

1. SOCIAL ISSUES

1.1. Quota For Acid Attack Victims in Central Government Jobs

In News

- Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) has released an order in which victims of acid attacks have been included under Right of Person with Disability Act, 2016.
- After the new order, the Acid attack victims will also be entitled to 1 % reservation.

Key Highlights

- According to DoPT order, in case of direct recruitment, 4% of the total number of vacancies (up from the existing 3%) in groups A, B and C shall be reserved for people with benchmark disabilities. A person with benchmark disabilities is defined as one who has not less than 40% of a specified disability.
- One per cent of all vacancies will be reserved for those suffering from blindness, low vision, deafness, hardness of hearing, locomotor disability including cerebral palsy, dwarfism, muscular dystrophy and cured leprosy.
- Acid attack victims, those with autism, intellectual disability, specific learning disability, mental illnesses and deaf-blindness (a combination of sight and hearing loss) will also be entitled to a one per cent reservation.
- Intellectual disability is characterised by significant limitations, both in intellectual functioning such as reasoning, learning and problem solving, and in adaptive behaviour that covers a range of daily skills.
- The rule has provisions to ensure that reservation for people with disabilities is not adjusted against posts meant for those from Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Classes.
- Under the new rules, all government organisations have been asked to appoint 'grievance redressal officers' to look into complaints.
- Any person with a benchmark disability, who faces discrimination, can report the case to the designated officer. The deadline is two months, and the action taken must be communicated to the person.

Legal And Administrative Framework To Check Acid Attack

- In April 2013, in the aftermath of what is known as the Nirbhaya case, the Indian legislature amended the rape laws of the country and created a specific offense for attempted or completed acid attacks.
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC)** were amended to include sections to deal with acid attacks. The new sections in the IPC – **326A and 326B** – provided a minimum sentence of ten years, extendable to life imprisonment, for an acid attack, and five to seven years' imprisonment for attempted acid attacks.
- The **Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)** was also amended to clarify that an attacker was liable to pay a fine and the medical expenses of the victim in addition to a compensation.
- A further amendment mandated all hospitals to provide medical aid to acid attack survivors free of cost and to immediately inform the police of an acid attack.
- In order to restrict **over-the-counter sale of acids**, SC in 2013 gave an interim direction which included:
 - Prohibiting over-the-counter sale of acid unless the seller maintained a register recording the details of the buyer such as name, address, quantity sold and purpose of buying acid.

- Requiring that sellers sell acid only after the buyer showed a government photo ID indicating their address. Prohibiting the sale of acid to anyone below 18 years of age.
- Requiring all stocks of acid to be declared by the seller to their local government authority within 15 days.
- Allowing the local authority to confiscate any undeclared acid and imposing a fine up to Rs 50,000.
- In April 2015, the Supreme Court directed the State Legal Aid Services Authority to ensure that victim compensation schemes were publicized and provided minimum compensation of Rs 3,00,000 for acid attack survivors.
- It further directed that the Home Ministry (MHA) and Family Welfare Ministry to ensure that the state governments give appropriate notice of the restrictions on the over-the-counter sale of acid.

1.2. **Stree Swabhiman Initiative**

In News

- The Information Technology and Electronics Ministry has announced to launch the new scheme initiative under Stree Swabhiman Drive.
- The new initiative has been introduced by the Ministry and the Common Service Centres (CSCs) to ensure and maintain perfect health for women and at the same time to maintain health hygiene.

Key Highlights

- Under the initiative, semi-automatic and manual sanitary napkin micro manufacturing units will be set up at CSCs across India, particularly those operated by women entrepreneurs. It will also help in creating employment opportunities for over 10 women at one CSC.
- CSC will provide access to affordable, reliable and modern (eco-friendly) sanitary napkins (menstrual pads) to adolescent girls and women in rural areas.
- Its purpose is to improve awareness on menstrual health and hygiene of women, thus help to protect dignity and rights of women.

Common Service Centres

- Common Services Centre (CSC) programme is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY), Government of India.
- CSCs are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.
- CSCs are more than service delivery points in rural India. They are positioned as change agents-promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods. They are enablers of community participation and collective action for engendering social change through a bottom-up approach with key focus on the rural citizen.
- CSCs enable the three vision areas of the Digital India programme:
 - Digital infrastructure as Utility to Every Citizen
 - Governance and services on demand
 - Digital empowerment of citizens

1.3. Rapid Reporting System for the Scheme for Adolescent Girls**In News**

- The Central Government, in coordination with the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD), has come up with a new beneficiary module (i.e. Phase -1) of Rapid Reporting System (RRS).
- It is a web-based online monitoring Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG). This web portal has been developed by Ministry of WCD in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC).
- This Rapid Reporting System (RRS) web portal will provide the service of monitoring of Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) and take corrective measures by ensuring a faster flow of information, accurate targeting of beneficiaries and reduction of leakages.

Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG)

- MWCD is implementing the Scheme for Adolescent Girls (SAG) in selected 508 districts across the country.
- SAG aims at empowering out of school adolescent girls of 11 to 14 years by improving their nutritional and health status, upgrading their skills.
- In addition to the nutritional support under the scheme, the girls are equipped with information on health, hygiene and guidance on existing public services.
- The Scheme aims to mainstream out of school girls into formal education or non-formal education.
- The scheme is being implemented using the platform of Integrated Child Development Services Scheme. Anganwadi Centers (AWCs) are the focal point for delivery of the services.
- Scheme for Adolescent Girls is a centrally sponsored scheme, implemented through Centre and State share in the ratio of 50:50, for nutrition component 60:40 for the rest of the activities for State and UTs with legislation, 90:10 for NE and three Himalayan States and 100% for UTs without legislation.

1.4. Child Nutrition and Development Nodal Agency Bill, 2017**In News**

- Child Nutrition and Development Nodal Agency Bill, 2017 was presented as a private member bill in the Parliament.
- Aiming to eradicate malnutrition among children, the bill has proposed setting up a nodal agency, which would work in mission mode, for child nutrition and development.

Rationale Behind Setting Up Of Nodal Agency

- Despite thousands of crores of rupees being spent and a number of government schemes working for child development, the status of health and nutrition of children remains abysmal.
- Currently, all nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive schemes work in silos. As a result, they are not able to achieve the intended outcome.
- The establishment of a nodal agency that would facilitate coordination of all ministries and departments and execute the schemes in a convergent manner is urgently required.

Key Highlights Of The Bill

- The bill proposes setting up of a body which would facilitate and supervise multi-sectoral programme in high, medium- and low-burdened districts with malnourished children.
- The Bill states the agency would coordinate and administer policy implementation among various ministries responsible for implementing programmes aimed at eradicating malnutrition.

- At the end of each financial year, the agency will submit a report of its activities to the Central government.

1.5. Reward Work, Not Wealth Report

In News

- International rights group Oxfam has released a report titled 'Reward Work, Not Wealth'.
- The report reveals how the global economy enables wealthy elite to accumulate vast wealth even as hundreds of millions of people struggle to survive on poverty pay.

Key Highlights

- Inequality is increasing –In this context, the report said that 2017 saw an unprecedented increase in the number of billionaires, at a rate of one every two days. Billionaire wealth has risen by an average of 13% a year since 2010 – six times faster than the wages of ordinary workers, which have risen by a yearly average of just 2%.
- The situation appears even more grim globally, where 82% of the wealth generated last year worldwide went to the 1%, while 3.7 billion people that account for the poorest half of population saw no increase in their wealth.
- The report also mentioned that there are few categories which are losing out in current setting. These include women, small-scale food producers, the working poor, unprotected and informal workers, slave workers, youth and child labours and contract workers in supply chain. Women workers often find themselves at the bottom of the heap and nine out of ten billionaires are men.

India Specific Observation

- India's richest 1% garnered as much as 73% of the total wealth generated in the country in 2017. It also said India's top 10% of population holds 73% of the wealth – i.e. the stock of wealth, and not just wealth generated in a year – and 37% of India's billionaires have inherited family wealth. They control 51% of the total wealth of billionaires in the country.
- 67 crore Indians, comprising the population's poorest half, saw their wealth rise by just 1% in 2017.
- It said that India added 17 new billionaires last year, taking the total number to 101. The Indian billionaires' wealth increased to over Rs 20.7 lakh crore – increasing during the last year by Rs 4.89 lakh crore, an amount sufficient to finance 85% of the all states' budget on health and education.

What Can We Do About It?

The following is some of the recommendations from the report which examine what governments, international institutions, and corporations should do:

- Set concrete, timebound targets and action plans to reduce inequality - Governments should aim for the collective income of the top 10% to be no more than the income of the bottom 40%.
- End extreme wealth - Governments should use regulation and taxation to radically reduce levels of extreme wealth.
- Work together to achieve a revolution in inequality data.
- Incentivize business models that prioritize fairer returns including cooperatives and employee participation in company governance and supply chains.
- Support gender equality in the workplace and eliminate gender pay gap.
- Limit returns to shareholders and promote a pay ratio for companies' top executives that is no more than 20 times their median employees' pay, and preferably less.

- Publicly commit to achieving universal free public services.
- Share profits with the poorest workers
- Support collective bargaining - Publicly commit to meaningful and constructive engagement with independent trade unions on an ongoing basis.
- To end the inequality crisis, we must build an economy for ordinary working people, not the rich and powerful.

1.6. Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT)

The fifth Amrit (Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment) outlet was inaugurated at the advanced pediatrics center in Post Graduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER).

About AMRIT Scheme

- With the aim to reduce the expenditure incurred by patients on treatment of cancer and heart diseases, the Ministry for Health & Family Welfare, has launched the Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment (AMRIT) programme.
- As part of the programme, retail outlets will sell drugs for the cancer and heart diseases at highly discounted rates. The AMRIT pharmacy would be selling 202 cancer and 186 cardio-vascular drugs, and 148 types of cardiac implants at very affordable prices. Patients can buy medicines and implants at 50 to 60 percent cheaper prices than the open market from AMRIT outlet.
- The project has been floated in a tie-up with government-owned HLL Lifecare Ltd (HLL) which is deputed to establish and run the AMRIT chain of pharmacies across the country.

1.7. NHFDC Conference 2018

In News

- The State Channelizing Agencies (SCAs), Public Sector Banks (PSBs), and Regional Rural Banks (RRBs) of the National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC) participated at a National Conference held in January.
- The conference was aimed to have better coordination with the NHFDC and the SCAs to achieve smooth and efficient implementation of the NHFDC schemes.

About NHFDC

- The National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC) has been set up by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India in 1997.
- The company is registered under Companies Act, 1956 as a Company not for profit.
- It is wholly owned by Government of India.
- NHFDC functions as an Apex institution for channelising the funds to persons with disabilities through the State Channelising Agencies (SCAs) nominated by the State Government(s).

1.8. Inclusive Development Index

In News

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) has released Inclusive Development Index(IDI) 2018.

- The IDI is an annual assessment of 103 countries' economic performance that measures how countries perform on eleven dimensions of economic progress in addition to GDP. It has 3 pillars; growth and development; inclusion and; intergenerational equity – sustainable stewardship of natural and financial resources.

Key Highlights

- **Norway** remains the world's most inclusive advanced economy, while Lithuania again tops among the list of emerging economies.
- Among advanced economies, Norway is followed by Ireland, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Denmark in the top five. The top-five most inclusive emerging economies are Lithuania, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Latvia and Poland.
- It ranked India at the **62nd place** among emerging economies much below China's 26th position and Pakistan's 47th. Of the three pillars that make up the index, India ranks 72nd for inclusion, 66th for growth and development and 44th for inter-generational equity.
- The index has also classified the countries into five sub-categories in terms of the five-year trend of their overall Inclusive Development Growth score – receding, slowly receding, stable, slowly advancing and advancing.
- Despite its low overall score, India is among the ten emerging economies with 'advancing' trend. Only two advanced economies have shown 'advancing' trend.
- Performance is mixed among BRICS economies, with the Russian Federation ranking 19th, followed by China (26), Brazil (37), India (62) and South Africa (69).
- The neighbouring countries ranked above India include Sri Lanka (40), Bangladesh (34) and Nepal (22).
- The countries ranked better than India also include Mali, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Ghana, Ukraine, Serbia, Philippines, Indonesia, Iran, Macedonia, Mexico, Thailand and Malaysia.

Why India Has A Low Rank In This Index

- The report said that the excessive reliance by economists and policy-makers on GDP as the primary metric of national economic performance is part of the problem.
- India's debt-to-GDP ratio is high, which creates doubts about the sustainability of government spending.
- India's labour force participation rate is low, informal economy is large, and many workers are vulnerable to employment situations with little room for social mobility.
- New business creation continues to be held back by corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, and the large administrative burden involved in starting and running companies
- India needs more progressive tax system to raise capital for expenditures in infrastructure, health care, basic services and education.
- To respond more effectively to social concerns, economic policy needs a new compass setting, broad-based progress in living standards, and a new mental map in which structural reform is re-imagined and reapplied to this task.

1.9. Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA)**In News**

- The PMSMA has reached one crore mark in antenatal check-ups, which is laudable, with the commitment from doctors in the government sector across States/ UTs and with the help of the large number of private sector doctors who have voluntarily pledged for this initiative
- The programme has been successful in reaching out to the difficult and remote areas of India, since out of the 1 crore checkups across the country, more than 25 lakh check-ups were conducted in high priority districts identified by the Health Ministry for focused attention.
- While all States/ UTs have made significant efforts to reach out to pregnant women, Maharashtra has reported the largest number of check-ups among the Non-Empowered Action Group (EAG) States, and Rajasthan has reported the largest number of check-ups among the Empowered Action Group States.

About PMSMA

The scheme has been launched, in June 2016, with the objective of boosting the health care facilities for the pregnant women, especially the poor. Under PMSMA, the pregnant ladies will be given free health check-up and required treatment for free on 9th of every month to ensure that every pregnant woman receives at least one checkup in the 2nd/3rd trimester of pregnancy.

Need For The Scheme

- As per the latest data on Rapid Survey On Children (2013-14), institutional deliveries are 78.7%, and in spite of increase in number of pregnant women coming to institutions per delivery only 62% women receive antenatal care in first trimester.
- Despite the availability of treatment guidelines, mechanism for monitoring, and regular training of healthcare providers; the desired coverage and quality of maternal healthcare service is still a matter of concern leading to a high MMR of 167 per 1 Lakh live births.
- Therefore, with the objective to provide quality antenatal care to every pregnant woman the government launched this scheme.

Objectives/Benefits

- The main objective of the scheme is to provide a healthy life to the pregnant women.
- Lowering the chance of MMR (maternity mortality rate).
- To make sure a safe delivery of the baby.
- The scheme is to detect every single health issues a pregnant woman may suffer from so that they can be sent to concerned doctors for further treatments.
- The scheme is aiming to provide a training program to the mothers who have no idea about how to raise children. The program will give them proper education where they can be made aware of health and upbringing of the new born.

Key Features

- **Eligibility:** The scheme is for the pregnant women only. Women who are in their three months to six-month pregnancy will be eligible to take the scheme. It is for the women who are not from urban areas; semi urban and rural areas will be preferred.
- The checkup will take place on ninth day of every month. Blood pressure, weight, sugar level, hemoglobin test, blood test, screening and some other tests are done for free under this scheme.
- All medical checkup will be free of cost. Medical centers, hospitals, private clinics and government health centers will host these checkups.
- This checkup process will include the health of the baby as well.
- Each woman suffering from different health problems will be marked differently so that doctors can easily detect the problem.

Challenges

1. Lack of infrastructure and health professionals in rural areas. The current ratio is 1:2000 persons which is very poor and WHO says it should come down to 1:1000 i.e. doctor-patient ratio.
2. Lack of electrification and electricity in villages therefore failing the purpose of scheme as with no electricity or limited electricity the ultra sounds machines won't work leading to poor screening facility.
3. Success of scheme will also depend on mindset therefore failure the role of social organizations, civil society and glam sabhas is very critical for teaching women the benefits of such schemes.

Conclusion

The scheme will help India to achieve its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets on MMR and IMR. So, there is a need for participative intervention of all stakeholders including the government, civil society, and people at large.

1.10. Smart Star-Rating for Garbage Free Cities

In News

- Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched the 'Protocol for Star Rating of Garbage-Free Cities'.
- The star-rating initiative has been developed by the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban.
- It has been launched with a vision that includes:
 - All cities achieve "Garbage Free" status wherein at any point of time in the day, no garbage or litter is found in any public, commercial or residential locations (including storm drains and water bodies) in the city (except in litter bins or transfer stations);
 - 100 per cent of waste generated is scientifically managed;
 - All legacy waste has been remediated and city is scientifically managing its municipal solid waste, plastic waste and construction & demolition waste.
 - Steady reduction in the waste generated by the city and visible beautification of the city to achieve a clean & aesthetically pleasing city

Key Highlights

- The ratings of cities will be done on a 7-star rating system based on multiple cleanliness indicators for solid waste management. It will include Door to Door Collection, bulk generator compliance, source segregation, sweeping, scientific processing of waste, scientific land filling, plastic waste management, construction and demolition management, dump remediation & citizen grievance redressal system etc.
- Further city should be ODF(Open Defecation Free) before it could be given rating of 3 star or above.
- While cities may self-declare themselves as 1-star, 2-star or 4-star, MoHUA will carry out an additional verification through an independent third party to certify cities as 3-star, 5-star or 7-star. Cities will need to get recertified themselves every year to retain their star-status.
- The rating protocol provides stakeholders with a single metric to rate a city's cleanliness, rather than separately evaluating multiple factors which contribute to a city's overall cleanliness and garbage free status.
- The distinctive feature of Star Rating System will be that many cities can have higher stars as compared to only one city can be "Cleanest city" under Swachh Survekshan.

1.11. Initiative To Make 100 Websites Accessible To Persons With Disabilities

In News

- In an initiative to empower Persons with Disabilities, 100 accessible websites of various State Governments/UTs under Accessible India Campaign were launched by the Union Minister for Social Justice and Empowerment.
- Accessible websites are those websites into which Persons with Disabilities can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with the Web, and that they can contribute to the Web.
- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) initiated a 'Website Accessibility Project' for State Government/Union Territories under Accessible India Campaign through ERNET India, an autonomous scientific society under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), to make total 917 websites accessible.

Accessible India Campaign

- Accessible India Campaign (AIC) is the nationwide flagship campaign of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- The aim of the Campaign is to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Divyangjans all over the country. The campaign is based on the principles of the Social Model of Disability, that disability is caused by the way society is organised, and not the person's limitations and impairments. The physical, social, structural and attitudinal barriers prevent People with Disabilities from participating equally in the socio-cultural and economic activities.
- The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe, and dignified lives.
- For creating universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities, the campaign has been divided into three verticals:
 - **Built Environment.** The Built Environment Accessibility component of Accessible India Campaign aims to increase the accessibility of public/government buildings.

- **Transport and Information:** Transport accessibility component of Accessible India Campaign aims to make all international airports fully accessible immediately and domestic airports by March 2018.
- **Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem:** Accessibility of Information and Communication System is another crucial pillar of Accessible India Campaign. The main aim under this vertical is to make Central and State Government websites accessible.

1.12. India Moves To Stub Out Tobacco Industry Rights

In News

- The Indian government is pushing the Supreme Court to apply a rarely used doctrine that would strip the \$11 billion tobacco industry's legal right to trade, an effort aimed at deterring tobacco companies from challenging tough new regulations.
- The government has for the first time asked the top court to classify tobacco as "**res extra commercium**", a Latin phrase meaning "outside commerce".

Significance Of This Move

- If applied, the doctrine would have far reaching implications - in denying an industry's legal standing to trade, it gives authorities more leeway to impose restrictions.
- For example, the Supreme Court's application of the doctrine to alcohol in the 1970s paved the way for at least two Indian states to ban it completely and allowed courts to take a stricter stance while regulating liquor. The same could happen with tobacco if a similar ruling was made.

Background

- With an aim to curb tobacco consumption – which kills more than 9,00,000 people each year in India – the government has in recent years raised tobacco taxes, started smoking cessation campaigns, and introduced laws requiring covering most of the package in health warnings.
- But a court in Karnataka last month quashed those labelling rules after the tobacco industry successfully argued that the measure was "unreasonable" and violated its right to trade.
- The government appealed against the ruling in the Supreme Court which put on hold the Karnataka court order. In its filing, the government included "res extra commercium" because it wants to stop the industry from pursuing such arguments again.

1.13. High Risk Pregnancy portal

In News

- Haryana has achieved the distinction of becoming the first state in the country to launch High Risk Pregnancy (HRP) Portal.
- This portal will not only help in early identification of high-risk pregnant cases up to the grass-roots level but also ensure their timely referral to the civil hospitals for further management and delivery by specialists.
- Haryana had also implemented birth companion strategy under which one female attendant would be allowed during delivery in the labour room. The presence of a female birth companion during delivery is a step towards improving the quality of care in labour rooms for improving the maternal and neo-natal outcome and for respectful maternity care.

Key Highlights

- This innovative web application has been designed to track every high risk pregnant woman till 42 days after delivery, so that she receives adequate treatment during the ante-natal period for healthy outcome of pregnancy.
- Instructions had been issued to all civil surgeons for 100 per cent entry of high risk pregnant cases in the HRP Portal and their management at Civil Hospitals by specialists
- Significance: This initiative will definitely increase the pace of decline in Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR), and Still Birth Incidence as morbidity and mortality is quite high in high risk pregnant cases, if not managed timely.

1.14. Maharashtra On The Boil**In News**

- On January 1, members of the Dalit community on their way to Bhima-Koregaon, a village near Pune, were attacked, allegedly by people from upper caste.
- In the violence, a young man was killed. Protests erupted, and by January 2, they spread throughout Maharashtra.

Importance of Koregaon-Bhima

- The Koregaon Ranstambh (victory pillar) is a memorial for British East India Company soldiers killed in a battle on January 1, 1818, in which a small group of infantrymen — about 500 of them Mahars (a Scheduled Caste community) — held off a numerically superior force from the army of Peshwa Bajirao II.
- According to historians, the Mahars fought alongside the British because the Peshwa had scorned their offer to join his army.
- After Dr. Ambedkar visited the site on January 1, 1927, it became a place of pilgrimage for Dalits, an assertion of pride. In recent years, attendance has been in the lakhs, with Dalits coming from all over India. This year, the bicentenary saw an especially large influx.

Trigger Of Violence

- According to many counts, Sambhaji, Shivaji's son and successor, was captured by the Mughals; according to legend, he was tortured and his mutilated corpse thrown into the Bhima river.
- Govind Mahar, a Dalit, gathered the dismembered parts of his body and performed the last rites. Later, Mahars of the village erected a memorial to Sambhaji. Govind Mahar's tomb stands near Sambhaji's in Vadhu-Budruk village, near Bhima-Koregaon.
- On December 29, a board came up in Vadhu-Budruk hailing Govind Mahar, which, locals say, irked the Marathas in the village, who believe that their ancestors performed Sambhaji's last rites. Mahar's tomb was vandalised.
- This acted as a trigger point for protests and violence, which occurred later.

Analysis

- In the past couple of years, the Maratha community of Maharashtra has been mobilised on an unprecedented scale. This mobilisation has happened not only on the roads — through silent marches across the state — but fundamentally in the minds of the community, particularly the youth.

- While many have marvelled at the political novelty of silent yet vocal marches that have unsettled political equations, the significance of mobilising the state's single largest community on caste basis has hardly been realised.
- Thus, two connected but contradictory dimensions of the Maratha mobilization can be seen: on the one hand, it has brought to the forefront the internal stratification within the community; on the other hand, it has brought the community together with a sense of pride located in history combined with a sense of injury in the present.
- Trapped in the distortions of the political economy and rendered rudderless by the political bankruptcy of their leaderships, the two largest communities of Maharashtra (Maratha community and Dalit Community) inevitably fall back upon three things: Mutual suspicion, assertion of caste pride/identity and a confrontation in the shadows of history and memory.
- This is a sure recipe for inter-community violence. Maharashtra has been on the boil for some time now and the provocation at Pune was only a trigger.
- This trigger was caused because of another long-standing crack in Marathi society: The Brahmin vs non-Brahmin division. The mobilization of all non-Brahmin communities against Brahmin oppression was going on for some time. But the near-withdrawal of Brahmins from politics allowed this crack to subside for much of the past six to seven decades.
- However, assertive mobilisation of the Brahmins resumed recently under the auspices of caste-based platforms of the Brahmins who, apart from the usual murmurings about reservations on economic basis and about the poor among the Brahmins, focused on the tools of history and memory. This renewed the crack in the society.
- The latest violence has brought into sharp focus three cracks Marathi society is made up of. The Brahmin-non-Brahmin crack which operates at the subterranean level, the Dalit-Maratha crack that often plays out in a brutal manner and the divisions internal to caste blocs that ironically strengthen caste identities rather than weakening them.

Maratha Reservation Protest

- In 2016, the Maratha community, a dominant force in Maharashtra politics, has been silently protesting in the state.
- The Marathas feel the present scenario tilts the balance a little too much in favour of Dalits and the protests are to highlight three major demands — *reservation for Marathas, a modification of the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and punishment for the Kopardi rape accused.*

Who Are Marathas And Why Are They Demanding Reservation?

- Marathas form nearly 32-40% of the state population. They traditionally belong to **the warrior caste** but also include members of the kunbis or the peasant class (Kunbis have reservations within the OBC block).
- The community has **been politically and socially influential** – 13 of the 18 Chief Ministers of the State were Marathas – and have controlled the rural economy by holding co-operative bodies including banks and sugar co-ops under their command.
- But the fruits of development have not seeped through the community. There is a class differentiation within the community which is highly visible.
- On one hand, there are sugar barons and wealthy farmers exporting their produce while on the other, there are lakhs of farmers holding small land holdings hit by the ongoing agrarian crisis.

- While OBCs and other castes have made progress in education, the Maratha community has not found edge here. They attribute this to lack of special reservation.

Nature And Possible Impact Of This Protest

- So far these protests have been **non-violent**, although large people especially youths are participating in the protests.
- It has an **anti-Dalit overtone** and many Bramhin and Muslim organization have also lent their support to this protest. It could damage the social fabric of the state to an irreparable extent with two of the most populous communities at loggerheads with each other.
- It is **faceless and leaderless**. It is similar to a Kumbh Mela where people across age groups – though it is dominated by youngsters – include men and women and cuts across all ideologies, progressive and radical within the Marathas are participating. This is creating difficulty for the government as it remains undecided with whom it should talk and negotiate.
- There is possibility is that political leaders could **hijack the agitation** and use the cadres for the next assembly elections which would lead to divisive politics rather than an effort to find a solution.
- Although the demand of reservation stems from the widespread poverty and unemployment among Marathas due to repeated agrarian crisis, this protest also reflects the **undercurrent of a conflict simmering within the community**, which has revived its demand for reservations. As it will alter the existing quota of OBCs, it can bring these communities at loggerhead.
- Also, it can spread to other parts of the country and many more dominant castes would start demanding reservation for their community.

Conclusion

- The Patel agitation witnessed in Gujarat or the Jat agitation of Haryana is eerily similar to the one bubbling in Maharashtra in terms of their demand for reservation.
- Although these agitations (Patel, Jat, Maratha agitations) have caste overtone, the root cause is the economic one. Entangling these agitations with caste and identity issues will divert the attention and could create political storm.
- Agrarian reforms along with other economic steps like employment generation and equal distribution of resources have potential to address the issue.

1.15. Medaram's Jatara To Get National Tag**In News**

- Central government is likely to declare Medaram's Sammakka-Sarakka/Saralamma Jatara a national festival.
- This year, the four-day Jatara, scheduled to begin on January 31, is expected to have a footfall of 1.20 crore persons. The Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs released Rs. 2 crore as Centre's contribution towards conducting the massive event.
- Once declared a national festival, Jatara can be considered for 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' tag of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

About Medaram's Jatara

- Medaram Jatara is popular as the biggest tribal Jatara in south Asia. This is a huge congregation of people of all categories including the majority of tribal people of Telangana, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

- Held once in two years, the Jatara reflects the lifestyle and culture of the tribal community.
- It is also popularly called as “Sammakka, Saralamma Jatara” and is held at Medaram, a tribal village of old Warangal district.
- It is held during Magha Purnima to honour the twin goddesses Sammakka and her daughter Sarakka.

1.16. Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav-2018

- To celebrate the idea of unity in diversity, the Ministry of Culture had organised the 7th edition of the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat matrix in Karnataka.
- The State paired with Karnataka is Uttarakhand.
- The Mahotsav covered a profusion of art forms from classical and folk, music and dance, theatre to literature and the visual arts and offered the chance to experience the best in established and emerging virtuosity.
- A handloom and handicrafts-utsav was part of the event. The gastronomic culture of several partnering states was showcased through a food festival.

The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme was launched by the Prime Minister on 31st October, 2016 to promote engagement amongst the people of different states/UTs so as to enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

2. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

2.1. MPLAD Scheme To Continue

In News

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved continuation of the Members of Parliament Local Area Development (MPLAD) scheme through the term of the 14th Finance Commission (March 31, 2020).
- The MPLADS funds are released to the nodal District Authorities on receipt of requisite documents and as per the scheme's guidelines.

Background

- The MPLAD Scheme was introduced in 1993 to enable MPs to create durable assets based on local requirements in their constituencies.
- The central idea is **creation of durable community assets** and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on local requirements.
- The preference is given to works such as related to national priorities, including provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc.
- The scheme essentially entitles every MP (Lok Sabha as well as Rajya Sabha Members) to **recommend** spending Rs. 5 crore every year on works of development nature.
- The MPs can recommend the work(s) in their constituency (in case of Lok Sabha) or anywhere in the State from where they are elected (in case of Rajya Sabha).
- MPLADS is a **centrally-sponsored plan scheme** fully funded by the government of India.
- The funds released under the scheme are **non-lapsable**. This means that if the funds for a particular are not spent in that year, it will be carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.
- The **district authority is empowered** to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.
- The scheme has many credible works in its credit (such as Bihar Flood rehabilitation, Tsunami rehabilitation, etc). However, it has got more bad reviews than good.

Issues And Challenges

- **Conflict of Interest:** The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) has observed that these schemes "*seriously erode the notion of separation of powers, as the legislator directly becomes the executive*".
- **PAC's Observation**
 - Public Account Committee (PAC) in its 55th report observed that total expenditure incurred *depicts significant shortfall in the utilization* of funds each year.
 - The committee also highlighted that *effective monitoring mechanism* is not in place.
- **Misuse of funds:** Study reports have found that MPs were often using the money to *channel it back to their own hand-picked contractors or trusts*. The misuse of MPLAD money to promote private enterprises or commercial activity of organizations is an equally serious violation of the guidelines, but it appears to be happening on a scale that should cause worry.
- **CAG observation on MPLAD**

- poor utilization of funds, poor monitoring by the ministry, poor quality and, at times, inadmissible work, and suspected fraud and corruption.
 - Selection of prohibited work (prohibited in guidelines)
 - Works were not documented as per the guidelines and in most cases either the dates were not entered or were completely invalid.
- **Coordination and cooperation with State authorities** creates serious impediments on the execution of works.

Way Forward

- The details of all works executed or in progress should be uploaded after proper data validation.
- Accountability for maintenance of records at various levels should be prescribed and monitored.
- A robust and regular internal audit system should be immediately put in place both at ministry and at the state level.

Conclusion

- Despite its odds this scheme has sustained a long way and making positive contribution towards aiming a difference in the society.
- In May 2010, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court ruled that there **was no violation of the concept of separation of powers** because the role of an MP in this case is recommendatory and the actual work is carried out by the Panchayats and Municipalities which belong to the executive organ.
- While the question of constitutionality of the MPLAD scheme may have been put to rest by the Supreme Court ruling, other issues related to implementation of the scheme still remain. Unless problems are tackled in an efficient manner, the efficacy of the scheme will remain in doubt.
- One way to achieve this objective is to ensure proper monitoring of all the developmental works through mandatory participation of grass root level people.

2.2. No Viable Alternative To Hanging

In News

- The Centre, in an affidavit filed in Supreme Court, has said that there is no viable method at present other than hanging to execute condemned prisoners. According to Centre, lethal injections are unworkable and often fail.
- The government was responding to a query from the court on alternative modes of execution.

Background

- The court is hearing a writ petition filed by Delhi High Court lawyer, who sought the court's intervention to reduce the suffering of condemned prisoners at the time of death.
- According to the petition, when a man is hanged to death, his dignity is destroyed. Hence, the practice of hanging is **against Article 21 (Right to Life)** of the Constitution, which also included the right of a condemned prisoner to have a dignified mode of execution so that death becomes less painful.
- Issuing notice, the court had asked the government to consider the "dynamic progress" made in modern science to adopt painless methods of causing death.

Need To Devise A Dignified Procedure Of Death

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- The constitutional validity of Section 354(5), which mandates death by hanging, of CrPC had been upheld by a three-judge Bench of this Court in ***Deena alias Deen Dayal vs. Union of India***.
- However, the Bench had, in an earlier hearing, favoured a re-look at the practice of hanging to death as “the Constitution of India is an organic and compassionate document which recognises the sanctity of flexibility of law as situations change with the flux of time”.
 - In ***Gian Kaur vs. State of Punjab***, SC opined that the “right to life” including the right to live with human dignity would mean the existence of such a right up to the end of natural life. This also includes the right to a dignified life up to the point of death including a dignified procedure of death.
 - In ***Bachan Singh vs. State of Punjab***, Justice Bhagwati said that the physical pain and suffering which the execution of the sentence of death involves is also no less cruel and inhuman. In India, the method of execution followed is hanging by the rope.
 - 187th Report of the Law Commission recommended against the present mode of execution.

Some Facts

- No capital punishment in 103 countries.
- Hanging prevalent in five countries including India, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq etc.
- Lethal injection is common in China, Guatemala, Maldives, Taiwan, USA etc.
- Stoning is common in Iran, Mauritania, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, UAE, Yemen etc.
- Beheading as a capital punishment is still prevalent in Saudi Arabia.

2.3. 18th All India Whips Conference

In News

- 18th All India Whips conference was held at Udaipur, Rajasthan on 8th-9th January 2018.
- It was organized by Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA). The conference focused on the efficient functioning of legislatures.

Key Highlights

- The conference provided a platform to Whips of various political parties to exchange their views and experiences and discuss the challenges facing them in discharge of their Parliamentary duties and evolve norms for efficient working of parliamentary machinery.
- The conference considered rolling out **e-Sansad/e-Vidhan** in Parliament and State Legislatures to digitize and make their functioning paperless.
- It also adopted ten recommendations regarding smooth functioning of parliamentary machinery. These include:
 - Reform of Zero Hour for prompt reply and Action Taken Report from concerned Ministry;
 - Developing the concept of Committee Hour for discussing reports of various Committees by the Legislatures;
 - Reforms in the structure of Private Members Business;
 - Legislative framework for more working days in both Union and State Legislatures;
 - Infrastructural and Institutional support to Chief Whips for better coordination and functioning of Legislatures and Parliament;

- Digitization of the Secretariats of the State Legislatures;
- Consensus building in the Legislatures for not going to the well of the House by the Members etc.

About Whip

- A whip is an important member of a political party's parliamentary body, having a central role in 'Floor Management' in both the Houses of Parliament and is responsible for discipline within the party.
- Whips play three-Dimensional Role – **Monitoring, Moderating and Motivating**.
- Their main job is ensuring that their members in Parliament and legislature vote in line with the party's official policy on important issues and make sure that the members turn out for important votes.
- Such an importance of Whips in the Parliamentary system had been acknowledged by organizing the First All India Whips Conference at Indore in 1952, in the very first year of general elections to the First Lok Sabha.

e-Sansad and e-Vidhan

- These are mission mode projects of Government of India under Digital India, to make the functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures paperless.
- Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs (MoPA) is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of both the projects.
- These projects would make the functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures participative, responsive, transparent, productive and more accountable to the public and make the entire Legislative process more efficient.
- Further, this environment friendly initiative is in line with the 'Go Green' initiative of the Government.
- For rolling out e-Vidhan in the State legislatures, funding to the maximum extent would be provided by the MoPA.

2.4. Government Notifies Electoral Bonds For Political Donations

[For detailed discussion, refer the topic Electoral Bonds in September 2017 issue of Current Affairs Magazine]

- In a bid to curb influence of illicit cash in Indian political system, the Finance Ministry has notified the contours of new electoral bonds.
- Announced during the last Budget session, these bonds will now be the only way to make donations to political parties.

Key Highlights

- A citizen of India or a body incorporated in India can purchase electoral bonds from specified branches of State Bank of India (SBI) in multiples of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs 100,000, Rs 1 million, and Rs 10 million by making payment from their bank accounts.
- These bonds will be an interest-free debt instrument, resembling promissory notes, where SBI will be the custodian of the donor's funds until political parties redeem them.
- The purchaser will be allowed to buy electoral bond(s) only on due fulfilment of all the extant KYC [know your customer] norms and by making payment from a bank account. It will not carry the name of payee.

- Political parties, which have secured at least 1 per cent votes in the last general election to the Lok Sabha or the state Assembly and are registered under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, will be eligible to receive donations through electoral bonds.
- They can encash the bonds within 15 days of issuance in their bank accounts disclosed to the Election Commission.
- Electoral bonds will be available for purchase for a period of 10 days in January, April, July, and October, and for 30 additional days during the year in which the Lok Sabha elections take place.

2.5. SC Sets Aside Order Cancelling Larger Tobacco Health Warnings

[Also refer the topic "Union Health Minister conferred WHO Director-General's Special Recognition Award for contribution to global tobacco control" from June issue of CA Magazine]

In News

- The Supreme Court on Monday put on hold a lower court's order that quashed central government rules mandating larger health warnings on tobacco packages.
- It is considered as a setback for the country's \$11 billion tobacco industry.
- The High Court of Karnataka last month struck down federal government rules requiring 85 percent of a tobacco pack's surface to be covered in health warnings, up from 20 percent earlier. The rules had been in force since 2016.
- India's tobacco packaging rules are among the world's most stringent. A government survey last year found that 62 percent of cigarette smokers thought of quitting because of such warning labels on the packets.

2.6. TRAI Issues Interconnect Rules

In News

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has issued the Telecom Interconnection Regulations 2018.
- Interconnection means the commercial and technical arrangements under which service providers connect their equipment, network and services for the benefit of customers across their networks.
- It comprises rules for crafting network connectivity agreements, provisioning of such connectivity amongst operators at initial stages, augmentation of Points of Interconnect, applicable rates or charges, disconnection of ports, and financial disincentive on interconnection issues.
- Interconnectivity was the flashpoint between Reliance Jio and incumbent telecom operators like Bharti Airtel, Vodafone, and Idea Cellular, at the time when the newcomer launched its services in 2016.
- The new entrant had accused large established operators of not providing it sufficient Points of Interconnect leading to massive call failures on its network, while the incumbents blamed free calls offered by Reliance Jio for "tsunami" of network traffic.
- In this context, this step assume significance since there were no clear guidelines on the time frame for entering into such network connectivity pacts.
- The rules will come into effect from 1 February 2018.

Key Highlights

- New guidelines require telecom operators to sign an interconnection agreement on a non-discriminatory basis within 30 days of receipt of a network connectivity request from a rival service provider.
- It also provides for a penalty of a maximum of Rs 1 lakh a day per circle for operators that violate these rules. It is contrary to the previous interconnect agreement rules, which did not provide for any penalties on defaulting operators.
- Point of interconnect (PoI) is a mutually agreed point of demarcation where the exchange of traffic between the two operators takes place. For provisioning of ports at the PoI, the regulator has fixed a 30-day time frame, instead of the earlier 90 days.
- So far, there was no explicit timeline for inking of interconnect agreements. TRAI has also laid down a 'formula' that would act as a ceiling for bank guarantees in case of interconnection, instead of the current practice of such guarantees being negotiated between operators.

Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI)

- TRAI is an independent regulatory body established under the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India Act 1997 to oversee the telecommunications industry in India.
- TRAI is charged with ensuring the orderly growth of the telecom sector while protecting the interests of both telecom service providers and consumers.
- It encourages technological improvements and makes recommendations for how providers can improve efficiency and technical compatibility.
- The TRAI Act was amended by an ordinance, effective from 24 January 2000, establishing a Telecommunications Dispute Settlement and Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to take over the adjudicatory and disputes functions from TRAI.
- TDSAT was set up to adjudicate any dispute between a licensor and a licensee, between two or more service providers, between a service provider and a group of consumers, and to hear and dispose of appeals against any direction, decision or order of TRAI.

2.7. Telecom Ombudsman**In News**

- A Parliamentary panel has expressed concern over delay in setting up of an ombudsman to deal with consumer grievances in the telecom sector.
- Even though TRAI (Telecom Regulatory Authority of India) had recommended for an ombudsman before the year 2004, the same has not been put in place till date.

Key Highlight

- It has asked the Telecom Department and TRAI to act with concrete plan for setting up the ombudsman in telecom sector in a "definite and clear time-frame".
- The committee reiterated their earlier recommendations and emphasised that urgent steps be taken to amend the Consumer Protection Act so as to bring telecom consumer complaints including financial claims of customers under Consumer Protection Act and also steps be taken for setting up of e- courts to address telecom complaints.
- Earlier, the Consumer Protection Act was applicable to telecom cases -- large in number with small ticket size -- but a Supreme Court decision excluded the telecom consumers from the purview of the Act.

- At the same time, TRAI Act 1997 does not entail handling of individual consumer complaints by the regulator and all complaints received by it are forwarded to concerned telecom operators for suitable action.

2.8. National Trust

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to amend Section 4(1) and Section 5(1) of the National Trust for the Welfare of Person with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 to fix the term of the Chairperson and Members of the Board of National Trust for three years.

Rationale Behind This Amendment

- Section 4(1) of the National Trust Act, 1999 provides that the Chairperson or a Member of the Board of National Trust would continue in office beyond the prescribed term of three years until his successor shall have been duly appointed.
- In case of resignation of the Chairperson, section 5(1) of the Act provides for him to continue in office until his successor is duly appointed by the Government.
- The wording of the above provisions of the Act in its present form has resulted in continuation of a Chairman for an indefinite period as no suitable successor could be found eligible for appointment.
- The proposed amendments in these provisions of the Act seek to avoid such a situation and will thus eliminate any chance of prolonged continuation in the same post by any incumbent.

National Trust:

- The National Trust is a statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, set up under the “National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities” Act (Act 44 of 1999).
- The objectives of the National Trust in particular are :-
 - to enable and empower persons with disability to live as independently and as fully as possible within and as close to their community as possible;
 - to facilitate the realisation of equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of persons with disability;
 - to extend support to its registered organisations to provide need based services; and
 - to evolve procedures for appointments of guardians and trustees for persons with disabilities.

2.9. Election Commission Sets Up Panel To Suggest New Poll Rules

The Election Commission has set up a 14-member panel to study how social media and other digital platforms are used ahead of polls and make suggestions on how to adapt the Model Code of Conduct to these changes.

Key Highlights

- The committee has been set up to suggest changes to Section 126 of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, which prohibits poll campaign in the last 48 hours leading to voting, in the wake of media expansion.
- Apart from suggesting modifications to the election law, the committee will also study the impact of new media and social media during the “silence period” and its implication in view of Section 126 and suggest changes to the model code of conduct (MCC) accordingly.

- It has also been tasked to examine the difficulties faced in regulating media platforms during the prohibitory 48 hours in a multi-phase election.
- The order, regarding the formation of committee, came after the commission withdrew its notice issued to Congress President for giving interviews to TV channels on December 13, a day before the second phase of the Gujarat polls.
- The decision to issue a notice had evoked a strong reaction from different political parties and EC eventually withdrew its notice.

Model Code of Conduct:

- It is a set of instructions to be followed by both political parties and candidates contesting elections. The guidelines and instructions cover general conduct, campaigning, meetings etc. during elections.
- It is essentially “voluntary” and is not backed by any law.
- The Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately on announcement of the election schedule by the commission and it remains in place till the entire process of elections is complete.
- The objective is to ensure free and fair elections and to provide a level playing field to all political parties contesting the election. It is meant to prevent the ruling party from using or misusing the official machinery to improve its prospects in elections.

Evolution

- The model code is not something that was suddenly thrust on the political parties or their candidates.
- It was in 1968 that the Election Commission, in consultation with political parties, formulated the code that was intended to regulate the conduct of political parties in the context of elections.
- The objective was to ensure that campaigning went on healthy lines and the elections were conducted peacefully.
- So long as the code remained on paper and was not strictly enforced, there was hardly any protest. But from the T.N. Seshan era in the 1990s, the focus shifted to enforcement.

Is The Enforcement Effective?

- While the ECI does issue notices to politicians from various parties for the violation of the MCC, it generally does not go to the extent of taking any action. The issue ends with a warning to the candidate not to repeat the same mistake.
- Hence, political parties do violate the MCC sometimes. However, if we analyze the effectiveness of MCC so far, we can say that it has an indisputable legitimacy and parties across the political spectrum have generally adhered to its letter and spirit.
- Despite no statutory backing, this success can be attributed to following factors:
 - Each party follows the code in the hope that other parties, especially the ruling party, will also follow it.
 - Its main function is to prevent the ruling party from using or misusing the official machinery to improve its prospects in elections. This objective provides the MCC a greater legitimacy across all parties.
 - Over a period of time, EC has carved a niche for itself and is highly regarded as an unbiased organization in the eyes of public. Hence, any adverse notice from EC to the

political parties violating the MCC tends to affect the voter's sentiment in a negative manner. As a result, political parties do try to follow the codes

Need for Statutory Backing

- In 2013, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Law and Justice recommended to accord statutory backing to the MCC. The Committee has held that most of the stipulations of the MCC are already contained in various laws and are therefore enforceable.
 - To be sure, the violation of secrecy of voting, causing enmity among communities, the prohibition of public meetings 48 hours prior to the conclusion of polls, besides other offences, are covered by the Representation of People Act, 1951.
 - Besides, impersonation at voting, offering inducements to voters, or accepting gratification to do something they never intended, amount to bribery under the Indian Penal Code.
 - To threaten or to intimidate voters and candidates is an act of interference with their respective free electoral rights. The Parliamentary panel further points out that the EC invokes its 1968 order which pertains to the allotment of election symbols, either to suspend or to derecognise political parties for violations of the code.
- On the basis of the above, the Standing Committee contends that the MCC as a whole could not be construed merely as voluntary in its application. Furthermore, since most of its provisions are enforceable, the remaining stipulations in the MCC should also be accorded statutory backing.

Counter Arguments:

- The bar on the ruling party from the use of its position for electioneering to combine official work with campaign activity, the exercise of monopoly over public places and transport facilities are important non-statutory stipulations in the code.
- The legal codification of these norms would be a potential nightmare, exposing the entire electoral process to needless litigation. These broad objectives are best achieved by oversight of an impartial election watchdog.
- If statutory backing were accorded, any violation to the MCC would bring judiciary in to the picture. Since our judiciary is overburdened, we cannot expect the verdict within a certain time frame.
- The Parliamentary Committee makes a pointed reference to its dissatisfaction with the existing legal remedy. This pertains to the absence of a procedure of immediate appeal where the nominations of candidates are rejected by returning officers. The decisions of the latter can, under the current system, only be challenged in the High Courts after the announcement of election results.
- This is an area where, in view of the Constitutional authority invested in the EC, with quasi-judicial powers, political parties could work out an amicable resolution. In any case, statutory backing would not solve the problem.

Conclusion:

- With a growing number of political parties and candidates in the fray, there is greater need for impartial oversight of the electoral process today than a few decades ago. A stronger EC would therefore best serve the larger purposes of the conduct of free and fair elections.
- Parliament could ill-afford to contemplate a legislation that seeks to accord legal status to the model code in its entirety. That would inevitably circumscribe the role and functions of the EC.

2.10. Haj Subsidy Abolished

In News

- The government has withdrawn subsidy for Haj pilgrims. According to the government, Haj subsidy funds will be used for educational empowerment of girls and women of minority community.
- In 2012, a constitutional bench of the Supreme Court had directed that the Haj subsidy be done away with. Hence, in the new policy, as per the recommendations of a committee, the government has decided to do away with the Haj subsidy.

Haj Subsidy ControversyWhat Is Haj Subsidy?

- Haj subsidy is given to Indian Muslim Haj pilgrims by the Indian government, having originated during the British colonial era.
- The Haj Committees Act was implemented by British rulers alongside a series of other acts in order to appease Muslim demands before the partition of India.
- No other country has Haj subsidies.
- In 1973, the rules changed to offer Indian Muslims a concessionary ticket if they fly to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iraq and Iran on India's national airline, Air India.
- At present, the Ministry of Civil Aviation provides subsidies to Indian Muslim pilgrims through the Haj Committee of India, which includes the airfare subsidy as well as subsidies for the pilgrims to travel domestically to reach the Haj points and assist with meals and accommodation.

What Is The Controversy?

- All Haj air traffic is now shared by Air India and Saudi Arabia's national airline.
- It has become the most controversial point of discussion on India's Haj subsidy, with many beginning to view it as a subsidy for the airline rather than the Muslim community.
- Many believe that if Haj travel is opened to more airlines, the airfare will be cheaper.
- Also, Many Muslim leaders have called for the abolishment of the Haj subsidy, arguing that it is "un-Islamic" as according to the Quran, only those Muslims who can afford the expenses should perform Haj.
- There is an argument that India is constitutionally a secular state, it should not subsidize expenses related to performance of religious rituals of any religion and this includes Haj.

2.11. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment) Bill, 2017**In News**

- Lok Sabha has passed the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment) Bill 2017.
- It will allow government to take up infrastructure projects within the 100 metre prohibited periphery around protected monuments.
- The need was felt to amend the law to allow construction works related to infrastructure financed and carried out by any department or office of the central government for public purposes which is necessary for the safety or security of the public at large.

Key Highlights

- The bill proposes amendments in the legislation to the 1958 Act that prohibits carrying out any public work or project or other constructions in any prohibited area around protected monuments.

- The bill also sought to have a new definition of "public works" under the Act.
- The Bill empowers the National Monuments Authority to consider an impact assessment of the proposed public works in a prohibited area, including its (i) archaeological impact; (ii) visual impact; and (iii) heritage impact.
- The Authority will make a recommendation, for construction of public works to the central government, only if it is satisfied that there is no reasonable possibility of moving the construction outside the prohibited area.

2.12. EC Disqualifies 20 Delhi AAP MLAs

In News

- The Election Commission has recommended disqualification of 20 Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs for holding an Office of Profit.
- In its opinion sent to President, the Election Commission said the MLAs, by occupying the post of Parliamentary secretaries between March 13, 2015 and September 8, 2016, held offices of profit, and were liable to be disqualified as legislators. Parliamentary Secretaries assist ministers with their work.

Current Status

- The Delhi High Court has issued order restraining the poll panel from issuing any notification announcing byelections to fill the vacancies of the 20 Assembly seats whose legislators have been disqualified.
- It has also asked the Election Commission of India (ECI) to present reasons for its decision to disqualify 20 AAP MLAs for holding offices of profit.
- The disqualified legislators have, in their petitions, contended that there was "gross and serious" violation of principle of natural justice as they were not given a hearing before the ECI formed its opinion.

Background

- In 2015, twenty AAP legislators were designated Parliamentary Secretaries to Ministers by the Delhi government. The BJP filed a complaint with the President of India, alleging that they were holding offices of profit and as elected representatives - except those who were designated Ministers - could not do so, hence they should be disqualified as MLA.
- In anticipation, the Delhi Assembly passed an amendment to the Delhi Member of Legislative Assembly (Removal of Disqualification) Act, 1997, which exempts Parliamentary Secretaries from "office of profit". The Bill went up to the President of India for his assent, but he refused to give his nod to it.

Other Procedural Irregularity Cited By The Home Ministry

- The home ministry says there are other violations as well. Such appointments - like that of parliamentary secretary - require the prior sanction of the Lieutenant Governor, which was never sought.
- Moreover, several Supreme Court judgments have clearly stated that an office of profit is deemed not by salary alone but also by perks, which in this case would be occupying office space in the Secretariat and availing of official cars.

Previous Disqualification Due To Office Of Profit

- The Supreme Court disqualified Samajwadi Party MP Jaya Bachchan in 2004 for holding on to the post of Uttar Pradesh Film Development Council's Chairperson – a job that the SC deemed to be an 'office of profit'.
- However, the issue first shot to national prominence in 2006 when the BJP demanded Congress president Sonia Gandhi's disqualification from the Lok Sabha for holding the position of chairperson of the National Advisory Council (NAC).
- Gandhi had then resigned from her Lok Sabha seat. She contested the by-poll from Amethi to be re-elected later.

Constitutional Position On Office Of Profit

- The three elements for attracting disqualification under Article 102(1)(a), of the Constitution are:
 - there must be an office;
 - the office must be one where the holder derives profit;
 - such an office must be under the government.
- Supreme Court judgements in **Jaya Bachchan v. Union of India (2006)** as well as **U.C. Raman v. P.T.A Rahim (2014)** pointed out that unless some remuneration is attached to the office or the office is capable of yielding some pecuniary gains it would not be an office of profit. It has also been made clear by the court that compensatory allowances are meant to meet the out-of-pocket expenses and hence do not constitute any profit.

Disqualification in India and England: A Comparison

- In England, there is no general theory that a disqualification arises from holding an office of profit under the Crown.
- There, disqualifications are specific and disqualification arises only when a person holds a disqualifying office so declared under a parliamentary legislation. The position is, however, different in India as there prevails a general disqualification under the Constitution, but specific exemptions may be granted from it under a law of Parliament

2.13. Meeting of The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE)

The 65th Meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) was held under the Chairmanship of Union Human Resource Development Minister. The focus of the meeting was on Higher Education.

Key Highlights

- CABE will make all out efforts to increase GER by opening new universities, colleges, using infrastructure more productively and using Operation DL and online education.
- CABE will take positive action to plug regional disparities and will prepare perspective plan.
- CABE commits to take necessary steps to ensure that no deserving student should be denied opportunity to have higher education for lack of means.
- CABE appreciates initiatives in giving more thrust on improving quality, accord more autonomy to quality institutes, and introducing digital initiatives to improve governance, enhance quality and choice.
- CABE will strive more for bringing accountability of all stakeholders.
- CABE has decided to participate wholeheartedly in innovative programmes like Unnat Bharat, Swachh Bharat, Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat, Smart and Green Campus.

- CABE rededicates to ensure Equity, Accessibility, Quality , accountability and affordability.

Central Advisory Board Of Education:

- The Central Advisory Board of Education, the oldest and the most important advisory body of the Government of India in education, was first established in 1920 and dissolved in 1923 as a measure of economy. It was revived in 1935 and has been in existence ever since.
- It is the highest advisory body to advise the Central and State Governments in the field of education. The committee has representatives of central organisation, universities, state and bodies including planning commission, NGOs and civic society. The CABE committee headed by HRD Minister is generally made for three years.
- The function of CABE would be:
 - a) to review the progress of education from time to time;
 - b) to appraise the extent and manner in which the education policy has been implemented by the Central and State Governments, and other concerned agencies, and to give appropriate advice in the matter;
 - c) to advice regarding coordination between the Central and State Governments/UT Administrations, State

2.14. SC Judges Press Conference**In News**

- In an unprecedented move, four senior-most Supreme Court judges had held a press conference to tell the nation that unless the institution is preserved, democracy will not survive in the country.
- The press conference -- attended by Justices Jasti Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi, Madan Lokur and Kurian Joseph --is the first in the history of independent India and a first for the Supreme Court.
- The judges told the reporters, during press conference, that there was an urgent need to preserve the judiciary system if democracy was to be protected, and that they failed to convince Chief Justice Of India (CJI) Deepak Misra towards the same.

Issues Raised By The Judges

- The issue raised at the press conference was regarding administration of the Supreme Court which, they said, is not in order and many things which are less than desirable have happened in the last few months.
- It mainly included the issue of "allocation of cases by CJI". The four senior judges believed that all important cases get heard by CJI-led bench and do not get distributed to other senior judges heading benches.
 - They contended that there have been instances where cases having far reaching consequences for the nation and the institution have been assigned by the chief justices of this court selectively to the benches 'of their preference' without any rationale basis for such assignment.
 - Specifically, the Four judges were annoyed that a public interest litigation seeking a probe into Judge B M Loya's "mysterious" death was assigned to court no. 10 and not to any of the first four benches other than the CJI-led bench.
 - The judges further had a simmering grievance about the medical college admissions scam being sent to court no 7 after a Justice Chelameswar headed bench sent it to a five-judge

bench of himself, the CJI, himself, and Justices Gogoi, Lokur and Joseph. The medical college admissions scam is to do with the role of sitting and retired judges of high courts in enabling private medical colleges admit students to MBBS courses despite the apex court's order to the contrary.

- The four judges also said that it was wrong on part of CJI to head a small bench and deal with the memorandum of procedure when it was earlier heard by a five-judge bench.

How Are Cases Assigned?

- There is no written procedure in the top court that is followed to allocate cases.
- When a case is filed, its details and subject matter are scrutinized by the SC registry, which receives and processes all documents. The cases are categorised on the basis of subject matter. There are 47 broad categories such as letter petitions, public interest matters, taxation, service matters and criminal appeals. Each category has multiple sub-categories.
- The registry notifies the roster for the benches, which is done on the basis of the subjects (or categories), and the CJI approves it. More than one bench is allocated the same subject matter.
- The CJI, as the master of roster, has the prerogative to mark the sensitive cases to specific benches but that the process should not be arbitrary. As the head of the institution, the CJI also has the discretion to set-up larger benches.

Criticism

- It is very unfortunate that the internal dispute of the judiciary was brought out in this manner publicly. Many believe that by holding the press conference to bring out the internal dispute in public, the institution of judiciary have been denigrated.
- If the four judges have got good reasons to challenge the monopoly of the CJI, they should have challenged him in the confines of the four walls of the judiciary.
- It will have serious repercussions for the public image of the judiciary and the Indian Constitution.
- Case allocation is the sole prerogative of CJI and during the tenure of previous CJIs many important cases went to a bench which was not a senior bench. For example - Chief Justice Khehar allocated the Birla Sahara matter to a bench presided over by Justice Arun Mishra and Justice Amitava Roy overlooking 10 senior benches.

Conclusion

We are faced with an extraordinary situation where the judiciary is being marginalised from within, not from outside. It is important for this institution to ensure that an impression is not given to the public that the constitution of benches and allocation of matters is being done in a manner more palatable to the executive. Government is the single biggest litigant before the Supreme Court. Citizens are entitled to expect the free and fair administration of justice.

3. ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

3.1. Centre Drafts Model Contract Farming Act To Safeguard Farmers From Price Risks

In News

- The government has come out with a draft model contract farming act, which industry insiders said will protect farmers from price risks and encourage food processing companies to invest more in infrastructure and farming technology once States adopt it.
- The draft law follows a Union budget announcement that a Contract-farming act would be drafted to integrate farmers with agro-industries to ensure better price realization for their produce as part of an initiative to double the incomes of farmers in the country.
- Contract farming is a system of contractual production of agricultural raw produce by the farmer for procurement by private companies who process and sell it further.

Provisions

- **Non-Applicability of AMPC Act:** All contract farming deals will be outside the purview of the Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) Act.
- **Agreement to be registered:** The draft law suggests all contract farming agreements entered into between buyers and farmers in respective States should be registered with a State-level agency called *Contract Farming (Development & Promotion) Authority*.
- **Compensation provision:** Both the sponsor and producer are liable to pay damages and compensation in case of a breach of contract as decided by the authority.
- **Rule making by authority:** It also gives the authority limited powers to make legislation with prior approval of respective State government or Union Territory administration. The role played by the authority would be that of a guide and an umpire.
- **Facilitation fee:** The Act allows the authority to collect the facilitation fee from the sponsor of up to 0.3 per cent ad valorem on the contracted produce.
- **Onus of infrastructure creation:** The proposed Act puts the onus of professionally managing inputs, technology and pre and postharvest infrastructure and services on the sponsor of the contract according to mutually agreed terms.
- **Contract farming facilitation group:** The model act has provided for a contract farming facilitation group at the village or Panchayats level to coordinate all arrangements between the companies and the farmers.
- **Farmer-buyer agreement:** The model act seeks to ensure that farmers and buyers abide by pre-agreed price and quantity to protect farmers from post-harvest market unpredictability.
- **Dispute resolution:** The act also says that the disputes relating to these contracts will be taken care of by a state-level farming development and promotion agency. Apart from this local-level recording committees can be approached for registering and implementing these contracts.
- **Bars transfer of ownership:** The Model act bars the transfer of ownership of farmer's land to companies under all circumstances so to protect ownership right of farmers.

Key Features of Model Contract Farming Act:



Ensure buying of entire pre-agreed quantity of contract farming produce as per contract	To guide the contracting parties to fix pre-agreed price	To decide sale-purchase price in case of violent movement (upswing or downswing) of market price vis-à-vis pre-agreed price as a win-win framework
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Provided contract farming facilitation group at village level to take quick and need based decision	Contract farming to remain outside the ambit of APMC Act	Catering to a dispute settlement mechanism at the lowest level possible for quick disposal of disputes	Contract Farming (Development & Promotion) Authority to carry out the assigned mandates
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Positives/Benefits

- **Multiple benefits:** An Act on contract farming will encourage the private sector to take progressive steps in terms of investments and the broader use of technology in the sector both of which will lead to greater productivity and efficiency, leading to increased farmer incomes and food security at large.
- **Reduced post-harvest risks:** The model Contract-farming act will also help farmers integrate with food processing units and avoid post-harvest price risks.
- **Balancing of interests:** While protecting interest of small farmers, the act will ensure smooth flow of raw material to industry bypassing mandis or APMCs. Moreover, this will help firms to save on the 5-10 percent market fee.
- **Make farming more organised:** The model act will make farming a more organised activity and help improve quality and quantity of production.
- **Ensure uniformity across states:** Such law is badly needed to streamline the system and make it more uniform across states as currently there is no uniformity or homogeneity regarding what kinds of produce comes under this or what conditions will have to be met for contract farming to be allowed. Thus will reduce disputes and conflicts.
- **Already a norm:** The contract farming is already practiced across the country in various forms for a number of crops including sugarcane, plantation crops and potato.

Negatives

- **Opposition by Farmer union:** Farmer unions have opposed the proposed act as contract-farming act will promote an unequal arrangement where agribusinesses will be in position of strength in comparison to poor farmers.
- **Favour rich agri-business groups:** Rather than incentivizing farmers with subsidized inputs and procurement at remunerative prices, the Act talks of incentivizing companies. And Act also has a provision to allow companies to buy produce at lower than contracted prices citing inferior quality which may be used against farmers.
- **Farmer the ultimate loser:** The companies keep the parameters for procurement at such a high level that farmers engaged in contract farming are never able to meet. As a result, farmers lose out in such contracts.
- **Contract farming not viable in India:** The contract farming may not be suitable for agriculture in India where the majority of farmers depend on small or marginal landholdings.
- **Leads to monoculture farming:** Contract farming can also be detrimental by encouraging large monoculture farming and ending food crop production diversity.
- **High chances of dispute:** Other issues are high incidence of conflicts between the farmer and the procuring entity on quality/quantity of produce as well as a high risk of post-harvest losses. This is true especially when perishable agricultural produce is concerned.
- **Practical difficulty:** If prices rise sharply as compared to the contracted price, it will be difficult to force the farmer to sell the produce and such challenges will be difficult to resolve.
- **No need for a separate law:** Some experts says that a separate legal structure is not required for contract farming as the provisions of the Indian Contract Act are sufficient to cover the necessary requirements.

Way Forward

- While protecting the interests of farmers through law seems a sound step but the government also needs to be careful that it doesn't clamp down on the produce buying companies in the bargain.

- Moreover, given that 86% of farmers in India are either small or marginal farmers the costs incurred by contracting companies will be higher than in a scenario where the average size of the farm brings in economies of scale. Thus, getting farmers to set up farmer-producer organisations (FPOs) and agri-cooperatives to negotiate contracts with companies makes eminent sense.
- And there is also a need to carefully review the draft act to ensure balanced protection of all stakeholders and to avoid any red-tapism in proposed structure.
- The key issue is also to dovetail contract farming with other regulations and policies such as minimum support prices, e-NAM, price deficiency payments and crop insurance. They shouldn't work at cross-purposes.

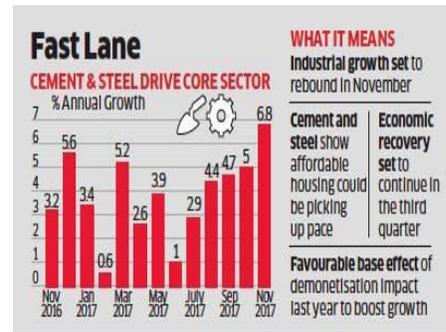
3.2. Steel, Cement Lead Core Sector Growth To A 13-Month High

In News

- Activity in the eight core sectors of the economy accelerated to a 13-month high of 6.7% in November according to data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry with growth being propelled by the steel and cement sectors. (Steel and cement sector have a weight of more than 40% in the Index of Industrial Production).
- Thus, the core sector growth in November 2017 was the best since 7.1% in October 2016.
- The **eight infrastructure sectors** included in the index are coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement and electricity.

Data Analysis

- **Favorable base effect:** Part of the rise is due to the favorable base effect stemming from the disruption in the wake of demonetization in November 2016 that will prevail over the next few months.
- **Effect of demonetization ends:** Steel and cement growth at very high growth rates of 16.6% and 17.3% indicates restoration of the production in these sectors over pre-demonetization levels. Thus, the impact of demonetization and rollout of the goods and services tax (GST) in July had faded.
- **Growth of real estate sector:** Further the growth in steel and cement sector also augurs well for real sector investment and affordable housing sector.
- **Other view:** Some experts says that this does not point to a recovery in construction or real estate sector but more towards demand created by public sector investment particularly in roads.



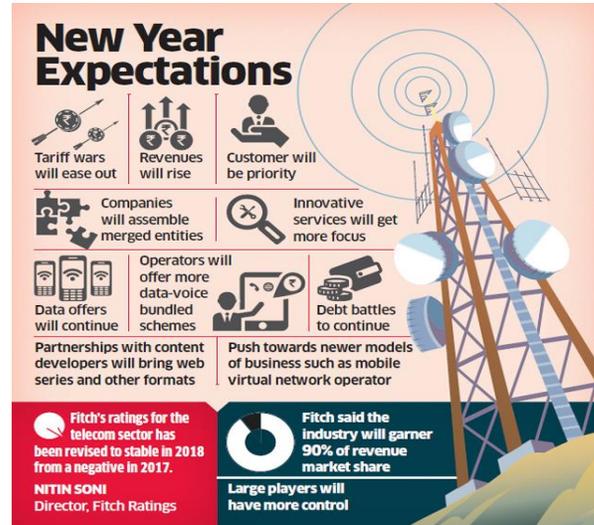
3.3. TRAI Issues Consultation Paper On National Telecom Policy 2018

In News

- The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has released a consultation paper inviting stakeholder comments on the new National Telecom Policy, 2018 that is expected to be finalized by March 2018.
- This policy will set the mission and objectives to be accomplished by the end of calendar year 2022 when India will be celebrating its 75 years of Independence.

Proposed NTP 2018

- **Twin goals:** TRAI says NTP 2018 can have twin goals - *firstly* to facilitate development of communication infrastructure and services to achieve inclusive socio-economic growth in the country; and *secondly* to propel India to become the front-runner in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- **Objective:** The objectives of the NTP, 2018 include increasing rural tele density to 100 per cent and attracting investments equivalent to \$100 billion in the communication sector.
- **Other objectives:** It also aims for enabling access for wire line broadband to 50% households; Providing wireless broadband access at affordable rates to 90% population; Achieving 900 million broadband connections at minimum download speed to 2 Mbps; of this at least 150 million connections at a minimum download speed of 20 Mbps; Developing 10 million public Wi-Fi hotspots in the country etc.
- **Major themes:** NTP 2018 major themes will be regulatory and licensing frameworks impacting the telecom sector, connectivity-for-all, quality of services, ease of doing business and absorption of new technologies including 5G and IoT (internet of things).
- **Rural E-Empowerment:** It also aims at providing data connectivity of at least 1 Gbps speed to all gram panchayats to electronically empower them.
- **Manufacturing and skilling:** The government also wants to encourage innovation and manufacturing and develop a large pool of digitally skilled manpower.
- **Essential infrastructure:** TRAI also suggested that telecom systems and services should be considered as essential infrastructure for development and recommended a review of licence and regulatory compliance costs keeping in view global practices.
- **Financing:** It also said that making finance available for communication projects at par with other connectivity infrastructure sectors such as roadways, railways, waterways and airways. It also said that the goals can also be achieved by review of licence fee, USOF levy and spectrum usage charge and by declaring roadmap for availability and auction of spectrum in different bands in ensuing period.
- **Uniformity:** Consultation paper also asks for working towards a one-nation, one-licence for services.
- **International ranking:** Besides it intends to help India leapfrog to amongst top 50 nations in international rankings in terms of network readiness, communications systems and services.



Final Analysis

- The proposed policy will be a step in right direction as according to an Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) study a 10 per cent increase in the rate of growth of broadband subscribers will result in a 2.4 per cent increase in the GDP rate.
- International experience also suggests that telecommunication services catalyze the growth of all sectors of economy particularly the fundamental sectors like health, education, agriculture, digital services and industry.

3.4. Ease Of Doing Business: Government Targets 90 Reforms To Climb World Bank's Report

In News

- India is targeting 90 measures including quicker construction permits, simpler registration of new companies, and Aadhar based identification of Directors to achieve a higher ranking in the World Bank's annual listing.
- This time India has one month less to implement the steps because the World Bank has advanced the deadline for submission to May 1 for the next set of rankings usually announced in October.

Suggested Reforms

- **Suggestions by DFS:** The Department of Financial Services will consider doing away with the requirement of providing a company seal to open a bank account. It has been proposed that cash refunds on import of capital equipment should be given within a year instead of the current system of claiming input tax credit to improve ease of paying taxes.
- **Suggestions by Industry department:** The industry department proposed a set of reforms for the Ministry Of Corporate Affairs including replacing the digital signature and director identification number with Aadhar.
- **Suggestions by DIPP:** The DIPP suggested the move to bring down the number of procedures, cost and time taken to acquire DIN and digital signatures.
- **Suggestion by MCA:** The Ministry Of Corporate Affairs will also consider doing away with the procedure of giving a separate permanent account number to companies after registration since one is allotted at the time of registration itself.
- **Suggestions to Urban Development Ministry:** DIPP has written to the urban development ministry to engage with frontline staff involved in giving construction permits.



Way Forward

- We do need to be proactive when it comes to ease of doing business. However, while the World Bank's report focuses on Mumbai and New Delhi to form the big picture the Centre needs to urge policy reform and follow through action on a truly pan-India basis.
- Also, on four parameters i.e. dealing with construction permits; enforcing contracts; starting a business; and registering property India is seen as faring especially poorly. If we can improve matters under the four heads, India's overall rank would rise significantly.
- Moreover, instead of trying to game the ranking system, the government should focus on improving systems from bottom up.

3.5. SEBI Proposes Universal Exchange

In News

- The Security and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has cleared in principle the convergence of financial exchange allowing the same exchange to offer products in the equity, commodity derivatives, currency segments, interest rate futures, and other debt instruments.

- Thus, after allowing universal broking licenses, SEBI has now allowed setting up of Universal exchanges. And converge trading by universal exchanges will be launched from October 2018.
- This will enable the BSE and NSE to launch the commodity derivative trading and enable the Multi Commodity Exchange of India (MCE) and National Commodity and Derivative Exchange (NCDEX) to move into the equity segments.

Positive

- **Expected move:** The move was always in the card after the Forward Market Commission was merged with the SEBI to create single regulator.
- **More competition:** In theory, this move should enhance competition across all categories creating deeper market with the lower spread and exchange fees.
- **May lead to consolidation:** It may also lead to consolidation as in that case cross holding norms will have to be reviewed in case merger between exchanges appears attractive.
- **Greater convenience:** It should offer greater convenience as traders will be able to trade all assets categories a single account.
- **Easier to face global competition:** Indian exchanges will find it easier to compete with the global universal exchanges such as Singapore's SGX and Dubai's DGCX and this might also help in preventing exporting our market.

Negative

- **Not a level playing field:** This does not seem to be a level playing field as commodity exchanges are perhaps on a weaker wicket. As commodity exchanges do not have enough products, they need to further develop market and they do not have co-location or institutional investors.
- **Risk management will be a challenge:** Risk management across asset classes will be big new challenge given the significant difference between commodities and equities, margin for future on different commodities underlying are different, contract tenure are different and margin changes on seasonal basis for agricultural commodities.
- **Require change in operation system:** If the NSE and BSE do start offering commodity derivatives segment they will have to keep those segments open for long hours and extensive review and modification of margin system and trading platform will be required. Similarly, if the MCX steps into the equity and equity derivatives it will need to review its risk management system.

Way Forward

Overall this is a progressive but the way it is implemented will be crucial. Extensive review, analysis is required and global best practices need to be incorporated before finalizing the said move.

3.6. Cheque Bounce Case: New Bill To Provide For Interim Compensation

In News

- As the government pushes for a cashless economy legislative steps are under way to fortify other instruments of financial transactions including cheques.
- In a move to prevent unscrupulous elements from holding back payment through an often long drawn litigation in cheques bounce cases the government has come up with a series of amendments to the **Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881** through **amendment bill, 2017**.
- The Act defines promissory notes, bills of exchange and cheques. It also specifies penalties for bouncing of cheques and other violations with respect to such negotiable instruments.

Proposed Changes

- **Interim compensation:** The Bill inserts a provision allowing a court trying an offence related to cheque bouncing to direct the drawer (person who writes the cheque) to pay interim compensation to the complainant. The interim compensation will not exceed 20% of the cheque amount and will have to be paid by the drawer within 60 days of the trial court's order to pay such a compensation. **(New section 143A)**
- **Deposit in case of appeal:** The Bill inserts a provision specifying that if a drawer convicted in a cheque bouncing case files an appeal the appellate court may direct him to deposit a minimum of 20% of the fine or compensation awarded by the trial court during conviction. This amount will be in addition to any interim compensation paid by the drawer during the earlier trial proceedings.
- **Returning the interim compensation:** In case the drawer is acquitted (during trial or by the appellate court) the court will direct the complainant to return the interim compensation along with an interest. This amount will be repaid within 60 days of the court's order

Positives

- **Restoration of faith in cheque system:** The amendment will also increase the faith of traders in cheque system as earlier judicial delay has eroded the faith in the use of cheques.
- **Promote cashless transaction:** The move is also in the consonance of the steps taken by the government to promote cashless transaction for high-end amount.
- **Help trade and commerce:** Further it is expected that the proposed amendments will help trade and commerce in general by allowing lending institutions including banks to continue to extend financing to the productive sectors of the economy.
- **Prevent delaying tactics:** This will prevent delaying tactics of unscrupulous drawers of dishonoured cheques due to easy filing of appeals and obtaining stay on proceedings.
- **Prevent frivolous litigation:** The said amendment will also discourage frivolous and unnecessary litigation so as to save time and money of parties and court.

Way Forward

The proposed amendment is a right step to further promote ease of doing business in India but at the same time such problems can be resolved completely only when judiciary as a whole is reformed in the direction of speedier resolutions of disputes.

3.7. Incentives Likely For Companies To Enhance Output From Ageing Oil & Gas Fields**In News**

- The government is planning to offer fiscal incentives such as lower taxes and higher share in profit to companies to encourage them to boost oil and gas output from local ageing fields.
- The Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH) the technical arm of the oil ministry has unveiled a draft policy framework to promote enhanced recovery methods. It says recovery from domestic fields has been below global average and most of the producing fields are ageing.
- Enhanced recovery process involves injection of fluids in oil and gas fields to boost yield but are usually very expensive, technologically complex and time taking thus discouraging companies from undertaking such efforts.

Proposed Policy

- **Eligible fields:** The policy will apply to all fields irrespective of the time of the award of the respective production contracts.
- **Non-eligible fields:** The fields that are already producing oil or gas using enhanced recovery techniques and the fields for which development plans for enhanced recovery projects have been approved will not qualify.
- **Committee to decide eligibility:** A committee of oil ministry officials will decide on the eligibility of such projects and monitor their progress.
- **Proposed weighted deduction:** Operators undertaking enhanced recovery pilot programme shall be eligible for weighted deduction available from the business income to the extent of 150% of the amount paid towards the pilot expenses. The weighted deduction will be applicable till March 31, 2025.

Sops for Recovery

Incentives in DGH's draft policy:

Operators to get **weighted deduction of up to 150%**

To get **50% cess waiver** on crude output for 10 years

GAS PRODUCERS Sops equal to **10%** of wellhead price on output

OFFSHORE FIELDS
Waiver of applicable royalty

ONSHORE FIELDS
Discount in share of profit or revenue share

- **Waiver of cess:** Operators will get a waiver of 50% on the applicable cess on gross production of crude oil from designated wells of an approved enhanced recovery project for 10 years. Where cess is not applicable, a notional cess shall be calculated and the equivalent amount shall be reduced from the government's share of profit petroleum or revenue share. The waiver on cess would apply only if the average crude oil price of Indian basket during a calendar quarter is below \$80/barrel or as decided by the official committee.
- **Incentives for gas producers:** For gas producers the incentive would be equal to 10% of gas wellhead price on the gross production from designated well of an approved project for a period of 10 years.
- **Incentives for offshore field:** For offshore fields the incentive shall be in the form of waiver of applicable royalty. In cases where the royalty on gas produced is less than the total incentive amount the difference can be obtained by the company from the government's share of profit or revenue share.
- **Incentives for onshore field:** For onshore fields the incentive shall be in the form of discount on the government's share of profit petroleum or revenue share. But where no profit share or revenue share is applicable the government will make a budgetary allocation for equivalent incentive.

3.8. India, Thailand Risk Landing On Currency Manipulator Watch List

In News

- India and Thailand may have to give freer rein to the rupee and baht this year to avoid triggering USA accusations that they are manipulating their currencies to support exports.
- The Reserve Bank of India and Thailand policy makers have already exceeded a key threshold on how much it can intervene to curb their currency's gains that the USA monitors. Two countries have been actively accumulating reserves to stem appreciation pressure on their currencies.

Criteria For Deciding On Currency Manipulator By USA

- While the U.S. has not branded any country a manipulator since 1994 meeting two of the following three criteria will get a country on the monitoring list:
- ❖ **Trade surplus:** A trade surplus with the U.S. of \$20 billion or more.

- ❖ **Current account excess:** A current account excess of at least 3% of gross domestic product.
- ❖ **Net buying of foreign currencies:** Net buying of foreign currencies amounting to at least 2% of GDP over a 12-month period.

Analysis

- **Reduced exports:** If the two countries central banks seek to assuage U.S. concerns to avoid a range of possible penalties it will lead to gains for their currencies and potentially reduce their export competitiveness.
- **Not able to manage undue volatility:** The monetary authority in India and Thailand will not be able to take steps and intervene to curb undue volatility in their currencies.
- **Advanced countries themselves responsible:** The monetary policy normalization in the advanced economies has spurred abrupt outflows in 2018 and central banks of small open economies are just taking steps to reduce volatility.

Way Forward

Considering the current policy of USA government the Trump administration will likely continue to try and name and shame countries that run large current account surpluses and accuse them of currency manipulation. So in such an environment the countries such as India need to promote development of their export infrastructure to boost overall exports.

3.9. Services PMI Shows Return To Growth

In News

- Services sector activity returned to growth in December following a contraction in November on the back of stabilizing new orders.
- The Nikkei Purchasing Manager's Index (PMI) Business activity index, which measures services sector activity came in at 50.9 in December from 48.5 in November. A reading above 50 denotes an expansion while one below 50 implies a contraction.

Pointers From The Index

- **Overall position:** Though solid overall, cost inflationary pressures also eased from November's recent-high whilst business expectations remained positive. Reflecting improvements in output requirements, job creation quickened to the fastest since September.
- **The reason for turnaround:** The turnaround in business activity stemmed from growth in information and communications and finance and insurance with declines seen elsewhere.
- **Job growth:** Higher activities in services led to increased hiring by firms with jobs growth quickening to the fastest since September the PMI survey of 400 private sector firms showed.
- **GST impact:** However effects of the goods and services tax (GST) still persist since a large chunk of the improvement in PMI account delayed payments from previous months and cash shortage still not abated.



Final Analysis

- A improvement in the sectors bodes well for the Advance Estimate of gross domestic product in the current financial year wherein the government saw the lowest growth in its tenure at 5.7 per cent in July-September 2017.
- But it remains to be seen whether this uptick sustains given the frequent dips below 50 over the course of 2017,

3.10. Government Gets Lok Sabha Approval For Rs 80000 Crore PSBs Recapitalisation

In News

- India's biggest state owned banks are likely to get Rs 80,000 crore of fresh capital this fiscal year after the government sought Parliament's nod for additional spending toward the infusion. Major beneficiaries may include State Bank of India, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank and Indian Bank.
- There will not be any net outflow or impact on the budget as the funds will be raised through bonds the government had announced in October 2017.

Recapitalization plan

- **Overall programme:** The government had in October last year announced a Rs 2.11 lakh crore capital infusion plan with Rs 58000 crore of this to be raised by the banks themselves and Rs 1.35 lakh crore through recapitalization bonds.
- **Bonds features:** The proposed bonds will be non tradable and also not eligible for statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) status for banks and insurers.
- **Parameters:** There are a number of parameters (35 parameters) on the basis of which the recap bonds will be distributed among the banks. It is likely that weaker banks will be infused with further capital only to cover their provisioning requirements while the stronger banks will be provided with capital for growth as well.
- **Impact on fiscal deficit:** While finer details are not known the whole transaction will only be a 'below-the-line' book entry for calculation of the fiscal deficit and hence will not impact an already precarious fiscal situation.

Bond With Banks

<p>Infusion part of ₹2.11 lakh cr capital support announced earlier</p> <p>Performing banks likely to get bulk of funds</p> <p>No net cash outgo; bonds to raise funds</p> <p>Lenders to get bulk of proposed infusion over 2 months</p>	<p style="font-size: 1.2em; color: red;">₹6.9 lakh cr</p> <p>NPAs of state-run banks at end of Sep 2017</p> <p>Govt also finalising reforms for PSBs including strengthening of boards, resolution of NPAs and HR issues</p>
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Benefits Of Infusion Of Capital

- **Encourage credit pickup:** The infusion of cash is part of the process to clean up books of the banks and is aimed at encouraging credit pickup to drive investment that is needed to support economic revival.
- **Help in overcoming NPA:** Recapitalization bond programme by the government will help public sector banks come out of the spiraling non performing asset mess.
- **Help PSB build their provisioning coverage ratio:** Capital infusion will also help public sector banks build their provisioning coverage ratio as they will be able to allocate much of their operating profits towards loan loss provisioning without having to worry about the impact on their capital positions.
- **Raise valuation of PSB:** The infusion and subsequent balance sheet clean up are expected to substantially raise the valuation of PSBs and help the government mop up more when it decides to dilute its shares in them at a later date.

- **Reduce the gap between PSB and private banks:** The implementation of the proposed Rs 2.11 lakh crore recapitalization plan will narrow the gap between the capital profiles of Indian public and private sector banks.

Way Forward

This is the first time in a decade that there is a real chance of meeting the banking sector's challenges. But it is still a long haul as banks besides facing capital constraints are also facing inefficiencies. These need to be resolved under overall Indradhanush plan.

3.11. Government Nod For Revised PPP Port Concessions

The government has approved a revised model concession pact for projects based on public private partnership (PPP) design at major ports to make the investment climate more investor friendly.

Provisions Of Revised PPP Port Concessions

- **Exit routes:** The revised Model Concession Agreement (MCA) includes providing an exit route to developers by way of divesting their equity up to 100% after completion of two years from the Commercial Operation Date (COD) similar to the MCA provisions of the highways sector.
- **Dispute resolution:** The amendments in the MCA envisage constitution of the Society for Affordable Redressal of Disputes - Ports (SAROD-PORTS) as a disputes resolution mechanism similar to the provision available in the highways sector.
- **Land concessions:** The government said under provision of additional land to the concessionaire land rent had been reduced from 200% to 120% of the applicable scale of rates for the proposed additional land.
- **Royalty payment:** Concessionaire would pay royalty on per MT of cargo/TEU handled basis, which would be indexed to the variations in the WPI annually. This would replace the present procedure of charging royalty, which is equal to the percentage of gross revenue, quoted during bidding.
- **Compensation:** Concessionaire will now be compensated for the increase and imposition of new taxes, duties etc. except in respect of imposition/increase of a direct tax, both by central and state government.

Benefits

- **Overall benefits:** The approved amendments in the Model Concession Agreement will make the port projects more investor friendly and make investment climate in the port sector more attractive.
- **Resolve revenue grievances:** The changes in revenue payment will help to resolve the long pending grievances of PPP operators that revenue share was payable on ceiling tariff and price discounts were ignored.
- **Other benefits:** Concessionaire will be free to deploy higher capacity equipment/facilities/technology and carry out value engineering for higher productivity and improved utilization and cost saving of project assets.

3.12. National Logistics Index: Gujarat, Punjab, Andhra Best Performing States

In News

- **New index:** The new Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) index developed by the Commerce and Industry Ministry and Deloitte ranked states in terms of the logistical support they provided to promote goods trade.
- **Best performing states:** Gujarat, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh are the best performing states in terms of mobility of goods and efficiency of logistics chain according to a new ranking of states brought out by the government.
- **Ranking of other states:** Karnataka, Maharashtra, Haryana, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana and Chhattisgarh made up the remaining top 10. Assam, Bihar and Jammu & Kashmir featured on the bottom of the list owing to the lack of good transport facilities, scarcity of logistics services and bad track record in timeliness.
- **Parameters:** The ranking is based on parameters such as the competitiveness of pricing, timeliness and availability of infrastructure and that of services among others
- **Aim:** The index aims to encourage states to provide the policy push towards improving their logistics-related infrastructure.
- **At global level:** On the global front, India's position in the annual World Bank's Logistics Performance Index had improved to 35 in 2016, the last time the report was published. This was a jump from the 54th spot India had occupied in the previous report.

REPORT CARD

Doing it right and wrong on logistics

Top states	Bottom-rung states
Gujarat	Jharkhand
Punjab	West Bengal
Andhra Pradesh	Assam
Karnataka	Bihar
Maharashtra	Jammu & Kashmir

Source: Logistics Ease Across Different States by Commerce and Industry Ministry & Deloitte

3.13. India Ranks 30th On WEF Global Manufacturing Index

In News

- **India's position:** The World Economic Forum (WEF) released its Global Manufacturing Index putting India on the 30th position five places below China, which is continuously striving to develop better avenues of manufacturing by boosting infrastructure.
- **Other countries:** Japan topped the rankings on the back of developing the best structure of production in the Geneva based WEF's first '**Readiness for the future of production report**' and is followed by South Korea, Germany, Switzerland, China, Czech Republic, USA, Sweden, Austria and Ireland in the top 10.
- **Comments on India:** Talking about India, which had a total manufacturing value of over \$420 billion in 2016 the report said that the country's manufacturing sector has grown by over 7 per cent per year on average in the past three decades and accounts for 16-20 per cent of India's GDP.
- **Categorization:** The report has categorized 100 countries in four major groups for its ranking which include, Leading (strong current base, high level of readiness for future); High Potential (limited current base, high potential for future); Legacy (strong current base, at risk for future); or Nascent (limited current base, low level of readiness for future).
- **Legacy group:** India has been placed in the Legacy group alongside Hungary, Mexico, Philippines, Russia, Thailand and Turkey among others.
- **Leading group:** China is on the list of Leading countries. The report pointed out that the 25 countries placed in the Leading category were in the best position to gain as production systems stand on the brink of exponential change.
- **Other ranking:** In terms of the scale of production India has been ranked ninth while for complexity it is at 48th place. For market size India is on third spot while areas where the country is ranked poorly

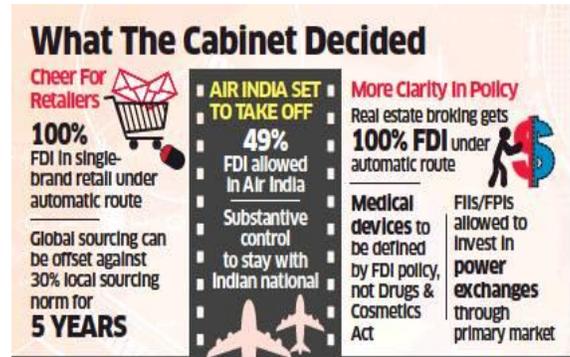
(90th or even lower) include female participation in labour force, trade tariffs, regulatory efficiency and sustainable resources.

3.14. Government Opens FDI Door Wider

Government has announced sweeping relaxations in foreign direct investment (FDI) rules in single-brand retail and other areas besides allowing overseas carriers to acquire as much as 49% of Air India to help speed up its divestment.

Relaxed FDI Provisions

- **Disinvestment in Air India:** The cabinet also allowed overseas airlines to own up to 49% in Air India subject to conditions. The earlier policy allowed foreign airlines to own up to 49% in Indian carriers but excluded Air India. However, the overall overseas investment limit will be 49% against 100% for other Indian carriers
- **Local sourcing rule in retail sector:** Single brand retailers can set off incremental sourcing of goods from India for global operations during initial five years, beginning April 1 of the year of the opening of first store against the mandatory FDI in single brand retail under automatic route.



- **Other provisions for local sourcing:** Besides, overseas retailers can now delay having to meet the 30% local sourcing norm by five years removing a significant stumbling block. Approvals for such investments have also been made automatic. After five years the firm will have to meet the sourcing norm every year.
- **Foreign investment in domestic companies:** The government also decided to ease policies relating to foreign investments in a domestic company that is engaged in only investing in the capital of other Indian companies and where up to 100% FDI with prior government approval is allowed. If these activities are regulated by any financial sector regulator foreign investment up to 100% under automatic route will be allowed and if they are not regulated by any financial sector regulator fully foreign investment up to 100% will be permitted under government approval, subject to conditions including minimum capitalization requirement.
- **Real estate broking:** The government also clarified that real-estate broking services don't amount to realty business and is therefore eligible for 100% FDI under automatic route in sync with the rule applicable to other broking services.
- **FDI in power exchange:** It also decided to allow FII/FPIs to invest in power exchanges through the primary market as well. Earlier FII/FPI purchases were restricted to the secondary markets only.
- **Other relaxations:** The government also relaxed FDI policy for medical devices and audit firms associated with companies receiving overseas funds.

Benefits

- **Ease of doing business:** Brands such as Uniqlo and Xiaomi that had applied to start single brand retail businesses may now get approval under the automatic route. The easing of the sourcing rules will help in ease of doing business in India.
- **Save time:** The use of Automatic route is a welcome move as it will save time that went into scrutinizing and processing the applications.

- **Make India an attractive investment destination:** The reform will boost India's attractiveness as an investment destination.
- **Balancing the competing interest:** Capping foreign investment at 49% in AI would allow it to retain the national carrier status even after privatization, which would enable investors to hold on to AI's valuable flying/landing rights and parking slots at airports across the world attained through various bilateral, government-to-government deals.
- **Benefit startups in broking service:** The clarification on real estate broking services is also a welcome move given the number of start-ups in this space offering innovative broking products.
- **Benefit the electricity sector:** The decision to allow 49% FDI under automatic route for power exchanges should help electricity bourses secure direct funding to develop new generation products. In particular there is opportunity to serve buyers who are keen on renewable energy but with the risk of non-availability or seasonality suitably hedged.

Hurdles

- **Opposition to Air India disinvestment:** The government will have to face opposition to its plans to divest stake in Air India. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Transport, Tourism and Culture in a draft report is said to have described Air India as a 'national pride' and urged that the airline be given a chance for at least five years to revive.
- **Problem related to local sourcing norm:** Companies such as Apple that use cutting-edge or state-of-the-art tech but do not source goods for global business says that sourcing norms could still be a hurdle. Till the local sourcing clause is removed no such tweaks would be enough to bring these companies to India.
- **Opposition by trading bodies:** Trader bodies such as CAIT have opposed the move as it will facilitate easy entry of MNCs in retail trade and will also result in making a large number of people jobless.

Way Forward

- It is welcome that the government has eased foreign investment norms further although these are incremental rather than path-breaking in nature.
- Having liberalized FDI in single brand retail the government should now make bold and open up multi-brand retail as well. This is the reform that would level the field with e-commerce and pave the way for the maximum increase in job creation.

3.15. Government To Soon Bring Corporate Governance Norms At State Owned Banks

In News

- The government is planning to refresh the corporate governance norms for state-owned banks.
- In an earlier report Reserve Bank of India committee had recommended additional qualifications for bank staff to be posted in credit operations, treasury and risk management areas.
- In the current financial year, the finance ministry has proposed a bailout package of Rs 2.11 trillion to be paid over the next few years to the ailing PSBs.

Proposed Corporate Governance Norms

- **Global best practices:** It has also been proposed to adopt global best governance practices and providing more autonomy to PSBs.
- **Employee's performance measurement:** The governance reforms will bring in measures to track the performance of the executive-rank employees of the banks.
- **Changes in incentive structure:** Reforms are also proposed to make PSBs more accountable and change is also proposed in their incentive structures so that their lending practices are in line with the productive allocation of credit.

Benefits

- **Respond to criticism:** The proposed steps will respond to Moody's criticism that reforms needed for efficiency and better operating performance are absent at public sector banks.
- **Balancing approach:** The move is being seen as a balance between an outright privatization of banks, which is considered politically unfeasible and the option to let them continue with a business-as-usual approach.
- **Improvement in share prices:** A joint study by IIM Calcutta, Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs and Thought Arbitrage Research Institute showed there is a strong correlation between standards of corporate governance in banks and the performance of their share prices.

Way Forward

These steps will help in making the recent steps of government such as Indradhanush scheme, recapitalization of banks etc. more successful. The PSB also need to be made socially accountable along with being professionally managed.

3.16. Government To Consolidate Large Subsidiaries Of PSUs Into Single Unit

In News

- Government has embarked on a consolidation drive by merging the group companies of Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corp to create a single unit that would harness embedded synergies.
- More such government companies like NMDC, Container Corporation, Shipping Corporation and Coal India may soon follow the path of consolidation.

Benefits

- **Cost optimization:** The move is aimed at pruning the number of subsidiaries or special purpose vehicles under these entities will result in cost optimization and bring the cost base at state firms on a par with those at private sector establish.
- **Efficient management practices:** The government also hopes that proposed consolidation will bring in efficient management practices.
- **Reduce compliance burden:** Managing so many subsidiaries has become very complicated for the managements. Compliance is also costly and consequences of noncompliance are huge.
- **Remove complex structure:** It will also resolve the problem where government firms are often blamed for complex



structures with many group companies pursuing almost the same business objectives. For instance Power Finance Corp has about 25 subsidiaries spread across the country.

- **Consolidation urgently needed:** The presence of multiple entities in the PSU space is a throwback to the 1960s. Economies of scale in such structures are not available now.

3.17. Tax Litigation Taking Toll On Economy

In News

- According to the Economic Survey Income Tax Department is the biggest litigant but loses 85% of cases.
- And faced with a success rate that is less than 30% the Survey says that the tax department will gain from a reduction in appeals pursued at higher levels of the judiciary besides leading to a reduction of workload on high courts and the Supreme Court.
- Till March 2017 there were approximately 1.37 lakh direct tax cases and 1.45 lakh indirect tax cases under consideration by the Income Tax Appellate Tribunal, high courts and Supreme Court.
- Together the claims for indirect and direct tax stuck in litigation by the quarter ending March 2017 amounted to nearly 7.58 lakh crore over 4.7% of GDP.

Benefits

- **Reduce pendency:** The reduction of government tax litigation will reduce the workload of the judiciary and further lead to reduction in delays and pendency of cases.
- **Remove other hindrances for the economy:** Resolution of tax disputes will resolve other connected issues which are taking a severe toll on the economy in terms of stalled projects, mounting legal costs, contested tax revenues and reduced investment.

Way forward

- The Survey recommends that separate benches at high courts to handle tax cases can help prune their pendency and bring about consistency in resolving litigation.
- There is also a need for a robust dispute resolution process as currently there is no provision to settle on the basic fine and the current resolution allows for just reducing the penalties and interest.

3.18. Cabinet Approves New Consumer Protection Bill

In News

- The Centre had introduced the Consumer Protection Bill in the Lok Sabha to repeal the 30-year-old Consumer Protection Act, 1986.
- New Consumer Protection Bill seeks to establish an authority to safeguard consumer's rights along with provisions to deal with misleading ads.

Provisions

- **CCPA:** The Bill aims to set up an executive agency Central Consumer Protection Authority (CCPA) to make intervention when necessary to prevent consumer detriment arising from unfair trade practice and to initiate class action including enforcing recall, refund and return of products. CCPA has been designed along the lines of the United States Federal Trade Commission.

- **Class action suit:** The bill will introduce class action lawsuits to India, which means that a group of people with the same or similar injuries caused by the same product or action can sue the company as a group. If the verdict goes in their favour, all consumers in the group stand to benefit.
- **Punishment provisions:** The Bill has strong provisions to check adulteration and misleading ads and also provides for fine up to Rs 50 lakh and jail up to 5 years for manufacturers and service providers for false and misleading ads. Against adulteration the Bill has provisions for fine up to Rs 10 lakh and life term imprisonment.
- **Misleading advertisements:** It also provides for ban on celebrities endorsing misleading advertisements.
- **Dispute adjudication:** The Bill has several provisions aimed at simplifying the consumer dispute adjudication process of the consumer dispute redressal agencies besides enabling consumers to file complaints electronically.
- **ADR provisions:** It has provisions for post-litigation stage mediation as an alternate dispute resolution mechanism. The bill also provides for product liability action.

Benefits

- **Overall benefit:** The new bill seeks to enlarge the scope of the existing law and make it more effective and purposeful. The stress is also being given on consumer empowerment.
- **In consonance with the current period:** New Bill will safeguard the consumer rights in view of current challenges posed by e-commerce, direct selling, tele-marketing and misleading ads.
- **Fills institutional gap:** Establishment of CCPA fills an institutional void in the regulatory regime extant. Currently the task of prevention of or acting against unfair trade practices is not vested in any authority.

Way Forward

The bill is a step in the right direction and ensures that consumer interest is given utmost importance against scrupulous practices. At the same time it need to be ensured that grievance redressal mechanism should be speedy to create effective deterrence.

3.19. India Needs \$4.5 Tn For Infrastructure

In News

- India will require investments of about \$4.5 trillion by 2040 to develop infrastructure to improve economic growth and community well-being according to the Economic Survey 2017-18.
- The current trend shows that India can meet around \$3.9 trillion infrastructure investment out of \$4.5 trillion. The cumulative figure for India's infrastructure investment gap will be around \$526 billion by 2040.

Hurdles Pointed Put By Survey

- **Overall hurdles:** There is a massive under investment in infrastructure sector due to collapse of public private partnerships especially in power and telecom projects; stressed balance sheets of private companies; issues related to land and forest clearances.
- **Hurdles in road sector:** On road sector the Survey says as on September 2017 out of the 1263 total ongoing monitored projects across sectors there were 482 projects in road transport and highways with original cost of 317373.9 crore. Of these 43 projects face cost overruns and 74 projects time overruns.

- **State of Railways:** Further it added that the share of Indian Railways in freight movement has been declining over a period of time primarily due to non-competitive tariff structure.
- **Telecom sector:** The telecom sector is going through a stress period with growing losses, debt pile, price war, reduced revenue and irrational spectrum costs. The crisis has also severely impacted investors, lenders, partners and vendors of these telecom companies.

Way Forward

- Survey says that the need of the hour is to fill the infrastructure investment gap with financing from private investment institutions dedicated to infrastructure financing like National Infrastructure Investment Bank and also global institutions like Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and New Development Bank which are focusing more on sustainable development projects and infrastructure projects.

3.20. Farm-Sector Reforms: Centre Mulls Shifting Agriculture Marketing To Concurrent List

In News

- The Centre is evaluating a proposal to bring marketing of farm goods under the Constitution's Concurrent List so that it has greater say on the relevant regulations and taxation.
- An amendment to the Constitution requires stipulated majorities in both Houses of Parliament and state Assemblies.
- Many state governments have opposed the move as they feel the amendment will be against the concept of cooperative federalism.

Benefits

- **Overcome existing hurdles:** State government has been reluctant to reform agriculture trade that impedes center's efforts to empower farmers with easy access to buyers outside their states and freedom from exploitative middlemen.
- **Reducing inflation of cost of goods:** A key objective of the change is also to weed out sundry state level taxes that inflate the cost of farm goods procurement by the government and private traders, even as the farmers get less-than-remunerative prices.
- **Boost to E-NAM:** Shifting agriculture marketing to the Concurrent List will give a boost to electronic national agriculture market (e-NAM) which is designed to multiply the farmer's choice of buyers.
- **Authority to direct state:** If the agriculture marketing comes under Concurrent List the Centre's views will prevail in case of a dispute either between itself and a state or between two or more states. Moreover the Centre will be able to direct a state not to levy a particular fees or allow some commission.

Way Forward

- The proposed step is in the right direction as many committees such as The Ashok Dalwai committee on doubling farmers' income has recommended that the concept of one-India market may benefit if agricultural marketing is brought under the Concurrent List.
- Moreover while cultivation is limited to the land and area of farming operations marketing has no boundaries and needs to operate on a pan-India level to meet demand across the country.
- Future marketing intervention by the State governments need to be align with the One-nation, One-market concept by laying greater emphasis on long term connectivity for agricultural produce across states and geographies.

3.21. Luxembourg Third Most Favoured Base For FPIs**In News**

- Luxembourg has dethroned Singapore to become the third most popular destination for foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) investing in Indian equities.
- Luxembourg has traditionally been an important gateway for pooling of investments from European funds which are invested not only in India but across the globe. The country is preferred even for routing of debt investments due to simpler rules and no compliance burden.
- This shift in FPI preference comes after India renegotiated its double tax avoidance agreement (DTAA) with Mauritius and Singapore.
- Experts say the share of Mauritius and Singapore could fall further as FPIs explore other destinations for better tax sops. They say the trend could gain momentum after March 2019 when the full capital gains tax rate comes into effect for investors based out of Mauritius and Singapore.

3.22. Economic Survey: Tariff Renegotiation, Judicial Delays Threat To Power Sector**In News**

- The Economic Survey identified judicial delays and power-tariff renegotiation as some of the areas potentially hurting investment in the renewable energy sector.
- The Survey reiterated the relevance of using the direct benefit transfer (DBT) to dole out subsidies to the needy section and curbing wasteful consumption and emphasized investments and advocated investments in energy-storage systems to avoid import dependency. .
- Some discoms started to renegotiate electricity tariffs, mutually agreed in power purchase agreements (PPA) with independent power producers after new record low rates of solar and wind-based power through competitive bidding. The survey pointed out that renegotiating the tariffs could result in risk for investments worth Rs 48000 crore.

Way Forward

- The survey suggested introducing payment guarantee fund or foreign exchange fund to boost investor confidence in renewable energy.
- Taking a cue from the meager domestic manufacturing capacity of solar power generation equipment the survey also said that substantial investments will ensure that India can be a leader in manufacturing energy storage systems seen by many as the next frontier of power sector investment.

4.1. Iran Unrest

Tens of thousands of people have protested in Iran.

About The Protests

- The demonstrations began with protests against President Hassan Rouhani's failed economic policies, but rapidly snowballed into calls for death of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.
- It must be remembered that Iran is an Islamic state where it is seen as particularly blasphemous to criticise the supreme ruler, who holds complete authority. This is signaling to the deeper political crisis.
- The protests are believed to have fanned across the country through messages on social media that have criticised the government for spending a fortune on external causes in the Middle East, including in Palestine and Lebanon, while the Iranian people were suffering.
- About 90 percent of those arrested in protests were under 25 years old and the protests have engulfed almost whole of Iran including the smaller towns and villages.
- The protests in scale, size and demographics are thus massively different than the previous protests of 2009. These new protests thus resemble in many ways, the 2011 Arab Spring protests that toppled a number of Middle Eastern dictators.

Reasons For The Protests

- Iran's anti-government protests are a result of deep-rooted structural issues that have existed for decades. Years of social and economic inequality has pushed tens of thousands across the country to rally over the rising cost of living and against the policies of the system that has ruled Iran for more than three decades.
- Iran is still heavily reliant on its oil reserves, adding that successive governments have failed to solve institutional problems that have piled up over the years. These include the lack of foreign investment and the overbearing role of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC).
- Iran's inflation is at 9.6 percent while its unemployment rate sits at 13 percent. However, the unofficial rate is estimated to be almost double the formal figure.
- For many Iranians the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers which they thought would bring economic relief through the relaxation of internationally imposed sanctions has failed to deliver the economic benefits it promised.
- The landmark nuclear deal came under threat when US President Donald Trump took office last year. Trump was a vocal critic of the deal even before he won the presidential race, pledging to change and review much of its content. During the first year of his presidency, Trump imposed two new packages of sanctions on Iran harming the economy even further.
- Iran's persisting structural problems lay in legislation, the banking system, Iran's accessibility to the international finance system and corruption.
- With the nuclear deal constantly under threat of revocation, foreign banks that seek to finance investment projects remain hesitant to establish themselves in Iran for fear of sanctions returning.
- In the face of mounting economic challenges, the government has increasingly imposed taxes on its citizens.

- Iran's involvement in regional conflicts has also played a role in prompting the latest wave of protests with citizens accusing the state of misplacing national funds on maintaining the status quo in Syria and supporting Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's government.
- Another factor working to the detriment of Iran's economy was the influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Established following the 1979 Islamic revolution, the IRGC is a branch of Iran's armed forces that is aimed at protecting the country's Islamic Republic system.
- President Rouhani continues to face resistance from the revolutionary guard whenever he attempts to implement reform.
- The country has for years relied on the IRGC's local investments to keep the economy afloat and because of the sanctions, the government needs the IRGC to continue developing major projects.
- What prevents foreign investments is the involvement of the IRGC who push parliament into not approving legislation that would ease the process of foreign investments.
- The IRGC's extensive involvement has caused widespread anger over the way the guard has monopolised the economy. The bulk of Iranians perceive the IRGC as a mafia that is above the law, responsible for much of the corruption.
- As much as half of Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) is currently under the control of Khamenei and the revolutionary guard, including mammoth conglomerates in strategic sectors.
- The system's inability to implement meaningful reforms is why Iran witnesses social and political unrest every decade in 1999, in 2009 and now in 2018.

Question

Why are there protests in Iran? How these are similar to the Arab Spring and what are the main reasons behind the protests.

4.2. All About Yemen Issue

Yemen is facing worst humanitarian crisis in 50 years.

Background

- Yemen was formed in 1990 with the unification of the U.S. and Saudi-backed Yemeni Arab Republic in the north and the USSR-backed People's Democratic Republic of Yemen to the south.
- Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was a military officer then and ruled in the North since 1978 assumed leadership of the new country.
- Despite the unification, Yemen has faced numerous challenges to remain one. These are:
 - Marginalised Southern Yemenis under Al-Hirak movement rebelled in 1994 ;
 - Yemen's government has fought the Houthi movement in Northern Yemen, six times between 2004 and 2010 ;
 - Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and the related Ansar al-Sharia insurgent group captured territory in the south
- Along religious lines, Yemen is divided geographically with Shias predominant in the north and Sunnis forming the majority elsewhere. Yemenis of different sects prayed at the same mosques without a second thought. But the rise of political Islam has increased tensions as has the spread of Sunni ideologies making an ideal ground for the emergence of the Houthi movement.

The Crisis

- In Yemen, the uprising came in January 2011 when citizens took to the streets of the capital, Sana'a, calling for an end to the 32 year-long rule of President Ali Abdullah Saleh.
- The United Nations Security Council in October 2011 adopted a resolution supporting a deal in which Saleh would receive immunity in exchange for a transfer of power to his deputy and an end to the escalating violence.
- By November 2011 when the transition had occurred, the new President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, in addition to large-scale corruption and unemployment, had to deal with attacks by al-Qaeda and the Houthi insurgency which had been going on since 2004 after the group had claimed regions in Northern Yemen and the continuing loyalty of military officers to Saleh.
- With insecurity playing a major role in Yemen, as loss of life and displacement, including the destruction of infrastructure, further worsened the economic conditions.
- Non-political factors like the drought, food insecurity, severe humanitarian crisis in the South, aggravated by a massive movement of population from the Horn of Africa and unemployment also weakened the transition.
- By 2014, armed conflict between the government and militias had spread across Yemen leaving the citizens in limbo.
- Houthi rebels supported by forces loyal to ex-president Saleh exploited public discontent with the interim government and lay siege to the capital, gradually seizing control of government institutions by the first quarter of 2015.
- Interim President Hadi and his government after escaping house arrest by fleeing to the Southern city of Aden and controlling less than a quarter of the country, abandoned his post thus creating a vacuum for ISIS to establish a new State in the region.
- Fleeing to Saudi Arabia to seek help, the absence of the president might have worked to the insurgent's group favour but an intervention of an Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia initiated a military campaign to restore President Hadi's to power.
- Without a United Nations mandate, Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states began an air campaign aimed at restoring Hadi's government. The coalition received logistical and intelligence support from the US, UK and France. They launched a campaign of bombardment, devastating Yemen which introduced the supposed proxy war between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shia Iran.

Current Scenario

- Jihadist militants from al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and rival affiliates of the Islamic State group (IS) have taken advantage of the chaos by seizing territory in the south and carrying out deadly attacks, notably in Aden.
- The coalition wanted to halt the smuggling of weapons to the rebels by Iran, an accusation Tehran denied but the UN said the restrictions could trigger the largest famine the world has seen for many decades.
- Although the coalition eased its restrictions on rebel-held ports after several weeks, the extended closures resulted in a sharp increase in prices of basic commodities, accelerating food insecurity and the collapse of already basic services.
- At the end of November 2017, a dispute over control of Sanaa's biggest mosque triggered armed clashes that left dozens of people dead.

- Separatists seeking independence for south Yemen, which was a separate country before unification with the north in 1990, formed an uneasy alliance with troops loyal to Hadi's government in 2015 to stop the Houthis capturing Aden.
- But relations have always been strained and tensions came to a head at the end of January 2018 when the separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC) accused the government of corruption and mismanagement and demanded the removal of Prime Minister Ahmed bin Daghar.
- He rejected the call and denounced what he called a coup against legitimacy and the country's unity when separatist units attempted to seize government facilities and military bases in Aden by force.
- The situation has been made more complex by divisions within the Saudi-led coalition. Saudi Arabia reportedly backs Mr Hadi, who is based in Riyadh while the United Arab Emirates is closely aligned with the separatists.

The Humanitarian Crisis

- About half of Yemen's population of about 26.8 million is in areas directly affected by the conflict.
- Basic services across the country are on the verge of collapse. Severe food insecurity, malnourishment among children, chronic drug shortages, unpaid salaries, and conflict-related destruction have affected the lives of Yemenis.
- As of March 2017, an estimated 18.8 million people - 69% of Yemen's population - needed some kind of humanitarian or protection assistance, according to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). That includes 10.3 million in acute need who urgently require immediate, life-saving assistance in at least one sector.
- The World Food Programme has classified seven of Yemen's 22 provinces as being at "emergency" level - one-step below famine on the five-point Integrated Food Security Phase Classification scale. Ten provinces are at "crisis" level.
- Yemen usually imports more than 90% of staple food. However, a naval embargo imposed by the Saudi-led coalition, fighting around the government-controlled port of Aden and air strikes on the rebel-held port of Hudaydah, have severely reduced imports since 2015.
- The World Bank estimates that the poverty rate has doubled to 62%, with public sector salaries on which about 30% of the population depend paid only irregularly.
- People have been forced to rely on untreated water supplies and unprotected wells, placing them at risk of life-threatening illnesses. An outbreak of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea was declared in October.
- Treatments for chronically ill patients are increasingly unavailable due to import difficulties, rising prices or lack of health personnel. Mothers and young children are also at particular risk.
- The conflict has also taken a toll on education. About 2 million children are out of school. More than 1,600 schools are currently unfit for use due to damage, presence of displaced people or occupation by combatants, and some two million children are out of school.

4.3. China's Arctic Policy

China releases white paper on Arctic policy.

The Arctic

- The Arctic is situated at a special geographical location. It commonly refers to the area of land and sea north of the Arctic Circle (approximately 66 degrees 34 minutes N), totaling about 21 million square kilometers.
- In the context of international law, the Arctic includes the northernmost landmasses of Europe, Asia and North America adjacent to the Arctic Ocean and the relevant islands, and a combination of sea areas within national jurisdiction, high seas and the Area in the Arctic Ocean.
- There is no single comprehensive treaty for all Arctic affairs. The Charter of the United Nations, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Spitsbergen Treaty and other treaties and general international law govern Arctic affairs at present.
- The continental and insular land territories in the Arctic cover an area of about 8 million square kilometers with sovereignty over them belonging to Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States, respectively.
- The Arctic Ocean covers an area of more than 12 million square kilometers in which coastal States and other States share maritime rights and interests in accordance with international law.
- These coastal States have within their jurisdiction internal waters, territorial seas, contiguous zones, exclusive economic zones and continental shelves in the Arctic Ocean. Certain areas of the Arctic Ocean form part of the high seas and the Area.
- States from outside the Arctic region do not have territorial sovereignty in the Arctic but they do have rights in respect of scientific research, navigation, over-flight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines in the high seas and other relevant sea areas in the Arctic Ocean. They also possess rights to resource exploration and exploitation in the Area, pursuant to treaties such as UNCLOS and general international law.
- In addition, Contracting Parties to the Spitsbergen Treaty enjoy the liberty of access and entry to certain areas of the Arctic, the right under conditions of equality and in accordance with law, to the exercise and practice of scientific research, production and commercial activities such as hunting, fishing and mining in these areas.
- The Arctic boasts a unique natural environment and rich resources, with most of its sea area covered under thick ice for most of the year. The Arctic natural environment is now undergoing rapid changes. Over the past three decades, temperature has been rising continuously in the Arctic, resulting in diminishing sea ice in summer. Scientists predict that by the middle of this century or even earlier, there may be no ice in the Arctic Ocean for part of the year.
- On the one hand, melting ice in the Arctic has led to changes in the natural environment, or possibly can result in accelerated global warming, rising sea levels, increased extreme weather events, damaged biodiversity and other global problems. On the other, with the ice melted, conditions for the development of the Arctic may be gradually changed, offering opportunities for the commercial use of sea routes and development of resources in the region.
- Commercial activities in the region will have considerable impact on global shipping, international trade and energy supply. This will bring about major social and economic changes, and exert important influence on the way of work and life of Arctic residents including the indigenous peoples. They may also pose a potential threat to the ecological environment of the Arctic. The international

community faces the same threat and shares the same future in addressing global issues concerning arctic.

The Chinese Policy

- China made it clear that it is an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs. Geographically, it is a "Near-Arctic State", one of the continental States that are closest to the Arctic Circle.
- The natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China's climate system and ecological environment and in turn on its economic interests in agriculture, forestry, fishery, marine industry and other sectors.
- China stated that it is closely involved in the trans-regional and global issues in the Arctic, especially in such areas as climate change, environment, scientific research, utilization of shipping routes, resource exploration and exploitation, security and global governance.
- These issues are vital to the existence and development of all countries and humanity, and directly affect the interests of non-Arctic States including China.
- It made it clear that it enjoys the freedom or rights of scientific research, navigation, over-flight, fishing, laying of submarine cables and pipelines and resource exploration and exploitation in the high seas, the Area and other relevant sea areas, and certain special areas in the Arctic Ocean, as stipulated in treaties such as the UNCLOS and the Spitsbergen Treaty and general international law.
- The Chinese stated in its policy that Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road (Belt and Road Initiative), an important cooperation initiative of China will bring opportunities for parties concerned to jointly build a "Polar Silk Road" and facilitate connectivity and sustainable economic and social development of the Arctic. This was a clear signal to expand the SREB and MSR to the Arctic's.
- China spelt out its policy goals on the Arctic as: to understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the Arctic, so as to safeguard the common interests of all countries and the international community in the Arctic and promote sustainable development of the Arctic.
- In order to realize the above-mentioned policy goals, China proclaimed that it will participate in Arctic affairs in accordance with the basic principles of "respect, cooperation, win-win result and sustainability".
- Participating in Arctic affairs, China declared that it prioritizes scientific research, underscores the importance of environmental protection, rational utilization, law-based governance and international cooperation and commits itself to maintaining a peaceful, secure and stable Arctic order.

Assessment

- Before this release, China's Arctic interests were heavily focused on environmental issues i.e. the impacts of melting polar ice on China's continental and oceanic environment, and its impact for the country's agricultural development.
- It has been a long time since China has been involved in Arctic affairs. In 1925, China joined the Spitsbergen Treaty and started active participation in addressing the Arctic affairs.
- Accordingly, Chinese policymakers had been emphasizing on the importance of conducting scientific work in the region and the country had made considerable investments in polar research since the 1990s.
- China has undertaken four research expeditions, has an Arctic research station in Norway's Svalbard archipelago and has a number of elite academic institutes dedicated to Arctic research.

- It also owns the world's largest icebreaker vessel, Xuelong (Snow Dragon), which has been central to China's research activities for developing the Arctic policy.
- The white paper shows China's intention of building a "Polar Silk Road" which would involve shipping roads in the region and has pledged corporate governance for the same.

The Svalbard Treaty or the Spitsbergen Treaty :

- This Treaty was signed in Paris during the Versailles negotiations after World War I. In this treaty, international diplomacy recognized Norwegian sovereignty (the Norwegian administration went in effect by 1925) and other principles relating to Svalbard.
- These principles are:
 - I. **Svalbard is part of Norway:** Svalbard is completely controlled by and forms part of the Kingdom of Norway. However, Norway's power over Svalbard is restricted by the limitations.
 - II. **Taxation:** This allows taxes to be collected, but only enough to support Svalbard and the Svalbard government. This results in lower taxes than mainland Norway and the exclusion of any taxes on Svalbard supporting Norway directly. Also, Svalbard's revenues and expenses are separately budgeted from mainland Norway.
 - III. **Environmental conservation:** Norway must respect and preserve the Svalbard environment.
 - IV. **Non-discrimination:** All citizens and all companies of every nation under the treaty are allowed to become residents and to have access to Svalbard including the right to fish, hunt or undertake any kind of maritime, industrial, mining or trade activity. The residents of Svalbard must follow Norwegian law though Norwegian authority cannot discriminate against or favor any residents of any given nationality.
 - V. **Military restrictions:** Article 9 prohibits naval bases and fortifications and also the use of Svalbard for war-like purposes. It is not, however, entirely demilitarized.
- As of 2017, there are 46 parties to the treaty including India which signed the treaty in 1923.

Arctic Council:

- The Arctic Council is a high level intergovernmental body set up in 1996 by the Ottawa declaration to promote cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States together with the indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants.
- The Council has the eight circumpolar countries (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Denmark (Greenland and Faroe Islands), Canada, US and Russia) as member states and is mandated to protect the Arctic environment and promote the economies and social and cultural well-being of the indigenous peoples whose organizations are permanent participants in the council.
- Observer status in the Arctic Council is open to Non-governmental organizations, Non-littoral states as well as to Intergovernmental and Inter-Parliamentary organizations.
- The Arctic Council currently has 12 observers including India.

India and the Arctic:

- India's engagement with the Arctic dates back to nearly nine decades when it signed the 'Treaty between Norway, US, Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Great Britain and Ireland and the British overseas Dominions and Sweden concerning Spitsbergen' also called the 'Svalbard Treaty' in February 1920 in Paris.

- Today India's interests in the Arctic region are scientific, environmental, commercial as well as strategic.
- India initiated its Arctic Research Program in 2007 with thrust on climate change in the circumpolar north. The major objectives of the Indian Research in Arctic Region are as follows:
 - To study the hypothesized tele-connections between the Arctic climate and the Indian monsoon by analyzing the sediment and ice core records from the Arctic glaciers and the Arctic Ocean.
 - To characterize sea ice in Arctic using satellite data to estimate the effect of global warming in the northern polar region.
 - To conduct research on the dynamics and mass budget of Arctic glaciers focusing on the effect of glaciers on sea-level change.
 - To carry out a comprehensive assessment of the flora and fauna of the Arctic vis-à-vis their response to anthropogenic activities. In addition, it is proposed to undertake a comparative study of the life forms from both the Polar Regions.
- India launched its first scientific expedition to the Arctic Ocean in 2007 and opened a research base named "Himadri" at the International Arctic Research Base at Ny-Alesund, Svalbard, Norway in July 2008.
- India was elected to the Council of the International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) in 2012.
- India got observer status in the council in 2013.

5.1. Delhi Declaration

In News

- To mark the 25th anniversary of the ASEAN-India dialogue partnership, 15th anniversary of our Summit-level partnership and 5 years of strategic relations, India is hosting the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi in January 2018.
- The theme of the Special Commemorative Summit was "Shared Values, Common Destiny". The Summit resulted in the adoption of the Delhi Declaration which would chart the future course of ASEAN-India relations.

Highlights Of The Declaration

- **On Strengthening relations** -- The declaration called for strengthening and deepening ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership for mutual benefit, across the whole spectrum of political, security, economic, socio-cultural and development cooperation.
- **About Political and Security Cooperation** – The declaration reaffirmed the importance of maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region. It called for other lawful uses of seas and to promote peaceful resolutions of disputes, in accordance with universally recognised principles of international law, including 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- **Regarding Transnational Crimes** -- It called for strengthening cooperation to combat other transnational crimes, including people smuggling, trafficking in persons, illicit drug trafficking, cybercrime, and piracy and armed robbery against ships.
- **Against Terrorism** -- Deepen cooperation in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, violent extremism and radicalisation through information sha... sharing, law enforcement cooperation and capacity building under existing ASEAN-led mechanism.
- **Cyber-security** -- Strengthen cooperation on cyber-security capacity building and policy coordination, including through supporting the implementation of ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy.
- **Economic Ties** -- It was reaffirmed to work to further strengthen ASEAN-India economic relations, including through full utilisation and effective implementation of ASEAN-India Free Trade Area. They also called for swift conclusion to comprehensive and mutually beneficial Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) in 2018 to further trade ties. They also look forward to establish ASEAN-India Trade and Investment Centre.
- **For sustainability of marine resources** – It stated that there should be a sustainable use of marine resources in Indian and Pacific Oceans and measures shall be taken to address the threats to these resources including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, loss of coastal ecosystems and the adverse impacts of pollution, marine debris and ocean acidification.
- **Physical and digital connectivity** -- Reaffirming their commitment to enhance physical and digital connectivity in line with Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and ASEAN ICT Masterplan (AIM) 2020 by availing \$1-billion line of credit (LoC) was announced by India. It was also announced that they will also work towards encouraging early completion of India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway Project and extend it to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam.
- **Peaceful use of outer space** -- India and ASEAN countries will continue to collaborate in peaceful exploitation of outer space, through implementation of the ASEAN-India Space Cooperation

Programme. It will include launching of satellites, sustainable exploitation of ground, sea, atmospheric and digital resources for equitable development of region.

- **On Maritime cooperation** -- It emphasised need to promote maritime transport cooperation and encourage potential private sector participation in development of seaports, maritime logistics network and maritime services in order to create greater efficient linkages and continue discussions on these priority areas.
- **For enhancing businesses** -- It called for promotion of stable and sustainable growth for MSMEs, including through technology transfer, as well as enhancing capacity building, technical assistance, access to innovation and opportunities to integrate into global and regional value chains were agreed upon.

NOTE—India and ASEAN has been covered in the month of July 2017 in article 5.4 in detail.

Question

What was the aim and focus of the ‘Delhi Declaration’ signed between India-ASEAN. Describe keeping in mind the highlights of the Delhi Declaration.

5.2. India – Myanmar Border Pact

The Union Cabinet approved an agreement between India and Myanmar on land border crossing.

About The Agreement

- The agreement will facilitate regulation and harmonization of already existing free movement rights for people ordinarily residing in the border areas of both countries.
- It will also facilitate movement of people on the basis of valid passports and visas which will enhance economic and social interaction between the two countries.
- It is expected to provide connectivity and enhance interaction of the people of North Eastern States of India with the people of Myanmar.
- The agreement would give a boost to the economy of the North East and allow us to leverage our geographical connections with Myanmar to boost trade and people to people ties.
- It will safeguard the traditional rights of the largely tribal communities residing along the border which are accustomed to free movement across the land border.

5.3. India – Israel Relations

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu's visited India.

Highlights Of The Visit

- Six months after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Israel (first ever by any Indian prime minister to the Jewish nation) , his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu arrived in India today for a six-day state visit.
- The Israeli Prime Minister is the second Prime Minister from his country after Ariel Sharon to visit India in the last 25 years of a diplomatic relationship.
- The visit from 14 to 19 January 2018 marked the twenty fifth anniversary year of India-Israel relationship and its growing partnership.

- The summit level meetings between the two countries, that commenced with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's historic visit to Israel, had strengthened the bonds between the two governments and peoples and have consolidated the foundation for their Strategic Partnership. The current visit takes the relationship further.
- It was resolved that in the next twenty-five years the two respective countries will strive to raise bilateral cooperation in diverse sectors to a qualitatively new level in consonance with our Strategic Partnership.
- It was decided that both sides should work together on a Five Year Joint Work Plan for strategic cooperation in Agriculture and Water.
- Both sides also agreed to deepen cooperation in innovation, business and trade, space, homeland security and cyber, higher education and research, science and technology, tourism and culture.
- The two prime ministers noted with satisfaction the commencement and implementation of India-Israel development cooperation - three-year work programme in Agriculture (2018-2020) aimed at increasing farmers' productivity and optimization of water use efficiency.
- The leaders of the two nation welcomed the completion of all formalities for the launch of the India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F) that was announced during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Israel. This visit marked the first Call for Proposals under the fund to encourage enterprises from both countries to utilize this significant platform for undertaking joint R&D projects in innovative and futuristic technologies and products for the benefit of the two peoples.
- Both nations underscored the role of youth in enhancing future collaboration in innovation and have decided to commence an annual exchange of visits of one hundred youth from the science streams.
- The two Prime Ministers commended the decision of the respective Ministries of Science and Technology to commence nine joint R&D projects in the areas of big data analytics in health care and security in cyber space, in pursuance of their decision in July 2017 to upgrade scientific and technological collaboration.
- It was decided to build a strong network between the next generation of the best women scientists and technologists of the two countries. For that purpose, an India-Israel Women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) Symposium will be organized in October 2018 in India.
- The visit marked the initiation of cooperation between India and Israel in the energy sector with the signing of an MoU on Cooperation in the Oil and Gas sector that will promote collaboration in the upstream sectors, research and development in future technologies and start-ups in oil and gas.
- Welcoming the initiative taken by India to establish the International Solar Alliance to promote renewable energy for sustainable development in the context of climate change, Israel declared its willingness to become a Partner Country.
- Underlining the role of the private sector in trade and investment, both Prime Ministers urged the private sector to actively explore investment opportunities in both countries, including through the India's flagship programmes such as Make in India, Start-Up India and Digital India.
- In this context both the nations noted the importance of facilitating the movement of business persons through simplification of visa regulations, fast-tracking of visa applications, issuing of multiple entry visa, especially for the information technology and new technology sectors.
- Recognizing the important contribution made by Indian caregivers in Israel, the two nations agreed to embark upon negotiations in 2018 in order to move forward as speedily as possible and to the satisfaction of both sides towards an early bilateral agreement.

- Noting that doing trade and business also requires better connectivity, the two nations decided to expedite the conclusion of an Agreement on Maritime Transport that will encourage greater business between the shipping organizations of the two nations and create new opportunities in maritime services and training. This agreement will also encourage wider cooperation in development of maritime business and Israel's participation in the Sagarmala Project.
- As it is a fact that enhanced people-to-people contacts will forge the strongest bonds of friendship between India and Israel in the future. The two countries decided to enhance connectivity between the two countries through the signing of a Protocol Amending Air Transport Agreement to expand the scope of cooperation in the civil aviation sector.
- An Indian Cultural Centre will open in Israel in 2018 in pursuance of the Prime Minister of India's desire to promote greater cultural understanding. Both sides signed an MoU in Film Co-Production in recognition of the role that films play in promoting people-to-people contact.
- Both Prime Ministers agreed to holding Festivals of India and Israel in their respective countries in the Year 2019 as a further step to solidify friendship between the peoples of both countries.
- Both the leaders noted the readiness of Israeli companies to enter into joint ventures with Indian companies in the defence sector under the Make in India initiative. Thus it was decided that the Defence Ministries will hold discussions in 2018 with active involvement of the public and private sectors, in order to create the basis for viable, sustainable and long term cooperation in the defence industry.
- Recognizing the grave threat that terrorism poses to peace and security including from non-state actors both Prime Ministers reiterated that there can be no justification for acts of terror on any grounds whatsoever and advocated strong measures against terrorists, terror organizations, those who sponsor, encourage or finance terrorism or provide sanctuary to terrorists and terror groups.
- They reiterated the importance of building comprehensive cooperation in counter-terrorism, including cyber-space and welcome the signing of the MoU on Cooperation in Cyber Security between India and Israel.
- They agreed to explore ways to develop joint programmes of assistance for third countries in the areas of training, capacity building and the development of small projects in the agriculture, water, health-care and education sectors.
- The two Prime Ministers discussed the developments pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process. They reaffirmed their support for an early resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians for arriving at a comprehensive negotiated solution on all outstanding issues, based on mutual recognition and effective security arrangements, for establishing a just and durable peace in the region.

Conclusion

- The durable and multifaceted cooperation is beneficial for the welfare of the people of both countries and the next twenty five years will be an opportune time to strengthen bonds between the peoples of India and Israel through activities that enhance understanding and create opportunities for mutual progress. Hence it is beneficial for both the nations to continue high level exchanges and to maintain dialogue in all areas and to work in practical ways for the benefit of their peoples.
- The partnership between the two nations is complimentary whether its defence or agriculture. The new emerging world order further accentuates the need of both the nations to come closer.

[NOTE: For detailed discussion on India-Israel relation, refer July issue of Current Affairs magazine.]

5.4. India- Cambodia

Comprehensive talks took place between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Cambodian counterpart Samdech Hun Sen.

Highlights Of The Visit

- Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia paid a State Visit to the Republic of India from 24-27 January 2018
- During the visit it was agreed that the business chambers and export promotion organisations would be encouraged to regularly participate in business events in each other's countries and explore possibilities of greater economic and commercial cooperation. This would strengthen bilateral trade and investment.
- Both nations agreed on an early signing of a Bilateral Investment Treaty between the two countries.
- The Prime Minister of India welcomed the suggestion of the Prime Minister of Cambodia to help train Cambodian youth in information technology. To this effect, the Prime Minister of India announced support to set up a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology in Cambodia.
- Both leaders agreed to have scheduled services operated by designated airlines of respective countries in the near future and supported the expansion of the air traffic rights and civil aviation arrangements to facilitate the people-to-people contacts and promote tourism between the two countries.
- In respect of defence ties, it was decided to further enhance the same by including through exchanges of senior level defence personnel, capacity building projects, etc.
- The two nations agreed for complete freedom of navigation and overflight and peaceful resolution of maritime issues based on international law, notably the 1982 UNCLOS.
- The leaders of both the nation unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.
- The leaders emphasized the central and vital role of the United Nations in fighting terrorism and recognized that the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy is a unique global instrument that will enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism.
- They also called for swift and effective implementation of relevant UN Security Council resolutions to combat terrorism worldwide. In this connection, they called for an early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).
- The two leaders reaffirmed their collaboration in combating all forms of Human Trafficking especially of women and children by signing a bilateral Memorandum of Understanding for prevention, rescue, recovery, repatriation and re-integration of the victims of trafficking.
- The Prime Minister of India highly appreciated Cambodia for hosting the goodwill visits of Indian ships for three consecutive years starting from 2015 to 2017.
- Indian side reaffirmed its commitment to undertake restoration and conservation work at the ancient temple of Lord Shiva at Preah Vihear and also expressed satisfaction over the ongoing restoration work at Ta Prohm temple being carried out by Archaeological Survey of India.
- The Prime Minister of Cambodia highly appreciated India's Lines of Credit and grants-in-aid being extended for developmental projects in Cambodia, restoration and conservation of temples, capacity building programme, scholarship scheme as well as funding for social development through Quick Impact Projects under Mekong Ganga Cooperation initiative.
- The two sides emphasized the importance of an early reform of the United Nations Security Council.

- The Cambodian side reiterated its support for India's permanent membership of the reformed and expanded UN Security Council. The Indian side reiterated its support for Cambodia's candidature as a member of the United Nations Economic and Social Council for the term 2019.
- The Prime Minister of India welcomed Cambodia's decision to join the International Solar Alliance (ISA). The two leaders agreed to explore the possibility to cooperate further in the area of solar energy. India also extended invitation to Cambodia to participate in the Founding Conference of ISA, which is scheduled to be held on 11 March, 2018 in New Delhi.
- The Prime Minister of India expressed India's willingness to assist Cambodia in agriculture related IT applications including Soil Health Cards for farmers and establishment of electronic National Agriculture Market.
- The key agreements signed between the two nations were :
 - Memorandum of Understanding on prevention of Human Trafficking.
 - Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty in Criminal Matters
 - Cultural Exchange Programme.
 - Dollar credit line agreement for US \$36.92 million for the Stung Sva Hab water resource development project.

India - Cambodia Relations

Background

- India-Cambodia relations go back to the 1st century AD when Hindu and Buddhist religious and cultural influences emanated out of India to various parts of South-East Asia.
- Cambodians are today predominantly Buddhist but retain a strong influence of Hindu rituals, idolatry and mythology. The pervading influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Indian architecture are borne out by the magnificent structures at Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Bayon, Ta Phrom and other religious and historical sites in Cambodia.
- India-Cambodia bilateral relations are warm and cordial. In the 1950s, India was associated with the International Control Commission on Indo-China. After the collapse of the Khmer Rouge regime, India recognized the new government and re-opened its Embassy in Phnom Penh in 1981 when much of the world shunned Cambodia.
- This factor along with India's association with the Paris Peace Accords and their finalization in 1991 is fondly remembered by the Cambodian leadership.
- India also committed military and non-military personnel for the conduct of the UNTAC-sponsored elections in 1993. India was one of the original contributors to UN de-mining operations in Cambodia.
- The Government of India also responded to an appeal by Cambodian Government to undertake the conservation of the famous Angkor Wat temple during the period 1986 to 1993, at a time when peace in the country was yet to be settled.
- India and Cambodia cooperate in a number of multilateral and regional fora. Cambodia for the first time declared its open support in favour of India for permanent membership of the UNSC at the South Summit Conference in Havana in 2000. It has time and again reiterated this support at various international fora and during bilateral interactions.
- In the context of our 'Act East' policy and the ASEAN, Cambodia is an important interlocutor and a good partner. Contemporary times have witnessed expansion of cooperation in diverse fields such as institutional capacity building, human resource development, and extension of financial assistance in infrastructure projects, security and defence.

- On the political front, there has been regular exchange of high level visits. Bilateral defence cooperation between two countries has been continuing with the conduct of annual training capsule for Royal Cambodian Armed Forces in Peacekeeping and Demining modules; defence training programmes under ITEC and ship visits by Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard.
- In 2016, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by both sides to promote parliamentary exchanges in the administrative branch and to jointly promote human resource development through exchange of experiences, knowledge, expertise and study visits.

Commercial Relations

- India-Cambodia trade has been growing steadily in the last few years. The total trade between India and Cambodia stood at US\$187.36 million in 2015, which indicated a 10% increase over the corresponding figure for 2014 (total trade US \$169 million).
- While the overall trade has shown a continuous trend of growth, the trade basket remains very narrow.
- India unilaterally provides preferential market access for exports from Cambodia.
- The principal commodities exported from India are: drugs and pharmaceutical products, organic chemicals, yarn, woven fabric, leather, man-made staple fibers, tobacco, vehicle parts, machinery and cosmetics. Whereas the main exports from Cambodia are non-ferrous metals.
- The trade basket can be however expanded by sourcing lentils, yellow maize, black eye beans, chick peas, black pepper, palm oil, shellac, eucalyptus chips/pulp, cashew nuts, turmeric, sesame seeds etc. being produced in large quantities in Cambodia.
- With a view to provide an institutional framework for increasing investments it is suggested that there should be a early conclusion of a Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT). Both sides are looking forward for early signing of the treaty.

Reasons For Low Trade Between India And Cambodia

- The mediocre trade performance is attributable to three main factors.
 - The first one is logistical constraints. The relatively far distance and under-developed connectivity infrastructure makes transportation of goods between Cambodia and India more costly.
 - According to a report by the Indian embassy in Phnom Penh, the high cost of handling containers at Sihanoukville port makes Indian products less competitive in the Cambodian market and is the main cause of limited exports from India to Cambodia.
 - The second issue is identical markets with comparable prices. Cambodia's exports are predominantly textiles and agricultural produce such as rice, while India is generally self-sufficient with respect to these products.
 - Lastly, the price of Cambodian garment products are more receptive and affordable to US and EU consumers when compared with the Indian market. The prices are further manipulated by India's protectionist policies, especially the "Make in India" initiative.
- Simply put, although India provides duty-free access to most Cambodian products, its domestic products are still generally more competitive given various tax and non-tax incentives provided by the Indian government to local producers and investors under the Make in India scheme.

Cultural Relations

- An MOU on the Establishment of ICCR's Chair on Buddhist & Sanskrit Studies at Preah Sihanouk Raja Buddhist University was renewed in 2016 for a period of 3 years.
- India has been appointed co-chair of the prestigious International Coordinating Committee (ICC) on Preah Vihear, a world heritage site and one of the oldest temples and pilgrimage site of Lord Shiva.

- For the restoration of Preah Vihear Temple, Indian side has conveyed its willingness to carry out restoration and conservation work of Gopura-5 and some segments of Gopura-1 of Preah Vihear.
- Embassy with the support of Ministry of Culture organized a month long Festival of India in Cambodia during January-February 2017. The festival also marked 25th Anniversary of India-ASEAN dialogue partnership.

Tourism

- A MOU on Tourism Cooperation between Indian and Cambodia was signed in 2015.
- Both sides have further agreed to encourage promotion of tourist destinations and circuits considering demand of Buddhist related spiritual sites.
- Cambodia has agreed in principle for the conclusion of 5th freedom traffic rights between Cambodia and India.
- The civil aviation authorities of the two sides held bilateral air services talks and signed a memorandum of Understanding in 2016.

Assessment

- India is the world's second most populous country and a major global economic powerhouse, there is significant potential to boost economic cooperation.
- From Cambodia's perspective, diversifying trading partners provides strategic room for maneuver. Too much reliance on the US and EU markets is not safe and sustainable for Cambodia's long-term economic development. This makes Cambodia look for Indian markets.
- From Indian point of view, geopolitical and economic national interests in Southeast Asia have gained momentum in recent years, especially in order to bolster India's standing as a regional power and to avert the region from falling completely into China's economic dominance.
- This manifests in some recent initiatives from the New Delhi administration, particularly to replace its two-decade-old Look East Policy with an Act East Policy, to revitalise and solidify its regional engagement.
- Cambodia, widely seen as one of China's closest allies in the region, would be under the spotlight as part of India's comprehensive engagement strategies.

Question

India and Cambodia share a historical bond which transcends through the times. Critically analyze.

5.5. India and Thailand

Minister of External Affairs visited Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore.

India – Thailand Relations

Background

- India and Thailand, located in each other's extended neighborhood, share a maritime boundary in the Andaman Sea. India's bilateral relations with Thailand are rooted in history, age-old social and cultural interactions and extensive people to people contacts.
- The shared link of Buddhism is reflected in regular pilgrimages to places of Buddhist interest in India by a large number of Thai people. Hindu elements can be found among those reflected in Thai architecture, arts, sculpture, dance, drama and literature. The Thai language incorporates Pali and Sanskrit influences. A large Indian Diaspora living and working in Thailand is another important bond.
- In the past two decades with regular political exchanges, growing trade and investment, India's ties with Thailand have now evolved into a comprehensive partnership.
- India's 'Act East' policy has been complemented by Thailand's 'Look West' policy in bringing the two countries closer. Both countries are important regional partners linking South and Southeast Asia.
- They cooperate closely in the ASEAN, East Asia Summit (EAS) and BIMSTEC groupings as also Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) and Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).
- The India-AESAN Agreement on Trade in Goods was implemented in 2010 and the India-ASEAN FTA in Services and Investments was signed in 2014 and came into force in July 2015.

Economic Relations

- Thailand is the second largest economy in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS).
- India and Thailand are celebrating 70 years of diplomatic relations in 2017. India's 'Look East' policy (since 1993) and Thailand's 'Look West' policy (since 1996) which has now metamorphosed into India's 'Act East' and Thailand's 'Act West' are strongly contributing in consolidating bilateral relations including economic & commercial linkages.
- Two-way trade in 2016 totaled US \$ 7.72 billion, with about US \$5.15 billion in Thai exports to India and US \$ 2.57 billion in Indian exports to Thailand.
- In the ASEAN region, Thailand ranks as India's 4th largest trading partner after Singapore, Indonesia and Malaysia.
- The fast growing Indian market remains attractive for Thai investors, given the vast opportunities available in infrastructure sector, tourism and retail industries. India continues to remain an interesting market for export of goods from Thailand.
- Currently, Thai goods have benefited from tax reduction under ASEAN-India FTA in Goods, which came into effect from 01 January, 2010 and resulted to the flow of more goods into Indian market.
- An Early Harvest Scheme (EHS), covering 82 products (now 83 products) under the India-Thailand FTA, in place since September 2004, has already resulted in phenomenal growth in our bilateral trade.
- Thailand views India as the gateway to South Asia and beyond. As a result of the reduced tariff rates and new initiatives adopted by both the countries, trade between two countries increased manifold in recent years. Bilateral Trade has multiplied eight times since 2000 to reach US\$ 7.72 billion in 2016.
- There is an active India-Thai Joint Commission (headed by respective Foreign Ministers) as also a well-established India-Thai Chamber of Commerce and an active India-Thai Business Association. A Joint Business Council has been set up since May 2013 with the involvement of the private sector to stimulate expansion of bilateral trade and investments, and facilitate business partnerships.

Defence

- Defence cooperation is growing steadily and forms an important aspect of the multifaceted relationship between India and Thailand. They are important partners linking South and Southeast Asia.
- The India-Thailand defence cooperation comprises regular joint exercises / joint maritime patrols near the international maritime boundary to counter terrorism, piracy and smuggling; training of officers at each other's Armed Forces Training institutions and exchange of visits at various levels.

Culture

- Cultural exchanges take place under the framework of a Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) between the two governments. An Indian Cultural centre was opened in Bangkok in September 2009. Cultural Agreement Programme for 2016-19 was signed during the visit of Thai PM to India in June 2016.
- A number of India Studies Centers are operational in prestigious Thai Universities. Regular visits of Indian cultural troupes are organized, in addition to Indian film and food festivals etc. Embassy in collaboration with Ministry of Culture and several local partners organized Festival of India in Thailand.

Education

- An MoU on Cooperation in the field of Education was signed in 2005. During 2014-15 Government of India offered 130 scholarships to Thai students under its ITEC and ICCR sponsored schemes.
- A large number of Thai students are also studying on self-financing basis.
- In 200, Government of India contributed towards construction of a new building for the Sanskrit Studies Centre at Silpakorn University, Bangkok and has deputed a Sanskrit professor.
- An India Studies Centre is functioning at the Thammasat University of Bangkok since April 1993. The Mahidol University of Bangkok offers a Masters of Arts course on Indian studies.
- A Chair in Chulalongkorn University's India Study Centre was inaugurated in March 2012. Ministry of AYUSH and Rangsit University signed an MOU on establishing a Chair on Ayurveda at Rangsit University.

Indian Diaspora

- It is estimated that there are around 250,000 people of Indian origin in Thailand. Many of them have lived here for several generations over the past century.
- Majority of them hold Thai nationality. The Indian community mainly comprises Sikhs, Punjabis, Gorakhpuris, Tamils and Sindhis.

6. SUMMITS AND ORGANISATION

6.1. Global Economic Prospects Report - 2018

In News

- World Bank forecasts broad-based recovery for global economy.
- Global economic prospects report is the flagship report on global economic future.
- It is a yearly publication by the World Bank group which states the world over economic prospects based on national, regional and global macroeconomic parameters.

Highlights Of The Report

- Global growth reached 3 percent in 2017 - its strongest rate since 2011 in a broad-based upturn. It is predicted to edge up to 3.1 percent in 2018, as a continued recovery in emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) will be able to more than offset a slight moderation in advanced economies.
- EMDE growth is projected to strengthen to 4.5 percent in 2018 in a supportive global environment as activity in commodity exporters gradually dissipate and growth in commodity importers remains robust.
- The global outlook is still subject to downside risks including the possibility of financial stress, increased protectionism, rising geopolitical tensions and over the longer term weaker potential growth.
- Given the prospects for a continued softening of potential growth, structural reforms that spur long-term growth, investment and productivity should take priority.
- Growth in the East Asia and Pacific region is forecast to slip to 6.2 percent in 2018 from an estimated 6.4 percent in 2017. A structural slowdown in China is seen offsetting a modest cyclical pickup in the rest of the region. Though risks to the outlook have become more balanced but stronger than expected growth among advanced economies could lead to faster than anticipated growth in the region.
- On the downside rising geopolitical tension, increased global protectionism, an unexpectedly abrupt tightening of global financial conditions and steeper than expected slowdown in major economies including China pose downside risks to the regional outlook. Growth in China is forecast to moderate to 6.4 percent in 2018 from 6.8 percent in 2017.
- Growth in the Latin America and the Caribbean region is projected to advance to 2 percent in 2018 from an estimated 0.9 percent in 2017. Growth momentum is expected to gather as private consumption and investment has strengthened particularly among commodity exporting economies.
- Additional policy uncertainty, natural disasters, a rise in trade protectionism in the United States or further deterioration of domestic fiscal conditions could throw off the positive growth.
- Growth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is expected to jump to 3 percent in 2018 from 1.8 percent in 2017. Reforms across the region are expected to gain momentum, fiscal constraints are expected to ease as oil prices stay firm and improved tourism is anticipated to support growth among economies that are not dependent on oil exports. Continued geopolitical conflicts and oil price weakness could set back economic growth.
- Growth in the South Asia region is forecast to accelerate to 6.9 percent in 2018 from an estimated 6.5 percent in 2017. Consumption is expected to stay strong, exports are anticipated to recover and investment is on track to revive as a result of policy reforms and infrastructure upgrades. While

setbacks to reform efforts, natural disasters or an upswing in global financial volatility could slow growth.

- India is expected to pick up to a 7.3 percent rate in fiscal year 2018/19 from 6.7 percent in FY 2017/18. This is due to the effects of the large scale reforms initiated by the Government of India. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax and demonetization will boost the economy in general but might have few negatives in the short to medium term. Corporate debt burdens and non-performing loans in the banking sector might weigh down the private investment.
- The report noted that India is a very large economy. It has a huge potential. At the same time it has its own challenges. The current government is very much aware of these challenges and is showing just doing its best in terms of dealing with them.
- On the productivity side, India has enormous potential with respect to secondary education completion rate. All in all improved labor market reforms, education and health reforms as well as relaxing investment bottleneck will help improve India's prospects. In all likelihood India is going to register higher growth rate than other major emerging market economies in the next decade.
- Growth in the Sub-Saharan region is anticipated to pick up to 3.2 percent in 2018 from 2.4 percent in 2017. Stronger growth will depend on a firming of commodity prices and implementation of reforms. A drop in commodity prices, steeper than anticipated global interest rate increases and inadequate efforts to tackle debt could set back economic growth.

Assessment

- Despite a recent acceleration of global economic activity, potential output growth is slowing up.
- The decline has been even steeper in emerging market and developing economies. This slowdown mainly reflects weaker capital accumulation. It is also evidence of slowing productivity growth and demographic trends that dampen labor supply growth.
- These forces will continue and unless countered will depress global potential growth further by 0.2 percentage point over the next decade. Policy options that could slow or reverse this trend include steps to lift physical and human capital, encourage labor force participation and improve institutions.
- The year 2018 will likely mark a turning point for the global economy. For the first time since 2008, the negative global output gap is expected to close. Output gaps should approach zero among emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs) due to the recent recovery in commodity markets as well as among advanced economies.
- Closed output gaps in major advanced economies will allow normalization of monetary policy after a decade of exceptional easing. If advanced economies further withdraw stimulus, EMDE policymakers need to be alert to the potential for adverse spillovers even while pursuing policies to support strong and sustained growth.
- In the next two decades a greater number of educated workers from developing countries will enter the global workforce altering the skill composition of global labor. As emerging market and developing economy (EMDE) per capita incomes draw nearer to advanced-economy per capita incomes between-country (and overall) inequality will decline through 2030. The forthcoming education wave will also reduce inequality within countries especially in EMDEs.

6.2. 4th International Dharma-Dhamma Conference

About The Conference

- The Conference is being organised by Nalanda University in collaboration with the Centre for Study of Religion and Society, India Foundation and the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India,

with an aim to provide an opportunity to academics and policy makers from India and abroad to share ideas and build collaboration for a better world.

- This event is being organized as part of the commemorative events to celebrate the silver jubilee of ASEAN --Indian Dialogue Partnership with the active support of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
- The overall theme of the Conference is “**State and Social Order in Dharma-Dhamma Tradition**” which aims to facilitate cross-pollination of ideas and foster harmony at the global level to explore the shared values of the dharmic traditions that may provide the guiding light to the world today and a vibrant sense of interconnectedness.
- Dharma is a Sanskrit word and Dhamma is a Pali word.
- The notion of Dharma-Dhamma, in its manifold manifestations, including truth and non-violence, peace and harmony, humaneness and spiritual linkages and universal fraternity and peaceful co-existence, served as a moral compass that guided people in the Indian sub-continent through ages and continues to shape and sustain the Indian cultural ethos. The conference aims to focus on the essential identity among diverse dharmic traditions having distinct characteristics and remarkable commonalities.
- India's Act East policy is a reflection of the importance India gives to the strategic partnership with ASEAN and this event is being organized as part of the commemorative events to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership ,15 years of summit-level interaction and five years of strategic partnership.
- The theme of the conference conforms to the founding vision of Nalanda which stressed upon contributing to the promotion of peace and human values by bringing together the entire region of East Asia and Central Asia on one platform of knowledge.

About India Foundation

- India Foundation is an independent research centre focussed on the issues, challenges and opportunities of the Indian polity.
- The Foundation aims at increasing awareness and advocating its views on issues of both national and international importance.
- It seeks to articulate Indian nationalistic perspective on issues. India Foundation’s vision is to be a premier think tank that can help understand the Indian civilizational influence on our contemporary society.

6.3. Raisina Dialogue 2018

About the Raisina Dialogue

- The Raisina Dialogue is a multilateral conference committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community.
- Every year, global leaders in policy, business, media and civil society are hosted in New Delhi to discuss cooperation on a wide range of pertinent international policy matters.
- The Dialogue is structured on the lines of the Shangri-la dialogue as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.

- The conference is hosted by the Observer Research Foundation in collaboration with the Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs.

Highlights Of 2018 Dialogue

- The theme for the 2018 Conference was **“Managing Disruptive Transitions: Ideas, Institutions and Idioms”**.
- This theme was aimed at exploring the shifting dynamics within the global order where old relationships need new directions, emerging partnerships face unprecedented constraints and the notions of power and sovereignty are challenged.
- The Dialogue will foster discussions on the role of institutions, the possibility of collective action and successful responses to these modern developments.
- This year’s inaugural session was attended by Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and Prime Minister of Israel B.Netanyahu.
- The other significant highlight of the event was the coming together of chief of navies of all ‘QUAD’ countries on a platform to discuss maritime security in the India-Pacific region.
- The key discussions held were :
 1. Implications of the changing nature of the workforce on regulation, on skilling and on the hiring process.
 2. Solutions to capital deficit and to incentivise institutional investor funds to direct their funds to the emerging markets.
 3. Russia’s decisive role in the emerging world order and expectations from Putin’s next term.
 4. Assessment of men and women being differently targeted and affected by conflict situations.
 5. The link between gender inequality, politically motivated violence and resultant security politics and conflict resolution mechanisms.
 6. Underrepresentation in leadership positions in academia and policymaking and what objectives implementing a gender bias serves.
 7. The threats that such ‘terror-states’ pose and the preparedness of the international order to respond to the terror groups of a Digital Century.
 8. Both public and private institutions role in overcoming traditional barriers that curtail the effective participation of women in policy and politics.
 9. Role of an innovation-driven geo-economic strategy in forming foreign policy as well as shaping strategic partnerships that energise this process.
 10. Effective strategies for the creation of counter-narratives to those propagated by extremist movements that threaten the global peace.
 11. New dynamics in the Indian and Pacific Oceans for the changing geopolitical and security dynamics as well as new partnerships that may drive regional cooperation.
 12. Other key discussions revolved around Terrorism, importance of India-Pacific region, rise of India as a regional power, threat from China to the region ,cyber security, Indo-US relationship, role of G20 nations, Nuclear threat, changing world order and its affect’s on India etc.

Assessment

- The Raisina Dialogue as a premiere foreign policy conference held annually by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has grown significantly and is taking an institutional character. It also accentuated the shift of power from trans-Atlantic to India-Pacific.
- The Raisina Dialogue basically reflects India's growing prominence internationally and its acceptance by other states in the international system.
- It also allows the Government to self-assess its standing on various issues related to security and international politics.
- At a time, when India is facing a challenge at its borders, the dialogue provides an opportunity for academicians, scholars, researchers, policy makers and journalists to assess the Indian foreign policy afresh.

Observation and Research Foundation(ORF)

- ORF is an independent think tank based in New Delhi established in 1990.
- ORF provides non-partisan, independent analyses and inputs on matters of security, strategy, economy, development, energy, resources and global governance to diverse decision-makers (governments, business communities, academia, civil society).
- ORF's mandate is to conduct in-depth research, provide inclusive platforms and invest in tomorrow's thought leaders today.

Question

What is Raisena Dialogue? Discussing the key issues centered at the dialogue highlight the importance of this event in shaping India's foreign policy.

6.4. International Dam Safety Conference – 2018

India hosted the International Dam Safety Conference - 2018 at Thiruvananthapuram on January 23-24.

About The Conference

- The International Dam Safety Conference-2018 was organized jointly by the Central Water Commission (CWC), Kerala Water Resources Department (KWRD), Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), National Institute of Technology, Calicut (NITC), and College of Engineering, Trivandrum (CET).
- This Conference is fourth in the series, being organized under the aegis of ongoing Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP). CWC is managing DRIP with the financial assistance from the World Bank to rehabilitate about 225 dams in India.
- The earlier conferences organized in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017 received overwhelming response in terms of professional participation, technical papers contributed and participation by Indian and overseas organizations in the exhibition.
- These conferences bring together dam professionals and experts in the various inter-related disciplines from within India and around the world to discuss, reflect and share technology and experience in addressing dam safety issues and strategies to address them.
- The Conference reflects the developments in technologies, materials and instrumentation for dam design, construction, operation, maintenance and rehabilitation including case histories on dam safety issues and solutions.

- The themes for various sessions include Sustainable Dam Safety Initiatives; Uncertainties and Risk Management in Dams; Operation, Maintenance, Rehabilitation and Upgrading of existing dams; Dam Safety Management Practices and Integrated Flood Management for existing dams.
- Seven dam safety guidelines and manuals developed under DRIP was released for implementation during the conference. A software programme - **Dam Health and Rehabilitation Monitoring Application** (DHARMA) – was launched during the conference.
- DHARMA is a web tool to digitize all dam related data effectively. It will help to document authentic asset and health information pertaining to the large dams in the country, enabling appropriate actions to ensure need based rehabilitation. It is a new stride in asset management aspect by India.

Assessment

- Dams have played a key role in fostering rapid and sustained agricultural and rural growth and development, which have been key priorities for the Govt. of India since independence. Over the last seventy years, India has invested substantially in the critical infrastructure required to manage and store the limited surface water resources in reservoirs to ensure food, energy, and water securities.
- Globally India ranks third after China and the United States of America in terms of number of large dams (5254 large dams in operation and 447 large dams under construction) with a total storage capacity of about 283 billion cubic meters.
- About 80% of these large dams are more than twenty-five years old, and about 213 dams exceed the age of 100 years and were built in an era whose design practices and safety considerations do not match with the current design standards and the prevailing safety norms. This necessitates special efforts at rehabilitation of old dams and ensuring their long term structural safety.
- Such conferences not only provides for the platform to discuss and deliberate the issues of dams & dam safety but also acts as an effective awareness cum research platform.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

7. DEFENCE AND SECURITY

7.1. Steps Taken By MHA To Tackle Increasing Cyber Crime

Chairing a meeting on the action plan for the newly created Cyber and Information Security (CIS) Division of the ministry, the Minister of Home Affairs said an Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) and the Cyber Police Force will set up under the CIS.

Background

- Over a period of time there has been phenomenal increase in the use of smart-phones , laptops, computers and internet. With this increase the cyber crimes have also increased many folds and the challenges have increased in front of the law enforcement agencies.
- Cybercrime cases present technical, administrative as well as legal challenge to the maintenance of law and order and internal security of the nation.
- Observing a need to gear up the institutional set up to tackle the menace of cyber crime the Govt. of India last year in November had set up a new division in the Ministry of Home namely - Cyber and Information Security Division.
- This division will deal with matters relating to security clearances, Cyber Security, Cyber Crime, National Information Security Policy & Guidelines (NISPG) and implementation of NISPG etc.
- It will act as a dedicated wing to track and counter online fraud, hacking, identity theft, dark net, trafficking and cyber attacks on critical infrastructure.
- The CIS Division will have four Wings namely Security Clearance, Cyber Crime Prevention, Cyber Security and Information Security Wings each headed by an Under Secretary level Officer.

Proposed Step's By CIS Division Of MHA

- Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), an apex coordination centre in New Delhi will be set up to deal with cybercrimes. It will coordinate with State governments/UTs and closely monitor cyberspace and social media with due emphasis on vernacular content.
- I4C will also block those websites which flout Indian laws and circulate child pornography and communally and racially sensitive content.
- I4C will also maintain list of suspects and leads generated during investigations in cybercrime cases which will be shared with law enforcement agencies.
- Under the new framework being envisaged by the CIS division, state governments will set up State cybercrime coordination cell at headquarter-level and also establish district cybercrime cell. Every state may setup cybercrime coordination cells headed by a senior officer of ADGP/IG rank, designated as State Cyber Crime Coordinator.
- This cell may be responsible for setting up of institutional mechanism for handling cybercrime at District/police station level, guide and facilitate officers of such units, oversee capacity building, provide necessary lab resources, take up investigation of specific cybercrime cases and coordinate with the state cybercrime coordinators of other states in case of offences under IT Act, 2000 that fall under the jurisdiction of two or more states.
- The district cybercrime cells may also be setup as per need, headed by deputy superintendent of police or additional superintendent of police supported by sub inspector / inspector as deemed necessary and at least three domain experts in information technology, mobile telephony, digital forensics, cyber law hired from the market.
- The CIS division has asked States to establish mechanisms to improve training and forensics related to cybercrime in every district and release funds for setting up of cyber-forensic training institutes cum

laboratories. The existing infrastructure at the state and district levels will also be given a boost to generate capacity for tackling cybercrimes.

- It is decided to set up a specialized Cyber Warrior Police Force, keeping the state cyber cells at the foundation of the specialized force.
- An online cyber crime reporting portal for better redressal of complaints is also on the cards.
- A special advisory has been issued to all the states to improve coordination and maintain uniformity in institutional set up and procedures.
- It was also decided that there is a need to bring in expertise and private sector help in this regard will be taken.
- Central govt. decided to fund the required research and development projects which addresses the cyber related issues to keep pace with the fast changing technological world.
- Since cybercrimes are borderless crimes and may involve cooperation with other states or country, it is important to strengthen not only the inter-state cooperation but also international cooperation mechanism.
- Hence, it was also deliberated that India should revisit and reconsider its position on becoming a member of the **Budapest Convention** because of the surge in cybercrime, especially after a push for digital India.
- India until now was declining the membership of the Budapest Convention on several grounds such as security, dominance by developed countries etc.

About Budapest Convention

- International efforts to address cybercrime and e-evidence as a matter of criminal justice have been pursued since 1980s initially by the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) and from the mid-1990s also by G8.
- By 2001 the problems of cybercrime and e-evidence were sufficiently important to warrant an international treaty but cybercrime and information technologies were not yet considered too relevant on national interests and security of states to prevent consensus.
- Therefore, the Budapest Convention was forged by the member-states of the Council of Europe as well as Canada, Japan, South Africa and the US. By August 2016 all of these countries with the exception of two members of the Council of Europe, (the Russian Federation and San Marino) had signed the treaty.
- The Budapest Convention provides for:
 - I. The criminalisation of conduct, ranging from illegal access, data and systems interference to computer-related fraud and child pornography.
 - II. Procedural law tools to make the investigation of cybercrime and the securing of e-evidence in relation to any crime more effective.
 - III. International police and judicial cooperation on cybercrime and e-evidence.

Question

- A. What are the institutional changes government of India is bringing in to better control and restrict the menace of cybercrimes. Explain in detail that how these steps can be better achieved without the support of center-state cooperation.
- B. What do you know of Budapest Cyber Convention and how signing this can help India in its fight against cybercrimes?

7.2. About NRC (National Register of Citizens) Assam**In News**

- Assam's first National Register of Citizens has been published with names of 1.9 crore people as state's legal citizens.
- The NRC, for which a total of 3.29 crore people had filed an application, is aimed at identifying illegal immigrants in the state. The unpublished names are still under stages of verification.
- The next draft will be decided as per the guidelines of the Supreme Court in April, 2018. The process of filing the applications had ended in May, 2018 and a total of 6.5 crore documents were received from 68.27 lakh families across Assam.
- National Register of Citizens, 1951 is a register prepared after the conduct of the Census of 1951 in respect of each village, showing the houses or holdings in a serial order and indicating against each house or holding the number and names of persons staying therein.

Updation of NRC in Assam

- The NRC will be updated as per the provisions of:
 - I. The Citizenship Act, 1955 and The Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.
 - II. Ministry of Home Affairs (Office of Registrar General, India) Order
- As per the two statutes the eligibility status would be ascertained based on the NRC 1951, Electoral Rolls upto 1971 and in their absence the admissible documents upto 24th March (midnight) 1971. The updated NRC shall contain names of persons eligible for inclusion in updated NRC by virtue of being original inhabitants of Assam

Background

- The demands to update the NRC of 1951 were first raised by the All Assam Students Union (AASU) and Assam Gana Parishad more than three decades ago. The organisations had submitted a memorandum to the Centre in January 1980, two months after launching the anti-illegal foreigners Assam Movement.
- In November 1999, at an official-level tripartite meeting to review the implementation of the Assam Accord, a decision was taken that the NRC would be updated.
- The Assam Accord of 1985 did not contain any specific mention of updating the NRC. With regard to the issue of illegal Bangladeshi migrants, the Accord merely stipulated that "Foreigners who came to Assam on or after March 25, 1971 shall continue to be detected, deleted and expelled in accordance with law. Immediate and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners."
- In the absence of any expressed demand for updating the NRC of 1951, the Government of India took no initiative in this regard.
- Instead, it constituted a number of Tribunals and Appellate Courts under both the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act and the Foreigners Tribunal Act to detect illegal Bangladeshis.
- In June 2010 a pilot project in this regard was initiated in two revenue circles -- Barpeta and Chayagaon. However, the project was suspended following violent protests by the All Assam Minority Students Union (AAMSU) which alleged that there were numerous anomalies in the NRC.
- Whereas successive governments have been extremely reluctant to update the NRC of 1951 due to various political considerations and vested interests, the Hon'ble Supreme Court took up the matter in earnestness when the issue was brought before it.

- In the course of hearing a clutch of writ petitions filed by various parties, especially the one by Assam Public Works, an NGO, in July 2009 in which it had prayed for the deletion of illegal voters from the voters' list of Assam and sought updation of the NRC as part of that process, the Supreme Court, brushing aside the delaying tactics of the Union and state governments, ordered them to begin the process of updating of the NRC in Assam.
- The Supreme Court constituted a Committee "to take care of any clarification that would be required with regard to the modalities in the preparation of the NRC." Initially, the date for publication of the final draft of the NRC was set as on or before January 1, 2016. But upon the request of the State Coordinator, the Court agreed to extend the deadline by two years.

Issues At Hand

- The publication of the first draft has not been met with any violent protest as anticipated. However, it has raised serious apprehensions in the minds of those whose names do not figure in the list. The fact that only some of the names of the members of a single family appeared on the list while others did not has also raised doubts about the rigour of the verification process.
- Given that a proper documentation system does not exist in the country for most of those whose names do not appear in the NRC procuring the required documents, especially birth certificates in order to prove their relationships with persons whose names have appeared in the legacy documents and thus establish their citizenship is fraught with difficulties.
- This is particularly so in the case of many settlers who have come to Assam from other parts of the country. State governments, to which documents were sent for verification, have been slow to respond.
- An even more important issue is what happens to those people whose names do not figure in the final NRC and are declared illegal entrants into the state. The popular rhetoric for dealing with such illegal migrants has always been to deport them to Bangladesh, but this is easier said than done.
- Bangladesh has consistently denied that its citizens have illegally emigrated to India. Although the Supreme Court in its order of 2014 had instructed the Government of India to enter into discussions with Bangladesh on streamlining the deportation process but in the absence of any agreement under which Bangladesh agrees to take back its citizens, the Government of India cannot do much except push a few illegal migrants across the border.
- The situation is further compounded by that fact that many illegal migrants who were declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunals have either absconded to other states to evade arrest or are dead.
- Since the deportation of illegal migrants is not feasible, the only option before the government is to let them reside in the country on humanitarian grounds but after stripping them of all citizenship rights.
- Such an option might not go down well with the people of Assam who are at present protesting against the Citizenship Amendment Bill of 2016, which proposes to grant citizenship to all refugees (except Muslims) who have fled religious persecution in their home countries.
- The publication of the updated NRC is a positive step in so far as it puts to rest wild speculations about the extent of the illegal migrant population in Assam and the resulting polarisation that political parties have been exploiting to make electoral gains.
- However, the absence of any clear policy as to how to deal with the proclaimed illegal migrants has created a sense of unease in the minds of many presently residing in Assam.
- Further while the NRC is being updated for Assam, there is no plan to prepare similar NRCs for the other states in the North East where illegal migration continues to be a volatile issue.

- The need of the hour therefore is for the Union Government to allay apprehensions presently in the minds of the people of Assam and take steps to contain any adverse fallout after the publication of the final draft of the NRC.
- At the same time, it also needs to spell out what it intends to do with the persons whose names do not figure in the final NRC. As it may now be unrealistic to insist on hard borders and narrow identities and push for large transfers of populations. A fresh political imagination is required which recognizes that modern nations are a product of migrations and cultural diffusion is necessary to address the citizenship issue in a mature and reasonable way.

7.3. Agni 5

India successfully conducted the "first pre-induction trial" of its over 5,000-km range Agni-V intercontinental ballistic missile which brings the whole of Asia and China as well parts of Europe and Africa within its nuclear strike envelope.

About Agni 5

- Agni -5 is the fifth in the line of the Agni Missiles to strengthen the defence of the Indian armed forces. It is most advanced missile in the Agni series with new technologies incorporated in it in terms of navigation and guidance, warhead and engine.
- It has a range of over 5,000 km (intercontinental).
- Very high accuracy Ring Laser Gyro based Inertial Navigation System (RINS) and the most modern and accurate Micro Navigation System (MINS) has ensured the missile reached the target point within few metres of accuracy.
- The three-stage 17-metre tall, 2 metre wide Agni-5 missile is capable of carrying a nuclear warhead of about 1.5 tonnes.
- The missile so programmed that after reaching the peak of its trajectory it will turn towards Earth to continue its journey towards the intended target with an increased speed due to the attraction of the earth's gravitational pull.
- At present Agni series missiles that India has in its armory are: Agni-1 with 700 km range, Agni-2 with 2,000 km range, Agni-3 and Agni-4 with 2,500 km to more than 3,500 km range. Agni-5 has higher reliability, longer shelf life, less maintenance and enhanced mobility.
- This has made India become a part of the super-exclusive club of countries with ICBMs or inter-continental ballistic missiles after US, Britain, Russia, China and France.

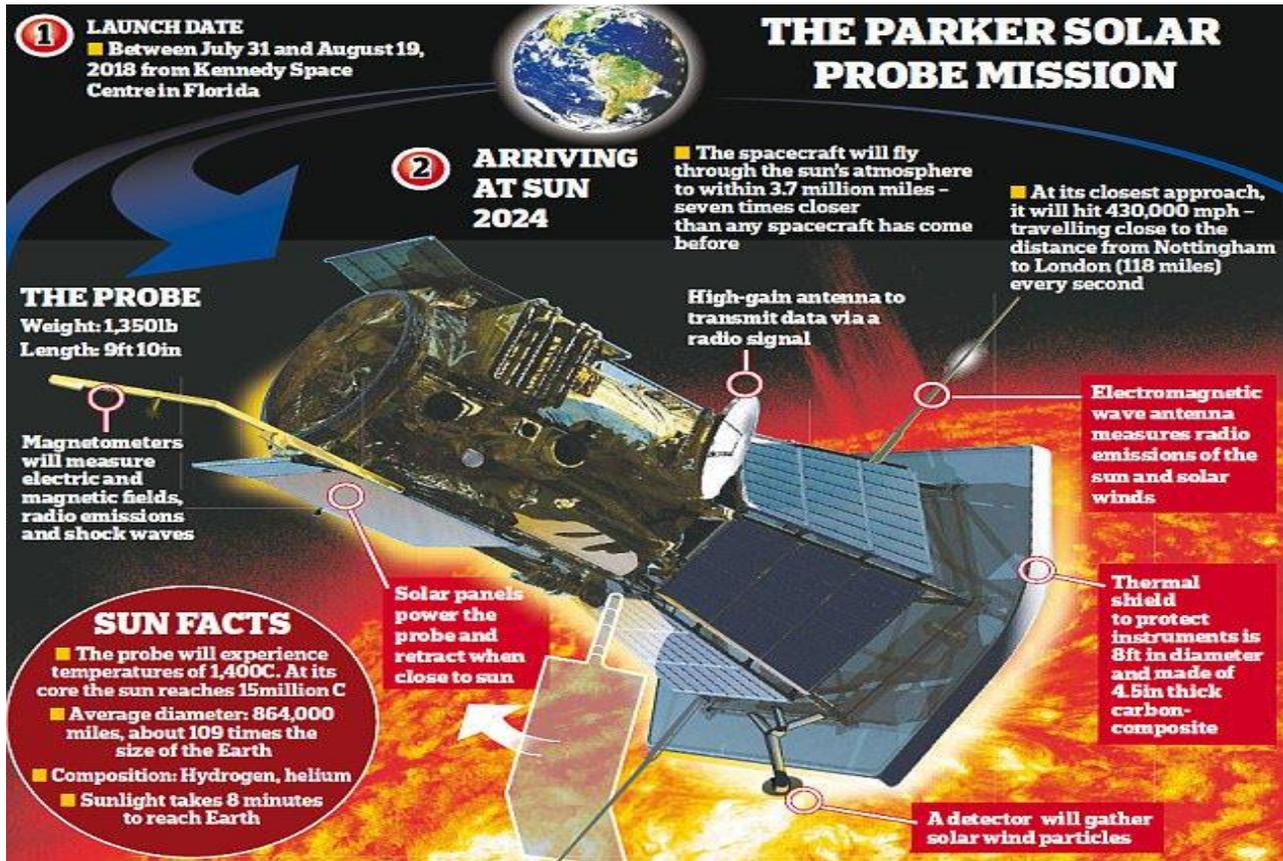
Assessment

- The 21st century is witnessing a greater amalgamation of virtual and real tools in the form of hybrid threats to states ranging from cyber to chemical warfare. Yet kinetic weapons like long-range missiles play a significant role in the prevailing 'no war no peace' (in military parlance, no war, no peace mode refers to a confrontation or face-off position) conditions.
- Development of Agni-5 with a conventional warhead and ability to strike a mobile target like an aircraft carrier will allow India to continue to deter inimical forces from trying to dominate the Indian Ocean region. Such deterrence will assist in retaining peace, stability and freedom of movement in the IOR which is essential for India's as well as whole region's growth and development.

VAJIRAM & RAVI

8. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

8.1. NASA To Launch Parker Solar Probe To Explore Sun's Outer Atmosphere



- NASA is going to launch Parker Solar Probe in 2018 to explore the sun's outer atmosphere. It will be launched onboard of Delta IV Heavy launch vehicle. It will perform its scientific investigations in a hazardous region of intense heat and solar radiation.
- The primary goals of mission are to Trace how energy and heat move through solar corona, explore what accelerates solar wind as well as solar energetic particles. The probe will use Venus' gravity during seven flybys over nearly seven years to gradually bring its orbit closer to the Sun. The spacecraft will fly through the Sun's atmosphere as close as 6.2 million kilometres to our star's surface, well within the orbit of Mercury and closer than any spacecraft has gone before.

8.2. Bharat Bio Typhoid Shot

- Bharat Biotech has received a pre-qualification from the World Health Organisation (WHO) for **Typbar Typhoid Conjugate Vaccine**.
- **Typbar TCV is the first typhoid vaccine clinically proven to be administered to children from 6 months of age to adults**, and confers long-term protection against typhoid fever.
- Typhoid conjugate vaccines (TCVs) are innovative products that have longer-lasting immunity than older vaccines, require fewer doses, and can be given to young children through routine childhood immunization programs.

- The WHO pre-qualification enables the procurement and supplies of this life-saving vaccine to UNICEF, the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO) and GAVI (a vaccine alliance) supported countries.

Typhoid Fever

- Typhoid fever is **caused by the bacterium Salmonella Typhi** (S. Typhi), which infects humans due to contaminated food and beverages from sewage and other infected humans. Symptoms of typhoid include fever, fatigue, headache, abdominal pain, and diarrhoea or constipation.
- Currently, a third of the global population is at risk of typhoid fever, which results in reduced school attendance, loss of work and wages, lowered pregnancy outcomes and impaired the physical and cognitive development of children.
- Urbanisation and climate change have the potential to increase the global burden of typhoid. In addition, increasing resistance to antibiotic treatment is making it easier for typhoid to spread through overcrowded populations in cities and inadequate and/or flooded water and sanitation systems.

8.3. GOLD and ICON Mission To Explore The Ionosphere

- NASA has announced that it would launch two missions to explore the little-understood area of 96 km above Earth’s surface. **The Global-scale Observations of the Limb and Disk (GOLD) mission** will be launched in January 2018, and **the Ionospheric Connection Explorer (ICON)** will be launched later in 2018.
- The two missions were complementary. ICON will be in low-Earth orbit, at 560 km above Earth, like a close-up camera while GOLD will be in a geostationary orbit over the Western Hemisphere, about 35,398 km above the planet’s surface. It will help in full-disk view of the ionosphere and the upper atmosphere beneath it every half hour. The two missions can cooperate with each other when ICON passes through GOLD’s field of view and each mission can get a snapshot of the same region.
- The ionosphere is the ionized part of Earth’s upper atmosphere, from about 60 km to 1,000 km (620 mi) altitude, a region that includes the thermosphere and parts of the mesosphere and exosphere. The ionosphere is ionized by solar radiation. It plays an important role in atmospheric electricity and forms the inner edge of the magnetosphere.

8.4. India’s Fastest Supercomputer

- **Pratyush**, India’s fastest supercomputer yet, was unveiled at the Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM) in Pune.
- Pratyush is a collection of several computers that can deliver a **peak power of 6.8 petaflops**, facilitating the weather forecasting and climate monitoring in the country.

Rank	Site	Rpeak (TFlop/s)	Power (kW)
1	National Supercomputing Center in Wuxi, China	1,25,435.9	15,371
2	National Super Computer Centre in Guangzhou, China	54,902.4	17,808
3	Swiss National Supercomputing Centre, Switzerland	25,326.3	2,272
4	Japan Agency for Marine Earth Science and Technology, Japan	28,192	1,350
5	DOE/SC/Oak Ridge National Laboratory, United States	27,112.5	8,209

- It will help India with better forecasts in terms of monsoon, extreme events, cyclones, tsunamis, earthquakes, air quality, lightning, fishing, hot and cold waves, flood and drought among others. It will enable to map regions in India at resolution of 3 km and globe at 12 km
- **Pratyush is fourth fastest supercomputer in world** dedicated for weather and climate research. **It follows supercomputing machines in Japan, US and United Kingdom.** It will improve rankings of Indian supercomputer from 300s to 30s in Top500 list, a respected international tracker of the world's fastest supercomputers.

8.5. SpaceX Launches Secretive Zuma Mission

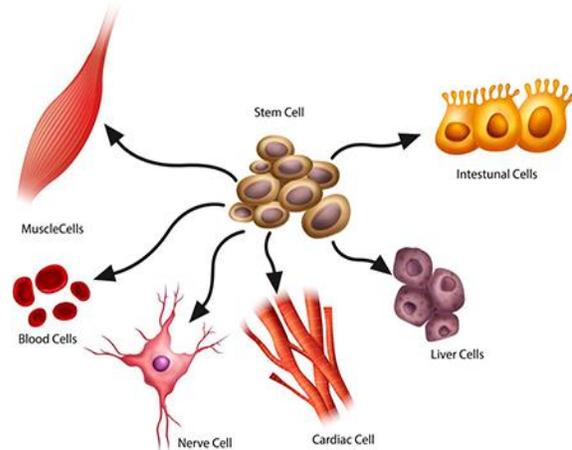
- SpaceX has launched the secret Zuma mission for united state govt. It was launched by using Rocket Falcon 9
- **Zuma Mission:** It is a secret mission in its nature or purpose and the agency behind it remains a mystery. It has been manufactured by Northrup Grumman, Virginia based aerospace and defence company. It was delivered to low-Earth orbit (LEO).
- **SpaceX:** SpaceX (Space Exploration Technologies Corporation) is aerospace manufacturer and space transport services company headquartered in California, US. It was founded in 2002 by Internet tycoon Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla Motors and former PayPal entrepreneur with the goal of creating the technologies to reduce space transportation costs and enable colonization of Mars. SpaceX has developed the Falcon 1 and Falcon 9 launch vehicles, both designed to be reusable, thus reducing the cost of launch. It also has developed Dragon spacecraft to supply cargo to ISS. It is also developing manned version of Dragon.

8.6. Hepatitis C

- Hepatitis C is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis C virus: the virus can cause both acute and chronic hepatitis, ranging in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness.
- The hepatitis C virus is a bloodborne virus and the most common modes of infection are through exposure to small quantities of blood. This may happen through injection drug use, unsafe injection practices, unsafe health care, and the transfusion of unscreened blood and blood products.
- HCV can also be transmitted sexually and can be passed from an infected mother to her baby; however these modes of transmission are much less common.
- Hepatitis C is not spread through breast milk, food, water or by casual contact such as hugging, kissing and sharing food or drinks with an infected person.
- A significant number of those who are chronically infected will develop cirrhosis or liver cancer.
- Antiviral medicines can cure more than 95% of persons with hepatitis C infection, thereby reducing the risk of death from liver cancer and cirrhosis, but access to diagnosis and treatment is low.
- The **Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** is going to roll out **National Programme for Control of Viral Hepatitis**, a new scheme for free treatment of Hepatitis C from the 2018-19 financial year. Under the new scheme, the focus will be on anti-viral treatment of Hepatitis C which will be provided free at all government health set-ups.

8.7. First-Ever Working Human Muscle from Stem Cells

- Scientists from Duke University in North Carolina, US for first time have developed working human skeletal muscle from stem cells in the laboratory.
- Stem cells are undifferentiated biological cells that can differentiate into specialized cells and can divide to produce more stem cells. They are found in multicellular organisms.
- In mammals, there are two broad types of stem cells: **embryonic stem cells and adult stem cells**. Embryonic stem cells can be isolated from the inner cell mass of blastocysts and adult stem cells are found in various tissues which can act as a repair system for the body, replenishing adult tissues.
- Scientists had developed human skeletal muscle using adult skin or blood cells that were reprogrammed into a juvenile, versatile state. These cells were induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) which can become any other type of human cell like naturally-occurring stem cells found in embryos.
- The development is breakthrough that holds promise for sufferers of degenerative muscular diseases. This technique will allow scientists to grow endless amount of functioning muscle in lab to test to test drugs and gene treatments for degenerative diseases.



8.8. India Misses Kala Azar Elimination Deadline

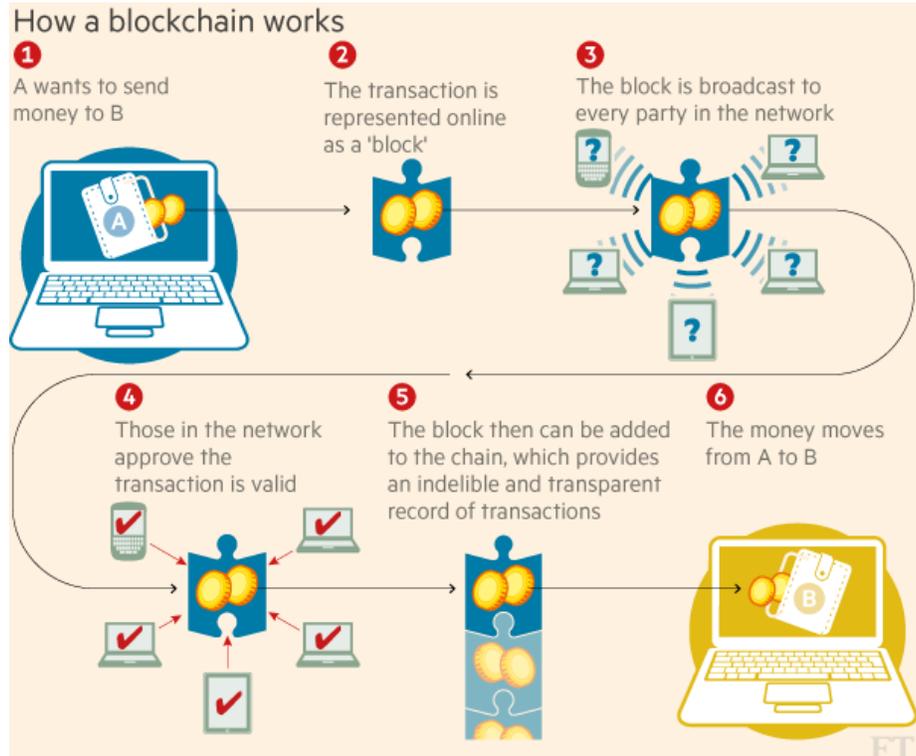
- India has missed the 2017 deadline for elimination of Kala Azar (black fever). In fact, **endemic blocks have increased from 61 to 68 in 17 districts of Bihar and Jharkhand** and related condition called **Post Kala Azar Dermal leishmaniasis (PKDL)** that may act as a reservoir of fresh KA infections is also on the rise.
- Elimination is defined as reducing the annual incidence of **Kala Azar (KA)** to less than 1 case per 10,000 people at the sub-district level.
- Kala Azar is a slow progressing indigenous disease **caused by a single-celled parasite of the Leishmania family. In India Leishmania donovani is the only parasite causing the disease.** The parasite is found in abundance in the bone marrow, spleen and liver.
- Post Kala Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL) is a condition when Leishmania donovani invades skin cells resides and develops there and manifests as dermal lesions. Some kala Azar cases develop PKDL after a few years of treatment.
- KA vector needs to be eliminated to eliminate Kala Azar. As the endemic blocks have majority of houses made from wood, it is very difficult to eliminate the vector as it dwells in the wooden structure and escapes various measures to kill it. Hence to break the infection transmission solution for this issue is to build pucca houses for people in these areas. Secondly even after treatment of Kala Azar patients completely, it is the Post Kala Azar Dermal Leishmaniasis (PKDL) cases which then become source for future KA cases.

8.9. Blockchain Technology

- Currently, most people use a trusted middleman such as a bank to make a transaction. But blockchain allows consumers and suppliers to connect directly, removing the need for a third party.
- Using cryptography to keep exchanges secure, blockchain provides a decentralized database, or “digital ledger”, of transactions that everyone on the network can see. This network is essentially a chain of computers that must all approve an exchange before it can be verified and recorded.

How Does It Work In Practice?

- In the case of Bitcoin, blockchain stores the details of every transaction of the digital currency, and the technology stops the same Bitcoin being spent more than once.
- The technology can work for almost every type of transaction involving value, including money, goods and property. Its potential uses are almost limitless: from collecting taxes to enabling migrants to send money back to family in countries where banking is difficult.
- Blockchain could also help to reduce fraud because every transaction would be recorded and distributed on a public ledger for anyone to see.



8.10. Chinese Scientists Have Successfully Cloned Monkeys

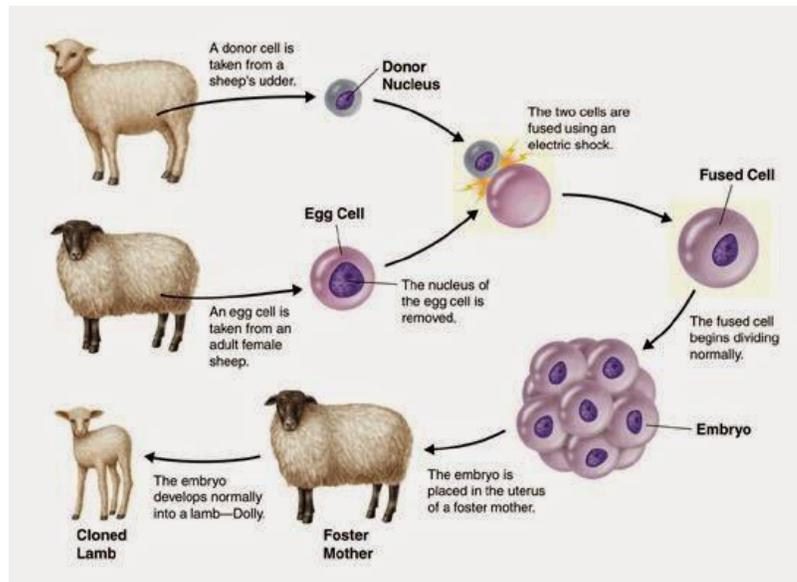
- Chinese scientists for first time have successfully cloned two identical long-tailed macaques (monkeys), named **Zhong Zhong** and **Hua Hua** using same technology that produced Dolly sheep two decades ago.
- **This development makes them world’s first primates – the order of mammals that includes monkeys, apes and humans – to be cloned from non-embryonic cell.**
- These two identical long-tailed macaques were cloned using process called **somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT)**, which involves transferring the nucleus of cell, which includes its DNA, into egg whose nucleus is removed.

Significance

Genetically identical animals are useful in research because confounding factors caused by genetic variability in non-cloned animals can complicate experiments. This development breaks technical barrier for the cloning of primate species, including humans. It will make possible to study diseases in populations of genetically uniform monkey and test new drugs for a range of diseases before clinical use.

8.11. Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer

- In SCNT the nucleus, which contains the organism's DNA, of a somatic cell (a body cell other than a sperm or egg cell) is removed and the rest of the cell discarded. At the same time, the nucleus of an egg cell is removed. The nucleus of the somatic cell is then inserted into the enucleated egg cell. After being inserted into the egg, the somatic cell nucleus is reprogrammed by the host cell. The egg, now containing the nucleus of a somatic cell, is stimulated with a shock and will begin to divide. After many mitotic divisions in culture, this single cell forms a blastocyst (an early stage embryo with about 100 cells) with almost identical DNA to the original organism.



- Stem cells can then be obtained by the destruction of this clone embryo for use in therapeutic cloning or in the case of reproductive cloning the clone embryo is implanted into a host mother for further development and brought to term.

8.12. Rotavac Is The First Indian Designed Vaccine To Pass The WHO Test

- Rotavac became first indigenously developed vaccine from India to be pre-qualified by **World Health Organisation (WHO)**. It means that vaccine can be sold internationally to several countries in South America and Africa.
- The **Rotavac vaccine, developed by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech Limited**, was included in India's national immunization programme.
- The Rotavac vaccine protects against childhood diarrhoea caused by the rotavirus and was built on strain of the virus isolated at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.
- While several vaccines from India have been pre-qualified, this is the first that was entirely developed locally and is a sign that there is a credible industrial, scientific and regulatory process in place to develop vaccines in India.

8.13. What Is Leprosy?

- Leprosy, **also known as Hansen's disease**, is a chronic infectious disease caused by ***Mycobacterium leprae***. The disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes. Leprosy is known to occur at all ages ranging from early infancy to very old age. Leprosy is curable and early treatment averts most disabilities.
- Transmission: The exact mechanism of transmission of leprosy is not known. At least until recently, the most widely held belief was that the disease was transmitted by contact between cases of leprosy and healthy persons. More recently the possibility of transmission by the respiratory route is gaining ground. There are also other possibilities such as transmission through insects which cannot be completely ruled out.

- Signs/symptoms and diagnosis: Clinical signs are easy to observe. In a country or area with a high incidence of leprosy, an individual should be regarded as having leprosy if he or she shows ONE of the following cardinal signs:
 - Skin lesion consistent with leprosy and with definite sensory loss with or without thickened nerves.
 - Positive skin smear

8.14. Pulse Polio Immunization

- As a part of **national immunisation day observed on 28 January**, pulse polio immunisation program for 2018 was launched.
- Polio, or poliomyelitis, is a crippling and potentially deadly infectious disease. It is caused by the poliovirus. The virus spreads from person to person and can invade an infected person's brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis
- The polio virus causes paralysis, called as **acute flaccid paralysis (AFP)**. This is characterised by sudden muscle weakness and fever in one or more limbs.
- India reported its last polio case in 2011 and is also declared polio free by WHO in 2014.
- In India two types of vaccines administered for polio:
 1. Injectable inactivated polio vaccine (IPV)
 2. Oral polio vaccine (OPV)
- **IPV** is administered alone or in combination with other vaccine including OPV.

8.15. India Commissions High Performance Computer System Mihir

- India commissioned its High Performance Computer (HPC) system - **named 'Mihir' (meaning Sun) - at the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting at Noida (NCMRWF)**, Uttar Pradesh.
- The Ministry of Earth Sciences has acquired the HPC facility of 6.8 Peta Flops (PF) and has been installed at two of its constituent units: 4.0 Peta Flops HPC facility at Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune and 2.8 Peta Flops facility at NCMRWF, Noida
- The new HPC facility is expected to improve the following services:
 - a) Weather forecasts at block level over India which can predict extreme weather events.
 - b) High resolution seasonal/extended range forecasts of active/break spells of Monsoon.
 - c) Very high resolution coupled models for prediction of cyclones with more accuracy and lead time.
 - d) Ocean state forecasts including marine water quality forecasts at very high resolution.
 - e) Tsunami forecasts with greater lead time.
 - f) Air quality forecasts for various cities
 - g) Climate projections at very high resolution
- This new HPC facility will not only help in meeting the operational requirements of the ministry of earth sciences (MoES) but also support the research and development activities in MoES and other academic institutions working on various problems related to Earth Science.

8.16. INS Karanj Launched In Mumbai

- The Indian **Navy's third state-of-the-art Scorpene class submarine, INS Karanj**, was launched. The new submarine is named after the earlier Kalvari class INS Karanj, which was decommissioned in 2003.

- **Six Scorpene class submarines are being built under Project 75 by the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL), Mumbai, under a technology transfer agreement signed in October 2005 with the Naval Group of France.**
- The Scorpene class is the Navy's first modern conventional submarine series in almost two decades, since INS Sindhusastra was procured from Russia in July 2000.
- INS Kalvari, manned by a team of eight officers and 35 sailors, carries sea-skimming SM39 Exocet missiles and the heavyweight wire-guided Surface and Underwater Target (SUT) torpedoes. For self-defence, it has mobile anti-torpedo decoys.
- **First of the 6-Scorpene class submarines, INS Kalvari was commissioned in Mumbai last December. The second in the series of six submarine project, INS Khanderi was launched on January 12, 2017 and is undergoing sea trials.**
- All **six diesel-electric attack submarines** will be equipped with an anti-ship missile, which has a proven record in combat, besides other weapon systems.
- The state-of-the-art features of the Scorpene submarines include superior stealth and ability to launch crippling attacks with precision-guided weapons. The attacks can be carried out with torpedoes both while submerged and on the surface in all war theatres, including the tropics, giving it an unmatched invulnerability.
- The submarine has an overall length of 67.5 metres and height of about 12.3 metres. The hull form, fin and hydroplanes are specifically designed to produce minimum underwater resistance.
- Among 6 Scorpene class submarine **the first four submarines will be conventional, while the last two are to be equipped with the Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) system, which will enable the vessel to stay underwater for longer duration.**

9. ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

9.1. Two New Ginger Species Found In The Northeast

- Scientists have discovered two new species of Ginger in easternmost districts, Ukhrul in Manipur and Tuensang in Nagaland, both bordering Myanmar.
- *Hedychium chingmeianum*, the species discovered in Tuensang district, is an epiphytic plant and grows on tall trees, while *Caulokaempferia dinabandhuensis* was found growing in rock crevices, boulders and humus rich soil in the Shirui Hills, where the highest peak stands at an elevation of 2,938 metres.
- Most of the species under the genus *Hedychium* have medicinal properties. It is yet to be ascertained whether the newly discovered species *Hedychium chingmeianum* has medicinal properties or not. The plant, with reddish stems and creamy white flowers.
- The species *Caulokaempferia dinabandhuensis* ,has beautiful oval-shaped pink flowers which appear in June-July.

9.2. Malabar Sanctuary Home To New Night Frog Species

- A new frog from Kerala is the latest contribution to the spurt in amphibian discoveries across India: scientists have just discovered the Mewa Singh's Night frog, belonging to a genus endemic to the Western Ghats, from Kozhikode's Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- According to a scientific paper *The Journal of Threatened Taxa* (an international journal on conservation and taxonomy), the new night frog *Nyctibatrachus mewasinghi* is light brown in colour with an off-white underside, and sports faintly wrinkled skin with prominent granular projections.
- It was found that the frog's genetically closest relatives are the Athirappilly night frog (found south of the Palakkad Gap in Thrissur and Idukki) and the Kempholey night frog (found in the northern Western Ghats of Kerala and Karnataka).
- Morphologically, the Mewa Singh's night frog can be distinguished from these similar-looking and genetically close relatives by several physical characteristics, including the pattern of its webbed fingers and toes. The frog has been named after wildlife scientist Mewa Singh, in honour of his contributions to behavioural ecology and primate studies.
- Frogs in the genus *Nyctibatrachus*, commonly known as night frogs, are found only in the Western Ghats mountain range. The addition of the Mewa Singh's night frog to this group brings the total number of night frogs to 36.
- **Malabar Wildlife Sanctuary** is a protected area located along the Western Ghats and spread across 74 square kilometres. The sanctuary is part of the western ghats, a biodiversity hotspot. It also comes under the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve and forms a part of the Wayanad Elephant Reserve.

9.3. Karnataka To Buy 640 Electric Vehicles Under FAME India Scheme

- Department of Heavy Industries has given permission to purchase the electric vehicles under the National Electricity Mobility Mission of the Central government's Fame India scheme.
- The Department is giving subsidy up to 60 per cent under the scheme with funds to set up infrastructure to charge the vehicles across Bengaluru. Of the electric vehicles, 40 will be buses, 100 cars and 500 three-wheelers.
- The state-run transport corporation will operate the eco-friendly vehicles for the commuting public and protect the city's environment and save fossil fuel.

- The Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid &) Electric Vehicles (FAME) was launched in 2015 to promote eco-friendly vehicles across the country by providing fiscal and monetary incentives for adoption and market creation of both hybrid and electric technologies vehicles.
- The scheme incentivizes all vehicle segments, including two-wheeler, three-wheeler auto, four-wheeler vehicles, light commercial vehicles and buses. The scheme also covers hybrid and electric technologies like a strong hybrid, plug-in hybrid and battery electric vehicles.
- Its mandate is to support hybrid or electric vehicles market development and its manufacturing eco-system to achieve self-sustenance in a specified period.

9.4. New Species Of Blind Fish Discovered Inside Meghalaya Cave

- A new species of blind fish has been discovered inside a cave in East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya, a New Zealand-based science journal has revealed.
- The fish -- Schistura larketensis -- gets its name from Larket village, to encourage local people to take up biodiversity conservation, has apparently lost its sight living in the perpetual darkness inside the cave. It has also lost its pigments too while adapting to its habitat in the dark waters
- The new fish species can also be immediately distinguished from all other species of Schistura, barring Schistura papulifera -- another cave fish from Synrang Pamiang cave system in the same district -- for its vestigial subcutaneous eyes appearing as black spots.
- The orbital diameter gradually decreases as the species matures, with the eyes completely absent in older individuals. Eventually, only small, faintly blackish spot-like depressions appeared in place of eyes, indicating evolutionary and as morphological adaptations.
- The researchers have also expressed regret to see the high level of siltation, pollution and acidification of the water drainage systems in Jaintia Hills due to accumulation of acid mine drainage (AMD) from open-cast coal mining. Several cement plants located on top of the wide and long cave systems are threatening the cave biodiversity as a whole.

9.5. Mankidia Denied Habitat In Simlipal

- Mankidia, one of the 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Odisha, were denied habitat rights inside the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) under the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006.
- The State Forest Department has objected on grounds that tribals could be attacked by wild animals, especially tigers while advocating that habitat rights to PVTG should be confined to Simlipal Tiger Reserve's buffer zone.
- However, tribal rights activists have said the Forest Department continued to play the role of an obstructionist by denying tribals their rights. "Habitat" as defined under Section 2(h) of the FRA (Forest Rights Act) includes the area comprising the customary habitat and such other habitats in reserved forests and protected forests of primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities and other forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes.
- Mankidia, a marginalised group that critically depends on making rope with siali fibre that is richly available in Similipal, would now be deprived of the non-timber forest produce.
- There is no empirical evidence that Mankidias face tiger threat in their villages. For decades, they have been residing inside the core area of the tiger reserve with animals.

- **Particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG)** (earlier: Primitive tribal group) is a government of India classification created with the purpose of enabling improvement in the conditions of certain communities with particularly low development indices.
- The Dhebar Commission (1960-1961) stated that within Scheduled Tribes there existed an inequality in the rate of development. During the fourth Five Year Plan a sub-category was created within Scheduled Tribes to identify groups that considered to be at a lower level of development.
- This was created based on the Dhebar Commission report and other studies. This sub-category was named "Primitive tribal group". The features of such a group include a pre-agricultural system of existence i.e. practice of hunting and gathering, zero or negative population growth, extremely low level of literacy in comparison with other tribal group.
- In 2006 the government of India proposed to rename "Primitive tribal group" as Particularly vulnerable tribal group.

- Similipal, which derives its name from '*Simul*' (Silk Cotton) tree, is a national park and a Tiger Reserve situated in the northern part of Orissa's Mayurbhanj district. The tiger reserve is spread over 2750 sq km and has some beautiful waterfalls like Joranda and Barehipani.
- The Government of India declared it as a biosphere reserve in 1994. UNESCO added this National Park to its list of Biosphere Reserves in May 2009. This tiger reserve also comes under Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve that includes the adjacent Hadgarh and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuaries.
- Apart from its biodiversity, the region around Similipal forests is home to a variety of tribes. Prominent among these are Kolha, Santhala, Bhumija, Bhatudi, Gondas, Khadia, Mankadia and Sahara.

9.6. Territorial Army Battalion Of Ex-Armymen To Clean Ganga

- As Part of its mission to clean the Ganga by 2020, the Central government has sanctioned the raising of a Territorial Army (TA) battalion comprising ex-servicemen of the Army.
- This battalion will be raised in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, in February 2018, as a Composite Ecological Task Force (CETF) battalion of TA for National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).
- It will be raised "as a pilot project", and "will be responsible for the tasks and activities related to resurrecting the Ganga".
- The battalion will be responsible for monitoring ecological and environmental projects related to the river, and also raise public awareness through campaigns, the official document states.
- The exact charter of duties is still to be finalized. However, it is expected that besides planting trees and checking soil erosion, the CETF TA will also manage public awareness campaigns, patrol sensitive river areas for the protection of biodiversity, keep a tab on the river pollution levels, assist the government in enforcing pollution control measures, support local civil administration and police in managing the ghats, and provide support and assistance if and when there is a flood or natural disaster in the region.
- The **Indian Territorial Army (TA)** is a second line of defence after the Regular Indian Army; it is not a profession, occupation or a source of employment. It is only meant for those people who are already in mainstay civilian professions; in fact, gainful employment or self-employment. Civil profession is a prerequisite for joining the Territorial Army.

9.7. Government Rejects Tibetan Antelope Breeding Suggestions

- The Union environment ministry has turned down a suggestion by a Parliamentary panel to consider captive breeding of the Tibetan antelope, Chiru, a protected species once harvested for shahtoosh shawls, saying it will serve neither conservation nor weavers' interests.
- The ministry has told the parliamentary standing committee on science, technology and environment that the Tibetan antelope is critically endangered and accorded the highest degree of protection and any attempt to breed the animal would be neither economical nor feasible.
- The Tibetan antelope is protected under India's Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, which bans any hunting or trade in its parts and products, including shawls. But the parliamentary panel had in March 2017 asked the ministry to consider efforts to breed the animal to add "sustainable livelihood opportunities" for shawl-makers in Jammu and Kashmir
- The panel had cited antelope breeding efforts in China and Mongolia in its recommendation. But the environment ministry has pointed out that it takes three to five hides to make a single shawl and the antelopes have to be killed because the underfur, or wool used to make the shawl, cannot be sheared for its extraction.
- The ministry said the antelope inhabits the high altitude regions of Ladakh and the Tibetan plateau and requires a large expanse of land for movement to fulfill its feeding and breeding requirements. The quality of its wool depends on the cold and harsh climatic conditions at altitudes of between 3,800 metres and 5,500 metres.
- According to the government, maintaining the antelopes below this altitude will not serve any purpose. And any attempt at conservation breeding in Ladakh at altitudes of above 3,800 metres may be "neither economical nor feasible" because humans cannot be posted there continuously for more than two to three months

9.8. New Moth Species Discovered In Arunachal Pradesh

- Researchers have discovered a new species of moth from the Talle Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh.
- **They suggested that the new species, scientifically named *Elcysma Ziroensis*, be commonly called Apatani Glory, named after a local tribe called Apatani.**
- This species has only been seen during autumn, notably in the month of September, indicating that it is a univoltine species, meaning it has one brood of young in a year.

9.9. Sikkim Allows People To Forge Fraternal Ties With Trees

- Recently the Government of Sikkim came up with a unique way of preserving trees by encouraging people to forge a relationship of brotherhood or sisterhood with trees through a practice locally known as Mith/Mit or Mitini.
- A recent notification by the Forests, Environment & Wildlife Management Department, Government of Sikkim titled Sikkim Forest Tree (Amity & Reverence) Rules 2017 states that the "State government shall allow any person to associate with trees standing on his or her private land or on any public land by entering into a Mith/Mit or Mitini relationship.
- The notification also states that a person can also adopt a tree "as if it was his or her own child in which case the tree shall be called an adopted tree."
- A third way to forge a relationship with a tree is by "preserving a tree in remembrance of a departed relative in which case the tree shall be called a smriti tree."

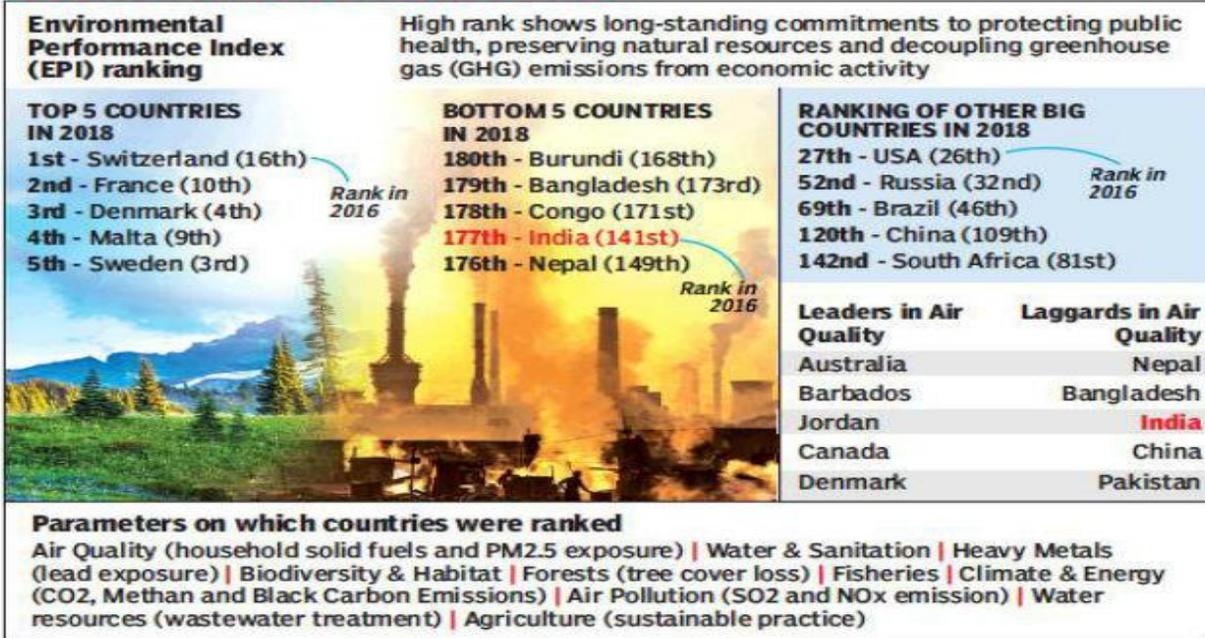
- In case an individual wants to forge a relationship with a tree which does not stand on his or her land but another's, the person concerned shall execute an agreement with the owner and compensate him or her in terms of the market value of the timber or the wood contained in the tree.
- In the second scenario if the person desires to enter into a relationship with a tree located on public land then permission from the said department or agency needs to be taken.
- For every clause, the Sikkim Forest Department has issued specific forms which a person will have to fill up and submit to the forest authorities. The notification states that after verification the Assistant Conservator of Forests will register the tree in the name of the person concerned.

- As per the Forest Survey of India, 2015 the forest cover of Sikkim is 47.80 % of the State's total geographical area. Over the past few years, the State government has also started an initiative of identifying heritage trees where 21 trees of 25-ft. girth and above and 32 trees of 20-25 ft. girth have been demarcated as heritage trees.
- The Sikkim Forest Tree (Amity & Reverence) Rules also prohibit felling or damage to any tree registered as Mith/Mit or Mitini, adopted or smriti and points out that any such violation shall be treated as a forest offence

9.10. India Ranks 177 Out Of 180 In Environmental Performance Index(EPI)

- India is among the bottom five countries on the Environmental Performance Index 2018, plummeting 36 points from 141 in 2016, according to a biennial report by Yale and Columbia Universities along with the World Economic Forum.
- Its overall low ranking — 177 among 180 countries — was linked to poor performance in the environment health policy and deaths due to air pollution categories.
- India's low scores are influenced by poor performance in in the Environmental Health policy objective. Deaths attributed to PM2.5 have risen over the past decade and are estimated at 1,640,113, annually.
- Despite government action, pollution from solid fuels, coal and crop residue burning, and emissions from motor vehicles continue to severely degrade the air quality for millions of Indians," the report said. The EPI said air quality remains the leading environmental threat to public health.
- Pollution is particularly severe in places such as India and China, where greater levels of economic development contribute to higher pollution levels [World Bank and Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2016].
- As countries develop, increased population growth in large cities, as well as increased industrial production and automotive transportation, continue to expose people to high levels of air pollution.

SWITZERLAND TOPS LIST



9.11. Zero Budget Natural Farming Project

- The Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) project has been launched by the Himachal Pradesh government to promote organic farming. The project was launched from the Palampur Agriculture University, which has dedicated 25-acre land to practice the zero budget farming model.
- The programme is made of a set of natural farming methods under which the cost of growing and harvesting plants is zero. The programme is a bit different from organic farming as this practice believes more in natural growth of crops without adding any fertilizers and pesticides or any other foreign elements
- The programme involves almost no monetary investment and envisages the use of 'Jeevamrutha' and 'Beejamrutha' (sources of beneficial bacteria). 'Zero Budget' refers to zero net cost of production of all crops, which means that farmers don't have to buy fertilizers and pesticides to ensure the healthy growth of crops
- The main aim of ZBNF is to eliminate the use of chemical pesticides and use biological pesticide instead. The farmers are advised to use cow dung, urine, plants, human excreta, earthworms and similar biological fertilizers for crop protection. The practices not only protect soil from degradation but also help in retaining soil fertility
- They also lower the cost of inputs of farmers and give better capacity to increase their income.

