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Current Affairs

MADE EASY

March, 2018

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AGRICULTURE LOAN WAIVERS

In February 2018, Rajasthan government announced a one-time crop loan waiver for small and marginal farmers and land revenue exemption. This will cost Rs 8,000 crore to the state exchequer.

Background:

- Agriculture loan waivers are not a recent phenomenon in India.
- **Colonial era:**
 - ♦ Famine Commissions were appointed which recommended that agricultural loans could be advanced.
 - ♦ On their recommendation the Usurious Loan Act, 1918, was enacted which authorized the Judiciary to relieve the debtors of the liability to pay excessive interest.
- **Central Debt Waivers:**
 - ♦ In the independent India, the alarming levels of indebtedness resulted in the first loan waiver decision taken in 1990 and the Agriculture and Rural Debt Relief Scheme was approved. The scheme was implemented during 1990-91.
 - ♦ In 2008, UPA government announced an Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008.
- **Recently announced State Loan Waivers:**
 - ♦ In June 2017, Maharashtra Government announced agricultural loan waiver which is expected to benefit 8.9 million farmers and which would cost Maharashtra Exchequer Rs. 340 billion.
 - ♦ In 2017, UP Government announced that it would be financing the loan waiver from its budgetary resources. Karnataka has also announced a debt waiver to the tune of Rs. 81.7 billion for farmers availing loans from co-operatives.
 - ♦ The latest to join is Rajasthan, which has announced waiver of all farm loans up to Rs. 50,000 per farmer.

Arguments in favour:

Following arguments are given by some in favor of granting loan waivers:

- Objective of Loan waiver is to provide relief to the ailing rural economy and bring some respite to the distressed farmers as a large population is dependent on agriculture.
- Farmer suicides are rising and one of the main reasons is indebtedness. Nothing is more important than saving the life of a farmer and thus one shouldn't question loan waivers.
- Also if the government can give tax sops to industries corporate and units setup in special economic zones then why can't it waive off the loans of farmers who are at the base of food security.

Arguments against:

But various experts like former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan and committee's (such as the CAG performance audit of the

Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008 and expert group headed by Radhakrishna on indebtedness) have criticized agriculture loan waivers on various grounds.

A. Negative effect on economy:

1. Rising NPA's:

- ♦ This scheme had made people unenthusiastic about repaying their loans in anticipation of future write-offs esp. when assembly elections are due.
- ♦ This has increased the rate of non-repayment and thus has contributed to the rise of non-performing assets (NPAs) which is not good for economy.
- ♦ In 1990, there was a loan waiver by the VP Singh government, and it took almost nine years for banks to recover from this scheme worth Rs10000 crore.

2. Leads to fiscal deficit:

- ♦ Loan waivers cost tax payers. For instance, about Rs. 525 billion was spent on the loan waiver of 2008, as per the International Council for Research on International Economic Relations.
- ♦ This increases government's fiscal deficit.

B. Might be good for individual farmers, but not for agriculture:

We should ask this question that, is this scheme the best possible way to address the issues of agrarian crisis? Would the loan waiver scheme help to reduce farmer suicides?

1. Non-productive use of credit:

- ♦ CAG report found that many beneficiaries took loans for non-agricultural purposes. About Rs 20.5 crore were spent on debt waivers for these kinds of loans.
- ♦ Farmers can never repay a loan if a major portion of loan credit is used for unproductive purpose.
- ♦ **So, the loan waiver scheme might be good for 'farmers' as individuals, but not for 'agriculture'.**

2. Priority Sector lending targets not met:

- ♦ Major reason for banks to violate priority sector and other guidelines is the non-repayment of loans by farmers.
- ♦ Thus banks will become reluctant in future to give loans for agriculture sector.

3. Over-emphasis of credit:

- ♦ Credit in agriculture has been given too much importance while other factors responsible for productivity (like ensuring irrigation, timely inputs and technology) and improved market opportunities have been ignored.

- ♦ According to the Radhakrishna committee, various factors contribute to this crisis of indebtedness such as “stagnation in agriculture, increasing production and marketing risks, institutional vacuum and lack of alternative livelihood opportunities.”

4. Short-term:

- ♦ The benefits of the loan waiver scheme would be very short-term, and the same problem of indebtedness might arise in the next season also.
- ♦ This is because due to the lack of a long-term solution in this approach, the productivity and the yield will not increase and many farmers would continue to be defaulters.
- ♦ **We should remember that “Loan waiver is an attempt to cure the symptom and not the disease.”**

C. Flaws in the concept of loan waivers:

Even if we believe for a moment that loan waiver is a solution then we should realize the concept is flawed due to various reasons:

1. Land holding is the wrong criteria:

- ♦ The scheme aims to help the small and marginal farmers, but the definition on the basis of the size of land holdings does not make much sense.
- ♦ According to MS Swaminathan, in rain-fed, arid, and semi-arid areas, income from agriculture is very uncertain even for farmers having 4 or 5 hectares of cultivatable land and is closely dependent on the behavior of monsoon.

2. Discouraging the honest farmers:

- ♦ Loan waivers create a moral hazard by effectively punishing those who repay their loans.
- ♦ The farmers who have invested out of their savings rather than borrowings would be deprived of the benefit of this scheme.
- ♦ Also, the scheme covers only crop loans, and farmers who have invested in infrastructure would be discriminated against even though they have to pay back the loans out of crop yields only.

3. Ignores informal source of credit:

- ♦ Informal sources of credit outweigh the formal sources in case of small and marginal farmers.
- ♦ Still, the problem of indebtedness due to informal sector lending is not considered in the loan waiver scheme.

4. Ignores landless laborers:

- ♦ Landless laborers are even more vulnerable as they do not even have the option to sell land. There is no respite for the landless laborers in the loan waiver scheme.

D. Flaws in the implementation of loan waivers:

Following below are the findings of the CAG performance audit of the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008 –

1. **Inclusion, exclusion errors:** 13.5% of the eligible beneficiaries were excluded from the list of eligible farmers, while 8.5% of the beneficiaries were not eligible for debt waiver.

2. **Ineligibility to get fresh loans:** In almost 6% of the audited accounts, farmers were not extended relief in accordance with their entitlements. I.E. they were deprived of their rightful benefits.

3. **Extension of fresh credit:** After extending benefits under the scheme, the lending institutions were required to issue certificates to farmers to ensure that the farmer was eligible for applying for fresh loans from the institution. However, in many cases it was not done. And due to this, farmers could not apply for a fresh loan.

4. **Monitoring:** There was Lack of independent checks by RBI and NABARD on the lending institutions.

E. Political aspect:

1. **Vote-bank politics:** It is just a political move to get votes. It's a perfect example of vote-bank politics.
2. **Politically unsound:** This scheme has created a discontent among the non-beneficiary group of farmers and amongst most of the urban people.

WAY AHEAD:

Medium to Long term measures (Alternative use of resources):

- There could have been an alternative use of the huge amount of government resources that have been spent on the loan waiver scheme, to help all the farmers in general that are suffering due to the 'Agricultural Crisis'.
- The budget should give a large push to core issues like public investment in infrastructure, land and water management including rain water conservation and watershed development, research and extension, price stabilization etc, to make cultivation viable and profitable.
- Various studies have shown that improved accessibility due to investment in rural roads gave the farmers a chance to learn about modern agro-economic practices, improved the accessibility to input markets and has reduced transportation costs.
- Apart from this, crop insurance should emerge as the main vehicle to cope with rural distress. Instead of stressing on loan waivers, government should ensure proper implementation of Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana.

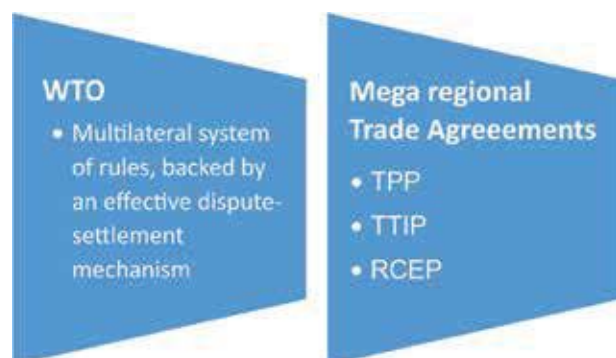
Short term measures:

The above recommendations are long term measures, and even if indebtedness is not the major cause of agrarian crisis and is just a symptom, it is still a cause of distress. Thus there has to be a short term measure to take care of this issue.

- 'Report of Expert Group on Indebtedness' chaired by Radhakrishna has recommended (i) Rescheduling of Loans of Farmers Affected by Natural Calamities and (ii) Formalization of Informal Credit to solve the problem of rural indebtedness are very relevant.
- An attempt can be made to restructure bad farm loans (particularly in regions where farmers' suicides have taken place), as in the case of industry, before writing them off.

MULTILATERALISM TO MEGA REGIONALISM

In January 2018, during the visit of ASEAN Leaders to India, the two sides announced in Delhi Declaration that efforts would be intensified towards creating a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).



Background:

- A cardinal principle for WTO negotiations is consensus. The WTO works on the principle of one vote for each member country, irrespective of size or economic power. This principal though good in theory have created increasing complexities in a multipolar WTO with a membership of over 160 countries.
- The Negotiation process under WTO being a painfully slow one requiring broad-based consensus has led to growth of mega-regional trade agreements.
- **Major agreements under negotiation are:**
 - ♦ Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).
 - ♦ Regional Cooperation for Economic Partnership (RCEP).
 - ♦ Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).

Reasons for Surge of Mega-Regional Trade Agreements:

- **Dissatisfaction with progress of WTO**
 - ♦ Unwillingness on the part of Developed nations to provide market access; Failure in implementation of Doha development agenda; apparent north-south divide in WTO Ministerial conferences etc.
 - ♦ Recent failure of 11th WTO Ministerial conference at **Buenos Aires** in December 2017 even to reach a consensus on Ministerial declaration reaffirms need for emergence of Mega-regional trade agreements.
- Increased involvement of big developed countries like USA and EU with developing countries on a bilateral or regional level.
- Mutual Gains due to removal of trade barriers among countries.
- Spectacular growth of emerging economies like China and India.
- Global slowdown and creation of excess production capacities in the developed countries.

Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)/ now Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP):

- Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a trade agreement between 12 Pacific Rim countries: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, United States and Vietnam signed on 4 February 2016.
- TPP represented 40% of Global GDP and 33 % of World trade.
- As his first executive decision, U.S. President Donald Trump withdrew from TPP signalling his commitment to 'America First' campaign promise.
- Since then, US is seeking to promote bilateral trade deals, renegotiate existing trade deals, and impose trade restrictions to protect American businesses, which signifies trend towards protectionism/anti-globalisation.
- **Recent development: CPTPP**
 - ♦ The other 11 countries except US, have now agreed for new trade agreement called **Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership**, which is amended version of TPP and now expected to be signed in March 2018.
 - ♦ **CPTPP** includes all the original members of the TPP except the United States: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, and Vietnam.
 - ♦ Combined GDP of CPTPP would be **13.4% of global GDP** significantly less than 36% of TPP but still CPTPP would be one of the biggest trade agreement.
 - ♦ Although CPTPP would not be large enough to rewrite the rules of global trade (when compared with TPP), it has significant potential and has attracted attention from non-members such as South Korea, Indonesia and even U.K.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP):

- RCEP is a comprehensive free trade agreement under negotiation between 16 countries: the 10 ASEAN Member States and ASEAN's free trade agreement (FTA) partners viz. Australia, China, India, Japan, Korea and New Zealand.
- The RCEP aims to be the largest free-trade bloc in the world, covering about **3.5 billion people** and **30 per cent of the world's GDP**.
- **Scope of Negotiation under RCEP:** Broad spectrum of issues such as Trade in Goods, services, investment, economic & technical cooperation, intellectual property, competition and dispute settlement.

• Significance of RCEP for India:

- ♦ It is strategically important for India in the context of India's **Act East Policy**.
- ♦ India is not part of other two Mega regional trade blocks i.e. TPP and TTIP, Membership of RCEP would **reduce the negative fallout** of other regional trade pacts over Indian economy.
- ♦ RCEP will create opportunities for Indian companies in sectors where India has competitive advantage like information and communication technology, IT-enabled services, professional services, healthcare, and education services.
- ♦ RCEP is expected to **harmonize trade-related rules**, investment and competition regimes of India which could facilitate Indian companies plug into **regional and global value chains**.
- ♦ RCEP will **boost inward FDI** and provide **access to new Markets**.
- ♦ RCEP would help India streamline the rules and regulations of doing trade, which will **reduce trade costs** and improve ease of doing business in India.

• Challenges/Concerns of RCEP for India:

- ♦ Several countries are putting pressure on India to commit to zero tariffs on more than 90 per cent of items for all members including China. This would mean withdrawal of protection to domestic Industries and farmers from indiscriminate competition.
- ♦ **Indirect FTA with China:**
 - ♦ India does not have any FTA with China, neither there is any such negotiation going on.
 - ♦ With China India has already huge trade deficit of more than \$50 billion per annum, any FTA with china would result into flooding Indian markets with cheap Chinese products, which would further increase the trade deficit.
- ♦ Many RCEP members are now asserting inclusion of substantial commitments in the area of **e-commerce** and **investment facilitation** — the two areas where India wants to preserve its sovereign right for policymaking.
- ♦ India's main interest is in liberalisation of service sector, including easier work visa norms. Most of the 15 partner countries of the RCEP, particularly the 10-member ASEAN countries, have **not made any substantial offers in Mode 4** related to movement of workers and professionals, despite repeated push by India.
- ♦ RCEP may have adverse impact over India's policies of rural development and industrialisation especially '**Make in India**'.
- ♦ In the area of **intellectual property rights**, several members have been pushing provisions that go beyond TRIPS, with could have serious adverse consequences for **Indian generic medicines** manufacturers.

- ♦ Agreeing to **data exclusivity, extending patent terms** and unduly strong enforcement measures will weaken the entire generic medicine sector and take away several health safeguards in India's Patent Act, notably section 3(d).

Do You Know?

Definition of Service Trade under General Agreement on trade in Services (GATS)

Mode 1: Cross Border Supply (e.g. Business process outsourcing, telemarketing etc.)

Mode 2: Consumption Abroad (e.g. Tourists, patients or students)

Mode 3: Commercial Presence (e.g. Banks, hotels etc.)

Mode 4: Presence of Natural Persons (e.g. movement of professionals, or Consultant)

Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

- The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a proposed trade agreement between the United States and the European Union.
- **Objective:** The aim is to boost the economies of the EU and the US by removing or reducing barriers to trade and foreign investment.
- **Scope:** The agreement is under ongoing negotiations and its main three broad areas are: market access; specific regulation; and broader rules and principles and modes of co-operation.

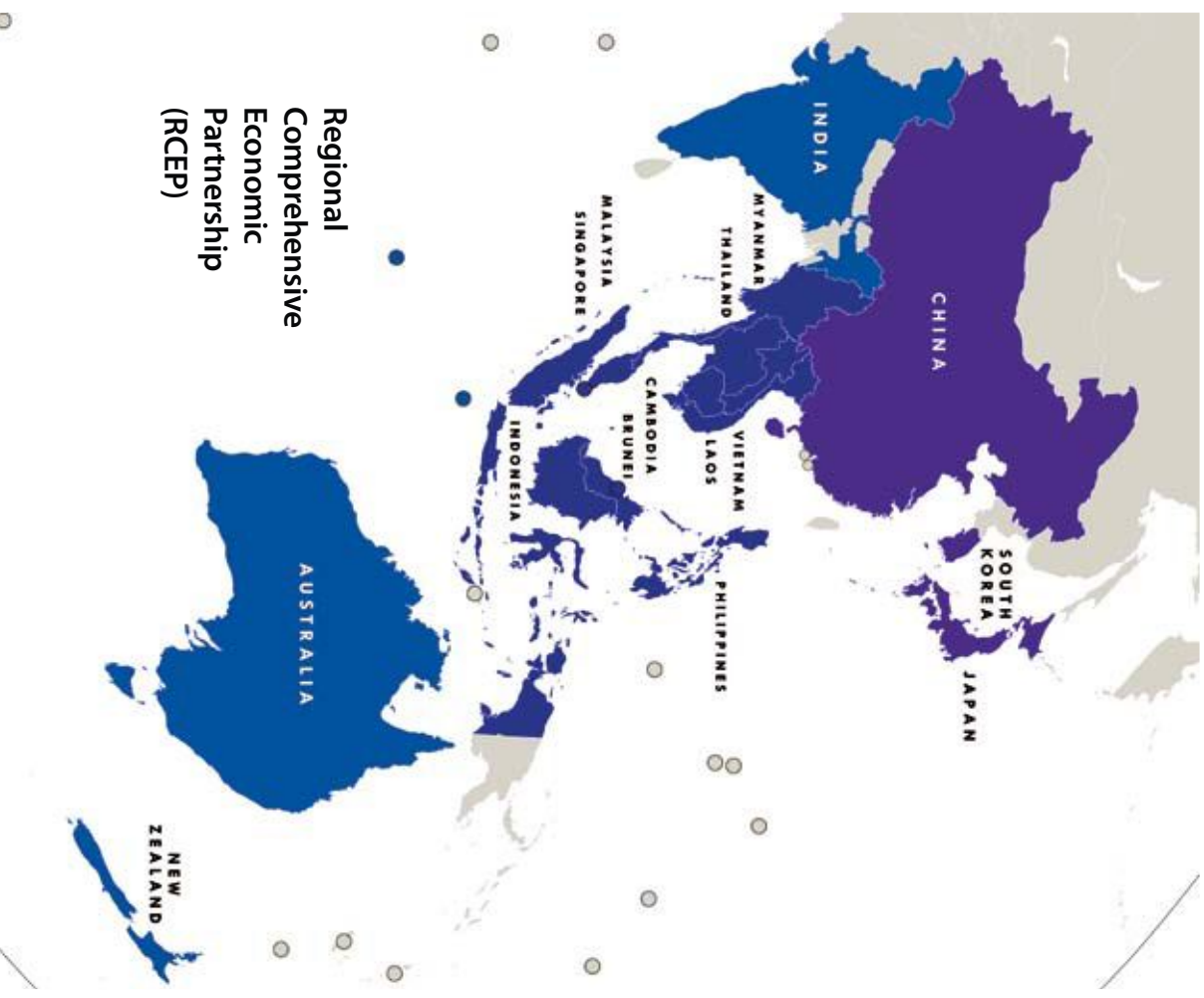
Way ahead for India in backdrop of growing Mega-Regionalism:

- India signed Free trade agreement with ASEAN (2010), South Korea (2009), Japan (2011). However, it is believed that India's Trade partners gained more from these agreement than India due to poorly developed manufacturing sector.
- Hence, it is time to increase the competitiveness of manufacturing sector by improving logistics infrastructure and trade facilitation.
- India should help its Manufacturing Industry to **adjust to global standards** on technical barrier to trade and **Sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS)**.
- India need to participate actively with RCEP and should seek to join Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC).
- India should make efforts to revive the primacy of Multilateral trading system like WTO, which better serve Indian Interest.
- India should deepen its trade relations with India's **major trade partners like EU and USA** by removing barrier to the movement of goods and services.
- India should **increase its investment in Research and Development** and should create conducive environment for creativity and innovation.

TPP Trans-Pacific Partnership



**Transatlantic
Free Trade Area (TAFTA)
or Transatlantic Trade and
Investment Partnership (TTIP)**



**Regional
Comprehensive
Economic
Partnership
(RCEP)**

PROTECTIONISM

At Davos, World Economic Forum 2018 PM Narendra Modi condemned protectionism in the world and equated it with terrorism as being an equally serious threat to the world.

Meaning of Protectionism:

- Protectionism points towards the government policies that restrict free trade between particular countries, seeking to protect the local industries and jobs from unfair foreign competition.

Means of carrying out Protectionism:

- 1. Import Tariffs:** Taxing imported goods at a higher price to make them costlier and less-competitive in the domestic market.
- 2. Quantitative Quotas on Imported Goods:** Limiting the number of products that can be procured from the international market, thereby reducing their presence domestically.
- 3. Providing Subsidies to Domestic Companies:** This involves subsidizing costs or providing cheap loans to domestic players in order to make their product cheaper. Consequently, their competitiveness increases against the foreign goods.
- 4. Administrative Barriers:** Excessive government regulations can place huge burdens on foreign imports, making it difficult to sell them in domestic markets.
- 5. Manipulating Exchange Rate:** Deliberate attempt by a country to lower its currency value. It makes imports costlier and exports cheaper resulting in free market distortion.
- 6. Trade Defence Measures:** There are three types of trade defence instruments: antidumping (AD) measures, countervailing measures and safeguard measures within the framework of WTO can be utilised as potent means for protectionism.
- 7. Domestic Content Requirement:** To force foreign firms to produce or source domestically what they would otherwise produce in or source from another country.

Viability of protectionist policies:

- In the short run:**
 - If a country is trying to grow strong in a new industry, tariffs will protect it from foreign competitors. That gives the new industry's companies time to develop their own **competitive advantages**.
 - Protectionism also temporarily **creates jobs** for domestic workers. The protection of tariffs, quotas or subsidies allows domestic companies to hire locally.
 - This benefit ends once other countries retaliate by erecting their own protectionism.
- In the long run:**
 - In the long term, trade protectionism weakens the industry. Without competition, companies within the industry have no need to innovate.

- Eventually, the domestic product will decline in quality and become more expensive than what foreign competitors produce.
- With more countries adopting protectionist measures, the global economic growth decreases and global trade suffers.

Analysing the Degree of Protectionism in the Present Scenario:

- Data from the World Bank and Global Trade Alert point out that the world's top 60 economies have adopted more than 7,000 protectionist trade measures on a net basis since the financial crisis of 2008.
- The tariffs are now worth more than \$400 billion.
- The United States and European Union are each responsible for more than 1,000 of the restriction.
- India is next with over 400 followed by Argentina, Russia and Japan.
- During the same time, just three – Brazil, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia – of the 60 largest economies in the world have actually reduced tariffs and other barriers.
- Bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations have come to a kind of standstill. Most nations have seen a decrease in cross-border financial trade. The bleak future of TPP and NAFTA point towards failing trade pacts.
- The exit of United Kingdom from the European Union also points towards an inward-looking policy.
- There has been an increase in the restrictions on movement of people among countries for employment prospects. E.g:
 - America is planning to harden the norms for H1-B visas to cut immigrations and promote 'Buy American and Hire American'.
 - Australia has scrapped its 457 visa programme which allowed entry of professionals into the country in order to save Australian jobs from outsiders.
- These protectionist measure purported to protect local jobs have been acting against the forces of globalization.



Close Vigil on Protectionism by the International Community:

- Global organizations like WTO, World Bank, IMF and UNCTAD have repeatedly highlighted the perils of protectionist and isolationist policies.
- Leaders like Indian PM Narendra Modi and German Chancellor Angela Merkel have denounced the isolationist tendencies at the World Economic Forum 2018.
- Mr. Modi went on to say that protectionism was as bad as terrorism. He pitched for more open trade policies and strongly defended globalization.
- A similar stand was reiterated by the Chinese President Xi Jinping during the WEF 2017 meet wherein he criticised policies like 'America First' and firmly advocated globalisation.

India's performance with respect to 'openness':

- **Facts showing India's anti-protectionist credentials**
 - ♦ According to a survey by UNCTAD India is among the top 3 investment destinations globally. The FDI flows crossed US\$60 billion in 2016-17 as India liberalised its FDI regime to a huge extent.
 - ♦ India has been making great strides in facilitating business in the country. Its ranking in the Ease of Doing Business index has seen an improvement of 30 places elevating it to the 100th position among 190 countries.
 - ♦ India has been taking efforts to replace 'red tape' with 'red carpet' and has largely uprooted license raj.
 - ♦ Further, credit rating agency Moody's Investor Services upgraded India's sovereign rating from the lowest investment grade of Baa3 to Baa2. This highlights India's increasingly investment friendly nature.
- **Facts painting India's policies as being protectionist in nature:**
 - ♦ India has been among the highest imposer of anti-dumping duty in the world, restricting bulk import of products to protect domestic industry.
 - ♦ India's domestic industry lobbies, especially in the steel sector, have been mounting pressure on the government against any tariff concessions to the 16-member RCEP grouping of countries, fearing that tariff concessions to countries like China may hurt the domestic steel industry.
 - ♦ India has often been criticised for its public procurement policy by the WTO which allegedly leads to distortion in the agriculture market.
 - ♦ India recently lost a case to USA at the WTO wherein it mandated presence of local content in solar cells and modules to

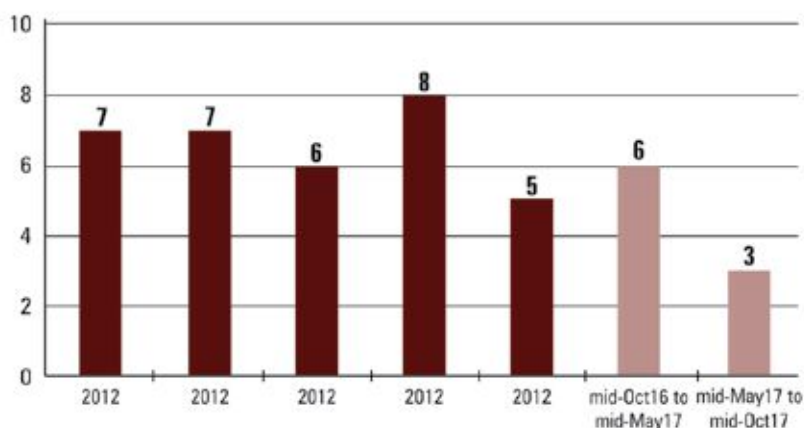
promote the domestic solar industry and achieve the solar energy target of 100 GW.

- ♦ The Indian Budget for 2018-19 increased import duties on several products in order to promote Make-in-India programme and create jobs. This, according to some critics, went against the ethos of openness that PM Modi promoted at the WEF 2018.

Way Forward for India and the World:

- It is necessary for the world leaders to embrace more open trade policies instead of erecting protectionist barriers to tackle unfavourable economic headwinds.
- Protectionist tendencies are deemed to harm the global economy in the long run, leaving behind no beneficiaries of such policies.
- The latest findings of WTO on extent of trade barriers presents a glimmer of hope. The G20 economies applied 16 new trade-restrictive measures during the review period (mid-May 2017 to mid-October 2017).
- This equates to an average of just over three restrictive measures per month compared to six during the previous review period.
- The IMF in its report World Economic Outlook has also predicted a revival in global trade as a result of revival in global export market. The world economy is estimated to grow by 3.9 % in both 2018 and 2019 as compared to 3.7% growth in 2017.
- Inward looking policies have therefore to be reduced to the minimum in order to capitalise upon the possibility of a global economic expansion.
- After the 2008 global financial crisis, the G20 vowed to "refrain from raising new barriers to investment or to trade in goods or services". There is a large room for actually fulfilling this standstill pledge of the nations in the present context.

G20 Trade-restrictive measures
(average per month)



AIR INDIA DISINVESTMENT

In January 2018, Union Government cleared the proposal of 49 per cent foreign investment in Air India (AI).
According to analysts, Centre has finally decided to push ahead on its privatization.

About:

- Air India is an Indian airline owned by Air India Limited, a government-owned enterprise.
- The airline was founded by J. R. D. Tata as Tata Airlines in 1932. After World War II, it became a public limited company and was renamed as Air India.
- **Privatisation plan:**
 - ♦ In 2017, NITI Aayog recommended strategic disinvestment of Air India.
 - ♦ On 28 June 2017, the Government of India announced the privatization of Air India. A parliamentary standing committee has been set up to look into the view. It is yet to express its views.

Arguments for Privatization:

- **Huge debt:** It is operationally inefficient, has been grossly mismanaged and is unable to compete with private sector operators. Due to this it is consistently making losses and is dependent on the government for survival. **It has a debt of close to Rs 50,000 crore.**
- **Overstating profit:** Analysts strongly believe that the Air India is overstating its operational profit as due to its poor service it has been losing market share. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) questioned its operational profit of Rs 105 crore for 2015-16.
- **Failure of 2012 bail out package:**
 - ♦ The 2012 turnaround plan (in which the airline was provided with a bailout package of Rs 30,000 crore) has not shown the desired results.
 - ♦ Air India has failed to meet the operational targets as well as target of raising Rs500 crore annually through monetization of assets in the four-year period from 2012-13 to 2015-16 (the company managed to raise only Rs 64.06 crore).
- **Wastage of tax payers money:**
 - ♦ If the status quo exists then the government will have to keep bailing out Air India leading to wastage of tax payers money.
 - ♦ It will also affect the fiscal health of the government.
 - ♦ Also this amount can be used in other important areas such as health and education.
- **Against the principles of market economy:**
 - ♦ Going by the established norms of market economy, the government should not be providing goods and services where the private sector has a vibrant presence.
 - ♦ Presence of state-owned companies having access to government finances and practically no fear of failing

affects price discovery in the market and can hurt private sector operators in the business.

Will give a push to pending reforms:

- ♦ This will send a strong signal to investors that India is serious about reforms.
- ♦ This will also set an example and pave the way for disinvestment of other loss-making companies, such as Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL) and Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) which cant compete in India's hyper-competitive telecom market.

Challenges in it's privatization:

It will not be easy for the government to privatize Air India.

- Firstly, as Civil Aviation Minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju stated that it would be difficult to find gullible investor for Air India which has **debt of close to Rs 50,000 crore.**
 - ♦ The NITI Aayog has said that **all non-aircraft** related debt should be written off to make it attractive for investors.
 - ♦ But it will be difficult to convince banks, financial institutions, oil companies and the Airports Authority of India to agree to such a massive write-off.
- Secondly, there is problem of employees. The Air Corporation Employees' Union has warned the government of a "major confrontation" if it decides to go ahead with this disinvestment.

Way ahead:

- Government should sit with professionals to find ways to make the deal attractive for a prospective buyer.
- For this, government should reduce the level of debt in the company. This can be done in various ways:
 - ♦ Government can sell it's non-core assets. Airline owns prime real estate valued at over Rs 4,000 crore. For example the Hotel Corporation of India— one of its subsidiaries, which runs hotels — can be sold to reduce debt.
 - ♦ Government should try convincing the financial institutions to convert a part of the debt into equity.
 - ♦ Or the government can even infuse equity capital one last time in Air India.
- While selling it to buyers, government should highlight the positives of Air India like sizeable presence in overseas sectors, having wide-bodied aircraft etc.
- Now it is true that it will face opposition from trade unions, but **if the government which has the political capital to withdraw 86% of the currency by value from circulation**, then selling a inefficient loss-making public sector companies should be comparatively much easy.

CURBING OFFSHORE TRADING IN INDIAN DERIVATIVES

Recently, three major stock exchanges of India decided to stop providing data feed and other support to overseas exchanges that list derivatives linked to Indian stocks and indices.

About:

- Let's understand the problem: Suppose, Mr. Sam from USA wants to purchase Nifty (Indian derivative/index) in order to hedge his risk or make speculative gain. Definitely he can buy Nifty from NSE.
- However, Singapore stock exchange is also providing SGX-Nifty (i.e. Derivative whose underlying asset is Indian index Nifty).
- Mr. Sam prefers Singapore stock exchange for buying SGX-Nifty instead of Nifty from NSE due to various reason like low transaction cost and low taxation.
- This is causing revenue loss to Indian stock exchange (say NSE) and Indian exchequer.
- Now, Indian stock exchanges namely National Stock Exchange (NSE), the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the Metropolitan Stock Exchange of India have decided to stop sharing data with overseas exchange (Singapore Exchange).
- They expect that with no data sharing, offshore trading in Indian derivative will come down and domestic market share of derivative trade will increase.

Do You Know?

What is derivative?

- An arrangement or product (such as a future, option, or warrant) whose value derives from and is dependent on the value of an underlying asset, such as a commodity, currency, or security.

Objectives of derivatives:

1. Hedging of risk
2. Make speculative gain

Why such move by Indian Stock exchanges?

- To reduce offshore trading of Indian derivatives.
- Presently, market share of overseas/offshore exchanges in trading of Indian derivative is higher than share of domestic stock exchanges. This is causing revenue loss for Indian financial sector as well Indian exchequer.
- Reduce migration of liquidity from India, which is not in the best interest of Indian markets.

Why Overseas stock exchanges are preferred than Indian stock exchanges for trading in Indian derivatives?

- Longer trading hours in offshore exchanges making them more investor-friendly.

- **Low-tax jurisdictions** that offer investors the chance to lower their transaction costs like Singapore and Dubai.
- The fact that offshore derivatives are **denominated in dollars** make them more attractive for investors.
- In India, in contrast, the **securities transaction tax and the capital gains tax** discourage foreign investment in financial assets.
- Non-availability of sophisticated financial products/derivative instruments in Indian stock exchanges.
- High **tax uncertainty** in India.
- Complexity of the regulatory framework governing capital flows into and outside India.

Debate:

Advantages of current decision:

- ♦ It would prevent loss of revenue to Indian stock exchanges as well Indian exchequer.
- ♦ International Financial Services Centre in Gujarat, may also benefit from the crackdown on offshore derivative markets.

Disadvantages of current decision:

- ♦ **Protectionist move:** The action constitutes protectionism, which harms overseas market (Singapore Stock Exchange, or SGX) that has served global investors well.
- ♦ Although this decision favors domestic securities industry/exchanges, but will have adverse impact over the larger economy.
- ♦ **Loss of Revenue from License fees:** The termination will result in, among other things, a loss of revenue coming through license fees from overseas exchanges for data sharing.
- ♦ This shows the country in a poor light and India will further lose appeal in the global community.
- ♦ Foreign exchanges, will likely find other ways to list derivatives linked to Indian stocks and indices without any help from Indian exchanges soon. The present move, thus, is unlikely to rein in the vast offshore market for Indian derivatives.

Way ahead?

- ♦ Then, what should have been done? There is need to **address the structural problems** that have caused trading in Indian derivatives to move offshore.
- ♦ India should come up with a smarter regulatory and tax structure.
- ♦ The right way to deal with loss of competitiveness is to address the root cause of that. This would require economic reforms by the Securities and Exchange Board of India, the Reserve Bank of India, and the finance ministry.

ECONOMIC SURVEY 2017-18

In January 2018, during the budget session,
Union finance Minister tabled the Economic Survey.

TEN NEW FACTS ON THE INDIAN ECONOMY

- Large increase in registered indirect and direct taxpayers.
- Formal non-agricultural payroll much greater than believed.
- States' prosperity is positively correlated with their international and inter-state trade.
- India's firm export structure is substantially more egalitarian than in other large countries.
- Clothing incentive package boosted exports of ready-made garments.
- Indian parents continue to have children until they get the desired number of sons.
- Substantial avoidable litigation in tax arena which government action could reduce.
- To re-ignite growth, raising investment is more important than raising saving.
- Direct tax collections by Indian states and local governments are significantly lower than those of their counterparts in other federal countries.
- Extreme weather adversely impacts agricultural yields.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SURVEY

Overview of the macro economy

- **Gross Domestic Product (GDP):**
 - ♦ The Central Statistics Office (CSO) has estimated the GDP growth to be 6.5% in 2017-18 as compared to 7% in 2016-17.
 - ♦ The average GDP growth rate from 2014-15 till 2017-18 is expected to be 7.3% as compared to the average 7.5% between 2014-15 and 2016-17.
- **Gross Value Added (GVA):**
 - ♦ The GVA (at constant prices) is estimated at 6.1% in 2017-18 as compared to 6.6% in 2016-17.
 - ♦ The agriculture and industry sectors are expected to grow at 2.1% and 4.4% respectively, while the service sector is estimated to grow at 8.3%.
- **Inflation:**
 - ♦ The Consumer Price Index (CPI) based inflation was 3.3% in 2017-18 (April- December).
 - ♦ The average food inflation was 1.2% for the same period.
 - ♦ CPI inflation was below 3% in the first quarter of 2017-18, because of low food inflation, and marginally rose to 3% in the second quarter.
- **Current Account Deficit (CAD):**
 - ♦ India's CAD increased from 0.4% of GDP in 2016-17 to 1.8% of GDP in the first half of 2017-18.
 - ♦ This has been attributed to an increase in merchandise imports relative to exports.
- **Fiscal deficit:**
 - ♦ As of November 2017, the fiscal deficit stood at 112% of the budget estimate.
 - ♦ The fiscal deficit is 3.2% (budget estimate) of GDP in 2017-18 as compared to 3.5% of GDP in 2016-17.

Ease of Doing Business' Next Frontier: Timely Justice

- India jumped 30 places and was ranked overall 100 in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Report 2018.
- However, on contract enforcement it was ranked at 164, although the government has taken steps to improve contract enforcement.
- The backlog in High Courts by the end of 2017 was around 3.5 million cases including delay of economic cases (company cases, arbitration cases and taxation cases) in courts.
- **Economic impact:**
 - ♦ This is affecting the economic activity by leading to stalled projects, legal costs, contested tax revenues, and consequently reduced investment.
 - ♦ Delays in power, roads, and railways projects led to an increase in almost 60% of the project costs.
- **Suggestions:**
 - ♦ The government and the judiciary must coordinate to introduce reforms to facilitate ease of doing business.
 - ♦ Judicial capacity should be strengthened in the lower courts to reduce the burden on higher courts.
 - ♦ The tax department must limit its appeals, given that their success rate is less than 30% at all three levels of judiciary (Appellate Tribunals, High Courts, and Supreme Courts).
 - ♦ The government must increase its expenditure on the judiciary, improve the courts case management and court automation system, and create subject specific benches.

Goods and Services Tax (GST):

- **Increase in taxpayers**
 - ♦ Under GST, the number of unique indirect taxpayers increased by over 50% (3.4 million).
 - ♦ Voluntary compliance also increased under GST, with 1.7 million voluntary registrants.
- **GST and states**
 - ♦ The distribution of GST base among states is linked to their GSDP, with Maharashtra (16%), Tamil Nadu (10%), Karnataka (9%) having the highest share.
 - ♦ GST data shows that a state's GSDP per capita has a high correlation with its export share in the GSDP. Five states account for 70% of India's exports - Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana.

Fiscal Federalism:

- In comparison to developed countries, India collects a lower share of direct taxes in total taxes.
- **Scenario in States:**
 - ♦ For example, in India, states generate 6% of their revenue from direct taxes, as compared to 19% in Brazil.
- **Scenario in Local Bodies:**
 - ♦ Rural local governments, in India, raise 6% of their total revenue from direct taxes as compared to 40% in Brazil. Urban local governments raise 44% of their revenue from their own sources.
 - ♦ Several states have not devolved enough taxation powers to local bodies. Further, local governments collect only a small fraction of their potential tax revenue.
 - ♦ Therefore, local governments rely heavily on devolved funds from central and state governments.
 - ♦ These devolved funds are largely tied in nature, to either specific sectors or schemes.
 - ♦ This constrains the ability of local governments to spend on local public good as per their own priorities.

Investment and saving:

- India saw high levels of investment and saving rates in the mid 2000's followed by a pronounced, gradual decline, returning back to normal levels.
- A fall in both private investment, and household, and government saving have contributed to such decline between 2007 and 2017.
- **Suggestion:**
 - ♦ There needs to be a focus on revival of investment.
 - ♦ Easing the cost of doing business, creating a transparent, stable tax and regulatory environment, and supporting small and medium industries will help revive private investment.

- **Challenges:** However, the decline in investment will be difficult to reverse because: (i) it stems from the balance sheet stress of companies, and (ii) its large magnitude.

Agriculture and food management:

- **Uncertain growth:**
 - ♦ Growth rates of agriculture and allied sectors have been fluctuating: 1.5% in 2012-13, 5.6% in 2013-14, -0.2% in 2014-15, 0.7% in 2015-16, and 4.9% in 2016-17.
 - ♦ The uncertainty in growth in agriculture is because 50% of agriculture is dependent on rainfall.
- **Undergoing Structural changes:**
 - ♦ The agriculture sector has been witnessing a gradual structural change.
 - ♦ The share of livestock in the GVA in agriculture rose from 22% in 2011-12 to 26% in 2015-16.
 - ♦ The share of crops in the GVA fell from 65% in 2011-12 to 60% in 2015-16.
 - ♦ The gross capital formation in agriculture declined from 8.3% in 2014-15 to 7.8% in 2015-16.
- **Impact of Climate change on agriculture:**
 - ♦ The average decline in rainfall between 1970's and 2000's is 26 mm in Kharif season and 33 mm in Rabi season. This has significant implications on agriculture, especially in unirrigated areas.
 - ♦ Such changes in temperature and precipitation will result in estimated overall farm income losses of 15% to 18%, and further, 20% to 25% for unirrigated areas.
- **Develop irrigation:**
 - ♦ Given the rising water scarcity, and depleting water resources, there is a need to increase irrigation.
 - ♦ Technologies of drip irrigation, sprinklers, and water management must be employed to meet this challenge.

Industrial growth:

- The overall industrial sector growth was 5.8% in the second quarter of 2017-18 as compared to 1.6% in the first quarter.
- As per the estimate of national income 2017-18, industrial sector grew at 4.4% and the manufacturing sector grew at 4.6%.
- The eight core industries (coal, crude oil, natural gas, petroleum refinery products, fertilizers, steel, cement, and electricity) grew by 4.8% in 2016-17 as compared to 3% in 2015-16.

Infrastructure:

- India requires around USD 4.5 trillion worth of investments till 2040 to develop infrastructure. As per the current trend, India can raise around USD 3.9 trillion.
- The under investment in the infrastructure sector has been due to:
 - ♦ Collapse of Public Private Partnerships.
 - ♦ Stressed balance sheets of private companies.
 - ♦ Delays in acquisition of land and forest clearances.

Services Sector:

- The services sector contributed 55.2% to India's GVA in 2017-18.
- As per the CSO the growth of the services sector is expected to be 8.3% in 2017-18 as compared to 7.7% in 2016-17.
- In 15 states, services contribute to more than half of the gross state value added (GSVA). With a share of 3.4%, India is the eighth largest exporter of commercial services.

Real estate:

- The share of real estate sector (including ownership of dwellings) accounted for 7.7% of India's overall GVA in 2015-16.
- Real estate and construction together are the second largest providers of employment. As per projections, it is

estimated to employ 52 million by 2017, and 67 million by 2022.

Informal economy:

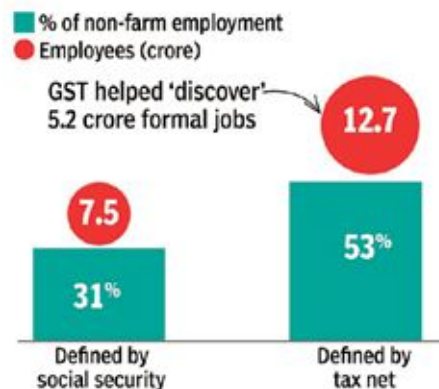
- A firm is considered to be in the formal sector if: (i) it provides social security to its employees, or (ii) it is registered under the GST network. 0.6% of firms meet both of the criteria, known as the hard core formal sector.
- 87% of firms are purely informal, 12% of firms are registered under GST but do not provide social security. Less than 0.1% provide social security but are not registered under GST (usually GST exempted firms).
- India's formal sector non-farm payroll is greater than current perception. Formal non-farm payroll is 31% of the non-agricultural workforce based on a social security defined formality, and 53% based on a tax definition formality.

THE REASONS TO CELEBRATE

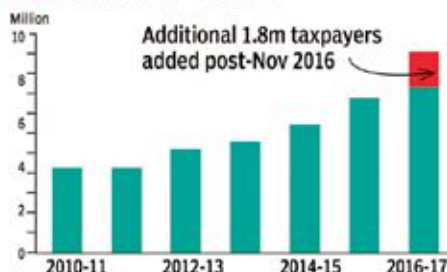
1 THE ECONOMY IS ON A REBOUND



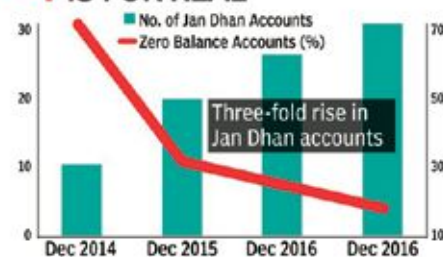
3 'FORMAL' JOBS MORE THAN ESTIMATED



2 MORE INDIANS ARE PAYING TAXES



4 FINANCIAL INCLUSION IS FOR REAL



AND THE REASONS TO BE CAUTIOUS

1 High global oil prices



2 Possibility of sharp correction in stock prices



3 RBI's window for further interest rate cut shrinking



4 Stigmatised capitalism—a feeling that some promoters had little skin in the game



BUDGET 2018-19

Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley presented
General Budget 2018-19 in Parliament.

Indian economy: A Snapshot

- A series of structural reforms will propel India among the fastest growing economies of the world.
- While GDP growth at 6.3% in the second quarter of 2017-18 signalled turnaround of the economy, growth in the second half is likely to remain between 7.2% to 7.5%.
- Country firmly on course to achieve over 8 % growth as manufacturing, services and exports back on good growth path.
- Fiscal Deficit pegged at 3.5 %, projected at 3.3 % for 2018-19.

Agriculture and Rural Economy:

- **Hike in MSP:** MSP for all unannounced kharif crops will be one and half times of their production cost like majority of rabi crops.
- **Funds for Animal Husbandry:** Two New Funds of Rs10,000 crore announced for Fisheries and Animal Husbandry sectors:
 - ♦ Setting up of Fisheries and Aqua culture Infrastructure Development Fund (FAIDF) announced for fisheries sector.
 - ♦ Setting up of Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) announced for financing infrastructure requirement of animal husbandry sector
- **Operation greens:**
 - ♦ On the lines of "Operation Flood" a new Scheme "Operation Greens" was announced with an outlay of Rs 500 Crore to address the challenge of price volatility of perishable commodities like tomato, onion and potato with the satisfaction of both the farmers and consumers.
- **Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs):**
 - ♦ Existing 22,000 rural haats will be upgraded into Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs) to take care of the interests of more than 86% small and marginal farmers.
 - ♦ These GrAMs, electronically linked to e-NAM and exempted from regulations of APMCs, will provide farmers facility to make direct sale to consumers and bulk purchasers.
 - ♦ An Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund with a corpus of Rs.2000 crore will be setup for developing and upgrading agricultural marketing infrastructure in the 22000 Grameen Agricultural Markets (GrAMs) and 585APMCs.

Budget 2018-19				
Budget Snapshot Key Numbers				
Figures in ₹ crore				
	2016-17 Actuals	2017-18 Budget Estimates	2017-18 Revised Estimates	2018-19 Budget Estimates
Revenue Receipts	13,74,203	15,15,771	15,05,428	17,25,738
Capital Receipts*	6,00,991	6,30,964	7,12,322	7,16,475
Total Receipts	19,75,194	21,46,735	22,17,750	24,42,213
Total Expenditure	19,75,194	21,46,735	22,17,750	24,22,132
Revenue Deficit	3,16,381	3,21,163	4,38,877	4,16,034
Effective Revenue Deficit	1,50,648	1,25,813	2,49,632	2,20,689
Fiscal Deficit	5,35,618	5,46,531	5,94,849	6,24,276
Primary Deficit	54,904	23,453	64,006	48,481
* Excluding receipts under Market Subsidisation Scheme				

- **Re-structured National Bamboo Mission:** Terming Bamboo as 'Green Gold', the Finance Minister announced a Re-structured National Bamboo Mission with an outlay of Rs.1290 crore to promote bamboo sector in a holistic manner.
- **Credit:**
 - ♦ Institutional Farm Credit has been raised to 11 lakh crore in 2018-19 from 8.5 lakh crore in 2014-15.
 - ♦ Facility of Kisan Credit Cards to be extended to fisheries and animal husbandry farmers to help them meet their working capital needs.
- **Crop residue management:**
 - ♦ A special Scheme to support the efforts of the governments of Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and the NCT of Delhi announced to address air pollution in the Delhi-NCR region.
 - ♦ This will be done by subsidizing machinery required for in-situ management of crop residue.

Infrastructure:

- Budgetary allocation on infrastructure for 2018-19 increased to Rs.5.97 lakh crore against estimated expenditure of Rs.4.94 lakh crore in 2017-18.

- Under the Bharatmala Pariyojana, about 35000 kms road construction in Phase-I at an estimated cost of Rs.5,35,000 crore has been approved.
- **Railways:** Railways Capital Expenditure for the year 2018-19 has been pegged at Rs.1,48,528 crore. A large part of the Capex is devoted to capacity creation.
- **Air Transport:**
 - ♦ **NABH Nirman:** The Budget proposes to expand the airport capacity more than five times to handle a billion trips a year under a new initiative - NABH Nirman.
 - ♦ **UDAN:** Under the Regional connectivity scheme of UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik) initiated by the Government last year, 56 unserved airports and 31 unserved helipads would be connected.
- **Energy:**
 - ♦ Under Ujjwala Scheme distribution of free LPG connections will be given to 8 crore poor women instead of the previous target of 5 crore women.
 - ♦ Under Saubahagya Yojana, 4 crore poor households are being provided with electricity connection with an outlay of Rs.16,000 crore.
- **Housing for all:**
 - ♦ To fulfil target of housing for All by 2022 ,more than one crore houses will be built by 2019 in rural areas, besides already constructed 6 crore toilets under Swachh Bharat Mission.
- **Reform for Enterprises:**
 - ♦ A national logistics portal as a single window online market place to link all stakeholders to be developed by the ministry of commerce.
 - ♦ A scheme to be launched to assign every individual enterprise in India a unique ID.

Employment Generation:

- Citing an independent study finance minister stated that 70 lakh formal jobs will be created this year.
- Government will contribute 12% of the wages of the new employees in the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) for all the sectors for next three years.
- **Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs):**
 - ♦ The Budget has given a big thrust to Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) to boost employment and economic growth.
 - ♦ It is proposed to set a target of Rs.3 lakh crore for lending under MUDRA yojana for 2018-19 after having successfully exceeded the targets in all previous years.
- **SHGs:** Loans to Self Help Groups of women will increase to Rs.75,000 crore by March, 2019.

Financial Sector Development:

- To encourage raising funds from bond market, the Finance Minister urged regulators to move from 'AA' to 'A' rating for investment eligibility.
- Government will establish a unified authority for regulating all financial services in International Finance Service Centre (IFSCs) in India.
- **Disinvestment:**
 - ♦ The Finance Minister announced that 2017-18 disinvestment target of Rs.72,500 crore has been exceeded and expected receipts of Rs.1,00,000 crore.
 - ♦ He set disinvestment target of Rs.80,000 crore for 2018-19.
- **Insurance:**
 - ♦ Three Public Sector Insurance companies- National Insurance Co. Ltd., United India Assurance Co. Ltd., and Oriental India insurance Co. Ltd., will be merged into a single insurance entity.
- **Initiatives in Gold trading:**
 - ♦ A comprehensive Gold Policy will be formulated to develop gold as an asset class.
 - ♦ The Government will also establish a system of regulated gold exchanges in the country.
 - ♦ Gold Monetization Scheme will be revamped to enable people to open a hassle-free Gold Deposit Account.
- **Tourism:**
 - ♦ To further boost tourism, the Budget proposes to develop ten prominent tourist sites into Iconic Tourism destinations.
 - ♦ This will be done by following a holistic approach involving infrastructure and skill development, development of technology, attracting private investment, branding and marketing.

Education:

- **Ekalavya Model Residential School:**
 - ♦ Ekalavya Model Residential School to be setup on par with Navodaya Vidyalayas to provide the best quality education to the tribal children in their own environment.
 - ♦ By 2022 these will be setup in every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons with special facilities for preserving local art and culture besides providing training in sports and skill development.
- **Rise:**
 - ♦ A major initiative named "Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE) by 2022" with a total investment of Rs.1,00,000 crore in next four years was announced.
 - ♦ **Objective:** To step up investments in research and related infrastructure in premier educational institutions, including health institutions.

- **Prime Minister's Research Fellows (PMRF) Scheme:**

- ♦ The Government would launch the "Prime Minister's Research Fellows (PMRF)" Scheme this year.
- ♦ **Objective:** To improve the quality of teachers an integrated B.Ed. programme for teachers will be initiated.
- ♦ Under this, 1,000 best B.Tech students will be identified each year from premier institutions and provide them facilities to do Ph.D in IITs and IISc, with a fellowship.

Health:

- **National Health Protection Scheme:**

- ♦ The world's largest government funded health care programme titled National Health Protection Scheme was announced.
- ♦ **Objective:** To cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries) providing coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.

- **National health policy:**

- ♦ Rs 1200 crore committed for the National Health Policy, 2017, which with 1.5 lakh Health and Wellness Centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people.

- **Health infrastructure:**

- ♦ Government will be setting up 24 new Government Medical Colleges and Hospitals by upgrading existing district hospitals in the country.

Digital Economy:

- NITI Aayog will initiate a national program to direct efforts in artificial intelligence.
- **Mission on Cyber Physical Systems:**
 - ♦ Department of Science & Technology will launch a Mission on Cyber Physical Systems.
 - ♦ Objective is to support establishment of centres of excellence for research, training and skilling in robotics, artificial intelligence, digital manufacturing, big data analysis, quantum communication and internet of things.
- **Five lakh wi-fi hotspots:**
 - ♦ To further Broadband access in villages, the Government proposes to set up five lakh Wi-fi hotspots to provide net connectivity to five crore rural citizens.

Defence:

- The Finance Minister proposed development of two defence industrial production corridors.
- Industry friendly defence production policy 2018 to be brought out to promote domestic production by public sector, private sector and MSMEs.

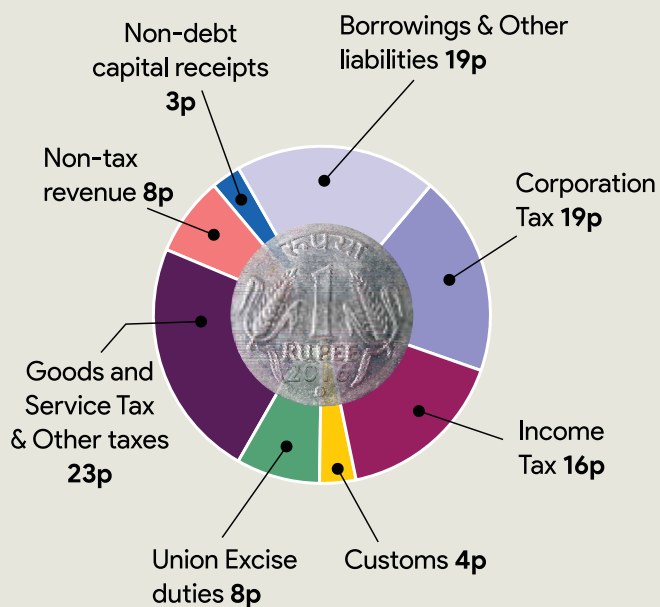
Emoluments to executive:

- The Budget proposes to revise emoluments to Rs.5 lakh for the President, Rs 4 lakhs for the Vice President and Rs.3.5 lakh per month to Governor. These emoluments were last revised in 2006.
- With regard to the emoluments paid to the Members of Parliament, the Finance Minister proposed necessary changes to refix the salary and allowances with effect from April 1, 2018.
- The law will also provide for automatic revision of emoluments every five years indexed to inflation and hoped that the Hon'ble Members will welcome this initiative.

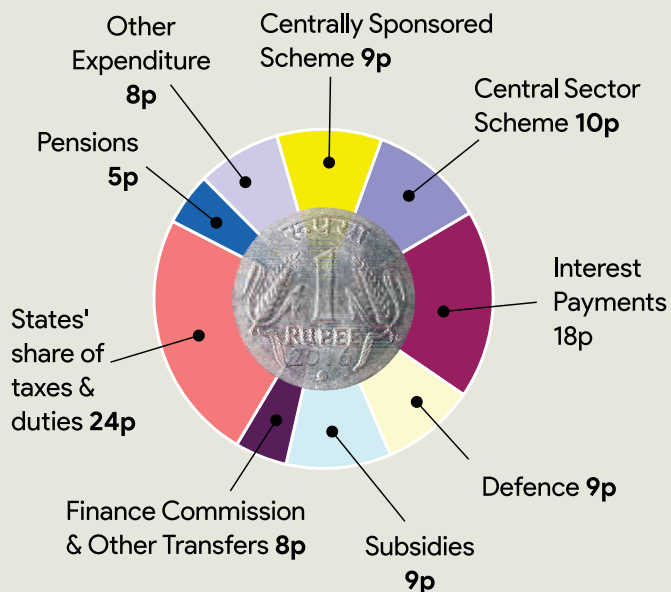
Taxation:

- To control cash economy, payments exceeding Rs. 10,000 in cash made by trusts and institutions to be disallowed and would be subject to tax.
- Proposed Tax on Long Term Capital Gains (LTCG) exceeding Rs. 1 lakh at the rate of 10 percent, without allowing any indexation benefit. However, all gains up to 31st January, 2018 will be grandfathered.
- The Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) to be renamed as central board of indirect taxes and customs (CBIC).
- E-assessment of Income tax to be rolled out across the country to almost eliminate person to person contact leading to greater efficiency and transparency in direct tax collection.
- Changes proposed in customs duty to promote creation of more jobs in the country and also to incentivise domestic value addition and Make in India in sectors.
- **Health and education cess:**
 - ♦ In order to take care of the education and health care needs of Below Poverty Line (BPL) and rural families, The Budget proposes to increase the cess on personal income tax and corporation tax to 4 percent from the present 3 percent.
 - ♦ The new cess will be called the "Health and Education Cess" and is expected to lead to a collection of an estimated additional amount of Rs. 11,000 crore.
- **Relief to Senior Citizens proposed:** The proposals are:
 - ♦ Exemption of interest income on deposits with banks and post offices are proposed to be increased from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 50,000.
 - ♦ TDS shall not be required to be deducted under section 194A. Benefit will also be available for interest from all fixed deposit schemes and recurring deposit schemes.
 - ♦ Hike in deduction limit for health insurance premium and/or medical expenditure from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000 under section 80D.

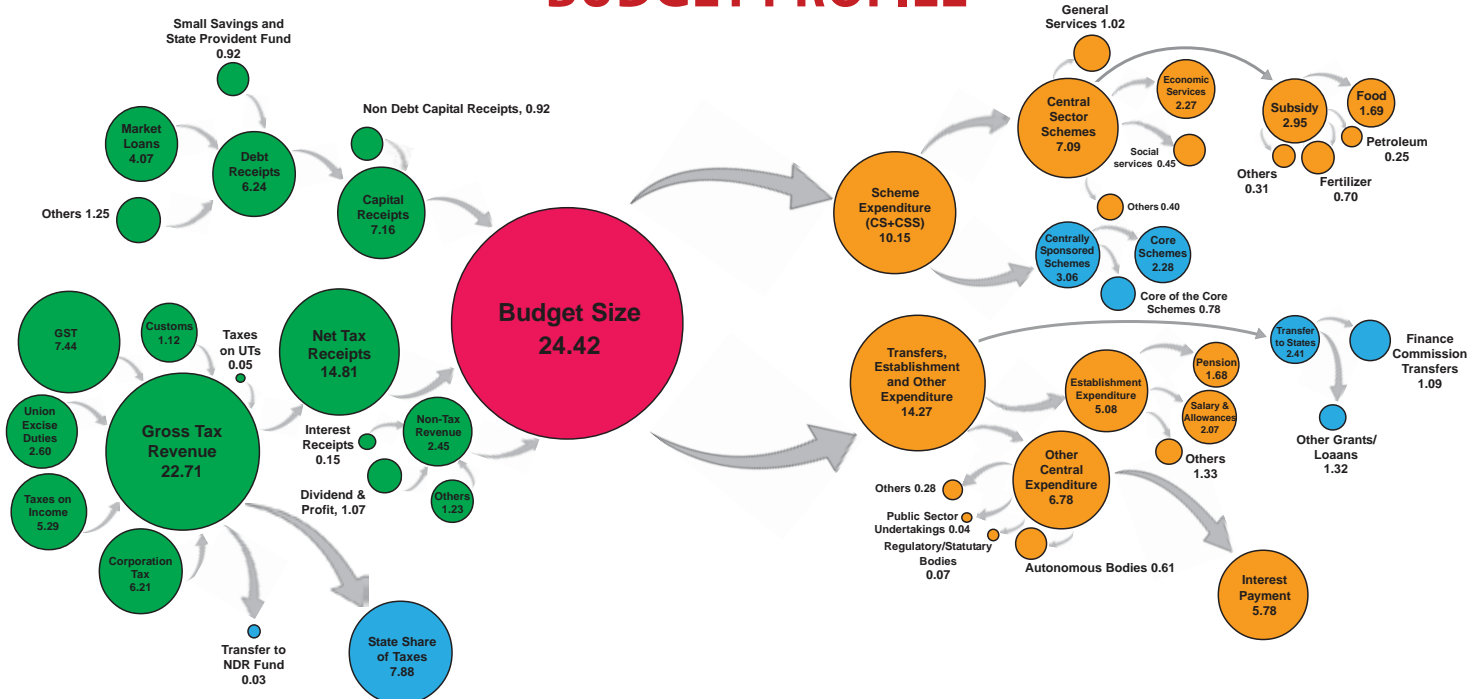
Rupee comes from



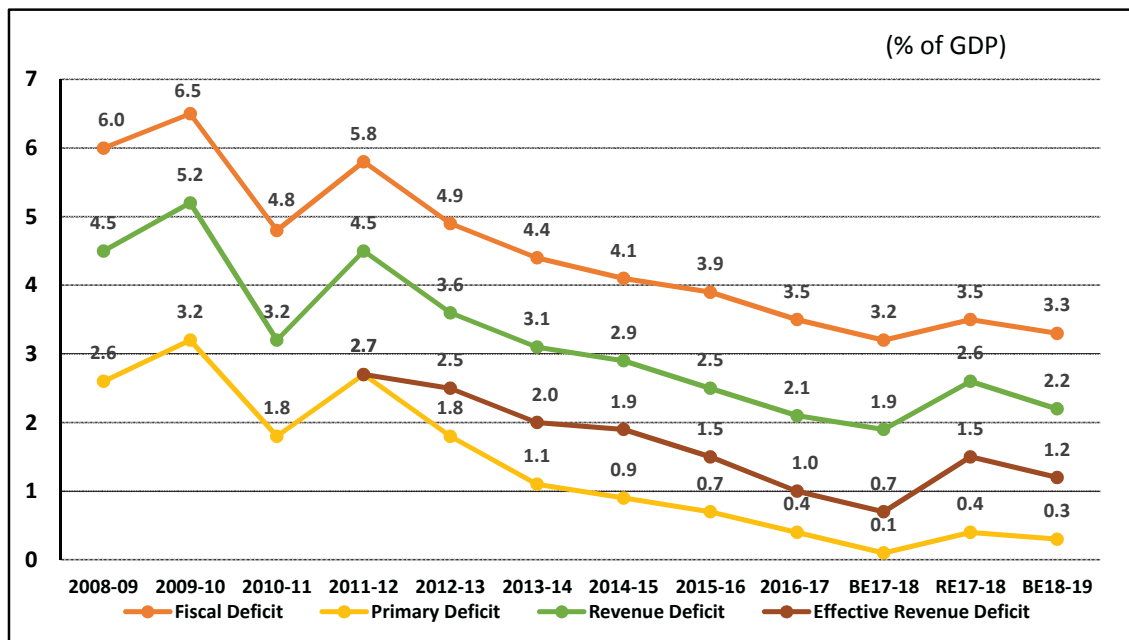
Rupee goes to



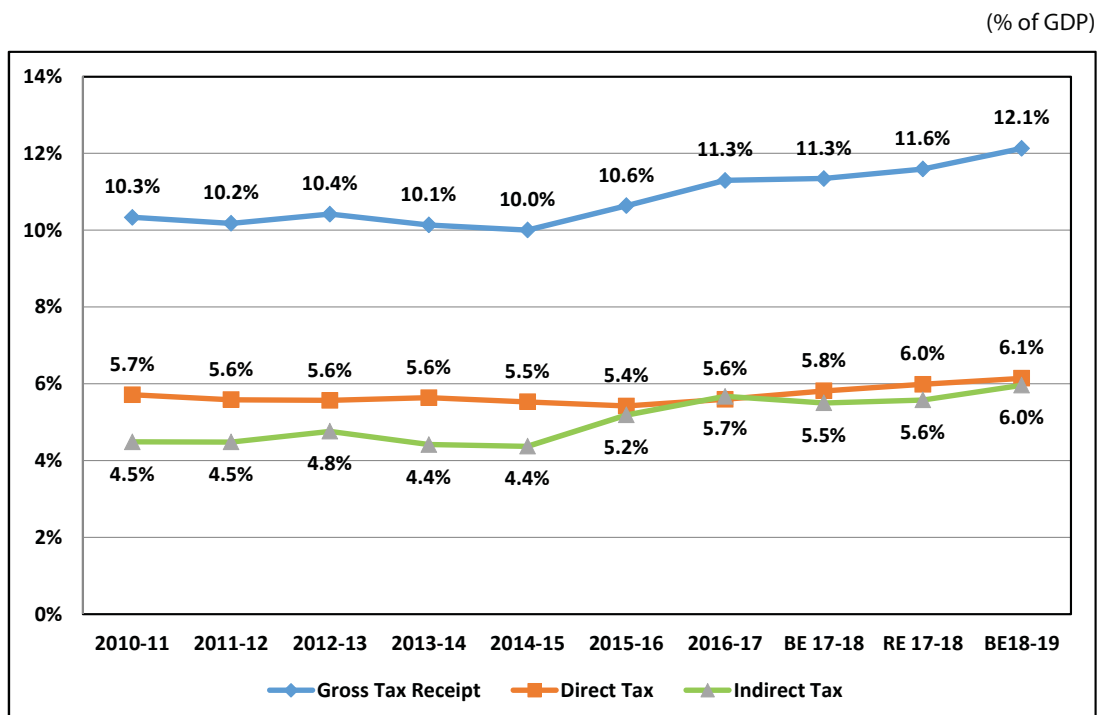
BUDGET PROFILE



DEFICIT TRENDS

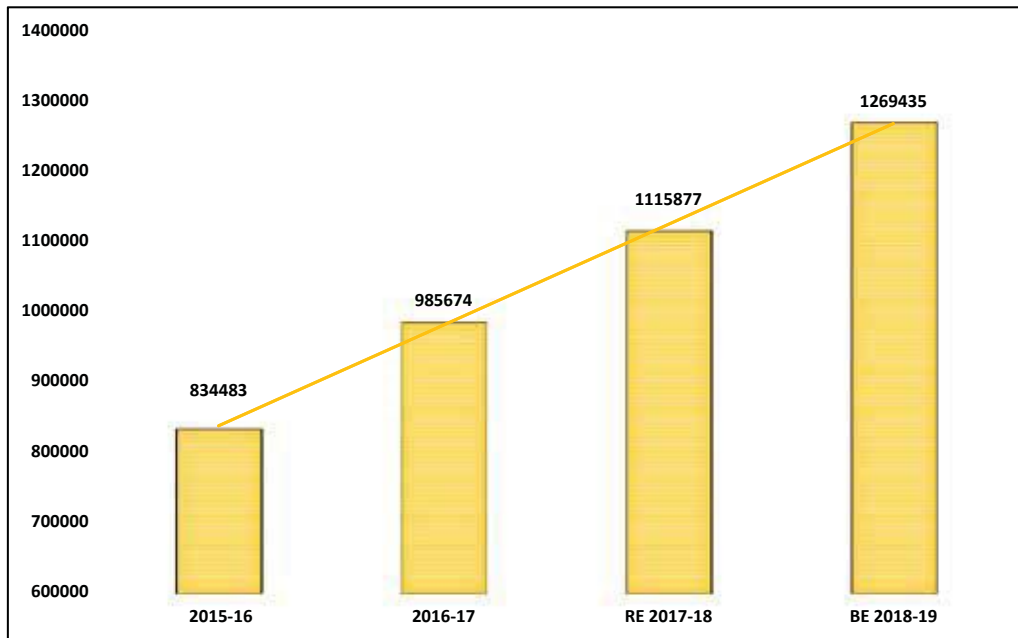


TREND IN TAX RECEIPTS



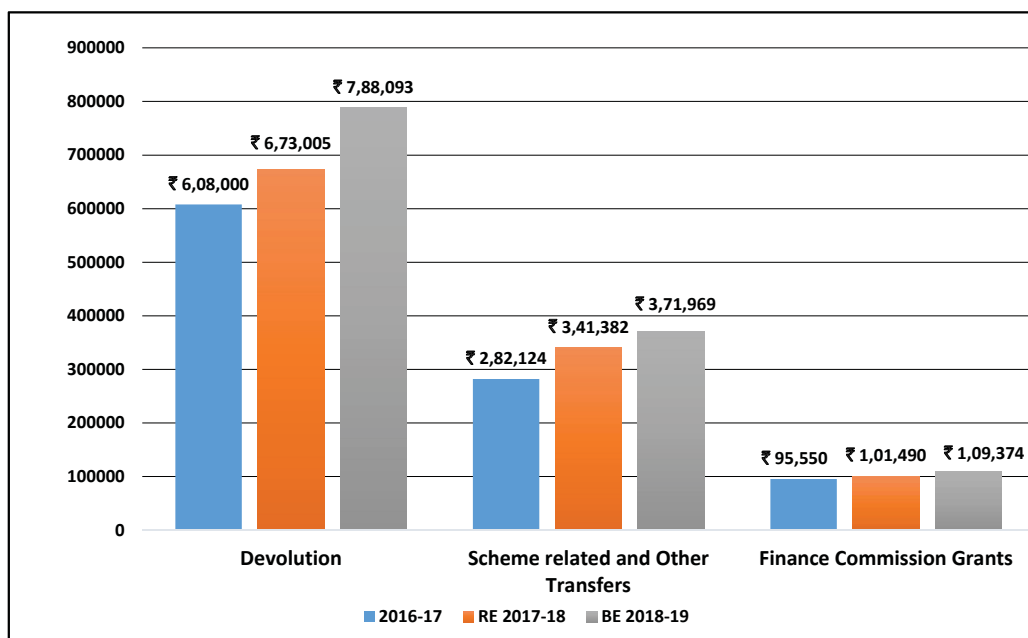
TOTAL TRANSFERS TO STATES AND UTs

(₹ in crore)



COMPOSITION OF TRANSFERS TO STATES & UTs

(₹ in crore)



KHALEDA ZIA ARRESTED

In February 2018, the former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Begum Khaleda Zia was sentenced and arrested in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case.

Khaleda Zia:

- Khaleda Zia is a Bangladeshi politician. She is the leader of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).
- She was the Prime Minister of Bangladesh from 1991 to 1996 and again from 2001 to 2006.
- Following her government's term end in 2006, the elections scheduled in 2007 were delayed due to political violence and in-fighting, resulting in a bloodless military takeover of the caretaker government.
- During its interim rule, it charged Zia and her two sons with corruption.

Arrest:

- On 8 February 2018, a special court in Bangladesh sentenced her to Jail for five years of rigorous imprisonment in a corruption case. After the verdict, she was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail.
- Her son, Tarique Rahman, the acting head of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), and four others — a former BNP MP, an ex-principal secretary to the PM, a nephew of Zia and a businessman — have also been convicted in the case.
- The judiciary charged her for embezzlement of international funds donated to Zia Orphanage Trust, filed during the 2006–08 caretaker government.
 - ♦ The Zia Orphanage Trust case was initiated by the military-backed caretaker government of Moeen U Ahmed as a part of the minus-two formula. Similar cases were also filed against Sheikh Hasina by the caretaker government in 2008.
 - ♦ Unlike the cases filed against Sheikh Hasina, which were dismissed once the Awami League (AL) assumed power, the cases against Zia continued.
- Apart from this case, Zia faces five other criminal cases, all pending before various courts in the country.

Zia Orphanage Trust graft case

Khaleda Zia
Former Prime Minister
and BNP Chairperson



Tarique Rahman
BNP senior vice
chairman and Zia
Orphanage Trust
settlor



Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui
Former principal secretary
to ex-PM Khaleda Zia



Kazi Salimul Haque
Former MP
from Magura



Mominur Rahman
Nephew of Ziaur
Rahman



Sharfuddin Ahmed
Businessman

Prosecution Argument

- **June 1991:** The Prime Minister's Orphanage Fund, solely administered by Khaleda Zia, received a \$1.25 million grant from United Saudi Commercial Bank
- Fund hastily formed before receiving the grant
- Money was deposited as FDR with Khaleda's permission
- Khaleda Zia deposited Tk2.33 crore to Zia Orphanage Trust and appointed Tarique as the trust's settlor
- **November 1993–March 2007:** Tk2.1 crore was withdrawn by the others
- A separate file was used to keep records of Khaleda Zia's signatures
- **November 1993:** Zia Orphanage Trust received Tk2.33 crore to set up an orphanage in Bogra
- Tk2.77 lakh was spent to purchase 2.79 acre land in Bogra after withdrawing Tk4 lakh from Zia Orphanage Trust
- **1993–2006:** The trust money remained idle in the bank, totalling Tk3.37 crore including interest in April 2006
- **April–July 2006:** Tarique and his cousin Mominur Rahman withdrew Tk3.3 crore using five cheques to open FDR with Prime Bank assisted by former MP Kazi Salimul Haque
- **March 2007:** Tk2.1 crore was transferred to Sharfuddin Ahmed's bank account

Defence Argument

- Allegations against Khaleda Zia are false, fabricated and politically motivated
- Money came from the emir of Kuwait for two trust funds under Ziaur Rahman's name
- No such things as Prime Minister's Orphanage Fund
- Money was distributed among Zia Orphanage Trust and Zia Memorial Trust
- No charge against Zia Memorial Trust, or settlor SM Mustafizur Rahman
- Other than the second investigation officer of the case, no witness recorded deposition directly accusing Khaleda
- Land purchased in Bogra to set up another orphanage, but no progress made after BNP government tenure
- No proof of Khaleda opening an account at or transferring money from Sonali Bank's corporate branch where the fund was allegedly kept
- No misappropriation of money as trust fund has Tk6 crore, from the initial fund of Tk2.33 crore
- In case of any irregularities, the case should have been tried under the Trust Act, not the anti-corruption law

Is the arrest politically motivated?

- The BNP has alleged that the corruption cases against Khaleda Zia are a political conspiracy by the ruling PM Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League (AL) government.
- But there is little doubt that the Khaleda-Tarique combine headed a corrupt and extortionist government (2002–2006). Tarique and his younger brother (the late Arafat Rahman 'Koko') ran an extortion racket and a parallel government during Khaleda Zia's prime ministership.

- Even Saudi Arabia has stated that Zia and her sons have invested billions of dollars in real estate in that country.
- Arrest of Khaleda Zia has raised several questions not just about the future of the party but also about the next parliamentary election due towards the end of 2018.

What about the next parliamentary election due in 2018?

- **Will she be able to contest?**
 - ♦ It is supposed that she will not be able to contest in the general election of 2018.
 - ♦ It is because the constitution of Bangladesh prohibits a convicted person sentenced to over two years from participating in election unless a period of five years has elapsed since that person's release.
 - ♦ Though the verdict has been given by a lower court, it is likely to affect Zia's electoral prospects unless a higher court stays the verdict and grants her bail.
- **Will BNP boycott the election?**
 - ♦ Against this backdrop, the question arises that will Khaleda Zia allow the BNP to contest the election in the event of her and her son's disqualification?
 - ♦ The BNP boycotted the last election but will not make the same mistake this time even though Khaleda Zia may be debarred from contesting.
 - ♦ But keeping control over the party from jail would prove equally challenging.
 - ♦ Further, while it's main ally Jamaat Islami has been de-registered as a political party and many of its cadres have been jailed or fighting criminal cases on charges of arson, the BNP lacks both street power and political will to go ahead without the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

Future of BNP?

- The BNP is at present in its politically weakest form. Many senior leaders of the party are facing various criminal charges for participation in violent protests during the early months of 2015, which resulted in the death of more than 100 people.
- **Leadership of Tarique Rahman:**
 - ♦ After the arrest of Khaleda Zia, the party immediately announced Tarique Rahman as the acting chairman.
 - ♦ This decision shows how Khaleda Zia is reluctant to hand over the top position to other senior leaders within the party despite Tarique Rahman also being convicted and sentenced to ten years in jail in the same case.
 - ♦ The BNP now has to be managed by a leader who has been living in London since 2008 and not in touch with the ground reality and therefore in no position to mobilise the grass root workers.
 - ♦ Tarique Rahman's poor leadership was very much visible when violent protests were orchestrated at his direction in 2014 and 2015, which ultimately backfired and affected the party's political fortune.

Is BNP heading towards a split?

- ♦ There is a chance that internal fault lines within the BNP may be exploited by the Awami League.
- ♦ The dissatisfaction within the BNP came out into the open when it held its party council last year. Many senior party leaders were side lined and those loyal to the leadership were given important positions within the party.

Future of Bangladesh's polity?

- Democracy in Bangladesh will face serious challenges if the main opposition party does not participate in the election.
- Political instability will not be good for Bangladesh and the region.
- Bangladesh is performing extremely well economically with more than 7 percent growth. It is for instance the second largest exporter of garments in the world.
- A lot will depend on how BNP manages to salvage its decaying political capital and to what extent the next elections are free and fair.
- With Tarique unable to return to lead the party and its electoral ally Jamaat's top leadership executed for war crimes, a weakened BNP may not be able to put up much of a fight in the elections.
- The conviction has placed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's arch political rival in a tight spot ahead of the next elections. The Awami League knows very well that a demoralised BNP will not have the stamina to put up a fight especially when its cadres are in disarray facing criminal charges.

Way ahead for India?

- During Khaleda Zia's premiership, Bangladesh and Pakistan joined hands to subvert India's interests.
 - ♦ It provided support to Indian insurgent groups in the Northeast. Zia's home minister is in jail for arranging arms and ammunition from Pakistan for the ULFA.
 - ♦ Apart from this, several Islamic extremist groups came into prominence, with the support of the Tarique clique and Pakistan.
 - ♦ Tarique wanted to use these extremists to target the AL leadership and workers, while Pakistan wanted to use them against India.
- India has backed Sheikh Hasina and must continue to do so, given the track record of the Khaleda-Tarique regime.
- But in Bangladesh, there is a growing perception of misrule by the Awami League (AL) government even though Hasina has done a lot for the economic and infrastructure development of the nation.
- So India must be prepared to deal with a BNP-Jamaat government in future and hope they would not commit the same mistakes vis-a-vis India once again.
- In short, India must continue to support Sheikh Hasina, but should not write off Khaleda Zia.

TALIBAN IN AFGHANISTAN: BBC STUDY

According to a new study by BBC, Taliban fighters are now openly active in 70% of Afghanistan.

Taliban:

• Timeline:

- The Hardline Islamic Taliban movement swept to power in Afghanistan in 1996 after the civil war which followed the Soviet-Afghan war.
- They were ousted by the US-led invasion five years later in 2001. Since then they have fought a bloody insurgency which continues today.
- Violence has soared since international combat troops left Afghanistan three years ago.
- In 2016, Afghan civilian casualties hit a new high - a rise attributed by the UN largely to the Taliban. More than 8,500 civilians were killed or injured in the first three-quarters of 2017, according to the UN.

• Human rights violation:

- When in power, they imposed a brutal version of Sharia law, such as public executions and amputations, and banned women from public life.
- Men had to compulsorily grow beards and women to wear the all-covering burka; television, music and cinema were banned.
- They sheltered al-Qaeda leaders before and after being ousted.

BBC Study:

BBC Study is based on conversations with over 1,200 individual local sources in all districts of Afghanistan, conducted from August 12 – November 21, 2017.

1. Presence of Taliban:

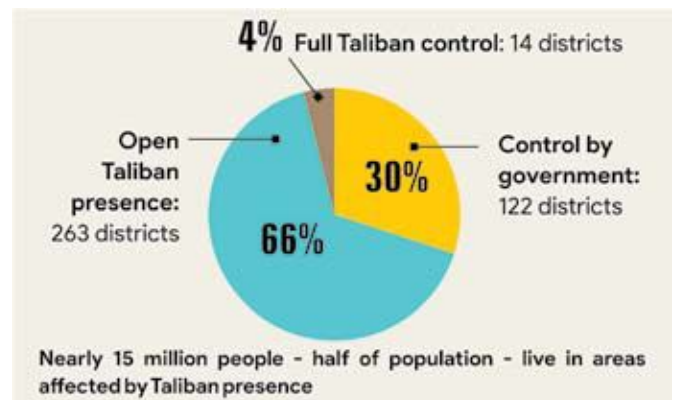
- Taliban are now in full control of 14 districts (that's 4% of the country) and have an active and open physical presence in a further 263 (66%).
- Thus Taliban now control or threaten much more territory than when foreign combat troops left in 2014.
- About 15 million people - half the population - are living in areas that are either controlled by the Taliban or where the Taliban are openly present and regularly mount attacks.
- The extent to which the Taliban have pushed beyond their traditional southern stronghold into eastern, western and northern parts of the country is clearly visible from the BBC study.
- In the areas defined as having an active and open Taliban presence, the militants conduct frequent attacks against Afghan government positions. These range from large organised group strikes on military bases to sporadic single attacks and ambushes against military convoys and police checkpoints.

2. Presence of Islamic State group:

- While Islamic State has shown they can hit targets in places like Kabul, they are largely confined to a relatively small stronghold on the border with Pakistan in the eastern province of Nangarhar.
- The group is fighting both the Afghan military and the Taliban for territorial control.
- During 2017 the number of attacks attributed to the group increased, with many targeting urban centres and often Shia Muslims in sectarian attacks almost never seen before in Afghanistan's 40-year conflict.
- IS does not fully control any district at present. However, the group has seized parts of the northern district of Darzab, displacing hundreds of people from their homes.

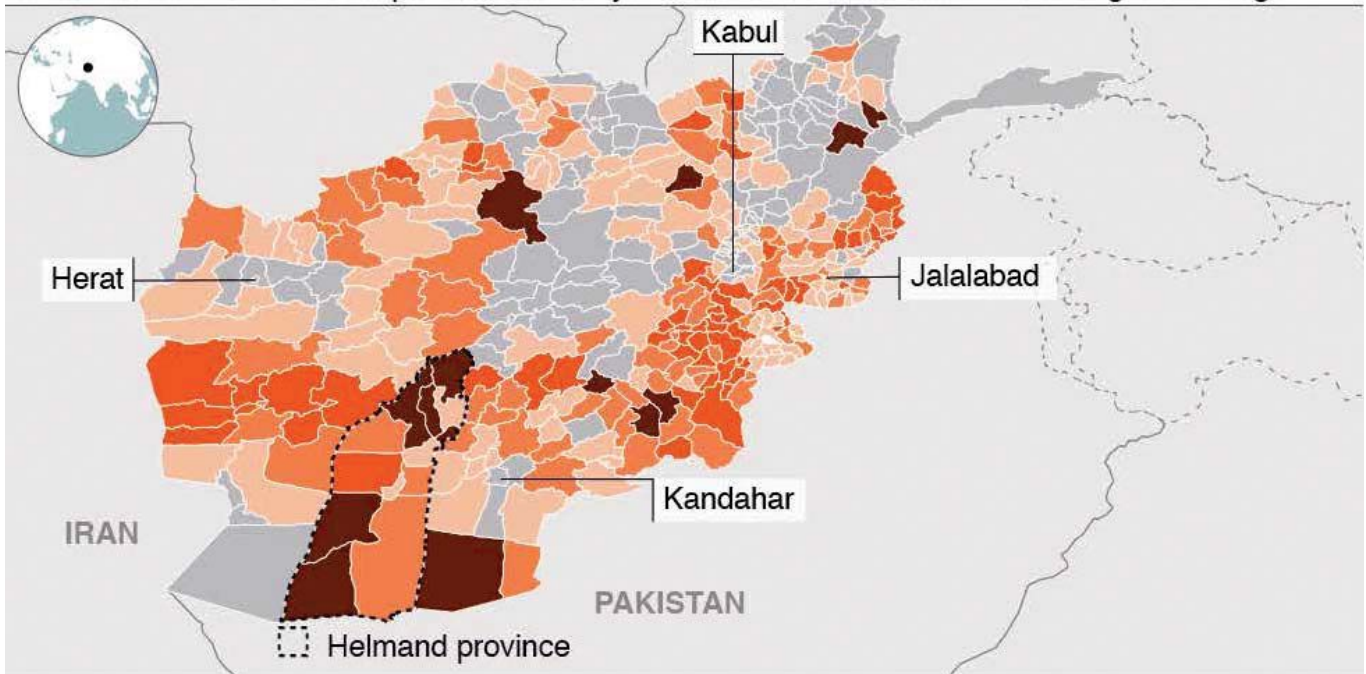
3. Presence of government:

- For the purposes of the investigation, districts controlled or held by the government are defined as having sitting representation from Kabul in the form of a district chief, police chief and courts.
- The BBC study found 122 districts (just over 30% of the country) did not have an open Taliban presence. These areas are ranked as under government control, but that does not mean they were free of violence.
- The Afghan government played down the report, saying it controls most areas.
- It argued that BBC report is influenced by conversations with people who may have experienced some kind of incident maybe for an hour in one day.
- However, in an acknowledgement of how far security has deteriorated, President Trump agreed last year to deploy 3,000 more soldiers, taking the size of the US force in Afghanistan to about 14,000.



Taliban presence in Afghanistan by district

Labelled cities have also experienced deadly suicide attacks, car bombs and targeted killings

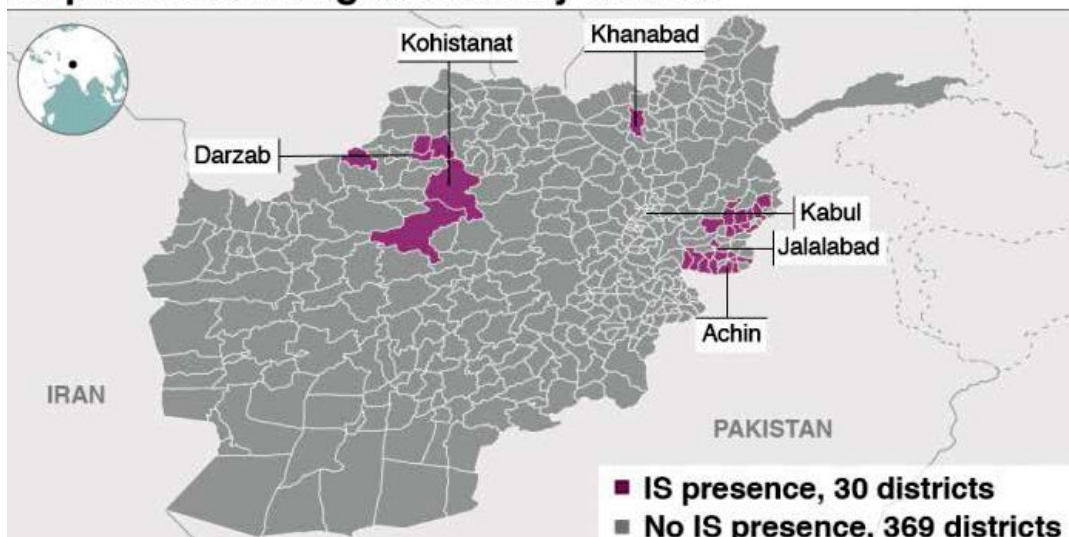


How the districts break down:

Open Taliban presence in government-held areas

- High - attacked at least twice a week, 15% of districts
- Medium - attacked at least three times a month, 20%
- Low - attacked once in three months, 31%
- Full government control, 30%
- Full Taliban control, 4%

IS presence in Afghanistan by district



MALDIVES POLITICAL CRISIS

In February 2018 Maldives President Abdulla Yameen declared a state of emergency and ordered the arrest of two judges of the Supreme Court including Chief Justice of the Maldives.

OVERVIEW OF CRISIS:

Supreme court verdict:

- In February 1, 2018, the Maldives Supreme Court Thursday ordered the immediate release of high-profile prisoners including former President Mohamed Nasheed and former Vice-President Ahmed Adeen.
- It also reinstated 12 Members of Parliament who had earlier been stripped of their seats.
- The court annulled all proceedings against the jailed political prisoners, and ordered their release until a fair retrial was held. But it did not order the dismissal of the charges against them.
- This in effect giving the opposition coalition a majority, and making President Abdulla Yameen vulnerable to impeachment.

Declaration of emergency:

- But Yameen has not only refused to abide by the orders of the judiciary but has gone ahead and arrested Supreme Court judges and members of the opposition.
- Subsequently he declared a 15-day state of Emergency in the country, suspending many citizen's rights, and giving the security forces sweeping powers to arrest and detain protesters and dissidents.
- The President is required to inform Parliament about a declaration of Emergency within two days, but the legislature currently stands suspended indefinitely.

INDIAN DIMENSION:

India's response:

- India has welcomed the Supreme Court order, and said the Maldives government must abide by it, calling it "imperative" for "the spirit of democracy and rule of law".
- India also appears to be openly siding with Nasheed and the Maldivian Opposition. This is not surprising.
- India has been ignored by the Yameen government, first by the summary removal of an Indian private company that was developing Male airport, then by the growing closeness between the Maldives President and China. More recently, Maldives signed a free trade agreement with China.

Demand for India's intervention:

- There are many in the Maldivian Opposition camp who have been clamouring for 'decisive Indian action in Maldives'.

■ PERPETUALLY IN CRISIS

Nov. 2008 : Mohamed Nasheed becomes the first democratically elected President.



Jan. 2012 : Row erupts over arrest of the Chief Justice.

Feb. 2012 : Nasheed announces his resignation after a mutiny by the police.

Nov. 2013 : Yameen defeats Nasheed in presidential election run-off.

Feb. 2015 : Nasheed is arrested on terrorism charges and later jailed for 13 years.

May 2016 : Nasheed is granted refugee status in the U.K., where he had gone for treatment.

Aug. 2016 : Arrest warrant issued against Nasheed for failing to return.

- Mohamed Nasheed, Maldives' former president and currently an opposition leader-in-exile, has urged India to come to the rescue of democracy in his country.

Operation cactus:

- India did precisely that nearly three decades ago, when it launched Operation Cactus on the night of 3 November 1988.
- A band of armed militants of the People's Liberation Organisation (PLOTE) came from Sri Lanka and seized control over vital installations in Maldives.
- However, they were unable to lay their hands on President Gayoom who shifted his hiding bases for hours and promptly requested the then Indian government of PM Rajiv Gandhi for immediate military help.
- Rajiv Gandhi dispatched 1,600 soldiers within nine hours and thereafter, it took just a few hours for the Indian forces to restore order and reinstall the Gayoom government.

Arguments for India's intervention:

- Ever since Yameen took power in 2013, India-Maldives relations have deteriorated.
- Apart from crushing democratic forces, Yameen has handed out big infrastructure projects to Chinese companies.
- He has openly challenged India by allowing Chinese naval ships to dock in Male.
- Yameen's relations with Saudi Arabia and the growing trend of radicalization in Maldives have also been areas of concern in New Delhi.
- If Yameen stays without much alteration in Maldives' internal balance of power, he will act further against Indian interests.
- It might make sense for India to sit out the internal affairs of faraway countries. But to do so in small, neighbouring countries will take away the title of regional leadership.
- The plethora of interventions in other countries has earned the US a whole host of enemies but one cannot credibly think of a global superpower staying out of major crises just to earn some goodwill.
- In recent months, China has helped mount a coup against dictator Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and has brokered an alliance of left parties in Nepal to fight the Nepali Congress, the party in power.
- In addition, India has about 25,000 Indian expatriates in Maldives who are engaged in a number of professional pursuits. Their safety and security is a matter of acute concern.

Arguments against repeating operation cactus:

Citing Operation Cactus to justify a similar action by India in the Maldives today is acutely flawed and erroneous. There are several reasons for that.

- Because it was a group of militants who had run over the Maldivian government, the Indian government won the international community's praise for its quick and effective action.
- The entire population of Maldives was shocked by the militants' action and was squarely behind the Gayoom government and India.
- The Indian government had been approached by none other than the President of Maldives, requesting military intervention.
- Yameen Abdul Gayoom is the President of Maldives, a sovereign nation — India cannot interfere in the domestic affairs of a sovereign neighbouring country in the name of 'saving democracy', no matter how grave the crisis.
- Why should India alone take the task and give its foreign policy an adventurist dimension?

What about covert options?

- The Maldivian Opposition has long been hoping for India to launch some sort of covert action and dethrone the Yameen government for the sake of restoring democracy in the Maldives.
- But on what basis can India launch such a covert mission?
- India also cannot afford to enrage China by launching such a covert mission, which can have dangerous long-term implications.
- Covert options, if at all they are being considered by India in the Maldives, have to be long-term in nature.

Way ahead for India?

• Wait and watch:

- ♦ It is widely believed that President Yameen has throttled democracy in his country. Also, the entire international community, barring China and Saudi Arabia, have censured Yameen's actions.
- ♦ Despite all this, no foreign country can exercise overt or covert methods to make him more democratic.
- ♦ India doesn't have too many options to intervene in the ongoing Maldivian crisis directly or indirectly.
- ♦ India can only wait for the presidential elections in the Maldives, which are due in the next six months, though there is a strong possibility that President Yameen may defer these elections or hold the elections in an opaque manner so that his victory is assured.

• Long term vision: don't depend much on Nasheed

- ♦ Nasheed, who has openly canvassed India for political backing, may be more India-friendly than Yameen. But, as with Sri Lanka, which has steadfastly built its ties with China even under a "pro-India" government, the same can happen in Maldives.
- ♦ India must be prepared to face up to the reality that if Nasheed were to return to power, the Maldives may end up doing the same. Countries act in their own interests.
- ♦ In south Asia, smaller nations have tried to balance their fears and insecurities of living in India's shadow by habitually playing it off against China, and to a lesser extent against Pakistan, using the leverage on both sides to secure their own interests.
- ♦ China's deep pockets do not give India a level playing field in this game, but deep historical and political connections give it a different kind of advantage. Yameen or Nasheed, in the long run, India must reach out to the Maldives without turning it into a zero-sum game with China.

INDO-ASEAN RELATIONS

India invited all ten heads of state of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as chief guests at the Republic Day celebrations.

ASEAN:

- ASEAN stands for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.
- **Objective:**
 - ♦ It is a political and economic union of 10 Asian countries aimed at promoting the economic growth, political stability of individual countries, and regional stability among its members.
 - ♦ Apart from economic and political growth it also focuses on social progress, social-cultural evolution among member countries, and provision of mechanisms and strategies to resolve differences peacefully.
- **History:**
 - ♦ It was formed in 1967, by Thailand, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia.
 - ♦ Membership has been extended to include Vietnam, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and Brunei.



Republic day 2018:

- **India and the ASEAN are celebrating:**
 - ♦ 25 years of their rapidly expanding partnership.
 - ♦ 15 years of their Summit engagement.
 - ♦ Five years of Strategic their Partnership.
- In addition, ASEAN completed 50 years of its establishment in 2017.
- **Republic day 2018:**
 - ♦ To mark the 25th anniversary of the partnership, all 10 Heads of States/Governments of ASEAN States

participated as Chief Guests in the Republic Day celebrations on 26 January 2018.

- ♦ This is for the first time that more than one Head of State/ Government has been invited as Chief Guest on India's National Day.
- ♦ It is also a measure of India's growing international profile and prestige that leaders of all 10 ASEAN countries have readily acquiesced to participate in this event.
- ♦ The presence of the entire ASEAN leadership on this occasion is a natural extrapolation of the Act East Policy (AEP).

Delhi declaration:

- During the visit, India and leaders of the ASEAN signed a statement called the "Delhi Declaration".
- **Key highlights:**
 - ♦ Strengthen ASEAN-India economic relations by effectively implementing the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, and intensifying efforts towards creating a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
 - ♦ Take steps towards early completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway Project. The trilateral highway should then be extended to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam.
 - ♦ Deepen cooperation in combating extremism and other transnational crimes such as human trafficking, illicit drug trafficking, cyber-crime and piracy.
 - ♦ Hold the first ASEAN-India Cyber Dialogue in 2018.
 - ♦ Cooperate for the conservation of marine resources, in the aviation and maritime transport sectors.
 - ♦ Deepen relations in science and technological exchange, implement an ASEAN-India Space Cooperation Programme, and encourage private sector investment.

Look East to Act East:

- Look East Policy (LEP) was put in place by then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992:
 - ♦ LEP was primarily focused on strengthening economic ties between India and ASEAN states.
 - ♦ The end of the cold war and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided a welcome opportunity for India to reach out to South-East Asia to capitalize upon its historical, cultural and civilisational linkages with the region.
- The Look East Policy registered impressive gains for 20 years after its inception.

- Having become a sectoral partner of ASEAN in 1992, India became a dialogue partner and member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996.
- India and ASEAN entered into a summit partnership in 2002, the 10th anniversary of LEP.
- The two sides launched negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in goods in 2003 which became effective in 2010. India's two-way trade with ASEAN now stands at approximately USD 76 billion.
- The India-ASEAN Free Trade pact in services and investments, which was concluded in 2014 and came into effect a year later, has the potential to reduce India's trade deficit with the region as also impart a strong impulse to bilateral exchanges.
- Act East Policy (AEP) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the first East Asia Summit (EAS) attended by him in Myanmar in November 2014.
 - India's 'Act East' policy, upgraded from the 'Look East' policy in 2014, serves as a platform for deepening and strengthening its relationship with Asean and the East Asian economies.
 - Act East policy highlight India's military, political and economic interests along with those of regional partners in the East.
 - The least-developed nations of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) have been a special focus area for India under it. The four, together, account for over a quarter of Asean's population and 12 per cent of its GDP.

Way Ahead: Five Key Areas for India & ASEAN

In the coming years, the ASEAN-India partnership should focus on five strategic areas:

1. Connectivity:

- Despite increasing trade between India and ASEAN, physical connectivity remains a binding constraint for further integration.
- Infrastructure projects that enhance transportation links between ASEAN and India are a key component of the economic connectivity and integration strategy.
- Several infrastructure projects linking India and ASEAN are underway, including the Trilateral Highway connecting India's Northeast to Thailand, the Dawei Deep-sea Port in Myanmar, and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project.
- Continued commitment and investment are needed in these infrastructure initiatives.
- But improved physical connectivity should be augmented by efforts to reduce other barriers to trade, namely, non-tariff barriers (NTBs) that have the potential to significantly impede trade and integration.

- The reduction of strategic barriers must be addressed to enhance the trade potential within ASEAN, and between ASEAN and India. Existing institutional mechanisms should be leveraged to align strategies and agreements for the reduction of NTBs over the next five years.

2. The Blue Economy:

- The maritime space is becoming increasingly central to security, economic development, and connectivity.
- Piracy, disputes over resources, territorial claims, terrorism, China's increasing assertiveness, and a fractured governance system are creating instability in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Ensuring peace and security in the IOR should continue to be at the centre of India and ASEAN partnership.
- Besides, there is scope for collaboration in blue economy.
- The blue (or ocean) economy refers to ocean-based economic activities, including fisheries and aquaculture, renewable ocean energy, seaports and shipping, offshore hydrocarbons and seabed minerals, marine biotechnology, research and development, and tourism.
- There is potential for greater strategic collaboration in sustainable economic development. This should include:
 - Collaboration on the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
 - Rejuvenating fish stocks.
 - Creating new public-private partnership models.
 - The development of accounting methods of ocean assets.
 - Knowledge-sharing.
 - Conservation and management of coastal and marine areas.

3. The Digital Age:

- Two areas of focus should shape the India-ASEAN agenda relating to digitalisation over the next five years: 1) Inclusive growth; and 2) Cyber Security.
- **Inclusive Growth:**
 - India and ASEAN must focus on ensuring greater economic inclusion.
 - Technological change and digitisation may greatly increase inequality in incomes, digital access, and opportunities.
 - India and ASEAN should facilitate greater knowledge sharing and best practices in fostering inclusive growth.
 - This should include ICT consultations between the private sector and governments with a focus on broadband connectivity.
- **Cyber security:**
 - The governance of cyber space and cyber security policy are still evolving, and both India and ASEAN should seek to be a decisive voice in norm-setting, and in cultivating inter-regional cooperation for addressing cyber insecurity.

- India and ASEAN's presence in the cyber governance space has become even more important in the context of China's aspirations to influence the digital governance architecture.
- Potential areas for India-ASEAN collaboration include cyber security strategy formulation, research and development efforts, harmonisation of legislation related to cybercrime, and establishment of multi-stakeholder dialogues.

4. Migration:

- India and ASEAN stand to benefit significantly from increased labour mobility and existing migration flows between the two regions show massive promise.
- The majority of international migrants from India move to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. In ASEAN, Singapore and Malaysia are migrant receiving (as well as sending) states. They rank 9th and 15th as receiving states of Indian migrants, respectively.
- Malaysia and Singapore benefit greatly from the inflow of foreign workers from India and elsewhere.
 - Job creation is expected to increase significantly by 2020 in Singapore and Malaysia. Gaps in labour supply across skill categories already exist and are on the rise in many sectors.
 - Finding sufficient and sufficiently skilled workers is a constraint for employers in Malaysia.
- The World Bank estimates that a 10-percent increase in low-skilled migrant workers in Malaysia would raise the country's GDP by 1.1 percent.
- India faces a jobs challenge, as economic growth in recent years has not been accompanied by growth in employment. Also, the contributions of remittances are essential for many families to meet their basic consumption needs.

- The benefits of migration for many Indians are overshadowed by poor systems for emigration before departure and poor treatment and working conditions while abroad.
- Thus, ASEAN and India should work together to reduce barriers to immigration, and facilitate the freer movement of labour between them, as they both stand to gain.

5. Soft Power:

- The fifth and final strategic area for cooperation is the strengthening of the partnership's regional influence through soft power.
- Soft power is the ability to shape the desired outcomes of other states through means other than military persuasion or coercion.
- In addition to India-ASEAN institutional and political relations, ASEAN and India have strong historical, cultural and religious ties.
- India has strengths to leverage in terms of soft power.
 - The first is that India presents an alternative growth model to the centralised, authoritarian Chinese one—a model that embodies and protects the people's freedoms and rights.
 - Further, India's pluralism and multiculturalism lends itself to being an important influencer in a diverse region.
 - Finally, India's democracy lends the nation greater legitimacy.

Concluding remarks:

- In a period of geopolitical uncertainty in Asia, ASEAN and India have an important role to play.
- India and the ASEAN are two actors indispensable to the creation of new 'rules of the game' in Asia."
- As India and ASEAN embark on the next phase of their strategic partnership, the above mentioned five areas hold the promise of impact.



ASHGABAT AGREEMENT

In February 2018, India joined the Ashgabat Agreement.

What is it?

- The Ashgabat agreement is a multimodal transport agreement.
- It envisages creation of an International Transport and Transit Corridor connecting Central Asia with the Persian Gulf. The corridor will be multi-modal, and shall consist of road, rail and sea transport.
- It shall also include easing of trade barriers and simple procedures for movement of goods between signatory states.
- The land transport component of the agreement includes rail links running through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran. Iran-Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan (ITK) railway line, which became operational in December 2014 is an important leg of this corridor.
- Besides, it will create a link with Omani ports of Salalah, Duqm and Sohar, and Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas, Jask and Chabahar.

Member countries:

- India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Oman, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.
- Turkmenistan is the depository state for the agreement.

Timeline:

- An agreement on establishing a new international transport and transit corridor was signed between Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Oman and Qatar in 2011, at Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan.
- This agreement formed the basis for developing the shortest trade route between the CARs and Iranian and Omani ports.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on legal, procedural, infrastructure aspects of the agreement were signed in 2014 in Muscat.
- While Qatar withdrew from the agreement in 2013, Kazakhstan applied for membership in the same year. Its membership was approved in 2015. The

inclusion of Kazakhstan increased the significance of the agreement, as it is the largest economy of the region.

- Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also announced Pakistan's bid to join the Agreement. However, it has been unable to gather consent of all four members.
- India's bid to become a member of Ashgabat Agreement received a boost during Prime Minister Modi's visit to all five CARs in 2015.
- Union Cabinet gave its approval for India to accede to the Ashgabat Agreement in 2016.
- After receiving consent from all four founding members, India's accession to the Ashgabat Agreement entered into force on 3 February 2018.

Significance for India:

1. wrt International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):

- India, along with Russia and Iran, has signed an agreement on creating the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which also has Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Oman as its members.
- The operationalisation of the INSTC is inching closer to becoming a reality. It encompasses ship, rail and road routes connecting India with Russia, Central Asia and Europe via Iran.



- The Iran-Turkmenistan-Kazakhstan (ITK) railway line will be the major route under the Ashgabat Agreement. It had become operational in 2014 and has also been included as part of the India-funded INSTC. Therefore, the Ashgabat Agreement and INSTC will be easily synchronized.
- India has also ratified the 'Transports Internationaux Routiers' (TIR) Convention, which facilitates trans-border movement of goods.
- Joining the Ashgabat Agreement shall fill in this missing link, and thus facilitate seamless link with Eurasia.

2. wrt Central Asia Region (CAR):

- CARs are part of India's extended neighbourhood.
- However, in the present geo-political scenario, India does not have a direct land link with the CARs. This has hampered India's trade with these countries.
- India's current trade with Central Asia is minimal at a little over \$1 billion and is not growing much. The volume of trade with the region accounts for a mere 0.11 per cent of India's total trade. And, India's share in Central Asia's total trade is only about one per cent.
- Population of the CARs is about 70 million, out of which 32 million live in Uzbekistan alone. Thus, these countries are important markets for India. With enhancement of connectivity, India's trade can expand in qualitative as well as quantitative terms.
- Joining the Ashgabat Agreement would make it easier for India to reach out to Central Asia which houses strategic and high-value minerals including uranium, copper, titanium, ferroalloys, yellow phosphorus, iron ore, rolled metal, propane, butane, zinc, coking coal, etc.
- Kazakhstan alone wants to increase its non-oil exports by 50 per cent by 2025. And, without direct transport access, India cannot procure the Central Asian riches needed for its manufacturing economy.
- Strategic location of these countries can also facilitate India's land connectivity with Eurasian region at large.

3. wrt Iran:

- India considers Iran to be our gateway to Eurasia, and thus, important link in the INSTC.
- India has recently sent its first consignment to Afghanistan through the Chabahar Port. It has also planned to construct a railway between Chabahar to Zahedan. In February 2018, India hosted the Iranian President this month.
- In this backdrop, joining the Ashgabat Agreement is definitely a step forward in India's march into Eurasia.
- India now must enlarge the strategic role of Chabahar port for evolving an integrated transportation network involving

both the INSTC and the proposed transit corridor to Central Asia.

- In fact, the Chabahar-Irانشahr-Zahedan-Mashad corridor is the ideal route to connect to Sarakhs (Turkmen border). India has already committed to lay a railway track from Chabahar to Zahedan. Chabahar port can be connected with INSTC if the line were to be further extended till Mashad.

4. wrt Eurasia:

- Accession to the agreement would enable India to utilise this existing transport and transit corridor to facilitate trade and commercial interaction with the Eurasian region.
- When it comes to Eurasia, container transport plays a significant role, and for India to join the competitive situation in the Euro-Asian transit system, active participation in transportation projects becomes essential.
- India's connectivity approach need not be limited to increasing trade and commerce but should aim to enhance investment and services, interlinking sources of raw material, centres of productions and markets between India and Eurasia.
- For example, a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) could spur the unhindered flow of raw materials as well as inflow of capital and technology through new industrial infrastructure along Chabahar and INSTC routes.

5. wrt Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS):

- The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region had a share of 0.91 percent in India's exports and 1.86 percent in its imports during 2015-16.
- Russia continues to be India's most important trading partner in the region accounting for about 65 percent of India's trade with CIS.
- India has established intergovernmental commissions and joint working groups with CIS countries of Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; and has pledged to expand its economic footprint in this region.
- Accession to the Agreement shall also diversify India's connectivity options with Central Asia.

Concluding remark:

- India's participation in Eurasian connectivity projects through the Ashgabat Agreement will serve to address the integration process under the EAEU and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in more viable ways.

NETANYAHU'S VISIT TO INDIA

In January 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid a visit to India.

Timeline:

The two countries are celebrating 25 years of friendship. Here's a look at some of the key milestones in the relationship:

- **1947:** The UN drafted a plan of partition of Mandate Palestine, approved by the UN General Assembly, but **rejected by most of the Arab world and also by India.**
- **1950:** India recognised Israel, but did not establish diplomatic relations.
- **1962:** PM Jawaharlal Nehru writes to Israeli PM Ben Gurion seeking arms and ammunition supply during the war with China. Israel responds, making it the basis for defence ties between the two countries.
- **1971:** PM Indira Gandhi asks then Israeli PM Golda Meir for weapons for the war against Pakistan. Meir agrees.
- **1985:** PM Rajiv Gandhi meets with his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting. It's the first public meeting between leaders of the two countries.
- **1992:** Diplomatic ties between India and Israel formally established by the Narasimha Rao government. Israel opens its embassy in New Delhi in February and in May, India opens its embassy in Tel Aviv.
- **1996:** India acquires 32 IAI Searcher unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, from Israel.
- **1996:** Israeli President Ezer Weizman leads a 24-member business delegation to India. Weizman is the first Israeli head of state to visit India. During his visit, a weapons deal involving the purchase of the Barak-1 vertically-launched surface-to-air missiles is finalised.
- **1999:** Israel supplies weapons as India battled Pakistani insurgents and army regulars during the Kargil war.
- **2003:** Ariel Sharon becomes the first Israeli PM to visit India.
- **2006:** Israel and India sign an agriculture cooperation pact.
- **2009:** Israeli Barak 8 air defence system is sold to India for \$1.1 billion.
- **2013:** Israel announces help to India to diversify and raise yields of its fruit and vegetable crops through centres of excellence across India.
- **2015:** India abstains from vote against Israel at the UN Human Rights Commission, signalling a shift in its Israel-Palestine policy.



- **2015:** President Pranab Mukherjee visits Israel to initiate deals on various collaborative projects on technology and culture.
- **2017:** PM Narendra Modi makes a stand-alone visit to Israel, the first ever by an Indian PM, and spends three days in the country.
- **2017 (December):** India votes for an Arab-sponsored resolution rejecting US recognition of Jerusalem as capital of Israel.

Highlights of the recent visit:

- **Economy:** The Key focus areas were
 - ♦ **Trade:** Increasing bilateral trade from present level of \$4 billion to \$10 billion.
 - ♦ **Investment:** Encouraging more involvement of Israeli companies to invest in India.
- **Terrorism:** The joint statement advocated "strong measures against terrorists, terror organizations, those who sponsor, encourage or finance terrorism or provide sanctuary to terrorists and terror groups."
- **Science & Technology:**
 - ♦ There was also agreement to increase cooperation in space, homeland security and cyber, higher education and research, science and technology, tourism and culture.
 - ♦ There will be Technology transfer especially in areas of water, agriculture, and innovation.
 - ♦ Centre of excellence: The two Prime Ministers apprised the progress on the 28 Centres of Excellence which are being jointly established in different States of India.
 - ♦ It was decided to organise India-Israel Women in STEM Symposium in October, 2018 in India.

List of MoUs/Agreements signed during the visit:

- MoU on **Cyber Security** Cooperation between India and Israel.
- MoU between the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and the Ministry of Energy on Cooperation in **Oil and Gas Sector**.
- Protocol between India and Israel on Amendments to the **Air Transport Agreement**.
- Agreement on **Film-co-production** between India and Israel.
- MoU between the Central Council for Research in Homeopathy, Ministry of AYUSH and the Centre for Integrative Complementary Medicine, Shaare Zedek Medical Center on Cooperation in the field of Research in **Homeopathic Medicine**.
- MoU between Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) and the Technion- Israel Institute of Technology for cooperation in the field of **space**.
- Memorandum of Intent between **Invest India and Invest in Israel**.
- Letter of Intent between **IOCL and Phinergy Ltd.** For cooperation in the area of metal-air batteries.
- Letter of Intent between **IOCL and Yeda Research and Development Co Ltd** for cooperation in the area of concentrated solar thermal technologies.

Importance of visit:

- This was only the second visit by an Israeli Prime Minister to India after the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992. The earlier visit was 15 years ago in 2003.
- The visit also commemorates the Twenty-five years of India-Israel relationship. It will strengthen the Indo-Israel relation.
- The visit was even more significant due to India's December 2017 vote in the United Nations General Assembly against the USA's decision to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem. It showed that India has been successful in de-hyphenating its relationship of Israel with Palestine issue.
- Israel is a very important defence partner for us. The visit will further strengthen our defence partnership and help us in modernizing our armed forces.

Concerns:

- Netanyahu upon arrival in Delhi called the India-Israel relationship a "marriage made in heaven".
- But as India actively tries to de-hyphenate the relationship with both Israel and Palestine, there are issues that have posed a true test to the bilateral friendship.

- Much depends on the personal tuning between the incumbent prime ministers.
- Partnering with Western (pro-Israel) powers in the global fight against terrorism, as well as respecting concerns of a vast Indian Muslim population supportive of the Palestinian cause have been a tightrope to walk.
- Its decision not to award a 500 million-dollar deal for Spike Anti-Tank Missiles to an Israeli company during the visit has pinched Israel.
- **Palestine:**
 - ♦ India's vote in support of a UN resolution condemning Donald Trump's declaration of Jerusalem as Israel's capital disappointed Tel Aviv.
 - ♦ Palestine issue and Israel's use of disproportionate force against Palestine may also potentially affect India's relationship in future.
- **Iran:** But perhaps an even bigger source of unspoken contention is the gathering momentum of the India-Iran relationship, seen most recently with the opening of Phase One of the Chabahar port built with Indian collaboration.
 - ♦ Israel is deeply uncomfortable with Iran's increasing clout in countries like Syria and Lebanon, and is looking for international support to curb it.
 - ♦ Israel has also serious reservations regarding the efficacy of the Iran nuclear deal. Israel believes that the deal merely delays the nuclear programme.
 - ♦ India on the other hand sees Iran as a key partner, central to its energy needs and its geo-strategic compulsions. India also support diplomatic negotiations to address concerns emanating from Iran's nuclear program.

Way ahead:

- Over the years India-Israel ties have expanded steadily. It is now fully out of the closet also.
- Under Narendra Modi and Benjamin Netanyahu the ties are on course for further expansion due to the personal chemistry they share.
- Netanyahu's visit and Modi's trip to Israel reaffirmed the fact that India and Israel have been able to insulate what many see as a strategic "match made in heaven" from their divergent policy preferences.
- However, India should balance its ties with Israel with its relationship with Arab countries and Iran.
- India should adopt pragmatic approach and expansion of ties with any country should be for the maximization of national interest only.

AGNI-5

In January 2018, Agni-5, was successfully flight tested to its full range from Dr. Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha.

Agni series:

- Agni-5 is the fifth missile in this series after Agni-1(700 km range), Agni-2(2000 km range), Agni-3 (2500 km range) and Agni-4 (3500km range).
- Agni missiles are a product of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Project (IGMDP) launched by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in 1982.
- Although the IGMDP terminated in 2008 on completion of its objectives, further development of Agni series of missiles has continued in order to enhance range, mobility and maintainability.
- With the exception of the Agni-1, all Agni missiles are fully solid-fuelled with carbon composite heat shields for re-entry protection.
- All of the Agni variants are known to be extremely accurate and use navigation systems based on a combination of ring laser gyros and inertial navigation.
- Presently, at least two Agni missile groups are reported to be in service.

Agni-5:

- It is an intercontinental surface-to-surface ballistic missile (ICBM) with a range of more than 5,000 km.
- **Recent test:**
 - ♦ This was the fifth test of the Missile and the third consecutive test of a canister on a road-mobile launcher. All the five missions so far have been successful.
 - ♦ While the first test was conducted on April 19, 2012, the second and third tests were carried out in 2013 and 2015. The last test was done on December 26, 2016.
- **Capable of MIRV:**
 - ♦ India's successful experience in space research, particularly the launch of multiple satellites on a single rocket, has endowed the scientists with the capability to master MIRV (Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicles) Technology.
 - ♦ In view of the R&D developments in China, it was considered expedient to commence a research programme on MIRV systems as a technology demonstrator.
 - ♦ Costing Rs. 100 crores per missile, the Agni-5, with a

Fire Power
AGNI-V

RANGE
More than
5,000
kilometres

- The Agni-V is the most advanced version of the indigenously-built missile series.
- It is an Intercontinental surface-to-surface nuclear-capable ballistic missile.
- Developed by DRDO.
- Agni-V was last tested on December 26, 2016.
- Countries with ICBM technology: U.S., Russia, U.K., France and China.

AGNI-V

3

Propulsion
stages

17.5

Length
metres

50

Weight
tonnes

1

Payload
tonne

3

Engine
stage solid

Other missiles in the series

	AGNI-1	AGNI-2	AGNI-3	AGNI-4	AGNI-5
Range (km)	700	2,000	3,000	4,000	5,000+
Test date	April 19, 2012	Sept. 15, 2013	Jan. 31, 2015	Nov. 9, 2015	Jan. 18, 2018

range of 5,000 km-plus, is known to be capable of carrying MIRV warheads.

Canisterised version:

- ♦ A canisterised version of the Agni-5 was first test-fired on January 15, 2015.
- ♦ The process of canisterisation means the warhead will be mated with the missile for storage, not stored separately and mounted on the missile shortly before launch.

Next step?

- ♦ After additional user trials over the next twelve to eighteen months, the nuclear-capable Agni-5 missile will be inducted into India's Strategic Forces Command (SFC).
- ♦ Normally, five to seven tests are carried out, including technical trials and user trials, before a missile is inducted into the arsenal.
- ♦ On the operationalisation of Agni-5, all targets in China will come within range from India. The Chinese are reported to be concerned at this development.

Should India develop Agni-6?

- Range enhancement has been the main goal so far. Long range weapons have two inherent strengths:
 1. the ability to remain deployed in depth away from the high-intensity conflict zone and
 2. the ability to strike distant target systems thus expanding the battlespace.
- Both these factors form important components of the deterrence calculus.

- The DRDO is also reported to have plans to develop the Agni-6 ICBM, which will be capable of carrying a 3-ton payload of MIRVs and manoeuvrable re-entry vehicles (MaRVs). The range of this missile is expected to be over 5,500 km.
- However, the existence of such a programme has been officially denied.
- In this arena, what ought to be the next goal for the Indian Weapon Development Programme? Should India develop Agni-6? If so, what should be the developmental goals?
- Damage mechanism (warhead), range and targeting accuracy define the potency of a missile.
- To further improve on Agni -5, the following could be undertaken:
 - ♦ One, further enhancing its range to over 10,000 km.
 - ♦ Two, improving on the targeting requirements and making the system capable of handling diverse target systems within existing range.
 - ♦ Lastly, developing different warhead versions of the missile.
- Militarily, further progression on all these prongs would be desirable. But it would be prudent to select primary focus areas based on an operational assessment.

1. Enhancing range?

- Agni-5, like its predecessors, is expected to have a nuclear warhead. India has No First Use (NFU) policy for nuclear weapons. Therefore, the target for Agni-5 has to be from a group of nuclear weapon nations.
- Barring two nuclear-powered nations that India shares its land boundary with, all others from this group are practically ruled out as they are unlikely to consider a nuclear attack on India in the foreseeable future.
- With an existing range of over 5000km, Agni-5 meets all the possible requirements as a nuclear weapon delivery vehicle. Agni-5 only enhances the existing value of nuclear deterrence as multiple options exist for Second Strike. No further enhancement of range is operationally essential.

2. Improving the target?

- Coming to the second area for potential enhancement, the Targeting process commences with fixing the location of the intended target system.
- Adequate data can be collected about fixed/large target systems with the use of satellites over a period of time and archived to be used on as required basis.
- However, the approach for targeting a mobile system needs to be different.
 - ♦ Detecting, identifying and tracking mobile target systems in hostile territory is possible only when they are within sensor range of existing air assets.

- Deployment of aerial assets for surveillance in hostile airspace is a high-risk mission and distance wise may not be possible in areas that can be targeted by Agni-5.
- There is also the added fact that mobile target can be better concealed on land, making mission failure a distinct possibility.
 - ♦ This contrasts with the case of a mobile target in international waters, where detecting and tracking are comparatively easier as airborne sensors can be deployed with minimal risks and the target cannot conceal itself.
- Therefore, a very low assurance level is expected in case a long range weapon like Agni-5 is used with a conventional warhead against a mobile target in hostile territory.

3. Developing different warhead versions of the missile:

- Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean are the lifeline of the Indian economy and Indian naval assets are present to ensure their security.
- However, extra-regional powers, with the support of infrastructure in countries in Indian Ocean Region (IOR), are increasing their military deployment and could infringe upon Indian interests.
- Aircraft carriers are invariably deployed as a part of Carrier Battle Group (CBG) with a number of combat and support ships for operational and logistical imperatives.
- Air-launched long-range cruise missiles like BrahMos can provide effective deterrence but the continuous deployment of air power over the long range is resource intensive.
- In such a scenario, a conventional warhead ballistic missile like Agni-5 can be a cost-effective tool.
- Additionally, ballistic missiles with their elliptical high angle trajectory and hypersonic speed limit the efficacy of most of the ship-based air defence systems.
- Thus a coordinated attack by cruise missiles and ballistic missiles will test the limits of even the most advanced air defence systems with a high probability of success.

Concluding remark:

- Weapons like long-range missiles play a significant role in the prevailing 'no war no peace' conditions.
- Successive successful tests of Agni-5 have paved the way for its operationalisation. This capability, on induction, will enhance India's deterrence power.
- Further 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, so essential for the region's growth and development.

UPCOCA DRAFT BILL - 2017

Recently, The Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly has passed Uttar Pradesh Control of Organised Crime Act, 2017 (UPCOCA). This bill is on the lines of the MCOCA to combat organised crimes in the state.

Salient provisions:

- **Crimes dealt with:**
 - ♦ UPCOCA deals with some of the crimes like land grabbing, money laundering, smuggling of wild animals, extortion, murder, illegal mining, etc.
- **Special provision:**
 - ♦ The UPCOCA law gives special powers to the police to arrest members of the crime syndicates.
 - ♦ The accused will not be able to get bail for 6 month if booked under the UPCOCA.
 - ♦ It has provision for police remand of 30 days for accused.
 - ♦ It shift the burden of proof from the prosecution to the accused.
 - ♦ The confession made before the police will be the final.
 - ♦ People booked under UPCOCA will be lodged in the high-security area of the jail. They could meet their relatives only after the approval of the district magistrate.
 - ♦ It empower the police to intercept communications and present them as evidence.
 - ♦ It proposes that journalists will require permission before publishing anything on organised crime.
 - ♦ The property obtained through crime can be taken over during the course of investigation.
- **Punishment:**
 - ♦ The Bill has provisions for punishment of minimum 7 years and fine of Rs. 15 lakh minimum.
- **Prevention of misuse of the bill**
 - ♦ The cases under it could be filed only on the recommendations of the committee of divisional commissioner and range deputy inspector general of police.
 - ♦ Property would be taken over with the permission of the court.

Justification of bill:

- **Status of crime in Uttar Pradesh:**
 - ♦ According to NCRB, Uttar Pradesh tops crime list in India.
 - ♦ In 2016 highest number of heinous crimes such as murder and against women occurred in UP.
- Strict provisions will act as deterrent against organised crime. It will help in curbing the organised crimes in state.
- Organised crimes are closely linked with terrorism as well. This law will help in addressing the problem of terrorism as well.

- Taking over of property collected through criminal activities will prevent their misuse by criminals during the course of investigation
- **States with similar laws:**
 - ♦ Maharashtra has Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA) to combat organised crimes like land mafia, mining mafia.
 - ♦ There are similar laws in Karnataka and Gujarat as well.

Opposition to bill:

- There is opposition to the bill on the ground that its some of the provisions are draconian
 - ♦ Shifting burden of proof to accused violates the basic principle of innocent until proven guilty.
 - ♦ Making confession made before police final and admissible in court contradicts CrPC, under which only a voluntary confession made before a magistrate is admissible
 - ♦ Requirement of permission for journalist is against the freedom of press.
- The bill could be misused against opposition politician and can there is fear of using it against any particular community.

Way forward:

- The present situation of law and order in UP makes this act a welcome step. It shows the seriousness of government in tackling the organised crime.
- However, The focus should be on providing better training and resources to the police and investigator who are more relevant and effective in tackling crime.

Organized Crime?

Organized crime is a category of transnational, national, or local groupings of highly centralized enterprises run by criminals who intend to engage in illegal activity, most commonly for money and profit.

Activities of organized crime include assassination, blackmailing, illegal gambling, counterfeiting of intellectual property, prostitution, smuggling, drug trafficking, arms trafficking, money laundering, trafficking in human beings etc.

There is a tendency to distinguish organized crime from other forms of crime, such as white-collar crime, financial crimes, political crimes, war crime, state crimes, and treason. This distinction is not always apparent and academics continue to debate the matter.

CRISIS IN JUDICIARY

In January 2018, Supreme Court's four senior-most judges went public against the Chief Justice of India over the allocation of cases. The Delhi Bar Association called the incident a black day in the history of Judiciary.

Timeline:

- **January 12:** Justices J. Chelameswar, Ranjan Gogoi, Madan B. Lokur and Kurian Joseph (Four senior-most judges of the Supreme Court, after the Chief Justice of India (CJI)), – held an unprecedented press conference on January 12, 2018.
 - ♦ In this they alleged that CJI has been assigning cases, which have far-reaching consequences to the nation, selectively to Benches of his preference, thus ignoring well established convention.
 - ♦ This included the petitions seeking **a probe into the death of CBI judge B.H. Loya.**
 - ♦ The press conference also followed a recent judgment of a Constitution Bench, led by Chief Justice Misra, in Prasad Education Trust case, which declared the authority of the Chief Justice of India as the master of the roster and that he alone could assign cases and decide on the composition of benches.
- **January 16:** Two-judge Bench of Arun Mishra and Mohan M. Shantanagoudar said that case (B.H. Loya case) may be placed before the 'appropriate Bench'.
- **January 16 and 18:** CJI held couple of rounds of discussion with four senior-most colleagues on the issues raised by them at a press conference on January 12.
- **January 22:** CJI headed bench of SC decided to examine the circumstances surrounding the death of CBI judge B.H. Loya and reach its own objective conclusion.
- **February 01:** SC made public its roster system for allocation of cases to judges, which is step in right direction to bring transparency in constitution of benches.

The whole episode involves two major issues, which need to be examined in detail.

- First, whether the judges were right in raising the issue in Public?
- Second issue pertains to issues raised by the judges in its press conference and their letter.

Do You Know?

B.H Loya case:

- B.H. Loya was special CBI judge who died in December 2014 due to cardiac arrest.
- He was hearing the Sohrabuddin 'fake encounter' case, in which BJP president Amit Shah was an accused but later discharged.
- Now petition has been filed in Supreme Court seeking a probe into the death of CBI judge B.H. Loya.

Prasad Education Trust case (Nov 2017):

- In this case petitioners alleged that some individuals were plotting to influence the Supreme Court.
- In an unusual order, a Division Bench headed by Justice Chelameswar went ahead to delineate the composition of the Bench to hear the case, in which charges of judicial corruption were made, coupled with hints that there would be a conflict of interest if CJI Misra were to hear it.
- Eventually, a five-judge Bench headed by Justice Misra overturned the order and asserted that the CJI was indeed the master of the roster and that he alone could assign cases and decide on the composition of benches.
- Ultimately, the petition was dismissed by a three-judge Bench of Justices R.K. Agrawal, Arun Mishra and A.M. Khanwilkar and 25 lakh in costs was imposed on the petitioner NGO.

Were the judges right in raising the issue in public?

Arguments in favour:

- ♦ Matter was raised in Public **as a last resort** in order to save democracy and the Supreme Court. It is duty of Supreme Court judges to **protect constitution** and constitutional democracy.
- ♦ There was no option available with them except to inform the public about the **lack of impartiality by CJI** in the process of **administration of justice.**
- ♦ There is need to **frame rules** on rational basis and to devise a **system for impartial allocation** of cases to restore the **faith of people** of India in the impartiality of the Supreme Court.
- ♦ Independence and impartiality of judges form the **basic structure of the Constitution.**
- ♦ Judges are the best arbiters of when rules require to be ignored, if not broken. For Example, Justice Dalveer Bhandari of the International Court of Justice gave media interviews on the Kulbhushan Jadhav case even as the matter is still pending.

Arguments against:

- ♦ A **strong and united judiciary** is essential for a strong and vibrant democracy. If the judiciary of a country is divided and polarised, it will have a direct effect on the very survival of democracy in that country.
- ♦ **People's faith in judiciary** is hampered due to such press conference.

- ♦ As per Charter called '**Restatement of Values of Judicial Life**' adopted by Supreme court in 1997, judges are advised to be "aloof", and "not enter public debate" or "give interviews to the media".
- ♦ **Wrong precedent:** Subordinate judiciary might take this event as a cue to air their differences against Chief Justice of their High court.
- ♦ When any judge has a difference of opinion on any professional matter with his brother colleagues, the best way to iron out these differences is to have an amicable discussion on the same.
- ♦ The press conference has brought into **public debate** the **conduct of various judges**, which the Constitution-makers wanted to avoid. Article 121 prohibits the legislature from discussing the official conduct of any judge of a constitutional court, except while debating an impeachment motion.

What alternative could have been taken by 4 judges?

- Judges should have called for a **full-court meeting** where they could have discussed the issue and found a solution.
- They could have sought the **intervention of the President** to resolve the issues.

Now, let's come to second and more important part of the controversy i.e.

Issues to be looked into:

- **Power to constitute benches:** Judges alleged that CJI has been assigning cases, which have far-reaching consequences to the nation, selectively to Benches of his preference, thus ignoring well established convention.
- **Authority of CJI:** Chief Justice's authority, as the master of the roster to decide which Bench should decide which case, did not make him a "superior authority". "The Chief Justice is only the first among equals — nothing more or nothing less".
- Concerns raised by the four senior judges pertain to substantive issues of **checks and balances to the powers of the CJI** in his capacity as Master of the Roster.
- **Departure from the impartiality** of the Court had damaged the institution of Supreme Court.
- **MoP issue:** As per their letter, Collegium had already finalised the memorandum of procedure (MoP) and sent it to the government on March 2017. They were critical of order of bench of Justice Goel and Lalit which held that there be no delay in finalising the MoP for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the High Courts.

Do You Know?

Memorandum of Procedure (MoP):

In October 2015, SC struck down National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) act and 99th Constitutional Amendment Act, which provided say to the executive in appointment of Judges of Supreme Court and High Court. Thereby reverting back to the system of appointment based on recommendation of Collegium.

However, in the Judgment court recommended 'appropriate measure' to improve the working of collegium system i.e. preparation of Memorandum of procedure.

Way forward:

- The power to constitute the benches, also indirectly implies the power to shape justice and law. There is need to **frame rules** on rational basis and to devise a **system for impartial allocation** of cases to restore the **faith of people** of India in the impartiality of the Supreme Court.
- **Transparency in constitution of Benches:** SC has taken a step in right direction by making its roster system for allocation of cases to judges public. However, the roster finalised is only about the presiding judges. It does not talk about the other judges who will be part of the benches. This need to be addressed.
- **Developing and following healthy convention** by which the power is shared with at least the next four senior-most judges, when political and sensitive cases are decided. This is required to avoid the charge of pick and choose, and to instill and sustain the confidence of the people in the judiciary.
- Government has been right in staying away from the internal conflict in the judiciary. **Government** must also **disclose its position on the Memorandum of Procedure** for judicial appointments and communicate this clearly to the Supreme Court.
- There is **need to pass Supreme Court Act** by Parliament after an open public discussion involving all stakeholders — civil society, the judiciary, the Bar and members of all shades of political opinion and restructuring of Supreme Court into three division Admission, Appellate and Constitutional.
 - ♦ Admission division comprising of 5 judges to consider admission of Special Leave petitions under Article 136.
 - ♦ Permanent Constitution Bench of the five senior-most justices to hear all matters of constitutional importance.
 - ♦ Appellate Division to comprise of remaining 21 Judges sitting in three judges bench to hear all matters admitted by the Admission Division and any other writs or appeals which lie as a matter of right to the Supreme Court.

GOVERNMENT LITIGATION

In recent months, Supreme Court and high courts have repeatedly faulted government for being the largest litigant in the country, with 1.4 million cases involving it, or an estimated 46 per cent of the total.

What is government litigation?

- Government litigation includes service matters, disputes with private entities as well as inter-se disputes between two government departments and disputes between two PSUs.

Present status of government litigation:

- The Supreme Court, since the 1970s, has berated successive governments for being callous and mechanical in pursuing litigation.
- As per Ministry of Law pendency in courts all over India includes:
 - ♦ Supreme Court- 60,750 cases.
 - ♦ High Courts- 40 lakhs cases in 2016.
 - ♦ District and Subordinate Courts 2.74 crores cases in 2016.
- Government is regarded to be the **biggest contributor to litigation in India**.
- Approximately **46% of the total pending cases in courts pertain to the government**. This includes cases relating to Public Sector Undertakings and other autonomous bodies.
- **Railways** with 66,685 cases pending has the **highest number of pending cases**- 10,464 cases are pending for more than 10 years.
- **Ministry of Panchayati Raj** with 3 pending cases has **the least number of pending cases**.

Reasons behind excessive litigations:

1. **Law Commission's report 126** observed following causes behind this:
 - ♦ Adoption of **policy of doing nothing** by government thereby delays in decision making.
 - ♦ The ample resources at government disposal encourage **litigious culture in government**.
 - ♦ **Lack of credibility in government actions** also led to common people putting their faith in courts thereby lead to litigation explosion.
 - ♦ Most of the times **frivolous litigations are pursued by PSUs** just because it is profitable instead of honoring the commitment.
 - ♦ **Indifference of government** compels the ordinary citizens to come to court for getting their otherwise legitimate entitlements.
 - ♦ **Lack of faith** in internal grievance redressal mechanism for solving disputes between two government entities.
 - ♦ **Abuse of discretionary power and subjective interpretations** of that power provide scope of dispute and lead to the litigations.

- ♦ **Rising welfare state** requires expansion of state activity which touches the public life in almost all spheres. This creates conflicting situation and lead to increase in litigations.

2. Failure of National Litigation Policy 2010

- ♦ **NLP 2010** completely failed to transform government into an efficient and responsible litigant due to following drawbacks:
- ♦ No measurable yardstick for determining responsibility and efficiency.
- ♦ It **failed to define "suitable action"**, or prescribe any method to conduct any disciplinary proceedings.
- ♦ **Ambiguity about role and powers** of "**Empowered Committees**" **at the national and regional levels** resulting in lack of transparency in their functioning.
- ♦ No Monitoring or **impact assessment mechanism to evaluate actual impact** on reducing government litigation.

Impact:

1. On Executive:

- ♦ Delay in decision making leads to adverse impact on governance.
- ♦ Huge loss of public money and resources on unproductive work.
- ♦ Loss of credibility as a responsible democratic government.

2. On Public Sector Undertakings:

- ♦ Huge cost of litigation which add up to the cost of product.
- ♦ Continuous engagement of manpower leaves little time to concentrate on the goal thereby eating into profit of the PSUs.

3. On Judiciary:

- ♦ Huge backlog of cases acts as a burden on judiciary and delay in justice delivery.
- ♦ Most of the scarce resources available at disposal of judiciary which otherwise can be used in imparting justice to common people goes in dealing with frivolous cases.
- ♦ Deciding dispute for almost every executive action makes judiciary **effective decision maker and violates the principle of separation of power**.

4. On Citizens:

- ♦ Paying hard earned money as a tax for unproductive and wasteful expenditure.
- ♦ Erosion of confidence in government and system.
- ♦ Waste of productive years of life in running courts and facing Frivolous litigations.

Way Forward:

1. Law commission in its 126th report recommended some remedial measures:

- ♦ There must be a provision of compulsory arbitration in agreements and must be enforced at pre litigation stage.
- ♦ Setting up of tribunals for services matters and entertain appeal against their decision very carefully.

2. Review of National Litigation Policy: The government is in process of reviewing the NLP 2010. The revision of the NLP needs to ensure **certain critical features are not missed** out:

- ♦ It must have **clear objectives** that can be assessed.
- ♦ The **role of different functionaries** must be enumerated.
- ♦ The **minimum standards** for pursuing litigation must be listed out.
- ♦ **Fair accountability mechanisms** must be established.
- ♦ The **consequences for violation** of the policy must be provided.
- ♦ A **periodic impact assessment programme** must be factored in.
- ♦ A litigation policy can have a profound effect on how the government thinks about itself as a litigant, and can help curb the problem, provided it is constructed with a thorough understanding of the problem and offers solutions based on evidence rather than conjecture.

3. A study by Department of Justice has recommended following steps to reduce litigations:

- ♦ Appointment **of a nodal officer in every department** to coordinate effective resolution of the disputes.
- ♦ Promotion **of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms-** encourage **mediation as the preferred form of dispute resolution** in service related matters and for resolution of cases between the government and private bodies by including reference to **either arbitration or mediation** in agreements.
- ♦ Avoid **unnecessary filing of appeals-** appeals should not be filed in routine matters-only in cases where there is a substantial policy matter.

4. Anytime Anywhere Dispute Resolution:

- ♦ **National Law School of India University, Bangalore** in collaboration with the Ministry of Consumer Affairs has established an Online Consumer Mediation Centre- **Online platform** with the motto '**Anytime Anywhere Dispute Resolution**'.
- ♦ Under this, once a complaint is lodged on the online platform, the complaint is forwarded to the company and **both parties get 30 days to amicably negotiate** and resolve the dispute. If the negotiation fails, then parties can opt for mediation.
- ♦ **The platform then appoints a third party neutral arbitrator- overall a person has 30 days (extendable by another 15 days)** from the start of the negotiation process to resolve the dispute. This initiative/model may be replicated for resolving government disputes.

Best Practices of Some Ministries/Departments

DRDO/Defence Ministry	CBDT/Ministry of Finance	CBEC/Ministry of Finance
Ministry of Defence had constituted an expert committee in 2015 to monitor the cases and to analyse and propose changes to reduce litigation in service matters.	Income Tax Business Application- all the appeals are now filed online- no manual intervention.	Threshold Limit Defined for Filing of Appeals (exception a challenge made on the constitutional validity of any legislative provision or against any circular/notification of the Department)
Monthly monitoring of cases.	Determined Monetary Threshold for Filing of Appeals	Pre SCN (Show Cause Notice) Consultation Settlement Commission
Introduction of mediation at the pre-litigation stage.	A Collegiums of two CCIT has been formed and on their recommendations the pending appeals which are considered irrelevant are being withdrawn from the High Courts.	Authority of Advanced Ruling: Public Limited Companies, Public Sector Undertaking, Joint Venture, Limited Legal Partnerships can approach the authority for seeking ruling in their dispute/cases.
Guidelines have been issued to the organisations/autonomous bodies with a view to reduce litigation and contempt cases	Central Committee to Decide on Settled Issues	Such rulings are applicable to concerned party and commissioner of appeal.
Service headquarters have been designated certain powers and they have been empowered to take swift action in service matters.	In this regard circulars have been issued to the officers directing them to withdraw cases/appeals if it involves the issues identified by the committee and that no further appeal are filed on the same.	A limit of 70 cases has to been decided by the Department for disposal by the commissioner of appeal per month.
	Notices/circulars have been issued for providing information on the same to general public.	Dedicated Panel of Advocates

DELHI SEALING DRIVE

Since the last few weeks, hundreds of shops across popular markets in Delhi have been sealed by municipal corporations of Delhi for carrying out unauthorized construction.

What Delhi master Plan 2021 says?

- **The Delhi Master Plan 2021**, among other things, allows for a **mixed land use policy** under which commercial and residential establishments can function simultaneously, albeit in a restricted manner.
- According to the Master Plan for Delhi—2021 of the Delhi Development Authority about only **4–5% of land in Delhi is available for commercial use**.

History of sealing drive in Delhi:

- The current sealing drive in Delhi is not the first one. Delhi witnessed **a massive sealing drive in 2006 and violent protests in which four people died**.
- The Delhi High Court sent a notice to the MCD in February 2006 to remove commercial construction in residential areas. Subsequently in March 2006, the Supreme Court ordered sealing of all unauthorized construction in Delhi and appointed a Monitoring Committee to conduct the sealing drive.
- The Centre brought in a law to stop the sealing drive and some amendments to the Master Plan 2021 were made, allowing greater relaxation to commercial establishments.

Reasons behind present sealing drive:

- The sealing drive in Delhi is being carried out by a **Supreme Court-appointed Monitoring Committee** against business establishments **that are using residential properties for commercial purposes without paying conversion charges**.
- A “use conversion charge” allows for residential properties along certain earmarked roads to be utilized for commercial purposes.
- There were two scathing reports by the Supreme Court-appointed Monitoring Committee that highlighted blatant and widespread unauthorised construction in Delhi.
- On December 15 last year, a Supreme Court bench recalled its 2012 order staying the sealing drive in Delhi.

Causes behind violation of rules:

- Limited land availability, population pressures and impracticality of motorized transport for daily errands has led to commercial and residential establishments coexisting in Indian cities.
- The need for commercial real estate for a city such as Delhi far outstrips the supply of affordable commercial real estate in appropriate quantity and quality.
- Political-bureaucratic nexus that has destroyed the vitality of urban civic bodies, are complicit in failure to check unauthorized constructions.
- When a notice is issued for a violations or non-payment of dues, officials and local corporators often act as middlemen to soften the blow or delay action.

- The often-cited solution – levying one-time conversion charges as penalty – also gets embroiled in red tape, bribery and litigation.

Impact:

- Small businesses operating from residential areas provide vital services to the community. By sealing them of their property will lead to dearth of services provider.
- Sealing of Commercial establishments in residential location leads to a reduction of consumption points for consumers.
- Loss of business will result into loss of tax revenues for the government.
- It also leads to huge loss of employment.
- Allowing a part of residential property to be used for commercial purposes creates congestion and the attendant problems, including solid waste management around residential areas. The sealing drive will to an extent help curb these problems.
- Most urban civic bodies are unable to raise enough revenues or widen their tax base because of corruption, red tape and cronyism. This drive may force traders to pay the legitimate fee and charges which will add to government coffers.

Government Steps to solve the issue:

The Delhi Development Authority approved amendments to the Master Plan under which:

- The floor area ratio (FAR) of local shopping complexes has been increased from 180 per cent to 300 per cent.
- Agricultural godowns on 12-metre wide roads will be regularized as part of the amendments.
- A reduction in conversion charge penalty from existing 10 times to two times has also been proposed.

Way forward:

- Delhi needs both affordable commercial property and livable residential environment. Finding the right balance is a challenging aim.
- **Regular inspections** to ensure constructions comply with approved plans and procedures.
- A more practical solution may be the government land authorities **selling one year certificates that allow the use for commercial purposes on a monthly payment basis**, which provide a practical solution for smaller businesses to run commercial operations without a significant initial capital outlay.
- There is an urgent requirement to **innovate on the creation of commercial real estate** in Delhi, since the population will need access to facilities that serve their commercial needs and at once create employment.
- The need is to innovate on **the financing aspect of the “use conversion charges”** and to enforce policies without demure or recourse.

REVIEW OF OBSOLETE LAWS

Recently, the Repealing and Amending Bill, 2017 and Repealing and Amending (Second) Bill, 2017 were passed by Parliament.

Repealing and Amending Bill, 2017 and Repealing and Amending (Second) Bill, 2017:

The key features of the Bills are as follows:

- **Repealing certain laws in whole:**
 - ♦ The two Bills repeal a total of 236 Acts.
 - ♦ Of these, 101 are amendment Acts, where the changes made by these laws have already been incorporated into the relevant principal Acts.
 - ♦ Further, 50 of the repealed laws were passed prior to 1947.
- **Amendment of certain laws:** The two Bills amend certain Acts to rectify drafting errors, which include: (i) The National Institute of Technology, Science Education and Research Act, 2007; (ii) The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, and (iii) The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.

What laws are termed as obsolete?

The law commission defined an obsolete law as:

- The subject matter of the law in question is outdated, and a law is no longer needed to govern that subject.
- The purpose of the law in question has been fulfilled and it is no longer needed.
- There is newer law or regulation in existence governing the same subject matter.

Why these laws are needed to be repealed?

- These pieces of legislation may have been relevant and necessary at the time they were introduced, but in the **absence of a periodic review** they continue to burden the statutory corpus.
- Statutes have to be specifically repealed, because in common with common law traditions, India doesn't have a system of desuetude. **Unless specifically identified and repealed, statutes are open-ended and remain on the books.**
- These laws are **archaic** mainly because the social, economic and legal conditions that required their enactment do not exist today.
- Many acts are **redundant**. For example, among the Acts repealed are the Prevention of **Seditious Meetings Act, 1911** and the **Preventive Detention Act, 1950**. The country still has a body of 'anti-terror' legislation as well as preventive detention laws.
- Some acts have questionable legal provisions which are not in tune with the progress of democracy. For example, **laws on**

'sedition' or exciting disaffection against the state, adultery and 'sex against the order of nature'. Such obsolete concepts and notions that underlie law-making also require an overhaul.

Adverse impact of retaining such laws:

- **Promotes inefficiency:**
 - ♦ Too many laws and irrelevant statutes hamper the decision making process of bureaucracy and make working of government machinery inefficient.
 - ♦ For example, **Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act 1956** is used by government to reduce marijuana consumption by closing down shops that sell Bob Marley t-shirts.
- **Scope of Corruption:**
 - ♦ The archaic acts like **Sarai Act 1867, Hotel receipts tax act 1980, Excise (spirits) act 1863** promotes inspector raj and provide scope of corruption.
 - ♦ **Additional burden on judiciary:** These laws create unnecessary burden on our criminal justice system. They **provide scope of multiple interpretations, increase litigations and incur expenditure and time** for operation of laws irrelevant in present day society.
- **Hamper Business activity:** Too many regulations and their multiple interpretations creates red tapism and inspector raj which has adverse impact on business activity and restrict ease of doing business.
- **Undemocratic:** Colonial era legislations like **Sec 124A of IPC** restrict democratic freedom provided by constitution and promote state's highhandedness.

History of repealing obsolete laws:

- In a first, Central Government in 1998 initiated the process of review and repeal of obsolete laws. It created the **Commission on Review of Administrative Law** which recommended repeal of 1,382 central laws. Of those, 415 were repealed.

Recent actions:

- **Initiatives for identification:** In September 2014, the PMO set up the **Ramanujam Committee** to identify central government statutes ready for repeal. It gave following recommendations:
 - ♦ There are 2,781 existing Union-level statutes which should be repealed.
 - ♦ Of these, 380 were enacted between 1834 and 1949, before the Constitution came into being.
 - ♦ Of the total identified statutes 1,741 old statutes are ready for immediate repeal. In other words, 63 per cent

of central legislation could be repealed without affecting governance adversely.

- ♦ *The Law Commission of India in its reports 248th, 249th, 250th, and 251st "Obsolete Laws: Warranting Immediate Repeal", recommended for repeal of 72, 113, 74 and 30 obsolete Acts respectively.*
- **Repeal of identified Acts:**
 - ♦ According to the government, during last 3 years the 1,175 laws have been repealed by way of four legislation—the **Repealing and Amending Act, 2015**, the **Repealing and Amending (Second) Act, 2015**, the **Appropriation Acts (Repeal) Act, 2016** and **Repealing and Amending Act, 2016**.
- **Role of states in repealing obsolete laws:**
 - ♦ The Ramanujam Committee identified 83 old statutes that could only be repealed by states.
 - ♦ Law Commission identified 62 statutes that needed to be repealed by the states, in addition to 83 identified by the Ramanujam Committee.
 - ♦ **100 Laws Repeal Project** by the Centre for Civil Society (CCS), in collaboration with NIPFP and Vidhi Legal Centre. The CCS has now brought out Repeal Law Compendiums for five states — **Chhattisgarh (25 statutes)**, **Telangana**

(26 statutes), **Uttar Pradesh (37 statutes)**, **Maharashtra (21 statutes)** and **Karnataka (24 statutes)**.

- ♦ There is plethora of statutes redundant at the state level but only a few states have done something about eliminating such redundant laws. For example,
 - ♦ Kerala repealed 697 statutes through an ordinance in 2005 and 102 through a Repealing Act in 2016.
 - ♦ In Rajasthan, 248 old statutes were repealed in 2015.
 - ♦ In 2016, the Maharashtra Repealing Act junked 64 old statutes.

Way Forward:

The repealing of obsolete laws is a very much required exercise taken up by central government. This must be followed by:

- Any new law or statute enacted must come with sunset clause and mandatory periodic review.
- States must also take action against such laws to bring effective change.
- After done repealing major laws, laws not in consonance with where we want India to go, like moving away freedom-restricting laws like portions of the Cinematograph Act, sedition and moving away from excessive state control in our economic policies must also be overhauled.

A list of 10 laws passed over the years – some strange, some shocking and some rather alarming. The following were recommended for repeal by the Law commission. Some have already been repealed.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>➤ Shore Nuisances (Bombay and Kolaba) Act, 1853: Contrary to the rather interesting name, the Act facilitated the removal of nuisances – obstruction and encroachments – below the high-water mark in the islands of Bombay and Kolaba for safe navigation in these harbours. This was one of the earliest laws on water pollution.</p> <p>➤ Excise (Spirits) Act, 1863: The Act provided for the levy of excise duty payable on spirits used exclusively in 'arts and manufactures or in chemistry'. (now repealed)</p> <p>➤ Dramatic Performances Act, 1876: The law empowered the state government to prohibit performances that are scandalous, defamatory or likely to excite feelings of disaffection.</p> <p>➤ Foreign Recruiting Act, 1874: This Act gave the central government power to issue an order preventing the recruitment of Indians by a foreign state. (now repealed)</p> | <p>➤ Collective Fines Ordinance, 1942: This ordinance enabled imposition of collective fines, empowering the state government to impose collective fines on the inhabitants of an area if it appeared that the inhabitants were involved in or abetting the commission of offences which could affect the defence of India, public safety, maintenance of public order, efficient prosecution of war, maintenance of supplies or services necessary to the life of the community.</p> <p>➤ Foreign Jurisdiction Act, 1947: This law conferred on the central government power in relation to a foreign jurisdiction, defined as any area with which the government has a relation to by way of treaty, agreement, grant, usage, sufferance or other lawful means. (now repealed)</p> <p>➤ Telegraph Wires (Unlawful Possession) Act, 1950: This law regulated and prescribed punishment for the unlawful possession of telegraph wires. Possession of telegraph wires had to be declared and those with more than 10</p> | <p>pounds of telegraph wire had to have the excess (above 10 pounds) converted to ingots.</p> <p>➤ State Bank of Samastha Act, 1950: The Law Commission recommended the removal of this law as it could not find any trace of the text of this law. "The text of this Act is not available on the Law Ministry's website, or from any other readily available source, an 15 indication that it is not in use. Neither are there any other documented instances where this Act has been used in the last few decades," the report noted.</p> <p>➤ Young Persons (Harmful Publications) Act, 1956: This law prevented the dissemination of certain publications considered harmful to young persons. 'Young person' has been defined as a person under the age of 21 years in this Act.</p> <p>➤ The Hotel-receipts Tax Act, 1980: This law taxed hotel service where the accommodation charges were more than 75.</p> |
|--|---|---|

Source: Law commission report

AADHAAR DATA LEAK

Recently, a leading newspaper, claimed that it “purchased” a service that provided unrestricted access to details for any of the more than 1 billion Aadhaar numbers created in India thus far.

About:

- This contradicted the assertion made by UIDAI that “Aadhaar data is fully safe and secure and there has been no data leak or breach at UIDAI.”
- It took just Rs 500 and 10 minutes in which an “agent” of the group created a “gateway” for this correspondent and gave a login ID and password.
- **Software to print:** They paid another Rs 300, for which the agent provided “software” that facilitated the printing of the Aadhaar card after entering the Aadhaar number of any individual.
- **Other Data Leak Case:** In November last, the UIDAI said it “found approximately 210 websites of government were displaying list of beneficiaries along with their name, address, and Aadhaar numbers”.

Reasons for the Data Leak:

- Investigations by The Tribune reveal that the racket may have started around six months ago, when some anonymous groups were created on WhatsApp.
- These groups targeted over 3 lakh village-level enterprise (VLE) operators hired by Government under the Common Service Centres Scheme (CSCS) across India, offering them access to UIDAI data.
- CSCS operators, who were initially entrusted with the task of making Aadhaar cards across India, were rendered idle after the job was withdrawn from them.
- The service was restricted to post offices and designated banks to avoid any security breach.
- Spotting an opportunity to make a quick buck, more than one lakh VLEs are now suspected to have gained this illegal access to UIDAI data to provide “Aadhaar services” to common people for a charge.
- Andhra Pradesh links everything to Aadhaar, all the way down to minor traffic offences. The police are allowed access to biometrics for identifying criminals and lost children. Access to such detailed information makes it vulnerable to leak.

Government’s Position:

- **No data breach:** “Tribune’s Story “Rs 500, 10 minutes, and you have access to billion Aadhaar details” is a case of misreporting. No biometric data breach,” UIDAI tweeted.
- It’s a case of misuse of the grievance redressal search facility at the disposal of designated personnel and state government officials, the UIDAI has suggested.

- **First Information Report:** The UIDAI, which denied ‘data breach’ had taken place, filed a FIR with the Delhi Police naming the people mentioned in the Aadhaar-data-for-sale story, the reporter and The Tribune.
- **Against unknown people:** After all criticism, the government clarified that the First Information Report had, instead, named unknown people.
- The Aadhaar data including biometric information is fully safe and secure, claimed the UIDAI.
- **Inversion of Democracy:** The government wish to continue the Aadhar Project despite the risk to the people. This is an inversion of democracy, where societal concerns are primary.

Clarification from UIDAI?

1. **What Portal or service was used to access the search facility?**
 - ♦ This isn’t clear at the moment.
 - ♦ *The Tribune* describes the search facility merely as a “gateway”. Another service, where a piece of software allowed the printing of Aadhaar cards.
2. **How many operators are in on the whole alleged scam of selling Aadhaar data for money?**
 - ♦ It’s still unclear.
 - ♦ **No Source:** *The Tribune* claims that up to one lakh village level enterprise (VLE) operators had access to UIDAI data, but doesn’t provide its sourcing for this number.
 - ♦ The UIDAI is silent on this issue.
3. **What can an authorised official do with this access?**
 - ♦ We are largely in the dark.
 - ♦ The UIDAI describes it purely as a tool for authorised people and state government officials to “help residents only by entering their Aadhaar number.”
 - ♦ **The clarification provided by the UIDAI can provide us an opportunity** to identify the extent of this problem. Who exactly should be punished? What should be done now to prevent future breaches?
 - ♦ **Section 59 of the Aadhaar Act** covers activities that are illegal under the rest of the Act. It should be strengthened to make the sensitive data leak proof.

Impact of Aadhar Data Leak:

- **Violation of Fundamental Rights:** The Supreme Court recently recognised the Right to Privacy as Fundamental Rights. The Aadhaar Data leak is violation of the same.
- **Privacy at risk:** Leakage of Aadhaar data reveals that the project has failed the privacy test.

- The Aadhaar ecosystem also holds data on all military personnel and their data is very sensitive, and the data leaks in such cases endangers national security.
- **Comprehensive Profile:** The data available on government websites can be utilised to build a comprehensive profile of an individual containing personal information. This can prove to be fatalistic.
- India opposed e-commerce negotiation at the WTO because they demanded access to citizens' database for free. Now, it is wide open that database has already been breached.
- The proposed data protection law will now hold no purpose, as the data has already been breached as revealed by The Tribune.
- The state governments must immediately disassociate themselves and cancel the MoU signed with UIDAI.
- **Possible Misuse:** Getting SIM cards, or bank accounts in anyone's name.
- **National security breach:** Any unauthorised access is, and is a major national security breach."
- **Exposed the Frailty of System:** Left leaders stated that the incident exposed the frailty of the UID system.
- Public are falling prey to phishing scams that use private information available on government websites to convince the victim that they genuinely represent the service provider and steal the money from their bank accounts.

Recommendations:

- **Reward:** The journalist behind the Aadhaar data breach story should be rewarded and not penalised, said Edward Snowden.
- **Punish the Guilty:** He also suggested that those who really need to be arrested are the authorities at the (UIDAI).
- **Reform Policies:** If the government were truly concerned for justice, they would be reforming the policies that destroyed the privacy of a billion Indians.
- **Right to investigative Journalism:** The Tribune has vowed to defend its right to undertake investigative journalism. It was supported by Editors guild of India.
- **Audit the security Practices:** UIDAI has no capability to audit the security practices of even its licensed ecosystem of over 300 agencies. It should incorporate it as a policy matter.

AADHAAR

About:

- Aadhaar number is a 12-digit random number issued by the UIDAI ("Authority") to the residents of India after satisfying the verification process laid down by the Authority.

Process of getting it:

- Any individual, irrespective of age and gender, who is a resident of India, may voluntarily enrol to obtain Aadhaar number.
- Person willing to enrol has to provide minimal demographic and biometric information during the enrolment process which is totally free of cost.
 - ♦ **Demographic information:** Name, Date of Birth (verified) or Age (declared), Gender, Address, Mobile Number (optional) and Email ID (optional)
 - ♦ **Biometric information:** Ten Fingerprints, Two Iris Scans, and Facial Photograph
- An individual needs to enrol for Aadhaar only once and after de-duplication only one Aadhaar shall be generated, as the uniqueness is achieved through the process of demographic and biometric de-duplication.

Clarification:

- Aadhaar number does not profile people based on caste, religion, income, health and geography.

- The Aadhaar number is a proof of identity, however, it does not confer any right of citizenship or domicile in respect of an Aadhaar number holder.

Significance:

- Aadhaar is a strategic policy tool for social and financial inclusion, public sector delivery reforms, managing fiscal budgets, increase convenience and promote hassle-free people-centric governance.
- Aadhaar can be used as a permanent Financial Address and facilitates financial inclusion of the underprivileged and weaker sections of the society and is therefore a tool of distributive justice and equality.
- Aadhaar identity platform with its inherent features of Uniqueness, Authentication, Financial Address and e-KYC, enables the Government of India to directly reach residents in delivery of various subsidies, benefits and services by using the resident's Aadhaar number only.
- The Aadhaar identity platform is one of the key pillars of the 'Digital India', wherein every resident of the country is provided with a unique identity.
- The Aadhaar programme is by far the largest biometrics based identification system in the world.
- It is unique and robust enough to eliminate duplicates and fake identities and may be used as a basis/primary identifier to roll out several Government welfare schemes and programmes for effective service delivery thereby promoting transparency and good governance.

PRIVATE MEMBER BILLS

In the winter session of Lok Sabha, 2017, 98 Private Members' Bills were introduced on issues ranging from protection of stray cows to including work under fundamental rights.

What is a private member bill?

- Members of parliament other than ministers are called private members and bills presented by them are known as private member's bills.
- Introduced by:**
 - A private member bill can be introduced by both ruling party and opposition MPs.
 - A private member can give a maximum of three notices for the introduction of Private Members Bills during a Session.
- Type of Private Members' Bills:**
 - A private member can introduce bills on issues of general import, Constitution Amendment Bill, Financial Bill, or Money Bill.
 - However, for Money Bill, prior recommendation of President, hence, the consideration of the Council of Ministers is needed, and is generally deemed as the Government Bill only.
- Power of president:** President can use his powers of absolute veto and can discard a private member bill.
- Procedure:**
 - It can be introduced in any of the Houses of the parliament after giving prior notice of one month.
 - The Bill undergoes the normal procedure of passing through three readings in both the Houses.
 - However, unlike Government Bills, Private Members' Bill does not go to the other House after passage. It will

become law only if the government moves a Bill on the issue and gets the President assent.

- Time allocated:** Two and a half hours on every alternate Friday are set aside for these Bills in the Lok Sabha.
- Committee on Private Members Bills and Resolution,** Lok Sabha:
 - It consists of 15 members and the Deputy Speaker is its Chairman.
 - The Committee is nominated by the Speaker and holds office for one year.
 - It allocates time to Private members' Bills and Resolutions, examines them before their introduction, classifies them, and examines the Private Constitution Amendment Bills.

■ The first such bill to be passed was the Muslim Wakf Bill in 1954 and the last was the Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Bill in 1969.

■ In the last session of Parliament, Rajya Sabha passed the Rights of Transgender Persons Bill. Moved by DMK MP Tiruchi Siva, it sought equal rights with dignity for transgenders.

Till now, only 14 private members' bills have been passed by Parliament

13th Lok Sabha
(1999-2004)

343 private members's bill were introduced, of which **17** were discussed

14th Lok Sabha
(2004-2009)

328 such bills were introduced, of which **14** were discussed

15th Lok Sabha
(2009-2014)

372 such bills were introduced and **11** were discussed

Difference between private member bill and government bill

	Public bill	Private member bill
Introduced by	Minister	Member of parliament other than a minister
Purpose of Bill	Reflects the policy of the government	Reflects the stand of the Political party concern.
Chances of being passed	High due to government majority in parliament	Low
Rejection of bill by the House	Rejection in Lower House means Censure against the government and may lead to it resignation	Has no effect on the government or the member concerned
Introduction	Requires 7 day notice	Requires a month notice
Drafting Authority	Drafted by concerned department in consultation with the Law Ministry	Drafting is the responsibility of the member concerned
Absolute veto power of the President	No	Yes

PRIVATE MEMBER'S BILLS PASSED BY PARLIAMENT				
	Title	MP's Name	House	Date of Assent
1	The Muslim Wakfs Bill, 1952	Syed Mohammed Ahmed Kasmi	Lok Sabha	21.05.1954
2	The Indian Registration (Amendment) Bill, 1955	S C Samanta	Lok Sabha	06.04.1956
3	The Parliamentary Proceedings (Protection of Publication) Bill, 1956	Feroze Gandhi	Lok Sabha	26.05.1956
4	The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 1953	Raghunath Singh	Lok Sabha	01.09.1956
5	The Women's and Children's Institutions (Licensing) Bill, 1954	Kamlendu Mati Shah	Lok Sabha	30.12.1956
6	The Code of Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill, 1957	Subhadra Joshi	Lok Sabha	26.12.1960
7	The Salary and Allowances of Members of Parliament (Amendment) Bill, 1964	Raghunath Singh	Lok Sabha	29.09.1964
8	The Hindu Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 1963	Diwan Chand Sharma	Lok Sabha	20.12.1964
9	The Supreme Court (Enlargement of Criminal Appellate Jurisdiction) Bill, 1968	Anand Narian Mullah	Lok Sabha	09.08.1970
10	The Ancient and Historical Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains (Declaration of National Importance) Bill, 1954	Dr. Raghunath Singh	Rajya Sabha	15.12.1956
11	The Hindu Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 1956	Dr. Seeta Parmanand	Rajya Sabha	20.12.1956
12	The Orphanages and Other Charitable Homes (Supervision and Control) Bill, 1960	Kailash Bihari Lall	Rajya Sabha	09.04.1960
13	The Marine Insurance Bill, 1959	MP Bhargava	Rajya Sabha	18.04.1963
14	The Indian Penal Code (Amendment) Bill, 1963	Diwan Chaman Lall	Rajya Sabha	07.09.1969

Critical analysis:

- **Not many have been passed:**

- ♦ Only 14 private members' bills have been passed since independence.
- ♦ The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, is the first private member's bill to get passed in the Rajya Sabha in the past 45 years.
- ♦ The last Private Member's Bill to get passed by Parliament was the Supreme Court (Enlargement of Criminal Appellate Jurisdiction) Bill, 1968.

- **Not given due consideration:**

- ♦ In the 15th Lok Sabha, 372 private members' bills were introduced and only 4% of them were discussed leading to lapse of 96% of them without a debate in the House.

- **Challenges:**

- ♦ Requirement of one-month prior notice for introduction in the House of Parliament.
- ♦ Selection of the name in the ballot by the member, and the President's recommendation, if the Bill involves financial implications, is must.
- ♦ Support of the majority of the House and hence, that of the Government and Treasury benches is essential to become a law.
- ♦ Requirement of a lot of research work for initiating a Private legislative proposal, and discussing it in the House.
- ♦ Opposition to the Motion of Introduction by the House, eg. A Private Member's Bill on section 377 of Indian Penal Code.
- ♦ Failure to get assurances from the government when the private members' concept is not acceptable to it.

- **Importance in a democracy:**

- ♦ The parliament is the principal legislating authority and the Members of Parliament (MPs) are authorized under Article 245 of the Indian Constitution to formulate laws for the country.
- ♦ Through a private members bill, an MP can attract media attention on an issue and pressurize the government for making a law on that matter, depending upon the political and socio-economic scenario, henceforth.
- ♦ They expedite government legislation on important matters, eg. Immoral Trafficking Act, 1956 was enacted following a private member's bill on the same.

Conclusion:

- Chances of passage of a Private Members' legislation depend upon its quality, and the issue that it seeks to raise.
- Private Members have shown keen interest in initiating proposals, and formulating legislation despite the odds that they face.
- An important issue stimulates debate, creates awareness and develops public opinion on it, and pressurizes the government to either extend its support to the Bill or enact a law on the matter after due consideration. Many such Bills have, actually, been passed as law.
- Despite lacking broader perspective on issues, being less comprehensive at times, and having the constraints on them, they lead to discussions in the House, get assurances from the government for comprehensive legislation on important matters.

CRIMINALIZATION OF POLITY

In late 2017 Supreme Court, asked the Centre to come up with a scheme to establish special courts to try politicians facing criminal cases.

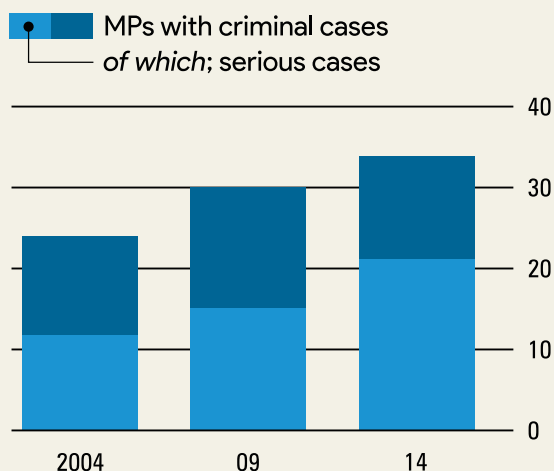
Criminalization of politics is defined as “participation of criminals in the electoral processes”.

Evolution of nexus between crime and politics:

- Three trends – political fragmentation, deepening competition and rise of coalition politics – converged in the late 1980s to break open the political system in an unprecedented manner.
- Tactics like Booth Capturing, bribing the voters, Money and Muscle power enabled Criminals to prove their win ability to the political parties and get party tickets.

Lok Sabha 543 members	MPs who would have been disqualified had the SC order been applicable
30% or 162 members have criminal cases against them	14% have serious criminal cases against them
State assemblies Total MLAs 4,032	PAPPU YADAV: Convicted for murder of CPM MLA Ajit Sarkar, acquitted by HC. SHAHABUDDIN: Convicted for murder of political activist. MITRASEN YADAV: Convicted for murder in 1967. Given presidential pardon. NAVJOT SINGH SIDHU: Convicted by Punjab and Haryana HC of causing death of a Patiala resident in 1988. Conviction stayed by SC.
31% or 1,258 members have criminal cases against them	14% have serious criminal cases against them
Source: ADR and National Election Watch	

India, share of Lok Sabha MPs with pending criminal cases, by election year, %



Source: Association for Democratic Reforms

Statistics:

- As per the analysis by National Election Watch of the affidavits submitted by MPs and MLAs to the Election Commission of India in 2014, out of the 4835 MPs/MLAs, 1448 have declared criminal cases against them in a self sworn affidavit filed with the ECI.
- Out of these 1448 who have declared criminal cases, 641 MPs/MLAs have declared serious criminal cases like rape, murder, attempt to murder, kidnapping, robbery, extortion etc.

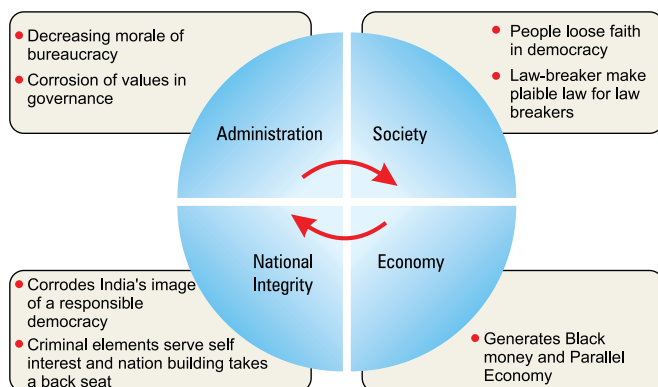
Reasons for growing nexus between crime and politics:

The opportunity to influence crime investigations and to convert the policemen from being potential adversaries to allies is the irresistible magnet drawing criminals to politics. Other reasons may be categorized as:

Social Causes	Legal Causes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protection for law-breakers on political, group, class, communal or caste grounds. Partisan interference in investigation of crimes and poor prosecution of cases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inordinate delays lasting over years and high costs in the judicial process, mass withdrawal of cases, indiscriminate grant of parole, etc.
Election funding	Competition in Politics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large, illegal and illegitimate expenditure in elections is another root cause of corruption. Actual expenditure is alleged to be far higher than formal limits. Accordingly, criminals invest in elections to make windfall gains upon winning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Political Parties get secured ability to garner votes through money and muscle power.
Statutory loopholes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Section 8(1), 8(2), and 8(3) of the RPA, 1951 provide grounds of disqualification for any person who is convicted and given varying range of imprisonment, for a period of 6 years from the date of his release from prison. Section 8(4) states that if a sitting member of Parliament or state legislature is convicted and sentenced to not less than 2 years of imprisonment shall be disqualified from being member of house. However, if the member goes on appeal against his conviction within 3 months, then he shall not be subject to disqualification.. 	

Impact:

Criminals becoming political leaders have multifaceted adverse effects like:

**Steps taken to decriminalize politics**

1. The Supreme Court in Lily Thomas vs. Union of India (July, 2013) held Section 8(4) as unconstitutional and void. Hence, now if a sitting member of Parliament or state legislature is convicted and sentenced to not less than 2 years of imprisonment, he will get immediately disqualified from being member of house.
2. In Public India Foundation Case (March, 2014), SC ruled that criminal trials, especially those dealing with corruption and heinous offences, involving election representatives should be completed in a year.
3. None of the Above (NOTA) option was introduced in the PUCCL vs Union of India, 2014. The SC also said: "Giving right to a voter not to vote for any candidate while protecting his right of secrecy is extremely important in a democracy..... Gradually, there will be a systemic change and the parties will be forced to accept the will of the people and field candidates who are known for their integrity."
4. Introduction of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) by the Election Commission (EC).
5. Improvement in accuracy of electoral rolls through computerization and fair revision process, voter id cards.
6. Disclosure of antecedents of candidates – criminal record, assets and liabilities.
7. Disqualification of persons convicted of criminal offence
8. Strict implementation of Model Code of conduct.
9. And now the latest SC verdict on setting up special mechanism for trial of lawmakers.

Some committees and reports:

1993 – Vohra Committee Report on criminalization of politics.

1998 – Indrajit Gupta Committee on State Funding of Elections.

1999 – Law Commission Report on Reform of the Electoral Laws.

2004 – Election Commission of India – Proposed Electoral Reforms.

2008 – The Second Administrative Reforms Commission.

2011 – NEW Recommendations for Electoral Reforms [submitted to Law Ministry & Election Commission of India (ECI)].

Further Recommendations:

1. Recently ECI suggested to impose life-time disqualification of politicians convicted in criminal cases.
2. EC also suggested disqualification of candidates charged for serious crime (where minimum punishment by law is not less than 5 years) and where charges have been framed by a court of law.
3. There is also a suggestion to replace the First past the post system with the 2 ballot system where 50% of the valid votes polled will be the minimum criteria for winning. If no candidates get 50% of the votes then the first 2 candidates with the largest share of votes will contest second round of polling and the one who gets 50% or more votes will be declared as winner.
4. Use of totalisers in counting of votes polled through EVM so that booth wise voting pattern remains undisclosed. Totaliser allows the votes cast in about 14 polling booths to be counted together. At present, the votes are tallied booth by booth.
5. Partial State funding of elections mainly in kind as suggested by Indrajit Gupta Committee may reduce the role of money power in elections.
6. Greater powers to EC eg: making false declaration before the returning officer an electoral offence under section 31 of the RPA.
7. Media reforms to make the media more accountable in what it reports and making the ownership more transparent along with relevant disclosure of any conflict of interest.

International scenario:

Switzerland is one of the leaders in clean politics. Some of the possible causes for this may be:

1. Switzerland doesn't have career politicians. Citizens serve for a time but also work independently. That avoids the pet projects, the influence peddling, and conflicts of interest that can result when you have a separate, professional long serving political class.
2. The country is so decentralized, decisions tend to be practical and informed by the needs of a small area, so there's less lost in translation to higher authorities.

STATE OF HEALTH INDEX

In February 2018, NITI Aayog released a comprehensive Health Index report titled, "Healthy States, Progressive India".

About:

- **Domains:** The Index covers three domains:
 - ♦ **Health Outcomes** (sub-domains: Key outcomes & Intermediate outcomes).
 - ♦ **Governance and Information** (sub-domains: Health monitoring and data integrity & Governance).
 - ♦ **Key inputs/Processes** (sub-domain: Health systems/ Service delivery).
- **Types of Ranking:**
 - ♦ There two sets of rankings: Overall and Incremental.
 - ♦ **Overall rankings:** These are based on composite index scores and signify absolute levels of performance of each State, relative to one another.
 - ♦ **Incremental rankings:** These are based on the difference between composite index scores in the base and reference year. Objective behind it is to measure annual incremental change in performance, and to nudge States towards obtaining optimal levels of performance.
- **Time period used for the rankings:**
 - ♦ The composite index score is calculated for a Base Year, which largely covers the 2014-15 period and a Reference year, which largely covers the 2015-16 period.
 - ♦ The Incremental ranks are a measure of the difference in performance between these two periods.
- **Categories of states:** In order to ensure comparison among similar entities, the States and UTs are ranked in three separate categories:
 - ♦ Larger States (21).
 - ♦ Smaller States (8).
 - ♦ Union Territories (7).
- **Indicators:** The Index includes 23 indicators which are used to calculate the composite index score and generate overall performance ranks and incremental ranks.
 - ♦ But, all the 23 indicators are applicable only to the 'Larger States' category,
 - ♦ For the 'Smaller States' a sub-set of 19 indicators are applicable while for the UTs 18 indicators are applicable.
- **Data sources used for the index are:** Sample Registration System (SRS), Health Management Information System (HMIS), Central MoHFW data, State Report, National Family and Health Survey (NFHS), Civil Registration System (CRS).
- **Stakeholders involved:** The Index was developed by NITI Aayog with technical assistance from the World Bank in consultation with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), States and UTs.

Its key findings are as follows:

Larger states:

- **Overall performance:**
 - ♦ **Top overall performers:** Kerala, Punjab and Tamil Nadu.
 - ♦ **5 States improved their position:** Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand.
 - ♦ 10 States have slipped from their original positions.
- **Incremental Performance:**
 - ♦ Most Improved States: Jharkhand, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh.
 - ♦ 15 States displayed positive incremental change.
 - ♦ Almost all EAG States show positive change.
 - ♦ 6 States have negative incremental annual performance.

Larger States : Categorization on Incremental and Overall Performance

Incremental Performance	Overall Performance		
	Aspirants	Achievers	Front-runners
Not improved	Uttarkhand, Haryana	Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat	Kerala
Least improved	Madhya Pradesh, Assam, Odisha	Maharashtra, Telangana, West Bengal	Tamil Nadu
Moderately improved	Bihar, Rajasthan	Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh	Punjab
Most improved	Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh	Jammu & Kashmir	

Smaller States:

- **Overall Performance:**
 - ♦ Top overall performers: Mizoram, Manipur and Meghalaya.
 - ♦ Mizoram retained the top position; Manipur and Goa improved their position.
- **Incremental Performance:**
 - ♦ Most Improved: Manipur, Goa and Meghalaya.
 - ♦ 4 States register positive incremental performance.
 - ♦ 4 States register negative incremental performance.

Union Territories:

- **Overall Performance:**
 - ♦ Top overall performers: Lakshadweep, Chandigarh and Delhi.
 - ♦ Only two UTs - Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands, improved their position from 2014-15 to 2015-16.

Incremental Performance:

- Top incremental performers: Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- Lakshadweep observed highest incremental performance of 9.56 points.
- Five UTs registered positive incremental progress.

Smaller States and UTs: Categorization on Incremental and Overall Performance

Overall Performance			
Incremental Performance	Aspirants	Achievers	Front-runners
Not improved	Tripura, Nagaland	Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh	—
Least improved	—	—	—
Moderately improved	—	—	Mizoram
Most improved	—	Manipur, Meghalaya, Goa	—

Overall Performance			
Incremental Performance	Aspirants	Achievers	Front-runners
Not improved	Daman & Diu	Chandigarh	—
Least improved	—	Delhi, Puducherry	—
Moderately improved	Dadra & Nagar Haveli	Andaman & Nicobar Islands	—
Most improved	—	—	Lakshadweep

Other key observations:

- While States/UTs that start at lower levels of development are generally at an advantage in notching up incremental progress over States with high Health Index scores, it is a challenge for States with high Index scores to even maintain their performance levels.
- The incremental measurement reveals that about one-third of the States have registered a decline in their performance in 2016 as compared to 2015, stressing the need to pursue domain-specific, targeted interventions.
- Common challenges for most States and UTs include** the need to focus on addressing vacancies in key staff, establishment of functional district Cardiac Care Units (CCUs), quality accreditation of public health facilities and institutionalization of Human Resources Management Information System (HRMIS).

Significance:

- It is the first attempt to establish an annual systematic tool to measure and understand the heterogeneity and complexity of the nation's performance in Health.
- The Health Index is a useful tool for systematic measurement of annual performance across States and UTs. It has set the foundation for a systematic output and outcome based performance measurement.
- It would also serve as an instrument for "nudging" States/UTs to a much greater focus on output and outcome based measurement of annual performance than is currently the practice.
- With the annual publication of the Index and its availability on public domain on a dynamic basis, it is expected to keep every stakeholder alert to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Goal number 3.
- The Index helps to identify areas in which States have improved, stagnated, or declined. It should be used to target interventions.

Competitive federalism:

- Health Index has been developed as a tool to leverage co-operative and competitive federalism to accelerate the pace of achieving health outcomes.
- But this is not the first time the Government has introduced rankings to get States to compete — over the past few years it has created an index to:
 - Measure improvement on ease of doing business at the State level.
 - Rank cities on cleanliness.
 - Measure efforts being made to create an ecosystem for startups.
- Undoubtedly, rankings help accelerate change — but much of this could be short-sighted and focused on improving scores rather than delivering sustainable results.
- For instance, just increasing the number of 24x7 primary healthcare centres is insufficient if there are not enough doctors and nurses to run them.

Way ahead:

- Key lessons have emerged that will guide improvement of both the methods and the data to improve the Index.
- There are also plans to link incentives under the National Health Mission (NHM) to performance on the Index.
- But there is also a Critical need for improving data systems in health like
 - inclusion of other key indicators.
 - periodic availability.
 - completeness for private sector providers.
- Next round?** The next round of the Health index is envisaged to be completed by the end of 2018, and will include overall performance up to 2016-17, and incremental performance from 2015-16 to 2016-17.

STENTS

Recently, the National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority (NPPA) passed an order on price control of stents.

Coronary Artery Disease (CAD):

- CAD happens when a waxy substance called plaque builds up on the inner walls of coronary arteries.
- This causes arteries to harden and narrow, decreasing blood flow to heart.
- As a result, heart doesn't get the blood, oxygen and nutrients it needs, which can lead to chest pain or a heart attack.
- CAD often develops over decades. So, one may not know he/she has a problem until he/she has a significant blockage or a heart attack.

What are Coronary Stents?

- Coronary stents are small, wire, mesh tubes that help widen a clogged artery and restore adequate blood flow to the heart.

How do they work?

- During the procedure, cardiologist places the stent over a thin, long tube with a balloon tip called a catheter and insert it into an artery in groin or arm.
- Once the stent reaches the clogged artery, doctor will inflate the balloon to expand the stent.
- When the stent reaches the desired size to widen the clogged artery, doctor will deflate and remove the balloon.
- The stent will stay in place permanently to help prop open the artery and decrease its chance of narrowing again.
- Over time, the inner lining of the artery grows over the surface of the stent, making it a permanent part of artery.

Types of Coronary Stents:

- **Bare-Metal Stents (BMS):**
 - ♦ These are tiny wire mesh tubes that help widen a clogged artery, but are not coated with a polymer or drugs to help prevent re-blockage of the artery.
 - ♦ This type of stent may be used in patients who are allergic to either the polymer or drugs used in drug-eluting stents.
- **Drug-Eluting Stents (DES):** It is a bare-metal stent that has been coated with a polymer that gradually releases a drug over the time when re-blockage is most likely to happen. This helps reduce the chance of the artery becoming blocked again. There are two types of drug-eluting stents:

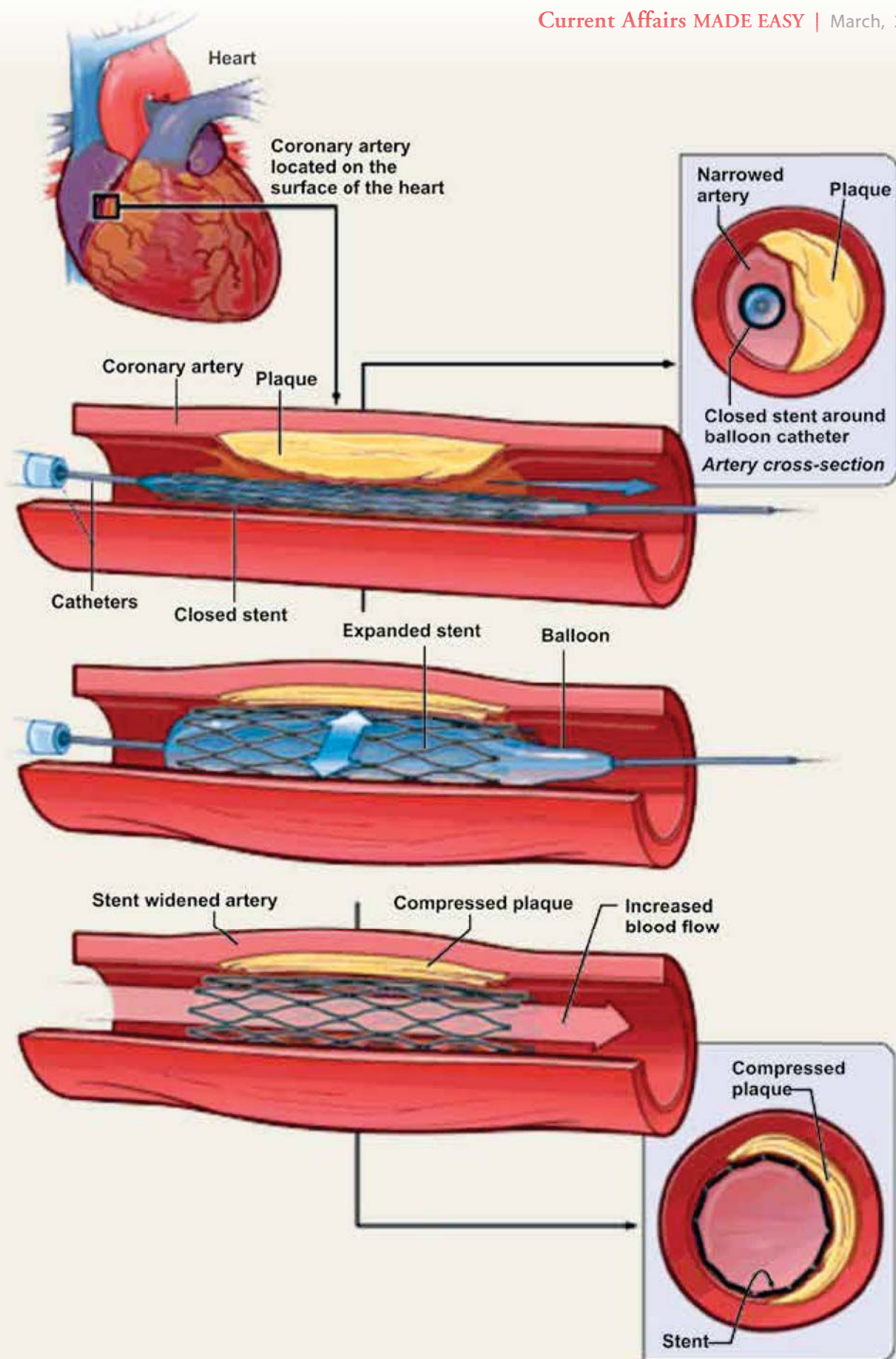
- ♦ **Permanent Polymer Drug-Eluting Stent:** In this type of stent, the polymer stays on the stent permanently, even after all the drug has been released.
- ♦ **Bioabsorbable Polymer Drug-Eluting Stent:** With this type of stent, the polymer and drug coating are fully absorbed by the body shortly after the drug has been fully released. This promotes better healing by eliminating long-term polymer exposure.

Price control by NPPA:

- NPPA has further brought down the cost of drug-eluting stents (DES) from 29,600 to 27,890, while marginally increasing the cost of bare-metal stents (BMS) from 7,400 to 7,660. The move comes a year after the NPPA slashed stent rates by nearly 85%.
- The new order also allows transparency and better government control and audit ease.
- Patients will have the option to get a stent and accessories from outside the establishment, and manufacturers are allowed only 8% trade margin.
- Stents selling lower than the ceiling rates cannot go up in price now after the new order.

Reason for price control:

- **Rise of CAD:**
 - ♦ A core committee, which examined the issues relating to the essentiality of coronary stents, observed in its report to the government in April 2016 that CAD has become a major public health problem in India.
 - ♦ Poor accessibility to quality health care and high pricing is a major deterrent for people seeking medical care. Price capping will minimise the expenditure in the health sector and allow more people to benefit from it.
- **Exploitive market system:**
 - ♦ According to NPPA, Price control is necessary under the exploitive market system characterised by exorbitant, irrational and restrictive trade margin.
- **Problem with BMS:**
 - ♦ The move will help more people opt for DES that are technologically better and more advanced than Bare-metal stents (BMS).
 - ♦ Bare-metal stents have a significantly higher rate of restenosis (the recurrence of abnormal narrowing of an artery or valve after corrective surgery).



MENSTRUAL HYGIENE MANAGEMENT (MHM)

In February 2018, *Pad Man*, an Indian biographical comedy-drama film was released. It is inspired by the life of Arunachalam Muruganantham, a social activist from Tamil Nadu who introduced low-cost sanitary pad.

Arunachalam Muruganantham:

- Arunachalam Muruganantham (born 1962) is a social entrepreneur from Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.
- He is the inventor of a low-cost sanitary pad-making machine, which can manufacture sanitary pads for less than a third of the cost of commercial pads.
 - ♦ These have been installed in 23 of the 29 states of India.
 - ♦ He is currently planning to expand the production of these machines to 106 nations.
- He is also credited for generating awareness about traditional unhygienic practices around menstruation in rural India.
- **Honours:**
 - ♦ In 2014, he was included in Time magazine's list of 100 Most Influential People in the World.
 - ♦ In 2016, he was awarded the Padma Shri by the Government of India.

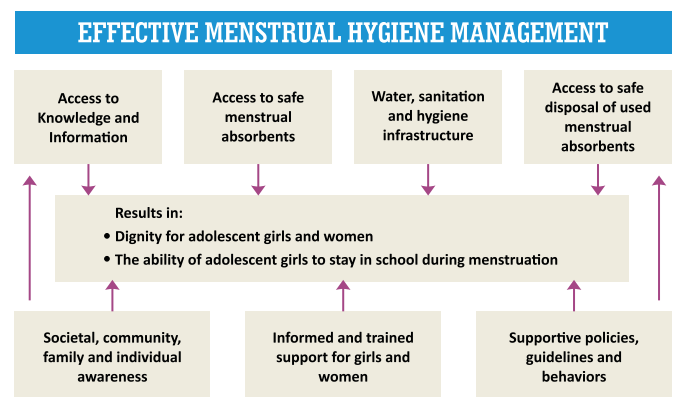
Terminology:

- **What is Puberty?**
 - ♦ Puberty is the name given to changes that occur in girls and boys as they grow up.
 - ♦ Most girls and boys begin to notice these changes taking place to their bodies between the ages of 10 and 14.
 - ♦ These changes take place over a number of years and also include emotional changes.
- **What is menstruation?**
 - ♦ Menstruation is the normal, healthy shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus that exits the body through the vagina.
 - ♦ Menstruation is also called a girls/woman's "period."
 - ♦ It usually lasts between three and seven days. Menstruation happens for most girls about once a month.
 - ♦ It is a sign that a girl can now become pregnant. Women stop menstruating during pregnancy but then start again after delivery.
- **What happens during menstruation?**
 - ♦ Girls have thousands of tiny eggs in their ovaries even at the time of birth.
 - ♦ Each month, or approximately every 21 - 35 days, on average, one of the eggs leaves an ovary and travels through a fallopian tube. When the egg leaves the ovary, this is called ovulation.

- ♦ Normally, the ovaries alternate each month, releasing an egg from the left ovary one month and then releasing an egg from the right ovary the next month.
- ♦ As the egg travels in the fallopian tube, a soft spongy lining forms in the uterus. This lining is mostly made of tiny blood vessels and is called the endometrium. The lining gives nourishment in case an egg and sperm meet to form an embryo, or baby, that begins to grow in the uterus.
- ♦ If the egg is not joined by a sperm, the endometrium or lining of the uterus is not needed. It flows out of the vagina. This bleeding is called a period.
- ♦ This whole cycle is called menstruation.

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Framework:

The essential elements of a menstrual hygiene management (MHM) programme consists of the following:



Menstrual absorbents:

- Managing menstruation in a hygienic way involves not only access to basic sanitation facilities, soap and water but also to so-called menstrual absorbents.
- Every adolescent girl and woman should use menstrual absorbents based on informed choice.
- Indian adolescent girls and women use different menstrual absorbents, not all of which are 'hygienic', however no girl should face ridicule or shame in this situation.
- Rather efforts should be made to increase access to hygienic options.

UN-HYGIENIC		
Menstrual absorbent	Advantages	Disadvantages
Natural materials (e.g. mud, cow dung, leaves)	Free, locally available	High risk of contamination, negative health impact, difficult and uncomfortable to use, less absorbent
News paper, plastic bags		
Strips of sari, towel, bed sheets, or other types of cloth	Easily available, washable, re-usable	Requires laundering in a private space with a water supply and soap and a sun-lit place to dry and air the cloths; odour risk if reused without adequate laundering; chaffing if used while damp
Tissue, toilet paper	Easily available in the local market; average absorption	Loses strength when wet and can fall apart; difficult to hold in place
Cotton wool	Good absorption properties; easily available locally	Difficult to hold in place; an expensive commodity

HYGIENIC		
Menstrual absorbent	Advantages	Disadvantages
Locally made reusable napkins	Can be used for 6-12 cycles; more cost-effective than disposable options; income generation opportunity; Environment-friendly as degrade on disposal.	Not always absorbent enough or the correct shape: requires adequate laundering in a private space with a water supply and soap and a sun-lit place to dry and air the cloths.
Commercial reusable sanitary napkins	Can be used for up to 12 cycles; cost-effective, yet more expensive than locally made; environment-friendly compared to disposable napkins; a high standard and hygienic product quality.	Costs may be prohibitive to potential users: requires adequate laundering in a private space with a water supply and soap and a sun-lit place to dry and air the cloths: not widely available.
Commercial disposable sanitary napkins	Often available, except in remote locations: range of sizes and types available in some locations; Well-designed through research and development.	Costs are prohibitive to many potential users: generate a lot of waste and not environment-friendly; Need to assure proper disposal.

MHM: Present Status in India

Education and Awareness:

- Girls received inadequate education on menstruation pre-menarche. Post-menarche, education programs focus on the biological aspects of puberty, with limited focus on psychosocial needs.
- Awareness programs are common, but are limited to product use, constrained by weak facilitators, and rarely target influencers.

MHM Products:

- The majority of women and girls in India use homemade products to manage their menstruation. Commercial pads are expensive for low income users, and low-cost pads vary in reach and quality.

Sanitation:

- Cultural practices, hygiene routines, and community attitudes related to menstruation limit girls' use of existing toilets,

particularly during menstruation. Current national level efforts to improve sanitation do not prioritize MHM or influence relevant community norms.

- Disposal solutions for menstrual waste are largely unexplored. Current programming does not prioritize vulnerable populations.

Policy:

- The recent national MHM Guidelines are a critical step towards a collaborative and integrated solution to MHM. Policy makers continue to function in silos and need greater alignment, accountability, and strategies for implementing the guidelines at the state level.

Issues associated with Menstruation:

- In India, Menstruation has always been surrounded by taboos and myths that exclude women from many aspects of socio-cultural life. Such taboos about menstruation impact girls' and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health.

- **Concept of Impurity:** Culturally in most parts of India, menstruation is still considered to be dirty and impure. The concept of impurity during periods is not just restricted to cultural dimension of life but also supported by religious point of view. In most of the religions menstruating woman are referred as 'ritually unclean'.
- **Health problems:** According to the **National Family Health Survey-4 (NFHS)**, released in 2015-16, only in seven of India's 36 states and union territories did 90% or more women in the 15-24 age group use hygienic protection during menstruation.
- **Empowerment:** 60 percent girls missed school on account of menstruation, 79 percent felt low confidence, 44 percent were embarrassed and humiliated over restrictions.
- **Gender discrimination:** Menstrual mismanagement adds to gender discrimination by reducing the subjective and objective conditions of young women. It adversely impacts women's education, equality, maternal and child health.
- **Environment:** Several studies report disposal habits of women and girls in India, which include throwing sanitary pads in the open, in water bodies, or mixed with other waste, cause environmental hazard due to improper disposal.
- **Economic:** Work absenteeism for women has also being observed during this phase in various reports.

Practices attached to Menstruation:

- In some famous religious places of India, women were also debarred from entering the inner sanctum of religious place because of menstruation.
- Like in lord Ayappa's temple situated in Sabarimala, Kerala, Shani Shingnapur temple, Maharashtra, Haji Ali Dargah, Mumbai, women are not allowed to visit inner sanctum because of impurity.
- In the Shani Shingnapur case, the High Court said it is the fundamental right of every woman to enter into places of worship and the government is duty-bound to protect it.
- Following the Bombay High Court order, the temple trust of Shani Shingnapur temple, has also allowed women to enter the inner sanctum of the temple.
- The Supreme Court in case of the Sabarimala temple said that neither a temple nor a governing body can ban a woman from entering the temple.

Tax on periods:

- In 2017, Government imposed a 12 per cent tax on sanitary napkins under the new GST regime.
- **Criticism of taxation of sanitary pads:**
 - This move has come under criticism, as feminists have called it as a **tax on periods, rather than pads**.
 - GST has classified sanitary pads as a 'luxury' item. Pads, an aid to menstrual hygiene, cannot fall within "luxury

goods", and should be exempt from taxes, in principle and practicality.

- **This levy speaks to a disturbing lack of perspective in decision-making and the sad absence of feminist thought in the mainstream.**
- The imposition of GST on pads is incompatible with Article 15(1) of the Constitution as it is per se discriminatory against women. Schools, workplaces and other public spaces are not built to accommodate the menstruating body; a tax on pads feeds into this systemic disadvantage.
- Government is more concerned with the idea of womanhood, rather than the poreality of females. The statement made by the state in **exempting kumkum, sindoor, bindis, alta** and bangles is to paint a picture of the ideal Indian woman as visibly married and Hindu.

Current State of the Government's Response

- **UNICEF India: WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) in Schools,** it aims to provide schools with safe drinking water, improved sanitation facilities and hygiene education that encourages the development of healthy behaviours for life.
- **Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK):** India's national adolescent health strategy, launched in January 2014 to prioritize access to MHM information, support, and MHM products through Adolescent Friendly Health Clinics and counsellors.
- **National MHM Guidelines:** It prioritizes sanitation infrastructure (e.g., individual and community toilets, solid waste management) and awareness programs for behavioural change. The MoDWS took the leadership in drafting the **National MHM Guidelines** under Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM).
- **SABLA program (2011):** It is an integrated service to improve health, nutrition, and empowerment for girls, suggests providing awareness about MHM to adolescent girls through Anganwadi Centers.

Suggestions:

- Strengthen the capacity of influencers—teachers, community health workers (CHW), mothers because they have an opportunity for sustainably scaling access to education and awareness on menstrual health, particularly through national programs (e.g., RKSK).
- **Menstrupedia** is a for-profit enterprise that has designed and developed a comic book on menstruation adapted to the local context to provide awareness and education on MHM to adolescent girls.
- Support market-based solutions to innovate and distribute low-cost, yet high-quality sanitary pads at scale. For Example: **Goonj organization** produces simple, reusable cloth pads made by local women using old cloth.

ANNUAL SURVEY ON EDUCATION REPORT (ASER)

In January 2018, Annual Survey on Education Report (ASER) 2017 was released.

About:

- The report was released by Pratham NGO.
- It looked into the state of secondary education in India for the age group 14-18. Findings were based on 26 rural districts across 24 states, 23,868 households and 28,323 youth in the age group 14-18.
- **Beyond basics:**
 - ♦ The survey looks 'Beyond Basics', exploring a wider set of domains beyond foundational reading and arithmetic in an attempt to throw light on the status and abilities of youth in this age group.
- **Domains:** Information was collected for four domains:
 - ♦ **Activity:** It looked at whether the youth were currently enrolled.
 - ♦ **Ability:** It looked at their ability to do basic reading and arithmetic.
 - ♦ **Awareness:** It examined their exposure to the media.
 - ♦ **Aspirations:** It explored their educational and career goals.

Major findings are as follows:

1. Activity:

- ♦ Overall, 86% of youth in the 14-18 age group are still within the formal education system, either in school or in college.
- ♦ The enrollment gap between males and females in the formal education system increases with age. There is hardly any difference at age 14; but at age 18, 32% females are not enrolled as compared to 28% males.
- ♦ Overall, about 5% of youth are taking some type of vocational training or other courses.
- ♦ A substantial proportion of youth are working (42%), regardless of whether they are enrolled in formal education or not. Of those who work, 79% work in agriculture - almost all on their own family's farm.

2. Ability:

- ♦ **Foundational skills like reading and basic arithmetic:**
 - ♦ About 25% of this age group still cannot read basic text fluently in their own language.
 - ♦ More than half struggle with division (3 digit by 1 digit) problems. Only 43% are able to do such problems correctly.
- ♦ **English reading:**
 - ♦ 53% of all 14 year-olds in the sample can read English sentences.

- ♦ For 18 year-old youth, this figure is closer to 60%. Of those who can read English sentences, 79% can say the meaning of the sentence.

♦ **Daily tasks like counting money, adding weights and telling time:**

- ♦ **Counting money** - 76% of surveyed youth could count money correctly. For those who have basic arithmetic skills, the figure was close to 90%.
- ♦ **Add weights** - 56% could add weights correctly in kilograms. For those who have basic arithmetic skills, the figure is 76%.
- ♦ **Telling time** - For the easy task (hour), 83% got it correct. But for the slightly harder task (hour and minutes) a little less than 60% got it right.

3. Awareness:

- ♦ 73% of the young people had used a mobile phone within the last week.
- ♦ 28% had used the internet and 26% had used computers in the last week. Girls and young women have far lower access to computer and internet as compared to boys. While 49% of males have never used the internet, close to 76% of females have never done so.
- ♦ As expected, almost every young person (85%) had watched television in the last week.
- ♦ 58% had read a newspaper and a little under half (46%) had listened to the radio in the previous seven days.

4. Aspirations:

- ♦ About 60% youth in the age group 14 to 18 years wanted to study beyond Std XII.
- ♦ Males aiming to join the army or police or becoming engineers and females showing preference for teaching or nursing careers.

Significance of 14-18 age group:

- ♦ According to Census 2011, one out of every ten Indians is currently in the age bracket of 14-18. This amounts to more than 100 million youth in all.
- ♦ These are crucial years in the life of a young person - years when life-changing decisions about career paths are made.
- ♦ And at age 18, we expect our youth to be prepared for adulthood, eligible to join the formal workforce and vote.
- ♦ Hence it is important to look at the youth in the higher age group and the challenges they face.

Positives from the findings:

- To start with the positive, 86% of the youth in the age group of 14-18 is still enrolled in the formal education system of a school or a college.
- This shows Right to Education (RTE) played its part in helping girls stay in school.
- What ASER measures are actually very rudimentary things. This really gives a sense of where we are and where we need to go in terms of policy interventions.
- ASER also asked youth about their study and professional aspirations and about 60% youth in the age group 14-18 years wanted to study beyond Std XII and only 1.2% wanted to do agriculture as their profession.

Concerns:

- **Quality of Education:**
 - ♦ These studies found that their skills in reading, writing and doing simple math were abysmal.
 - ♦ Even though RTE ensures near full enrolment upto age 14, learning outcomes started deteriorating at the same time due to automatic promotion irrespective of student's performance in exams.
 - ♦ This suggests that just increasing elementary-school enrollment, without addressing the quality of education and gender inequality, won't fix the fundamental skills gap plaguing youth in India.
- **Lack of simple everyday skills – beyond basics:**
 - ♦ Our education system is currently designed to get you to Class 10, 11 and college.
 - ♦ But these academic skills don't seem to get transferred to life skills or everyday skills. The learning skills are so poor that 40% could not count money and 44% could not add simple weights.
 - ♦ When elementary education is weak, subsequent learning is difficult. And with shaky reading and writing skills, our capacity to use these skills in our daily lives is crippled.
- **Digital Divide:**
 - ♦ Even as the government looks at ushering in a Digital India, digital penetration seems to be very poor particularly among girls.
- **Reasons for dropout:**
 - ♦ About one fourth of the youth said that they had to discontinue their studies because of financial reasons.
 - ♦ Among the girls, about one in three- mentioned their family's reluctance to let them study further because of distance and security.
 - ♦ There is no mechanism within our school system to effectively address the needs of children who have fallen behind.
- The survey points out that the government's flagship Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) launched in 2009 and

re-booted in 2013 as RMSA-Integrated has not been much of a success in India's secondary education scene.

Way Ahead:

- **Strengthen RTE:** RTE has helped to retain large number of children particularly girls in school. There is a need to strengthen RTE and its scope should be increased upto the age of 18.
- **Teaching and Evaluation:** Our teaching and evaluation methods have to be scrutinised and changed.
 - ♦ Instead of spoon-feeding the answers to all questions, we need to boost their creativity.
 - ♦ It's the teachers' job to see to it that the students know how to apply the textbook concepts taught in the classrooms. Learning needs to be meaningful and the teachers should connect it to real life examples.
- **Work with Private unaided schools:**
 - ♦ There is a need to work with private sector instead of castigating it for profit motive.
 - ♦ Contrary to popular opinion, most private unaided schools are inexpensive; 80% of them charge a fee that is lower than the government's per-pupil expenditure (PPE).
 - ♦ 13 million students left government schools between 2011 and 2016, while private school enrolment increased by 17 million in that duration.
- **Reorient vocational education:**
 - ♦ Out of the total youth who are working, 79% are working in agricultural related activities.
 - ♦ Foundational agricultural courses that replace the usual bachelor's courses but also add training in skills that could prepare the youth for alternative vocations need to be designed and delivered.
- **Use Digital technology:** New learning structures will be needed where local tutors help students and where learning groups can use group and peer learning processes to learn.

Pratham?

Pratham is one of the largest non-governmental organisations in India which works towards the provision of quality education to the underprivileged children in India.

It was co-founded by Madhav Chavan and Farida Lambay in Mumbai in 1994 to provide pre-school education to children in slums.

Pratham today has interventions spread across 23 states and union territories of India and has supporting chapters in the United States, UK, Germany, and Sweden.

Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), India's largest NGO-run annual survey, has been conducted by Pratham since 2005 to evaluate the relevance and impact of its programs.

INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT 2017

In February 2018, India State of Forest Report 2017 was released by Union Ministry of Environment.

About ISFR:

- Forest Survey of India (FSI) has been assessing the forest and tree resources of our country since 1987.
- The results of the assessment are published in its biennial report titled "India State of Forest Report (ISFR)".
- ISFR – 2017 is the 15th such report in the series.
 - ♦ The 2017 report for the first time contains information on decadal change in water bodies in forest during 2005-2015, forest fire, production of timber from outside forest, state wise carbon stock in different forest types and density classes.
 - ♦ Information on forest cover has been given for 633 districts.

Key findings of isfr-2017 are as follows:



Total forest and tree cover:

- It stands at 24.39% of the geographical area of the country.
- It has increased by 8,021 sq km (1%) as compared to assessment of 2015.
 - ♦ Forest cover has increased by 6,778 sq km.
 - ♦ Tree cover has increased by 1, 243 sq km.

Reason for increase:

- ♦ Implementation of forest management programs like Green India Mission, National Agro-Forestry policy (NAP), REDD plus policy, Joint Forest Management (JFM), National Afforestation Programme and funds under Compensatory Afforestation to States.
- ♦ Green Highways (Plantations & Maintenance) Policy to develop 1,40,000 km long tree line along the national highways will further go a long way in enhancing the forest & tree cover.

Types of forest:

- **Very dense forest (VDF):** The category of VDF — defined as a canopy cover over 70% — has increased by 1.36 %. This is a significant development as VDF absorbs maximum carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- **Open forests:** The increase in forest cover in VDF is followed by increase in open forest.
- **Moderately dense forest (MDF):** But the category of MDF — defined as a canopy cover between 40–70% — saw a 7,056 square kilometre-decline from 2015.

Scenario in States:

- **15 states/UTs have above 33 % of the geographical area under forest cover.** Out of these:
 - ♦ 7 States/UTs have more than 75 % forest cover. These are Mizoram, Lakshadweep, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Manipur.
 - ♦ 8 states have forest cover between 33–75%. These are Tripura, Goa, Sikkim, Kerala, Uttarakhand, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Chhattisgarh and Assam.
- About 40% per cent of the country's forest cover is present in 9 large contiguous patches of the size of 10, 000 sq.km, or more.
- **Top 5 states where forest cover has increased:** Andhra Pradesh (2,141 sq km), Karnataka (1,101 sq km), Kerala (1,043 sq km), Odisha (885 sq km) and Telangana (565 sq km).
- **Top 5 states where forest cover has decreased:**
 - ♦ Mizoram (531 sq km), Nagaland (450 sq km), Arunachal Pradesh (190 sq km), Tripura (164 sq km) and Meghalaya (116 sq km). All these 5 states are in the North East.
 - ♦ The main reasons for the decrease are: shifting cultivation, rotational felling, diversion of forest lands for developmental activities, submergence of forest cover, agriculture expansion and natural disasters.

Total Growing Stock:

- The total growing stock of India's forest and trees outside forests is estimated as 5,822 million cum. Of this, 4,218 million cum is inside the forests and 1,603 million cum outside.
- There is an increase of 53 million cum of total growing stock, as compared to the previous assessment.

Water bodies inside forests:

- Water bodies inside forest cover have increased by 2,647 sq km during the last decade.
- **Top three states showing increase in water bodies within forest areas:** Maharashtra (432 sq km), Gujarat (428 sq km), Madhya Pradesh (389 sq km).

Mangrove cover:

- Total mangrove cover stands at 4,921 sq km and has shown an increase of 181 sq km.
- All the 12 mangrove states have shown a positive change in the mangrove cover.
- **Top three gainers in terms of mangrove cover:** Maharashtra (82 sq km), Andhra Pradesh (37 sq km) and Gujarat (33 sq km).

Striving towards achieving NDC goal:

- **Total carbon stock in forest:** 7,082 million tonnes.
- **Increase:** There is an increase of 38 million tonnes in the carbon stock of country as compared to the last assessment.
- **Target:** India is striving towards achieving its NDC goal of creating additional carbon sink of 2.5 to 3.0 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030.

Bamboo area:

- India's bamboo bearing area rose by 1.73 million hectares (2011) to 15.69 million hectares (2017).
- Recently, Parliament has enacted a Bill in the Parliament by which it has ceased to define bamboo as a tree to promote economic activity among tribals.

Global standing:

- India is ranked 10th in the world, with 24.4% of land area under forest and tree cover.
- India has shown an increasing trend in the forest and tree cover, in comparison to the global trend of decreasing forest cover during the last decade.
- As per the latest FAO report, India is placed 8th in the list of Top Ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.

ANALYSIS

Rise in forest cover:

- Ever since these surveys began in 1987, most such

exercises have recorded an increase in India's forest resources. The 15th IFSR is in line with this trend. It shows that India's forest cover has registered a marginal increase of about one per cent between 2015 and 2017.

- In the aftermath, Environment Ministry commented that, "India has shown an increasing trend in forest cover as against the global trend of decreasing forest cover."
- Such self-congratulation is, however, misplaced.

Misplaced self-congratulation?

• Methodological problem:

- The survey itself notes that much of the increase "in the forest cover can be attributed to plantation activities both within and outside recorded forest areas as well as in the interpretation of satellite data".
- Herein lies the methodological problem with the IFSR.
- Since its inception, the audit has been recording plantations, including commercial monocultures, as forests.
- Such green wealth does have ecological functions. It helps retain moisture, holds soil and captures carbon to an extent.
- But plantations or other patches of greenery cannot sustain populations of endangered animals — the tiger, for example — trap rainwater to give birth to rivers or control floods.
- Such monocultures (one, two or, at the most, three tree species) are no substitute for biodiverse ecosystems.
- A study published in the journal Science in 2016, for example, found that the capacity of the green areas in Europe to absorb carbon dioxide has come down significantly despite the continent recording an increase in such areas over the past 250 years.

• Inclusion of more districts:

- The IFSR notes a more than one per cent increase in very dense forests.
- But this figure should be seen along with the fact that the survey this time has evaluated 44 more districts compared to the last such exercise in 2015.

• Northeast concerns:

- Since 2011, the Northeast region has lost more than 2,400 sq km of forests.
- This is a worrying trend as climate change mitigation programmes in the country emphasise the role of forests in the Northeast as carbon sinks.

Way ahead:

- The loss of forest cover in north-east should spur efforts towards effective conservation projects. Along with that, the country also needs a sound methodology to measure its forests.

CLEANING GANGA

This year's Union Budget, saw a ₹2,000 crore hike in budgetary allocation to the water resource ministry towards revival of Ganga.

Ganga River:

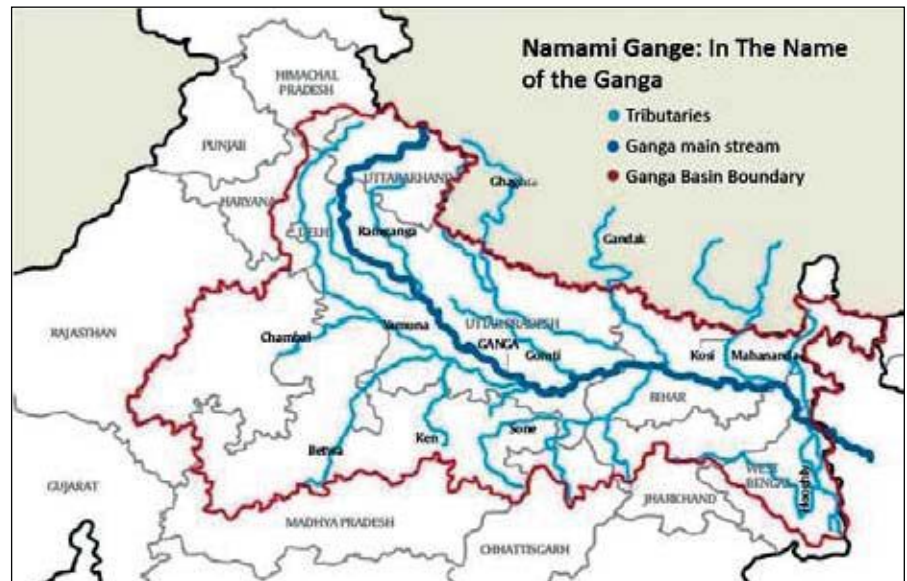
- The 2,525 km long Ganga flows through Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Bengal before reaching the Bay of Bengal.

Namami Gange programme:

- In 2015, the Union Cabinet approved the flagship "Namami Gange" programme which integrates the efforts to clean and protect the Ganga River in a comprehensive manner.
- In order to implement "Namami Gange" Programme, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of:
 - ♦ A high-level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary.
 - ♦ State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary.
 - ♦ District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- **Salient features of Namami Gange:**
 - ♦ Over 1,632 gram panchayats on the banks of Ganga to be made open defecation-free by 2022.
 - ♦ Several ministries are working with nodal Water Resources Ministry for this project includes - Environment, Urban Development, Shipping, Tourism and Rural Development Ministries.
 - ♦ Prime focus will be on involving people living on the river's banks in this project.
 - ♦ Under the aegis of National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) & State Program Management Groups (SPMGs) States and Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj institutions will be involved in this project.
 - ♦ Setting river-centric urban planning process to facilitate better citizen connects, through interventions at Ghats and Riverfronts.
 - ♦ Expansion of coverage of sewerage infrastructure in 118 urban habitations on banks of Ganga.
 - ♦ Development of rational agricultural practices & efficient irrigation methods.

Present status of efforts towards Cleaning Ganga:

- Despite the completion of two Ganga action plans and generous fund flows – 900 crore spent over the last 15 years



— the National Green Tribunal (NGT) in 2017 had observed that, "not a single drop of the Ganga has been cleaned so far."

Efforts by NDA government:

- ♦ In his Budget speech, finance minister Arun Jaitley has claimed that cleaning of Ganga has gathered speed, and 47 out of 187 sanctioned projects have been completed.
- ♦ But the latest National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) report updated on December 2017 reveals that only 18 projects have been completed in the last four years.

Why generous flows of funds have failed so far?

- For north India, Ganga is at the heart of its cultural and economic landscape.
- **Cultural reasons:**
 - ♦ The most delicate problem is the pollution associated with cultural and religious festivities.
 - ♦ The Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board estimated that the Maha Kumbh Mela in 2013 — where 120 million people participated — saw 70% increase in the organic pollution level in the river.
 - ♦ **Burning the Dead:** Cremation along rivers and immersion of remains is a unique reason for pollution in Indian rivers, and especially the Ganga. Burning of wood leads to air pollution as well.
- **Industrial discharge:**
 - ♦ Ganga's freshwater ecosystem has also been severely affected by industrial discharge.

- A CAG report has revealed that during 2016-17, the level of pollutants in the river across Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Bengal was six to 334 times higher than the prescribed levels.
- **Rural Sewage:**
 - About 1,650 gram panchayats lie directly on the banks of the Ganga. The sewage they generate is almost entirely untreated. About half the population in these villages defecates in the open.
- **Shortage of sewage treatment capacity:**
 - Namami Gange lays much emphasis on improvement of sewage infrastructure.
 - Yet, until December 2017, Namami Gange had created only 228.13 million litres per day of the 2,278.08 mld sewage treatment capacity it aimed for.

Implications:

- River Ganga has significant economic, environmental and cultural value in India.
- Rising in the Himalayas and flowing to the Bay of Bengal, the river traverses a course of more than 2,500 km through the plains of north and eastern India.
- Along with its tributaries, it covers 11 states that are home to 600 million people and serves water to 40% of India's population.
- The Ganga basin - which also extends into parts of Nepal, China and Bangladesh - accounts for 26 per cent of India's landmass.
- The Ganga also serves as one of India's holiest rivers whose cultural and spiritual significance transcends the boundaries of the basin.
- Thus given its religious and industrial importance, any further deterioration would have significant ramifications.

Way ahead:

- As the Ardh Kumbh is scheduled for next year, both the central and state government should put in place well thought out strategies to deal with the problem.
- A plan to clean Ganga needs to shift focus from such centralised large capital expenditure projects, to a decentralised process that undertakes cleaning-up from upstream to downwards, progressing through each watershed before entering the major trunk channel.
- As 12 major tributaries source the Ganga, its rejuvenation would not be possible without clear rejuvenation strategies for each of its tributaries.

- Strict monitoring and action is required from NGT against the polluting industries found non-compliant with prescribed effluent discharge standards.
- Introducing new statutes on making the polluter pay or treating the polluted water before it enters the system would prove to be an effective solution.
- In the absence of a well-connected underground sewage system, sewage treatment plants (STPs) would continue to suffer from shortage, under-evaluation and underutilisation. Thus develop adequate supportive infrastructures for successful execution of STPs.

NGT Guidelines on Cleaning Ganga

To prevent pollution of Ganga, National Green Tribunal (NGT) issued news directives in 2017 and has also appointed a supervisory committee (to be headed by the Secretary of the Water Resources Ministry) to oversee implementation of the directions passed.

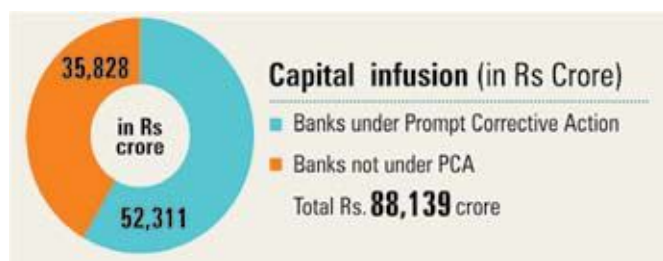
- **No development zone:** NGT has declared an area of 100 metres from the edge of the Ganga between Haridwar and Unnao as a 'No Development Zone'.
- **No dumping zone:** Dumping of waste within 500 metres of the river is prohibited.
- **Fine:** An environment compensation of Rs. 50,000 will be imposed on anyone dumping waste in the river.
- **Curb religious pollution:** Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments should formulate guidelines for religious activities on the Ghats of the Ganga and its tributaries.
- **Ban mechanical mining:** It has banned mechanical mining in the Ganga and its floodplains. Only manual or semi-mechanical mining is allowed.
- **End Ground water extraction:** All industrial units in the catchment areas of the Ganga should end indiscriminate groundwater extraction.
- **Shift tanneries:** Within six weeks, the Uttar Pradesh government should shift tanneries from **Jajmau in Kanpur to leather parks in Unnao** or any other suitable place.

Concluding remark:

- With a budget outlay of ₹20,000 crore to be executed over five years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet project — Namami Gange — launched in 2014, must therefore learn from the past mistakes.
- It is time to move beyond mere allocation of money and do serious implementation on the ground. Else, as the Supreme Court has once remarked the government, "it seems Ganga will not be cleaned even after 200 years."

BANK RECAPITALISATION

In January 2018, Union government unveiled the details of bank recapitalisation plan.



About:

- In October 2017, union government announced the Rs. 2.1 lakh crore recapitalisation plan for public sector banks (PSBs).
- Now in January 2018, government unveiled the detail.

Capital:

- Duration:** Recapitalisation package would be spread across the current financial year 2017-18 and the next year 2018-19.
- Capital infusion plan for 2017-18:** It includes 80,000 crores through recapitalisation bonds and 8,139 crores as budgetary support.

	For PCA Banks	For Non-PCA banks
Amount allocated (In financial year 2017-18)	Rs. 52, 311 crores.	Rs. 35,828 crores.
Major beneficiaries	IDBI (Rs. 10,610 crore), Bank of India (Rs. 9,232 crore), UCO Bank (Rs. 6,507 crore), and Central Bank of India (Rs. 5,158 crore).	State Bank of India (Rs. 8,800 crore), Punjab National Bank (Rs. 5,473 crore), and Bank of Baroda (Rs. 5,375 crore).
Use of amount	To maintain their regulatory capital requirements and to strengthen their governance and operations.	For investment in their growth capital.

- Differentiated approach:** The recapitalisation package would follow a differentiated approach for banks that have been assigned for prompt corrective action (PCA) and those that have not.
- Bonds:**
 - The bonds are to have a maturity period of 10-15 years and would be issued in six tranches.
 - They will be non-Statutory Liquidity Ratio and non-tradable bonds priced at a three-month average plus a certain spread decided by the government.

Reform agenda: Six Pillars of EASE:

- It also includes a reform package which sets a goal of 'Enhanced Access and Service Excellence (EASE)'.
- The six pillars to achieve the EASE Goal includes
 1. Customer responsiveness.
 2. Responsible banking.
 3. Credit offtake.
 4. PSBs as Udyami Mitra.
 5. Deepening financial inclusion.
 6. Digitalisation and developing personnel.
- Wholtime directors of the PSBs would be assigned theme-wise reforms to oversee. Their performance on the themes would be evaluated by the boards of the banks.
- Government would hire an independent agency to conduct a survey of the PSBs on the aspects of EASE to measure public perception about improvements in access and service quality. The results of the survey would be made public each year.

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework

Prompt Corrective Action Plan are the RBI suggested measures that should be taken by banks when certain financial indicators like capital adequacy ratio and NPAs goes worsen beyond a level.

RBI has issued a policy action guideline (first in 2014 and revised effective from April 1, 2017) in the form of Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework if a commercial bank's financial condition worsens below a mark.

The PCA framework specifies the trigger points or the level in which the RBI will intervene with corrective action. This trigger points are expressed in terms of parameters for the banks.

The parameters that invite corrective action from the central bank are:

1. Capital to Risk Weighted Asset Ratio (CRAR)
2. Net Non-Performing Assets (NPA) and
3. Return on Assets (RoA)
4. Leverage ratio

When these parameters reach the set trigger points for a bank (like CRAR of 9%, 6%, 3%), the RBI will initiate certain structured and discretionary actions for the bank.

IBBI REGULATIONS, 2017 AMENDED

In February 2018, The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) amended the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Fast Track Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2017.

According to the Amendments:

- The Resolution Professional shall appoint Registered Valuers to determine the fair value and the liquidation value of the Corporate Debtor.
- After the receipt of Resolution Plans, the Resolution Professional shall provide the fair value and the liquidation value to each member of the Committee of Creditors in electronic form.
- The Resolution Professional and Registered Valuers shall maintain confidentiality of the fair value and the liquidation value.
- A Resolution Plan shall provide for the measures, as may be necessary, for insolvency resolution of the Corporate Debtor for maximization of value of its assets.
- The Resolution Professional shall submit the Resolution Plan approved by the Committee of Creditors to the Adjudicating Authority, at least 15 days before the expiry of the maximum period permitted for the completion of the fast track Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process.

CriSidEx

Recently, the Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs Shri Arun Jaitley launched CriSidEx.

About:

- **Full name:** CRISIL-SIDBI MSE Sentiment Index, or CriSidEx.
- **What is it?**
 - ♦ It is India's first sentiment index for micro and small enterprises (MSEs).
 - ♦ It will tell the current state and expected outlook on the MSME sector every quarter.
- **Developed by:** CRISIL and SIDBI.
- **Composition:**
 - ♦ It is a composite index based on a diffusion index of 8 parameters and measures MSE business sentiment on a scale of 0 (extremely negative) to 200 (extremely positive).
 - ♦ CriSidEx will have 2 indices, one for the 'survey quarter' and another for the 'next quarter'. These will indicate the current state and expected outlook on the MSME sector every quarter.

Sentiment Index?

- Analysts use Sentiment index to predict the future direction of the market based on certain data.
- It seeks to quantify how various factors, such as unemployment, inflation, macroeconomic conditions or politics influence future behaviour.

NCDEX GUAR SEED OPTIONS

In January 2018, the Union Finance Minister, unveiled India's First Agri-commodity Options in Guar Seed by National Commodity and Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX).

NCDEX Guar Seed Options:

- **Agencies involved:** It is designed by NCDEX and approved by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- **Why in Gaur Seed?** Guar Seed is one of the most liquid contracts on the NCDEX platform and a large number of informal trading Centres in some communities of Rajasthan are already involved in some form of informal options trading.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ NCDEX Guar seed options is an important hedging tool which will allow farmers to mitigate their price risk, along with taking advantage of upward price movement.
 - ♦ It is expected to deepen trade in that commodity and will benefit farmers in reaping improved price realizations for their produce, with limited downside risk.

Options trading?

- Options are a type of derivative product.
- An 'Option' is a type of security that can be bought or sold at a specified price within a specified period of time, in exchange for a non-refundable upfront deposit.
- An options contract offers the buyer the right to buy, not the obligation to buy at the specified price or date.
- Just as futures contracts minimize risks for buyers by setting a pre-determined future price for an underlying asset, options contracts do the same however, without the obligation to buy that exists in a futures contract.
- They can be used as:
 - ♦ **Leverage:** Options help you profit from changes in share prices without putting down the full price of the share. You get control over the shares without buying them outright.
 - ♦ **Hedging:** They can also be used to protect yourself from fluctuations in the price of a share and letting you buy or sell the shares at a pre-determined price for a specified period of time.

- **Types:**

- Options are of two types, the 'Call Option' and the 'Put Option'.
- The right to sell a security is called a 'Put Option', while the right to buy is called the 'Call Option'.



National Commodity & Derivatives Exchange Limited (NCDEX)?

- NCDEX is an online commodity exchange based in India. It provides a commodity exchange platform for market participants to trade in commodity derivatives.
- It is the only commodity exchange in India promoted by national institutions and regulated by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).
- It is a public limited company, under the Companies Act, 1956.
- It commenced operations in 2003.
- **Products and services:**
 - NCDEX offers futures trading in 31 agricultural and non-agricultural commodities.
 - **DHAANYA:** NCDEX also offers an agricultural commodity index called DHAANYA which is computed in real time using the prices of the ten most liquid commodity futures traded on the NCDEX platform.
 - It launched Forward market in 2014.

ATAL PENSION YOJANA (APY)

Union Government has allowed small finance banks and payment banks to offer the Atal Pension Yojana (APY), which is expected to significantly increase the coverage of the scheme.

About:

- **Launched in:** 2015.

- **Target group:** It is primarily targeted at the unorganised sector and informal workers.
- **Eligibility condition:** Indian Citizens between the age group of 18 to 40 years eligible to join APY through their savings bank account or post office savings bank account.
- **Monthly pension amount:** It provides guaranteed minimum monthly pension of Rs. 1000 or Rs. 2000 or Rs. 3000 or Rs. 4000 or Rs. 5000 at the age of 60 years based on pension amount chosen.
- **Governments contribution:**
 - The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber.
 - The contribution will be for a period of 5 years, i.e., from Financial Year 2015-16 to 2019-20, who have joined the APY before 31st March, 2016, and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not income tax payers.
- **Significance of participation in APY:**
 - Builds a pensioned society.
 - Adds sustainable fee income to banks by way of attractive incentive for mobilising APY at the rate of 120-150 for each account."
- **Present status:** As of January 23, 2018, more than 84 lakh subscribers registered under the APY with an asset base of more than 3,194 crore.

GLOBAL INDEX OF TALENT COMPETITIVENESS

India moves up on a Global Index of Talent Competitiveness to the 81st position.

About:

- The index measures how countries grow, attract and retain talent.
- The list is released every year on the first day of the World Economic Forum (WEF) annual meeting.
- It was released by Adecco, Insead and Tata Communications.

Findings:

- **Top ranked countries:** Switzerland, Singapore and U.S.
- **Top ranked cities:** Zurich, Stockholm and Oslo.
- **Indian scenario:**
 - India has moved up on to the 81st position, from 92nd last year.

- ♦ But India remains a laggard among the BRICS nations. China (43), Russia (53), South Africa (63) and Brazil (73) continue to perform better than India.
- ♦ The report warns that the country faces "serious risk of worsening brain drain". India ranks 98th in the Attract pillar and 99th in retaining its own talent.

GEM 3.0

Third version of Government e Marketplace (GeM) was recently launched.

About:

- GeM is an online market place that was launched in 2016.
- **Objective:** To ensure that public procurement of goods and services in India (done by government bodies) worth more than Rs. 5 lakh crore annually is carried out through the online platform.
- **Benefits of GeM:**
 - ♦ **Transparency:** GeM eliminates human interface in vendor registration, order placement and payment processing, to a great extent.
 - ♦ **Efficiency:** Direct purchase on GeM can be done in a matter of minutes.
 - ♦ **Secure and safe:** GeM is a completely secure platform and all the documents on GeM are e-Signed at various stages by the buyers and sellers.
 - ♦ **Savings to the Government:** The transparency, efficiency and ease of use of the GeM portal has resulted in a substantial reduction in prices on GeM.
- It has been developed by **Directorate General of Supplies and Disposal (DGS&D)** with technical support of **National E-Governance Division (NEGD)**, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Salient features of GeM 3.0:

- Price comparison using third party sites – multisource and real time.
- E-earnest money deposit (e-EMD) and e-performance bank guarantee (e-PBG).
- Performance based user rating.
- Online vendor assessment (optional).
- Multi-cart functionality.
- Open and dynamic market place with rating based on performance of user on website.

National Sellers On-boarding Campaign:

- Coinciding with the migration to the 3.0 version, National Sellers

On-boarding Campaign has been launched to train sellers/ service providers for transition from GeM 2.0 to GeM 3.0.

Directorate General of Supplies & Disposal (DGS&D)

- It is an organization under Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- It was established in 1951.
- It is the nodal organization for hosting Government e-Market (GeM).

ILO RECOMMENDATION NO. 205

In February 2018, Union Cabinet gave its approval for placing the ILO Recommendation No. 205 before Parliament.

About:

- An ILO Recommendations is a non-binding instrument which seeks to serve as a guiding principle for national policy process.
- In 2015 International Labour Organization (ILO) at its 106th Session held in Geneva, adopted **Recommendation No. 205 which deals with "Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience"**.
- **Details of Recommendation no. 205:**
 - ♦ It guides member States on the measures to be taken to generate employment for the purposes of prevention, recovery, peace and resilience with respect to crisis situations arising from conflicts and disasters.
 - ♦ It states that Members should adopt a phased multi-track approach which includes promoting local economic recovery for employment, social protection, creation of sustainable enterprises (in particular small and medium-sized enterprises) etc.
- **Applicability:** It is applicable to all workers and jobseekers, and to all employers, in all sectors of the economy affected by crisis situations arising from conflicts and disasters and to workers engaged in crisis response, including in the immediate response.

Indian scenario:

- India supported the adoption of Recommendation in 2015.
- Each member state of ILO is required to submit the instruments so adopted before the competent authority (the Parliament in case of India).
- The adoption and placing of the Instrument for the information of the Parliament does not create any immediate obligation.

START-UPS

In February 2018, Union Minister of Commerce and Industry launched three new tools for States/UTs for ranking of Start-Ups in the country.

The three tools are:

1. State and Union Territory (UT) Start-up Ranking Framework.
2. Compendium of Good Practices for Promoting Startups in India.
3. Start-up India Kit.

1. State and UT Start-up Ranking Framework:

- **What it will measure?** Impact of each step initiated at the local level for building a strong Start-up ecosystem.
- **Objective:**
 - ♦ To encourage States/UTs to take proactive steps towards strengthening the Start-up ecosystems at the local level.
 - ♦ Enabling continuous learning through the dissemination of good practices.
- **Basis of the framework:**
 - ♦ It is based on the feedback collected from Start-up ecosystem stakeholders, which include startups, mentors, investors, accelerators, incubators and the government bodies.
 - ♦ Areas which should be given greater thrust like seed funding support, women entrepreneurship are given more score.
 - ♦ The parameters of this feedback focus on all the actions and initiatives undertaken by states on or before March 2018.

2. Compendium of Good Practices for Promoting Startups in India:

- The official release of the Compendium focuses on enriching the Start-up ecosystem through ethical behaviours.
- It covers 95 good practises across 7 areas of intervention: Incubation Support, Seed Funding, Angel & Venture Funding, Start-up Policy & Implementation, Simplified Regulations, Easing Public Procurement, Awareness & Outreach.

3. Start-up India Kit:

- It is primarily a one-stop guide on all Start-up India offerings.
- All the benefits available to startups from the Start-up India initiative can be found in the kit.
- It offers vital information, advice and assistance through website links, statistics, tools, templates, events, competitions and a glossary on start-up terms.

Significance of launch of recent tools:

- India is home to about 20,000 startups, with about 1,400 beginning operations every year.

- They are not only driving economic growth but also leading to technological innovations and employment generation in every state.
- To encourage and help start-ups the Government of India has taken the lead in creating policies and a framework.
- These three tools will act as catalysts to help the Start-up India initiative to drive India's economic growth.

INDUSTRIAL TRAINING INSTITUTES (ITIS)

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) has introduced new Affiliation Norms for Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs).

About:

- **Objective:** To reinvigorate the ITI ecosystem by focussing on their quality.
- **Salient features of norms:**
 - ♦ The civil and infrastructural requirements have been majorly overhauled. The minimum requirement for building ITIs has been reduced.
 - ♦ The application and assessment stage for ITIs has been made digital to simplify the process.
 - ♦ A new ITI can be set up with 4 trades and the minimum plot size will be around 1 acre to accommodate all technical requirements.
 - ♦ The land lease period has also been reduced to 10 years to assist entrepreneurs aspiring to enter the long-term training space.
 - ♦ Stringent physical inspection of infrastructure and machinery to be done by an expert committee.
 - ♦ These new affiliation norms supersede all the previous civil and procedural norms for affiliating ITIs under the aegis of National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT).
 - ♦ These norms will be applicable for new proposals from academic session 2018-19.

Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs)?

- These are post-secondary schools in India to provide vocational training in various sectors.
- These have been constituted under Directorate General of Employment & Training (DGET), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- As on 30th Oct 2017, there are a total of 13,912 ITIs across the country.

CROP LOSS DUE TO WEEDS

According to a study published by Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) in January 2018, India loses farm produce worth \$11b to weeds every year, more than the Centre's budgetary allocation for agriculture for 2017-18.

Economic losses due to weeds in 10 major crops

	in \$ million
Rice	4,420
Wheat	3,376
Soybean	1,559
Maize	739
Groundnut	283
Sorghum	276
Greengram	161
Mustard	72
Sesame	50
Pearlmillet	17



About:

- **Major crops affected:**
 - ♦ At \$4.42 billion, the actual economic losses due to weeds were found to be highest in rice, followed by wheat (\$3.376 billion) and soybean (\$1.56 billion).
 - ♦ However, the average yield loss is the lowest in rice – 14 per cent in transplanted rice and 21 per cent in direct-seeded condition.
 - ♦ The greatest average loss, on the other hand, was reported from groundnut cultivation, followed by maize and soybean.
- **Loss could be higher:** If more crops and locations are included, the losses may be much greater than what is currently estimated.
- **Global scenario:** Studies some years ago showed that globally, weeds are responsible for decreasing production of the eight most important food and cash crops by 13.6 per cent, leading to an economic loss of \$100 billion.
- **Solution:**
 - ♦ Judicious use of herbicides can cost farmers just one-third of what they spend on manual weeding. Proper weed management could bring down these losses substantially.

NATIONAL BANANA FESTIVAL, 2018

In February 2018, Union Agriculture Minister inaugurated the National Banana Festival, 2018.

National Banana Festival, 2018:

- **Duration:** 17 to 21 February, 2018.
- **Venue:** Kalliyoor, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.
- **Organized by:** Centre for Innovation in Science and Social action (CISSA) in partnership with Kalliyoor Gram Panchayat and a host of National and State organisations.

Banana:

- Banana and plantains major staple food crop for millions of people in tropical developing countries.
- **Region where grown:**
 - ♦ Banana is widely grown in tropical, sub-tropical, and coastal region of India.
 - ♦ World banana production is concentrated in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America because of the climatic conditions.
 - ♦ Today, banana is cultivated in more than 130 countries across the world in 5.00 million hectare and yielding 103.63 million tonnes of banana and plantain (FAO, 2013).
- **Indian scenario:**
 - ♦ Banana is native of India.
 - ♦ India is the largest producer of banana in the world with 29.7 million tonnes from an area of 0.88 million hectares with a productivity of 37 MT/ha.
 - ♦ Although India accounts for only 15.5per cent in area, its contribution in the world's production is 25.58per cent.
- **Role of MIDH:**
 - ♦ Production and productivity of banana has considerably increased with expansion of area due to interventions under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).
 - ♦ MIDH promotes adoption of High Density Planting, use of Tissue Culture Plants and other interventions in Post-Harvest Management (PHM) infrastructure.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ There is a growing recognition of the importance of banana and plantains as household food, nutritional security, as well as social security in many parts of the world.
 - ♦ There is also a considerable scope for the export of banana and its products, which further enhances the demand.

PORT LOGISTICS

In February 2018, Dun & Bradstreet Handed over the report titled "Port Logistics: Issues & Challenges in India" to Ministry of Commerce.

Report Summary:

• Port Performance Index:

- ♦ The study introduces a 'Port Performance Index' to benchmark performance of 13 major ports which handle around 67% of India's maritime trade.

Score	How many	Names
Ports with good score	3	JNPT, Kamarajar, Vizag.
Ports with average score	7	Cochin, Kandla, Paradip, Chennai, Mormugao, New Mangalore and V.O. Chidambaranar Port.
Ports with Poor score	3	Haldia, Kolkata and Mumbai Port Trust (MbPT).

• Challenges: Five most common problems across ports are:

- ♦ Port congestion.
- ♦ Customs clearance (including scanning & ICEGATE).
- ♦ Shipping line issues & charges.
- ♦ Documentation & paperwork.
- ♦ Regulatory clearance.

• Three major findings:

- ♦ Processes across the ports are not standardized or uniform.
- ♦ Costs and time for key processes are unpredictable and there is an unacceptable level of variation across ports as well as within port.
- ♦ Several government initiatives taken need to be followed through to completion.

MCA FOR MAJOR PORTS

In January 2018, Union Cabinet approved amendments in the Model Concession Agreement (MCA) for PPP projects in major ports to make the Port Projects more investor-friendly.

Reviving the port sector:

The new model concession agreement aims to revitalize India's port sector. Here's a quick look at its features:

- Change in equity holding to provide exit route to promoters.
- Provision for quick dispute redressal mechanism and revival of stalled projects.
- Refinancing of debt.
- Enabling higher productivity.
- Improve project implementation and operation.
- Change in revenue model.

DREDGING CORPORATION OF INDIA LTD. (DCIL)

In February 2018, Union Government informed Parliament that it has decided to sell off its entire public stake in Dredging Corporation of India Ltd. (DCIL).

Dredging?

- Dredging is the removal of sediments and debris from the bottom of lakes, rivers, harbours, and other water bodies.
- Sedimentation—the natural process of sand and silt washing downstream—gradually fills channels and harbours. Thus water depth continues to increase over time as larger and larger ships are deployed.
- Now as Vessels require a certain amount of water in order to float and not touch bottom, dredging becomes a routine necessity in waterways.
- Dredging often is focused on maintaining or increasing the depth of navigation channels, anchorages, or berthing areas to ensure the safe passage of boats and ships.



About:

- **What is it?** It is a Miniratna Indian public sector unit.
- **Function:**
 - ♦ It is mainly involved in maintenance dredging. But it is also involved in capital dredging, beach nourishment, and land reclamation.
 - ♦ It does dredging for Indian seaports exclusively. It occasionally dredges at foreign seaports in countries such as Sri Lanka, Taiwan and Dubai.
- **Headquarter:** Visakhapatnam.
- **Parent ministry:** It reports to the Ministry of Shipping.
- **Year of establishment:** 1976.
- **Sale of Entire Public Stake in DCIL:**
 - ♦ On the 1st of November 2017, the Government of India approved its privatization.

- ♦ The Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) has obtained approval of the Government to disinvest 100% Government of India Equity in DCIL in one go through two-stage auction process.
- ♦ This decision aims to upgrade technology, infuse capital to buy necessary dredgers/equipment's and instill experienced professional management to optimize operations of the DCIL.

NAVI MUMBAI INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

In February 2018, PM Modi attended the Ground Breaking Ceremony of Navi Mumbai International Airport.

About:

- It is an under construction greenfield international airport.
- **Location:** Ulwe Kopar-Panvel in Maharashtra.
- **Objective:**
 - ♦ Once developed, it will be the second international airport for the Mumbai Metropolitan Region by functioning alongside the Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport (CSIA).
 - ♦ The project is aimed at easing air traffic congestion at CSIA.
- **Executive agency:**
 - ♦ **Executive agency:** Mumbai International Airport Limited (MIAL). It is a Joint Venture between the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and the GVK Industries Ltd led consortium.
 - ♦ **Nodal agency:** City and Industrial Development Corporation (CIDCO). It is the nodal government agency for the project which will be built through public-private partnership (PPP) on a 'design, build, finance, operate and transfer' (DBFOT) basis.
 - ♦ MIAL will hold 74% equity in the airport with the AAI and CIDCO each holding 13%.

SARAS

In January 2018, the first flight trial of the new version of Saras airplane was successfully conducted.



About:

- Saras is the first Indian multi-purpose civilian aircraft.
- **Designed by:** National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL).
- **Timeline:**
 - ♦ The project kicked off in 1991 and the first prototype was introduced in 2004.
 - ♦ After years of development, the second SARAS prototype crashed outside Bengaluru in 2009 which led to the scrapping of its development program.
 - ♦ In February 2017, the project was revived.
 - ♦ The upgraded 14-seater SARAS PT1N completed its test flight earlier in January, 2018
 - ♦ The aircraft will soon be certified for both civil and military use. The plane is capable of executing both day and night missions.
- **Features of the revised version:**
 - ♦ It falls in the light transport aircraft category.
 - ♦ It is capable of executing both day and night missions.
 - ♦ It can be used for transporting civilians, freight, and in remote sensing exercises.
 - ♦ It can take off and land from semi-prepared airfields and even on grass runways.
 - ♦ The aircraft has been designed to travel at 425 km/h and it has a maximum continuous flight time of around five hours.

National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL)?

- It is India's second largest aerospace firm after Hindustan Aeronautics (HAL).
- **Origin:** It was established by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in 1959.
- **Headquarters:** Bangalore.
- It has the prime responsibility of developing civilian aircraft in India.

HIGHWAY CAPACITY MANUAL

Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways released India's first ever Highway Capacity Manual.

About:

- The manual is known as Indo-HCM.
- It has been developed by CSIR – CRRI.
- It will guide Road Engineers and Policy Makers about Road Expansion. i.e. it lays down guidelines for when and how to expand or manage different types of roads.

- This is the first time that such a manual has been developed in India. Countries like USA, China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan developed their own Highway Capacity Manuals long ago.

SFOORTI

In January 2018, Ministry of Railway launched Smart Freight Operation Optimisation & Real Time Information (SFOORTI) Application.

About:

- It is an App for Freight Managers which provides features for monitoring and managing freight business using Geographic Information System (GIS) Views and Dashboard.
- It is a major digital initiative to help plan the traffic flows and optimize freight operations.
- **Salient features:**
 - ♦ With this application, movement of freight trains on Geographic Information System (GIS) view can be tracked.
 - ♦ Both passenger and freight trains can be tracked over Zones/Divisions/ Sections in single GIS View.
 - ♦ It provides a Bird's eye view of all Freight Assets in a single window.
 - ♦ Expected Traffic at Interchange points to evaluate daily performance can be viewed.

LPG PANCHAYAT

In February 2018, The President of India, Shri Ram Nath Kovind, hosted an 'LPG Panchayat' at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

About:

- **Organised by:** Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- **What is it?**
 - ♦ Each LPG Panchayat has about 100 LPG customers.
 - ♦ Objective is to provide a platform for LPG consumers to share experiences and discuss benefits of LPG and link between clean fuel for cooking and women's empowerment.
- **Target:**
 - ♦ The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas intends to conduct 1 lakh such Panchayats across India before March 31, 2019.

SAKSHAM

This year's month long 'Saksham-2018' was inaugurated in Delhi on 16th January, 2018.

Saksham:

- Saksham is an acronym for **Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahotsav**.
- **Agencies involved:** It is an annual flagship event of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, Govt. of India.
- **Objective:** To make citizens aware about the conservation and effective utilization of petroleum products.

Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA):

- **Established in:** 1978.
- **Parent ministry:** Union Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- **Objective:** Advising government to promote energy efficiency so as to:
 - ♦ Conserve fossil fuel.
 - ♦ Save money.
 - ♦ Reduce the environmental impact of oil use.

NORTH-EAST REGION (NER)

Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) announced couple of measures for development of North-East Region (NER).

Exclusive Forum at Niti Aayog for Development of the Northeast:

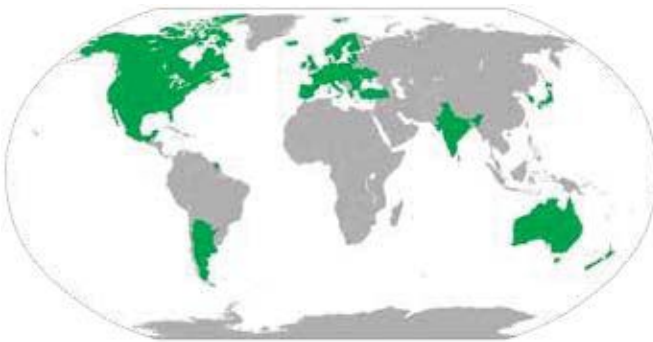
- Union Government has created an exclusive forum at the NITI AAYOG for the development of the North East Region.
- **Headed by:** It will be co-chaired by the Vice-Chairman of the Niti Aayog and Secretary of DoNER.
- **Objective:** The forum will look at various proposals both at the central and the state levels and prepare plans for the speedy development of the North Eastern Region.

North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme:

- The scheme has been sanctioned with 100 percent Central assistance.
- i.e. there will be 100% funding by Central Government for projects in the NER, which were earlier being undertaken on the basis of Centre-State sharing in the ratio of 90:10.

AUSTRALIA GROUP

In January 2018, India joined the Australia Group as its 43rd participant.



About:

- **Objective:**
 - ♦ The Australia Group is a multilateral export control regime (MECR) with the objective of preventing proliferation of biological and chemical weapons.
 - ♦ It helps member countries to identify those exports which need to be controlled so as not to contribute to the spread of chemical and biological weapons.
- **Origin:**
 - ♦ It was established in 1985 after the use of chemical weapons by Iraq in 1984.
 - ♦ The name comes from Australia's initiative to create the group.
- **Members:** With the incorporation of India on January 19, 2018, it now has 43 members, including the European Commission.
- **Secretariat:** Australia manages the secretariat.

Significance of India's Membership:

- India's entry into the group would be mutually beneficial and further contribute to international security and non-proliferation objectives.
- The entry is a show of support from the international community for India's non-proliferation records.
- Diplomats also believe that the membership will also boost India's membership bid for the Nuclear Suppliers Group which is being opposed by China.

- ♦ Earlier India joined the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2016 and the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) in 2017.

EU EXPANSION IN BALKANS

In February 2018, European Union (EU) announced expansion plans in Western Balkans.



About:

- The EU Commission has published a paper setting out the prospect of membership to six new countries by 2025.
- The six countries of western Balkans are: Montenegro, Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo.
- Its intention is to breathe a new life into the bloc, tighten controls on migration and counter Russian influence in the Balkans.
- But "enlargement fatigue" after the 2008 financial crisis, as well as Brexit, have cast doubt on its prospects.

Balkans?

The Balkans are made up of several countries in the south-eastern part of Europe.

They stretch from Slovenia in the north to Greece and the European part of Turkey in the southeast.

The countries that make up the Balkans are Greece, Albania, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia Herzegovina. Sometimes parts of Croatia, and Slovenia as well as Romania are considered to belong to the Balkans.

The region takes its name from the **Balkan Mountains** that stretch from the Serbian-Bulgarian border to the Black Sea.

LINGXIU

Recently, Chinese President Xi Jinping joins Mao and Deng as Lingxiu.

About:

- The Communist Party of China (CPC) has named President Xi Jinping as the lingxiu.
- The word lingxiu refers to highly revered state leaders. It is often bestowed to a leader who enjoys the highest prestige, who is the most capable and who is widely recognised by the entire Party.
- Till now the status that has been bestowed only to iconic leaders Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping.
- Xi's achievements in various fields, especially the anti-graft drive, have been widely acknowledged.

REGIONAL PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS 2018

The Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas 2018 was held during January 6-7, 2018 at Marina Bay Sands in Singapore.

About:

- **Origin:** The Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) conferences began in 2003.
- **Revision of format:**
 - ♦ In 2015, the Government revised the format of PBD and decided that the PBD conferences will be held once in two years in a city outside Delhi.
 - ♦ In the intervening year, it was decided that smaller, outcome-based Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conferences will be organised in Delhi on issues that concern the Indian diaspora.
- **Observance:** It is observed on January 9 as it was on January 9, 1915, when Mahatma Gandhi left South Africa and returned to India to lead India's independence struggle.
- **Objective:**
 - ♦ It is observed to mark the contribution of Overseas Indian community towards their homeland;
 - ♦ It also acts as an engagement and networking platform for overseas Indians, the government and the people of India.
 - ♦ During the event, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award is also given to individuals of exceptional merit to appreciate their role in India's growth.

Regional Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (RPBD):

- This Ministry organizes Regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (RPBD) to allow participation of the Indian diaspora who are unable to attend annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas in India.

- Theme of the 2018 regional Pravasi Bharatiya Divas was 'Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic ASEAN INDIA Partnership'.

PIO-PARLIAMENTARIAN CONFERENCE

In January 2018, first PIO-Parliamentarian Conference was held in New Delhi.

About:

- In the conference, Parliamentarians of Indian Origin from over 20 Democracies of the World gathered to share Parliamentary best practices and their experiences.
- Union minister for Parliamentary Affairs Shri Ananth kumar called the Conference a mini World Parliament of People of Indian origin, an ideal platform for PIOs to partner in the development of India.
- Further, he stated that PIOs have achieved great heights in Politics and Governance in various countries and also become Heads of State.
- While addressing the conference, PM Modi said that PIOs (Persons of India Origin) are like permanent ambassadors of India.

BATTLE OF STALINGRAD: 75TH ANNIVERSARY

Recently, Russia celebrated 75th anniversary of Battle of Stalingrad victory.

About:

- Battle of Stalingrad (23 August 1942 – 2 February 1943) was a major confrontation of World War II.
- In this Nazi Germany and its allies fought the Soviet Union for control of the city of Stalingrad (now Volgograd) in Southern Russia. Ultimately, Soviet troops defeated Nazi army.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ Many Historians consider it to be the greatest battle of the entire World War II.
 - ♦ It stopped the German advance into the Soviet Union and marked the turning of the tide of war in favour of the Allies.
 - ♦ It was an extremely costly defeat for German forces, and the Army High Command had to withdraw vast military forces from the West to replace their losses.
 - ♦ It is often regarded as the single largest (nearly 2.2 million personnel) and bloodiest (1.7–2 million killed, wounded or captured) battle in the history of warfare.

Stalingrad was major industrial city and key target for Hitler's forces – not least because it was named after Soviet leader **Josef Stalin**



■ **Jul 17, 1942:** Soviets reinforce Stalingrad front as Hitler sends 330,000 troops to take city – part of his campaign to conquer southern Russia

■ **Aug 23:** German 6th Army begins assault, supported by intense **Luftwaffe** air raids that leave much of city in ruins



Victory flag raised over Stalingrad, Feb 1943



Il-2 Sturmovik attack aircraft

Front lines

- Nov 18
- - - Dec 12
- Dec 24



■ **Nov 19-23:** Soviet counterattack hits weakly-defended German flanks, encircling entire 6th Army

■ **Nov 24:** Hitler forbids his troops from attempting to break out of city, instead ordering supplies to be flown in by air – effort ultimately fails to deliver quantity of material needed

■ **Dec 12-23:** German 4th Panzer Army makes unsuccessful bid to break Soviet encirclement

■ **Feb 2, 1943:** Facing starvation and with Soviets gaining ground, remnants of 6th Army – 91,000 men – finally surrender. **Soviet victory was turning point of World War II in Europe**

■ **Sep 12-Nov 18:** Fierce battle for city, with Soviets holding narrow strip of land, kept alive by constant ferrying of supplies across Volga. Germans worn down by losses, relentless close combat and approach of winter

Casualties: 850,000 Axis troops (German and allied) and 1.1 million Soviets were killed, wounded, missing or captured

INDIA-IRAN RELATIONS

President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani, paid his first State Visit to India from 15-17 February 2018.



List of MOUs/agreements signed during the visit:

1. Lease Contract for ShahidBeheshti Port-Phase 1 of Chabahar during Interim Period between Port and Maritime Organization (PMO), Iran and India Ports Global Limited (IPGL).
2. Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with Respect to Taxes on Income.
3. MoU on Exemption from Visa requirement for holders of Diplomatic Passports.
4. Instrument of Ratification of Extradition Treaty.
5. MoU on Cooperation in the field of Traditional Systems of Medicine.
6. MoU on the establishment of an Expert Group on Trade Remedy Measures to promote cooperation in areas of mutual interest.
7. MoU on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture and Allied Sectors.
8. MoU on Cooperation in the field of Health and Medicine.
9. MoU on Postal Cooperation.

TUIDIMJANG DAM

In February 2018, it was reported that Tuidimjang dam is being constructed by Myanmar.

Location:

- It is being constructed across Twigem river flowing into Myanmar from Manipur.
- The construction site is barely 100 metres from the Zero Line separating the two countries.
- International rules warrant border countries to check activities in No Man's Land – a 150-metre strip on either side of the boundary line.



Manipur's concern:

- In February 2018, residents of Khangtung village in Manipur's Chandel district reported to district officials about the activity.
- The development has stoked fears of submergence and water scarcity among border villagers esp. Khangtung village, inhabited by the Thadou tribe.
- This project will have huge negative social, cultural and economic impact on the residents of Khangtung and other Indian villages.

Manipur's turbulent history with dams:

- Manipur has had issues with internal dams too.
- **Mapithel dam:**
 - ♦ In June 2015, a tribal village named Chadong in Ukhrul district was submerged by the Mapithel dam on river Thoubal.
- **Khuga dam:**
 - ♦ The Khuga dam south of Manipur's Churachandpur town has hit turbulence too.
 - ♦ Taken up in 1980, the project lay dormant until 2002 leading to cost escalation from the initial 15 crores to 381 crores in 2009.
- **Tipaimukh:**
 - ♦ Controversy has also dogged Tipaimukh, the mega hydroelectric project proposed to be built by the National Hydroelectric Power Corporation Ltd. on river Barak in Manipur 35 years ago.
 - ♦ Manipur and downstream Assam have been protesting against the Tipaimukh project as they fear large-scale submergence and ecological degradation if the dam is built.
 - ♦ Bangladesh is also against the project, as Barak flows into Bangladesh from Manipur through southern Assam and feeds the Surma and Kushiara rivers in the country.

INS KARANJ

In January 2018, INS Karanj was launched.

About:

- It is a diesel-electric attack submarine based on the Scorpene class.
 - Scorpene is a conventional diesel-electric attack submarine weighing about 1,600 tonnes.
- It is the third scorpene class submarine and follows the launch of the first two Scorpene submarines — INS Kalavari and INS Khanderi.
- It is named after the earlier Kalvari class INS Karanj, which was decommissioned in 2003.

Project 75:

- Six Scorpene class submarines are being built under Project 75.
- The submarines are designed by French naval defence and energy group DCNS and manufactured by the Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDSL), an Indian shipyard in Mumbai.
- The deal was signed in 2005, but faced construction delays.
- Status of submarines:**
 - INS Kalvari:** It was commissioned in December 2017 by PM Narendra Modi.
 - INS Khanderi:** it was launched in January 2017, is currently undergoing deep dive trials and is expected to be commissioned in 2018.
 - INS Karanj:** it was launched on 31st January 2018.
 - Vela, Vagir and Vagsheer:** The remaining three submarines are in various stages of outfitting.
 - The entire project is expected to be completed by 2020.
- Significance**
 - Scorpene submarines can undertake various types of missions i.e Anti-Surface warfare, Anti-Submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine laying, area surveillance etc.
 - The Scorpene class is the Navy's first modern conventional submarine series in almost two decades, since INS Sindhusashtra was procured from Russia in July 2000.
 - The project was required because of the declining number of submarines in the Indian Navy and to replace the older Sindhughosh (Kilo) and Shishumar (U209) class of submarines.

INS CHAKRA

Russian authorities have demanded over \$20 million (approximately ₹125 crore) for fixing the nuclear submarine's front portion.

About:

- INS Chakra was damaged while the submarine was entering the harbour in Visakhapatnam. The details of the accident emerged in public in October, 2017.
- The developments around INS Chakra come even as the indigenously built nuclear ballistic missile submarine INS Arihant, which had suffered extensive damage because of human error in early 2017 is yet to be back to active sailing.

India leased the Akula-II class nuclear attack submarine from Russia for a 10-year period in 2011 for over \$600 million. It was inducted into service as INS Chakra in April 2012.

KEY STATS

Weight	Length:
8,140	114
tonnes	metres (approx.)

**GRAND ENTRY**

The induction of the submarine into the Navy in Visakhapatnam.

THE DAMAGE

- INS Chakra suffered damage while entering the harbour in Visakhapatnam.
- A large hole was formed in the sonar dome in the forward portion.
- Damage to INS Chakra was reported in October 2017.

THE PROBE AND AFTER

- A Russian team visited India for a joint investigation in October 2017.
- Russia has quoted \$20 million (approximately ₹125 crore) as the repair cost.

INS ARIHANT

Indian Navy stated that in 2017 INS Arihant suffered a major damage due to a possible human error and thus has not sailed now for months.

Summary facts:

- **What is the INS Arihant?** INS Arihant, a 6,000-tonne submarine is the lead ship of India's Arihant class of nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines built under the **Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project**.
- **Power source:** INS Arihant is propelled by an 83 MW pressurised light-water reactor at its core with enriched uranium fuel.
- **Armament:**
 - ♦ It is capable of carrying ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads.
 - ♦ It is armed with the K-15 Sagarika missiles with a range of 750 km. Later, the submarine will also be armed with the much longer range K-4 missiles, capable of striking targets at a distance of up to 3,500 km.
 - ♦ These 'K' series of missiles are named after former President APJ Abdul Kalam.
- **Timeline:**
 - ♦ **2009:** Launched by PM Manmohan Singh.
 - ♦ **2013:** The nuclear reactor of the submarine went 'critical'.
 - ♦ **2016:** Commissioned into service by PM Modi.
- **Builder:** Shipbuilding Centre (SBC), Visakhapatnam.

Significance:

- **Indigenous:** It's India's first indigenously built nuclear submarine.
- **Nuclear triad:**
 - ♦ With its induction India completed its 'nuclear triad' and joined elite league of countries.
 - ♦ A nuclear triad allows a country to launch nuclear missile from all three key defence bastions — land, air and sea.
 - ♦ Triad is important because in an enemy strike, even if one or even two of the wings are destroyed, the third can launch a retaliatory strike.
- **Depleting submarine fleet:** Adding Arihant to India's naval fleet is significant in light of the poor availability of other submarines.
 - ♦ In August 2016 it was reported that only seven submarines are available for deployment, though India owns 14 conventional submarines.
 - ♦ Further these submarines have to be split on either coasts; are run on either battery or diesel; have already completed a life-span of 20 years or more, on average.

- **Countering Sino-Pak:** Its presence in Indian fleet becomes significant in times of surgical strikes against Pakistan and China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean.
- **Provides Second strike capability:**
 - ♦ It is designed specially to be in deep ocean waters carrying nuclear weapons and provides a guaranteed 'second strike' capability to the country i.e it can hit back after being attacked by a nuclear weapon.
 - ♦ This is important because India, as part of its nuclear doctrine, follows a 'no first use' policy, a practice that Pakistan has refused to adopt.
- **Benefits of SSBN:**
 - ♦ It is a 'Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear Submarine' (SSBN).
 - ♦ SSBN's are those class of submarines which can lurk deep beneath the ocean making them virtually undetectable for months, they also carry nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles.

What next?

- Besides INS Arihant, two other such subs are also being constructed under the ATV (Advanced Technology Vessel) program launched "decades ago".
- INS Aridhaman, the next of these naval vessels, is likely to be completed by 2018.

IAAMS

In February 2018, 'Integrated Automatic Aviation Meteorological System (IAAMS)' was inaugurated at the INS Garuda.

About:

- IAAMS is an ambitious project of the Indian Navy to modernise the Meteorological infrastructure of the nine Naval Air Stations.
- IAAMS undertakes automatic and continuous recording of relevant weather parameters that are vital for accurate weather forecasting.
- INS Garuda is the fourth air station to have been installed with this integrated system.

INS Garuda?

- INS Garuda, is an Indian naval air station.
- **Location:** Willingdon Island, Kochi.
 - ♦ It is adjacent to INS Venduruthy and the headquarters of Southern Naval Command.
- **Establishment:** Commissioned in 1953, it is the oldest operating air station of the Indian Navy.

MAKE-II PROCEDURE

In January 2018, The Defence Acquisition Council cleared a simplified Make-II procedure.

Background:

- One of the salient features of the defence procurement procedure (DPP) 2006 was the introduction of a 'Make' Procedure for promoting indigenous design and development of the prototypes of high technology complex systems by the Indian industry.
- In a sense this was the precursor of what is today referred to as 'Make in India' in defence.
- Having drawn a blank for more than a decade since then, with not one development contract being awarded to anyone, the ministry of defence (MoD) decided a decade later in 2016 to create two sub-categories under which the make projects could be undertaken.
- **Make I:** The newly created make I sub-category entails funding of the cost of development of the prototype to the extent of 90 per cent.
- **Make II:** The projects under make II sub-category are supposed to be self-funded by the industry.
 - ♦ In this subcategory, no Government funding is envisaged for prototype development purposes but has assurance of orders on successful development of prototype.
 - ♦ The primary focus is upon development of equipment/system/platform or their upgrades or their sub-systems with an intent for import substitution.
- However, there was no separate, exclusive procedure outlined for 'Make-II' sub-category. Off late, the need was felt to have a separate, simplified procedure for sub-category 'Make-II' as it does not envisage any funding by the Government for development of prototype.

Simplified Make-II procedure:

- This simplified 'Make-II' procedure will amend the existing 'Make Procedure' in Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP)-2016.
- **Objective:** To enable greater participation of Industry in acquisition of defence equipment and to promote innovative solution.

Salient features of Make-II procedure:

- Concept of selection of two Development Agencies has been done away with. All the vendors meeting the minimum qualification criterion have been allowed to participate in the process.
- Eligibility criteria in respect of parameters such as Profitability,

Minimum period of registration of company, Minimum Credit rating requirement, etc, has been relaxed for participants.

- Eligibility criteria for start-ups has further been relaxed.
- Provisions for suo-moto proposals from Individuals/industry, particularly for innovative solutions have been introduced.
- Documentation requirement at various stages of the process, has been minimised.
- Timelines for various stages of process have been reduced.

Significance:

- It is a major steps towards 'make in India' in defence production.
- It is expected that this process will greatly help import substitution and promote innovative solutions.

Concerns:

- The 'Make' projects carry the risk of failure. In 'Make II' projects, this risk is borne by the developing agencies. The projects are undertaken by them on their own volition without any funding from the government. Therefore, there is no question of the Ministry of Defence ordering foreclosure of any such project.
- One is also left wondering why the objectives sought to be achieved by relaxing the procedure for 'Make II' projects could not be achieved by enlarging the scope of the Defence Technology Fund (DTF) which is separately being managed by the Department of Defence Research and Development.

CENTRAL INDUSTRIAL SECURITY FORCE

Union Cabinet has approved Cadre review of Group 'A' Executive Cadre of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF).

Recent Cadre Review:

- It provides for creation of 25 posts of various ranks from Assistant Commandant to Additional Director General ranks.
- The restructuring of the CISF Cadre will result in increase of Group 'A' posts from 1252 to 1277 with increase of 2 posts of Additional Director General, 7 posts of Inspector General, 8 posts of Deputy Inspector General and 8 posts of Commandant.
- **Impact:**
 - ♦ Timely creation of proposed posts in the Cadre Review of Group 'A' posts in the Force will enhance its supervisory as well as administrative capabilities.

Central Industrial Security Force (CISF)?

- **Origin:** The CISF came into existence in 1969 through the CISF Act 1968 amended in 1983 declaring the Force as Armed Force of the Union.

- **Duties:**

- ♦ The original charter of CISF was to provide protection and security to the property of Public Sector Undertakings.
- ♦ The Act was further amended in 1989, 1999 and 2009 to enlarge the charter of duties and security cover to Private Sector Units and other duties that may be entrusted by the Central Government.
- ♦ Currently, the Force is providing security cover to 336 Industrial Undertaking (including 59 Airports) spread all over the country.

- **Headquarters:** Delhi.

- **Head:** The Organization is headed by the Director General which is an Ex-cadre post.

- **Strength:**

- ♦ The CISF came into existence in 1969 with a sanctioned strength of only three Battalions.
- ♦ The CISF does not have a Battalion pattern like other CAPFs, except 12 Reserve Battalions and HQRs.
- ♦ The Force, which had made a beginning with a sanctioned strength of 3192 in 1969, has grown to a strength of 1,49,088 as on 30.06.2017.

MARATHA LI REGIMENT

In February 2018, Maratha Light Infantry (LI) regiment celebrated its 250th regimental day i.e. 250 years of rising.

About:

- The Maratha Light Infantry is an infantry regiment of the Indian Army.
- **Origin:** The first battalion of the Regiment was raised as 'second battalion Bombay Sepoys' in 1768 which was later known as 'jangi paltan'.
- **Composition:** The men are mostly drawn from all over the state of Maharashtra, with some percentage from Marathi speaking areas of Karnataka including Coorg.
- **Regimental centre:** Their regimental centre has been Belgaum, Karnataka, since 1922, which was part of the undivided Bombay state at that time.
- It is the only regiment of the Army from which two battalions were converted into Special Forces, the 2 & 21 Para Special Forces.

Light Infantry?

Light infantry is a designation applied to certain types of foot soldiers (infantry), typically having lighter equipment or armament or a more mobile or fluid function than other types of infantry, such as heavy infantry or line infantry.

BHARAT KE VEER

In January 2018, Union Home Minister launched the official anthem of Bharat Ke Veer.

About:

- The anthem is sung and composed by Kailash Kher.
- Whatever money come's from the anthem's downloads will be donated to Bharat ke Veer initiative.

Bharat Ke Veer portal:

- It was launched by the Union Home Ministry in 2017.
- This portal facilitates online donation directly to the families of Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) martyrs who have sacrificed their lives for the country in line of duty from January 1, 2016.
- It allows anyone to financially support the bravehearts of his/her choice or towards the "Bharat Ke Veer" corpus.
- To ensure maximum coverage, a cap of 15 lakh rupees is imposed and the donors would be alerted if the amount exceeds, so that they can choose to divert part of the donation to another braveheart account or to the "Bharat Ke Veer" corpus.
- "Bharat Ke Veer" corpus would be managed by a committee made up of eminent persons of repute and senior Government officials, who would decide to disburse the fund equitably to the braveheart's family on need basis.

WATAN KO JANO

In February 2018, Union Home Minister met the youth of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) under "Watan Ko Jano".

About:

- It is a Youth Exchange Programme organized by Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- **Objective:** To give exposure to the youth and children of J&K about the cultural and socio-economic development taking place in other parts of the country.
- **Project detail:**
 - ♦ Youth and children hit by militancy and from weaker sections of the society have been identified for the purpose.
 - ♦ Around 200 youth from the state are on a visit to different places of the country as part of the programme from 11th Feb-20th Feb, 2018.

CHIEF MINISTERS' PROFILE

In February 2018, The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch (NEW) released a report on the profile of serving chief ministers.

Wealth:

- Of the 31 Chief Ministers analysed by the Association for Democratic Reforms, 25 had declared assets over ₹1 crore in their latest election affidavits.
- Richest CM:** N. Chandrababu Naidu, (Telugu Desam Party leader and Andhra Pradesh CM) has declared assets worth ₹177 crore.
- Poorest CM:** Manik Sarkar (CPI (M) leader and Tripura CM) has declared assets worth 26 lakhs.
- Comment:**
 - Extreme inequality in India is not restricted to the general population only. It extends to top politicians as well. The richest Chief Minister is 680 times wealthier than the 'poorest' one.
 - Leaders who own ancestral property and have earnings from lawfully running businesses are not a cause for concern. Only in cases where the assets have increased sharply over a period of time should be considered seriously.

Highest assets

Name	State	Total assets
Chandrababu Naidu	Andhra Pradesh	₹177 Crore+
Pema Khandu	Arunachal Pradesh	₹129 Crore+
Amarinder Singh	Punjab	₹48 Crore+

Lowest assets

Manik Sarkar	Tripura	₹26 Lacs+
Mamata Banerjee	West Bengal	₹30 Lacs+
Mehbooba Mufti	Jammu and Kashmir	₹55 Lacs+

Criminal charges:

- 35%, or 11 of the 31 CMs, have criminal charges pending against them.
- 26% CMs have declared serious criminal cases.
- Comment:** Need of the hour is to amend the Representation of the People Act to restrain those with criminal and corruption cases from contesting in elections.

Educational qualification:

- 10% of the 31 CMs are 12th pass, 39% graduate, 32% graduate professional, 16% postgraduate and 3% doctorate.

ALL INDIA WHIPS CONFERENCE, 2018

In January 2018, 18th All India Whips Conference, 2018 was held in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

Recommendations:

- Around 90 delegates including Ministers, Chief Whips and Whips in Parliament and State Legislatures participated in the conference.
- The Conference gave Ten Recommendations for Efficient Functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures.
- The recommendations are regarding:**
 - Reform of Zero Hour for prompt reply and action taken report (ATR) 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.
- Follow up action on the Recommendations made by the Conference will be taken by Union Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs.

Whips?

- Whips are Member of legislatures appointed by each party in Parliament to help organise their party's contribution to parliamentary business.
- Whips are also largely responsible (together with the Leader of the House) for arranging the business of Parliament.
- One of their responsibilities is making sure the maximum number of their party members vote, and vote the way their party wants.
- Whips frequently act as tellers (counting votes in divisions).

CONVICTED PEOPLE FORMING POLITICAL PARTY

In February 2018, the Supreme Court questioned the rationale behind allowing a convicted person to form a political party.

About:

- **Background:**
 - ♦ SC is hearing a PIL seeking a ban on convicts from forming a political party or becoming an officer-bearer of any party for the time they are disqualified.
- **Arguments by Supreme court (SC):**
 - ♦ Supreme court observed that under the existing law, a convicted legislator cannot contest elections for six years. Now if he/she can't contest, how can he form political party and also select candidates.
 - ♦ This goes against earlier judgments that corruption in politics is to be ostracised for the purity of elections.
 - ♦ On the contention that people have a right to form associations, it said they can form an association to establish a school, but not when they are in the field of governance.
- **Way ahead:**
 - ♦ The court has asked the Centre to file its reply in two weeks.

MPLADS

In January 2018, Union Cabinet approved continuation of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) till the term of the 14th Finance Commission i.e. 31.03.2020.

About:

- **Background:**
 - ♦ The MPLAD Scheme is an ongoing Central Sector Scheme which was launched in 1993-94.
 - ♦ The Scheme is governed by a set of guidelines, which have been last revised in June, 2016.
- **What is it?**
 - ♦ The Scheme enables the Members of Parliament to recommend works for creation of durable community assets based on locally felt needs to be taken up in their constituencies in the area of national priorities namely drinking water, education, public health, sanitation, roads etc.
- **Impact:**
 - ♦ Since the inception of the Scheme till August, 2017, a total number of 18,82,180 works for Rs. 45,000 crores have been sanctioned from MPLADS fund.
 - ♦ The MPLAD Scheme has resulted into creation of various durable community assets which have impacted the social, cultural and economic life of the local communities in one way or the other.
- **Recent Cabinet Decision:**
 - ♦ The Scheme would entail an annual allocation of Rs. 3,950 crores and a total outlay of Rs. 11,850 crores over the next three years.

- ♦ There will be an additional annual allocation of Rs. 5 crores per year for monitoring through independent agency(ies) and for capacity building/training to State/District officials to be imparted by the Ministry.
- ♦ The MPLADS funds are released to the nodal District Authorities on receipt of requisite documents and as per provisions of Guidelines on MPLADS.

RAJYAPAL – VIKAS KE RAJDOOT

In January 2018, Committee of Governors submitted its report 'Rajyapal –Vikas Ke Rajdoot: Catalytic Role of Governors as Agents for Change in Society'.

About:

- **Background:** Committee of Governors was constituted During 48th Conference of Governors in October 2017.
- **Composition:** The Committee comprises:
 - ♦ ESL Narasimhan, Governor of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.
 - ♦ Banwarilal Purohit, Governor of Tamil Nadu.
 - ♦ Ram Naik, Governor of Uttar Pradesh.
 - ♦ Tathagata Roy, Governor of Tripura.
 - ♦ Acharya Devvrat, Governor of Himachal Pradesh.
- **Terms of reference:** It was constituted to examine the role of Governors in taking forward the developmental process.
- **Report detail:**
 - ♦ It suggests Governors play a mentoring role in overall implementation of developmental schemes in their states.
 - ♦ It emphasizes identifying priority areas along with activities that can help realise the objectives of Sarv Shrest Bharat.
 - ♦ The report describes an action-outcome framework that can be adopted by Raj Bhavans.

VOTING RIGHTS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS?

In January 2018, Parliamentary panel on External Affairs proposed proxy voting for migrant workers.

About:

- The Cabinet in August, 2017 cleared an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, which allows NRIs to vote by proxy, a facility only available till now to armed personnel and certain offices notified by the Election Commission.
- **Present status:**
 - ♦ It was introduced in the Lok Sabha in the recently concluded winter session and has not yet been debated on.
 - ♦ Incidentally, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2017 was not referred to any standing committee.

- **Extension to migrant workers?**
 - ♦ Now the panel headed by Shashi Tharoor deliberated on why electoral provision meant for NRIs should not be extended to others.
 - ♦ If proxy voting is meant to make it easier for NRIs to exercise their franchise and save up on travel costs, then why shouldn't the same facility be extended to a migrant worker within India?
 - ♦ Migrant workers like NRIs do not find time and money to come back home to vote. Everyone should get an equal opportunity.
 - ♦ *Data shows that only 10,000 to 12,000 NRIs have voted because they do not want to spend foreign currency to come to India for this purpose.*
- **Fear of misuse?**
 - ♦ But majority of panel members were unanimous in their opinion that proxy voting can be easily misused.
 - ♦ The panel members also asked how to have secret ballot in proxy voting.
 - ♦ The government should have explored a technically sounder way to get NRIs to vote. If money can be transferred online, then why not votes?

CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER

In January 2018, the Union Law Ministry appointed senior most Election Commissioner Om Prakash Rawat as the next Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) as the incumbent A.K. Joti retired.

OP Rawat:

- A Madhya Pradesh cadre IAS officer, Mr. Rawat has served as secretary, Department of Public Enterprises in the Ministry of Heavy Industries.
- He has been a recipient of the **Madhya Pradesh Award for recognition of forest rights in 2009.**
- He will have a tenure of almost a year till his retirement in December 2018.
- Former Finance Secretary Ashok Lavasa was appointed as Election Commissioner to fill the vacancy created by Mr. Rawat's elevation.



Appointment of election commissioners:

- Election Commission of India is a permanent Constitutional Body.
- **Setup:** Originally the commission had only a Chief Election Commissioner. It currently consists of Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.

- ♦ For the first time two additional Commissioners were appointed on 16th October 1989 but they had a very short tenure till 1st January 1990.
- ♦ Later, on 1st October 1993 two additional Election Commissioners were appointed.
- ♦ The concept of multi-member Commission has been in operation since then, with decision making power by majority vote.
- **Appointment of Commissioners:**
 - ♦ The President appoints Chief Election Commissioner and Election Commissioners.
- **Tenure of Commissioners:**
 - ♦ They have tenure of six years, or up to the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.
 - ♦ The Chief Election Commissioner can be removed from office only through impeachment by Parliament.
- **Status:**
 - ♦ They enjoy the same status and receive salary and perks as available to Judges of the Supreme Court of India.

CHIEF JUSTICES OF HIGH COURT

In February 2018, Centre appointed five new Chief Justices for High Courts in Karnataka, Kerala, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura.

About:

- The appointments have come on the recommendations made by the Supreme Court Collegium in January, 2018.
- In case of initial appointment of a Chief Justice of a High Court, the provisions of Article 217 will have to be followed.
- For purposes of elevation as Chief Justices the inter-se seniority of Judges will be reckoned on the basis of their seniority in their own High Courts.

CENTRAL TRIBUNAL, APPELLATE TRIBUNAL AND OTHER AUTHORITIES RULES, 2017

In February 2018, Supreme Court stayed the applicability of provisions of the Central Tribunal, Appellate Tribunal and other Authorities (Qualification, experience and other conditions of service of members) Rules, 2017.

About the Rules:

- The new Rules were framed under the Finance Act of 2017.
- These rules gave the government primacy in making key appointments to tribunals, including the National Green Tribunal.

Argument for stay on rules:

- It has been argued that the Finance Act (and the rules framed thereunder) strikes at the root of the independence of quasi-judicial bodies, such as the National Green Tribunal.
- Supreme court acting on a petition filed by Congress MP Jairam Ramesh, directed that the terms and conditions of service of members of the National Green Tribunal shall be governed by the provisions of the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.

CREAMY LAYER

Supreme court has decided to hear a plea to exclude SC/ST creamy layer from quota.

Indra Sawhney case:

- In 1992, a nine-judge Bench of the court in the Indra Sawhney case, or the Mandal case as it was popularly known, upheld the caste-based reservation for the OBCs as valid.
- The court also said the creamy layer of the OBCs (those earning a specified income) should not get the benefits of reservation.
- The ruling, however, confined the exclusion of the creamy layer to the OBCs and not the SCs/STs.

Petition by Samta Andolan Samiti:

- Now, the petition filed by Samta Andolan Samiti, which represents the poor strata of the SCs/STs in Rajasthan, wants the creamy layer of the SCs/STs excluded from the benefits.
- Arguments by petition:**
 - Rich among the SCs/STs are "snatching away" the benefits, while the deserving and impoverished continue to "bite the dust."
 - It is this lack of percolation of benefits to the poor and really backward among these communities that has led to social unrest, Naxalite movements and perennial poverty.
 - The petition refers to the Constitution Bench's 2006 judgment in the M. Nagaraj case that the "means test [a scrutiny of the value of assets of an individual claiming reservation] should be taken into consideration to exclude the creamy layer from the group earmarked for reservation."

Supreme court's response:

- The Supreme Court will hear a petition to exclude the affluent members, or the creamy layer, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes from the benefits of reservation.
- This is the **first time** a petition has been filed urging the Supreme Court to introduce the creamy layer concept for the SCs/STs.

RESERVATION IN RAJASTHAN

In February 2018, Rajasthan gave 1% quota to Most Backward Classes.

About:

- Rajasthan government has issued orders for granting 1% reservation to the Most Backward Classes, within the 50% ceiling mandated by the Supreme Court for quota in the government jobs and educational institutions.
- Most Backward Classes comprises Gujjars and four other nomadic communities (Banjara, Gadia-Lohar, Raika and Gadariya).
- Earlier, the State Cabinet had approved the decision last month and sent it for the Governor's consent.
- Though Gujjars have been demanding sub-categorisation of OBC quota for extending the benefit to them, the State government has gone ahead with its decision to create MBCs and given it the quota while not exceeding the 50% limit.

DEATH PENALTY

In January 2018, union government told Supreme Court that there is no viable alternative to Hanging.



Background:

- Supreme court is hearing a writ petition filed by Delhi High Court Lawyer Rishi Malhotra, who sought the court's intervention explore alternative means of execution like lethal injection.

Arguments for Lethal Injection:

- A condemned convict should die in peace and not in pain. A human being is entitled to dignity even in death.
- Modern science has made “dynamic progress” to adopt painless methods of causing death.
- Death by lethal injection is practised in several States in the U.S. Even the Law Commission of India had recommended lethal injection.
- In this background, Supreme Court had asked the government to consider the alternative modes of execution.

Government's reply:

- In this background, Union government responded to a query from the court on alternative modes of execution.
- It replied that:
 - There is no viable method at present other than hanging to execute condemned prisoners.
 - Lethal injections are unworkable and often fail.
- It also sought more time to file a detailed affidavit. The court gave the government four weeks to file the affidavit.

NATIONAL ANTHEM IN CINEMA HALLS

Supreme Court has made playing of national anthem in cinema halls made optional.

The Supreme Court has reversed a ruling that ordered the national anthem to be played before movie screenings while the audiences stood up. Further clarity on the issue will emerge after six months following a report from a committee.

Salient Features

- Theaters can choose whether to play the national anthem or not.
- If theaters play the national anthem, the audience will have to stand up.
- Exemption granted earlier to disabled persons will remain in force.
- A 12-member inter-ministerial committee has been established to recommend further actions.
- The panel will submit its report within six months, after which the guidelines may get updated.



REGULATORY BODIES

According to a Union Government order of January 2018, background checks by the Intelligence Bureau has been made mandatory for candidates shortlisted to fill posts of heads of various regulatory bodies and tribunals.

Process for selection of regulatory body heads:

The selection of chairpersons and members of regulatory bodies and tribunals are done by respective selection committees or search-cum-selection committees.

Now according to new norms notified by the personnel department, the process will be:

1. **Shortlisting:** The respective selection committee shall shortlist candidates in the first round.
2. **Verification by IB:** Intelligence Bureau (IB) will verify character and antecedents of the shortlisted candidates.
3. **Recommendation:** Based on the clearances from the IB, the selection committee shall recommend a panel of candidates, which shall be submitted for the consideration of the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) by the administrative ministry after obtaining approval of the concerned minister in charge.

Intelligence Bureau (IB):

- It is India's internal intelligence agency.
- **Parent ministry:** Ministry of Home Affairs.
- **Established in:** 1887. It was recast as the Central Intelligence Bureau in 1947.
- **Director of IB:** Rajiv Jain.



COMMUNALISM

In February 2018, Lok Sabha was informed that 111 people were killed and 2,384 others were injured in 822 communal incidents in the country in 2017.

About:

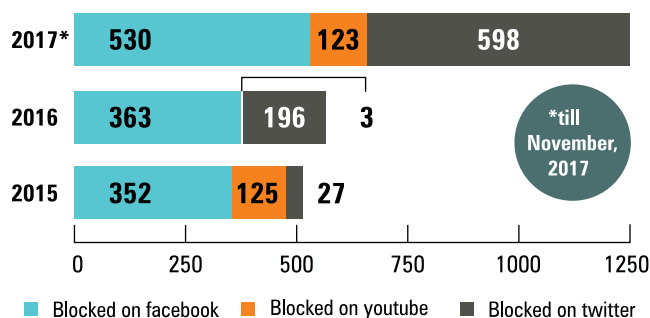
- U.P tops the chart: The highest number of communal incidents in 2017 were reported from Uttar Pradesh where 44 people were killed and 542 others were injured in 195 incidents.
- UP was followed by Karnataka (100 communal incidents), Rajasthan (91), Bihar (85), Madhya Pradesh (60), WEST BENGAL (58) AND Gujarat (50).
- In 2016, 86 people were killed in 703 incidents of communal violence. In 2015, a total of 97 people were killed in 751 incidents of riots.

URL BLOCKING BY GOVERNMENT

According to an internal note of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, the year of 2017 witnessed a 38% rise in Social Media URL blocking.

URL's blocked:

- A total of 1,329 social media URLs were blocked or removed on the recommendation of a government committee to deal with "objectionable content" last year till November 2017.
- This is an increase of nearly 38% from 2016.
- URLs that were blocked or removed on account of court orders during the same period came down from 100 in 2016 to 83 in January-November 2017.



Arguments for blocking:

- Government has authority to do so:
 - There are provisions in the Information Technology (IT) Act 2000 and Indian Penal Code to deal with "objectionable content" posted online.
 - Blocking is a sovereign power that is given to the government by virtue of Section 69A of the Information Technology Act.
- Misuse of social Media:**
 - The misuse of social networking sites for malicious purposes is on the rise.
 - The widespread usage of social networking sites and lack of awareness among users about the methods of cybercriminals is leading to a rise in the spread of malware such as Trojans and bots, and the theft of sensitive personal information.
 - This information may be used to impersonate persons and conduct identity theft and phishing attacks.

Concerns:

- There is a concern that a number of these blocking events happen for political reasons.
- There is a lack of transparency in terms of having in place adequate parameters on what kind of instances the power of blocking can be exercised because parameters like sovereignty and integrity of India are vast.
- A large number of things can be brought under it as per the subjective interpretation of the concerned authority.

- "Merely saying that blocking of a website or URL is in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India, would not suffice. Clear illustration of how the same would impact the sovereignty and integrity will be far more helpful.

AADHAAR FACE AUTHENTICATION

In January 2018, Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) announced that from July 1 onwards it will enable Aadhaar authentication using face recognition. However, this feature will be used only in "fusion mode", along with one more existing mode of authentication such as fingerprint, iris or one-time password (OTP).

What? Face recognition will be used in addition to fingerprints, iris scans for authentication.

When? By July 1, 2018.

Who will have access? UIDAI says data will be shared with select authentication agencies on need basis.

Why? Because of occasional inaccuracies in current system, particularly with elderly and those doing hard manual labour.

How will this work? Face ID will be used together with either fingerprints, iris scan or OTP.

Do we need to go to the Aadhaar centre again? No. Picture taken at the time of Aadhaar enrolment will be used for face authentication.

119 crore have Aadhaar number | **1,045 crore of the 1,510 crore authentications were biometric**

OXFORD HINDI WORD OF THE YEAR FOR 2017

'Aadhaar' is oxford's first Hindi word of the year.

About:

- This was announced by Oxford Dictionaries at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January 2018.
- According to oxford, the 'Hindi Word of the Year' is a word or expression that has attracted a great deal of attention and reflects the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of the past year.
- The accompanying shortlisted words include Notebandi, Swachh, Vikaas, Yoga and Bahubali, reflect the social, cultural, political and economic trends and events that have been part of 2017.

HEALTH

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON UNANI MEDICINE

In February 2018, a two-day International Conference on Unani Medicine was held.

About the conference:

- It was organized by Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM) to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Hakim Ajmal Khan. His birth anniversary is observed as Unani Day.
- The conference attended by about 500 international and national participants had deliberations on Integration of Unani Medicine in Mainstream Healthcare.
- On the occasion, CCRUM distributed AYUSH Awards for Unani Medicine in recognition of contributions made by various Unani experts.

Central Council for Research in Unani Medicine (CCRUM)

It was established in 1979 by the Government of India as an autonomous organisation to initiate, aid, develop and to co-ordinate scientific research in Unani System of Medicine.

Nomenclature:

- The Unani system of medicine is based on Greek philosophy and originated in Greece.
- That's why it is sometimes referred to as the "Greco-Arab" medicine or "Unani Tibb".
- The term Unani is derived from 'Unan', Arabic and Urdu for 'Greece'.

Principles:

- The basic theory of Unani system is based upon the well-known four-humour theory of Hippocrates.
- It postulates the presence of four humours in the body: dam (blood), balgham (phlegm), safra (yellow bile) and sauda (black bile), a parallel to kapha, vata and pitta, the three doshas in ayurveda.
- The quality and quantity of four humors affect the state of health and disease in the body.

Timeline of Unani System of Medicine:**Origin:**

- Unani system originated in Greece.
- The theoretical framework of Unani medicine is based on the work of Hippocrates (460-377 BC).

Role of Arabs:

- The system owes its present form to the Arabs who not only saved much of the Greek literature by rendering it into Arabic but also enriched it with their own contributions.

Introduction in India:

- In India, it was introduced by Arabs and Persians sometime around the eleventh century.
- During 13th and 17th century A.D. Unani Medicine reached its zenith as Delhi Sultans (rulers) provided patronage to the scholars of Unani System and enrolled them as court physicians.

Decline:

- During the British rule in India all the traditional systems of medicine along with Unani System faced almost complete neglect for about two centuries.
- The allopathic system was introduced and gained ground.
- It was mainly Sharifi family in Delhi, the Azizi family in Lucknow and the Nizam of Hyderabad due to whose efforts Unani Medicine survived during the British period.

Revival by Hakim Ajmal Khan:

- It saw the beginning of its revival during the freedom struggle due to the efforts of Hakim Ajmal Khan, a renowned physician and a freedom fighter.
- He established Ayurvedic and Unani Tibbia College and Hindustani Dawakhana a pharmaceutical company for manufacturing of Ayurvedic and Unani medicine in Delhi in 1916. Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated the college in 1921.
- Some of the Princely States also fully patronized this system.

Present status in India:

- After independence, Government of India took several steps for the all-round development of this system.
- Today, India has the largest number of Unani educational, research and health care institutions.

ROTAVAC

Rotavac vaccine has been “pre-qualified” by the World Health Organisation.

About:

- The Rotavac vaccine protects against childhood diarrhoea caused by the rotavirus.
- Rotavirus is responsible for an estimated 36% of hospitalisations for childhood diarrhoea around the world and for an estimated 200,000 deaths in low- and middle-income countries.
- The Rotavac vaccine has been developed by the Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech Limited. The Pune-based Serum International also has developed a rotavirus vaccine called Rabishield.
- Both of them have been included in India's immunisation programme.

Pre-qualification by WHO:

- To be “pre-qualified” means that the vaccine can be sold internationally to several countries in Africa and South America.
- While several vaccines from India have been pre-qualified, this is the first that a vaccine developed entirely in India (conceived and developed from scratch in India) has been “pre-qualified” by the WHO.
- This shows that there is a credible industrial, scientific and regulatory process in place to develop vaccines in India.

HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH AND MEDICAL EDUCATION

In February 2018, Union Cabinet approved the scheme for augmenting human resources for health and medical education, at a total estimated cost of Rs.14,930.92 crore upto 2019-20.

Background:

- According to Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 3, ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all at all ages is essential to sustainable development.
- Also as per World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations, there should be one doctor for 1,000 population. Adequate availability of human resources in health is a necessary prerequisite for this.
- To attain the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and to meet WHO standards for Human Resources in Health (HRH),

Schemes have been proposed for making available more Human Resources in Health sector, i.e. Doctors, Nurses in the country.

Salient Features:

- **New Medical Colleges:**
 - ♦ Continuation of ongoing scheme to establish 58 new medical colleges attached with existing District/Referral hospitals already approved under Phase-I by 2019-20.
 - ♦ Selection and establishment of 24 new medical colleges attached with existing District/ Referral hospitals under Phase-II by 2021-22. Their location will be selected within the identified underserved areas in Challenge Mode.
- **Increase of Medical Seats:** Continuation of Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Up-gradation of existing State Government/Central Government Medical colleges resulting in:
 - ♦ Increase of 10,000 UG seats by 2020-21.
 - ♦ 8,058 PG seats (4,058 in Phase-I by 2018-19 and 4,000 in Phase-II by 2020-21).
- **Nursing Scheme:** Continuation and completion of scheme for setting up of:
 - ♦ 112 Auxiliary Nursing and Midwifery (ANM) Schools and
 - ♦ 136 General Nursing Midwifery (GNM) Schools by 2019-20 in under-served districts of the country.
 - ♦ This Nursing Scheme will be implemented and completed with an amount of Rs.190 crores till 2019-20 for the schools where work has already been started.

Impact:

The establishment of new medical colleges and increase of MBBS and PG seats would:

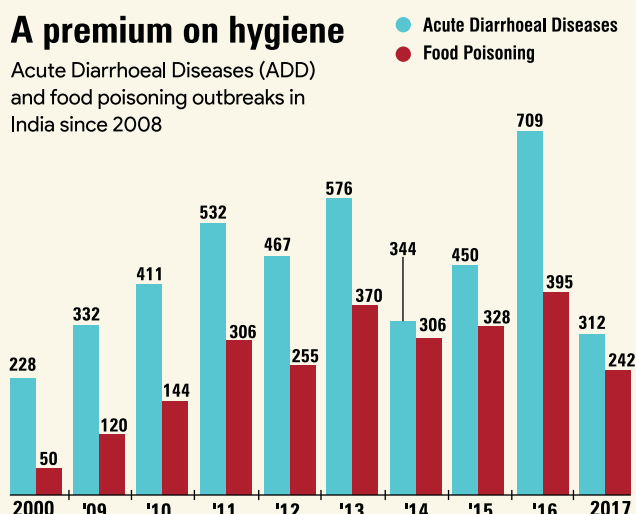
- Increase the availability of health professionals; Create additional 10,000 MBBS and 8,000 PG seats in the country.
- Bridge the gap in number of seats available in government and private sector.
- Improve tertiary care in the Government sector.
- Check the existing geographical distribution of medical colleges in the country.
- Promote affordable medical education in the country.
- Utilise the existing infrastructure of district hospitals.

FOOD POISONING

Recent data put out by the Union Health Ministry's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) has indicated that food poisoning is one of the commonest outbreaks reported in 2017. This is apart from acute diarrhoeal disease (ADD).

A premium on hygiene

Acute Diarrhoeal Diseases (ADD) and food poisoning outbreaks in India since 2008



■ Food poisoning, also called food-borne illness, is caused by eating contaminated food.

■ Hand washing and food hygiene play important roles in preventing this conditions, day doctors.

■ It is important to follow safety measures and maintain hygiene while handling food.

■ Incidence of ADD and food poisoning is high in areas that have bulk production of food such as canteens, hostels and wedding venues.

HPV

In January 2018, NTAGI approved the introduction of the Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine in the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP).

About:

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of viruses that are extremely common worldwide.
- Spread:** HPV is mainly sexually transmitted, but penetrative sex is not required for transmission. Skin-to-skin genital contact is a well-recognized mode of transmission.
- Types:** There are more than 100 types of HPV, of which at least 13 are cancer-causing (also known as high risk type).
- Impact:**
 - HPV infections usually clear up without any intervention within a few months after acquisition, and about 90% clear within 2 years. A small proportion of infections with certain types of HPV can persist and progress to cancer.
 - Cervical cancer is by far the most common HPV-related disease. Nearly all cases of cervical cancer can be attributable to HPV infection.

- Vaccines in India:** As of January 2018, two HPV vaccines are available in India, developed by Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD) and GlaxoSmithkline (GSK), while one vaccine developed by an Indian firm is in clinical trials.

National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI)

- It is an advisory body that recommends vaccines for India's Universal Immunization Programme (UIP).

EDUCATION

AUTONOMOUS COLLEGE

In February 2018, University Grants Commission (UGC) notified guidelines for autonomy to colleges.

Recent development:

- UGC has notified the UGC (Conferment of Autonomous Status Up on Colleges and Measures for Maintenance of Standards in Autonomous Colleges) Regulations-2018.
- Now applications will be invited from colleges under affiliated state and central universities for the autonomous status.

Eligibility conditions:

- Colleges (of any discipline) whether aided, partially aided and unaided/self-financing are eligible provided they are under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act.
- Colleges must have been given 'A' grade by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). This means a ranking of 3.51 and above in the NAAC's 4-point scale will be considered for grant of autonomous status without an on site visit by an expert committee.
- The college should have at least 10 years of existence.

Period of autonomy:

- Autonomy will also be accorded for a period of 10 years, instead of six.

Degree of autonomy:

Colleges will be empowered to

- Determine and fix its own courses.
- Restructure and redesign the syllabi to suit local needs.
- Prescribe rules for admission in accordance with prevalent reservation policies.
- Evolve methods to assess students' performance.
- Conduct examinations.
- Launch self-financing courses; among other powers.

- Appoint their own administrative staff and teaching faculty (including the principal) i.e. administrative autonomy.
- *The degree, however, will be awarded by the university. The certificate will bear the college's name.*

Comment:

- Greater self-governance in institutes of repute will ensure enhanced quality.
- But while welcoming the UGC's move, experts called for extending such autonomy to universities too.

AICTE RELEASES NEW MODEL CURRICULUM

In January 2018, the All-India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) formally released its new model curriculum for engineering and technical courses.

Features:

- **Credits reduced:**
 - ♦ Credits to be earned for an undergraduate degree has been reduced from 220 to 160.
 - ♦ The time freed would be utilised for practical and creative activities, including hackathons.
 - ♦ Each credit means 40-45 hours of work.
- **Mandatory internships:**
 - ♦ Internships have been made mandatory for the award of degrees. The internship would have a minimum of 14 credits.
 - ♦ While there were internships earlier too, there were no concrete guidelines. Since all institutions did not have mandatory internships, technical graduates were sometimes found unemployable for industry.
 - ♦ This was set to change with the new guidelines.

NCTE (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017

In December 2017, Union Minister of Human Resource Development introduced the National Council for Teacher Education (Amendment) Bill, 2017 in Lok Sabha.

NCTE Act, 1993:

- It establishes the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE).
- **Functions of NCTE:**
 - ♦ Planning and co-ordinating the development of the teacher education system throughout the country.
 - ♦ Maintenance of norms and standards in the teacher education system.
- **Regional Committee:**
 - ♦ Section 14 of the Act requires that every institution offering teacher education course has to obtain recognition from the Regional Committee.

- ♦ Section 15 of the Act requires that the recognised institution has to obtain permission from the Regional Committee for start any new course in teacher education.

Concern:

- However, certain institutions funded by the Central/State/UT Government, failed to obtain recognition from the said Council as required by sections 14 and 15 of the Act, though these institutions admitted students for the teacher education and training courses.
- In order to ensure that the future of the students who have already undergone the teacher training courses in such institutions is not put to jeopardy, it has been decided as a one-time measure to grant retrospective recognition or permission to such institutions or courses by amending sections 14 and 15 of the Act.

NCTE (Amendment) Bill, 2017:

The Bill proposed to amend the Section 14 and 15 of the act to grant:

- Retrospective recognition to such institutions funded by the Central/State/UT Government which offered teacher education courses on or after the appointed day till the academic year 2017-2018.
- Retrospective permission to the new course or training in teacher education offered by the institutions on or after the appointed day till the academic year 2017-2018.

WOMEN

NIRBHAYA FUND

In January 2018, details of the status of Nirbhaya Fund were revealed in a reply to a question raised in the Rajya Sabha in December, 2017.

About:

- **Paltry disbursal of fund:**
 - ♦ Union government has released only Rs. 20 crores for the Central Victim Compensation Fund (CVCF) under the Nirbhaya Scheme to various States and Union Territories.
 - ♦ This is only 10% of the total corpus of Rs. 200 crore allocated for the scheme.
- **Poor awareness:** Most of the survivors of sexual assault or acid attacks were not aware that they were entitled to compensation by the State under CVCF.

Central Victim Compensation Scheme (CVCF)?

- It has been created with a corpus of Rs.200 crores under section 357A CrPC.
- It will support States/UTs in providing fund towards compensation to the victim or her dependents who have suffered loss or injury as a result of the crimes (including survivors of rape and acid attack).
- **Ministry in charge:** Home affairs.

ANGANWADI SERVICES TRAINING PROGRAMME

In January 2018, Ministry of Women and Child Development launched the Management Information System (MIS) portal for Anganwadi Services Training Programme.

About:

- The Anganwadi Services Training Programme is under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme.
- The training provided to the Anganwadi Workers at the Anganwadi Workers Training Centres (AWTCs)/Middle Level Training Centres (MLTCs) is a part of the Anganwadi Services.
- AWTCs/MLTCs are run either by the respective State/UT Governments or by NGOs under the supervision of respective State Governments/UT Administrations.
- The Government of India releases funds to the State/UT Governments for implementation of the Scheme.
- **Management Information System (MIS) portal:**
 - ♦ It has been developed by the Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with National Informatics Centre (NIC), for submitting applications/estimates by NGOs for carrying out Anganwadi Services (ICDS) Training through AWTCs/MLTCs.

WOMEN IN ARMED FORCES

In January 2018, the Defence Ministry withdrew its appeals against a 2012 Armed Forces Tribunal decision setting aside denial of promotions and benefits to Short Service and Women Commissioned Officers commissioned before 2006.

Background:

- **Ajai Vikram Singh Committee:** In 2004, the government had accepted promotions of army officers at two, six and 13 years of

service to the ranks of Captain, Major and Lieutenant Colonel on the recommendations of the Ajai Vikram Singh Committee.

Benefit withheld for women officers:

- ♦ Though the promotions were made applicable to all commissioned officers, the benefit was later withheld from Short Service and Women Officers due to an interpretation by the Army's Military Secretary's (MS) Branch.
- ♦ The benefits were not extended despite a gazette notification by the Ministry extending the same to the affected officers. The problem was confined to personnel in the Army.
- ♦ In 2006, when the Short Service scheme was changed from 5+5+4 years system to 10+4 years system, the benefit was extended to officers opting for the new scheme resulting in a sharp disparity wherein senior officers were retired as substantive Lieutenants and Captains while their juniors could reach the Lieutenant Colonel-rank.

Appeal against discrimination:

- In 2012, on petitions filed by women officers and SSC officers, the Tribunal struck down this discrimination.
- But the Army and the Defence Ministry appealed in the Supreme Court.
- An expert panel set up by the Defence Ministry in 2015 recommended the withdrawal of the appeal, and said that such unnecessary litigation was due to an "a self-created negative interpretation even when the scheme had been approved for all officers by the Cabinet."
- Now a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra agreed to the Ministry's plea that the issue has been resolved and it would withdraw the case against the women commissioned officers.
- The decision is a morale booster for women Army officers.

SEEMA BHAWANI

The 69th Republic Day parade featured breathtaking stunts from the Seema Bhawani.



About:

- **What is it?** Seema Bhawani (or the border braves) is the first ever all-woman contingent of motorcyclists from Border Security Force (BSF).
- **Origin:** it was raised at Central School of Motor Transport, BSF Academy in 2016.
- **Members:**
 - ♦ It is a team of 113-women members who have been specially chosen by BSF trainers and are aged between 25-30 years.
 - ♦ They are drawn from various combat ranks of the force.
- **History created:**
 - ♦ It was the first time that women bikers from any force in the country were part of the Republic Day parade.
 - ♦ Prior to this, in 2015, women contingents of the Army, Navy and Air Force had made debut in this national parade, but not as motorcyclists.

SEX RATIO AT BIRTH (SRB)

In February 2018, NITI Aayog released a report titled the Healthy States, Progressive India which revealed shocking findings on Sex Ratio at Birth (SRB).

Decline in SRB:

- The sex ratio at birth (SRB) declined in 17 out of 21 large states of the country. These states recorded a substantial drop of 10 points or more.
- **Gujarat which tops the list:** Among the 17 states which recorded substantial drop of 10 points or more, in Gujarat the SRB fell to 854 females from 907 females per 1,000 males born registering a drop of 53 points from 2014-15 (base year) to 2015-16 (reference year) in this indicator.
- **Scenario in other states:** Gujarat is followed by Haryana, which registered a drop of 35 points, Rajasthan (32 points), Uttarakhand (27 points), Maharashtra (18 points), Himachal Pradesh (14 points), Chhattisgarh (drop of 12 points), and Karnataka (11 points).

Improvement in SRB:

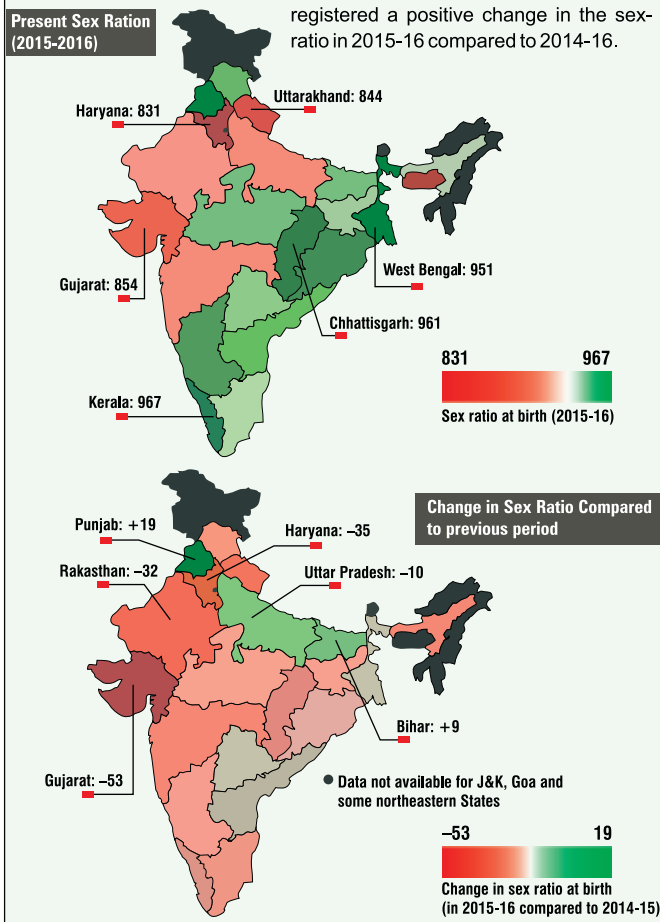
- Improvement in SRB was witnessed in Punjab, which registered a rise of 19 points, followed by Uttar Pradesh (10 points) and Bihar (9 points).

Comment:

- Sex ratio at birth reflects the extent to which there is reduction in number of girl children born by sex-selective abortions.
- States need to effectively implement the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 and take measures to promote the value of the girl child.

MISSING GIRLS

In 2015-16, none of the States had a sex ratio at birth of 1,000 or above. The term sex ratio at birth in this context denotes the number of female births per male births. Of the 21 larger States considered in the report, only three registered a positive change in the sex-ratio in 2015-16 compared to 2014-15.

**PRADHAN MANTRI SURAKSHIT MATRITVA ABHIYAN (PMSMA)**

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) has crossed one crore mark in antenatal check-ups.

About:

- Union Health Ministry launched Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) in 2016.
- Its objective is to provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care, free of cost, universally to all pregnant women on the 9th of every month.
- It guarantees a minimum package of antenatal care services to women in their 2nd / 3rd trimesters of pregnancy at designated government health facilities.

OTHER SOCIAL ISSUES

HOMOSEXUALITY

Supreme Court has referred to a larger Bench a writ petition filed by members of the LGBT community to strike down the Section 377 in the Indian Penal Code of 1860, which criminalizes homosexuality.

A shot in the arm

A look at how the top court chose to revisit **Section 377**

The issue arising out of Section 377 of the IPC is required to be debated upon by a larger bench..... law has to change pace with time and a section of people cannot live in fear of a law that criminalises their sexual orientation.

SC BENCH ON JAN. 8, 2018

■ On December 11, 2013, the Supreme Court set aside the 2009 Delhi High Court order decriminalising gay sex.

■ Subsequently, on January 28, 2014, the SC dismissed a Central government petition seeking a review of its verdict declaring gay sex an offence.

■ The SC Bench order on Monday arises out of a landmark ruling on August 24, 2017, declaring individual privacy a guaranteed fundamental rights. **"Sexual orientation is an essential attribute of privacy."** the SC had said.



AKKAI PADMASHALI

In January 2018, first Transgender marriage was registered in Karnataka.

About:

- The couple had got married on January 20, 2017.
- Transgender rights activist Akkai Padmashali married Vasudev V. on January, 2017. However, the couple took a year to formalise it and finally got their marriage registered in January 2018.



- Akkai, a Rajyotsava award winner, is co-founder of Ondede and Swatantra organisations, which work for the rights of sexual minorities and towards ending discrimination.
- The move comes after the 2014 NALSA judgment, and cabinet clearing of the state policy on transgenders in October 2017.
- It is a big thing to be registered under and recognised by a government body. The government should frame schemes to support transgenders' marriage.

WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

In January 2018, Union Ministry for Social Justice and Empowerment launched 100 accessible websites of various State Governments/UTs under Accessible India Campaign.

Accessible Websites:

- 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.
- Current Status of Accessible Websites:**
 - Total no. of websites: 917.
 - Under Development: 244.
 - Developed and Internally Audited: 208.
 - Live: 100.

Website Accessibility Project:

- The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) has initiated a "Website Accessibility Project" through ERNET India.
- Under it, in total 917 accessible websites will be made for the State Government/Union Territories under Accessible India Campaign. Now 100 accessible websites are made accessible under the project.
- Accessible Website Design Principles:**
 - Provide appropriate alternative text, Caption video;
 - Provide transcripts for audio;
 - All documents (e.g., PDFs) to be accessible;
 - Do not rely on color alone to convey meaning; and
 - Make sure content is structured, clearly written and easy to read.

ERNET India:

It is an autonomous scientific society under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY).

ENVIRONMENT

STRAW MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

In February 2018, Punjab Government made straw management system mandatory.

Recent decision:

- Punjab government has announced that no harvester combine shall be allowed to harvest paddy in Punjab without being attached to a straw management system.
- **Objective:** To check the dangerous trend of stubble burning and save the environment from air pollution.

Straw Management System (SMS):

- The SMS system attached to combine harvesters enables the machine to cut the paddy straw into small pieces and scatter it behind the tail of the machine.
- It would help in checking the burning of crop residue by farmers as they would be able to sow wheat using a happy seeder without having to bury the residue to clear the fields.

ROADKILL

In January 2018, Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT), a wildlife NGO launched an app called 'Roadkills'.

About:

- Unplanned development of roads and railway lines is the major cause of wildlife roadkills. In this background roadkill has been launched.
- It is a mobile-based android application, that will help citizens to report wildlife deaths by uploading geo-tagged photographs to a public forum.
- It accesses location information from phones and permits users to upload photographs of a dead wild animal on a road or railway line.
- The information from all records reported from across India with this citizen science initiative will be compiled as a database, which can soon be viewed on a map on the campaign's website (www.roadkills.in).



- The information generated Can help identify crucial sections of roads or railway lines where animal deaths are high to pinpoint regions that require urgent mitigation measures.

INTER-LINKING OF RIVERS

In January 2018, Fourteenth Meeting of the Special Committee for Inter-Linking of Rivers was held. In this, Union Minister of Water Resources called upon state governments to cooperate with one another and with the centre to expedite the projects for interlinking of rivers.

About:

- As directed by the Supreme Court vide its judgment in 2012, a committee called "Special Committee on Interlinking of Rivers" dated 23rd September, 2014 was constituted.
- It is chaired by Union Minister of water resources.
- Views on the ILR programme have been received from various State Government and experts in the meetings of the Special Committee.
- The Committee, after considering the views of all the stakeholders, is proceeding ahead to expedite the objectives of the interlinking of rivers as per terms of reference.

GOA BIRD FESTIVAL

In January 2018, the second edition of the Goa Bird Festival was held at Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary, Canacona.

About:

- The event was organized by the State Forest department with the support of Goa Tourism, the Goa Bird Conservation Network (GBCN) and Birderpics.com.
- Goa is said to have over 440 species of birds out of over 1,200 in the country. Some of the birds are endemic to the region as the State offers a unique **confluence of two diverse ecosystems — tropical forests and marine.**

Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary?

- It is located in Canacona Taluka, South Goa district, of Goa, India.
- It touches the border of Karnataka state.
- It was established in 1968 to protect a remote and vulnerable area of forest lining the Goa- Karnataka border.

C. YINGI

In February 2018, teams of scientists unveiled a "missing-link" species of spider named Chimerarachne yingi.

About:

- C. yingi, the creature with a scorpion like tail was found preserved in amber in Southeast Asia's forests after at least 100 million years.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ C. yingi fills a yawning gap in the evolutionary saga of the nearly 50,000 species of spiders that spin webs and trap prey around the world today.
 - ♦ It's a missing link between the ancient Uraraneida order, which resemble spiders but have tails and no silk-making spinnerets, and modern spiders, which lack tails.



TIGER CENSUS

In February 2018, it was announced that Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh will be part of India's tiger census.

Recent development:

- India's tiger census, which began in late 2017, will see coordination with Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh in estimating the territorial spread of the animal in the subcontinent.
- While India has engaged with Nepal and Bangladesh in previous tiger counts, this is the first time all countries are uniting in arriving at tiger numbers.

Tiger census?

- **Bodies involved:**
 - ♦ It is commissioned by the Union Environment Ministry's National Tiger Conservation Authority.
 - ♦ Since 2006, the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) — a Union Environment Ministry-funded body — has been tasked with coordinating the tiger estimation exercise.
- **Timeline:**
 - ♦ The once-in-four-years exercise calculated, in 2006, that India had only 1,411 tigers.
 - ♦ This rose to 1,706 in 2010 and 2,226 in 2014 in later editions on the back of improved conservation measures and new estimation methods.
 - ♦ The latest survey — divided into four phases — began in winter of 2017 and is expected to reveal its findings in early 2019.

Who are surveyed?

- ♦ Along with tigers, the survey also collects information on the prey population of deer and other animals.

GHATAK

Ghatak rifle will be given to Assam Forest Department to combat armed poachers who killed 30 rhinos in 2017. By this it become the first non-police or non-paramilitary force to acquire the Ghatak.



About:

- **Indigenous:** it is an indigenously developed rifle developed by Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO).
- **Hybrid rifle:** The rifle is described as a cross between an automatic close-combat weapon such as AK-47 and a more lethal long-range firearm.
- Ghatak is a Hindi word meaning 'Deadly'.

ASSAM'S PROGRAMME AGAINST POACHING

In February 2018, Assam government launched a new programme – "Modernisation of arms and equipment for protection, rescue and rehabilitation of rhinos, tigers and other wildlife"

About:

- **Objective:** To give Forest guards in Assam modern weapons to check rhino poaching.
- **Programme detail:** Forest guards have been given 954 Self-Loading Rifles (SLRs), 272 INSAS rifles, 133 rifles of .12 bore, 20 of 9 MM pistols and 91 Ghatak rifles.
- **Need of program:**
 - ♦ Assam has five national parks and 19 wildlife sanctuaries. The state is home to more than 91 per cent of Indian rhinos (2,431 rhinos as per 2015 census). It is also home to 167 tigers, 248 leopards and 1,169 Swamp deer besides a large number of other animals.
 - ♦ But rhinos and other animals are vulnerable to poaching. 74 rhinos have been killed by poachers in Assam since 2015.

Wildlife fast-track courts:

- Assam government has also setup 10 wildlife fast-track courts to exclusively deal with poaching and other related crimes against wild animals for the first time in the country.

GOLIATH GROUPE

In February 2018, species of Goliath grouper were found 45 km from the Visakhapatnam city.

About:

- Name:**
 - Scientific Name:** *Epinephelus itajara*.
 - Common name:** Atlantic Goliath Grouper, Goliath Grouper.
- It's a large saltwater fish of the grouper family.
- Distribution:**
 - It is found primarily in shallow tropical waters among coral and artificial reefs at depths from 5 to 50 m.
 - Its range primarily includes the Florida Keys in the US, the Bahamas, most of the Caribbean and most of the Brazilian coast, but on some occasions it is found in other regions also.
- IUCN status:**
 - This fish is recognised as a critically endangered species by the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature).
 - This fish is entirely protected from harvest in the U.S.



- It is a significant measure as in 2016, speeding alone accounted for nearly 74,000 of the 1.51 lakh deaths in road accidents.

INTERNATIONAL DAM SAFETY CONFERENCE-2018

In January 2018, International Dam Safety Conference-2018 was held at Kovalam.

About:

- What is it?**
 - This Conference is fourth in the series, being organized under the aegis of ongoing Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP).
 - These conferences bring together dam professionals and experts in the various inter-related disciplines from within India and around the world to share technology and experience in addressing dam safety issues.
- Organized by:** It was jointly organized 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).
- Venue:** Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram.

Do You Know?**Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP)**

- This project was started in 2012 by Central Water Commission (CWC) with assistance from the World Bank and is scheduled to be completed in June 2018.
- It envisages rehabilitation and improvement of 225 dams by working with:
 - Five state governments (Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha).
 - Two agencies (Damodar Valley Corporation in Jharkhand and Uttarakhand Jal Vidyut Nigam Ltd).

DISASTER MANAGEMENT**ROAD SAFETY MEASURES**

In January 2018, Union road transport ministry approved new measures for road safety.

About:

- All cars manufactured after July 1, 2019, will have to be equipped with airbags, seat-belt reminders, alert systems for speeds beyond 80kmph, reverse parking alerts, as well as manual override over the central locking system for emergencies.
- At present, only luxury cars have such features, which are crucial for the safety of occupants.

LOCATION IN NEWS**SAL RIVER**

In February 2018, Union government sanctioned a new project to control pollution in River Sal at Navelim town in Goa.

About:

- It is a small river in Salcete, Goa.
- The river opens near Margao and drains itself into the Arabian Sea at Betul.
- Sal River has a natural harbour, 'Kutubandh' in Velim, Goa, meaning 'hidden' from the Arabian sea.

Project:

- **Objective:**
 - ♦ Under it, around 32 kms of sewers will be laid and sewage treatment plant of 3 million litres per day (MLD) will be constructed.
 - ♦ This will help in reduction of pollution load besides improving the environment and sanitation in the town.
- **Parent program:** It was sanctioned by the Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change under the National River Conservation Plan.
- **Duration:** It is scheduled for completion by 2021.
- **Cost:**
 - ♦ It would cost of Rs. 61.74 crore.
 - ♦ Centre and State will share the cost on 60:40 basis.

BOGIBEEL BRIDGE

According to Railway Board Chairman, Bogibeel bridge will be inaugurated in June 2018.



About:

- **Type:** Road-rail bridge.
 - ♦ It is a double deck bridge with a two-line railway track on the lower deck and a three-lane road on the upper deck.
 - ♦ It is the fourth rail-road bridge built on the Brahmaputra. Others are pandu saraighat, Kolia-Bjumuraguri and Naranarayan Setu.

- **Location:**
 - ♦ It crosses Brahmaputra river.
 - ♦ It connects Dhemaji district (NH-52) and Dibrugarh district (NH-52B) in Assam.
- **Length:** Upon its completion, the 4.94-kilometre-long bridge will become the longest and fourth largest bridge in India.
- **Operator:** Northeast Frontier Railway.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ The bridge is located just over 20 kilometres away from the Assam- Arunachal Pradesh border.
 - ♦ It will thus act as an alternative to Kolia Bhomora Setu, Tezpur in providing connectivity to people residing in Upper Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.
 - ♦ It will also enhance India's ability to transport troops and supplies to its border with China in Arunachal Pradesh.

OLDEST FOSSIL OUTSIDE AFRICA

Nearly 200,000-year-old human fossil has been found outside Africa.

About:

- **Discovery:** Scientists have announced the discovery of a fossilised human jawbone in the Misliya Cave on the western slopes of Mount Carmel in Israel.
- **Age of fossil:** According to scientists, the fossil is between 1,77,000 and 1,94,000 years old.
- **Significance:** If confirmed it will push back by about 50,000 years the time that Homo sapiens first ventured out of Africa.

Misliya Cave?

- **What is it?** It is a rock shelter with an overhanging ceiling carved into a limestone cliff.
- **Location:** On the western slopes of Mount Carmel in Israel.
- **History:** According to archaeologists had determined that it was occupied 2,50,000 to 1,60,000 years ago, during an era known as the Early Middle Palaeolithic.

Mount Carmel?

- **Location:** It is a coastal mountain range in northern Israel stretching from the Mediterranean Sea towards the southeast.
- **Significance:** The range is a UNESCO biosphere reserve.
- **Habitation:** City of Haifa, Israel's third largest city, is located on the northern slope.

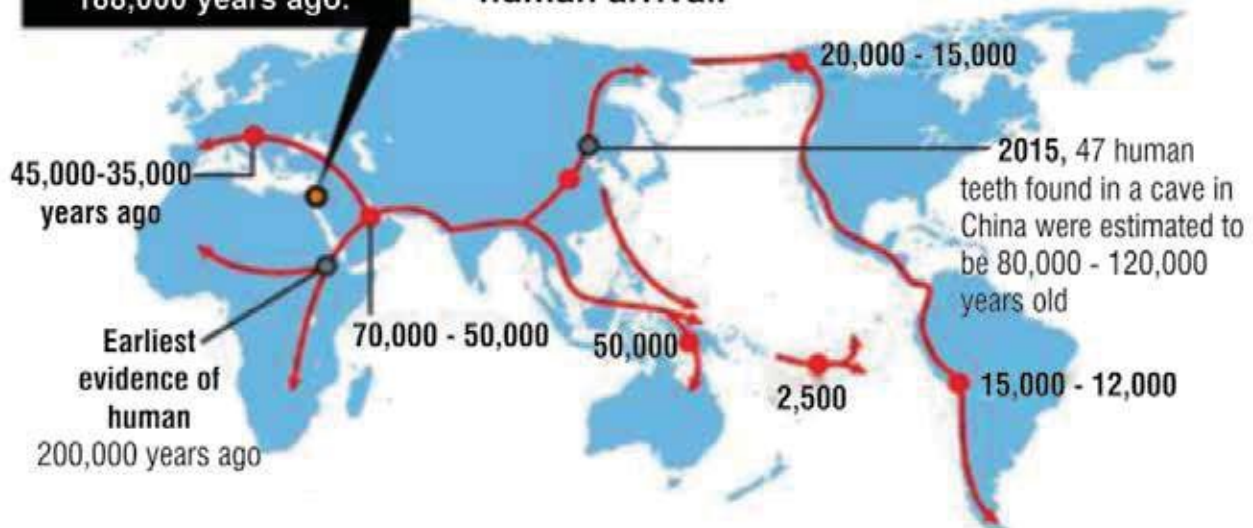
The discovery of a fossilised human jawbone in Misliya Cave in Israel, **the oldest found outside Africa**, has changed the narratives of early human migration patterns.

The fossil is of the left part of the upper jaw - 7 intact teeth and one broken incisor - of a young adult.



Fossil found in Israel cave dated to 174,000-188,000 years ago.

● Previously accepted estimates for human arrival.



The fossil, between 177,000 to 188,000 years old, suggests our ancestors **left Africa more than 50,000 years earlier** than previously believed.

This adds to the increasingly changing history of humans, following the June 2017 discovery of a potentially **300,000-year-old Homo sapiens fossils** in Morocco that pushes back the timeline of the origin of Homo sapiens.

Although this ancient person may have shared some anatomical characteristics with present-day people, this '**modern human**' would have **looked much different** from anyone living today.

Other archaeological evidence in the **inhabitants hunted large game species** like deer, gazelles and **use fire**. Evidence, including bedding, showed that it was used as a base camp.

MINAMATA CONVENTION ON MERCURY

In February 2018, Union Cabinet approved Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

About:

- **Objective:** It is a United Nations treaty to protect human health and the environment from the adverse effects of Mercury.
- **Nomenclature:** The Convention is named after the Japanese city Minamata which went through a devastating incident of mercury poisoning.
- **Timeline:**
 - ♦ It was agreed at the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on mercury in Geneva, Switzerland in January 2013.
 - ♦ It was adopted in October 2013 at a Diplomatic Conference (Conference of Plenipotentiaries), held in Kumamoto, Japan.
 - ♦ It became effective in August 2017.
 - ♦ It came into force in August 2017 after it was ratified by 50 members.
 - ♦ The first meeting of its Conference of the Parties (COP1) was held in September 2017 in Geneva.
- **Salient features of convention:**
 - ♦ Ban on new mercury mines and phase-out of existing ones,
 - ♦ Phase out and phase down of mercury use in a number of products and processes,
 - ♦ Control measures on emissions to air and on releases to land and water, and
 - ♦ Regulation of the informal sector of artisanal and small-scale gold mining.
 - ♦ The Convention also addresses interim storage of mercury and its disposal once it becomes waste, sites contaminated by mercury as well as health issues.
- **Membership status:**
 - ♦ Number of Signatories: 128.
 - ♦ Number of Parties (who have ratified it): 88.
- **Indian scenario:**
 - ♦ India signed the convention in 2014, but has not ratified it yet.
 - ♦ In February 2018, the Union Cabinet approved the proposal for ratification of Minamata Convention on Mercury and depositing the instrument of ratification enabling India to become a Party of the Convention.

- ♦ The approval entails Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury along with flexibility for continued use of mercury-based products and processes involving mercury compound up to 2025.

Mercury?

- Mercury is a naturally occurring chemical element.
- **Symbol:** Hg.
- **Atomic number:** 80.
- **Names:** It is commonly known as quicksilver and was formerly named hydrargyrum.
- **Properties:**
 - ♦ It is a heavy, silvery element.
 - ♦ It is the only '**metallic**' element that is liquid at standard conditions for temperature and pressure; the only other element that is liquid under these conditions is bromine.
- **Source and release in environment:**
 - ♦ Mercury occurs in deposits throughout the world mostly as cinnabar (mercuric sulfide). The red pigment **vermilion (Sindoor)** is obtained by grinding natural cinnabar or synthetic mercuric sulfide.
 - ♦ It can be released to the environment from natural sources – such as weathering of mercury-containing rocks, forest fires, volcanic eruptions or geothermal activities – but also from human activities.
- **Mercury poisoning:** mercury poisoning can result from exposure to water-soluble forms of mercury (such as mercuric chloride or methylmercury), by inhalation of mercury vapor, or by ingesting any form of mercury.
- **Application:** Mercury is used in thermometers, barometers, manometers, sphygmomanometers, float valves, mercury switches, mercury relays, fluorescent lamps and other devices.

Minamata Disease?

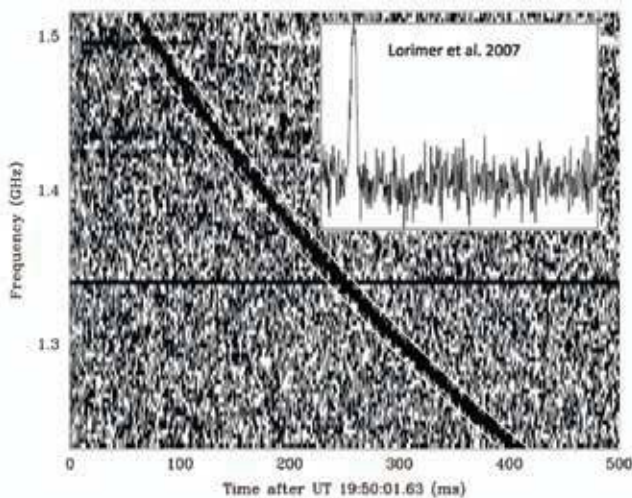
- **Cause:** It is a neurological syndrome caused by severe mercury poisoning.
- **Symptoms/effect:**
 - ♦ Symptoms include ataxia, numbness in the hands and feet, general muscle weakness, narrowing of the field of vision and damage to hearing and speech.



- ♦ In extreme cases, insanity, paralysis, coma and death follow within weeks of the onset of symptoms.
- **Name:** Minamata disease is sometimes referred to as Chisso-Minamata disease.
- **History:**
 - ♦ Minamata disease was first discovered in **Minamata City** in Kumamoto prefecture, Japan in 1956.
 - ♦ It was caused by the release of methylmercury in the industrial wastewater (point source pollution) from the Chisso Corporation's chemical factory, which continued from 1932 to 1968.
 - ♦ As of March 2001, 2,265 victims had been officially recognized (1,784 of whom had died).

FAST RADIO BURSTS

In January 2018, a research paper was published in Nature on the topic of fast radio bursts (FRB).



About:

- In astronomy, a fast radio burst (FRB) is a high-energy astrophysical phenomenon of unknown origin manifested as a transient radio pulse lasting only a few milliseconds.
- **Timeline:**
 - ♦ The first FRB was discovered by Duncan Lorimer and his student David Narkevic in 2007.
 - ♦ About 30 of these objects have been discovered deep in space since then.
 - ♦ **FRB121102:** Out of these only one burster, known as FRB121102, after the date it was discovered (Nov. 2, 2012), has repeated itself, hundreds of times now.
- **Nomenclature:**
 - ♦ Fast radio bursts are named by the date the signal was recorded, as "FRB YYMMDD".
 - ♦ It is commonly referred to as **Lorimer Burst** named after Duncan Lorimer who discovered it.

Features:

- ♦ Fast radio bursts are bright, unresolved (pointsource-like), broadband (spanning a large range of radio frequencies), millisecond flashes found in parts of the sky outside the Milky Way.
- ♦ Unlike many radio sources the signal from a burst is detected in a short period of time with enough strength to stand out from the noise floor.
- ♦ The burst usually appears as a single spike of energy without any change in its strength over time.
- ♦ The bursts last for a period of several milliseconds (thousandths of a second).
- ♦ The bursts come from all over the sky, and are not concentrated on the plane of the Milky Way.
- ♦ In a few unpredictable milliseconds, they typically emit as much energy as the sun does in a day.

Source of FRBs:

- ♦ The origin of the FRBs has yet to be determined.
- ♦ When the FRBs are polarized, it indicates that they are emitted from a source contained within an extremely powerful magnetic field.
- ♦ Proposals for its origin range from a rapidly rotating neutron star and a black hole to extra-terrestrial intelligence.

Frequencies and dispersion:

- ♦ The component frequencies of each burst are delayed by different amounts of time depending on the wavelength.
- ♦ This delay is described by a value referred to as a dispersion measure.
- ♦ This results in a received signal that sweeps rapidly down in frequency, as longer wavelengths are delayed more.

Recent research paper:

- Among the many explanations out there, one explanation was that the signals from the repeating burster FRB110212, are lasers propelling from an alien interstellar spacecraft.
- But the recent research paper has now debunked alien technology as the explanation for it. It argues that the signals from FRB110212, bore the marks of having been produced in a magnetic field at least thousands of times more powerful than normally seen in space.

TACOTRON 2

In a major step towards its "AI first" dream, Google has developed Tacotron 2.

About:

- **What is it?**
 - ♦ It is a text-to-speech artificial intelligence (AI) system that can articulate like humans.

- ♦ It delivers an AI-generated computer speech that almost matches with the voice of humans, technology news website Inc.com reported.
- ♦ According to google, the model achieves a mean opinion score (MOS) of 4.53 comparable to a MOS of 4.58 for professionally recorded speech.
- **Working:**
 - ♦ The system first creates a spectrogram of the text, a visual representation of how the speech should sound.
 - ♦ That image is put through Google's WaveNet algorithm, which uses the image and brings AI closer than ever to mimicking human speech.
 - ♦ It can easily learn different voices and even generates artificial breaths.
- **Way ahead:**
 - ♦ Company's CEO Sundar Pichai announced that the internet giant was shifting its focus from mobile-first to "AI first" and launched several products and features, including Google Lens, Smart Reply for Gmail and Google Assistant for iPhone.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE TASK FORCE

In January 2018, the Commerce & Industry Minister, Suresh Prabhu chaired the Meeting of the Task Force of Artificial Intelligence for India's Economic Transformation.

About:

- **Background:** It was constituted in August, 2017.
- **Composition:** It comprises members from Industry, academia and Government.
 - ♦ In September 2017, IIT Madras Professor Kamakoti was appointed to head this Taskforce
- **Objective:** To suggest policy intervention with respect to use of Artificial Intelligence and giving inputs for the Industrial Policy.

WADHWANI INSTITUTE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In February 2018, PM Modi inaugurated the Wadhvani Institute of Artificial Intelligence (WIAI).

About:

- **What is it?**
 - ♦ It is India's first artificial intelligence institute.
 - ♦ The institute will focus on improving India's sectors like healthcare, agriculture education and more, using the power of artificial intelligence (AI).

- **Location:** Mumbai University's Vidya Nagari campus in Kalina.
- **Established by:** It is a collaboration between Mumbai University campus and Wadhvani brothers, Romesh Wadhvani and Sunil Wadhvani, entrepreneurs of Indian origin living in the US.

BHARATNET

In January 2018, Union government announced that Government has completed Phase-1 of the BharatNet project.

About:

- **Objective:** BharatNet project aims to provide affordable broadband services to citizens and institutions in rural and remote areas, in partnership with States and the private sector.
- **Target:** To provide high-speed broadband to 2.5 lakh Gram panchayats by March 2019.
- **Background:**
 - ♦ The project, then called the National Optical Fibre Network, was approved by the previous government in 2011.
 - ♦ However, only a few hundred kilometres out of 3 lakh kilometres of optical fibre were laid across the country.
 - ♦ NDA government approved changes in the project to expedite rollout and renamed it as BharatNet.
 - ♦ It comprises of two phases.
- **Phase 1:**
 - ♦ Union government connected over one lakh Gram Panchayats (GP) across the country with high speed optical fibre network as per the declared deadline of 31 Dec 2017, thus completing the Phase-1.
- **Phase 2:**
 - ♦ The second phase of BharatNet project with an outlay of Rs. 31,000 crore was launched in November 2017.
 - ♦ Under this government will lay down optical fibre network across 1.5 lakh Gram Panchayats.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ After rural exchange rollout in the country when telecom services started, this is the biggest project involving domestically manufactured products for the entire project.
 - ♦ Rs 4.5 lakh crore value can be added to the national gross domestic product (GDP) on completion of BharatNet phase 2 as a study has suggested that every 10 per cent usage of Internet in India drives up GDP by 3.3 per cent.
 - ♦ The government estimates that the second phase of BharatNet will generate employment of 10 crore mandays during the rollout of the project.
- **Cost:** The total project cost of BharatNet is around Rs 42,000 crore.

MIHIR

In January 2018, Union Minister for Earth Science dedicated 'Mihir' to the nation.

About:

- **What is it?** 'Mihir' (meaning 'Sun') is a high performance computing (HPC) facility.
- **Location:** National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF) at Noida.
- **Services provides:** The new HPC facility is expected to improve the following services:
 - ♦ Weather forecasts at block level over India which can predict extreme weather events like Cyclone and Tsunami.
 - ♦ Air quality forecasts for various cities.
- **Significance:**
 - ♦ With this facility, India's capacity in weather forecasting will improve.
 - ♦ The HPC facility will be India's largest HPC facility in terms of peak capacity and performance and will improve India's ranking from the 368th position to around the top 30 in the Top 500 list of HPC facilities in the world.
- **Background:**
 - ♦ 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 HPC facility 'Pratyush' at IITM was dedicated to the nation on January 8, 2018.

VIVID 2018

In February 2018, National Meet on Grassroot Informatics-VIVID 2018 was held in New Delhi.

About:

- It was organized by **National Informatics Centre (NIC)**.
- The Theme for VIVID 2018 was **"Cyber Security and Innovation"**.
- The meet also held a wide range of relevant topics including Emerging Technologies (Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning & Big Data Analytics), Cyber Threats & Counter Measures, Critical Information Infrastructure protection etc.

FALCON HEAVY TEST FLIGHT

In February 2018, SpaceX launched a Falcon Heavy rocket.



About:

- The Falcon Heavy test flight is also known as Falcon Heavy demonstration mission.
- It was the first attempt by SpaceX to launch a Falcon Heavy rocket on 6 February 2018.
- The successful launch introduced the Falcon Heavy as the most powerful rocket in operation.

Elon Musk's Tesla Roadster:

- The dummy payload for this test flight was Elon Musk's Tesla Roadster which was attached with the rocket's second stage.
- It is a sports car owned by SpaceX CEO Elon Musk. This car was previously used by Musk to commute to work, and now it has become the first consumer car sent into space.
- **Driver:** Sitting in the driver's seat of the Roadster is "Starman", a dummy astronaut clad in a SpaceX spacesuit.
- The boosts of the second stage gave the combination sufficient velocity to escape Earth's gravity and enter an elliptical heliocentric orbit that crosses the orbit of Mars. The orbit reaches a maximum distance from the Sun at aphelion of 1.66 astronomical units (au).
- During the early portion of its voyage, the combination sent live video back to Earth for slightly over four hours.
- **Why a car?** The choice of this car as a dummy payload is a marketing move for Tesla. Concrete blocks are traditionally used to test rockets under payload.

ZUMA

Recently, SpaceX has launched secretive Zuma mission.

About:

- SpaceX blasted off a secretive U.S. government payload known as Zuma, a mission whose nature — and the agency behind it - remains a mystery.

- SpaceX has launched national security payloads in the past, including a spy satellite for the National Reconnaissance Office, and an X-37B space plane for the U.S. Air Force.

SpaceX:

- What is it?** Space Exploration Technologies Corp., doing business as SpaceX, is a private American aerospace manufacturer and space transport services company.
- Objective:** It was founded in 2002 by entrepreneur Elon Musk with the goal of reducing space transportation costs and enabling the colonization of Mars.
- HQ:** California, USA.
- Launch vehicles:** SpaceX has since developed the Falcon launch vehicle family and the Dragon spacecraft family, which both currently deliver payloads into Earth orbit.

SPACE COMMISSION

Dr. K Sivan has been appointed as Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman Space Commission.

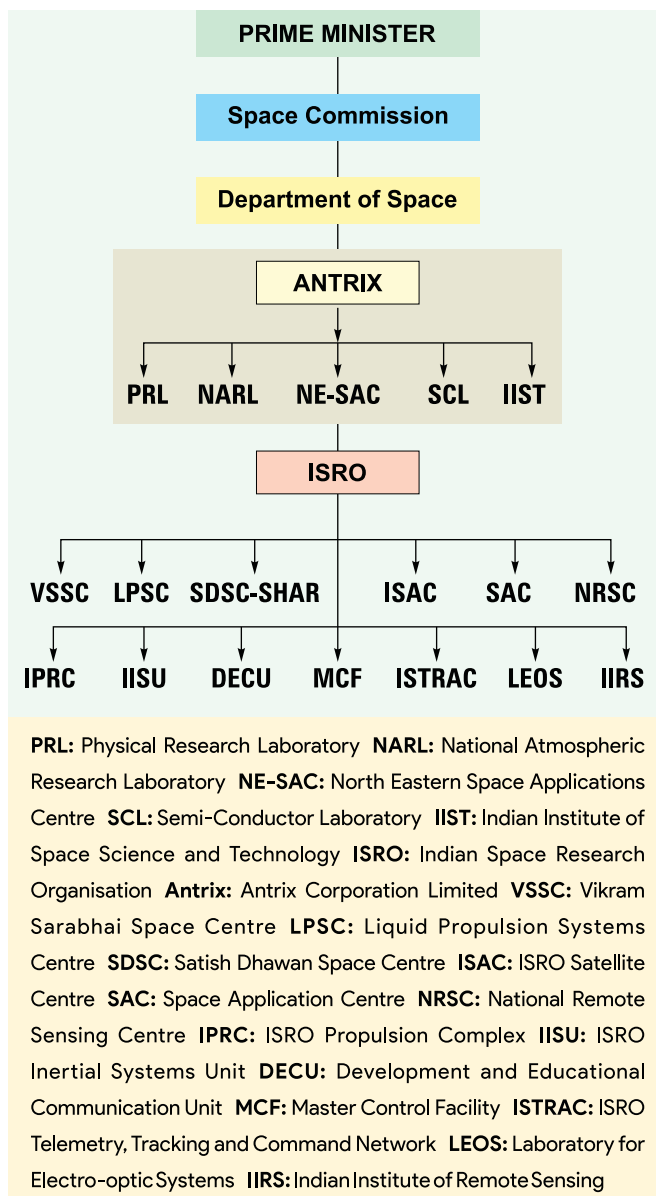
K Sivan:

- At present he is the Director of Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC).
- He will have a tenure of three years as Secretary, Department of Space and Chairman Space Commission from the date of assumption of charge of the post.



Organization structure:

- Space commission:**
 - The policy of the Indian Government in space activity is under the overall responsibility of the Space Commission which formulates guidelines and policies to promote the development and application of space science and technology.
 - In this activity the space commission is supported by other national level committees, such as insat coordination committee (ICC), the planning committee on natural resources management system (PCNNRMS) and the advisory committee on space sciences (ADCOS).
- Department of Space (DOS):**
 - The **Department of Space (DOS)**, created in 1972, acts as the implementing arm of the space commission's policies.
- Indian space research organisation (ISRO):**
 - ISRO under the guidance of DOS, is the main space-dedicated body to implement the national space programme and meet the national developmental needs.

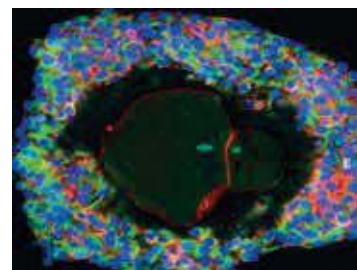


SCIENTISTS GROW HUMAN EGGS

In February 2018, Scientists succeeded for the first time in growing human eggs in a laboratory from the earliest stages in ovarian tissue all the way to full maturity.

About:

- Earlier, scientists had developed mouse eggs in a laboratory to the stage where they produced live offspring, and had also matured human eggs from a relatively late stage of development.



- Now the scientists at two research hospitals in Edinburgh and the Center for Human Reproduction in New York, have for the first time developed human eggs outside the human body from their earliest stage to full maturity.
- The results were published in the journal Molecular Human Reproduction.
- **Comment:**
 - ♦ It could help in developing regenerative medicine therapies and new infertility treatments.
 - ♦ But Independent experts also cautioned that there is much more to do before lab-grown human eggs could be safely be made ready for fertilisation with sperm.

NUCLEAR FUEL COMPLEX

Distinguished Scientist Dinesh Srivastava has taken over as Chief Executive officers of the Nuclear Fuel Complex (NFC).

About:

- **HQ:** Hyderabad.
- **Established in:** 1971.
- **Parent agency:** It is a major industrial unit of India's Department of Atomic Energy.
- **Function:** Supply of nuclear fuel bundles and reactor core components.

RESEARCH PAPER IN EARTH SCIENCE

In January 2018, Union Minister for Earth Science released the report titled "Bibliometrics analysis of research in the field of Earth System Science".

Key Findings:

- On an average, Indian researchers contribute about 5% of total papers and 7% of highly cited papers published in Earth Sciences worldwide.
- In terms of number of research papers during the recent decade (2006-2015), India stands
 - ♦ 1st in Himalayan Research,
 - ♦ 9th in Atmospheric Sciences,
 - ♦ 9th in Geosciences,
 - ♦ 15th in Ocean sciences,
 - ♦ 16th in Antarctic Research and
 - ♦ 25th in the field of Arctic Research.
- Among the funding agencies in research, DST, MOES and CSIR contribute maximum number of research papers.

MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING (MRI)

A Mumbai resident died after he was sucked into an MRI machine at the BYL Nair Hospital. Police arrested the resident doctor and the ward boy on duty.

All about MRI

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) produces highly detailed 3-dimensional images of the body using electromagnetic waves. The device was invented in the early 1970s and first used on humans in 1977.

An MRI scan can be used to examine almost any part of the body, including.

- Brain and spinal cord
- Bones and joints
- Breasts
- Heart and blood vessels
- Internal organs, such as the liver, womb or the prostate gland

Powerful magnets

The force of the device's approximately 10-tonne magnet is about 30,000 times as powerful as Earth's magnetic field, and 200 times stronger than a common refrigerator magnet.

MRI scans produce strong magnetic fields, it is for this reason that such scans are not administered on patients with:

- Pacemakers
- A nerve stimulator, which is an electrical implant to cure nerve pain
- Cardioverter-defibrillator, a device to regulate heart beats



An MRI Machine

Not allowed inside an MRI scan room

- Watches, phones
- Jewellery such as earrings and necklaces
- Hearing aids
- Metal objects

EUTHANASIA

In December 2017, an elderly couple Iravati Lavate (78) and her husband Narayan (87) had written to President Ram Nath Kovind seeking permission for euthanasia or mercy killing.

What is Euthanasia?

- Euthanasia is the termination of a very sick person's life in order to relieve them of their suffering.
- The term is derived from the Greek word euthanatos which means easy death.
- In many cases, it is carried out at the person's request but there are times when they may be too ill and the decision is made by relatives, medics or, in some instances, the courts.
- Method of Euthanasia:**
 - Euthanasia can be carried out either by taking actions, including giving a lethal injection, or by not doing what is necessary to keep a person alive (such as failing to keep their feeding tube going).
- What is not euthanasia?**
 - It is not euthanasia if a patient dies as a result of refusing extraordinary or burdensome medical treatment.
 - Doctrine of Double Effect:**
 - It's not euthanasia to give a drug in order to reduce pain, even though the drug causes the patient to die sooner.
 - This is because the doctor's intention was to relieve the pain, not to kill the patient.
 - This argument is known as the Doctrine of Double Effect.

Terminology:

- Active euthanasia:** In active euthanasia a person directly and deliberately causes the patient's death.
- Passive euthanasia:** In passive euthanasia death is brought about by an omission - i.e. by withdrawing or withholding treatment in order to let the person die.
- Voluntary euthanasia:** This is where euthanasia is carried out at the request of the person who dies.
- Non-voluntary euthanasia:**
 - This is where the person is unable to ask for euthanasia (perhaps they are unconscious or otherwise unable to communicate), or to make a meaningful choice between living and dying.
 - Then an appropriate person takes the decision on their behalf, perhaps in accordance with their living will, or previously expressed wishes.

- Palliative care:** Medical, emotional, psychosocial, or spiritual care given to a person who is terminally ill and which is aimed at reducing suffering rather than curing.
- Living will:** A document prepared by an individual in which they state what they want in regard to medical treatment and euthanasia.

Why people want euthanasia?

- A person who undergoes euthanasia usually has an incurable condition. Most people think unbearable pain is the main reason people seek euthanasia.
- But there are other instances where some people want their life to be ended.
- Terminally ill people can have their quality of life severely damaged by physical conditions such as incontinence, nausea and vomiting, breathlessness, paralysis and difficulty in swallowing.
- Psychological factors that cause people to think of euthanasia include depression, fearing loss of control or dignity, feeling a burden, or dislike of being dependent.

Ethics of euthanasia:

Euthanasia raises a number of agonising moral dilemmas:

- Is it ever right to end the life of a terminally ill patient who is undergoing severe pain and suffering?
- Under what circumstances can euthanasia be justifiable, if at all?
- Is there a moral difference between killing someone and letting them die?

Pro-euthanasia arguments:

- People have an explicit right to die:**
 - Many people think that each person has the right to control his or her body and life and so should be able to determine at what time, in what way and by whose hand he or she will die.
 - Behind this lies the idea that human beings should be as free as possible - and that unnecessary restraints on human rights are a bad thing.
 - Death is a private matter and if there is no harm to others, the state and other people have no right to interfere (a libertarian argument).
- Libertarian argument:**
 - If an action promotes the best interests of everyone concerned and violates no one's rights then that action is morally acceptable.
 - In some cases, euthanasia promotes the best interests of everyone involved and violates no one's rights.
 - It is therefore morally acceptable.

- **Medical resources:**

- ♦ In most countries there is a shortage of health resources. As a result, some people who are ill and could be cured are not able to get speedy access to the facilities they need for treatment.
- ♦ At the same time health resources are being used on people who cannot be cured, and who, for their own reasons, would prefer not to continue living.
- ♦ Allowing such people to commit euthanasia would not only let them have what they want, it would free valuable resources to treat people who want to live.

Anti-euthanasia arguments:

- **Sanctity of life:** Euthanasia is bad because it weakens society's respect for the sanctity of life. There are four main reasons why people think we shouldn't kill human beings:
 - ♦ All human beings are to be valued, irrespective of age, sex, race, religion, social status or their potential for achievement.
 - ♦ Human life is a basic good as opposed to an instrumental good, a good in itself rather than as a means to an end.
 - ♦ Human life is sacred because it's a gift from God.
 - ♦ Therefore the deliberate taking of human life should be prohibited except in self-defence or the legitimate defence of others.
- **We are valuable for ourselves:** The philosopher Immanuel Kant said that rational human beings should be treated as an end in themselves and not as a means to something else. The fact that we are human has value in itself.
- **Obligation to society:**
 - ♦ Secular opponents argue that whatever rights we have are limited by our obligations.
 - ♦ The decision to die by euthanasia will affect other people - our family and friends, and healthcare professionals - and we must balance the consequences for them (guilt, grief, anger) against our rights.
- **Devalues some lives:**
 - ♦ Some people fear that allowing euthanasia sends the message, "it's better to be dead than sick or disabled".
 - ♦ Not only does this put the sick or disabled at risk, it also downgrades their status as human beings while they are alive.
- **Patient's best interests:** There are a number of cases in which a patient may ask for euthanasia, or feel obliged to ask for it, when it isn't in their best interest. Some examples are listed below:
 - ♦ the diagnosis is wrong and the patient is not terminally ill.
 - ♦ the prognosis (the doctor's prediction as to how the disease will progress) is wrong and the patient is not going to die soon.
 - ♦ the patient is getting bad medical care and their suffering could be relieved by other means.
- **Proper palliative care:**
 - ♦ Palliative care is physical, emotional and spiritual care for a dying person when cure is not possible. It includes compassion and support for family and friends.

- ♦ Competent palliative care may well be enough to prevent a person feeling any need to contemplate euthanasia.
- ♦ The key to successful palliative care is to treat the patient as a person, not as a set of symptoms, or medical problems.

- **Fears about regulation:**

- ♦ Euthanasia opponents don't believe that it is possible to create a regulatory system for euthanasia that will prevent the abuse of euthanasia.

- **The slippery slope:**

- ♦ The slippery slope argument states that if we allow something relatively harmless today, we may start a trend that results in something currently unthinkable becoming accepted.
- ♦ Many people worry that if voluntary euthanasia were to become legal, it would not be long before involuntary euthanasia would start to happen.

- **Pressure on the vulnerable:** There is fear is that if euthanasia is allowed, vulnerable people will be put under pressure to end their lives.

- ♦ People who are ill and dependent can often feel worthless and an undue burden on those who love and care for them.
- ♦ Family or others involved with the sick person may regard them as a burden that they don't wish to carry, and may put pressure (which may be very subtle) on the sick person to ask for euthanasia.

- **Against the will of God:**

- ♦ Religious people generally believe that every human being is the creation of God. To kill oneself, or to get someone else to do it for us, is to deny God, and to deny God's rights over our lives.

Present status:

- In some countries there is a divisive public controversy over the moral, ethical, and legal issues of euthanasia.
- Passive euthanasia is legal under some circumstances in many countries.
- Active euthanasia however is legal or de facto legal in only a handful of countries (ex. Belgium, Canada, Switzerland) and is limited to specific circumstances and the approval of councilors and doctors or other specialists.
- **Indian scenario:**
 - ♦ Passive euthanasia is legal in India under exceptional circumstances.
 - ♦ In 2011 the Supreme Court of India legalised passive euthanasia by means of the withdrawal of life support to patients in a permanent vegetative state.
 - ♦ The decision was made as part of the verdict in a case involving Aruna Shanbaug, who had been in a Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) until her death in 2015.

MEDARAM JATARA

In February 2018, Medaram jatara festival concluded.

About:

- **Names:** Medaram Jatara is also known as Sammakka Saralamma Jatara.
- **What is it?**
 - ♦ It is a tribal festival honouring the fight of a mother and daughter, Sammakka and Saralamma, with the reigning rulers against an unjust law.
- **Location:**
 - ♦ It is celebrated in the state of Telangana, India.
 - ♦ The Jatra begins at Medaram in Tadvai Mandal in Warangal district.
 - ♦ Medaram is a remote place in the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, a part of Dandakaranya, the largest surviving forest belt in the region.
- **When celebrated?**
 - ♦ It is held every two years (biennially).
 - ♦ It is celebrated during the time the goddesses of the tribals is believed to visit them.
- **Ritual:**
 - ♦ People offer bangaram/gold (jaggery) of a quantity equal to their weight to the goddesses and take holy bath in Jampanna Vagu (stream).



- **Significance:**
 - ♦ Many tribal Devotees from different states of India (M.P, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Karnataka and parts of Jharkhand) reach to the festive place to celebrate the Jatara.
 - ♦ It is believed that after Kumbha Mela, the Medaram jatara attracts the largest number of devotees in the country.

Jampanna Vagu

- Jampanna vagu is a tributary to River Godavari.
- It is believed that Jampanna was the tribal warrior and the son of Tribal Goddess Sammakka.
- He died in a battle fighting against Kakatiyan Army in that stream and that's how the stream got its name and the red colour due to the blood of Jampanna (Scientifically the red colour of the water is attributed to the soil composition).
- Tribal's believe that taking a holy dip in the red water of Jampanna Vagu reminds them the sacrifice of their gods who save them and also induces courage into their souls.

INDUS SCRIPT

Scientists of The Institute of Mathematical Sciences, Chennai, (IMSc) have concluded that Indus script is written from right to left.

About:

- **Also known as:** Harappan script.
- **What is it?** It refers to short strings of symbols associated with the Indus Valley Civilization.
- **Time period of use:** It was in use during the Mature Harappan period, between the 26th and 20th centuries BC.



Script Characteristics:

- **Type of characters:** The characters are largely pictorial but include many abstract signs.
- **Writing Direction:**
 - ♦ The inscriptions are thought to have been mostly written from **right to left**. It is because there are several instances of the symbols being compressed on the left side, as if the writer was running out of space at the end of the row there.
 - ♦ But sometimes the script follows a **boustrophedonic style**.

Type of script:

- Since the number of principal signs is about 400-600, midway between typical logographic scripts and syllabic scripts, many scholars accept it to be logo-syllabic script.
- Typically, syllabic scripts have about 50-100 signs whereas logographic scripts have a very large number of principal signs.

Attempts at Decipherment:

- The first publication of a Harappan seal dates to 1873, in the form of a drawing by Alexander Cunningham. Since then, well over 4000 symbol-bearing objects have been discovered, some as far afield as Mesopotamia.
- In spite of many attempts at decipherments and claims, it is as yet undeciphered.
- **Obstacles for decipherment:**
 - The underlying language, if any, has not been identified.
 - The average length of the inscriptions is less than five signs, the longest being one of only 17 signs (and a sealing of combined inscriptions of just 27 signs).
 - No bilingual texts have been found.
- **Link to Brahmi script:** Some early scholars thought that the script was the predecessor of the Brahmi script used by Ashoka. However most scholars disagree, claiming instead that the Brahmi script derived from the Aramaic script.

Bilingual Inscription?

- In epigraphy, a bilingual is an inscription that is extant in two languages (or trilingual in the case of three languages, etc.).
- Bilinguals are important for the decipherment of ancient writing systems, and for the study of ancient languages.

Boustrophedonic Style?

- Boustrophedon is a kind of bi-directional text.
- Every other line of writing is flipped or reversed, with reversed letters.
- Rather than going left-to-right as in modern European languages, or right-to-left as in Arabic and Hebrew, alternate lines in boustrophedon must be read in opposite directions.
- Also, the individual characters are reversed, or mirrored.
- It is mostly seen in ancient manuscripts and other inscriptions. It was a common way of writing in stone in Ancient Greece.

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

In February 2018, census directorate stated that over 40 Indian languages and dialects are heading to extinction.

Breakup based on speakers:

According to a report of the census directorate of India –

- **Languages spoken by more than one lakh people:** 22 scheduled languages and 100 non-scheduled.
- **Languages spoken by less than 10,000 people:** 42.
 - These 42 languages are considered endangered and are heading towards extinction. A list prepared by UNESCO has also mentioned the 42 languages or dialects in India are endangered.

List of languages in endangered category:

- 11 from Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Great Andamanese, Jarawa, Lamongse, Luro, Muot, Onge, Pu, Sanenyo, Sentilese, Shompen and Takahanyilang).
- Seven from Manipur (Aimol, Aka, Koiren, Lamgang, Langrong, Purum and Tarao).
- Four from Himachal Pradesh (Baghati, Handuri, Pangvali and Sirmaudi).
- The other languages in the endangered category are Manda, Parji and Pengo (Odisha), Koraga and Kuruba (Karnataka), Gadaba and Naiki (Andhra Pradesh), Kota and Toda (Tamil Nadu), Mra and Na (Arunachal Pradesh), Tai Nora and Tai Rong (Assam), Bangani (Uttarakhand), Birhor (Jharkhand), Nihali (Maharashtra), Ruga (Meghalaya) and Toto (West Bengal).

Steps by government?

- **Scheme for Protection and Preservation of Endangered Languages of India (SPPEL):** it is implemented by Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), Mysore (under union ministry of HRD) with the objective of documenting all the mother tongues of India which are spoken by less than 10,000 people.
- **Establishment of Centers for Endangered Languages:** It is a scheme run by University Grants Commission (UGC) under for establishing centers in nine Central Universities for the same.
- Under **Digital India Mission**, Government of India has mandated the mobile phones sold from July 2017 should support all Indian languages.

Endangered Language?

An endangered language is a language that is at a risk of falling out of use, generally because it has few surviving speakers.

If it loses all of its native speakers, it becomes an extinct language.

UNESCO defines four levels of language endangerment between "safe" (not endangered) and "extinct":

- Vulnerable
- Definitely endangered
- Severely endangered
- Critically endangered

SULTAN QABOOS GRAND MOSQUE

In February 2018, PM Modi paid a visit at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Muscat, Oman.



About:

- It is the main mosque in the Sultanate of Oman located in the capital city of Muscat.
- It is named after Qaboos bin Said Al Said who is the Sultan of Oman since 1970.
- **Architectural style:** Contemporary Islamic.
- It is built from 3,00,000 tonnes of Indian sandstone.

INTERNATIONAL THEATRE OLYMPICS

In February 2018, the Vice President of India inaugurated the 8th edition of International Theatre Olympics being held in India for the first time.

About:

- The Theatre Olympics was established in 1993 in Delphi,

Greece, on the initiative of the famous Greek theatre director, Theodoros Terzopoulos.

- It is the first international theatre festival to present the finest productions of well-known theatre practitioners from around the world.
- Its tagline is 'Crossing Millennia' which emphasizes on the importance of connecting the past, present, and future together.
- **Hosting countries (till now every country is from Eurasia region):**

Edition of theatre Olympics	Year	Venues
1	1995	Greece
2	1999	Japan
3	2001	Russia
4	2006	Turkey
5	2010	South Korea
6	2014	China
7	2016	Poland
8	2018	India

8th Theatre Olympics:

- ♦ **Duration:** It is a 51-day-long event.
- ♦ **Venue:** It will be held simultaneously in various cities across the country.
- ♦ **Organized by:** National School of Drama, under the aegis of Ministry of Culture.
- ♦ **Theme:** Flag of Friendship.

EK BHARAT SHRESHTHA BHARAT

7th edition of 'Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav' was organized in January 2018 under the "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" programme.

Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav-2018:

- **Objective:**
 - ♦ To celebrate the idea of unity in diversity.
 - ♦ Events related to various art forms from classical and folk, music and dance, theatre to literature and the visual arts and would be organized.
- **Organized by:** Ministry of Culture.
- **Duration of festival:** 14th to 20th January, 2018.
- **Venue:** Karnataka.

Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:

- **Origin:**
 - ♦ It was announced by PM Modi on 31st October, 2015 on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.

- ◆ Subsequently, the initiative was announced in the Union Budget for 2016-17.
- **Objective:** To promote engagement and thereby understanding amongst the people of different states/UTs to ensure ensure a stronger united India.
- **Illustrative List of Activities under Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:**
 - ◆ Cultural Exchange Programmes between partnering States
 - ◆ Translation of at least 5 Award Winning Books and Poetry, popular folk songs of One State in the Language of the partner State.
 - ◆ Exchange programme for Writers and poets.
 - ◆ Organize Culinary festivals with opportunity to learn culinary practices.
 - ◆ Organize Educational Tours for schools/Universities Students reciprocally.
 - ◆ Promotion of Rajya Darshan for tourists.
- **Engagement matrix between states and UTs:** The below mentioned States and UTs are to enter into a wide range of mutual engagements.
 - ◆ Jammu & Kashmir : Tamil Nadu
 - ◆ Punjab : Andhra Pradesh
 - ◆ Himachal Pradesh : Kerala
 - ◆ Uttarakhand : Karnataka
 - ◆ Haryana :Telangana
 - ◆ Rajasthan : West Bengal
 - ◆ Gujarat : Chhattisgarh
 - ◆ Maharashtra :Odisha
 - ◆ Goa : Jharkhand
 - ◆ Delhi : Sikkim & Assam
 - ◆ Madhya Pradesh : Manipur & Nagaland
 - ◆ Uttar Pradesh : Arunachal Pradesh & Meghalaya
 - ◆ Bihar : Tripura & Mizoram
 - ◆ Chandigarh : Dadra & Nagar Haveli
 - ◆ Puducherry : Daman & Diu
 - ◆ Lakshadweep : Andaman & Nicobar

INTERNATIONAL KALA MELA

In February 2018, the first ever International Kala Mela was held in New Delhi.

About:

- **Objective:** It will serve as a meeting ground for artists of all kinds of the country and abroad.
- **Organized by:** Lalit Kala Akademi.

- **Duration:** 4th to 18th February, 2018.
- **Venue:** Indira Gandhi National Center for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi.

MADAVOOR VASUDEVAN NAIR

In February 2018, Kathakali maestro Madavoor Vasudevan Nair passed away.



About:

- Madavoor Vasudevan Nair was a Kathakali artist.
- He also served as Kathakali teacher in Kerala Kalamandalam for 10 years.
- He taught the **Kaplingadan style of Kathakali** performance and was also one of the last practitioners of this style.
- He died on 6 February 2018, aged 88 while performing at Agasthyacodu Mahadeva temple at Anchal in Kollam.
- **Awards:** He was conferred with
 - ◆ Padma Bhushan in 2011.
 - ◆ Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award in 1998.
 - ◆ State Kathakali Award in 2009.

Kaplingadan Style?

- Among the different styles of kathakali, the Kaplingadan school is centuries old and occupies a prominent place.
- It has evolved into what is today widely referred to as the "Thekkan kalari" or Southern school.
- Whereas the northern school known as Kalladikkodan gave importance to the hand gestures, rituals and enacting of the script with all classical observance the southern school stresses more on Bhavabhinaya (Facial Expression).

SPORTS

UNDER-19 CRICKET WORLD CUP-2018

India won the 2018 ICC Under-19 Cricket World Cup.

About:

- It was the twelfth edition of the Under-19 Cricket World Cup organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC). It was played in a 50 over format.
- Venue:** It was held in New Zealand from 13 January to 3 February 2018.
- Winner:** In the final, India defeated Australia to win their **fourth Under-19 World Cup, the most by any side.**
- Player of the series:** Shubham Gill (India).

Background?

- Under-19 Cricket World Cup was first contested in 1988, as the Youth World Cup.
- But it was not staged again until 1998. Since then, the World Cup has been held as a biennial event, organised by the ICC.

AANCHAL THAKUR

Aanchal Thakur won India's first international medal in skiing at FIS International Skiing Competition in Turkey.

About:

- Aanchal Thakur is an Indian female alpine skier.
- She represented India at the 2012 Winter Youth Olympics and 2017 Asian Winter Games team.
- In the 2018 Alpine Eijder 3200 Cup held in Turkey she won the bronze medal.
 - This was organised by the Federation Internationale de Ski.
 - By this she created history after becoming the first Indian skier ever to claim a medal in the international skiing event.

2018 AUSTRALIAN OPEN

The 2018 Australian Open recently concluded.

About:

- It was a tennis tournament played at Melbourne Park in Australia between 15–28 January 2018.
- Records:**
 - It was the 50th edition of the tournament in the Open Era.
 - It was the 200th Grand Slam event of the Open Era.
- Winners:**
 - Men's Singles:** Roger Federer (Switzerland). He became the first man to win 20 grand slam titles.
 - Women's Singles:** Caroline Wozniacki (Denmark). It was her first grand slam title.

Ageless wonder Roger Federer wins his 20th Grand Slam title, defeating Marin Cilic 6-2 6-7(5) 6-3 3-6 6-1 in Australian Open final.

	Slam Titles	Aus Open	French Open	W'don	US Open
Roger Federer	20	6	1	8	5
Rafael Nadal	16	1	10	2	3
Pete Sampras	14	2	0	7	5

Federer is the **only male** in the club of 20 or more singles Slam winners. Other are Margaret Court (24), Serena Williams (23) and Steffi Graf (22). Apart from winning 20, Federer was the **losing finalist in 10 Slams.**

He also equalled the record of **6 Australian Open** wins held by Roy Emerson and Novak Djokovic.

Federer, who got his first Slam title in 2003, has **won three of the last five** majors.

At **36 years and 173 days**, Federer is **second oldest** player ever to win a Slam title after **Ken Rosewall**, who won the 1972 Australian Open at **37 years and 63 days.**

KHELO INDIA SCHOOL GAMES

In February 2018, the first ever Khelo India school games concluded.

Khelo India:




- The Khelo India programme has been introduced to revive the sports culture in India at the grass-root level by building a strong framework for all sports played in our country and establish India as a great sporting nation.
- To accomplish the above objectives, Khelo India programme has been divided into 12 verticals (refer infographic below).
- Talented players identified in priority sports disciplines at various levels by the High-Powered Committee will be provided annual financial assistance of INR 5 lakh per annum for 8 years.

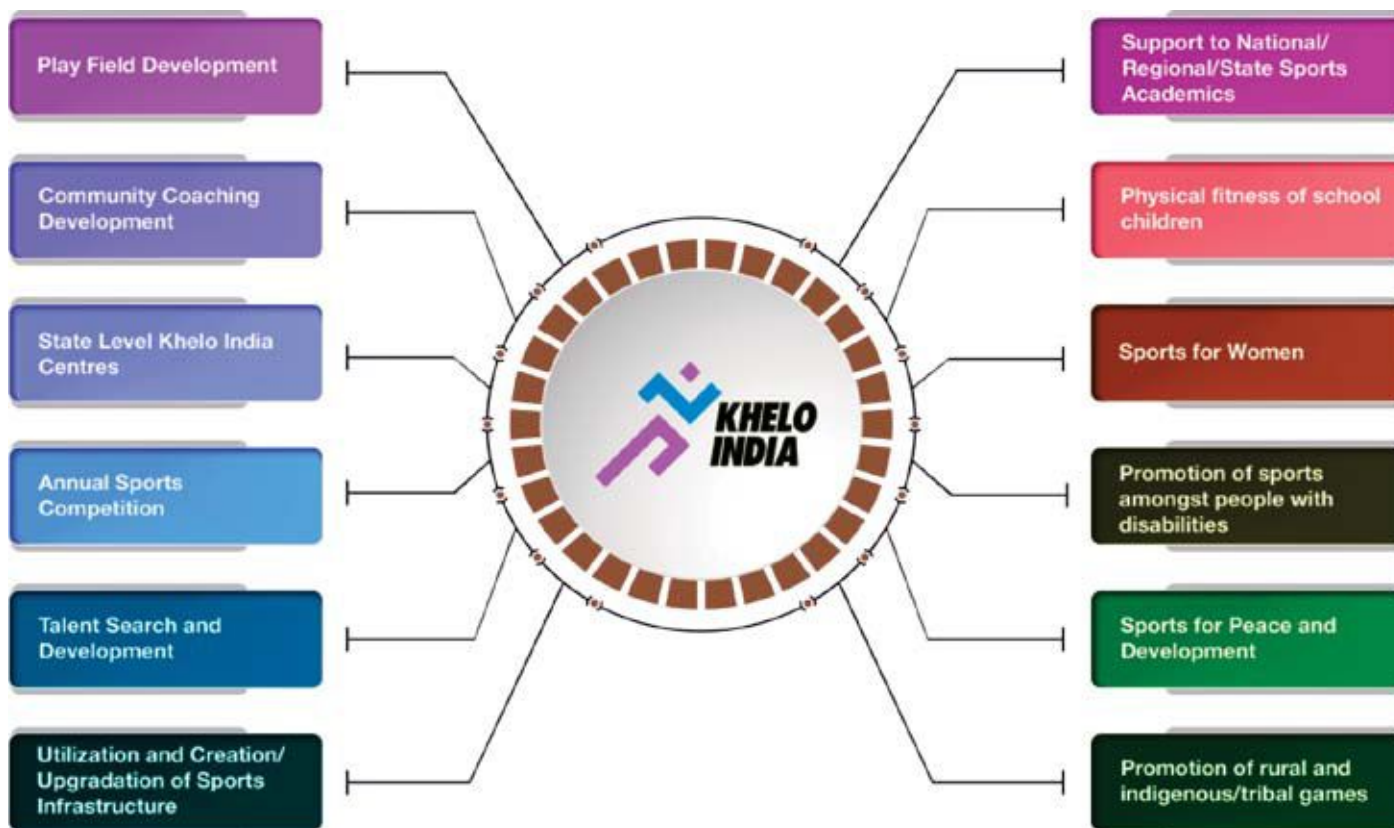
Khelo India School Games (KISG):

- These are a part of the Khelo India programme.
- **Organization structure:**
 - ♦ Khelo India School Games will be annual competitions held in collaboration with the School Games Federation of

India (SGFI) and the National Sports Federations (NSFs).

- The SGFI and NSFs will draw up and conduct an annual calendar of competitions at the lower level in the run-up to the Khelo India School Games at the National level.
- The first KISG were held from 31st January to 8th February, 2018 in New Delhi.
- Under-17 athletes participated across 16 disciplines, which are as follows: Archery, Athletics, Badminton, Basketball, Boxing, Football, Gymnastics, Hockey, Judo, Kabaddi, Kho-Kho, Shooting, Swimming, Volleyball, Weightlifting, and Wrestling.
- **Medal Tally:**

RANK	STATE				TOTAL
1	Haryana	38	26	38	102
2	Maharashtra	36	32	43	111
3	Maharashtra	25	29	40	94



PERSON IN NEWS

PARBATI GHOSE

In February 2018, Parbati Ghose passed away.

About:

- She was an Odia actress and director.
- She is regarded as Odisha's first female filmmaker. She is known mainly as producer, with husband Gaura Ghosh, producing seminal films in the early history of the Oriya cinema, e.g. Bhai Bhai (1956); Lakshmi (1962); Kaa (1966).
- **Awards:** She was conferred with the
 - ♦ National film award for her stellar performance in Lakshmi, Kaa and Stree.
 - ♦ Jayadev Puraskar.
 - ♦ Bioscope Award.



ASMA JAHANGIR

Asma Jahangir died in February 2018 from cardiac arrest.

About:

- She was a Pakistani human rights lawyer and social activist.
- She is regarded as Asia's Joan of Arc.
- **Key positions held:**
 - ♦ Co-founded and chaired the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.
 - ♦ Was became Pakistan's first woman to serve as the President of Supreme Court Bar Association.
 - ♦ Served as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief.
 - ♦ Co-chaired South Asia Forum for Human Rights.
 - ♦ In 2016, she was named as the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in Iran, remaining till until her death in February 2018.
- **Awards:**
 - ♦ Ramon Magsaysay Award, 1995.
 - ♦ Right Livelihood Award (along with Edward Snowden), 2014.
 - ♦ UNESCO/Bilbao Prize for the Promotion of a Culture of Human Rights.
 - ♦ Officier de la Legion d'honneur by France.
- **Her prominent writings include:**
 - ♦ The Hudood Ordinance: A Divine Sanction?
 - ♦ Children of a Lesser God.



NEELAM KAPUR

Neelam Kapur Takes Over As Director General, Sports Authority Of India.

Neelam Kapur:

- She is an Indian Information Service officer of 1982 batch.
- **Earlier positions held:**
 - ♦ She has earlier headed Directorate of Film Festivals, Directorate of Audio Visual Publicity (DAVP) and Directorate of Field Publicity (DFP).
 - ♦ During her stint in PIB as Principal Director General, Ms. Neelam Kapur was head of media operations for Commonwealth Games held in New Delhi in 2010.



Sports Authority of India (SAI)?

- It was set up in 1984 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of Government of India.
- **HQ:** Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium (Delhi), Delhi.
- **Functions:** It is the apex National Sports body for the development of sport in India.
- It is also entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining and utilizing, on the behalf of Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, the following Stadiums in Delhi:
 - ♦ Jawaharlal Nehru Sports Complex.
 - ♦ Indira Gandhi Sports Complex.
 - ♦ Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium.
 - ♦ Dr. Shyam Prasad Mookherjee Swimming Pool Complex.
 - ♦ Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Ranges.

INDU MALHOTRA

Indu Malhotra has been recommended for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court.

About:

- She is a senior counsel practising in the Supreme Court of India.
- She was the second woman to be designated Senior Advocate by the Supreme Court in 2007.
- In December 2016 she has been made member of the High Level Committee (HLC) in the Ministry of Law and Justice by the Government of India to review Institutionalization of Arbitration Mechanism in India.



- She has been unanimously recommended for appointment as a judge of the Supreme Court. **She will also be the first woman judge to be elevated directly from the Bar.**

AZIZ ANSARI

Aziz Ansari is first Person of Indian Origin (PIO) to win a Golden Globe.

About:

- Aziz Ansari, the US-born son of immigrants from Chennai, became the **first Indian-American and first Asian to win a Golden Globe for best actor.**
- Ansari won the award for comedy series 'Master of None' in which he plays the role of 30-year old actor Dev Shah.
- He had already won an Emmy for writing the series.



SOUMITRA CHATTERJEE:

Soumitra Chatterjee has been conferred Legion of Honor.

- He is an Indian Bengali film and stage actor and poet. He has acted in more than 200 films.
- **Indian honours:**
 - ♦ Padma Bhushan.
 - ♦ Dadasaheb Phalke Award, India's highest award in cinema.
 - ♦ Two National Film Awards as an actor.
 - ♦ Sangeet Natak Akademi Award.
- **French honours:**
 - ♦ Commandeur de l' Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, France's highest award for artists; He is the first Indian film personality to be conferred with it.
 - ♦ Legion of Honor, France's highest civilian award.



About:

- Padma Awards are one of the highest civilian Awards of the country.
- **Categories:** These are conferred in three categories, namely, Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri.

Category	Awarded for
Padma Vibhushan	Exceptional and distinguished service.
Padma Bhushan	Distinguished service of high order.
Padma Shri	For distinguished service in any field.

• Disciplines in which awarded:

- ♦ The award seeks to recognize works of distinction.
- ♦ It is given for distinguished and exceptional achievements/ service in all fields of activities/disciplines.
- ♦ An illustrative list of the fields is: art, social work, public affairs, science & engineering, trade & industry, medicine, literature and education, sports, civil service, etc.

• Who are eligible?

- ♦ All persons without distinction of race, occupation, position or sex are eligible for these awards.
- ♦ However, Government servants including those working with PSUs, except doctors and scientists, are not eligible for these Awards.

• Nomination process:

- ♦ The nomination process is open to the public. Even self-nomination can be made.
- ♦ All nominations received for Padma Awards are placed before the Padma Awards Committee, which is constituted by the Prime Minister every year.
- ♦ The committee is headed by the Cabinet Secretary and includes Home Secretary, Secretary to the President and four to six eminent persons as members.
- ♦ The recommendations of the committee are submitted to the Prime Minister and the President of India for approval.

• Award ceremony:

- ♦ Padma Awards are announced every year on the occasion of Republic Day except for brief interruption(s) during the years 1978 and 1979 and 1993 to 1997.
- ♦ These awards are conferred by the President of India at ceremonial functions which are held at Rashtrapati Bhawan usually around March/ April every year.
- ♦ The awardees are presented a Sanad (certificate) signed by the President and a medallion.
- ♦ The recipients are also given a small replica of the medallion, which they can wear during any ceremonial/ State functions etc., if the awardees so desire.
- ♦ The award does not amount to a title and cannot be used as a suffix or prefix to the awardees' name

AWARDS

PADMA AWARDS

Padma Awards 2018 were announced on the eve of Republic Day-2018.



Padma Vibhushan Padma Bhushan Padma Shri

History:

- The Government of India instituted two civilian awards- Bharat Ratna & Padma Vibhushan in 1954.
- The latter had three classes namely Pahela Varg, Dusra Varg and Tisra Varg.
- These were subsequently renamed as Padma Vibhushan, Padma Bhushan and Padma Shri vide Presidential Notification issued on January 8, 1955.

Limits:

- Awards per year:** The total number of awards to be given in a year (excluding posthumous awards and to NRI/foreigners/OCIs) should not be more than 120.
- Posthumous:** The award is normally not conferred posthumously. However, in highly deserving cases, the Government could consider giving an award posthumously.
- Gap between two Padma awards:** A higher category of Padma award can be conferred on a person only where a period of at least five years has elapsed since conferment of the earlier Padma award. However, in highly deserving cases, a relaxation can be made by the Awards Committee.

2018 Padma Awards: Summary

- How many?** This year the President of India has approved conferment of 85 Padma Awards including two duo cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one).
- Breakup:** The list comprises 3 Padma Vibhushan, 9 Padma Bhushan and 73 Padma Shri Awards.
- Women awardees:** 14 of the awardees are women.
- Foreigners/NRI etc.:** The list includes 16 persons from the category of Foreigners/NRI/PIO/OCI.
- Posthumous awardees:** 3 Posthumous awardees.

2018 Padma Awards List

Padma Vibhushan

Name	Field
Illaiyaraja	Art-Music
Ghulam Mustafa Khan	Art-Music
Parameswaran Parameswaran	Literature and Education

Padma Bhushan

Pankaj Advani	Sports- Billiards/Snooker
---------------	---------------------------

Mahendra Singh Dhoni	Sports-Cricket
Philipose Mar Chrysostom	Spiritualism
Alexander Kadakin (Foreigner/Posthumous)	Public Affairs
Ved Prakash Nanda (OCI: USA)	Literature and Education
Ramachandran Nagaswamy	Others-Archaeology
Laxman Pai	Art-Painting
Arvind Parikh	Art-Music
Sharda Sinha	Art-Music

Padma Shri

Rudrapatnam Narayanaswamy Tharanathan (Duo)	Art-Music
Rudrapatnam Narayanaswamy Thyagarajan (Duo)	Art-Music
Ibrahim Sutar	Art-Music
R Sathyanarayana	Art-Music
Vijay Kichlu	Art-Music
Mohan Swaroop Bhatia	Art-Folk Music
Vijayalakshmi Navaneethakrishnan	Art-Folk Music
Doddarange Gowda	Art-Lyrics
Ramli Bin Ibrahim (Foreigner)	Art-Dance
Bhaju Shyam	Art-Painting
Langpoklakpam Subadani Devi	Art-Weaving
Gobaradhan Panika	Art-Weaving
Manoj Joshi	Art-Acting
Sisir Purushottam Mishra	Art-Cinema
I Nyoman Nuarta (Foreigner)	Art- Sculpture
Pravakara Maharan	Art-Sculpture
Pran Kishore Kaul	Art
Baba Yogendra	Art
Damodar Ganesh Bapat	Social Work
Sudhanshu Biswas	Social Work
Sitavva Joddati	Social Work
Lentina Ao Thakkar	Social Work
Sulagitti Narasamma	Social Work
Subhasini Mistry	Social Work
Malai Haji Abdullah Bin Malai Haji Othman (Foreigner)	Social Work
Sampat Ramteke (Posthumous)	Social Work
Prafulla Govinda Baruah	Literature and Education-Journalism
Pandit Shyamlal Chaturvedi	Literature and Education-Journalism
Zaverilal Mehta	Literature and Education-Journalism
Arup Kumar Dutta	Literature and Education

Arvind Gupta	Literature and Education
Piyong Temjen Jamir	Literature and Education
Digamber Hansda	Literature and Education
Malti Joshi	Literature and education
A Zakia	Literature and Education
Panatawane Gangadhar Vithobaji	Literature and education
Bhagirath Prasad Tripathi	Literature and Education
Maharao Raghuveer Singh	Literature and Education
Chandra Sekhar Rath	Literature and education
Keshav Rao Musalgaonkar	Literature and education
Joyshree Goswami Mahanta	Literature and education
Krishna Bihari Mishra	Literature and Education
Anwar Jalalpuri (Posthumous)	Literature and Education
Tomio Mizokami (Foreigner)	Literature and Education
Habibullo Rajabov (Foreigner)	Literature and education
Saikhom Mirabai Chanu	Sports-Weightlifting
Somdev Devvarman	Sports-Tennis
Kidambi Srikanth	Sports-Badminton
Murlikant Petkar	Sports-Swimming
Jose Ma Joey Concepcion III (Foreigner)	Trade & Industry
Rameshwarlal Kabra	Trade & Industry
Rajagopalan Vasudevan	Science and Engineering
Manas Bihari Verma	Science and Engineering
Vikram Chandra Thakur	Science and Engineering
Amitava Roy	Science and engineering
Abhay Bang (Duo)	Medicine
Rani Bang (Duo)	Medicine
Lakshmikutty	Medicine-Traditional
Sanduk Ruit (Foreigner)	Medicine-Ophthalmology
Pankaj M Shah	Medicine-Oncology
M R Rajagopal	Medicine-Palliative care
Yeshi Dhoden	Medicine
Bhabani Charan Pattanaik	Public Affairs
Tommy Koh (Foreigner)	Public Affairs
Hun Many (Foreigner)	Public Affairs
Thant Myint – U (Foreigner)	Public Affairs
S S Rathore	Civil Service
Romulus Whitaker	Others-Wildlife Conservation
Bounlap Keokangna (Foreigner)	Others-Architecture
V Nanammal	Others-Yoga
Nouf Marwaai	Others- Yoga
Siddeshwara Swamiji	Others-Spiritualism
Narayan Das Maharaj	Others-Spiritualism
Nguyen Tien Thien (Foreigner)	Others-Spiritualism
Somdet Phra Maha Muniwong (Foreigner)	Others-Spiritualism

IHSAN DOGRAMACI FAMILY HEALTH FOUNDATION PRIZE

In January 2018, WHO announced that Vinod Paul will be presented with Ihsan Dogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize.

Ihsan Dogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize:

- It is conferred by World Health Organisation (WHO) in recognition to services in the field of family health.
- It is named after Professor Ihsan Dogramaci.

Ihsan Dogramaci?

- Ihsan Dogramaci (1915 - 2010) was a Turkish paediatrician, entrepreneur, philanthropist, educationalist and college administrator.
- He authored over 100 scientific articles, three books, six book chapters and served as the editor of four medical journals.
- Positions held:**
 - Founder of Hacettepe University, one of the overall highly ranked universities in Turkey which specializes in medical sciences in Ankara, Turkey.
 - Chairman of the UNICEF executive board.
 - Executive director and president of International Pediatric Association (IPA).
 - Co-ratifier of WHO's constitution.
 - First President and the Chairman of its Board of Trustees in WHO since 1985.

Vinod Paul:

- He is an internationally renowned researcher, clinician, educator and public health advocate in the area of family health, with a special focus on newborn health.
- Contribution:**
 - He was instrumental in establishing the Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health in 2005-06.
 - He has played a key role in formulating national child health guidelines and programmes in the country.
 - His efforts brought the long-neglected issue of newborn health to the centre-stage of strategies for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Positions held:**
 - Currently, he is a Member of NITI Aayog.
 - Prior to this, he was head of the Department of Pediatrics at AIIMS, New Delhi.
- Ihsan Dogramaci prize:**
 - He is the first Indian to receive Ihsan Dogramaci Family Health Foundation Prize.
 - The award will be formally presented to him at the World Health Assembly to be held in Geneva, Switzerland in May 2018.



SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI FELLOWSHIPS AND AWARDS

In January 2018, President of India conferred 47 artists with Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowships and Awards for 2016.

Sangeet Natak Akademi fellowship:

- **Official name:** Sangeet Natak Akademi Ratna Sadasya.
- **What is it?**
 - ♦ It is "the most prestigious and rare honour" conferred by the Akademi.
 - ♦ The fellowship does not refer to any specific work or achievement of an artist but to the "significant and lasting contribution on a sustained basis over a period of time".
- **History of the fellowship:** The fellowship was established in 1954.
- **Cash award:** Rs. 3 lakh.
- **How many people at a time?** The fellowship is restricted to 40 individuals at any given time.

Eligibility Criteria:

- ♦ It is conferred without distinction of nationality, race, caste, religion, creed, or sex.
- ♦ The criteria restricts any person below the age of 50 to ordinarily be considered for the honour, although a minimum age of 35 is required.
- ♦ Persons who are already deceased do not qualify; if an honoree dies before the honour is conferred, however, the honour will be assigned posthumously.

Sangeet Natak Akademi puruskar:

- It is the highest Indian recognition given to practicing artists.
- **Instituted in:** 1952.
- **Award categories:** The awards are given in the categories of music, dance, theatre, other traditional arts and puppetry, and for contribution/scholarship in performing arts.
- **To how many people:** The number of awards to be given annually is 33 at present.
- **Prize money:** The award consists since 2003 of Rs. 50,000, a citation, an angavastram (a shawl), and a tamrapatra (a brass plaque).

GRAMMY AWARDS

In January 2018, Grammy awards were announced.

About:

- A Grammy Award (stylized as GRAMMY, originally called Gramophone Award), is an award presented by The Recording Academy.
- It recognizes achievement in the mainly English-language music industry.
- It shares recognition of the music industry as that of the other performance awards such as the Academy Awards (film), the Emmy Awards (television), and the Tony Awards (theater).
- The first Grammy Awards ceremony was held in 1959.
- The 60th Annual Grammy Awards, honoring the best achievements from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017 were held on January 28, 2018 in New York City.

Bruno Mars, who has revived retro funk and rhythm and blues (R&B) for a new generation, swept the **Grammy Awards**, winning six of them, including the 'Album of the Year' and the 'Record of the Year' for 24K Magic. Kendrick Lamar won five awards, including the 'Best Rap Album' for *Damn*

Here is a list of the big winners:

Album of the Year: **Bruno Mars** - *24K Magic*

Record of the Year: **Bruno Mars** - *24K Magic*

Song of the Year: **Bruno Mars** - *That's What I Like*

Best new artist: **Alessia Cara**

Best Pop Album: **Ed Sheeran** - *Divide*

Best Rock Album: **The War on Drugs** - *A Deeper Understanding*

Best R&B Album: **Bruno Mars** - *24K Magic*

Best Rap Album: **Kendrick Lamar** - *Damn*

Mars's music covers many styles, including pop, rock, reggae, soul and hip hop

Bruno Mars

Hillary Clinton

BEYOND MUSIC

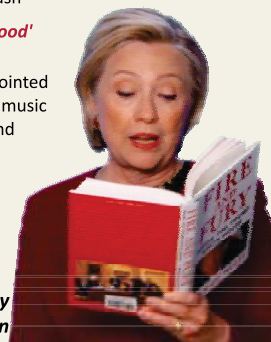
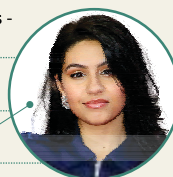
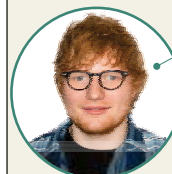
The function also became a platform for artists to voice their views on sexual harassment scandals, the Trump administration's immigration policy and gun violence

- **Fire and Fury**
A pre-recorded skit aimed at Donald Trump, with a surprise appearance by **Hillary Clinton** reading passages from the book *Fire And Fury*, was played. It was a hot topic on Twitter soon after, prompting UN Ambassador Nikki Haley to post that the segment was "trash"

- **'Not just Hollywood'**
Recording artist Janelle Monae pointed her finger at the music industry's role and responsibility following a wave of sexual harassment and abuse scandals

that have rocked Hollywood. "It's not just going (on) on Hollywood," Monae announced during the show

- **A country of dreamers**
Singer Camila Cabello, a Cuban-Mexican immigrant brought to the U.S. as a child, spoke about the American dream in a thinly veiled reference to Trump's policies on immigration



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UNDER
THE GUIDANCE OF
Mr. B. SINGH
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Civil Services Scholarship Test (CST)

Thousands of sincere and talented civil services aspirants are unable to take coaching guidance due to unfavorable economic conditions. NEXT IAS (A unit of MADE EASY Group) has taken an initiative to acknowledge the talent of such candidates. NEXT IAS will provide scholarship upto 100% in tuition fee in GS: Pre cum main classroom program for civil services examination 2019

Category	Scholarship in Tuition fee
A	100%
B	75%
C	50%
D	25%
E	10%

Test Pattern (Objective Type)

Paper	Syllabus	No of Questions	Negative Marking
General Studies	Current Affairs	14	1/3 Marks
	History	17	
	Geography	13	
	Polity	13	
	Economics	15	
	Science & Technology	12	
	Environment & Ecology	16	
		100 Questions	

Time Duration : 2 hours | Total : 100 Questions | Total : 200 marks

Procedure For Registration :

- Log on to www.nextias.com
- Fill Civil Services Scholarship Test online registration form & pay the registration fee (Rs.100).
- Username & password will be mailed to your respective e-mail id.
- Login & download your admit card.
- Venue & timing will be mentioned on admit card.
- Candidate should carry admit card along with valid photo ID proof to enter the examination hall.

Important Dates :

Last date to register online : 9th May, 2018
 Download Admit Card : 10th & 11th May, 2018
 Test Date : 13th May, 2018
 Results : 18th May, 2018

Test Centres:

Delhi, Noida, Hyderabad, Bhopal, Jaipur, Lucknow, Kolkata, Bhubaneshwar, Pune, Indore, Patna

Test Date : 13th May, 2018 | **Test Timing : 10:30 am to 12:30 pm**

Old Rajinder Nagar Centre :

Ground Floor, 6, Old Rajinder Nagar
 (Near Salwan School Gate No. 2) New Delhi - 60
 Ph : 011-49858612, 8800338066

Saket Centre (Classes) :

316/274, Westend Marg
 (Opp. MADE EASY Centre), Saidulajab, Near Saket Metro Station, New Delhi-30
Admission & Enquiry : 44-A/1, Kalu Sarai, Near Hauz Khas Metro Station,
 New Delhi-110016; Ph : 011-45124642, 8800776445