** was **Justice Rana Bhagwandas**, who served as the acting Chief Justice for brief periods between 2005 and 2007.
11.		

MISCELLANEOUS

	In News	Description
1.	Digital Detox App by SHUT Clinic	• Doctors at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru, have come up with a mobile app that helps people reduce mobile usage. • So, if you are one of those tech addicts who can't help but spend most your waking life glued to your cell phone, relief may finally be at hand – on your cell phone. • The app has been found to be effective in bringing about behavioural changes.
2.	2019: A cluster of anniversaries	2019 marks – • 150th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi • 150th anniversary of the death of Mirza Ghalib • 100th anniversary of the Government of India Act of 1919 • 100th anniversary of Rowlatt Act or Black Act • 100th anniversary of Jallianwala Bagh massacre • 50th anniversary of the Gujarat riots of September-October 1969 • 35th anniversary of first Indian to be in outer space • 35th anniversary of Operation Blue Star **Note:** All the above historic persons and happenings are important for exam this year. While preparing, give more focus on these issues/events.
3.	Wi-Fi facility at 2,000 rail stations soon	Railway Minister has instructed officials - • to **provide Wi-Fi facilities** at a minimum of 2,000 stations as soon as possible. • to **set up a single helpline number** for all non-security railway complaints. • to **distribute point of sale (PoS) machines** in all trains to each catering staffer to address complaints related to overcharging by the caterer (to **ensure transparency in catering services**) • replace conventional coaches with **modern LHB (Linke Hofmann Busch) design coaches** in all long distance trains
4.	China Chang'e-4 lunar probe and	• China has named the lunar rover, which was deployed recently to carry out a string of experiments on the unexplored far side of the

'Yutu 2'	moon, as 'Yutu 2'.
5. What is a marketplace and inventory based model of e-commerce?	• Marketplace based model of e-commerce means providing an information technology platform by an e-commerce entity on a digital & electronic network to act as a facilitator between the buyer and seller. • Inventory based model of e-commerce means an ecommerce activity where inventory of goods and services is owned by e-commerce entity and is sold to the consumers directly.
6. IBM Patents: India second highest contributor	**In news:** • Tech giant IBM said it had received 9,100 patents in 2018 across areas such as artificial intelligence (AI), cloud computing and cybersecurity, with India being the second highest contributor to the global record tally. • In 2018, IBM employee inventors received a record number of 9,100 patents (with US 1st and India 2nd highest contributor) • IBM inventors from India received over 800 patents.
7. Assam shutdown against ST status for 6 groups	• Shutdown has been called in Assam against the Centre's move to grant Scheduled Tribe status to six "advanced" communities — Chutia, Motok, Moran, Koch-Rajbongshi, Tai-Ahom and Tea Tribes/Adivasis — which are currently categorised as Other Backward Classes.
8. Sahayak Air Droppable Containers	• Indian Navy has successfully tested containers that can be air-dropped to enhance its operational logistics capability at sea. • Sahayak Air Droppable Containers can carry spares for ships up to 2,000 km away from the coast. (Ships need not return to coast to collect spares) • These cylindrical containers have been indigenously developed by the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory and the Aeronautical Development Establishment of the Defence Research and Development Organisation.
9. Renuka dam	• Centre signs pact with 5 States on Renuka dam (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh) • To restart construction of the Renuka multipurpose dam project in the Upper Yamuna Basin.

	• The Renuka dam project has been conceived as a storage project on the Giri river (a tributary of the Yamuna) in Sirmaur district of Himachal Pradesh.
10. Chardham	• The four towns of Uttarakhand - Yamnotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath - are considered as Chardham. **Why in news?** • Government had proposed to provide all-weather connectivity to the four holy towns of Uttarakhand. • However, SC had issued a stay order for Chardham projects till the environment clearance is taken by the authorities.
11. Cricket in Dubai brings Pandits and Muslims closer	• The two communities had parted on a bitter note during the traumatic displacement in January, 1990. • Kashmiri Pandits participated for the first time in the cricket league, **helping to mend broken bonds between the communities**.
12. India-US ties:	• India has committed to purchase $5 billion worth of oil and gas from the U.S. annually, and $18 billion worth of defence equipment that are under implementation. • U.S. export to India has gone up by at least 30%.
13. Gulshan Mahal to become National Museum of Indian Cinema	• Gulshan Mahal, the elegant 19th-century bungalow in South Mumbai, was once known for qawwalis and cultural gatherings. • Now it is all set to return in a new avatar — as the home of the National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC). • Originally known as Gulshan Abad (garden of prosperity), it was built in the mid-1800s.
14. Kumbh will generate ₹1.2 lakh crore revenue	• The mega Kumbh Mela, which began on January 15 and will continue till March 4, is expected to generate a revenue of ₹1.2 lakh crore for Uttar Pradesh, according to apex industry body Confederation of Indian Industry. • Global festival: The Mela attracts a massive number of tourists from various countries like Australia, the U.K., Canada, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, New Zealand, Mauritius, Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka, the Kumbh is a festival of the world.
15. RailWire WiFi	• The Indian Railways has one of the world's largest public WiFi

	networks in RailWire WiFi.
	• The network, provided by RailTel, a 'Mini Ratna' central PSU (Public Sector Undertaking) under the Ministry of Railways, is not only one of the largest but also one of the fastest public WiFi networks.
	• Free WiFi services to commuters are being provided under 'RailWire', RailTel's retail Broadband initiative.
16. Aadhaar is now passport to Nepal and Bhutan	• Aadhaar cards are now valid travel documents for Indians under 15 and over 65 travelling to Nepal and Bhutan, according to a Home Ministry communique.
	• Indian citizens going to Nepal and Bhutan don't need a visa if they have a valid passport, a photo identity card issued by the government of India or an election ID card issued by the Election Commission.
	• Earlier, persons over 65 and under 15 could show their PAN card, driving licence, Central Government Health Service (CGHS) card or ration card, but not the Aadhaar, to prove their identity and visit the two countries.
17. 'Bihar outgrew others in FY18 GDP'	According to Crisil report –
	• Bihar and Andhra Pradesh led the pack among States in terms of GDP growth in financial year 2017-18.
	• Bihar registered 11.3% and Andhra Pradesh registered 11.2% growth, compared with the national GDP growth of 6.7% for the year.
	• 12 of the 17 general category States grew faster than the national growth rate.
	• However, the report noted that this growth was not equitable, with the gap between the per capita incomes in low-income and high-income States widening over the last five years.
	• Jharkhand, Kerala, and Punjab are at the bottom.
18. China's 2018 growth slows to 28-year low	• China's economy shows growing signs of weakness. Its growth slows to 28-year low.
	• Reasons: Weak domestic demand, bruising U.S. tariffs drag economy
	• China to roll out more stimulus to avert a sharper slowdown.
	• Slowdown has fuelled anxiety about global risks.

19. Tribal meet held in Rajasthan	• Rajasthan tribal meet stresses on preserving indigenous practices. • It laid emphasis on re-establishing their links with the livestock, local herbs, traditional foodgrain and indigenous agricultural practices as a safeguard for protecting their culture. • Subjects of agriculture and health care discussed. • The tribal farmers took a pledge to preserve the fertile soil in their areas for ensuring food security.
20. 'Total Cleanliness Survey' by Railways	• Pune-Secunderabad Shatabdi is India's cleanest train • North Western Railway (NWR) topped the zonal rankings in the 'Premium' category trains • Southern Railway topped in the 'Other than Premium' category' trains • Survey part of 'Swachh Rail-Swachh Bharat' mission • 'Premium' trains include - Rajdhani, Shatabdi, Duronto, Tejas and Gatiman • 'Other than Premium' category - Sampark Kranti, Intercity, Jan Shatabdi and other Mail and Express trains
21. ICICI Loan scam	• CBI booked **Chanda Kochhar**, the then managing director and chief executive officer of ICICI Bank, for **sanction of credit facilities in violation of RBI rules**, which caused a loss of ₹1,730 crore to the bank.
22. PM inaugurated Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd.'s Integrated Refinery Expansion Complex in Kochi	• The new refinery is expected to make great contribution towards Ujjwala scheme by doubling the LPG production. • The Prime Minister also laid the foundation stones of the petrochemical complex in Kochi and the second campus of the Skill Development Institute at Ettumanoor. • He also opened the LPG storage facility of the Indian Oil Corporation at its Kochi bottling plant. • Kerala State to invest ₹1,427 crore for the petrochemical park project.
23. 'RDP India 2019'	• Ministry of Defence had launched a mobile app 'RDP India 2019' on the Republic Day, with the intent of making available the highlights of the Republic Day event, not only to the spectators at Rajpath, but also to the general public all over the world. • This app contains information about the Parade on Rajpath, New

	Delhi, including Order of the March, details of the tableaux presented by different States and Ministries, children cultural performances, fly past and names of recipients of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar 2019.
24. ASER Report: Poor condition of toilets for schoolgirls	According to ASER report – • Seven northeastern States lag behind in toilets for schoolgirls. • 34.96% schools in the eight northeastern States had usable toilets for girls in 2018 compared to 36.66% in 2016. • Sikkim - best performing state with 75.7% schools having usable toilets for girls. (National average 66.4%) **Do you know?** • Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is prepared by NGO Pratham
25. 'Project Gaushala'	**In news:** • Madhya Pradesh government to set up 1,000 'gaushalas' or cow shelters in the State in the next four months to accommodate around one lakh stray cows and their progeny. • Setting up 'gaushalas' in every village panchayat was a key promise made by the Congress in its manifesto for the 2018 Assembly elections. • With this announcement, the government expects to not only tackle stray cattle menace but also create 40 lakh man-days employment. • The Department of Rural Development will be the project's nodal agency. The project will be implemented by gram panchayats, self-help groups, the institutions empanelled with the State Board for Conservation of Bovine Animals etc.
26. ISRO launched Human Space Flight Centre	• The Human Space Flight Centre, which will be the hub of ISRO's manned missions, was inaugurated at the ISRO headquarters in Bengaluru. • Gaganyaan, the country's first crewed mission, is set to happen by 2022.

(TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE)

Model questions: (Answers are provided at the end)

Q.1) Consider the following statements with respect to 'Central Information Commission (CIC)'

1. It has been constituted under the Right to Information Act, 2005
2. Chief Information Commissioner is appointed by the President of India

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.2) Central Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners are appointed by the president on the recommendations of a nomination committee. Who of the following is not a member of this nomination committee?

a) Prime Minister
b) A Union Minister Nominated by Prime Minister
c) Speaker of Lok Sabha
d) Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha

Q.3) Which of the following statements are NOT correct regarding Central Information Commission?

1. It is a statutory body.
2. It consists of four members with one Chief information Commissioner and three Information Commissioners.

3. It has a jurisdiction over Central Government Bodies, PSU and MNCs working in India.

Select the code from following:

a) 1 only
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.4) Consider the following pairs and choose the correct pair/s from the code given below
Monuments of national importance : : Located in

1. Haveli of Agha Khan : : Alwar
2. Ranipur Jharail Temples : : Pithoragarh
3. Neemrana Baori : : Agra
4. Hathi Khana : : Jaipur

Code:

a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 only
c) 1, 2 and 3
d) None

Q.5) Which of the following statements is/are correct about Vultures?

1. They are the primary removers of carrion
2. Vultures of genus 'Gyps' are called as flying fox

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only

b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.6) Almost 95% of Vulture population disappeared from India. Which of the following statements are correct about Vultures?

1. All Vulture species found in India are critically endangered.
2. Vultures died by consuming carcasses of cattle which were tainted by a pain killer called Diclofinac.

Select the code from following:

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.7) Consider the following statements with reference to Vulture Conservation Breeding Centers

1. These have been established by the Central government under Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. There is at least one such center in every state.

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.8) U.K. Sinha committee is associated with -

a) Teacher Reforms

b) Pension Reforms
c) Labour Reforms
d) MSME Reforms

Q.9) Consider the following statements with regard to recent Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)

1. Morocco has been named the second best performing country after Sweden
2. The bottom five in the list are Saudi Arabia, U.S., India, South Korea and China.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both
d) None

Q.10) Consider the following statements with respect to 'INS Arihant'

1. It belongs to Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear (SSBN) class
2. It will be armed with K-15 and K-4 missiles

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.11) Route 606, also known as Delaram-Zaranj Highway connects which of the following countries?

a) India and Myanmar
b) India and Bhutan
c) Iran and Afghanistan

d) China and Pakistan

Q.12) Salma Dam is a landmark infrastructure project undertaken by Government of India on river Hari Rud, in Herat province of -
   a) Bangladesh
   b) Bhutan
   c) Afghanistan
   d) Nepal

Q.13) Which of the following statement is incorrect regarding the Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)?
   a) Atal Innovation Scheme (AIM) is working to establish 500 ATLs in Central Universities across India.
   b) The AICs under Atal Innovation Scheme will help start-ups to expand quicker and enable innovation-entrepreneurship, in core sectors of the economy such as manufacturing, energy, transport, education, agriculture, water and sanitation, etc.
   c) Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) will provide financial support of Rs.10 crore and capacity building for setting up of each AIC.
   d) Atal Innovation Scheme (AIM) is working to establish 500 ATLs in schools across India.

Q.14) Consider the following statements about 'Online Labs'
   1. It hosts experiments in Physical, Chemical and Biological sciences for the students from classes 9 to 12

with content aligned to NCERT /CBSE and State Board Syllabus
   2. It is funded by Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology
   3. It will be established at Atal Tinkering Labs established across the country as a part of the Atal Innovation Mission

Select the correct statements
   a) 1 and 2
   b) 2 and 3
   c) 1 and 3
   d) All of the above

Q.15) Consider the following statements about Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs):
   1. It is part of Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)
   2. Mentor India Campaign will engage leaders who can guide and mentor students at Atal Tinkering Labs
   3. ATLs can be established in schools (Grade VI – XII) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society.

Select the correct statements
   a) 1 and 2
   b) 2 and 3
   c) 1 and 3
   d) All of the above

Q.16) Which of the following is under the aegis of NITI Aayog?
   1. Atal Pension Yojana
   2. Atal Tinkering Lab
   3. Atal Innovation Mission

Select the correct code:
   a) 1 and 2
   b) 2 and 3
   c) 1 and 3
   d) All of the above

Q.17) Which of the following are not part of Open Defecation Free (ODF) States of India, according to Swachh Bharat Mission?
   1. Bihar
   2. Rajasthan
   3. Uttar Pradesh
   4. Madhya Pradesh
   5. Uttarakhand

Select the correct code
   a) 1, 2 and 3
   b) 2, 3 and 5
   c) 1 and 3
   d) Only 1

Q.18) Which among the following protocol deals with the condition that "faecal sludge/septage and sewage is safely managed and treated, with no discharging and/or dumping of untreated faecal sludge/septage and sewage in drains, water bodies or open areas?
   a) Open Defecation Free Plus
   b) Open Defecation Free
   c) Open Defecation Free Plus Plus
   d) Open Urination Free

Q.19) Which of the following is not a part of Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)?
   a) Every household should have access to tap and sewerage line.

   b) Developing greenery and well maintained open spaces e.g. Parks
   c) Reducing pollution by switching to public transport and constructing facilities for non-motorized transport like walking/cycling.
   d) Providing government broadband internet connection to all households through optical fiber network.

Q.20) The chief characteristic features of the Neolithic culture include:
   1. Practice of agriculture and domestication of animals
   2. Polishing of stone tools
   3. Manufacture of pottery
   4. The new technology of smelting metal ore and crafting metal artifacts

Select the correct answer using the codes given below:
   a) 1 and 2 only
   b) 2 and 3 only
   c) 1, 2 and 3
   d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.21) In the context of Indian economy, Open Market Operations' refers to
   a) Borrowing by scheduled banks from the RBI
   b) Lending by commercial banks to industry and trade
   c) Purchase and sale of government securities by the RBI
   d) None of the above

Q.22) **If** **the** **RBI** **implements** **an** **expansionist open market operations policy, this means that it will?**

    a) Buy securities from non-government holders

    b) Offer commercial banks more credit in open market

    c) Sells G-securities (government securities) in open market

    d) Openly announces to the market that it intends to expand its credit

Q.23) **Which** **of** **the** **following** **are** **instruments of Monetary Policy?**

    a) Repo Rate

    b) Liquidity adjustment Facility

    c) Cash Reserve Ratio

    d) Open Market Operations

Select the code from below:

    a) 1 and 4

    b) 2 and 3

    c) 1,2 and 4

    d) All of the above

Q.24) Consider the following statement about Call Money Market:

    1. Borrowing and lending of funds take place on overnight basis.

    2. Participants in the call money market in India currently include all the scheduled commercial banks (SCBs), cooperative banks, insurance.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

    a) 1 only

    b) 2 only

    c) Both 1 and 2

    d) None

Q.25) The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) acts as a bankers' bank. This would imply which of the following?

    1. Banks keep their deposits with the RBI

    2. RBI provides loans to banks whenever they are in need

    3. It rediscounts the Bills of exchange

Choose the correct answer using the codes given below.

    a) 1 and 2 only

    b) 2 and 3 only

    c) 1 and 3 only

    d) All of the above

Q.26) Which among the following are government's measures to enhance tax revenues?

    1. expansion of the GST taxpayer base

    2. improving the return filings compliance

    3. detect tax evasion

    4. PSU dividends

Choose the correct options:

    a) 1 and 4

    b) 2 and 3

    c) 1,2 and 4

    d) All of the above

Q.27) Consider the following statements with regard to 1992 Indra Sawhney judgement:

    1. Supreme Court held that the "test or requirement of social and educational backwardness cannot be applied to Scheduled Castes and

Scheduled Tribes, who indubitably fall within the expression 'backward class of citizens'."

2. It laid down a 50 per cent limit on reservations and observed that economic, social and educational criteria were needed to define backward classes.
3. The judgment also held that Economic backwardness cannot be the sole criterion.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 2 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.28) Anshi National Park is located in -
a) Kerala
b) Karnataka
c) Uttar Pradesh
d) Odisha

Q.29) Point Calimere WS is located in –
a) Kerala
b) Karnataka
c) Tamil Nadu
d) Andhra Pradesh

Q.30) Consider the following statements about Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)
1. It finds exoplanets that periodically block part of the light from their host stars.
2. It looks for dips in the visible light of stars, to determine the size of the exoplanet.

3. It is developed by European Space Agency (ESA).

Select the correct statements
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.31) Consider the following statements about NASA's 'TESS':
1. It is an all-sky survey mission that will discover thousands of exoplanets around nearby bright stars.
2. TESS detected its first confirmed exoplanet, a super-Earth named HIP 116454b in 2014.

Select the correct statements
a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.32) Consider the following about Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP):
1. The Scheme provides central assistance in the form of loan to State Government to speed up the implementation of large irrigation projects.
2. Union Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare is responsible for framing policy guidelines for implementation.

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.33) Consider the following statements with reference to Raisina Dialogue

1. It is a bilateral conference between think tanks of India and Israel.
2. It is held every year in New Delhi.
3. The conference is hosted by the Observer Research Foundation in collaboration with the Ministry of External Affairs of India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

a) 1 and 2
b) 1 and 3
c) 2 and 3
d) 1,2 and 3

Q.34) Consider the following statements with regard to International Solar Alliance:

1. The International Solar Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in 2015.
2. The Alliance includes all the member countries of the United Nations.
3. It is headquartered in Paris

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 and 2
b) Only 1
c) 1 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.35) Common Risk Mitigation Mechanism is related to which of the following?

a) UNFCCC
b) International Solar Alliance (ISA)
c) Stockholm Convention
d) CBD

Q.36) Which of the following countries are part of 'QUAD'?

1. India
2. U.S.A.
3. Russia
4. Japan

Select the correct answer using code below

a) 1 and 3
b) 2 and 4
c) 1, 2 and 4
d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.37) Which one of the following issues the "Global Economic Prospects" report periodically?

a) The Asian Development Bank
b) World Economic Forum
c) International Monetary Fund (IMF)
d) The World Bank

Q.38) Consider the following statements with reference to Raisina Dialogue 2019

1. The theme of this year is "A World Reorder: New Geometries; Fluid Partnerships; Uncertain Outcomes".
2. The name "Raisina Dialogue" comes from Raisina Hill, an elevation in New Delhi that is home to the Government of India.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

a) 1 and 2
b) 1 and 3

c) 2 and 3

d) 1,2 and 3

Q.39) Consider the following statements with regard to National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

1. It was launched in 2011 to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20-30%.
2. It is a ₹300-crore programme.
3. It is a programme notified under the Environment Protection Act.

Select the correct statements

a) 2 only

b) 2 and 3

c) 1 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.40) Consider the following statements about Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana:

1. Target beneficiaries are the pregnant women who are in the 2nd and 3rd Trimesters of pregnancy.
2. It allows involvement of private practitioners to volunteer for the campaign.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

a) 1 Only

b) 2 Only

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.41) With reference to constitutional amendment bill, which of the statements given below is/are correct?

1. The constitutional amendment bill must be passed in each House by Absolute Majority.
2. In case of joint sitting, for the purpose of deliberation and passage of constitutional amendment bill, the bill must be passed by a simple majority.

Choose the appropriate code:

a) 1 only

b) 2 only

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.42) When a constitutional amendment aims to modify an article related to the federal structure, then

a) consent of only half the States is required with simple majority

b) consent of only half the States is required with special majority

c) consent of only half the States is required with absolute majority

d) None of the above

Q.43) Which of the following is incorrectly matched?

a) 100th Amendment act – Land Boundary Agreement

b) 101st Amendment Act – GST

c) 98th Amendment Act – Article 371 J

d) 122nd Amendment Bill – 10% quota for the economically weaker sections (EWS)

Q.44) Chutia, Motok, Moran, Koch-Rajbongshi communities were in news recently. They belong to –

a) Arunachal Pradesh

b) Assam
c) West Bengal
d) Tripura

Q.45) What term is used for the estimate of advance payment to the government to carry on its work till the passing of the appropriation bill?
a) Vote on Credit
b) Finance Bill
c) Vote on Account
d) Supplementary budget

Q.46) After the general discussion of Budget, a Vote on Account is passed. What is the purpose of 'Vote on Account'?
a) For the government to function, two months advance grant is passed before passing the budget.
b) To get consent of opposition for passing of Budget
c) To discuss the total expenditure of the government in previous year
d) To get the money passed from the contingency fund

Q.47) The budget consists of two types of expenditure—the expenditure 'charged' upon the Consolidated Fund of India and the expenditure 'made' from the Consolidated Fund of India. Consider the following statements regarding the expenditure 'charged' upon Consolidated Fund of India:
1. It is non-votable by the parliament and it can only be discussed.
2. Emoluments and allowances of the President and other expenditure

relating to his office are charged upon Consolidated Fund of India.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.48) The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) is carried out each January as a voluntary activity. Which of the following statements are correct regarding AWC?
1. It is an international Program that focuses on monitoring the status of waterbirds and wetlands.
2. It aims to increase public awareness on issues related to wetland and waterbird conservation.
3. In India AWC is annually coordinated by Bombay Natural History Society and Wetlands International.

Select the code from following:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.49) Consider the following statements about Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs)
1. It was developed and sites are identified by BirdLife International
2. IBAs are places of international significance for the conservation of birds and other biodiversity
3. A site can be listed as an IBA only if it holds a population of a species

categorized by the IUCN Red List as Critically Endangered

Select the correct statements

a) 1 Only
b) 1 and 2
c) 2 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.50) With reference to Wetlands International, consider the below statements:

1. It is an intergovernmental organization formed by the countries which are signatories to Ramsar Convention.
2. It works at the field level to develop and mobilize knowledge, and use the practical experience to advocate for better policies.

Which of the statements given above is/are incorrect?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.51) Which of the following statements related to the Bird Life International is/are correct?

1. It is a platform for all the stakeholders engaged in genetic resource conservation and management of birds in developing nations.
2. It is the official Red List authority for birds, for the International Union for Conservation of Nature.

3. It publishes the scientific journal Bird Conservation International.

Select the appropriate code

a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All

Q.52) Government of India has launched an ambitious scheme called Pradhan Mantri Aawas Yojna. Which of the following statements regarding PMAY are correct?

1. It aims to provide every family a pucca house with water connection, toilet facilities, 24*7 electricity supply and access.
2. In the first phase the scheme is targeting the construction of houses in urban areas.

Select the code from following:

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.53) Consider the following statements regarding 'UDAN' Scheme:

1. The scheme has been launched by Railway Ministry to connect remote areas of the country with superfast tracks.
2. The acronym 'UDAN' stands for 'Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik'.
3. The scheme UDAN envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the

country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.

Which of the above statements are correct?
   a) 1 and 2
   b) 2 and 3
   c) 1 and 3
   d) All of the above

Q.54) Consider the following statements with regard to National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF):
   1. It is a competency-based framework that organizes all qualifications according to a series of levels of knowledge, skills and aptitude.
   2. It shall be mandatory for all training/educational programmes/courses to be NSQF-compliant
   3. All training and educational institutions shall define eligibility criteria for admission to various courses in terms of NSQF levels.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
   a) 1 only
   b) 1 and 2
   c) 2 and 3
   d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.55) With reference to 'National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF)', which of the statements given below is/are correct?
   1. Under NSQF, a learner can acquire the certification for competency only through formal learning.

2. An outcome expected from the implementation of NSQF is the mobility between vocational and general education.

Select the correct answer using the code given below:
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both 1 and 2
   d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.56) Consider the following statements and choose the correct ones from the code given below:
   1. 45th World Skills Competition (2022) will be held in Delhi.
   2. India Skills 2018 was held in Delhi and it is an initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship

Select correct answer:
   a) 1 only
   b) 2 only
   c) Both
   d) None

Q.57) National Skill development Fund and National Skill development Corporation have been set up by
   a) Ministry of Finance
   b) Ministry of Skill development
   c) Ministry of Commerce
   d) Ministry of MSME

Q.58) 'Shailesh Nayak Committee' is concerned with
   a) Coastal Zone Regulations
   b) Rate Hole Mining

c) Merchandise Exports from India
d) Non-Performing Assets

Q.59) Consider the following statements with respect to 'External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs)'

1. ECBs can be raised as Loans and Capital Market Instruments
2. ECBs cannot be used for investment in stock market
3. DEA (Department of Economic Affairs) along with RBI (Reserve Bank of India), monitors and regulates ECB guidelines and policies.

Select the correct statements
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.60) Consider the following statements with reference to External Commercial Borrowings

1. These are loans in India made by non-resident lenders in foreign currency to Indian borrowers.
2. These are regulated under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999.

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.61) Which of the following schemes is under the 'Core of the Core Schemes'?

a) National Social Assistance Programme
b) Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme
c) Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana
d) National Rural Drinking Water Mission

Select the correct code:
a) 1, 2 and 3
b) 1 and 2 Only
c) 2, 3 and 4
d) All of the above

Q.62) Indian planning is shifting from Allocation based schemes to demand driven Right based schemes like MGNREGA, Food Security Act etc. Which of the following statements are correct regarding Demand Driven Schemes?

1. The implementation of schemes is highly centralized.
2. States do not have the flexibility to develop their own perspective plans.
3. It is a bottom – top approach.

Select the code from following:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 3 only
d) All of the above

Q.63) Which of the following is/are the rights guaranteed under Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948?

1. Freedom of Belief and Religion
2. Right to Education
3. Right to Own Property

4. Right to Marriage and Family

Choose the correct answer from the codes given below
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 1,2 and 3 only
c) 1,3 and 4 only
d) 1,2,3 and 4

Q.64) Government of India has being trying to protect the critically endangered Great Indian Bustard. Which of the following statement are correct about Great Indian Bustard?
1. To protect the bird and create awareness, this has been made the state bird of Haryana.
2. It is a flight less bird.
3. It is found in arid and semi-arid grassland.

Select the code from the following:
a) All of the above
b) 1 and 2
c) 2 and 3
d) 3 only

Q.65) Rajasthan Government has set up a captive breeding centre for Great Indian Bustard(GIB). Consider the following statements
1. First Captive breeding centre for GIB was set up in Haryana in 2015
2. GIB is a flightless bird
3. GIB is listed as critically endangered in IUCN Red Data List

Which of the above statement[s] is/are correct?
a) 3 only

b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1 and 2 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.66) Consider the statements regarding Cassini Spacecraft
1. It is an unmanned space mission
2. It is the first space probe for the study of Saturn and first to enter its orbit
3. It is a flagship initiative of NASA

Which of the given statements is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2
b) Only 1
c) 1 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.67) Consider the following about Central Information commission:
1. The Central Information Commission has been constituted under the Right to Information Act, 2005.
2. The jurisdiction of the Commission extends over all Central Public Authorities.
3. The commission submits its report to the President of India.

Which among the following is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2
b) 1 and 3
c) 2 and 3
d) 1,2 and 3

Q.68) Central Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners are appointed by the president on the recommendations of a nomination

committee. Who of the following is not a member of this nomination committee?

a) Prime Minister
b) A Union Minister Nominated by Prime Minister
c) Speaker of Lok Sabha
d) Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha

Q.69) Which of the following statements are NOT correct regarding Central Information Commission?

1. It is a statutory body.
2. It consists of four members with one Chief information Commissioner and three Information Commissioners.
3. It has a jurisdiction over Central Government Bodies, PSU and MNCs working in India.

Select the code from following:

a) 1 only
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.70) Consider the following statements regarding Central Information Commission (CIC):

1. It was constituted through an Official Gazette Notification under the provisions of the Right to Information Act (2005).
2. It entertains complaints and appeals pertaining to offices, financial institutions, public sector undertakings, etc., under the Central Government, State Government and the Union Territories.

Which of the above statements is/are INCORRECT?

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.71) Which of the following bird species are migratory in nature?

1. Pelican
2. Flamingo
3. Northern Duck
4. Amur Falcon

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

a) 1 and 3 only
b) 1 and 4 only
c) 2, 3, and 4 only
d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Q.72) Consider the following statements about Pulicat lake

1. The lake is the second largest brackish water ecosystem in the country after the Chilika lake in Odisha.
2. It is located on border of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Select the correct code:

a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.73) Which of the following is/are related to CBI?

1. Balwantray Mehta committee
2. Vineet Narain case

3. Delhi Special Police Establishment (DSPE) Act of 1946

Choose the correct option
a) 3 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.74) The Central Bureau of investigation (CBI) was established by the resolution of Ministry of Home Affairs in 1963. Which of the following statements regarding CBI are correct?
1. It is a statutory body.
2. It derives its powers from Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.
3. It is an independent body and does not come under government's control.

Select the code from following:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 only
c) 2 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.75) Consider the following about the appointment of CBI Director:
1. CBI director is appointed by the Centre.
2. CBI director is appointed on the basis of the recommendation by a panel comprising the Central Vigilance Commission as chairperson, other vigilance commissioners, Home Secretary and Secretary.

3. Lokpal Act governs the appointment of the CBI director.

Which among the following is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2
b) 1 and 3
c) 2 and 3
d) 1,2 and 3

Q.76) The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a social security programme comprised of different sub-schemes targeted at different deprives sections of population. Which of the following schemes come under NSAP?
1. Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS)
2. Indira Gandhi National Widow Pension Scheme (IGNWPS)
3. Indira Gandhi National Disability Pension Scheme (IGNDPS)
4. National Family Benefit Scheme (NFBS)

Select the code from following:
a) 1,2 and 3
b) 2,3 and 4
c) 1,3 and 4
d) All of the above

Q.77) The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) is a social security programme comprised of different sub-schemes targeted at different deprives sections of population. Which of the following statements are correct regarding NSAP?
1. The scheme is administered by Ministry of Rural Development.

2. The program is being implemented in rural as well as urban areas.
3. For getting benefits under NSAP the applicant must belong to a Below Poverty Line (BPL) family.

Select the code from following:
a) 1 and 2
b) 2 and 3
c) 1 and 3
d) All of the above

Q.78) Consider the following statements with regard to International Labour Organization
1. It is the only 'tripartite' UN agency.
2. Its headquarters is in Geneva.
3. It has received the Nobel Peace Prize.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a) 1 and 2
b) 1 and 3
c) 2 and 3
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.79) 'Future of Work' report is released by
a) International Monetary Fund (IMF)
b) International Labour Organisation (ILO)
c) World Trade Organisation (WTO)
d) Amnesty International

Q.80) Mekedatu dispute is concerned with
a) Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh
b) Karnataka and Tamil Nadu
c) Karnataka and Goa
d) Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

Q.81) Which of the following statements regarding H1N1 is/are correct?
1. It is transmitted by an Influenza A virus subtype H1N1
2. The 'H' stands for hemagglutinin and 'N' for neuraminidase - both proteins on the outer layer of the virus
3. Swine influenza is a respiratory disease that occurs in pigs that is caused by the Influenza A virus.
4. It is a Non-contagious disease

Select the correct answer using the code given below:
a) 1 , 2 and 3 only
b) 2 and 4 only
c) 1, 2 and 4 only
d) All the above

Q.82) Which of the following National Parks are present in Assam?
1. Nameri National Park
2. Kaziranga National Park
3. Manas National Park
4. Dibru Saikhowa National Park

Select the code from below:
a) 2 and 3
b) 1, 2 and 3
c) 2, 3 and 4
d) All of the above

Q.83) 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.84) Consider the following statements about Kaziranga National Park

1. It is part of the middle Brahmaputra alluvial flood plains
2. Wild Water Buffalo is only found in Kaziranga National Park
3. It is a World Heritage Site

Select the correct statements

a) Only 3

b) 2 and 3

c) 1 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.85) South Asian Nitrogen Hub is an initiative funded by –

a) United Kingdom

b) South Africa

c) Nepal

d) India

Q.86) Which among the following are the major sources of Nitrogen pollution?

1. Agriculture
2. Sewage
3. Vehicles
4. Poultry

Select the correct answer using code below

a) 1 and 3

b) 1,2 and 3

c) 2 and 3

d) 1,2,3 and 4

Q.87) Agriculture is one of the largest Green house gas contributors on earth. Which of the following statements are correct regarding this?

1. Cattle rearing is responsible for release of a large amount of Methane in atmosphere.
2. Use of manure in soil leads to production of Methane and Nitrogen oxides.
3. Burning of crop stubble release a large amount of CO2 and soot in air
4. Clearing space for agriculture leads to deforestation and hence global warming.

Select the code from following:

a) 1,2 and 3

b) 2,3 and 4

c) 1,3 and 4

d) All of the above

Q.88) Nitrogen gas forms 78% of the earth's environment. Which of the following statements are correct about atmospheric Nitrogen?

1. It creates an inert environment in atmosphere. If Nitrogen is not present, Oxygen would react violently and oxidize (burn) carbon and other elements.
2. Nitrogen adds mass to air and helps in maintaining atmospheric pressure.
3. Nitrogen is taken up by humans through respiration from the atmosphere which helps in building of amino acids and proteins.
4. Some plants have the ability to fix atmospheric nitrogen with the help of bacteria.

Select the code from below:

a) 1,2 and 3
b) 2,3 and 4
c) 1,2 and 4
d) All of the above

Q.89) Which of the following countries is not a member of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)?
a) Myanmar
b) Maldives
c) Afghanistan
d) Bhutan

Q.90) To check indoor air pollution caused by the use of solid biomass fuels and conventional cook stoves in the rural areas, which institute/organisation has developed a multi-fuel improved cook stove called "NEERDHUR" –
a) DRDO- The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
b) CSIR- National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)
c) CSIR- The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
d) DRDO- National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI)

Q.91) Robben Island was in news recently. It is located in
a) North America
b) Europe
c) South America
d) South Africa

Q.92) Recently Kyasanur Forest Disease was in the news. Consider the following statements w.r.t it

1. It is a viral disease also known as rodent fever
2. It is endemic to South Asia
3. Kyasanur forests are located in Andhra Pradesh

Select the correct code
a) Only 1
b) Only 2
c) 1 and 3
d) 2 and 3

Q.93) Which among the following is/are genetic diseases?
1. Hemophilia
2. Down's syndrome
3. Sickle-cell anemia
4. Kyasanur Forest disease (KFD)

Select the correct answer using the code given below
a) 1 and 2 only
b) 2 and 3 only
c) 1, 2 and 3
d) All the above

Q.94) Which among the following is known as "Birds Paradise of Asia"?
a) Ranganathittu
b) Vedanthangal
c) Mangalajodi
d) Kaggaladu

Q.95) Which of the following statements with reference to Lake Chilika is incorrect?
a) It is a brackish water lagoon
b) It is the largest coastal lagoon in the World
c) It is the largest coastal lagoon in India

d) It is the single largest habitat of Irrawaddy dolphins in the world

Q.96) Consider the below statements with regard to Institutions of Eminence scheme:

1. It is a scheme of UGC which aims to help 20 (10 public and 10 private) higher education institutions from the country.
2. There will be no financial assistance to the private institutions under this Scheme.
3. Empowered Expert Committee (EEC) to select 20 Institutions of Eminence is headed by former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) N Gopalaswami.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

a) 1 only
b) 1 and 3 only
c) 2 and 3 only
d) 1, 2 and 3

Q.97) Consider the following statements

1. Keoladeo National Park is placed on the Montreux Record under the Ramsar Convention.
2. Golden Langur in India is found only in Assam

Select the correct code:

a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.98) The government has relaunched 'Khelo India' program. Which of the following statements are correct regarding the program?

1. 1000 sportsmen will receive a scholarship of 5,00,000 for eight years.
2. It will promote 20 universities as the hub of sports excellence.

Select the code from below:

a) 1 only
b) 2 only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2

Q.99) Agriculture is one of the largest Green house gas contributors on earth. Which of the following statements are correct regarding this?

1. Cattle rearing is responsible for release of a large amount of Methane and nitrous oxide in atmosphere.
2. Use of manure in soil leads to production of Methane and Nitrogen oxides.
3. Burning of crop stubble release a large amount of CO_2 and soot in air.
4. Clearing space for agriculture leads to deforestation and hence global warming.

Select the code from following:

a) 1,2 and 3
b) 2,3 and 4
c) 1,3 and 4
d) All of the above

Q.100) Which of the following are greenhouse gases?

1. Methane

2. Nitrous oxide
3. Carbon dioxide
4. Ammonia
5. Carbon monoxide

Select the correct codes:
a) 1, 2, 3 only
b) 1 and 2 only
c) 1, 2, 3 and 5
d) 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5

Q.101) Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) is responsible for Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) relating to
1. Geographical Indication of goods
2. Copyrights
3. Semiconductor integrated circuits' layout design

Select the correct code:
a) 1 and 2
b) Only 2
c) 2 and 3

d) All of the above

Q.102) Consider the following statements about Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant
1. It is the first in the world to have post-Fukushima safety enhancement requirements implemented and operated successfully
2. It has a pressurized heavy-water reactor (PHWR) type of nuclear reactor

Select the correct statements
a) 1 Only
b) 2 Only
c) Both 1 and 2
d) Neither 1 nor 2
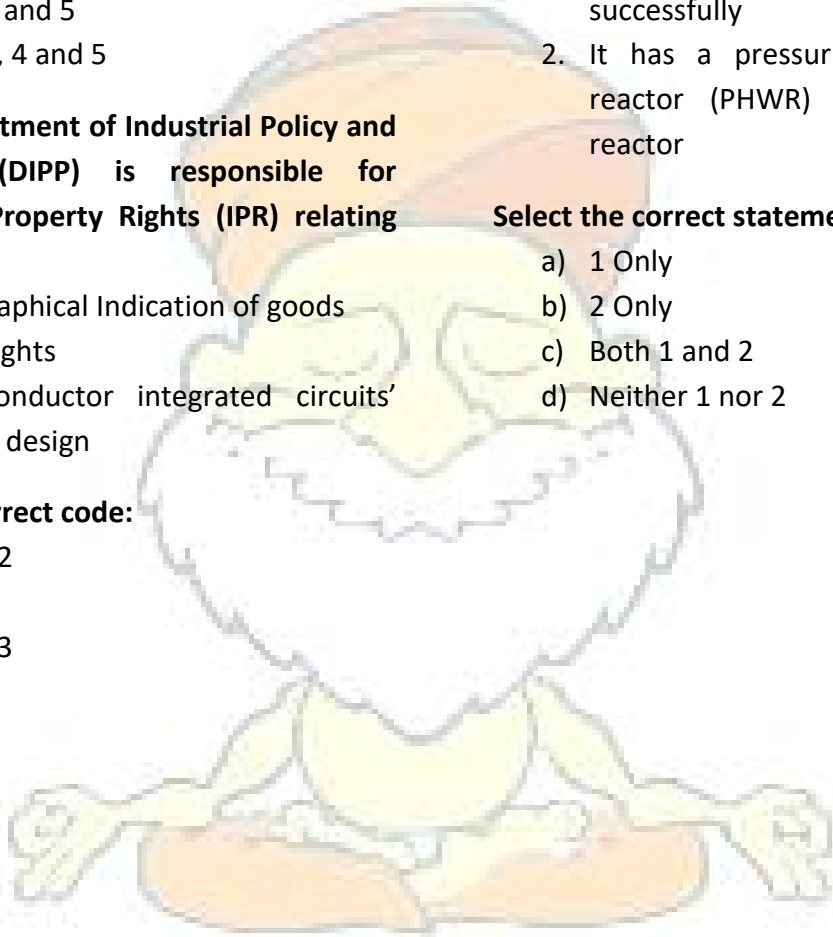
2019 JANUARY MONTH CURRENT AFFAIRS MCQs SOLUTIONS

#	Ans	#	Ans	#	Ans	#	Ans
1	c	27	d	53	b	79	b
2	c	28	b	54	d	80	b
3	b	29	c	55	b	81	a
4	d	30	a	56	b	82	d
5	a	31	a	57	a	83	c
6	b	32	a	58	a	84	c
7	d	33	c	59	d	85	a
8	d	34	b	60	c	86	d
9	a	35	b	61	b	87	d
10	c	36	c	62	c	88	c
11	c	37	d	63	d	89	a
12	c	38	a	64	d	90	b
13	a	39	a	65	a	91	d
14	a	40	d	66	b	92	b
15	d	41	d	67	a	93	c
16	b	42	a	68	c	94	c
17	c	43	d	69	b	95	b
18	c	44	b	70	b	96	d
19	d	45	c	71	d	97	c
20	c	46	a	72	a	98	c
21	c	47	c	73	c	99	d
22	b	48	d	74	b	100	a
23	d	49	b	75	b	101	d
24	a	50	a	76	d	102	a
25	d	51	b	77	d		
26	c	52	a	78	d		