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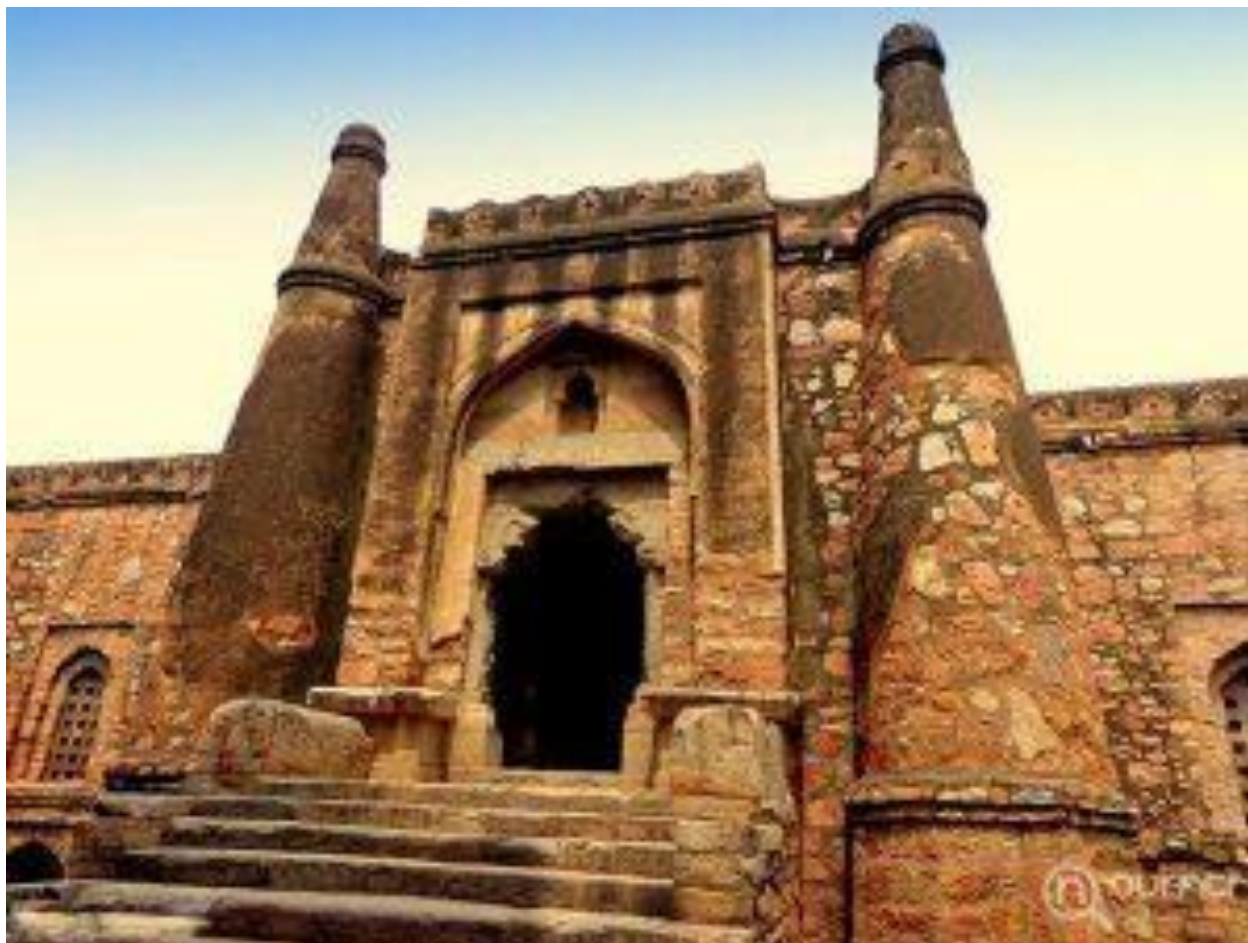
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Khirkki Mosque



- **Context:** The Archaeological Survey of India (Delhi Circle) of Ministry of Culture has discovered a hoard of 254 Copper Coins in the premises of Khirkki Mosque during the course of conservation of the monument.
- **This mosque lies** on the southern periphery of the village Khirki. The mosque was **built by Khan-i-Jahan Junan Shah, the Prime Minister of Firoz Shah Tughluq** (1351-88), and is believed to be one of the seven mosques built by him.

Hindi Diwas 2018

- **Context:** National Hindi Divas or Hindi Day is observed every year on September 14 in India to promote Hindi as Matra Bhasha (mother tongue) of India. The day is a celebration of the Hindi language and its cultural heritage and values among the people of the country and abroad.

Why do we celebrate National Hindi Diwas?

- The Constituent assembly of India adopted Hindi as the official language of the country on September 14, 1949 under Article 343. It started being observed as Hindi Day after stalwarts like Beohar Rajendra Simha, Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Kaka Kalelkar, Maithili Sharan Gupt and Seth Govind Das lobbied hard for the cause.
- Hindi language is spoken by as many as 250 million people as the original language and it is the fourth language of the world.

Battle Of Haifa

Why in news?

The Embassy of India held a ceremony in Haifa to mark the Centenary of the Battle of Haifa when on 23 Sep 1918, **Indian soldiers from the Jodhpur, Mysore and Hyderabad Lancers liberated the city of Haifa.**

Indian participation in World War I

- In World War I the Indian Army (alongside Britain) fought against the German Empire on the Western Front, in East Africa, Mesopotamia, Egypt and Gallipoli.
- It included 3.7 million tonnes of supplies, over 10,000 nurses, 1,70,000 animals, £146m of Indian revenue, and political support including that of Gandhi, who helped recruit Indian volunteers in the face of nationalist opposition.
- The **Indian Army was the largest volunteer force in the world**, which provided 1.5 million troops to serve overseas from regions such as the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Bihar.
- Of these men, around 50,000 died, 65,000 were wounded, and 10,000 were reported missing, while 98 Indian army nurses were killed.
- Volunteering offered **a chance to break through the caste system**, because becoming a soldier paid well and it meant becoming part of the ‘warrior’ caste, which gave high status in society.
- Indian forces had their **greatest impact in West Asia**, with 60 per cent of all Indian troops serving in Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq), and another 10 per cent in Egypt and Palestine.
- **India Gate in New Delhi** commemorates the 70,000 Indian soldiers who lost their lives fighting for the British Army during the World War I. The memorial bears the names of more than 13,516 British and Indian soldiers killed in the Northwestern Frontier in the Afghan war of 1919.
- India’s contribution to the British became one of the reasons for passing the

Montague-Chelmsford Reforms which introduced dyarchy to the provinces (meaning Indian representatives would be elected and would represent the province to the British Crown.)

- Following this period, Gandhi launched his first India-wide campaign of civil disobedience against British authority in February 1919. It was not driven by anti-Western or anti-British sentiment per se, but by the pursuit of self-determination.

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Paryatan Parv 2018

Why in news?

The Union Ministry of Tourism recently organized the second edition of “**Paryatan Parv**”- a nation-wide celebration of Tourism.

being held in countries across the world.

- The Mart will provide a platform for all stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industries to interact and transact business opportunities.

About Paryatan Parv

- **Paryatan Parv** is being organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country and reinforcing the principle of “Tourism for All”.
- **Components of Paryatan Parv**
 - **Dekho Apna Desh:** It will encourage Indians to visit their own country. It will include video, photograph and blog competitions visited during event, stories of India through Travelers’ Eyes to promote tourism.
 - **Tourism for All:** It will promote tourism events at sites across all States in country. These will mainly be People’s events with large scale public participation. The activities at these sites will include Cultural Programmes of Dance, Music, Theatre, Tourism Exhibitions showcasing culture, cuisine and handicrafts and handlooms etc.
 - **Tourism & Governance:** It will have interactive sessions and workshops with stakeholders on varied themes like Skill Development in Tourism Sector, Innovation in Tourism, and Developing Rural Tourism in locations near established destinations.
- **India Tourism Mart 2018(IMT-2018):** The Tourism Ministry in partnership with the Federation of Associations in Indian Tourism and Hospitality (FAITH) will organize the first ever ITM 2018 during Paryatan Parv.
- **FAITH** is the apex organization of all the important trade and hospitality associations of the country.
 - The objective of the event is to create an annual Global Tourism Mart for India in line with major international travel marts

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Swachhata Hi Seva Campaign

Why in news?

Recently, Swachhata Hi Seva (SHS) Campaign was launched.

About the Campaign

- It is a (jan andolan) the second edition of the campaign launched in 2017, which aims at accelerating the vision for a Clean India.
- Objectives of SHS
 - **Accelerate** the momentum of Swachh Bharat in the run-up to its 4th anniversary.
 - **Re-energise** the Swachh Bharat Jan Andolan and lay down the foundation of sustainability
 - **Reinforce** the concept of “Sanitation as everyone’s business”
 - Commence Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth year celebrations with a **nationwide campaign**
- It also aims at engaging shramdan activities with huge community mobilisation through grassroot swachhata champions such as woman sarpanches, students, film celebrities, sports persons etc.
- The Campaign also aims to engage with media which has been playing crucial role in creating awareness about the Swachh Bharat Mission.

- Eradication of manual scavenging.
- 100% collection and scientific processing/disposal/reuse/ recycling of municipal solid waste.
- A behavioral change in people regarding healthy sanitation practices
- Generation of awareness among citizens about sanitation and its linkages with public health.
- Supporting urban local bodies in designing, executing and operating waste disposal systems.

Facilitating private-sector participation in capital expenditure and operation and maintenance costs for sanitary facilities.

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan or Clean India Campaign

- It is a nationwide campaign and the biggest ever cleanliness drive in the country.
- The goal is to achieve Swachh Bharat by 2019, as a tribute to the **150th Birth Anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi**, by improving the levels of cleanliness in rural areas and making Gram Panchayats Open Defecation Free (ODF).
- Specific Objectives:
 - Elimination of open defecation.
 - Conversion of insanitary toilets to pour flush toilets.

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Program For International Student Assessment (PISA)

Why in news?

Recently Ministry of Human Resource Development has decided to end the boycott of PISA formally.

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- India had stayed away from the assessment when it was ranked dismally low in 2012 and 2015 and 72nd among 74 countries in 2009.
- India will send its officers to Paris to negotiate India's terms of participation in 2021 with OECD as it has been realised that education is not about rote learning.
- Unlike 2009, when Tamil Nadu and Himachal Pradesh were assessed, Union Government will request OECD to assess Chandigarh in 2021.

that will improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.

- It has 36 member countries and was founded in 1960 by 18 European nations plus the United States and Canada.
- India is not a member of OECD.

About PISA

- It is an international assessment that measures 15 years old students' reading, mathematics, science literacy and even innovative subjects like collaborative problem solving and money literacy every three years.
- By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.
- It was first conducted in 2000 and is coordinated by Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is conducted in the United States of America by NCES.
- It assesses students in 80 countries and education system and helps to understand the education system and how it can be improved. The result is shown not individually but it shows a national mean score. Its goal is to provide outcomes of learning and not outcomes of schooling.

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

- It is an intergovernmental economic organisation which aims to promote policies

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HIV/AIDS ACT, 2017

Why in News?

Health Ministry issues notification to bring **HIV/AIDS Act, 2017**, into force.

Problems faced by HIV Patients

Apart from the mental and physical trauma the HIV/AIDS patients go through, there are various problems that they face socially, like-

- **Stigma and Discrimination-** Sometimes, people with HIV/AIDS are abandoned by their families and are forced to live in destitution, resulting in psychological devastation.
- **Social and Economic-** The main social and economic impacts for people living with HIV are loss of labour or education due to illness and increased expense of healthcare and transport. The compounding of these impacts often leads to increased levels of poverty, food insecurity and nutrition problems.

This called for legal recourse to protect the rights and interest of people suffering from HIV/AIDS.

Salient features of the Act

- **Prohibition of Discrimination-** It lists various **grounds on which discrimination** against HIV positive persons and those living with them is prohibited. These include the **denial, termination, discontinuation or unfair treatment** with regard to employment, education, health care, residing or renting property, standing for public or private office, and insurance.
 - The requirement for **HIV testing as a pre-requisite for obtaining employment** or accessing health care or education is prohibited.
 - It prohibits individuals from publishing information or advocating feelings of **hatred** against HIV positive persons and those living with them.
- **Informed consent-** No HIV-affected person can be subject to medical treatment, medical interventions or research without informed

consent. Further, no HIV positive woman, who is pregnant, can be subjected to sterilisation or abortion without her consent.

- **Guidelines for testing centres-** No HIV test shall be conducted or performed by any testing or diagnostic centre or pathology laboratory or blood bank, unless such centre or laboratory or blood bank follows the guidelines laid down for such test
- **Disclosure of HIV status-** No person is compelled to disclose his HIV status except by an order of the court. A breach of violation attracts a jail sentence of up to two years or a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh, or both.
 - Every establishment is obligated to **keep HIV-related information protected**. Every HIV-positive person is compelled to take reasonable precautions to prevent the transmission of HIV to other persons.
- **Confidentiality of data-** Every establishment keeping the records of HIV-related information of protected persons shall adopt data protection measures in accordance with the guidelines to ensure that such information is protected from disclosure
- **Central and State Government to take measures-** The state and Centre shall take all such measures for prevention of spread of HIV or AIDS, in accordance with the guidelines and must make diagnostic facilities, anti-retroviral therapy and opportunistic infection management available to all HIV-infected people and ensure wide dissemination of the same.
- **Welfare Measures & protection of children-** Apart from facilitating better access to welfare schemes to affected persons the government shall also take appropriate steps to protect the property of children affected by HIV or AIDS for the protection of property of child affected by HIV or AIDS.
 - A person between the age of 12 to 18 years who is mature in managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family shall be competent to act as a

guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age.

- **Isolation of Person-** It prohibits isolation of segregation of an HIV-positive person. Every HIV-positive person has the right to reside in a shared household and use facilities in a non-discriminatory manner.
- **Ombudsmen-** Every state has to appoint one or more Ombudsmen to inquire into violations of the provisions of the Act. Within 30 days of receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman is required to pass an order as he deems fit. Failing to comply with the orders of the Ombudsman attracts a penalty of up to Rs 10,000.

patients in society is still a challenge.

- A streamlined process of procurement and storage of medicines related to HIV/AIDS.

However, it has been argued that the provisions only protect infected individuals from prejudiced behaviour and attitudes. Communities that are vulnerable to infection, individuals who are yet to be tested and kin of those infected are still subjected to stigma and biased perspectives. Further, there have been instances of shortage of medicines related to HIV/AIDS.

Related Data

- India has the **third largest HIV-infected** population with an estimated 2 million people. The country **aims to decrease** new infections by 75 per cent between 2010 and 2020 and eliminate AIDS by 2030.
- National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) noted that the **rate of decline** in annual new HIV infections has been relatively slower in recent years.
- However, **impact of the HIV/AIDS control programme** has been significant, with more than an 80 per cent decline in estimated new infections from the epidemic's peak in 1995
- Estimated AIDS-related deaths declined by 71 per cent since its peak in 2005.

Way forward

- The need is to adopt a **holistic approach to successfully combat discrimination** against the infected and the vulnerable and create safe spaces for them.
- The next important step will be **public education** as acceptance of HIV/AIDS

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Manual Scavenging

Why in news?

Recent deaths of five manual scavengers in Delhi highlights how the practice of manual scavenging still persists.

What is Manual Scavenging?

- The **International Labour Organisation** defines it as the removal of human excreta from public streets and dry latrines, and cleaning septic tanks, sewers and gutters.

Legal Position on Manual Scavenging

- Manual scavenging is prohibited by both international instruments, and Indian law. International agencies such as the UNICEF (as a water and sanitary issue), the WHO (as a health issue), the UNDP and the ILO have all called for an end to the practice.
- India's Constitution bans the practice of untouchability, and the **Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955**, prohibits compelling anyone to practice manual scavenging.
- Aimed specifically at ending manual scavenging, **The Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993** declared the employment of manual scavengers and construction of dry toilets to be punishable with fines and imprisonment.
- Superseding the 1993 Act, the **2013 Act** goes beyond prohibitions on dry latrines, and outlaws all manual excrement cleaning of insanitary latrines, open drains, or pits. And, importantly, it recognizes a constitutional obligation to correct the historical injustice and indignity suffered by manual scavenging communities by providing alternate livelihoods and other assistance.

Some facts on Manual Scavenging in India

- The Census of India in 2011 established that more than 2.6 million dry latrines exist in India.
- According to Census of India 2011, there are 740,078 households across the country

where human excreta is removed by a person from a dry latrine.

- In addition, the Socio-Economic Caste Census 2011 said that there are 182,505 families in rural India engaged in manual scavenging.
- According to **National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK)** since January 1, 2017, one person has died every five days, on an average, while cleaning sewers and septic tanks across the country.

However, despite such legal and constitutional safeguards, **manual scavengers remain victims of discrimination**. There are a number of reasons for this.

- Firstly, **sanitation being a State subject**, it requires States' support.
- Secondly, the law requires that the rehabilitation of scavengers has to be carried out as per the existing schemes, even though these very schemes have not been successful in eradicating the practice in the past.
- Thirdly, it is not just the law but the **attitude of public authorities** which aggravates the plight of the scavengers. The Government has repeatedly sought an extension of deadline to curb the problem, exhibiting lack of commitment.

Problems associated with Manual Scavenging

- Every year, hundreds of manual scavengers die, asphyxiated by poisonous gases. According to data collated by the National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) there have been **634 deaths related to manual scavenging since 1993**, with Tamil Nadu reporting the highest number of such deaths at 194, followed by Gujarat 122, Karnataka 68 and Uttar Pradesh 51. The figure may change as the process of collecting details from states and updating the data is going on.
- Manual scavenging is not only a caste-based

but also a **gender-based occupation** with **90 per cent of them being women**. Households with dry latrines prefer women to clean the excreta instead of men as they are located inside the house. According to a **Human Rights Watch report**, on an average, women get paid as little as between Rs 10 and Rs 50 every month per household. It is much less than men who earn up to Rs 300 a day for cleaning sewer lines.

- Manual scavengers are **exposed to the most virulent forms of viral and bacterial infections** that affect their skin, eyes, and limbs, respiratory and gastro-intestinal systems.
- The practice of caste-based exclusion and discrimination shows failure of access and entitlements not only to economic rights, but also to civil, cultural and political rights. It involves what has been described as “**living mode exclusion**”; exclusion from political participation and exclusion and disadvantage from social and economic opportunities.
- **A vicious cycle of poverty and social immobility**- Undermined physical capacity and the feeling of vulnerability and hopelessness associated with this form of discrimination triggers a vicious cycle of impoverishment, low educational attainment, and social immobility for manual scavengers and their families.

Technological Solutions to end manual scavenging

- Hyderabad Municipality has deployed 70 mini jetting machines. These mini vehicles can have easy access to the narrow lanes and smaller colonies to clear the choked sewer pipes (drainages).
- Bandicoot- India’s first ‘manhole cleaning robot’ is an exoskeleton robot which cleans manholes without the need for humans to enter the pit.

Why it still Persists?

- While legally manual scavenging is banned, caste apartheid and poverty perpetuate this practice.

- Scavenging does not require any skill and provides some additional income with no competition, investment and risk.
- These features coupled with the need for cleaning dry latrines and a lack of alternatives, force the scavengers, particularly women, to continue in this occupation.
- It has also been found that in certain cases, scavengers also face a difficulty in taking up other occupations like running shops due to the prevailing social prejudices.

Way Forward

- Immediate steps should include **holding officials accountable** for properly enforcing relevant laws, including the 2013 Act and The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.
- **The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is conducting a survey** to identify manual scavengers. The first phase has identified 53236 manual scavenger across 12 states. There is a need to extend the survey to whole country and create a reliable database so as to extend benefits of 2013 Act to intended beneficiaries.
- Recently Centre launched a challenge asking innovators, NGOs, research institutions, companies and cities to propose technology and business solutions to clean urban sewers and septic tanks without human entry.
- Dalits must be empowered through education and economic uplift. As per NCSK data, the Rs 10 lakh compensation that is mandated under law in case of manual scavenging deaths, has been paid in only 70 of the 123 cases since January 2017. Compensation should be paid immediately.
- The **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** should make expansion of the sewer network a top priority and come up with a scheme for scientific maintenance that will end manual cleaning of septic tanks to achieve its target of eradicating manual scavenging by 2019.
- A determined approach to end this practice requires a campaign against social prejudice and caste based discrimination.

ADULTERY

Why in News?

The Supreme Court unanimously struck down Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) that makes adultery a punishable offence.

Court's Stand

- Supreme Court held that the 158-year-old law was unconstitutional and fell foul of **Article 21** (Right to life and personal liberty) and **Article 14** (Right to equality). It destroys and deprives women of dignity and offends sexual freedom of women..
- **Mere adultery can't be a crime** unless it attracts the scope of **Section 306 (abetment to suicide)** of the IPC. It can be ground for civil issues including dissolution of marriage but it cannot be a criminal offence.
- Equality is the governing principle of a system and **husband is not the master of the wife**. Women must be treated with equality and any discrimination shall invite the wrath of Constitution. Section 497 IPC which deals with Adultery is absolutely manifestly arbitrary.
- The apex court also declared **Section 198(1) and 198(2) of the CrPC**, which allows a husband to bring charges against the man with whom his wife committed adultery, unconstitutional.

Section 497

- Section 497 says "Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery."
- The offence of adultery entailed a **maximum punishment of five years**, or with fine, or both
- The apex court had earlier on three separate occasions, in 1954, 1985 and 1988, upheld the constitutionality of Section 497.

outside his marriage, but **with an unmarried woman**, that does not amount to an offence under the provision though it also effects the sanctity of marriage.

- If the **husband of a woman connives with another man** for the latter to participate in sexual intercourse with the former's wife, then there would be no adultery.
- A woman committing adultery is not even deemed to be an "abettor" to the offence. Also it **legalises the act of Adultery** if committed by with the consent or connivance of the husband of the woman who is party to the act.
- **Section 198(2) of the Cr. P. C.** allows the initiation of criminal proceedings for Adultery only at the instance of the husband of the adulteress, but the wife of the man party to the act of adultery cannot institute a complaint.

Conclusion

The SC's new verdict that matrimonial issues fall in the realm of civil law and need not be resolved by criminal law is quite rational. The verdict is not promoting adultery; it just says that adultery is not a criminal offence. However, it should also be the duty of court and the society to make sure that the changes are not used to perpetuate adultery.

Ambiguities in Adultery Law

- If a married man has sexual intercourse,

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Section 377 Decriminalized

Why in news?

In **Navtej Singh Johar v/s Union of India** case the 5 judges Constitutional Bench, headed by Chief Justice declared the parts of Section 377 of the IPC unconstitutional thus decriminalizing homosexuality.

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- The ruling declares that **Section 377 violates Articles 14, 15 and 21** insofar as it penalises any consensual sexual relationship between two adults in private, be it homosexual, heterosexual, lesbian or transgender persons.
- Provisions of Section 377 **remain applicable** in cases of non- consensual carnal intercourse with adults, all acts of carnal intercourse with minors, and acts of bestiality.

Background on Section 377 of IPC and related Judicial Pronouncements

- Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1861, (IPC) came into force in 1861 during the British rule to criminalise sexual activities “against the order of nature”, including homosexual activities.
- One of the **first legal challenges** to Section 377 came in 1994, when the NGO AIDS Bhedbhav Virodhi Andolan (ABVA) filed a petition for its repeal which was dismissed.
- In July 2009, in **Naz Foundation case** the Delhi High Court had decriminalised homosexuality among consenting adults, holding it in violation of Article 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution of India.
- The Supreme Court in 2013 in the **Suresh Kumar Koushal versus Naz Foundation case** overruled the Delhi High Court’s order on the basis of the fact that “miniscule fraction of the country’s population constitute LGBTQ,” and that in over 150 years less than 200 people were prosecuted for committing offence under the section. Thus, the Supreme Court reinforced the criminalisation of homosexuality.

- **Section 377 of the IPC states:** “Whoever voluntarily has carnal inter course against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.”
- Section 377 does not penalise sexual identities per se. It prohibits sexual acts that are considered against the order of nature.

Two landmark judgments on sexual orientation and privacy

- **National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) case, 2014-** In this case concerning the rights of transgender people, the court ruled that there could be no discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.
- In **Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (2017), or the ‘privacy case’**, a nine-judge Bench ruled that “sexual orientation is an essential attribute of privacy”. It said that the “right to privacy and the protection of sexual orientation lie at the core of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution”.

Highlights of the verdict

- **Sexual autonomy and Right to Privacy:** A person’s sexual orientation and autonomy to choose his/her sexual partner is an important pillar and an in segregable facet of individual liberty. It is an expression of identity protected in various ways by Article 14, 15 and 21. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is **violation of freedom of choice and expression** (Article 19).
- **Restrain on State Action:** Expression of intimacy is at the **heart of right to privacy**. Right to sexual orientation is a vital personal right falling within the private protective sphere and realm of individual choice and autonomy. **The state has no business to intrude** into these personal matters. This

also includes right of persons of the community to navigate public places on their own terms, free from state interference.

- **Section 377 of the IPC:** Observing it as “capricious and irrational”, the court said that
 - Section 377 fails to make a distinction between consensual and non-consensual sexual acts between competent adults making it manifestly arbitrary. This is violative of the right to equality that includes the right against arbitrariness.
 - Moreover, it does not take into account that consensual sexual acts between adults in private space are neither harmful nor contagious to society.
- **Rule of Law instead of Rule by the law:** Court observed that Section 377 provides for rule by the law instead of the rule of law. The rule of law requires a just law which facilitates equality, liberty and dignity in all its facets. Rule by the law provides legitimacy to arbitrary state behaviour. Section 377 “infringed” on the fundamental right to non-discrimination, to live a life of dignity, and privacy guaranteed in the Constitution.
- **Constitutional morality:** It must seek to make a society pluralistic and inclusive. Any attempt to impose a homogeneous, uniform, consistent and a standardised philosophy would violate constitutional morality. It is the responsibility of all three organs of the State to curb any propensity of popular sentiment or majoritarianism.
- **Against Majoritarianism:** While rejecting the logic in Suresh Koushal case(2013) that the LGBTQI community forms only a tiny part of the population, the SC said that Constitution is not for just the majority, the fundamental rights are guaranteed to “any person” and “any citizen”, and the sustenance of these rights does not require majoritarian sanction.
- **Health aspect:** Homosexuality is **neither mental illness nor moral depravity**. The SC quoted the Indian Psychiatric Society’s view that “homosexuality is **not a psychiatric disorder**”, and that same-sex sexuality is a normal variant of human

sexuality, much like heterosexuality and bisexuality. Moreover **India’s new mental illness law** does not consider homosexuality to be a mental illness.

Analysis of the judgement

- Court pronounced that LGBTQ possess full range of constitutional rights, including sexual orientation and partner choice, LGBTQ has equal citizenship and equal protection of laws. It will help in **enforcing principles of social justice**, based upon the importance of diversity and human rights.
- Court has added a **new test of constitutional morality** to examine the constitutionality of laws enacted by Parliament. The verdict **enlarges the scope of personal freedom** by giving preference to constitutional morality over social morality.
- **Transformative constitutionalism**, that is, treating the Constitution “dynamic, vibrant and pragmatic”, responsive to its citizens, and not a lifeless text.
- **Right to Sexual Health:** The verdict highlights both negative and positive obligations of the state to ensure the health and well-being of LGBTQ individuals.
 - **Negative obligations** amount to the state’s non-interference with the right to health.
 - **Positive obligations** entail access to health services and treatment facilities. It asks for sensitive counsellors and health workers “to help individuals, families, workplaces and educational and other institutions” to understand sexuality and foster equality, non-discrimination and a respect of human rights.
 - In addition, it would **help efforts at HIV/AIDs prevention** which was hindered due to stigma and fear of prosecution among homosexuals and transgender persons.
- The SC also emphasised that **attitudes and mentality** have to change to accept the distinct identity of individuals and respect them for who they are rather than compelling them to become who they are not.
- The SC urged the government to **broadcast**

this judgement and organise **public awareness** campaign to eliminate stigma against LGBTQ people. Government officials, police, should be given periodic sensitisation campaigns.

- The SC also apologised to the India's LGBTQ people (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) and their families, for the delay in providing redressal for the ignominy and ostracism they have suffered.

realise the judgement on ground.

- Supreme Court judgment has merely decriminalised homosexuality but it has **not altered the civil law/Personal laws** on it. The validation of homosexual marriages, inheritance and adoption require legislation on which Parliament has to work.

Current social acceptance of same-sex relationships

- A study spanning 19 states by the Delhi-based Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in 2016 found strong views against homosexuality.
- 61% of the respondents disapproved of homosexual relationship. Only a fourth of the respondents approved of a homosexual relationship.
- The youngest respondents (15 to 17 years of age) were more approving of same-sex relationships than people in an older demographic.

Concerns yet to be addressed

- Since the **ruling would not be retrospective**, so people convicted under Section 377 are left without any effective remedy. According to data from the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) between 2014 and 2016, there were 4,690 cases of persons being booked under Section 377.
- Decriminalising gay sex is only the first step towards creating a more equal society. A 2016 survey by Mission for Indian Gay and Lesbian Empowerment (MINGLE) revealed **one in five LGBT employees were discriminated against at the workplace**. Such discrimination has economic costs too. A 2014 World Bank report said India loses \$31 billion due to stigma and exclusion of the community.
- Court judgments or laws cannot remove **social prejudices** on their own. The recent judgment on mob lynching is an example. India's social and political groups will have to show the courage and will power to

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Swadesh Darshan Scheme

What to study?

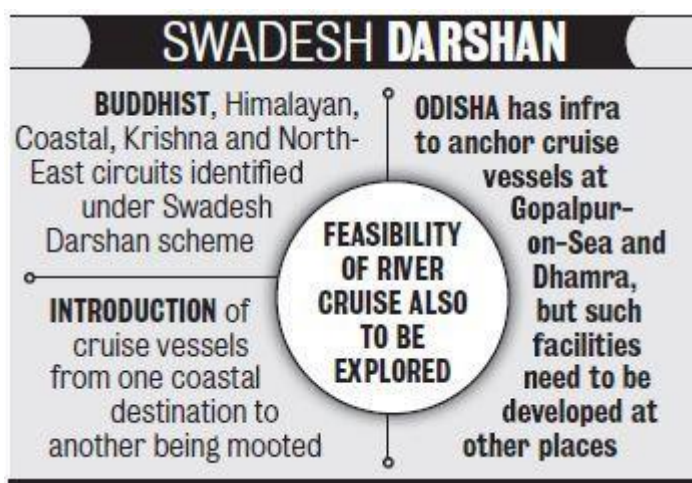
- For Prelims and Mains: Key features and significance of the scheme, various circuits covered.
- **Context:** Two coastal tourism projects taken up under Swadesh Darshan scheme were recently inaugurated by the Vice- President.
- The first circuit includes beautification of Nellore tank and Pulicat Lake, facelift to Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, construction of a restaurant and development of Ubbala Madugu, Kotha Koduru, Mypadu, Rama Theertham, and Isukapalli project.
- The second coastal tourism circuit is aimed at developing Kakinada port, Hope Island, Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary, construction of cottages and wooden huts at Passarlapudi, Aduru and S Yanam and development of Kotipalli project.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- The **Tourism Ministry** had launched ‘**Swadesh Darshan**’ scheme with an objective to develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country. These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- The scheme is **100% centrally funded** for the project components undertaken for public funding.
- To leverage the voluntary funding available for **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
- Funding of individual project will vary from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by **PMC (Programme**



Management Consultant).

- A **National Steering Committee (NSC)** will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.
- A **Mission Directorate** headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/UTs governments and other stake holders.
- **PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.**

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Krishna Kutir

- **Context:** Union Ministry of Women and Child Development recently inaugurated widows' home 'Krishna Kutir' at Vrindavan in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The construction of the home was funded by Central Government and it will be managed by the Uttar Pradesh Government.

Krishna Kutir:

- Krishna Kutir is *a special home for 1000 widows set under Swadhar Greh scheme* and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by government organization. It was constructed to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan.

About Swadhar Greh Scheme:

- The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.
- The scheme provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need.
- The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.

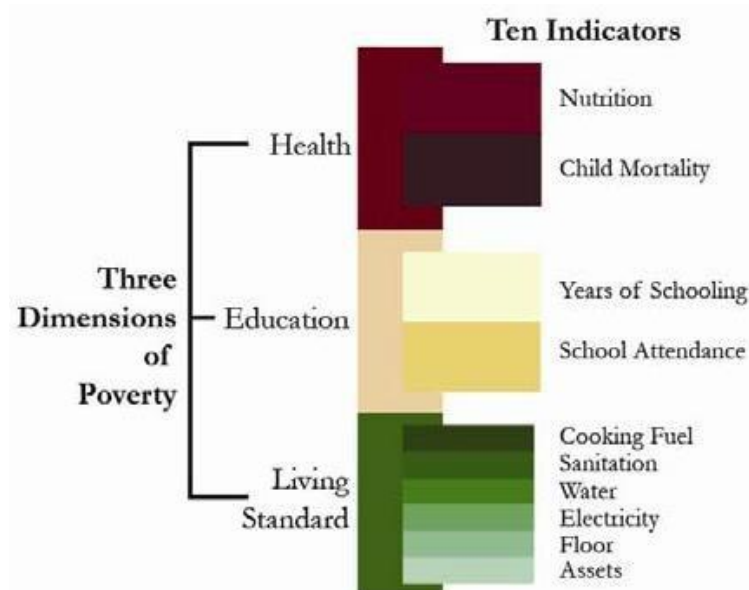
Implementation of the scheme:

- The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfil the norms are placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary(WCD) of the State/UT concerned.

- The agency should be either recognized by State/UT under existing law or should be well known with the experience or working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported satisfactory by the State Govt./UT Administration concerned.
- It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women's welfare/social welfare for a minimum period of two years.
- Its financial position should be sound.
- It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.
- It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.
- It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:

Multidimensional Poverty Index 2018



- **Context:** The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) have released the 2018 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

About Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI):

- The MPI provides the most comprehensive view of the various ways in which 1.3 billion people worldwide experience poverty in their daily life.
- The MPI looks at the multifaceted nature of poverty. It identifies people's deprivations across **three key dimensions – health, education and living standards**, lacking amenities such as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition or primary education. Those who are left behind in at least a third of the MPI's components are defined as multidimensionally poor.

How is the global MPI2018 aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals?

- Rather than viewing challenges one by one, in silos, the MPI shows how

deprivations related to SDGs 1,2,3,4,6,7, and 11 are concretely interlinked in poor people's lives.

- Rather than providing only national headlines, the global MPI is disaggregated by subnational region, area, ethnicity, or age cohort.
- The indicators underlying the global MPI 2018 have been revised to better align with the SDGs.

Performance of India:

- India has made giant strides in reducing multidimensional poverty, bringing down its poverty rate from 55% to 28% in ten years.
- Between 2005-06 and 2015-16, more than 271 million people have come out of the clutches of poverty in India. However, India still has the largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty in the world-around 364 million people. 156 million out of 364 million people who are MPI poor in 2015/2016 are children.
- India's scale of poverty reduction has parallels with the phenomenal level of poverty reduction achieved in China a decade or so earlier. India's scale of multidimensional poverty reduction over the decade from 2005/6 to 2015/16 – from 635 million poor persons to 364 million– can be compared to the speedy pace of China's poverty reduction, which occurred over more than 20 years.
- Across nearly every state, poor nutrition is the largest contributor to multidimensional poverty. Not having a household member with at least six years of education is the second largest contributor. Insufficient access to clean water and child mortality contribute least.

State- wise data:

- Among states, Jharkhand had the

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greatest improvement, with Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, and Nagaland only slightly behind. However, Bihar is still the poorest state in 2015/16, with more than half of its population in poverty.

- In 2015/16, the four poorest states – Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh – were still home to 196 million MPI poor people – over half of all the MPI poor people in India. Delhi, Kerala and Goa have the lowest incidence of multidimensional poverty.

India's relative performance:

- Among the South Asian countries, only Maldives boasts lower MPI of 0.007 than India (0.121). Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan and Afghanistan all boast higher incidences of multidimensional poverty.
- After India (364 million people), the countries with the largest number of people living in multi-dimensional poverty are Nigeria (97 million), Ethiopia (86 million), Pakistan (85 million), and Bangladesh (67 million).

Global performance:

- The global MPI covers 105 countries in total, home to 75% of the world's population, or 5.7 billion people. Of this proportion, 1.3 billion are identified as multi-dimensionally poor, and half of them are younger than 18 years old.
- 83% of the world's poor live in South Asia and Africa. The latest data further reveals the vast majority of the multidimensional poor – 1.1 billion people – live in rural areas around the world, where poverty rates are four times higher than among those living in urban areas.

UN Sees 70% Chance Of EL Nino Event This Year

- **Context:** The World Meteorological Organisation forecast “a 70% chance of an El Nino developing by the end of this year.” The warming phase of ENSO is called El Nino.
- The organisation sees increased odds of higher surface temperatures in most of Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America, Africa and along much of South America’s coastline. Interior parts of South America, Greenland, many south Pacific islands and some in the Caribbean were identified as possible exceptions.

- El Nino sets in when there is anomaly in the pattern. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America.
- The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition. The temperature of the water could rise up to 10 degrees Fahrenheit above normal. Warmer surface waters increase precipitation and bring above-normal rainfall in South America, and droughts to Indonesia and Australia.

What is ENSO?

- ENSO is nothing but *El Nino Southern Oscillation*. As the name suggests, it is an irregular periodic variation of wind and sea surface temperature that occurs over the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean.
- ENSO affects the tropics (the regions surrounding the equator) and the subtropics (the regions adjacent to or bordering the tropics). The warming phase of ENSO is called El Nino, while the cooling phase is known as La Nina.

What is El Nino?

- El Nino is *a climatic cycle characterised by high air pressure in the Western Pacific and low air pressure in the eastern*. In normal conditions, strong trade winds travel from east to west across the tropical Pacific, pushing the warm surface waters towards the western Pacific.
- The surface temperature could witness an increase of 8 degrees Celsius in Asian waters. At the same time, cooler waters rise up towards the surface in the eastern Pacific on the coasts of Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. This process called upwelling aids in the development of a rich ecosystem.

What causes El Nino?

What are El Nino’s effects?

- El Nino affects global weather. It favours eastern Pacific hurricanes and tropical storms. Record and unusual rainfall in Peru, Chile and Ecuador are linked to the climate pattern.
- El Nino reduces upwelling of cold water, decreasing the uplift of nutrients from the bottom of the ocean. This affects marine life and sea birds. The fishing industry is also affected.
- Drought caused by El Nino can be widespread, affecting southern Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. Countries dependent on agriculture are affected.
- Australia and Southeast Asia get hotter.
- A recent WHO report on the health consequences of El Nino forecasts a rise in vector-borne diseases, including those spread by mosquitoes, in Central and South America. Cycles of malaria in India are also linked to El Nino.

Why is it a concern?

- The rise in sea surface temperature may be intensified by global warming. From the current study, we learn that El Nino can exacerbate global warming and hence the process could become a

vicious circle.

What is La Nina?

- La Nina is *a climate pattern that describes the cooling of surface ocean waters along the tropical west coast of South America*. It is considered to have the opposite effect of El Nino.
- It brings greater than normal rainfall in Southeast Asia and Australia, and causes drier-than-normal conditions in South America and the Gulf Coast of the United States. La Nina events sometimes follow El Nino events.

How long does it last?

An El Nino or La Nina episode lasts nine to 12 months. Some may prolong for years. Its average frequency is every 2 to 7 years. El Nino is more frequent than La Nina.

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Dissolution Of Medical Council Of India

- **Context:** After failing to get the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case released by exercising its statutory power to remit life sentences, the government in Tamil Nadu has taken recourse to a possible constitutional remedy. It has decided to invoke the **Governor's clemency power under Article 161 of the Constitution**.

What's the issue?

- In 2014, the Tamil Nadu government tried to invoke its remission powers under Section 432 of the Code of Criminal Procedure to release the convicts. The Centre opposed the move, arguing that since the case had been prosecuted by the Central Bureau of Investigation, the state first needed to take the Centre's "concurrence" as required by Section 435 of the code.
- The dispute went to the Supreme Court, which decided in the Centre's favour in 2015, ruling that *the word "consultation" in Section 435 in spirit meant "concurrence"*. In August this year, the Centre denied concurrence to Tamil Nadu on the grounds that releasing the people convicted of assassinating a former prime minister would have "international ramifications" for India.

What should the governor do now?

- Tamil Nadu Governor will now have to take a call on the advice of the State's Council of Ministers and decide whether he is bound by it. He can either reject the proposal or seek its reconsideration. In either case, he will be mindful of the fact that his decision will be subject to judicial review.

Is the governor bound by the Cabinet's advice?

- It is settled in law that except in matters

where governor has discretion or enjoys independent powers, they are bound by the Cabinet's decision. Governor does not have the option of returning a decision for reconsideration either since the Indian Constitution provides that recourse only for the President. However, governor's decision, even if made on the aid and advice of the Cabinet, is subject to judicial review. Further, Supreme Court rulings on how governor should make decisions under Article 161 add to the complexity of the present case.

- In two separate judgements, the apex court has reiterated that governor's power to pardon cannot be used mechanically. In Epuru Sudhakar, which involved a Congress leader in Andhra Pradesh, the court ruled that political considerations cannot be the basis for granting pardon, and set aside the governor's clemency order.

Options before the governor:

- *One, he can sit on the cabinet recommendation endlessly*, as Article 161 of the Constitution does not prescribe any time limit for him to take a decision on the cabinet resolution.
- *Two, he can return the resolution to the cabinet for clarification or reconsideration.*
- *Third, he can reject the resolution prompting the stake-holders to take the issue to courts*, where it will be a time-consuming process.

Is concurrence of the Centre necessary?

- *Since state's executive power extends to all laws on the concurrent list*, including the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code, governor has the power to remit sentences handed down under such laws. In the particular matter of Rajiv Gandhi's assassins,

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though, the point of concurrence was insisted upon as the case had been investigated by a central agency.

- But given that the exercise of governor's power under Article 161 is constitutional, it does not require the Centre's concurrence. The aid and advice of the state Cabinet is enough.

Why Centre's intervention is necessary?

- There is a possibility that the Centre will challenge the governor's order if he accepts the state Cabinet's advice, not least because it will cause several legal and diplomatic complications.
- Since three of the convicts are Sri Lankan nationals, what will be their legal status after they are released? Will the Indian government be willing to let foreign nationals convicted of assassinating a former prime minister live in the country? Will it deport them to Sri Lanka, where they are bound to be arrested again? If they propose to move to another country, can India be expected to facilitate such a move?

Way ahead:

- An omnibus order of release clearly will not address the particularities in each case, or evaluate the gravity of their role in the crime and the effect on society of releasing them.
- **Moral issues:** In principle, the idea that convicts who have suffered prolonged incarceration require compassion cannot be faulted. The idea of locking away a person for life, without so much as a sliver of hope of freedom, is not in keeping with the ideals of a truly modern society.
- **What should not be ignored?** It is impossible to ignore the impact of such a decision on capital punishment. When lifelong imprisonment is regarded as a humane alternative to capital punishment, releasing life convicts may only strengthen the demand for the

imposition of the death penalty — which would be retrograde. Although there are many political considerations behind the move to release the convicts, this case must be decided on the basis of legal principles alone.

What you need to know? Article 161:

- **Article 161** deals with Power of Governor to grant pardons, etc, and to suspend, remit or commute sentences in certain cases.
- It states, the Governor of a State shall have the power to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person convicted of any offence against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the State extends.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PARDONING POWERS OF PRESIDENT AND GOVERNOR:

- The scope of the pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161. The power differs in the following two ways:
 - The power of the President to grant pardon extends in cases where the punishment or sentence is by a Court Martial but Article 161 does not provide any such power to the Governor.
 - The President can grant pardon in all cases where the sentence given is sentence of death but pardoning power of Governor does not extend to death sentence cases.

Significance of pardoning powers:

- The pardoning power of Executive is very significant as it corrects the errors of judiciary. It eliminates the effect of conviction without addressing the defendant's guilt or innocence.
- Pardon may substantially help in saving an innocent person from being punished

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due to miscarriage of justice or in cases of doubtful conviction.

- The object of pardoning power is to correct possible judicial errors, for no human system of judicial administration can be free from imperfections.

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Criminalisation Of Politics

Why in news?

In **Public Interest Foundation Case** a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice issued directions aimed at decriminalisation of politics.

Background

- According to the prevalent law, the lawmakers and candidates are barred under the Representation of Peoples Act (RPA) from contesting elections only after their conviction in a criminal case.
- The current verdict was pronounced on a question whether lawmakers facing criminal trial can be disqualified from contesting elections at the stage of framing of charges against them.

Supreme Court Observations/Recommendations

- Problem of criminalisation of politics is “not incurable” but **requires urgent attention** before it becomes “fatal” to the democracy.
- The Apex court recommended that the **Parliament must make law** to ensure that persons facing serious criminal cases do not enter into the political stream.
- The Court directed **disclosure of criminal cases** pending against the candidate by himself/herself through Election Commission of India and his/her political party.
- Moreover the criminal antecedent of candidates must be **widely publicized** through different media including the websites of concerned political parties.
- Court also made **observations on political parties**. The SC said that it is the political parties that form the government, man the parliament and run the governance of the country. It is therefore, necessary to introduce internal democracy, financial transparency and accountability in the working of the political parties.

Reasons for Criminalisation of Politics

- Vote Bank:** As the SC has observed that we as a voter are not yet organically evolved,

therefore, majority of the voters are maneuverable, purchasable. Expenditure for vote buying and other illegitimate purposes through criminals leads to nexus between politicians and criminals.

- Corruption:** In every election all parties without exception put up candidates with a criminal background. The general trend is that these candidates are elected to office. **Institutionalization of corruption** and failure to deal with corruption has bred contempt for the law. This, combined with the criminalization of politics, flourishes the corruption. The past three Lok Sabhas have seen an increasing number of legislators with criminal background or pending cases against them — 124 in 2004, 162 in 2009 and 182 in 2014.
- Loop Holes in The Functioning of Election Commission:** For the past several general elections there has existed a gulf between the Election Commission and the voter. Common people hardly come to know the rules made by the commission. Model Code of Conduct is openly flouted by candidates without any stringent repercussions.
- Denial of Justice and Rule of Law:** Toothless laws against convicted criminals standing for elections further encourage this process. In December 2017, the Government announced to set up 12 **fast-track courts** across the country to try criminal cases pending against sitting MPs and MLAs. 40 percent of pending cases have been transferred to special courts — of which **judgments have been pronounced in just 136 cases (11%)**.
- Though the Representation of the People Act (RPA) disqualifies a sitting legislator or a candidate on certain grounds, there is **nothing regulating the appointments to offices within the party**. A politician may be disqualified from being a legislator, but he may continue to hold high positions within his party, thus also continuing to play an important public role which he/she has

been deemed unfit for by the law. Convicted politicians may continue to influence law-making by controlling the party and fielding proxy candidates in legislature.

Impact of Criminalization

- **The law-breakers get elected as law-makers-** The people who are being tried for various offences are given the opportunity to make laws for the whole country, which undermines the sanctity of the Parliament.
- **Loss of public faith in Judicial machinery-** It is apparent that those with political influence take advantage of their power by delaying hearings, obtaining repeated adjournments and filing innumerable interlocutory petitions to stall any meaningful progress. This questions the credibility of the judiciary.
- **Tainted Democracy:** Where the rule of law is weakly enforced and social divisions are rampant, a candidate's criminal reputation could be perceived as an asset. This brings in the culture of muscle and money power in the politics.
- **Self-perpetuating:** Since the parties focus on winnability of the candidate (also hampering the inner party democracy), they tend to include more and more influential elements. Thus, criminalization of politics perpetuates itself and deteriorates the overall electoral culture.

- The Election Commission must take adequate measures to break the nexus between the criminals and the politicians.
- There are provisions in the Representation of the people Act, 1951 to punish candidates and parties for misuse of religion and other unlawful elements in elections, unfortunately these provisions are not effectively enforced because of lack of political will and prolonged legal battles and litigation.

Way Forward

- There is a need to **curb the high cost of campaigning** to provide a level playing field for anyone who wants to contest elections.
- As recommended by the **Law Commission of India's report on Electoral Disqualifications**, by effecting disqualification of tainted politicians at the stage of framing of charges, with adequate safeguards, the spread of criminalisation of politics may be curbed.
- Filing of a false affidavit should qualify as a 'corrupt practice' under the Act. Conviction on the charge of filing of a false affidavit must be grounds for disqualification as recommended by the Law Commission.

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Reservation In Promotions

Why in News?

A five-judge Constitution bench allowed for grant of **quota for promotions in the government jobs to SCs and STs without the need to "collect quantifiable data"** reflecting the backwardness among these communities as mandated by the Nagaraj judgement of 2006.

Background

- **Nine judge bench in Indra Sawhney case(1992)**
 - o the Supreme Court upheld the Mandal Commission's 27 percent quota for backward classes with a condition that combined reservation should not exceed 50%.
 - o It also struck down the government notification reserving 10% government jobs for economically backward classes among the higher castes.
 - o Creamy layer must be eliminated from the Backward Classes.
 - o There should be no reservation in the promotions.
- As the Indra Sawhney judgement disallowed reservation in promotions and consequential seniority, **Parliament enacted three constitutional amendments** in 1995, 2000 and 2002, the most contested one being Article 16 (4A).
- **Article 16 (4A):** Allows for reservation in matters of promotion, with consequential seniority, in favour of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes which are not adequately represented .
- **Five judge bench in Nagaraj Case(2006)**
 - o The court upheld the constitutional validity of the amendments
 - o But it also said that for providing quota in promotions the states must provide:
 - ✓ quantifiable data on the backwardness of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST)
 - ✓ the facts about their inadequate representation
 - ✓ the overall administrative efficiency.

More about the recent judgement

- The Centre had alleged that the verdict in the M Nagaraj case put unnecessary conditions in granting quota benefits.
- The bench **did not make changes about the two other conditions** given in the 2006 Nagaraj verdict which dealt with adequacy of representation and administrative efficiency.
- The court said that the requirement to collect quantifiable data showing backwardness of SCs and STs was "contrary" to the nine-judge bench judgement in the Indra Sawhney verdict of 1992.
- The apex court also turned down the Centre's plea that overall population of SC/ST be considered for granting quota for them.
- The court also **asked the government to examine the possibility of introducing creamy layer** for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) says that if some sections bag all the coveted jobs ,it will leave the rest of the class as backward as they always were. This observation has led to criticism of the judgement in some quarters.
- However, it declined the demand to refer the case to a 7 judge bench to reconsider its 2006 Nagaraj judgement.

Arguments against Reservation in promotion

- **Hurts efficiency of administration:** This aspect becomes important in highly technical domains such as Nuclear research, space program, etc.
- **Cornering of Benefits:** Critics point out that like the reservation aspect, even the promotions will be cornered by a select few castes and tribes.
- **Reservation is suffice:** There should not be quota in promotions for higher services as the of backwardness of SC and ST employees is removed once they join government service.

Arguments in favour of Reservation in promotion

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- **False notion of “efficiency”**
 - o The ‘loss in efficiency’ argument is largely the result of an extremely conservative understanding of ‘merit’.
 - o The basis for that argument has never been articulated in any of the Supreme Court’s judgments and has always been stated as a self-evident truth and not grounded in any sort of empirical study.
 - o No person can be promoted unless they obtain a good rating in their annual confidential report which is currently the measure of efficiency.
- **Lack of representation in higher levels:**
 - o The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lack representation mainly at the Group A level which do not have direct recruitment provisions. Promotions are the only way members of these communities can make it to this level.
 - o There were only 4 SC/ST officers at the secretary rank in the government in 2017.
- **Large number of Vacant posts:** There was no definition of the expression “backward” of which “quantifiable data” was to be collected. As a result, all promotions made post-Nagraj were struck down on the ground that there was no quantifiable data.
- **Historical disadvantage:** Given that the marker of identity of Scheduled Castes is the historic disadvantage of the untouchable, the question of proving backwardness by quantifiable data for promotion does not arise.

Way forward

- With regards to the Supreme court observation about introduction of creamy layer with respect to SC/ST reservations, talks should be conducted with all stakeholders before moving ahead on such a contentious issue.
- As far as promotions are concerned, as of now there is ambiguity and vagueness in promotion process and hence there is a need for a comprehensive law to be enacted in line with the supreme court judgement.

Aadhaar Constitutionally Valid

Background

- Aadhaar sought to mandatory requirement of demographic and biometric data of an individual which was argued to be against the fundamental right to privacy.
- Aadhaar Act, 2016 was passed as Money Bill to give statutory backup to the Aadhaar and UIDAI. Its passage as Money Bill too was contested.
- Till now no exclusive Data Privacy Law exist in India giving rise to the concerns of State surveillance and misuse of personal data by the commercial entities.

Highlights of the Verdict

- **Constitutionality of Aadhaar:** Aadhaar scheme, which is backed by the Aadhaar Act, passes the **triple test** laid down in the Puttaswamy (Privacy) judgment to determine the reasonableness of the invasion of privacy (under Art 21) i.e.
 - **Existence of a law** - backed by the statute i.e. the Aadhaar Act, 2016
 - **A legitimate state interest** – ensuring social benefit schemes to reach the deserving and poor
 - **Test of proportionality** - balances benefits of Aadhaar and the potential threat it carries to the fundamental right to privacy.
- **No fear of Surveillance state:** Provisions of the Aadhaar Act “do not tend to create a surveillance state”.
 - Aadhaar collects minimal biometric data in the form of iris and fingerprints, and the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) — which oversees the Aadhaar enrolment exercise — does not collect purpose, location or details of the transaction.
 - To ensure non tracking, the Court ordered that Authentication logs should be deleted after six months, instead of the five years required under the existing Regulation 27(1) of the Authentication Regulations.
- **Security of the biometric data:** UIDAI has mandated only registered devices to conduct biometric-based authentication transactions.
 - There is an **encrypted, unidirectional relationship** between the host application and the UIDAI. This rules out any possibility of the use of stored biometric, or the replay of biometrics captured from another source.
 - Further, as per the regulations, authentication agencies are not allowed to store the biometrics captured for Aadhaar authentication.
- **Linking of Aadhaar with Financial transactions:** The 2017 amendment to Rule 9 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (Maintenance of Records) Rules, 2005 which made linking of bank accounts and all other financial instruments such as mutual funds, credit cards, insurance policies, etc. with Aadhaar mandatory, is declared unconstitutional. Because **the amendment did not stand the proportionality test in the triple test**, thus violating the right to privacy of a person which extends to banking details.
- **Aadhaar Act as Money Bill:** Section 7 being the main provision of the Act, the Supreme Court has upheld the validity of the Aadhaar Act being passed as a Money Bill. Section 7 of the Aadhaar Act, demands for Aadhaar based authentication to receive a subsidy, benefit or service etc. It is very clearly declared in this provision that the expenditure incurred in respect of such a subsidy, benefit or service would be from the Consolidated Fund of India.
- On a similar issue, the court has upheld the validity of Section 59 that also validates all Aadhaar enrolment done prior to the enactment of the Aadhaar Act, 2016. The court has said that since enrolment was voluntary in nature, those who specifically refuse to give consent would be allowed to exit the Aadhaar scheme.

Impact of the Judgement

- **Striking down of Regulation 27(1)** and reducing storage period of authentication data from five years to six months will **ensure personal data is not misused**. Amending Regulation 26 and making metabase relating to a transaction impermissible will **prevent fake profiling** of an Aadhaar holder.
- Striking down of Section 47 means **citizens can file a complaint** in case of data theft, which earlier could be done by the government (i.e. UIDAI) alone.
- That portion of **Section 57** of the Aadhaar Act which enables body corporate and individual to seek authentication is held to be unconstitutional. This makes it clear that **Aadhaar may only be used by the government, and not by private parties**.
- The ruling **clears the ambiguity** over several aspects of Aadhaar and unleashes its potential for good governance and effective distribution of social welfare services.
- The constitution bench strikes down the National security exception (Section 33(2)) under the Aadhaar Act while giving citizens the opportunity of being heard before disclosure of information under section 33(1) of the Aadhaar Act. This will indirectly ensure greater privacy of individual's Aadhaar data while restricting the government accessibility to it.
- Aadhaar's role in education and admissions is also restricted now. It upheld the Fundamental Right to Education (Art 21A) of children (6-14 yrs. age) and observed that admission is neither a service nor subsidy.
- The court has struck a delicate balance between the social welfare imperative and the citizen's fundamental right to privacy.
- **Impact of mandating Aadhaar on the poor:** Rather than enabling easier access, it may end up harming them by denying them their rights due to technical authentication problems.
- **Privacy:** We need a strong data protection law that prevents the government and private parties from non- consensually using Aadhaar—the **Justice Srikrishna Committee recommendations** provide a good starting point for that.
- The issue of the **right to be forgotten**, in case of Aadhaar data that have been collected, remains a grey area. The judgment does not clearly state that entities such as banks and mobile companies will have to delete the collected information.
- **Aadhaar as a single identifier:** If the Aadhaar number is 'seeded' into every database (train travel, air travel, bank account, mobile phone, employment history, health and so on.), it integrates these data silos. Aadhaar becomes the bridge across the hitherto disconnected data silos. People in government will be able to 'profile' the citizens, by pulling in information from various databases using that single identifier. Just the possibility of such profiling is likely to lead to self-censorship and, is likely to stifle dissent.
- **Minority Judgment:** Contrary to the majority judges, Justice Chandrachud rejected all the arguments and held Aadhaar Act as unconstitutional on the basis of invasion of privacy, all-pervasive state control, and exclusion. Moreover, he held that passing the Aadhaar Act as a money bill was a “fraud on the constitution.”

Challenges that still remain

- **For the Fintech companies**, where fraud and impersonation is a high risk, Aadhaar was a substantial support. It allows online authentication of customers leading to quick issuance of financial services and improves the service aspect. Verdict makes it like **removing an enabler** instead of ensuring protection of privacy of data.

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Department Of Official Language

Context: The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh recently chaired first review meeting of *the Department of Official Language of MHA* to discuss the functioning and issues related to implementation of Hindi language in official work.

Department of Official Language:

- With a view to ensuring compliance of the constitutional and legal provisions regarding official language and to promote the use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union, *the Department of Official Language was set up in June 1975 as an independent Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs*. Since then, this Department has been making efforts for accelerating the progressive use of Hindi for the official purposes of the Union.
- In accordance with the Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961, this Department has been entrusted with the following items of work:
 - Implementing the provisions of the Constitution relating to the Official Language and the provisions of the Official Languages Act, 1963 (19 of 1963), except to the extent such implementation has been assigned to any other Department.
 - Prior approval of the President for authorising the limited use of a language, other than English, in the proceedings in the High Court of a State.
 - Nodal responsibility for all matters relating to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union including Hindi Teaching Scheme for Central Government Employees and publication of magazines, journals & other literature related thereto.
 - Co-ordination in all matters relating

to the progressive use of Hindi as the Official Language of the Union, including administrative terminology, syllabi, textbooks, training courses and equipment (with standardised script) required therefor.

Constitutional provisions:

- *Part 17 of the constitution of India (Articles 343 to Article 351)* makes elaborate provisions dealing with the official language of the Republic of India. The main provisions dealing with the official language of the Union are embodied in Articles 343 and 344 of the Constitution of India. The Official languages have been listed in the 8th schedule of Constitution of India.

Official language of union:

- *Hindi written in Devanagari script is the Official Language of the Union.* The original constitution provided that for a period of 15 years from the commencement of the constitution, English will continue to be used for all official purposes of the Union.
- *The constitution made it clear that President may, during the said period, by order authorize the use of the Hindi language* in addition to the English language and of the Devanagari form of numerals in addition to the international form of Indian numerals for any of the official purposes of the Union.
 - The constitution also makes it clear that even after 15 years, the Parliament by law may provide for the continued use of English for any specific purpose.
 - The constitution has put all authority in the hands of the central government both for formulating and implementing the language policy.

- It is also special responsibility of the centre to develop and spread the official language (Hindi) of the union (art. 351).

Facts for Prelims:

- The department has developed a computer software called **“Kanthasth”** for translating the all kinds of official files from English to Hindi and vice versa to make the translation work simpler and quicker.
- An E-learning platform called the **“Pravah”** also being developed by the department for use in 16 Indian languages including English. Anybody can learn Hindi through his mother tongue with the help of this E- learning platform.

Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA)

- **Context:** Child Adoption Regulatory Authority (CARA) has allowed individuals in a live-in relationship to adopt children from and within India.
- **Exception:** CARA has barred applicants in a live-in relationship from adopting a child on the ground that “the Authority would like the children to be placed only with a stable family and individuals in a live-in relationship cannot be considered as stable family.”

Eligibility:

- The eligibility criteria under Adoption Regulations, 2017, permit single women to adopt a child of any gender, while single men can adopt only boys.
- When a married couple seeks to adopt a child, it needs to give its consent for adoption and should be stable marriage for at least two years. Applicants have to be physically, mentally and financially stable to raise a child.

About CARA:

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is *a statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development*, Government of India.
- It functions as *the nodal body for adoption of Indian children* and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- CARA is designated as *the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions* in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993, ratified by Government of India in 2003.
- CARA primarily deals with adoption of orphan, abandoned and surrendered children through its associated /recognised adoption agencies.

Publishing Poll Candidate's Propaganda Is Paid News

- **Context:** Election Commission of India recently told the Supreme Court that repeated publication of propaganda lauding the achievements of a candidate in an election is nothing but “paid news”.
- The EC has asked the court to declare whether it amounts to “paid news” if widely circulated daily newspapers cover statements issued by, and in the name of, a candidate.

Concerns:

- Such news are not only laudatory of his or her record and achievements but also are a direct appeal to voters by the candidate. Therefore, politicians cannot say that it is part of their fundamental right to free speech to spew out “motivated propaganda”.
- If such motivated propaganda is allowed in the name of free speech during the election period, candidates with a strong network of connections will exploit their sphere of influence in society. This will have the unequal advantage of encashing such silent services.

Background:

- The commission has moved the court in appeal against a decision of the Delhi High Court to set aside the disqualification of a MP in Madhya Pradesh.
- ECI's National Level Committee on Paid News found that five newspapers, with a wide circulation, had published 42 news items that were biased and one-sided and aimed at furthering the prospects of the leader. Some of the reports were advertisements in favour of him. The committee concluded that the items fitted the definition of “paid news”.

Delhi HC order and why was it challenged?

- The Delhi HC order had not only overturned the EC's order on disqualification, but it also stated that the Commission's remit is limited to election expenditure incurred by candidates and not content of speech.
- While the EC does not usually move court on its own, this was seen as a fit case as it was felt that the Delhi HC order had dealt a major blow to the fight against paid news.
- It was also felt that unless the legal position on the issue was corrected, the EC's role and power to check paid news in elections will be irreparably undermined.
- Legal advice taken also weighed in favour of moving the Supreme Court.

Paid news menace:

- Over 600 paid news complaints were forwarded by EC to Press Council of India with reference to the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the government had informed Parliament.
- EC has repeatedly been asking the law ministry to treat paid news as a cognisable offence and the 2015 Law Commission reports call for amendments in laws to check the menace. The UPA government had also set up a Group of ministers to examine the issue.

Need of the hour:

The ECI has written to the Union government before, suggesting that paid news be made an electoral offence under the RPA. A Law Commission report from 2015 also recommends amending the RPA to this effect.

Appointment Of Lokpal

- **Context:** Government has constituted eight-member search committee headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai, to recommend names for posts of Lokpal chairperson and members. The selection process of Lokpal is underway as per guidelines of laid down in Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

Committee's Terms of Reference:

The search committee will start functioning soon. It will recommend names for Lokpal chairperson and members. It can also consider names other than those recommended by the search committee.

Highlights of the Lokpal Act of 2013:

- The Act allows setting up of anti-corruption ombudsman called Lokpal at the Centre and Lokayukta at the State-level.
- The Lokpal will consist of a chairperson and a maximum of eight members.
- The Lokpal will cover all categories of public servants, including the Prime Minister. But the armed forces do not come under the ambit of Lokpal.
- The Act also incorporates provisions for attachment and confiscation of property acquired by corrupt means, even while the prosecution is pending.
- The States will have to institute Lokayukta within one year of the commencement of the Act.
- The Act also ensures that public servants who act as whistleblowers are protected.

Powers:

- The Lokpal will have the power of superintendence and direction over any investigation agency including CBI for cases referred to them by the ombudsman.
- As per the Act, the Lokpal can summon or question any public servant if there

exists a prima facie case against the person, even before an investigation agency (such as vigilance or CBI) has begun the probe. Any officer of the CBI investigating a case referred to it by the Lokpal, shall not be transferred without the approval of the Lokpal.

- An investigation must be completed within six months. However, the Lokpal or Lokayukta may allow extensions of six months at a time provided the reasons for the need of such extensions are given in writing.
- Special courts will be instituted to conduct trials on cases referred by Lokpal.

Trust Status For Bharat Ke Veer

- **Context:** The government has granted the status of a trust to ‘Bharat Ke Veer’, a private initiative which aids families of paramilitary personnel killed in action. Akshay Kumar and former national badminton champion Pullela Gopichand have been included as trustees.

Who will manage the fund? “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.

Support by the government:

- The initiative has now been **formalized into a registered trust** for providing a platform for all citizens to contribute and provide assistance to the families of martyred personnel.
- **The public can visit** the ‘Bharat Ke Veer’ application and website, **and contribute** to support the families of jawans who die in the line of duty.
- Contributions to Bharat Ke Veer have been **exempted from Income Tax**.

About Bharat ke Veer:

- **What is it?** It is a fund-raising initiative by the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India on behalf of members of the Indian Armed Forces. It aims to enable willing donors to contribute towards the family of a braveheart who sacrificed his/her life in line of duty. This website is technically supported by National Informatics Centre (NIC) and powered by State Bank of India.

How it works? It allows anyone to financially support the bravehearts of his choice or towards the “Bharat Ke Veer” corpus. The amount so donated will be credited to the account of ‘Next of Kin’ of those Central Armed Police Force/Central Para Military Force soldiers. 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.

Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna

- **Context:** The Employee's State Insurance (ESI) has approved a scheme named 'Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna' for Insured Persons (IP) covered under the Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948.

of India.

- It is managed by Employees' State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) according to rules and regulations stipulated there in the ESI Act 1948.

About Atal Bimit Vyakti Kalyan Yojna:

- **Aim:** It aims to financially support those who lost their jobs or rendered jobless for whatsoever reasons due to changing employment pattern.
- **Its beneficiaries** will be insured persons covered under Employees' State Insurance Act, 1948 for period of two years continuously.

Key features:

- **Cash assistance:** Under the scheme, relief will be payable in cash directly to bank account of insured persons in case of unemployment. This financial assistance will be given to insured persons even while they search for new engagement. Beneficiary insured workers will be paid money, from their own contribution towards ESI scheme, in cash through bank account transfer.
- Under this scheme, workers will be able to draw 47% of their total contributions towards ESIC after remaining unemployed for at least three months from date of leaving their previous jobs. They can choose to receive the cash at one go or in instalments. It will be applicable to all factories and establishments employing at least 10 workers.

About ESI:

- ESI is self-financing social security and health insurance scheme for Indian workers.
- It is autonomous corporation by statutory creation under Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government

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Draft Rules For E Pharmacies

- **Context:** Ministry of health and family welfare has issued *a draft notification recently on the sale of drugs by E-Pharmacies*. The notification is about *the amendment of Drugs and Cosmetics Rules amendment* to enable registration of the e pharmacies and monitoring of their functioning.

Significance of these rules:

- With this, Rs 3000 crore online pharma business will be regularised from the day of final notification.
- These rules have been proposed to ensure accessibility and availability of drugs to the people across India.
- After the rules are finalised, people will be able to get genuine drugs through these online pharmacies.

Highlights of the Draft:

- All the e-pharmacies have to be **registered compulsorily** with the Central Drugs Standard control organisation.
- Psychotropic substances, habit-forming medicines like cough syrup and sleeping pills, schedule x drugs will **not be sold online**.
- Apart from registration, the e pharmacies have to **obtain a license from the State government** to sell the medicines online.
- The application of registration of e-pharmacy will have to be accompanied by **a sum of Rs 50,000** while asserting that an e-pharmacy registration holder will have to comply with provisions of Information Technology Act, 2000 (21 of 2000).
- The details of patient shall be kept **confidential and shall not be disclosed** to any person other than the central government or the state government concerned, as the case may be.

- The supply of any drug shall be made against **a cash or credit memo generated** through the e-pharmacy portal and such memos shall be maintained by the e-pharmacy registration holder as record.
- Both state and central drug authorities will be **monitoring the data of sales and transactions of e pharmacies**. Any violation of rules the registration of e-pharmacies will be suspended, and it can be cancelled too.
- The premises from which e-pharmacy is operated regular inspections will be conducted every two years by the central licencing authority.

Significance of the sector:

- Patients can order medicines by uploading the prescription, and they will be **delivered at home by the e pharmacies**. As **there are no distribution costs involved** and the e pharmacies procured directly from the manufacturers, the price may come down by 20 to 30% Maximum Retail Price.
- **All the transaction will be done electronically** which will encourage digital payments, and these bills can be tracked online for any misuse.
- Each E pharmacy shall appoint pharmacists with customer care which will **create the additional jobs in addition to the existing offline pharmacists** that are already giving jobs to the pharmacists.

National Sports Awards



National Sports Awards 2018 have been announced.

Key facts:

- National Sports Awards are given every year to recognize and reward excellence in sports.
 - **Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award** is given for the spectacular and most outstanding performance in the field of sports by a sportsperson over a period of four year.
 - **Arjuna Award** is given for consistency outstanding performance for four years.
 - **Dronacharya Award** for coaches for producing medal winners at prestigious International sports events.
 - **Dhyan Chand Award** for life time contribution to sports development.
 - **Rashtriya Khel Protsahan Puruskar** is given to the corporate entities (both in private and public sector) and individuals who have played a visible role in the area of sports promotion and development.
 - **MAKA Trophy:** Overall top performing university in inter-university tournaments is given Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (MAKA) Trophy.

Indian Culinary Institute

- **Context:** Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) has been inaugurated at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. It is *promoted by Union Ministry of Tourism*.

About ICI:

- The main objective of setting up of the Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) is to institutionalize a mechanism to support efforts intended to preserve, document, promote and disseminate Indian Cuisine, meet the sectoral requirement of specialists specific to Indian Cuisine, as also of promoting Cuisine as a Niche Tourism product.
- The ICIs will be Centres of Excellence which will offer structured regular programmes of study specific to culinary arts and culinary management leading to graduate and post graduate level degrees, promote research and innovation, organize demand driven certificate and diploma courses, document and create data base specific to Indian cuisine and commission studies and survey on cuisine.

Need:

- The need for ICI was felt as the formal education specific to Indian cuisine, a culinary art, with pan India sweep is conspicuous by its absence.
- There is no regular credible institutional source at apex level for supply of cuisine specialists to the Sector. Also, there was no institutional mechanism to document and disseminate knowledge related to cuisine and gastronomy.

Significance:

- In India, at present, there is a dearth of state-of-the-art training ground to groom top-of-the-line chefs of international standards. To fill this void, the Indian Culinary Institute would provide the

appropriate training platform at par with the elite “Chef Schools” functioning in different parts of the developed world.

- This effort will facilitate building a super-speciality food production workforce to assure positions of culinary experts in the hospitality industry. The ICIs will also help the local youth to get trained in these streams as well as create entrepreneurs and make them self-sufficient.
- The hotel and tourism industry in the proximity of these institutes will also get benefitted by getting the trained and skilled manpower which in turn will enhance their business.

Maldives Elections

Why in news?

India welcomed the **unexpected victory of the Maldives opposition leader** Ibrahim Mohamed Solih in presidential elections ending President Abdulla Gayoom Yameen's five-year controversial tenure.

Background

- Yameen government which came to power in disputed elections in 2013, had ruled with an iron hand, **withdrawing from the Commonwealth, conspicuously courting China and weakening traditional ties with India -cancelling Indian company GMR's contract to modernise Male airport, rejecting visa renewals of Indians working in the Maldives and declining to participate in joint naval exercises earlier this year.**
- Yameen government is accused of allowing a Chinese 'land grab' of Maldivian islands, key infrastructure, and even essential utilities, which not only undermined the independence of the Maldives, but the security of the entire Indian Ocean region.

Importance of Maldives for India

- Strategically located in the Indian Ocean, Maldives archipelago comprising 1,200 coral islands lies next to key shipping lanes which ensure uninterrupted energy supplies to countries like China, Japan and India.
- As the pre-eminent South Asian power and a **'net security provider'** in the Indian Ocean region, India needs to cooperate with Maldives in security and defence sectors.
- India was among the first to recognise Maldives after its independence in 1965 and to establish diplomatic relations with the country.
- Indians are the second largest expatriate community in the Maldives with approximate strength of around 26,000. Indian expatriate community consists of workers as well as professionals.

- Indian Army's 'Operation Cactus' foiled a coup in Maldives that was attempted by a pro-Eelam group in 1988.
- India maintains a naval presence in Maldives, at the request of the Maldives, since 2009.

Why Maldives election were important?

- Political Crisis:** The election was conducted in the background of an extraordinary situation in which President Yameen had recently declared a state of emergency and ordered the arrest of two judges to force the Bench to its earlier order that was against his government apart from imprisoning his half-brother and former president Maumoon Gayoom.
- Chinese Support:** The election witnessed the massive use of money and muscle power largely sourced from generous Chinese support. Yameen's five-year tenure saw the tiny island abandoning its long-time

Pro-India approach to a pro-China policy.

- Hence, new elected president can reverse the stand of pro-China policy to pro-India policy and also providing chance to improve bilateral relations for India.

Chance for India

- At the moment, India maintains excellent rapport with opposition parties and enjoys wide approval among Maldivian society for its positive role, particularly in the last one year that witnessed a 45-day emergency in February and widespread repression by the incumbent government.
- Delhi seems to have learned a lesson from its bitter experience during the undeclared blockade in Nepal which caused much damage to its goodwill among the Nepalese population.
- The Sri Lankan experience should remind India that given its economic and strategic heft, China will continue to be an influential

player in the region, including in the Maldives. Rather than getting obsessive about keeping China out of this strategic archipelago of the Indian Ocean, India should work with other powers, particularly the United States (US) and European Union to ensure that the Maldives' transition to democracy remains on smooth course.

- India can move forward with confidence and circumspection to mend the battered bilateral relations with Maldives.

Involvement of China in Maldives

- Two nations signed 12 pacts, including a free trade agreement (FTA) and endorsed China's ambitious Maritime Silk Road initiative. Maldives became the second country in South Asia, after Pakistan, to enter into an FTA with China.
- With China **owning 70 per cent of the country's debt**, the Maldives is now into **serious debt trap**.
- Maldives signed China's Belt and Road Initiative, changed laws to lease out several prime islands to China, and allowed Beijing to build an observation post in **Makunudhoo**, the westernmost atoll, not far from India.
- Chinese companies were given contracts for several infrastructure projects in the Maldives, including the recently inaugurated Sinamale Bridge linking Male to Hulhule Island, and a 1,000-apartment housing project on Hulhumale, a suburb that Beijing built on reclaimed land.

China's new type of colonialism

- China has been funding and implementing large infrastructure projects in countries around the world, in order to help align their interests with its own, gain a political foothold in strategic locations, and export its industrial surpluses.
- By keeping bidding on BRI projects closed and opaque, China often massively inflates their value, leaving countries struggling to repay their debts. Once countries become

ensnared in China's debt traps, they can end up being forced into even worse deals to compensate their creditor for lack of repayment.

- **Sri Lanka** was compelled to transfer the Chinese-built strategic port of Hambantota to China on a 99-year, colonial-style lease, because it could no longer afford its debt payments.

Other similar instances of backlash against China

- With China owning 70 per cent of the country's debt, the **Maldives** is now into serious debt trap. New elected president have asserted that they will review all infrastructure contracts awarded to China that were not commercially viable and lacked in transparency.
- **Malaysia** criticized China for using Malaysia's major infrastructure projects and difficult to repay loans to assert its influence over smaller countries. Malaysian President, who previously cleared the way for Chinese investment in Malaysia, ended his trip to Beijing by canceling Chinese projects worth almost \$23 billion.
- **Myanmar**, hoping to secure needed infrastructure without becoming caught up in a Chinese debt trap, has used the threat of cancellation to negotiate a reduction in the cost of its planned Kyaukpyu port from \$7.3 billion to \$1.3 billion.
- In **Pakistan**, which has long worked with China to contain India and is the largest recipient of BRI financing, the new government has sought to review or renegotiate projects in response to a worsening debt crisis.
- Countries as diverse as **Bangladesh, Hungary, and Tanzania** have also canceled or scaled back BRI projects.
- The president of **Nauru** the world's smallest republic, condemned China's "arrogant" presence in the South Pacific.
- Many countries have started imposing anti-dumping or punitive duties on Chinese goods. And as countries worry about China bending them to its will by luring them into debt traps, it is no longer smooth sailing for the BRI. **United States** escalated trade war

with China.

- The **European Union** had filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) about China's practices of forcing technology transfer as a condition of market access. Under WTO rules, countries may impose tariffs on subsidized goods from overseas that harm domestic industries.

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Russia And China Relations

About the Exercise

- **Nature and scale of the exercise** -The exercise is proclaimed as a **rapprochement** move by Russia to ensure **strategic partnership** between China and Russia. It is the biggest military exercise by Russia since 1981.

Why this exercise- Context

- **US hegemony** - US has recently unveiled its new defense policy that underlines strategic competition with Russia and China, thus bringing the two united against US. They both want to revise the status quo by containing US.
- **Changing Geopolitical order** –China’s rise since last decade and Russia’s continuous attempt to reassert its great power status is a continuous opposition to US led unipolar world. Both perceive the world today as multipolar with various fulcrums of power.

What is aimed to be achieved?

- **Russia’s interests**
 - The growing west sanctions and aggressiveness of NATO in Russia’s neighbor i.e. Eastern Europe is forcing Russia to look for partners to lessen the damage. As Russian economy is military driven Chinese accommodation in it would **strengthen its defenses**.
 - Russia wants to **assert** its national interests and sovereignty through this exercise.
 - Conducting exercise at this large scale in Far East is to ensure continuation of its development trajectory which has been shadowed several times during the past because of disturbances in this region. e.g. Japan’s victory over Russia in 1904-05, Chinese aggression in 1969 etc.
- **China’s Stake**
 - China wants to send a strong message to US against its effort to contain China by playing the Russian card.

- It wants to caution its regional rivals mainly India and Vietnam by its ability of multiple war fighting techniques in different theatres.
- Also, it wanted to learn from Russian army’s vast experience in fighting counter insurgency tactics that Russia used in Syria and Eastern Ukraine.

Effect on India Russia relation

- Russia’s accommodation of China has **long term security and strategic implications** for India.
- India has special and privileged strategic partnership with Russia but recently it has been on a decline. India has long been showing inertia with respect to Russia.
- India has been diversifying its defense and increasing its bonhomie with US and while doing this it has not accommodated Russian concerns thus impacting Indo- Russian relations.
- Russia has started changing its earlier stance with respect to China. It has come a long way in promoting military and trade relations with China e.g. selling of Sukoi 35, armur class submarine etc. Further, it has increased its energy supply to China and has become its largest oil supplier. It has asked India to support OBOR.
- Also, the long maintained embargo on supply of arms to Pakistan has been diluted and it is now favoring Taliban in Afghanistan peace process.
- Russia’s stronger relation with China will directly impact India’s relation with China and Pakistan. India and China has issues regarding boundary, Pakistan, OBOR, South China Sea etc. China can grow more assertive on these issues with Russian support which can weaken India’s strategic interests. Moreover, Russia is India’s biggest defense supplier, nuclear and cyber security provider and a trusted ally. Decline in the relation will impact our security interests too.

What should India Do?

India has to realign its relation with Russia in order to maintain balance of power in the region vis a vis China.

- **Developing strong Economic Partnership** – Trade is the weakest link in India Russia relation. No relation can be carried out without a strong economic interdependence in present age. India Russia bilateral trade is around \$11 billion whereas Russia China trade is \$100 billion. India has to address various trade related issues like visa regime, an alternate route to carry trade amidst US sanctions etc.
- **Limitation of Russia-China relation** – Though Russia and China are building their partnership but both countries has structural differences with respect to their position in the world, level of economic growth, relation with US and their role in Central Asia and Europe. India needs to build on these diverging interests between the two. Russia and India can together work in Central Asia and Eastern Europe as India does not pose threat to Russia’s position in these regions unlike China. Russia has been a great power and still is a major power India needs to help Russia in building that image again.
- **Common interests of the trio** – India, China and Russia should work together as all three prefer multipolar world order, peace in Afghanistan and stability in Central Asia. The most apt platform to realize this is Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Conclusion

India has to bring realism into its relation with Russia in order to preserve its strategic and security interests.

Early-Harvest Package For RCEP

Why in News?

Members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), have finalized an **early-harvest “package”**

with the aim of concluding trade negotiations by the year-end.

Background

- The RCEP, forged during the **2012 ASEAN summit in Cambodia**, was built upon the premise of broadening and deepening engagement among parties and facilitating participation to **promote economic development** in the region.
- But the negotiations which had begun in 2012 **resulted in a stalemate** due to various differences among members.
- In the earlier ministerial meetings, India has made it clear that it doesn't favour an **“early harvest”**, this means **agreements on all the three pillars** of negotiations — goods, services and investment — can be implemented only as a package, not one at a time. So even if a consensus is reached early on goods (which is what most nations want), it cannot be enforced in isolation.
- The trade ministers of 16 RCEP members met in Singapore on 30th August 2018 to review the progress of negotiations.

Potential gains for India from joining RCEP

- **Benefits related to exports:** Apart from various sectors of potential exports growth like processed food, metal manufactures, gems, etc. focusing on trade in services with ASEAN will give India an opportunity to use its competitive strength to become a services export hub for the ASEAN region.
- This assumes even greater importance since our focus has been on products with favourable terms of trade for India, implying that, per-unit foreign exchange realization from these products will be greater than per-unit foreign exchange expenditure on imports of similar products within intra-industry trade pattern.

- **FDI gains-** RCEP will facilitate India's integration into sophisticated regional production networks. The arrangement is expected to harmonise the trade-related rules, investment and competition regimes of India with those of other countries in the group. There would be a boost to inward and outward **foreign direct investment**, particularly **export-oriented FDI**.
- **Connection with global value chain-** ASEAN has been a great region in establishing international production network (IPN). India can gain from such experience and help in integrating micro and small-and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) into regional value chains.
- **Better engagements-** It can deepen integration among the member countries. Given that the possibility of India joining the TPP is still a long way off, being a member of the RCEP will help India prepare itself to better engage with mega FTAs in the future.
 - Regional economic integration is an indispensable component of the Act East policy and joining RCEP has a potential to giving a philip to the policy. If India is out of the RCEP, it would make its **exports price uncompetitive** since other RCEP members would enjoy preferential access. The ensuing export-losses contributes to **foreign exchange shortages** and the subsequent extent of depreciation of the rupee.

Potential Challenges for India from RCEP

- **India's trade deficit-** India has **\$104 billion trade deficit** with RCEP grouping, which is **64% of India's total trade deficit** of 2017-18. India has already agreed to offer **tariff liberalization** on 74% of goods from China, Australia and New Zealand, and it could go up to 86% for other RCEP members. This may further increase the deficit.
- **Threat from Chinese products-** The move may lead to Indian markets being flooded

with more Chinese goods, especially in steel and textile sector which may harm the local industry and distort trade.

- India's SME sector will especially face tough competition from China and it is this sector where future jobs can be created because the top notch manufacturing units in India are going for robotics and automation in a big way.
- **Costly legal suits-** Inclusion of an **Investor State Dispute Settlement mechanism** could lead to India getting involved in **costly legal suits** filed against it by corporates.
- **Issue of strict IPR regime-** India has to be wary of measures that may lead to **losing its right to produce cheap generic drugs** due to the enforcement of a **strict IPR regime** related to patent term extension and **data exclusivity**.

Way forward

- India should **focus on skilling its manpower** as the aging countries of Asia would anyway need skilled professionals from India because of its **demographic advantage**.
- Along with negotiating the much-needed space to its real sectors to gain competitive edge, India will need **second-generation reforms** of its **domestic economic policies**, including those that reform its factor markets, to make its trade more competitive. These reforms will help India better access other markets.
- Do a trade deal which will provide the necessary instruments that will **ensure the economic viability of small farmers and industries**, especially small-scale producers, in the face of relentless import competition.
- The government must take into account the deeper **strategic pitfalls of slowing down India's RCEP**
- **engagement, i.e.,** giving China further space in the regional trade and security architecture.

Unrealized Potential Of South Asian Trade

Why in News?

Recently World Bank has released a report called A Glass Half Full: The Promise of Regional Trade in South Asia.

Trends in trade in South Asia

- **Intra-regional trade-** It accounts for a little more than 5 percent of South Asia's total trade while it accounts for 50 percent of total trade in East Asia and the Pacific and 22 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Intra-regional trade part of regional GDP-** The relatively large economies of South Asia just have only 1% of its trade as GDP as against 2.6 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa and about 11 percent in East Asia and the Pacific.
- **Trade Restrictiveness-** According to global trade data, trade restrictiveness index is 2 to 9 times higher for imports from South Asia than rest of the world in case of India, Nepal, Srilanka and Pakistan.
- **Disproportionate cost of trade-** The South Asian regional trading cost is 20% higher than ASEAN.

Causes of Skewed Trend

- **Non-functional SAFTA**
 - **Para tariffs** – These are duties levied on imports but not on domestic production. These Para tariffs are kept out of SAFTA thus leads to artificial high tariffs. E.g. simple average tariff in Bangladesh in fiscal year 2016/17 almost doubles, from 13.3 percent to 25.6 percent due to Para tariffs.
 - **Sensitive List** - This list comprises goods that are exempted from tariff rationalization. Almost 35 percent of the value of intraregional trade in South Asia is subject to sensitive list tariffs. There is no provision in SAFTA to phase out this list.
- **Non-Tariff Measures** - Non-tariff barriers (NTBs) in form of sanitary, labor, phyto-sanitary etc. are abnormally high for specific products and market combinations in South

Asia. It varies from over 75 percent to over 2000 percent. E.g. port restrictions are imposed by several countries in the region. For instance, Pakistan allows only 138 items to be imported from India over the Attari–Wagah land route, the only land port between the two countries. This erodes market access opportunities. This is further accentuated by information asymmetries with respect to different forms of non-tariff barriers across the region.

- **Lack of Border infrastructure and procedural delays-** There is poor transportation and logistics infrastructure across south Asian borders. Inefficient customs and border procedures makes the trade slow thereby increasing the cost of trade. e.g. cumbersome product registration and requisite authorization processes for pharma import.
- **Poor Regional Connectivity-** There is dearth of air, land and water transportation in the region. The service trade is hugely restricted due to unfriendly visa regimes. It restricts FDI and development of regional value chains.

- **Lack of normal trade between India and Pakistan-** The complex trade relation between India and Pakistan has heavily impacted South Asian trade. The two countries account for 88% of the region's GDP. The trade potential is of \$37 billion which today stands at \$2 billion only.
- **Trust Deficit-** There is security dilemma in the South Asian region due to large size of India vis-à-vis other countries in the region. This fear and insecurity give rise to mistrust which is perpetuated further by a lack of people-to-people interactions and partnerships.

What needs to be done?

- **Restructuring of SAFTA** - Eliminate SAFTA's sensitive list in 10 years and for starters the list can be narrowed down as of

now. Also, a panel of experts should be formed to decide on elimination of Para tariffs reduction and accelerate removal of Para tariffs on non-sensitive list.

- **Non-Tariff Barrier reduction-** NTB can be addressed by filling the information gaps, developing border infrastructure and simplifying the administrative procedures. An awareness program across the region and a bilateral dispute resolution mechanism is essential. Introduction of electronic data interchange, risk management systems, and single windows at borders is the need of the hour.
- **Enhance Regional Connectivity** – Connectivity is main constituent of trade relations. Road, rail and air connectivity will induce trade. Bilateral air service policies and simplified Visa regimes should be followed. E.g. success of India Sri Lanka air service agreement.
- **Building Trust-** Trust induces trade and trade results into peace and prosperity. The border haats at India Bangladesh border is a case in point. It has helped in developing social capital between both the countries.

Benefits of enhanced trade

- **Socio economic conditions** - South Asian region suffers from similar problems like poverty, hunger, malnutrition, unemployment, gender discrimination etc. All countries in the region will gain from regional trade as it will help in lowering socioeconomic disparities.
- **Gains to various stakeholders-** Consumers gain from access to food products, services, and consumer goods. Producers and exporters gain from greater access to inputs, investment, and production networks. Firms gain from expanding market access in goods and services.
- **Increased Access to landlocked countries and sub regions** - Landlocked countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal, and isolated sub regions, such as Northeast India and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and the Federally-Administered Tribal Areas in Pakistan will benefit as cost of

transportation and logistics will come down. It will in turn increase the access.

India -Pakistan trade relations- A recipe for peace

Current Status-Slow progress in trade with declining trend-

- Though trade increased by 3.5 times between 2000-2005 but it was slow. Recently it fell in 2017 to \$2.40 billion from \$2.70 billion in 2013-2014.
- There has been **minimal increase in Indian exports** after Pakistan's change in import policy in 2012. In 2016-2017 new exports were only 12% of India's total export to Pakistan.
- In absence of full trade relations there is rampant **illegal trade** routed through West Asia and Nepal.
- **Indirect trade** via UAE is 10 times the normal bilateral trade.

Required Changes

- **Development of Regional Value chains** in textile, pharma and sports goods. Develop links between textile hubs i.e. Lahore and Surat etc.
- **Normalization of trading relations** i.e. Non-discriminatory in nature thereby complying with the WTO rules.
- **Narrowing the sensitive list** on both sides and reducing non- tariff barriers.
- **Business level dialogue-**It includes building social capital in trading community; develop business to business linkages through national chambers and implementing SAARC visa regime.

National Digital Communications Policy-2018

- **Context:** The Union Cabinet has approved the National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018) and re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the “Digital Communications Commission”.

Impact:

- The NDCP-2018 envisions supporting India’s transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communications needs of citizens and enterprises by establishment of a ubiquitous, resilient and affordable digital communications infrastructure and services.
- The ‘Customer focused’ and ‘application driven’ NDCP-2018 shall lead to new ideas and innovations, after the launch of advanced technology such as 5G, IOT, M2M, etc. which shall govern the telecom sector of India.

The key objectives of the policy are:

- Broadband for all.
- Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector.
- Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India’s GDP from ~ 6% in 2017.
- Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017.
- Enhancing India’s contribution to Global Value Chains.
- Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.
- These objectives are to be achieved by 2022.

The policy aims to:

- Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen.

- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022.
- Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas.
- Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector.
- Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill.
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices.
- Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals.
- Facilitate India’s effective participation in the global digital economy.
- Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe.
- Secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

The policy advocates:

- Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority.
- Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects.
- Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines.
- Removal of barriers to approvals.
- Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks.

Background:

- As the present world has entered the era of modern technological advancements in the Telecom Sector such as 5G, IoT, M2M etc., a need was being felt to introduce a ‘customer focused’ and ‘application driven’ policy for the Indian

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Telecom Sector, which can form the main pillar of Digital India by addressing emerging opportunities for expanding not only the availability of telecom services but also telecom based services.

- Accordingly, the new National Digital Communications Policy – 2018 has been formulated, in place of the existing National Telecom Policy-2012, to cater to the modern needs of the digital communications sector of India.

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Ordinance To Supercede Medical Council Of India

- **Context:** An ordinance seeking to replace the existing body running the Medical Council of India or MCI with a government-appointed committee has been signed by President Ram Nath Kovind.
- The committee or the ‘Board of Governors’ has now been appointed by the government in “supersession of the MCI”. The Board members include persons of eminence in the medical field.

Background:

- Pending parliament’s approval to the bill, the government has chosen to go for the ordinance since the term of the existing committee running the MCI ends in November.
- A bill to replace the MCI with a National Medical Commission (NMC) has already been presented in parliament. A parliamentary standing committee has also made its recommendations, but due to time factor, the bill “has gone into an area of uncertainty.”

National Medical Commission Bill:

- The bill provides for the constitution of **four autonomous boards** entrusted with conducting undergraduate and postgraduate education, assessment and accreditation of medical institutions and registration of practitioners under the National Medical Commission.
- According to the draft bill, **the commission will have government nominated chairman and members**, and the board members will be selected by a search committee under the Cabinet Secretary. There will five elected and 12 ex-officio members in the commission.
- As per the Bill, the government, under the National Medical Commission (NMC), can dictate guidelines for fees

up to 40% of seats in private medical colleges. This is aimed at giving students relief from the exorbitant fees charged by these colleges and is a standout feature of the bill.

- The bill also has **a provision for a common entrance exam and licentiate (exit) exam** that medical graduates have to pass before practising or pursuing PG courses. For MBBS, students have to clear NEET, and before they step into practice, they must pass the exit exam.
- Recognised medical institutions don’t need the regulator’s permission to add more seats or start PG course. This mechanism to reduce the discretionary powers of the regulator.
- Earlier, medical colleges required the MCI’s approval for establishment, recognition, renewal of the yearly permission or recognition of degrees, and even increase the number of students they admitted. Under the new bill, the powers of the regulator are reduced to establishment and recognition. This means less red tape, but also less scrutiny of medical colleges.

Background:

- The Medical Council of India was first established in 1934 under the Indian Medical Council Act, 1933. This Act was repealed and replaced with a new Act in 1956. Under the 1956 Act, the objectives of MCI include:
 - Maintenance of standards in medical education through curriculum guidelines, inspections and permissions to start colleges, courses or increasing number of seats.
 - Recognition of medical qualifications.
 - Registration of doctors and maintenance of the All India Medical Register. Regulation of the

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medical profession by prescribing a code of conduct and taking action against erring doctors.

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SECTION 497 OF IPC

Differing viewpoints

Ahead of a Constitutional Bench hearing on Section 497, the Centre has objected to the dropping of adultery as an offence

WHAT IS SECTION 497?

It mandates that if a man has sexual intercourse with another's wife without the husband's consent or connivance, he is guilty of the offence of adultery and should be punished



CENTRE'S VIEW

Section 497 supports, safeguards and protects the institution of marriage

BENCH'S VIEW

The provision creates a dent in the individual, independent identity of a woman when the emphasis is laid on the connivance or consent of the husband

- **Context:** The Supreme Court has declared *Section 497 of the Indian Penal Code as unconstitutional* saying that the penal provision on adultery was manifestly arbitrary and dents the individuality of women.

Important observations made by the Supreme Court:

- Adultery might not cause of an unhappy marriage, but it could be result of an unhappy marriage.
- In case of adultery, criminal law expects people to be loyal which is a command which gets into the realm of privacy.
- Adultery can be ground for civil issues including dissolution of marriage but it cannot be a criminal offence.
- Any provision treating woman with inequality is not Constitutional.
- Mere adultery can't be a crime, unless it attracts the scope of Section 306 (abatement to suicide) of the IPC.

Why strike it down?

Section 497 perpetuates subordinate status of women, denies dignity, sexual autonomy, and is based on gender stereotypes. Section 497 based on women as chattel, seeks to control sexuality of woman, hits the autonomy and dignity of woman. Besides, Section 497 perpetrates subordinate nature of woman in a marriage.

- Therefore, it should be struck down for

violation of Articles 14, 21.

Here are the problems with Section 497 which the petitioners wanted to be addressed:

- The petitioners want the adultery law to be made gender neutral. This is because the law calls for the man to be punished in case of adultery, but no action is suggested for the woman.
- As per Section 497, a woman whose husband has had sexual intercourse with another woman cannot file a complaint because the law makes no such provision for her.
- Moreover, the adultery law in IPC reduces women to an object because no consent of the married woman is required for a man to have sexual intercourse with her. As per Section 497, if the woman's husband agrees, the act is not a crime. This is the reason many have called this law an anti-women law.

What is Section 497?

- Section 497 of the 158-year-old IPC says, "Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting to the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery, and shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to five years, or with fine, or with both. In such case the wife shall not be punishable as an abettor."

Past Supreme Court judgements on adultery:

- The adultery law had come up in court thrice in the past — in 1954, in 1985, and in 1988.
 - In 1954, the SC rejected that Section 497 violated the right to equality.
 - In 1985, it said that women didn't

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need to be included in the law as a party which can make complaints.

- In 1988, the Supreme Court said that the adultery law was a “shield rather than a sword”.

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Draft Charter Of Patients’ Rights

- **Context:** The draft *Charter of Patients’ Rights, prepared by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)*, has been released. The Ministry plans to implement the Charter of Patients’ Rights through State governments for provision of proper health care by clinical establishments.

Highlights of the draft:

- **The draft charter includes 17 rights** with description, draws upon all relevant provisions, inspired by international charters and guided by national level provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document.
- **The proposed Charter draws upon all the existing relevant provisions**, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document, thereby making them publicly known in a coherent manner.
- There is an expectation that this document will act as a guidance document for the **Centre and state governments to formulate concrete mechanisms** so that patient’s rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set-up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law.

The charter also prescribes certain responsibilities that the patient must adhere to.

- **These include:** providing all required information to their doctor, without concealing relevant facts, so as to ensure a correct diagnosis and treatment.
- **Patients are also expected to follow all instructions** regarding appointment time, co-operate with hospital staff and fellow patients, avoid creating disturbance to other patients, and maintain cleanliness in the hospital.
- **Patients should respect the dignity of**

the doctor and other hospital staff. Whatever the grievance may be, patient or caregivers should not resort to violence in any form.

- **The patients should also take responsibility for their actions** based on choices made regarding treatment options and in case they refuse treatment.

Significance of the charter:

- If the draft Charter of Patients’ Rights released by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare comes into force, patients will not just have the right to emergency medical care and informed consent, but will also have the right to non-discrimination, seek a second opinion and choose alternative treatment options, if available.

Way ahead:

- Once adopted, the charter will have to be prominently displayed at all hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and diagnostic laboratories. Further, the Centre and state governments need to set-up a grievance redressal mechanism for patients.
- This charter is expected to act as a guidance document for the Union Government and State Governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that Patients’ Rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law. The onus is now on the States to follow the charter effectively.

Need for a charter on this:

- Right to non-discrimination is an important right. Every patient has the right to receive treatment without any discrimination based on his or her illnesses or conditions, including HIV

status or other health condition, religion, caste, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

- The charter assumes significance as India does not have a dedicated regulator like other countries. Existing regulations in the interest of patients and governing healthcare delivery systems are still on the anvil.

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Fixed Dose Combination (FDC) Drugs

- **Context:** The government has prohibited the manufacture, sale or distribution of 328 fixed dose combination (FDC) drugs for human use with immediate effect.
- The health ministry's ban on FDCs included painkillers, anti-diabetic, respiratory and gastro-intestinal medicines, covering 6,000 brands.

- Given that there is not much data available on drug-drug interaction and side-effects in FDC, India's system for collecting data for problematic drug reactions is weak. When multiple drugs from the same therapeutic group, like antibiotics, are clubbed together, it may lead to resistance.
- A lot of FDCs sold in India are unapproved, given the lack of coordination between state and central regulators. A study published in the journal of Public Library of Science (PLOS) in May found that over 70% of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) combinations, which are used as painkillers, were being marketed in India without central government approval.

What necessitated this?

- The expert panel probing the efficacy of 349 banned FDCs, after considering these drugs “irrational”, cited safety issues and lack of therapeutic justification, and recommended continuing the ban. It also found that many FDCs were formulated without due diligence, with dosing mismatches that could result in toxicity.

What are FDCs?

- An FDC is a cocktail of two or more active drug ingredients in a fixed ratio of doses. According to US healthcare provider IMS Health, almost half the drugs sold in India in 2014 were FDC, making it a world leader in combination drugs.

Why are they popular in India?

- FDCs' popularity in India is due to advantages such as increased efficacy, better compliance, reduced cost and simpler logistics of distribution.
- FDCs have shown to be particularly useful in the treatment of infectious diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis, where giving multiple antimicrobial agents is the norm. FDCs are also useful for chronic conditions especially, when multiple disorders co-exist.

Is there a flipside to FDCs?

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National Aids Control Organization (NACO)



Context: The **National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO)** has released the report HIV Estimations 2017.

Key facts:

- The HIV Estimations 2017 is the 14th round in the series of HIV Estimations under National AIDS Control Programme (NACP).
- NACO undertakes HIV estimations biennially in collaboration with the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) – National Institute of Medical Statistics (NIMS).
- The first round of HIV estimation in India was done in 1998, while the last round was done in 2015.

Highlights of the report:

- As per the report, in 2017, India had around 21.40 lakh people living with HIV (PLHIV) with adult prevalence of 0.22%.
- Around 87.58 thousand new HIV infections and 69.11 thousand AIDS related deaths happened in 2017 while around 22,675 mothers needed Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) for prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV.
- HIV Estimations 2017 corroborate the previous rounds in terms of

characteristic of the HIV epidemic in India i.e. national prevalence and incidence remains low, but the epidemic is high in some geographical regions and population group.

- The rate of decline in annual new HIV infections has been relatively slower in recent years.
- The report concludes that, overall, the impact of the programme has been significant with more than 80% decline in estimated new infection from peak of epidemic in 1995. Similarly, estimated AIDS related death declined by 71% since its peak in 2005.

Need for data on this:

- **The objective of HIV Estimations** is to provide updated information on the status of HIV epidemic in India at national and State/UT level. Estimations of adult HIV prevalence, annual new infections (HIV incidence), AIDS-related mortality and prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) needs are produced as outcomes of HIV estimations. The modelled estimates are needed because there is no direct reliable way of measuring these core indicators which are used to track the epidemic and monitor and evaluate the response in countries around the world.

Way ahead:

- The report highlights the significant achievement of National AIDS response on prevention as well as on treatment front but has also indicated that there is no place for complacency as country move forward on ambitious goal of attaining the ‘End of AIDS’ by 2030.

About National AIDS Control Organization:

- It is a division of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare that provides leadership to HIV/AIDS control

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programme in India through 35 HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control Societies.

- In 1986, following the detection of the first AIDS case in the country, the National AIDS Committee was constituted in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.
- As the epidemic spread, need was felt for a nationwide programme and an organization to steer the programme. In 1992 India's first National AIDS Control Programme (1992-1999) was launched, and National AIDS Control Organization (NACO) was constituted to implement the programme.

Severe Acute Malnutrition

- **Context:** The National Technical Board on Nutrition (NTBN) has approved guidelines proposed by WCD Ministry for severe acute malnutrition. The measures are part of the community-based health management of children suffering from SAM.

Guidelines:

- Severely malnourished children must be fed ***freshly cooked food*** prepared from locally available cereals, pulses and vegetables. This is to be distributed by anganwadi centres, as part of the country's first-ever guidelines for nutritional management of children suffering from severe acute malnutrition (SAM).
- The guidelines outline the ***role of anganwadi workers and auxiliary nurse midwives (ANMs)*** in identifying severely wasted children. According to the recommendations, anganwadi workers have to provide modified morning snacks, hot cooked meals and take home ration for SAM children.
- They have to ***segregate those with oedema or medical complications*** and sending them to the nearest health facility or nutrition rehabilitation centres. The remaining children are enrolled into ***“community based management”***. This includes provision of nutrition, continuous monitoring of growth, administration of antibiotics and micro-nutrients as well as counselling sessions and imparting of nutrition and health education.
- The morning snacks and hot-cooked meals, which are served at anganwadis to children between the age of three to six years, should be “prepared freshly and served at the centralised kitchen/anganwadi centres. Locally available cereals, pulses, green leafy vegetables

and tubers, vitamin C rich fruits, as well as fresh milk and 3-4 eggs every week” have also been prescribed.

- Importantly, the government has also revised the ***method to be used to measure wasting and advised calculating weight based on the height of children*** instead of the mid-upper arm circumference.

What necessitated this?

- The government had, till now, only put in place guidelines for the hospitalization of severely wasted children who develop medical complications.

What is severe acute malnutrition?

- Severe acute malnutrition is the most extreme and visible form of undernutrition. Its face is a child – frail and skeletal – who requires urgent treatment to survive.
 - Children with severe acute malnutrition have very low weight for their height and severe muscle wasting. They may also have nutritional oedema – characterized by swollen feet, face and limbs. About two thirds of these children live in Asia and almost one third live in Africa.
 - Severe acute malnutrition is a major cause of death in children under 5, and its prevention and treatment are critical to child survival and development.
 - Across the globe, an estimated 16 million children under the age of 5 are affected by severe acute malnutrition. This number is staggering – most importantly, because children with severe acute malnutrition are nine times more likely to die than well-nourished children. These deaths are the direct

result of malnutrition itself, as well as the indirect result of childhood illnesses like diarrhoea and pneumonia that malnourished children are too weak to survive.

- Severe acute malnutrition can increase dramatically in emergencies. But despite what we see in the headlines, the majority of cases occur in developing countries not affected by emergencies. These settings are plagued by chronic poverty, lack of education, poor hygiene, limited access to food and poor diets. The result is significant barriers to sustainable development in these nations.

#Looreview Campaign

- **Context:** The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, under the aegis of Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban has partnered with Google to launch the Loo Review campaign.

campaign will press upon the Urban Local Bodies to take proactive steps to improve public toilet facilities across the country.

About the Loo Review campaign:

- It is aimed to encourage all local guides in India to rate and review public toilets on Google Maps.
- This campaign will allow all citizens to locate public toilets in their cities on Google Maps, Search and the Assistant and also provide feedback on the same.
- Local Guides are people who share reviews, photos, and knowledge on Google Maps to help people explore the world.

Significance:

- The joint campaign to be run throughout October and November 2018 is an effort to increase the awareness and ease of locating public toilets across India. 500+ cities in India with more than 30,000 toilets with the name of “SBM Toilet” are currently live on Google Maps.
 - One of the objectives of the SBM- U is to provide sanitation coverage through public toilet facilities across cities in India for achieving Open Defecation Free (ODF) status. There is now a need to ensure that the ODF status is sustained through continuous usage and proper maintenance of public toilets. The ‘Public toilets near me’ feature will benefit citizens, particularly women and senior citizens, who often find it difficult to find access to clean toilets in the public space.
 - The feedback provide by local guides through the Loo Review

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E-Aarogyabharati (E-VBAB) Network Project

- **Context:** Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Telecommunications Consultants India Ltd (TCIL) have signed an Agreement for the **implementation of e-VidyaBharati and e-AarogyaBharati (e-VBAB) Network Project**. The project is hailed as a digital bridge of knowledge and health between India and Africa.

web-based technology, various educational institutions and hospitals in India and the participating African countries.

The e-VBAB Network Project will be completely funded by the Government of India for its entire duration and will be open for participation to all our partner countries in Africa. The Project will be another important milestone in our development partnership with Africa.

About e- VBAB Network project:

- E-VBAB Network Project is primarily **a technological upgrade and extension of the Pan-African e-Network Project (Phase I)** which was implemented in 48 partner countries across Africa from 2009 till 2017. The Phase 1 of the Project successfully imparted tele-education and tele-medicine by linking educational institutions and hospitals in India with those from the participating African countries.
- Over the 5 years project duration, e-VBAB Network Project will **provide free tele-education courses in various academic disciplines** to 4000 students every year from African countries. The Project will also be utilized for providing free Continuing Medical Education (1000 every year) to African doctors/nurses/para-medical staff. Further, Indian doctors, through this project will provide free medical consultancy to those African doctors who seek such consultancy.
- In order to operationalise the e-VBAB Network Project, **a Data Centre and Disaster Recovery Centre will be established in India** along with Learning Centres in various African countries which decide to be part of the Project. There will be two separate platforms for e-VidyaBharati (tele-education) and e-AarogyaBharati (tele-medicine) which will link, through a

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‘Exporting Corruption Report’

Context: The 2018 edition of the ‘*Exporting Corruption Report*’ has been released by anti-corruption organisation Transparency International. The classification of enforcement is based on the convention countries’ enforcement actions in the period 2014-2017.

Highlights of the report:

- In this 2018 report, China, Hong Kong, India and Singapore — all with 2% or more of world exports, but not parties to the OECD (Anti-Bribery) Convention – are classified for the first time and all fall into the lowest level (little or no enforcement).
- This poor performance argues for these countries’ accession to the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention. They are, however, parties to the UN Convention against Corruption, which also calls for enforcement against foreign bribery. Transparency International urges them to join the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention.

Performance of India:

- India is among four countries with “no or little enforcement” mechanism to check foreign bribery.
- The report asks India to criminalise foreign bribery and introduce effective legislation to protect whistleblowers in the private sector.

The report notes that:

- The Indian government does not publish statistics on its foreign bribery enforcement and does not disclose such statistics on request.
- The authorities do not disclose any information about unpublished cases related to bribery of foreign public officials by Indians.
- India is also not clear whether the governmental enforcement and

investigative agencies collect information related to foreign bribery, separately or not.

- There are also inadequacies in implementation of Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) Treaty. The translation of documents into foreign languages is a major factor slowing down the MLA process.

Challenges ahead:

- As foreign bribery is not yet criminalised in India, the adequacy of the enforcement system in relation to this specific offence cannot be assessed. However, certain shortcomings in the enforcement system, in particular those evident from current enforcement of domestic corruption, are also a concern for foreign bribery enforcement.
- In particular, while the Indian Penal Code and Prevention of Corruption Act prescribe criminal and civil liability for domestic corruption, the reality is that actions taken against the perpetrators have been few.

Concerns expressed by the report:

- If China, Hong Kong, India and Singapore do not enforce hard-won international standards for conducting business, competitors from countries that do enforce will find themselves disadvantaged.
- This may lead to a reduction in enforcement, destabilising the global marketplace. The real losers will be the global economy and people in countries affected by exported corruption, especially grand corruption.

OECD Anti-Bribery Convention:

- The OECD Anti-Bribery Convention was adopted in 1997 to address the supply side of international corruption.
 - Its aim is to create a level playing

field between OECD countries by subjecting countries to the same criminal standards. Before the OECD Convention, the US was the only OECD country that prohibited its companies from bribing foreign officials. The OECD Convention does not address private (business-to-business) bribery.

- There are now 44 parties to the convention, 36 of them members of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development).

Highlights:

- **Criminalisation:** Prohibits the bribery of foreign officials.
- **Enforcement:** Includes an obligation to prosecute companies suspected of bribing public officials abroad.
- **Cooperation:** Encourages enhanced collaboration between the law enforcement agencies of signatory countries.
- **Tax Deductions:** Bans the tax deductibility of bribes to foreign public officials.
- **Whistleblowing:** Recommends the establishment of effective whistleblowing mechanisms.
- **Monitoring:** The OECD carries out rigorous peer-review examinations monitoring the level of implementation of the OECD Convention and OECD recommendations.

‘E-SAHAJ’ PORTAL

- **Context:** The Government has launched an online ‘e-Sahaj’ portal for grant of Security Clearance. The portal will facilitate an applicant to submit application online and also to view the status of his application from time to time.

reduced further. In 2016, there were 209 cases which were over 6 months old; in 2017, this came down to 154 cases and further down to 47 cases in 2018.

About Security clearances:

- MHA is the nodal Ministry for security clearances in certain sensitive sectors before issue of licence/permit, permission, contract etc, to companies/bidders/individuals by the administrative Ministry.
- The objective of national security clearance is to evaluate potential security threats, including economic threats, and provide risk assessment before clearing investment and project proposals in key sectors.
- The aim is to strike a healthy balance between meeting the imperatives of national security and facilitating ease of doing business and promoting investment in the country.

Significance of the portal:

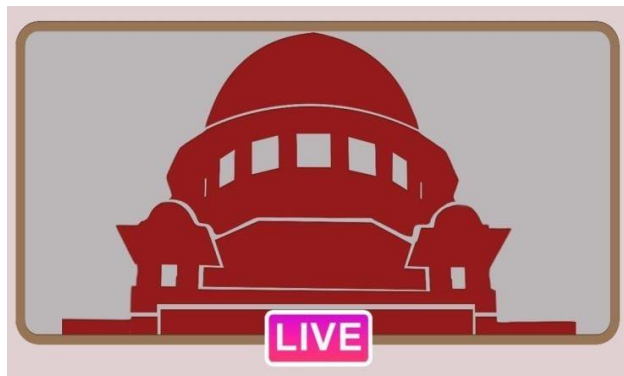
- With the introduction of online portal, the process has become standardized, resulting in a process which will be faster, transparent and easy to monitor. Various functionaries can access the application and documents online and take timely decisions.

Background:

MHA has cleared about 1,100 cases of security clearance in the past one year. Although the given timeline is 90 days, MHA strives to decide Security Clearance cases in 60 days (average time per case in 2018 is 53 days), which is being

Supreme Court Allows Live Streaming Of Cases

Context: Ushering in more transparency in the judiciary's work, the Supreme Court has given its nod to **live-streaming of court proceedings**, saying this will bring more accountability and enhance the rule of law.



Pilot project:

- As per the court's order, the project must be implemented in a progressive, structured and phased manner, with certain safeguards to ensure that the purpose of live-streaming of proceedings is achieved holistically and that it does not interfere with the administration of justice or the dignity and majesty of the court hearing the matter and/or impinge upon any rights of the litigants or witnesses.
 - **As a pilot project, only cases of constitutional and national importance** being argued for final hearing before the Constitution Bench be live-streamed initially. For this, it said, permission of the court concerned will have to be sought in writing in advance.
 - **Consent of parties to the proceedings must be insisted upon**, and if there is no unanimity between them, the court concerned can take the appropriate decision in the matter. The court concerned will also have the power to revoke permission at any stage of the proceedings.

- **There must be a reasonable time-delay** (say 10 minutes) between the live court proceedings and the broadcast, in order to ensure that any information which ought not to be shown, as directed by the court, can be edited from being broadcast.
- Till a full-fledged module and mechanism for live-streaming of the proceedings of the Supreme Court over the internet is evolved, it can be live-streamed in designated areas within the court via intranet.

What necessitated this?

- Although courts in India are ordinarily open to all members of the public, sometimes they are denied the opportunity to witness the proceedings due to logistical issues and infrastructure restrictions. By providing 'virtual' access of live court proceedings to one and all, **it will effectuate the right of access to justice or right to open justice and public trial, right to know the developments of law and including the right of justice at the doorstep of the litigants.**
- **It will "reduce the public's reliance on second-hand narratives** to obtain information about important judgments of the court and the course of judicial hearings". Society will be able to view court proceedings first-hand and form reasoned and educated opinions about the functioning of courts. **This will help reduce misinformation and misunderstanding about the judicial process.**

Significance of the move:

- This is a giant step by the Supreme Court to move towards a regime of transparency.
 - **Live streaming will deal head on with the problem of distance.** Given

that the court is located in New Delhi, many people cannot afford to be present physically in Supreme Court to follow the arguments, even if the case directly affects them in some way. In fact, even litigants are often unable to travel to court because of the cost and distance involved, leaving it entirely to their lawyers to run the case.

- A live telecast of proceedings also has the potential to **reduce unwarranted delays** in the cases caused by the occasionally cavalier attitude of lawyers. With the client's eye firmly on them, lawyers are likely to expedite cases. Further, this will provide an opportunity to young lawyers to showcase their talents to the world and has the potential to break the stranglehold of a select few over the legal profession.
- Live streaming could act as a welcome **check on the judiciary**. With the public watching, there is every chance that there will be a reduction in the sometimes unnecessary oral comments that cause much controversy but have no judicial bearing.

What next?

- Supreme Court Rules, 2013, will have to suitably amended to provide for the regulatory framework to incorporate the changes.
- Besides, live telecast comes with some drawbacks. As seen in the Parliament, there is a tendency to grandstand among lawmakers, who want to show their electorate that they are indeed working hard. The court has to make sure proceedings are unaffected by the introduction of a new technology.

PRAGATI

- **Context:** The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, recently chaired his 29th interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for **Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation**.

About PRAGATI:

- PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man's grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

Unique features:

- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.
- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, on-going Programmes and pending Projects.
- The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project

Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.

- The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

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Police Forces In 6 UTS Merged

Context: The Ministry of Home Affairs has notified the National Capital Territory of Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Chandigarh (Police Service) Rules 2018 amalgamating police forces in six Union Territories.

serving vested interests in their home services and ensure that they don't become complacent.

Changes:

- The rules effectively mean that officers who are not direct IPS recruits could be posted in any of the six UTs and will be at the disposal of the Ministry.
- There are around 533 posts that will be covered under the new rules; they include assistant commissioners of police and deputy superintendent of police.
- The Rules will come into effect upon the promotion or direct recruitment of Inspectors to the post of ACP. Half of the posts at the ACP rank will be filled through direct recruitment and the other half through promotion. Earlier these postings were decided by the respective UT administrators.
- The post/grade/service eligible for induction into the Entry Grade for the new service, according to the notification, would include personnel currently employed as inspectors in the Delhi Police, A&N Islands Police, Lakshadweep Police, Daman & Diu Police, Dadra and Nagar Haveli Police and Chandigarh Police.

Significance:

- This initiative is being viewed as the first step towards the creation of a central police cadre allowing for the posting of police personnel across the country irrespective of the force they are initially inducted into.
- A central pool allowing inter-transferability would also ensure that local police personnel do not fall prey to

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Indus Water Treaty

INDUS WATER TREATY SEP, 1960



On April 1, 1948, India stopped the supply of water to Pakistan from every canal flowing from India to Pakistan. Pakistan protested and India finally agreed on an interim agreement on May 4, 1948. This agreement was not a permanent solution; therefore, Pakistan approached the World Bank in 1952 finally in Ayub Khan's regime that an agreement was signed between India and Pakistan in September 1960.

- **Context:** India and Pakistan have agreed to undertake the *Indus Waters Treaty mandated tours by their Commissioners in the Indus basin on both sides* to resolve issues on the various hydroelectric projects, including the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The recently concluded deliberations were held to further strengthen the role of the *Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)* for matters under the 1960 Treaty.

About the treaty:

- Signed in 1960 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then Pakistan President Ayub Khan, *the treaty allocates 80% of water from the six-river Indus water system to Pakistan.*
- Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum from the Indus water system that flows from India to Pakistan. The Indus river basin spans parts of 4 countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and China) in an area that is more than 30% arid.
- *Under the treaty, control over six north Indian rivers were divided between the two countries. India got control over the rivers Beas, Ravi and Sutlej*

whereas Pakistan got control over Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.

- This is a unique treaty involving *a third party. It was brokered by the World Bank.*
- A *Permanent Indus Commission* was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty. The Commission solves disputes arising over water sharing.
- The Treaty also provides *arbitration mechanism* to solve disputes amicably.

Mechanism for cooperation:

- The treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of the rivers. However, there have been disagreements and differences between India and Pakistan over the treaty.
- The water commissioners of Pakistan and India were required to meet twice a year and arrange technical visits to projects' sites and critical river head works, but Pakistan had been facing a lot of problems in timely meetings and visits.

Kartarpur Sahib Pilgrim Corridor

- **Context:** Citing the strong sentiments Sikhs attach to the Kartarpur Sahib gurdwara in Pakistan, Punjab Minister Navjot Singh Sidhu has written to the Centre, asking for steps to realise a “Kartarpur Sahib corridor” for pilgrims.

What’s the issue?

- The visa wrangles have deprived numerous pilgrims of reaching this gurdwara over the years. The rift between the two neighbours, India and Pakistan, grew so much over the years that even visiting the historical gurdwaras at will became a problem.

The shrine:

- The gurdwara in Kartarpur stands on the bank of the Ravi, about 120 km northeast of Lahore. It was here that Guru Nanak assembled a Sikh community and lived for 18 years until his death in 1539.
- The shrine is visible from the Indian side, as Pakistani authorities generally trim the elephant grass that would otherwise obstruct the view. Indian Sikhs gather in large numbers for darshan from the Indian side, and binoculars are installed at Gurdwara Dera Baba Nanak.

Access to gurdwaras in Pakistan:

- Sikh jathas from India travel to Pakistan on four occasions every year — for Baisakhi, the martyrdom day of Guru Arjan Dev, the death anniversary of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and the birthday of Guru Nanak Dev.
- These Indian pilgrims are given access to all gurdwaras in Pakistan.

Complex issue:

- The “corridor” would bring Pak infrastructure right up to the Indian

border. Over the past year, gurdwaras in Pakistan have been used for a pro-Khalistan campaign. Earlier this year, a gurdwara displayed posters and distributed pamphlets for the so-called “Sikh Referendum 2020”, and Pakistan denied permission to the Indian envoy and diplomats to visit it.

- Pakistan’s intent also remains suspect, and Indian officials are wary of the corridor being misused by both state and non-state actors in that country.

World Hindu Congress (WHC)

- **Context:** The second World Hindu Congress is being held in Chicago, Illinois, U.S.
- It is inspired by the Hindu principle, *Sumantrite Suvikrante* or THINK COLLECTIVELY, ACHIEVE VALIANTLY.
- On the eve of the 125th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s historic address to the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, Hindus from around the world and of all backgrounds are invited to actively participate.

About WHC:

- The World Hindu Congress (WHC) is *a global platform for Hindus to connect, share ideas, inspire one another, and impact the common good*. It offers Hindus an opportunity to introspect towards improvement and tap into our collective resources to seek tangible solutions to the most pressing issues of our age.
 - *Held once every four years, WHC’s seven parallel conferences* showcase how the values, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit of the global Hindu community find expression in a variety of spheres, including economic, education, media, organizational, and political, as well as the unique leadership and contributions of Hindu women and youth.
 - WHC also serves as a platform to address critical issues impacting Hindus worldwide, including human rights, discrimination, and cultural assaults.

intermittently. But the outcomes of resulting resolutions and implementation of action plans have been sporadic at best. Many of these events never covered dimensions critically important to Hindus such as education, media, politics, and economy with regularity. Moreover, not many of these events were cross-dimensional in nature.

- Hindus have both spiritual and secular needs. Unfortunately, many of the secular needs and challenges have been left for others to handle. The WHC seeks to fill in this very important gap.
- The World Hindu Congress is an informal organization organized by *World Hindu Foundation*. But it is dependent on the efforts of volunteers representing Hindu organizations from around the world. Each Congress will be held in a different part of the world. All Hindu organizations, associations, and institutions are encouraged to participate and invited to become partners in World Hindu Congress.

Why World Hindu Congress?

- In the past, Hindus have held a number of forums and conferences

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International Day For The Preservation Of The Ozone Layer

- **Context:** The International Day for Preservation of Ozone Layer (or World Ozone Day) is observed every year on September 16 for the preservation of the Ozone Layer.
- **2018 Theme:** ‘Keep Cool and Carry On: The Montreal Protocol’.

Significance of the day:

- In 1994, the UN General Assembly proclaimed 16 September the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, commemorating the date of the signing, in 1987, of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

What you need to know about the Ozone layer?

- The ozone layer absorbs most of the Sun’s ultraviolet light which is harmful to human life and other life forms. The layer absorbs about 97 to 99% of ultraviolet rays and maintain the ozone-oxygen cycle.
- Dobson unit is a unit which is used to measure the ozone in the atmosphere at a standard temperature and pressure.

Montreal protocol:

- The Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer was designed to reduce the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances in order to reduce their abundance in the atmosphere, and thereby protect the earth’s fragile ozone Layer. The original Montreal Protocol was agreed on 16 September 1987 and entered into force on 1 January 1989.
- The Montreal Protocol includes a unique adjustment provision that enables the Parties to the Protocol to respond quickly to new scientific information and agree to accelerate the reductions required on chemicals already covered by the Protocol.

These adjustments are then automatically applicable to all countries that ratified the Protocol.

- Montreal Protocol stipulates that the production and consumption of compounds that deplete ozone in the stratosphere-chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), halons, carbon tetrachloride, and methyl chloroform-are to be phased out by 2000 (2005 for methyl chloroform). These compounds significantly deplete the stratospheric ozone layer that shields the planet from damaging UV-B radiation.

Background:

The phaseout of controlled uses of ozone depleting substances and the related reductions have not only helped protect the ozone layer for this and future generations, but have also contributed significantly to global efforts to address climate change; furthermore, it has protected human health and ecosystems by limiting the harmful ultraviolet radiation from reaching the earth...

Spain Offers Referendum On Greater Catalan Autonomy

- **Context:** Spain's prime minister has proposed a referendum on whether Catalonia should be given greater autonomy, in a bid to dampen tensions between Madrid and Barcelona.
- While stopping short of offering the wealthy region a vote on full independence, this proposal will still be seen as an olive branch for many in Catalonia who simply want to see more devolved regional powers.

Background:

- This comes in the wake of a political crisis last year when the Catalan government attempted a unilateral declaration of independence.

What's the issue?

- Catalonia, which has its own distinct language, was granted autonomy under Spain's 1978 Constitution adopted three years after the death of longtime dictator Francisco Franco.
 - In 2006, a statute granting even greater powers to the northwestern region, boosting its financial clout, was approved by the Spanish and Catalan parliaments. And in a referendum at the time, over 73% of voters in Catalonia approved it.
 - But in 2010 Spain's Constitutional Court struck down several articles of the charter, among them attempts to place the distinctive Catalan language above Spanish in the region and a clause describing the region as a “nation”. The ruling sparked a rise in support for independence in Catalonia, which is home to some 7.5 million people and accounts for about one-fifth of the Spanish economy.

Where is Catalonia?

- Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain in the north-east end of the Iberian Peninsula, designated as a nationality by its Statute of Autonomy.
- It has four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. The capital and largest city is Barcelona, which is the second most populated city in Spain.

How would a secession affect the Spanish economy?

- The Catalan region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, with textile and shipbuilding, and more recently, finance, services, and technology. Barcelona has a thriving start-up culture, and plays host to the annual Mobile World Congress, where the bleeding edge of technology is on display.
 - Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain. It accounts for 20.07% of the Spanish GDP. Secession would therefore cost Spain almost a fifth of its economic output, and trigger a row on how to carve up the €836 billion of national debt.
 - If Catalonia were to secede from Spain, it would have a GDP of \$314 billion, according to calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That would make its economy larger than Singapore and South Africa, and on a par with Israel. Its GDP per capita would be \$35,000, which would make the average citizen of the Catalanian state wealthier than his counterparts from South Korea or Italy.

Move, The First Global Mobility Summit

- **Context:** NITI Aayog, in collaboration with various ministries and industry partners, is organising ‘MOVE: Global Mobility Summit’ in New Delhi. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of India.
- **Aim of the Summit:** The summit aims to bring together stakeholders from across the sectors of mobility and transportation to co-create a public interest framework to revolutionize transport. The summit also aims to set the base for a transport system which is safe, clean, shared and connected, affordable, accessible and inclusive.

The summit will deliberate on five themes:

- Maximising asset utilisation and services.
- Comprehensive electrification and alternative fuels.
- Reinventing public transport.
- Goods transport and logistics.
- Data analytics and mobility.

Key features of the Summit:

- The summit will feature global political leaders from mobility space and will see the participation of over 2200 participants from across the world including government leadership, research organizations, academia, industry leaders, think tanks and civil society organisations.
- The conclave will see over 30 global CEOs, 100 state officials, and foreign delegates and 200 Indian CEOs participating in the event.
- International representation from embassies and the private sector will include the US, Japan, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, New Zealand, Austria, Germany, and Brazil.

Why Mobility?

- Mobility is what keeps the engine of life running. Whether it is personal mobility for work or leisure or mobility of goods across value chains, without the ability to traverse large distances in short time spans, civilization would not be where it is today. In an urbanizing world, mobility is integral to city design, facilitating the evolution of physical space for liveability. Ranging from pedestrian and personal transport to public transit and freight movement, mobility is a crucial piece of the development puzzle and the key to unlocking the potential of India’s economy and people.
- Across sectors, public and private expenditure is being invested in effective and efficient transport. The challenge lies in ensuring that these systems meet the needs of their users in a sustainable manner. It must be clean for environmental benefits, shared to maximize asset efficiency, and connected to meet user needs from end-to-end. Affordability of public transit is key for low-income users, and of freight for industry. Accessibility and inclusivity is crucial for remote and differently-abled users across geographies, with the philosophy of leaving no-one behind. Safe, energy-efficient and low-emission systems are necessary for India to meet its international commitments on climate change.

Way ahead:

- As mobility is what keeps the engine of life running, it is a key to unlock the potential of India’s economy and people.
- Affordability of public transit is crucial for low-income users and of freight for the industry. Accessibility and

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inclusivity are crucial for remote and differently-abled users across geographies, with the philosophy of leaving no-one behind. Safe, energy-efficient and low-emission systems are necessary for India to meet its international commitments on climate change.

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Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)

- **Context:** In the series of meetings of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Working Group (IWG) on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), the 3rd meeting is being held at Headquarters Eastern Naval Command, Vishakhapatnam.

About IONS:

- IONS, the 21st century's first significant international maritime security initiative launched in February 2008, provides a forum for discussion of regional maritime issues and promotes friendly relationships among member nations. It presently has 24 members and eight observer navies.
- *It is a voluntary initiative* that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues and, in the process, endeavors to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.
- Under the charter of business adopted in 2014, the grouping has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Information Security and Interoperability (IS&I) and anti-piracy now renamed as maritime security.

UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF)

Context: NITI Aayog and United Nations in India have signed Sustainable Development Framework for 2018- 2022.

What is UN Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF)?

- UNSDF 2018-2022 outlines development cooperation strategy between Union Government and United Nations Country Team in India in support of achievement of India's key national development priorities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
 - It was framed following highly participative process, in consultation with government entities, civil society representatives, academia, and private sector.
 - Focus areas under it include poverty and urbanization, health, water, and sanitation, education, climate change, nutrition and food security, clean energy, and disaster resilience; skilling, entrepreneurship, job creation, gender equality and youth development.
 - UNSDF also includes set of UN flagship programs that are aligned with major government schemes. These flagship programs will be scalable innovative, multi-sectoral solutions to some of most pressing development challenges that India faces and also serve as catalysts for increased investment of development finance.
 - UNSDF programmes range from affordable housing for poor to increasing access to clean energy in rural off-grid areas, protecting all children from vaccine-preventable diseases, providing quality education for all children and skilling for young people, especially young girls and ending stunting to

improving child sex ratio.

Support:

- Across these outcome areas, UN will support Union Government in south-south cooperation in partnership with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).
- The total planned budget outlay for implementation of UNSDF is approximately Rs. 11000 crore, of which 47% is planned to be mobilized through course of implementation from multiple sources, including private sector and government.

Targets:

The programmatic work outlined in UNSDF targets seven low-income states viz. Bihar, Jharkhand, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and UP along with North-East region and aspirational districts identified by the NITI Aayog. It will work on improving lives of most marginalized, poor, and vulnerable communities and people in the country, especially women and girls.

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IL & FS CRISIS

Why in News?

Recently an infrastructure financing company, **Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (IL&FS)**, an NBFC, defaulted on their loan repayment.

Background

- **IL&FS Group** is a vast conglomerate with a **complex corporate structure** that funds infrastructure projects across the world's fastest-growing major economy like Chenani- Nashri road tunnel, India's longest and has raised billions of dollars from the country's corporate debt market.
- IL&FS is a **Systematically Important Non-Deposit Core Investment Company (CIC-ND- SI)** i.e. any crisis at IL&FS would not only impact equity and debt markets but could also stall several infrastructure projects of national importance.
- Many major corporates, banks, mutual funds, insurance companies, etc. such as LIC, HDFC and SBI have stakes in the IL&FS group.

Possible Reason for Default

- **Critical lapse in Corporate Governance Norms:** as Risk Management Committee, constituted met only once between 2015 and 2018.
- **Shareholder Negligence:** Well-known institutions such as LIC, HDFC, etc. which were major shareholder in ILF&S are guilty of negligence. For example, HDFC had not nominated a director to the board of IL&FS since last year.
- **Asset-liability mismatch and weak corporate bond market:** IL&FS owns long-term infrastructure financed with short-term funding because long-term (tenure of more than 10 years) debt is not available in India. This resulted in defaulting in one of the short- term repayment obligation due to various reasons like:
 - **Slow pace of new infrastructure projects** in India, and some of

IL&FS's own construction projects, including roads and ports, have faced **cost overruns** amid delays in land acquisition and approvals. Disputes over contracts have locked about Rs 9,000 crore of payments due from the government.

• Lack of Effective Regulation:

- RBI which oversees NBFCs like IL&FS and the union finance ministry which oversees major shareholders like LIC, SBI, etc. are at fault here as the crisis was allowed to develop over a period of time.

Impact of Crisis

- **India's Lehman Brothers moment:** IL&FS debt papers enjoyed **highest safety status** by Credit rating Agency, for a long time on account of factors such as satisfactory liquidity conditions and the backing of major public sector units. However, current crisis reflects **Failure of Credit Rating Agencies**.
 - The lack of confidence in the credit ratings is in danger of undermining India's financial stability, leading to a drying up of credit lines for shadow lenders and wider concerns about the impact on the economy.
- **Lack of Capital Expenditure:** It's impact may spill over into the wider infrastructure industry, pushing up funding costs and pulling government investment plans for achieving New India by 2022.
- **Impact on Stock Market:** It might witness significant repercussions, including widespread redemption pressures, sell-off in the debt market, liquidity crunch and possible cancellation of licences of as many as 1,500 smaller non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) due to lack of adequate capital.
- **Liquidity crisis:** There are concerns over short-term liquidity in the market for commercial papers raised by NBFCs.

- **Impact on Shadow Banking:** According to RBI, India has about 11,000 shadow financing companies, out of which 248 are systemically important non-deposit taking institutions, who will face greater regulatory scrutiny and short term liquidity crisis, which could impact the sustainability of many NBFC's.
- **Other cascading effects of IL&FS's defaults:** Rising borrowing costs, exacerbated by the turmoil in markets in recent days, will lead to a credit crunch in the sector.

Steps Taken by Government

- **Taking Managing Control:** Government superseded the IL&FS board under **section 241(2) of the Companies Act, 2013**, which enables supersession of a company's board to prevent it from further mismanagement in order to protect public interest. Its Implications are
 - **Increasing Confidence of Lenders** by giving them assurance that their outstanding loans to IL&FS will be repaid.
 - **Improving Financial Market Stability:** It effectively stops the spread of systemic instability in an inter-connected financial system, especially as panic had started spreading across the financial, money and capital markets.
 - It helps in restoring the confidence of the financial market and Ease of doing Business in India.
- Government has also ordered **Serious Fraud Investigation Office (SFIO)** to investigate into the affairs of crisis-hit IL & FS and its subsidiaries amid concerns over financial irregularities.

Way Forward

- **Short Term Measures** like finalization of a restructuring plan, identification and valuation of assets, sale of the assets and repayment of outstanding loans.
 - Government must arrange adequate liquidity for IL&FS to obviate future defaults and ensure smooth

implementation of infrastructure projects.

- **Strengthening Corporate Governance norms** by implementing **Kotak panel recommendation** and incentivize boards to play a more effective role in supervising company executives.
- **Shareholders awareness:** Shareholders must be more actively involved in keeping tab on the key policy decisions of the companies.
- **Effective checks and balance system** at the firm level to check any discrepancies at initial level.
- **Leveraging National Financial Reporting Authority** for enforcement of auditing standards and ensuring the quality of audits to strengthen quality of audits and enhance investor & public confidence in financial disclosures of companies.
- **Creating an independent regulator for credit rating agencies**, to have rating actions in a proactive manner rather than a reactive manner.
 - Rating agencies also need better market intelligence and surveillance rather than depending upon historical data and some structure based on past estimates.
- **Deepening the debt markets:**
 - The Centre and the RBI should look at ways to provide access to infrastructure players like ILF&S to borrow long-term funds.
 - The successful resolution of issues of banks' non-performing assets (NPAs) through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) can increase sources of long-term debt.
 - The Indian corporate bond market is currently skewed towards high-rated debt instruments (AA and AAA) as most regulators in India have set a minimum of 'AA' rating for bonds to be eligible for investment. In line with the budget announcement, the government should work with various regulators to allow increased investment in relatively lower-rated bonds.

- **Timely Project clearances:** Ensuring timely clearances, especially to infrastructural projects is a must to minimise cost inflation of these projects. Expanding the “Plug and Play” approach to other sectors can be a possible solution.
- **Improved Ratings Accuracy:**
 - Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) should examine the process for issuing ratings for corporate bonds and figure out why the rating agencies did not spot early signs of the crisis.
 - There should not be undue importance on who is the promoter backing the company while providing ratings. Instead loan amount, asset quality, profitability, etc. should be basis for assigning rating to the company.

Bank Consolidation

Why in News?

- The government has decided that Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank shall be “**amalgated**” making the new entity **India’s third Largest Bank**.

Background

- Narasimham committee of 1991** had recommended a restructuring of Indian banks with 3-4 large banks that could be positioned as global banks and 8-10 smaller ones with a national footprint.
- The P J Nayak committee in 2014** suggested that government should privatise or merge some PSBs.
- In 2017, the government had approved the “**merger**” of SBI’s five associate banks and later of the Bharatiya Mahila Bank (BMB) with SBI.
- Last year, the Government had constituted **Alternative Mechanism Panel** headed by the Minister of Finance and Corporate Affairs, Arun Jaitley to look into merger proposals of public sector banks.
 - The proposals received from banks for in-principle approval to formulate schemes of amalgamation will be placed before the Alternative Mechanism.
 - A Report on the proposals cleared by Alternative Mechanism will be sent to the Cabinet every three months.
 - Alternative Mechanism may also direct banks to examine proposals for amalgamation.
 - Alternative Mechanism will receive inputs from Reserve Bank of India (RBI) before according in-principle approval.

Arguments in favour of Consolidation

- Too many Public Sector Banks (PSBs):** Currently there are **21** PSBs in India which often cannibalise into each other’s businesses.
- Resolving the NPA issue:**
 - Reserve Bank of India expects the gross NPA ratio for state-owned banks to rise

to 16.3% by March 2019 from 15.6% in March 2018.

- The consolidation is being seen as a way out of the NPA issue through the “strong” banks absorbing the strain on the books of weaker banks.
- Increase in business:** Consolidation will lead to substantial rise in:
 - customer base
 - market reach
 - offering more services or products to customers
- Global banks:** The consolidation will help create a globally stronger and competitive financial institutions. Currently Indian banks are small when compared with their global peers.
- Cost cutting:** Consolidation can lead to reduced operating costs for public sector banks as:
 - All duplicate operations and redundancies are rationalised (e.g. shifting and closure of many overlapping branches especially in urban areas).
 - Excessive manpower can be shed off in the long run.
- Enhanced geographical reach:** For example, Vijaya Bank has strength in the South while Bank of Baroda and Dena Bank had a stronger base in Western India. That would mean wider access for both the proposed new entity and its customers.
- Greater capital and liquidity:**
 - Merger will lead to a bigger capital base and higher liquidity which will help in meeting the norms under BASEL III.
 - It will also reduce the government’s burden of recapitalising the public sector banks time and again.
- Enhanced human resource:** Merger can lead to availability of a bigger scale of expertise and that helps in minimising the scope of inefficiency which is more common in small banks.
- Employee welfare:**
 - The merger **will not cause any job loss**

in any of these banks and no employee of the banks would have service conditions that are adverse to their present one.

- The **disparity in wages** for bank staff members will get reduced and service conditions would become uniform.

Arguments against consolidation

- **Setback to corporate governance perspective:**

- The merger sends out a poor signal of a dominant shareholder (the government) dictating decisions that impact the minority shareholders.
- Forced mergers of the stronger banks with the weaker banks tend take a toll on the operations of the strong banks. For example: Bank of Baroda's shares took a nosedive in wake of the announcement.

- **Meaningless without implementing governance reforms:** The new entity will face similar problems unless significant reforms take place in the overall functioning of public sector banks. Merger could only give a temporary relief but not real remedies to problems like bad loans and bad governance in public sector banks.

- **Setback to financial inclusion:**

- Consolidation may lead to large scale shutting down of overlapping branches of the entities being merged.
- Many banks have a regional audience to cater to and merger destroys the idea of decentralisation.

- **Systemic risks:** There is a global consensus that banks that are “too big to fail” are sources of serious risk to financial stability and consolidation might lead to such a scenario.

- **Protests:** Addressing the concerns of unions and shareholders can prove to be a major roadblock.

- **Varying work culture:** Aligning contrasting HR practices will also pose a challenge to the new management.

- **Harmonization of Technology:** It is a big challenge as various banks are currently

operating on different technology platforms.

Way Forward

- **Clear rationale:**

- The consolidation process among banks should be driven primarily by synergies, efficiency, cost saving, and economies of scale.
- It is essential to evaluate the merger of banks by assessing the benefits such as cost rationalization, additional business, etc. against the likely future costs.

- **Non-Imposition:**

- Mergers must happen on commercial considerations and must not be politically imposed.
- While PSBs are promoted by the government, they are run by their respective professional boards, which should take such decisions.

- **Twin-fold Governance reforms:**

- Independence from political interference
- More regulatory power to RBI over PSBs

- **Creating a healthy entity:** It should be ensured that these mergers do not create an entity that is weaker than the original pre-merger strong bank.

- **Training for HR:** Human resource from the smaller bank should undergo training programs to get acquainted with the new processes, technology and environment.

- **Allow “non risky” failures:** Failures are the essence of free market so sometimes we also need measures that allow banks to fail safely without causing systemic shocks.

Payments Regulator

Why in News?

Recently, Inter-Ministerial Committee headed by Subhash Chandra Garg submitted **draft Payment and Settlement System Bill, 2018**, which seeks to setup independent **Payments Regulatory Board (PRB)**.

Background

- **Growing Digital Payment:** According to Google and Boston Consulting Group (BCG) titled Digital Payments 2020 study, **digital payments in India will exceed \$500 billion by 2020**, up from \$50 billion in 2016, which required a comprehensive review of payments sector with an objective to promote access and competition in the payments industry.
- **Nachiket Mor Committee Report (2013)** observed that despite significant progress in bank-led payment systems, there remained a vast gap in the availability of basic payment services for small business, and low-income households.
- **Watal committee (2016)** recommended constituting a **Payment Regulatory Board (independent of RBI)** to promote competition and innovation in the payment ecosystem in India.
- **Budget 2017**, proposed to create a **Payments Regulatory Board** in the Reserve Bank of India by replacing the existing **Board for Regulation and Supervision of Payment and Settlement Systems**, which overlooks the payment ecosystem in India.

Provision of Payment and Settlement System Bill, 2018

- **Aim:** Draft bill seeks to consolidate laws relating to payments.
- **Setting up Independent Payments Regulatory Board (PRB):** Bill seeks changes to the composition of the PRB and recommended that the chairperson appointed by the government in consultation with RBI.

Objectives for the PRB:

- ✓ **Consumer protection:**
 - (i) Protect the interest of consumers, (ii) ensure safety and soundness of the payment systems, and (iii) create trust and confidence in the payment systems.
- ✓ **Systemic stability and resilience:** Control of systemic risk and systemic efficiency, stability and resilience.
- ✓ **Competition and innovation:** To enable, in the interest of consumers, (i) system participants to access payment systems based on objective, ownership neutral and proportionate standards, (ii) interoperability among system participants and among payment systems, (iii) payments systems and payment services to be developed and operated in a manner that promotes their ease of use, and (iv) improvements in the quality, efficiency and economy of payment systems and payment services.
- **Defining Role of RBI:** Bill provides role of RBI as an infrastructure institution in relation to its function of providing settlement system and payment system.
- **Parity Between Banks and Non-Banks:** It provides that the authorization criteria should be risk based and ownership neutral for different classes of payment systems.

Significance

- **Shifting of Power from RBI to PRB:** Bill proposes a major change in the payment industry which seems necessary because it was observed that central banks deal with matters of systematic importance only and their main aim is to promote financial stability.
- **Improving Efficiency** as PRB will only issue two types of instruments, regulations and orders, thereby, reducing multiplicity of

instruments.

- **Restoring Requisite RBI Power:** Bill provides the RBI with the powers to make a reference to the PRB to consider any matter, which in the opinion of the RBI, was important in the context of monetary policy.
- **Improving Confidence:** An independent regulator will instill confidence among users and investors.
- **Improving Financial Inclusion:** A robust Payment regulator will boost digital transactions in India, which is currently close to 90 million.

subsuming the existing Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT), to hear all appeals in finance.

Challenges

- **Another Bureaucratic Level:** Board could be made a scapegoat for policy failures in payments and settlement, by interfering in monitoring and regulatory function.
- **Crypto currency transactions** still function under grey area and haven't been brought under the legal purview.
- **Against the Majority Views:** Independent PRB is in contrast with the view of RBI, which wants the chairperson of the new regulator to be from the central bank with a casting vote. It also sidelined Watal Panel recommendation which had pitched for establishing PRB within the structure of RBI with a majority of non- RBI members nominated by the centre.
- **Cyber Breach Cost:** Cyber attacks cost India an estimated \$4 billion annually, and could rise to USD 20 billion by 2025, with the digitisation of payments presenting new challenges for cybersecurity.

Way Forward

- The **Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC)** recommended draft **Indian Financial Code** which seeks to move away from the current sector-wise regulation to a system where the RBI regulates the banking and payments system and a Unified Financial Agency subsumes existing regulators like SEBI, IRDA, PFRDA and FMC, to regulate the rest of the financial markets.
- FSLRC also envisages a **unified Financial Sector Appellate Tribunal (FSAT)**,

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India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)

Why in News?

Prime Minister on 1st September **launched the India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)** that offers doorstep banking to customers.

About IPPB

- India Post Payments Bank has been incorporated as a **public sector company under the department of posts, with 100% government equity** and is governed by the Reserve Bank of India.
- It **started operations on 30 January, 2017**, by opening two pilot branches one in Jaipur and the other in Ranchi.
- It will focus on providing banking and financial services to people in rural areas, by **linking all the 1.55 lakh post office branches with India Post Payments Bank** services by the end of 2018. This will **create the country's largest banking network** with a direct presence at the village level.
- It will offer a **range of products**—savings and current accounts, money transfer, direct benefit transfer, bill and utility payments, enterprise and merchant payments. These products, and services, will be offered across multiple channels (counter services, micro-ATM, mobile banking app, SMS and IVR).
 - It will also provide access to third-party financial services such as **insurance, mutual funds, pension, credit products and forex**.
 - It will not offer any ATM debit card. Instead, it will provide its customers a **QR Code-based biometric card**. The card will have the customer's account number embedded and the customer does not have to remember his/her account number to access the account.
 - IPPB has also partnered with different financial organisations to provide loans, investments and insurance products.

Analysis

There are various issues and challenges facing the IPPB, viz-

- Charges and restrictions:** There are 80 different charges and restrictions (including

charges to get cash delivered at doorstep, transactions, withdrawals and deposits, etc) which could prove to be challenges in its objective of financial inclusion.

- Limited manpower in post offices-** Clients might find it difficult to withdraw cash from rural post offices because these are managed by one or two people, who are unlikely to have a lot of money with them.
- Limited accessibility-** IPPB is **unable to offer ATM cards yet**. As a result clients can't use the united payments interface service.
- Technical Issues-** It's necessary that the customer's fingerprints match the UIDAI database for each transaction. The problem is that the UIDAI told the Supreme Court that it can't ensure 100 per cent biometric matching.
- Limited appeal- For Urban customers** who have easy access to private banks offering purely digital accounts with more services, interest rates of up to 6 per cent and latest technologies like UPI.
 - Even in rural areas, it is unlikely to make much sense since Jan Dhan Yojana has already provided zero balance bank accounts with RuPay debit cards with full-scale banks.
- Bad health of postal department-** Department of posts isn't in good health as its deficit doubled in the year 2016-17 and only 55 post offices have been added in the country in the last five years.
- Competition with Private players-** IPPB is also likely to face stiff competition from private companies, which are generally nimbler in adapting to business realities and far more customer-friendly compared to the government- owned ones. However, despite these challenges there is also a need to understand various advantages of establishing IPPB-
- Department of Posts and IPPB will work in tandem to take the benefits of government schemes and financial services that are not easily available in rural areas to customers

across the country and to the marginalized population in urban and rural areas alike. The objective of IPPB will be public service rather than promoting commercial interests.

- While many other banks and financial institutions are working on the same theme, the USP of IPPB will be its ability to ease access and handhold the adoption of new age banking and payments instruments among citizen of all walks of life through the delivery by postmen and Grameen Dak sevaks, savings agents and other franchisees who will take banking to door steps. IPPB thus aspires to the most accessible, affordable and trusted bank for the common man with the motto - **“No customer is too small, no transaction too insignificant, and no deposit too little”**.

banking services.

- Opening of bank branches in unbanked rural centres.

If it succeeds, the new payments bank could usher in a new era of rapid financial inclusion across rural India.

How IPPB is different from traditional banks?

- A payments bank is a **differentiated bank**, offering a limited range of products.
- It can **accept deposits of up to ₹ 1 lakh** per customer.
- Unlike traditional banks, it **cannot issue loans and credit cards**.
- It will offer **three types of savings accounts**—regular, digital and basic—at an interest rate of 4% per annum.
- It will provide **doorstep banking facility** at a charge of ₹15-35 per transaction. The limit for doorstep banking is ₹ 10,000.
- **Other payments banks** that have started operations are Airtel Payments Bank Ltd, Paytm Payments Bank Ltd and Fino Payments Bank Ltd.

Other initiatives taken for promoting Financial Inclusion in the country

- Pradhan Mantri Jan-Dhan Yojana
- Relaxation on Know Your Customer (KYC) norms.
- **Engaging business correspondents (BCs)** as intermediaries for providing financial and

Reining In Cad And Rupee

Why in News?

To contain the widening current account deficit (CAD) and check the fall of the rupee, the government recently announced specific steps to attract dollars and address volatility in the financial markets.

Background

- The recent fall in the value of Rupee has been mainly caused by pulling out of Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) and decline in demands of Indian exports, along with the rising crude prices, fears of an escalating trade war and higher US interest rates.
- India's CAD jumped to 2.4 per cent of Gross Domestic Product in the first quarter of 2018-19, from 1.9 per cent in March 2018.
- Data shows India's foreign exchange reserves have been falling steadily over the past five months.

Recent Steps taken to attract dollars

- Enabling more companies to raise External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs).
- Manufacturing firms can get ECBs up to \$50 m with minimum maturity of 1 year as compared to earlier three.
- Removal of exposure limit of 20% of FPI's corporate bond portfolio to a single corporate group.
- Masala bonds issued in 2018-19 exempt from withholding tax.
- Easing of curbs on marketing, underwriting of Masala bonds.

Way Forward

- Until the RBI can rein in domestic inflation and the government can take steps to boost exports and curb imports, emergency measures like the issuance of NRI bonds can only offer temporary respite to the rupee.
- The government will also take steps to cut imports of non-essential items such as steel, furniture, etc. and to boost exports.
- The government is also looking to expand the phased manufacturing plan to include

some sections of the consumer durables industry.

About Masala Bonds:

Masala bonds are rupee-denominated debt securities issued outside India by Indian companies.

The bonds are directly pegged to the Indian currency. So, investors directly take the currency risk or exchange rate risks.

External Commercial Borrowings

It is the financial instrument used to borrow money from the foreign sources of financing to invest in the commercial activities of the domestic country. Simply, borrowing money from the non-resident lenders and investing it in the commercial activities of India is called as external commercial borrowings.

Withholding Tax

It is an amount that an employer withholds from employees' wages and pays directly to the government. The amount withheld is a credit against the income taxes the employee must pay during the year. It also is a tax levied on income (interest and dividends) from securities owned by a non-resident as well as other income paid to nonresidents of a country.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

Why in News?

The government decided to make the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) an open-ended scheme, meaning that it will continue indefinitely.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

- It is a **financial inclusion program** of Government of India, that aims to expand and make affordable access to financial services such as bank accounts, remittances, credit, insurance and pensions.
- It focuses on **coverage of households** as against the earlier plan which focused on coverage of villages. It focuses on **coverage of rural as well as urban areas**. Any individual above the age of 10 years can open BSBDA Account.
- The plan envisages **universal access to banking facilities** with at least one basic banking account for every household, financial literacy, access to credit, insurance and pension facility. In addition, the beneficiaries would get RuPay Debit card having inbuilt accident insurance cover of Rs. 1 lakh.
- The plan also envisages **channelling all Government benefits** (from Centre / State / Local Body) to the beneficiary's accounts and pushing the Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT) scheme of the Union Government. The technological issues like poor connectivity, on-line transactions will be addressed.

Significance

- In spite of a strong position on world economic map India suffers from **the problem of poverty and poor financial inclusiveness**. Census, 2011 estimates that **only 58.7% of the households have access to banking services**.
- Poor households in India, in the absence of access to formal credit, have to deal with moneylenders who charge exorbitant rates of interest. **Household Survey on India's Citizen Environment and Consumer**

Economy, 2016, shows that within the poorest section of the population two in three taking credit from informal sources.

- Though access to **formal financial institutions** has improved over time but still thousands of villages not have a bank branch and **less than 10 percent of all commercial bank credit goes to rural area** which is the dwelling area for around 70 percent of the total population of India.

Achievements

- **Reducing Percentage of Zero Balance Accounts:** Share of **zero-balance accounts** which indicates **lack of activity** has fallen from 67% of the 125.47 million Jan Dhan Accounts in 2015 to only 28.88% of the 210 million Jan Dhan Accounts in 2016.
- **Rising Deposits in Accounts:** From 2016-17 the total deposits in these accounts has increased more than thrice. This shows the build-up of confidence which the government has succeeded to develop among the poor.
- **Plugging Leakages from Subsidy:** According to the **Economic Survey for 2015-16** leakages in LPG subsidy transfers **fell 24%** and the exclusion of beneficiaries had been greatly reduced, due to forced banking infrastructure created by Jan Dhan Accounts, Aadhaar and Mobile networks, the combination named as **JAM trinity**.

Challenges

- **Internet Connectivity Problem:** The inadequate infrastructure base for internet facilities basically in tribal and hilly areas making it difficult for **Business Correspondents** to deliver the required basic banking services
- **Diversion of Funds for Overdraft Facility:** The overdraft facility that the Jan Dhan scheme commits could be valuable for the poor but clarity has still not emerged on where the funds would be

diverted from to finance it.

- **Increasing Cost of Business Correspondents:** If these accounts have to be functional and not remain dormant then the density of banking correspondent has to be increased, which will increase the cost of delivering the banking services.
- **Managing Multiple Saving Bank Accounts:** Many of the individuals who already have savings bank accounts in other banks opened account under PMJDY for benefiting from the **Rs. 1 Lakh accident insurance and overdraft**. As per norms PMJDY is only for those who do not have any bank account either in public or private sector banking setup
- **Tackling Unaccounted Money Deposited During Notebandi:** After the announcement of Demonetization total deposits in 255 million Jan Dhan accounts have increased to Rs 642521 million by November 2016.

confidence and ease of doing banking transactions can be entertained.

Way forward

- Launching **massive campaign programmes** among the poor households and also focus on improving the level of **financial literacy and education** that can help them recognize the benefits they can avail under the scheme and the responsibilities associated with it.
- The **network of post offices** which spread across the nation even in the remotest areas can be utilised for effective implementation of the Jan Dhan Yojana. Introduction of **Indian Post Payment Banks** is a way forward.
- The policy focus should shift from the quantity of inclusion to the **quality of inclusion**. The measure of success of the scheme should include clearly-defined targets for usage and transactions.
- The trust mechanism should be improved between people and bank officials as there seems to be **lack of trust in banking correspondents** due to which borrowing from money lenders is still prevalent.
- It is recommended that **internet connectivity and speed** should be increased in tribal and hilly areas so that the

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Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund

Why in News?

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved a **Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund** (DIDF) with an outlay of Rs 10,881 crore during the period from 2017-18 to 2028-29.

Background

- Large number of dairy processing plants with India's Dairy Cooperatives were commissioned during **Operation Flood** which ended in 1996.
- Majority of these plants have never been expanded or modernised thereafter. These plants are operating with old & obsolete technologies, which may not be energy efficient.
- In order to improve efficiencies as well as increase production of products with higher value addition, Government of India had announced creation of **DIDF** in the Union Budget of 2017-18.

About the Fund

- **Objectives**
 - It will focus on building an **efficient milk procurement system** by setting up of chilling infrastructure & installation of electronic milk adulteration testing equipment.
 - Creation/modernization/expansion of **processing infrastructure and manufacturing facilities** for Value Added Products for the Milk Unions/ Milk Producer Companies.
- **Management:**
 - The project will be implemented by **National Dairy Development Board (NDDB)** and **National Dairy Development Cooperation (NCDC)** directly through the End Borrowers such as Milk Unions, State Dairy Federations, Milk Producer Companies etc.
- **Funding:**
 - The fund will be used to **provide loan for building an efficient milk procurement system** and other

processing infrastructure. The end borrowers will get the loan @ 6.5% per annum. The period of repayment will be 10 years with initial two years moratorium.

- Under the DIDF, **Rs 8,004 crore loan will be provided by NABARD** to the NDDB and the NCDC. The remaining amount will be the contribution by end-borrowers, the NDDB and the NCDC, and by the agriculture ministry towards interest subvention for the next 10 years.
- Apart from benefiting the farmers the fund is expected to create employment in various regions of the country.

Operation Flood

- A project of India's National Dairy Development Board (NDDB), it was launched in 1970 as the world's biggest dairy development programme, also responsible for **white revolution in the country**.
- It transformed India from a milk-deficient nation into the world's largest milk producer, surpassing the USA in 1998, with about 17 percent of global output in 2010–11.
- In 30 years it doubled milk available per person, and made dairy farming India's largest self-sustainable rural employment generator.
- Its major objectives included-
 - Increase milk production
 - Augment rural incomes
 - Fair prices for consumers

Multidimensional Poverty Index-2018

Why in news?

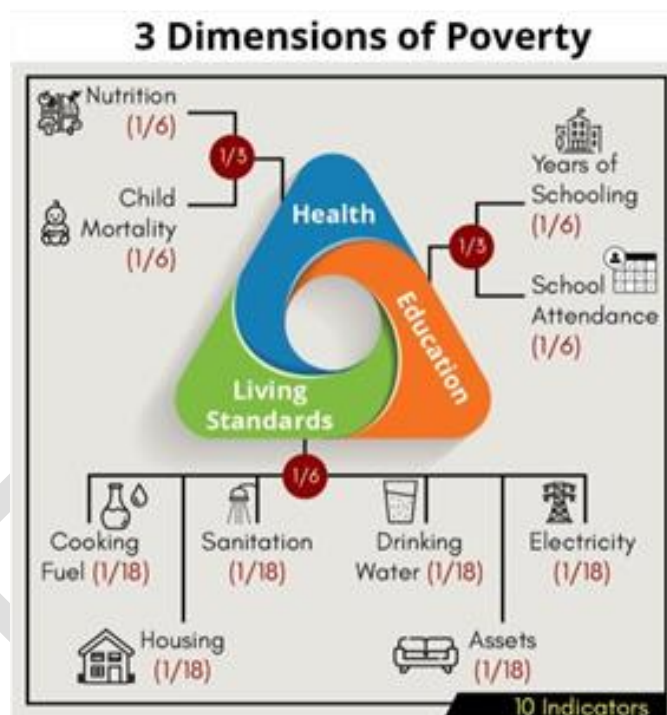
The 2018 global Multidimensional Poverty Index was released by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

Key findings of MPI 2018

The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI)- 2018 covers 105 countries in total, which are home to 75 per cent of the world's population, or 5.7 billion people.

- A total of **1.34 billion people from 105 countries are multidimensionally poor** i.e. 23.3% of the people living in these countries. They are deprived in at least one-third of overlapping deprivations in health, education, and living standards, lacking such things as clean water, sanitation, adequate nutrition, or primary education.
- 83% of multidimensionally poor people (more than 1.1 billion people) live in either Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.
- **Two-thirds of all MPI poor people** (nearly 892 million) live in middle-income countries.
- Multidimensional poverty is much **more intense in rural areas than urban areas**; globally there are 1.1 billion people living in multidimensional poverty in rural areas, compared to 0.2 billion people living in multidimensional poverty in urban areas.
- About 612 million people – **46% of those who are multidimensionally poor – live in severe poverty**, that is, they are deprived in at least half of the weighted indicators in health, education, and living standards. Sub-Saharan Africa accounts for 56% of world's severely poor.
- **In India**, 271 million people moved out of poverty between 2005-06 and 2015-16, but the country still has the **largest number of people living in multidimensional poverty in the world** (364 million people). Even so, India has cut its poverty rate from 55% to 28% in ten years.
- After India, the countries with the largest number of people living in multidimensional

poverty are Nigeria (97 million), Ethiopia (86 million), Pakistan (85 million), and Bangladesh (67 million).



The MPI measures

- **Incidence of poverty:** the proportion of the population who are poor according to the MPI (those who are deprived in at least one third of the weighted indicators).
- **Average intensity of poverty:** the average share of deprivations people experience at the same time.
- **MPI value:** The MPI value, which ranges from zero to one, is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty by the average intensity of poverty. It shows the proportion of deprivations that a countries' poor people experience out of the total possible deprivations that would be experienced if every person in the society were poor and deprived in every indicator.

What is the global MPI?

- The global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is an **international measure of acute**

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poverty covering over 100 developing countries. It complements traditional income- based poverty measures by capturing the severe deprivations that each person faces at the same time with respect to **education, health and living standards.**

- The **MPI measures multiple deprivations in the same households** in education, health and living standards and **10 indicators**, namely nutrition, child mortality, years of schooling, school attendance, sanitation, cooking fuel, drinking water, electricity, housing and assets.
- A **person is identified as multidimensionally poor (or ‘MPI poor’)** if deprived in at least one third of the **dimensions**. The MPI is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty (the percentage of people identified as MPI poor) by the average intensity of poverty across the poor. So, it reflects both the share of people in poverty and the degree to which they are deprived.
- The **global MPI was developed by OPHI with the UNDP** for inclusion in UNDP’s flagship Human Development Report (HDR) in 2010. It has been published in the HDR ever since.

multidimensional approach has a direct focus on the ends.

Limitations of the MPI

- The indicators **include both outputs**, such as years of schooling, and **inputs**, such as cooking fuel. It also includes both **stock and flow indicators**. A stock indicator is measured at a particular point in time, and it may have accumulated in the past. On the contrary, a flow indicator is measured per unit of time. Surveys do not have flow indicators for all dimensions.
- The **health data are relatively weak** and overlook some groups’ deprivations especially for nutrition, though the patterns that emerge are plausible and familiar. For example, in many countries there is no nutritional information for women. In other countries, there is no nutritional information for men, in others still, for children.
- Although the MPI indicators were selected in order to guarantee as much cross-country comparability as possible, **indicators’ comparability is still imperfect** for two reasons.
 - As detailed above in the case of nutrition, the information differs across the surveys used.
 - Even when they collect the same information, the minimum acceptable standards on certain indicators, such as some of the living standard ones, may vary greatly according to the culture.
- **Intra-household inequalities** may be severe, but, for the moment, these cannot be reflected in the global MPI, precisely because there is no individual-level information for all the indicators.
- While the MPI goes well beyond a headcount ratio to include the intensity of poverty experienced, it does **not measure the depth of poverty**—how far away, on average, from the deprivation cut-off in each indicator poor people are. Nor does it measure inequality among the poor—how deprivation is distributed among the poor.
- The estimates presented are based on **publicly available data and cover various**

How MPI is better than Income Poverty?

- As per World Bank, **international poverty line is currently valued at \$1.90** in terms of 2011 purchasing power parity. Income allows people to meet basic needs but at a practical level we find income does not always provide a sufficient representation of poverty.
 - For example: People may be above the poverty line but still deprived of needs such as housing. So, another way to measure poverty is to measure it directly in terms of the ability to meet a number of basic human needs such as access to housing, healthcare, sanitation and education. This is a multidimensional approach.
- From this perspective, income is the means to ends, while the ends themselves are the satisfaction of basic human needs. The

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years between 2005 and 2015, which limits direct cross-country comparability.

What's new in MPI-2018?

The new global MPI has changes in five of the ten indicators from the original MPI: nutrition, child mortality, and years of schooling, housing and assets.

- The **new threshold for nutrition** includes BMI (Body Mass Index)- for-age, and stunting as well as underweight for children.
- **For child mortality**, it considers whether a child has, sadly, perished in the household in the last five years preceding the interview date.
- For **years of schooling**, the new threshold requires six years, rather than five years, of schooling.
- A household is deprived in the **housing indicator** if the floor is made of natural materials; or the roof or walls are made of natural or rudimentary materials.
- Finally, the **assets indicator** now includes ownership of computers and animal carts.

MPI 2018 have been revised to better align with the SDGs. The MPI shows how deprivations related to SDGs 1,2,3,4,6,7, and 11 are concretely interlinked in poor people's lives. The global MPI reflects deprivations each person faces in multiple SDG areas – education, water and sanitation, health, housing, etc. Connecting to at least seven SDGs, the MPI brings many concerns together into one headline measure. And, since people are MPI poor if they are deprived in one-third of the weighted indicators, the MPI focuses on people who are being left behind in multiple SDGs at the same time.

Human Development Index

Why in news?

India's ranking in UN's Human Development Index (HDI) went up by one from last year, to **130th among 189 countries**, released by the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**.

Facts on Index

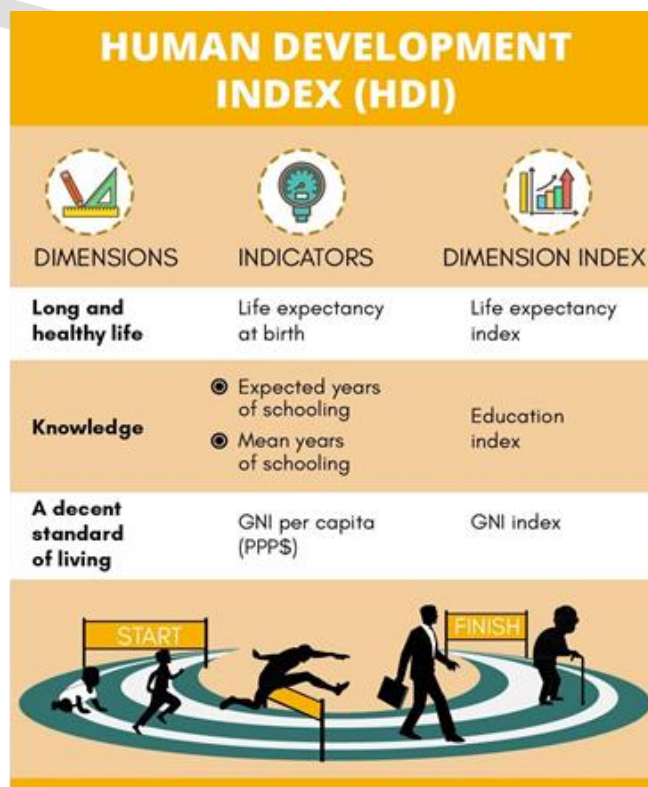
- Within South Asia, India's HDI value is above the **average of 0.638 for the region**, with Bangladesh and Pakistan, countries with similar population size, being ranked 136 and 150, respectively.
- Between 1990 and 2017, **India's HDI** value increased from **0.427 to 0.640**, an increase of nearly 50 per cent and an indicator of the country's remarkable achievement in lifting millions of people out of poverty putting the country in the **medium human development category**.
- India's **life expectancy** increased from **57.9(1990) to 68.8(2017)**.
- India's **per capita income** in PPP terms saw an increase of a 267% from **\$1,733 to \$6,353** between 1990 and 2017.
- **Expected years of schooling** went up from **7.6 years (1990) to 12.3 years (2017)**.
- Development hasn't been spread evenly, with India's **income inequality the highest at 18.8%** – compared to 15.7% for Bangladesh and 11.6% for Pakistan. In fact, when corrected for **inequality India's HDI value falls by 26.8% to 0.468**.

Outcome for India

- Most of the **improvements have flowed to the top of the social pyramid** while those at the base have only just been lifted out of poverty.
- **Middle class hasn't grown** as much as it should have, while small and medium enterprises have failed to transfer the agrarian workforce to manufacturing.
- **Inequality remains a challenge for India** as it progresses economically, though the Government of India and various state

governments have, through a variety of social protection measures, attempted to ensure that the gains of economic development are shared widely and reach the farthest first

- In India, **women remain significantly less politically, economically and socially empowered than men**. For instance, women hold only 11.6 percent of parliamentary seats, and only 39 percent of adult women have reached at least a secondary level of education as compared to 64 percent males.
- Female participation in the labour market is 27.2 percent compared to 78.8 percent for men.
- **Deteriorating air quality in major Indian cities** and its impacts on human health are also worrying. India also has one of the largest number of people in the world living on degraded land.



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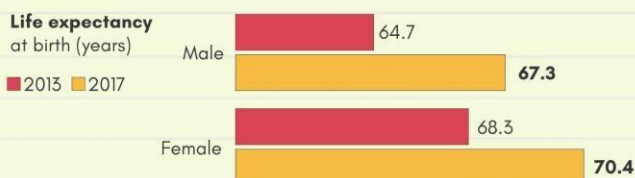
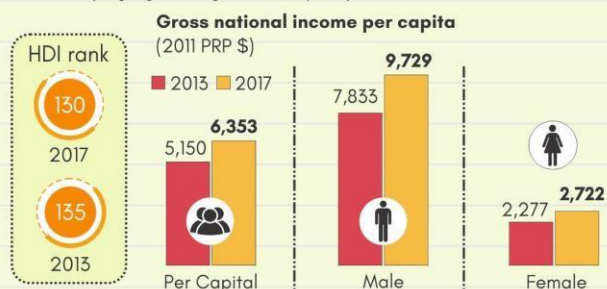
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Human development improving, but sluggishly

Particularly egregious is gender inequality and the suicide rate.



Maternal mortality ratio (deaths per 100,000 live births)	200 (for 2010)	174 (for 2015)
Infant mortality ratio (per 1,000 live births)	44 (for 2012)	34.6 (for 2016)
Under-five mortality ratio (per 1,000 live births)	56 (for 2012)	43 (for 2016)
Stunting (moderate or severe) (% under five years)	48% (2008-12)	37.9% (2010-2016)
Quintile ratio	5 (for 2003-2012)	5.3 (2010-2017)
Mean years of schooling—years	4.4 (for 2012)	6.4
Suicide rate (per 100,000 people) Female	7.8 (2003-09)	14.2 (2015)
Male	13 (2008-09)	17.9 (2015)

Some poorer countries do better than India in human development

Vietnam, despite being poorer, beats India on almost all parameters.

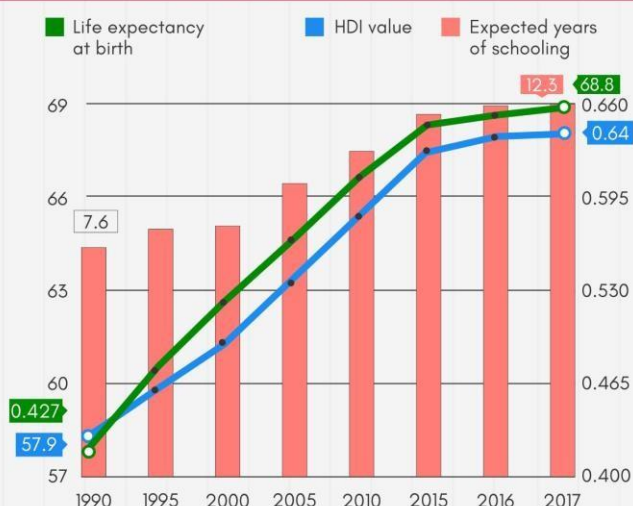
(in 2017)



	Year	India	Vietnam	Bangladesh
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	2015	174	54	176
Infant mortality (per 1,000 live births)	2016	34.6	17.3	28.2
Under five mortality (per 1,000 live births)	2016	43	21.6	34.2
Suicide rate per 100,000 people Male	2015	17.9	11.3	5.3
Female	2015	14.2	3.4	6.6

Source: Human Development Reports

INDIA'S HDI TRENDS



HOW NEIGHBOURS FARE

Nation	Rank
India	130
Bangladesh	136
Pakistan	150

189 Countries for Which
HDI is Calculated

Very high	59
Medium	92
Low	38



Top Scorers

Norway
Switzerland
Australia
Ireland
Germany

Worst Performers

Niger
The Central African Republic
South Sudan
Chad
Burundi

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National Digital Communications Policy- 2018

Why in News?

Recently, Union Cabinet approved the **National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018)** and re-designated Telecom Commission as the “**Digital Communications Commission**”.

Need of the new policy:

- NDCP- 2018 has been formulated to cater to the needs of **modern technological advancements** in the Telecom Sector such as – 5G, IoT, Machine to Machine (M2M) learning, etc. that required a ‘customer focused’ and ‘application driven’ policy for the Indian Telecom Sector.
- It seeks to overcome shortcomings of previous **National Telecom Policy, 2012** in areas such as enhancing rural tele-density, optical fibre network to gram Panchayats, minimum broadband speed, etc.
- This policy can form the main pillar of **Digital India** by addressing emerging opportunities for expanding the availability of Telecom services and also Telecom based services.
- Through NDCP-2018 government wants to focus on **socio-economic growth** of the country with the help of the telecom sector instead of seeing it as source of revenue generation.

Strategies for Three Missions

1. Connect India

- Establishing a ‘**National Broadband Mission – Rashtriya Broadband Abhiyan**’ to secure universal broadband access
 - Implementation of the following broadband initiatives, to be funded through USOF and Public Private Partnerships:
 - ✓ **BharatNet** – Providing 1 Gbps to Gram Panchayats upgradeable to 10 Gbps
 - ✓ **GramNet** – Connecting all key rural development institutions with 10 Mbps upgradeable to 100 Mbps
 - ✓ **NagarNet** – Establishing 1 Million public Wi-Fi Hotspots in urban areas

- ✓ **JanWiFi** – Establishing 2 Million Wi-Fi Hotspots in rural areas

◦ Implementing a ‘Fibre First Initiative’ to take fibre to the home, to enterprises and to key development institutions in Tier I, II and III towns and to rural clusters.

- Establishment of a **National Digital Grid** by:

- ✓ Creating National Fibre Authority.
- ✓ Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for

Common Rights of Way.

- Other components include - Enabling Infrastructure Convergence of IT, telecom and broadcasting by restructuring of legal, licensing and regulatory frameworks, creating a **Broadband Readiness Index** for States/UTs, facilitate the establishment of Mobile Tower Infrastructure etc.
- **Recognizing Spectrum as a key natural resource** for public benefit to achieve India’s socio-economic goals, ensure transparency in allocation and optimise availability and utilization.
- **Strengthening Satellite Communication Technologies** in India. This includes Revising licensing and regulatory conditions that limit the use of satellite communications, such as speed barriers
 - Optimise Satellite communications technologies in India, by **reviewing SATCOM policy** for communication services, along with Department of Space, to create a flexible, technology-neutral and competitive regime
 - **Making available new spectrum bands** (such as Ka Band) for satellite based commercial communication services.
 - Develop an **ecosystem for satellite communications** in India, with focus on: Promoting participation of private players, with due regard to national security and sovereignty
- Ensuring Inclusion of uncovered areas and

digitally deprived segments of society by **channelizing the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF)**.

- Ensuring Customer Satisfaction, Quality of Service and effective Grievance Redressal by establishing Telecom Ombudsman and a centralised web-based complaint redressal system, focusing on public health and safety standards etc.

innovation.

- **Local Manufacturing and Value Addition** by Rationalising taxes, levies and differential duties to incentivize local manufacturing of equipment, Introducing Phased Manufacturing Program for identified product segments, Preferring domestic products and services with domestically owned IPR in the procurement by government agencies etc.
- Other strategies include Capacity building, strengthening of PSUs, create a **roadmap for transition to Industry 4.0** by 2020 etc.

3. Secure India

- Core strategies include establishing a strong, flexible and robust **Data Protection Regime**, assuring Security of Digital Communications by formulating a policy on encryption and data retention, Instituting a sectoral **Cyber Security Incident Response System (CSIRT)**.
- Developing a **comprehensive plan for network preparedness, disaster response relief, restoration and reconstruction** components of which include –
 - Framing and enforcing standard operating procedures to be followed during disasters and natural calamities,
 - Enhancing the **Public Protection and Disaster Relief (PPDR)** plan for India by:
 - ✓ Facilitating the establishment of a Pan-India network for Public Protection and Disaster Relief (PPDR)
 - ✓ Making necessary spectrum available for PPDR including by establishing INSAT satellite-based mobile communication systems.

2. Propel India

- Catalysing Investments for Digital Communications sector by according Telecom Infrastructure the **status of Critical and Essential Infrastructure**, reforming the licensing and regulatory regime to catalyse Investments and Innovation.
- Ensuring a holistic and harmonised approach for harnessing Emerging Technologies by **creating a roadmap for emerging technologies** and its use in the communications sector, such as 5G, Artificial Intelligence, Establishing India as a global hub for cloud computing, content hosting and delivery, recognizing Digital Communications as the **core of Smart Cities** etc.
- Focussing on R&D by **creating a Fund for R&D** in new technologies for start-ups and entrepreneurs, Establishing Centres of Excellence, Fostering an Intellectual Property Rights regime that promotes

CONNECT INDIA Creating a robust digital communication infrastructure

- Provide universal broadband access with 50 Mbps speed to every citizen
- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022
- Enable fixed line broadband access to 50% of households
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 Billion connected devices

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SECURE INDIA

Ensuring digital sovereignty, safety and security of digital communication



Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals and facilitates India's effective participation in the global digital economy



Ensure that net neutrality principles are upheld and aligned with service requirements, bandwidth availability and network capabilities including next generation access technologies



Address security issues relating to encryption and security clearances



Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe and secure digital communications infrastructure & services

Concerns

- Some of the major targets listed in the 2012 policy are still to be achieved. For example, the minimum broadband speeds are set at 512 kbps at present even though the 2012 policy had envisaged minimum broadband speeds of 2Mbps by 2015. Instead of delving into why these targets were missed and how things can be improved, the National Digital Communications Policy 2018 lists out more and new targets.
- Further, it neither spells out how it plans to achieve the stated objectives nor gives a specific timeframe to implement the various proposals.

Significance

- The essence of the NDCP lies in its innate vision to transform the face of India's ICT industry by leveraging the principles of Design, Innovation and Creativity-led Entrepreneurship (DICE).
- It is praiseworthy to note that this policy focuses on end-to-end solutions along the entire ICT value chain under the core themes of 'Connect India, Propel India and Secure India'.
- Overall, the vision is great and the policies are created with the best of intent, however, we cannot fall behind this time around on the implementation front.

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Military Exercises

- **Exercise Kazind 2018:** It is the 3rd edition of Joint military exercise between the Indian and Kazakhstan Army, which was held in Otar region of Kazakhstan.
- **Yudh Abhyas:** It is the 14th edition of Joint military combat exercise between the Indian and the US army, which was held at Chaubattia, Uttarakhand.
- **Exercise Slinex 2018:** It is the 6th edition of a bi-lateral Naval Exercise between India and Sri Lanka, held in Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.
- **Nomadic Elephant-2018:** It is an annual, bilateral military exercise between Indian and Mongolian armies.
- **BIMSTEC MILEX-18:** It is the first multilateral military field training exercise between BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) nations.
- **Exercise Aviaindra-18:** It is a bi-annual exercise conducted since 2014, between the air force of India and the Russian Federation.

Additional Information

- **Tri-service Exercise:** India and the US have decided to hold their first-ever **mega tri-service exercise** off the eastern coast of India next year.
 - o This will be second such tri-service exercise, with a foreign country, after Russia.

Mid-Air Refuelling Of LCA Tejas

Why in news?

Recently Indian Air Force (IAF) successfully carried out first ever mid- air refuelling of indigenously developed Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas.

Significance

- **India joins in elite group of countries** which have successfully developed air-to-air refuelling system for military aircraft.
- Air-to-air refuelling capability for LCA will be force multiplier for IAF as it enhances potential of aircraft to stay airborne for much longer period ,thus increasing its range and endurance.
- It will also enable IAF options to exploit operational potential of LCA as well as to participate in international exercises without having to stop or stage through several locations enroute.
- LCA gets much closer to important battle-ready tag, called final operational clearance (FOC) with this trial of air-to-air refueling.

LCA Tejas

- It is **single-seat multi-role jet fighter, powered by single engine**. It is pegged as world's smallest and lightest supersonic fighter aircraft in its class.
- It has been designed, developed and manufactured indigenously by state owned Hindustan Aeronautical Limited (HAL) as part of LCA programme, started in 1980s to replace India's ageing MiG-21 fighters.
- **Range:** It has limited reach of little over 400-km and will be mainly used for close air-to-ground operations (unlike Russian-origin Sukhoi-30MKIs or Rafale which have deep strike capability into enemy territory due to their long range).
- **Weaponry:** It can fire air-to-air missiles, carry bombs and precision guided ammunition.

Smart Border Fence

Why in news?

Recently Union Home Minister inaugurated the smart border fencing pilot projects under the comprehensive integrated border management system (CIBMS) programme.

More on News

- Smart fencing at the borders is a technological solution devised to address the security issues in the Border States and the two projects in five kilometers areas each have been installed along the Indo-Pak International Border in Jammu on a pilot basis.
- It has got hi-tech surveillance system that would create an invisible electronic barrier on land, water and even in air and underground.
- A stretch of 60 kms of Assam's border with Bangladesh would also in November be provided CIBMS pilot project to stop illegal migration.
- Ministry has been working towards upgrading border infrastructure, with more than 600km of roads having been built so far.
- The smart border fencing projects built under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) programme is the first of its kind in the country to guard stretches where physical surveillance is not possible either due to inhospitable terrain or riverine borders.

Role of technology in border management

- **Upgrading existing system:** Technology can be **integrated with the existing systems** to facilitate better detection and interception by the man behind the machine.
- **Checking infiltration:** It can be help to detect infiltration via land, underwater, air and tunnels by deploying close-circuit television cameras, thermal imagers and night vision devices, BFSRs, underground monitoring sensors, and laser barriers along the border.
- **Cross Border Trade:** It can also facilitate

cross border trade. For example: Blockchain technology can help quickly and securely process transactions, it also makes much easier to identify and trace illegitimate trade.

- **Removing Human errors:** As there is a limit to the ability of human to remain alert, see and hear, the smart gadgets can be used to enhance human capability. It will help to reduce human error and also stress on the man on ground.
- **Mobility:** Advanced technologies in the vehicles can be used around the border areas and improving the functionality of their armored vehicles. Vehicles used by the security personnel are multipurpose, designed to help movement in tough terrains like deserts, no man's land and mountainous regions.
- **Communication:** It can be used for better coordination among various stakeholders, and also between states and the centre. GSAT 7 is the first dedicated military communication satellite built by ISRO that will provide services to the Indian defence forces with the main user being the Indian Navy.
- **Surveillance:** In order to improve patrolling and surveillance of the coastal areas, especially the shallow areas close to the coast. Drones can be deployed in the most dangerous and rugged circumstances and are made to assist rescue teams and forces.

CIBMS

- It is a **robust and integrated system** that is capable of addressing the gaps in the present system of border security by seamlessly integrating human resources, weapons, and high-tech surveillance equipment.
- It has three main components:
 - **New high-tech surveillance** devices such as sensors, detectors, cameras, etc. as well as existing equipment for round-the-clock surveillance of the international border.
 - An **efficient and dedicated communication network** including fiber

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optic cables and satellite communication for transmitting data gathered; and

- A **command and control centre** to which the data will be transmitted providing a composite picture of the international border.

Border protection grid

- It is set up in Indian states bordering Bangladesh to strengthen **Indo-Bangladesh border security** in a bid to curb various illegal activities.
- The grid comprises various elements namely physical barriers, non-physical barriers, surveillance system, intelligence agencies, state police, BSF and other state and central agencies.

Existing Systems at Borders

- BSF has been provided with night surveillance capabilities such as Passive Night Vision Goggles (PNG), Night Weapon Sights (NWS), Hand Held Search Lights (HHS), Hand Held Deep Search Metal Detectors (HHMD), etc.
- Sophisticated devices such as Hand Held Thermal Imagery (HHTI) systems, Long Range Reconnaissance Observation Systems (LORROS), Battle Field Surveillance Radars (BFSR), etc. are already being used at Borders.

Issues which India might face

- The system might suffer numerous technical glitches such as a large number of false alarms, line of sight constraints, unreliable information transmission, and equipment malfunction.
- At present, many of the high-tech surveillance devices deployed by the BSF are not optimally utilized because the required technical expertise is not uniformly available among the force's personnel.
- The exorbitant cost of the electronic devices and the lack of easy availability of spare parts act as a deterrent against their use.
- Erratic power supply and adverse climatic and terrain conditions in the border areas could potentially undermine the functioning

of the sophisticated system.

Other measures for effective border management

- Vulnerability mapping of entire border has been made a continuous process based on which sensitive spots are identified and adequate measures are taken to further strengthen security in these spots.
- Up-gradation of intelligence network and co-ordination with sister agencies, conduct of special operations along the border.
- Raising the issues of infiltration from across the border during various meeting with counterpart countries i.e. Company Commander Meeting, Commandant Level Meeting, Sector Commander Level Meeting, Frontier Level Meeting and Director-General Level Talks.

Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods

Why in news?

Disaster managers and scientists in Sikkim are siphoning out excess water from lake to prevent it from **Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods**.

More on News

- **Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods (GLOFs)**, are a subject of concern in the Sikkim Himalayan region as several lakes have been formed due to melting of scores of glaciers in the region.
- In order to prevent any disasters due to outbursts from such lake, a project was started in the South Lhonak Lake where in high density polyethylene (HDPE) pipes have been installed to siphon off water from the glacial lake.
- Transporting the pipes to high altitudes poses serious challenges. Yaks are used to carry the pipes and other materials to the lake situated at 17,000 ft. The way to the lake is full of steep and narrow passages.
- Sikkim has installed a **Lake monitoring and information System** (water level Sensor) at South Lhonak lake. The sensor gives the water level of the lake and also monitored the lake level when there is sudden fluctuation in water level

What is Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods?

- Floods caused due to outburst of glacial lakes is known as Glacial Lakes Outburst Floods.
- The moraine wall act as a natural dam, trapping the melt water from the glacier and leading to the formation of a glacial lake.
- Retreat of glaciers in the wake of global warming is expected to increase the number of glacial lakes and also expand the size of the existing ones.
- The formation of moraine-dammed glacial lakes and glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) is major concern in countries such as Bhutan, Tibet (China), India, Nepal and Pakistan.
- The Himalayan states, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir,

are surrounded by about 200 potentially dangerous glacial lakes formed by glacial melt but till date no early warning system is in place to evacuate people in case these lakes breach their thin walls of debris and loose soil.

- In addition, this process can be further influenced if more glacial lakes are formed due to increase in debris cover and if black carbon (soot) is transported in accumulation areas of the glaciers.

Factors triggering GLOFS

- **Rapid slope movement** into the lake and melting of ice incorporated in dam are both directly and indirectly linked to glacier retreat which have increased due to anthropogenic factors.
- Retreat of glaciers in the wake of **global warming** increases the number of glacier lakes and also expand the size of the existing ones.
- **The radiative balance-** the balance between the amount of energy received by the earth from the sun and the energy it emits back has changed in the Himalayas in recent years due to human activities,. This imbalance “directly or indirectly results in the common incidents of fast glacier melting, glacial lake outbursts floods.
- In recent years, increasingly erratic and **unpredictable monsoon rainfall patterns** and increased climate variability have led to severe and frequent flood disasters.
- The contributing **human activities** include mass tourism; developmental interventions such as roads and hydropower projects; and the practice of slash and burn type of farming in certain pockets of the Indian Himalayan region.
- **Black carbon** also plays important factor which melts the ice on the mountain due to albedo effect.
- Other Factors like Cascading processes (flood from a lake situated upstream), Earthquake, Melting of ice incorporated in dam/forming the dam, Blocking of

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subsurface outflow tunnels, Long-term dam degradation also trigger GLOFS.

Impact

- **Catastrophic Societal Impacts:** The sudden and intense flooding that results can be catastrophic for nearby communities. Fatal GLOFs have been documented in the Andes and in the Hindu Kush-Himalaya region.
- **Impact on Ocean Circulation:** Major Glacial lake outburst floods from ice dammed lakes into oceans are considered to change circulation patterns by reducing the salinity of the surface layer of the ocean and influence the global climate.
- **Impact on Geomorphology:** GLOFs, have significant potential to influence erosion-accumulation interactions and sediment dynamics like bank and depth erosion of the stream/river channel, meander shift, and, in some cases, replacement of existing channels and formation of new ones or formation of erosional terraces.

Measures

- **Access to early warning systems and timely information** is key to minimizing the adverse impacts of floods and improve the efficiency of the response.
- **Continuous monitoring** is needed to **understand changing dynamics of Himalayan glaciers.**
- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) among many other organisations, is also engaged in **glacial lake monitoring** and water bodies in the Himalayan region of Indian River Basins.
- To identify hazardous lakes, **remotely sensed data-based methods** can be installed.
- Prevention or mitigation of the magnitude of the flood by **dam remediation like artificial dams, tunnels, open cuts, concrete outflows, flood protection walls.**
- Mitigation measures are important including **community preparedness, GLOF hazard mapping, vulnerability assessment, hazard zone demarcation, and identification of GLOF safe evacuation**

sites, alternate community based early learning warning systems and identifying vulnerable communities

- There is the need to set up a disaster database, improve post-disaster damage and needs assessments and have systematic ways of capturing climate change/variability impacts in disaster risk management and development sectors.

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Landslide Warning System

Why in news?

Recently, a **real-time landslide warning system** has been set up in the Sikkim-Darjeeling belt of north-eastern Himalayas.

Background

- According to **Global Fatal Landslide Database (GFLD)**, Asia was found to be the most-affected continent where 75% (India = 20%) of landslides occurred, with a substantial number reported along the Himalayan Arc.
- As per global database on landslides, the world's top two **landslide hotspots exist in India**: the southern edge of the Himalayan arc, and the coast along south-west India where the Western Ghats are situated.
- According to **Geological Survey of India (GSI)**, about 12.6 % of the total land mass of India falls under the landslide-prone hazardous zone.
- **Vulnerability of Sikkim's**: 4,895 square kilometer area is sensitive to landslides, of which 3,638 sq km area is surrounded by human population, roads and other infrastructure.

About Warning System

- It will help in **saving lives and loss to property** by issuing advance alerts by 24 hours.
- The warning system **consists of over 200 sensors** that can measure geophysical and hydrological parameters like rainfall, pore pressure and seismic activities.
- It has been deployed by the researchers of Kerala based Amrita University in collaboration with the Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority and partly funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- University had earlier installed a landslide warning system in **Kerala's Munnar district**.

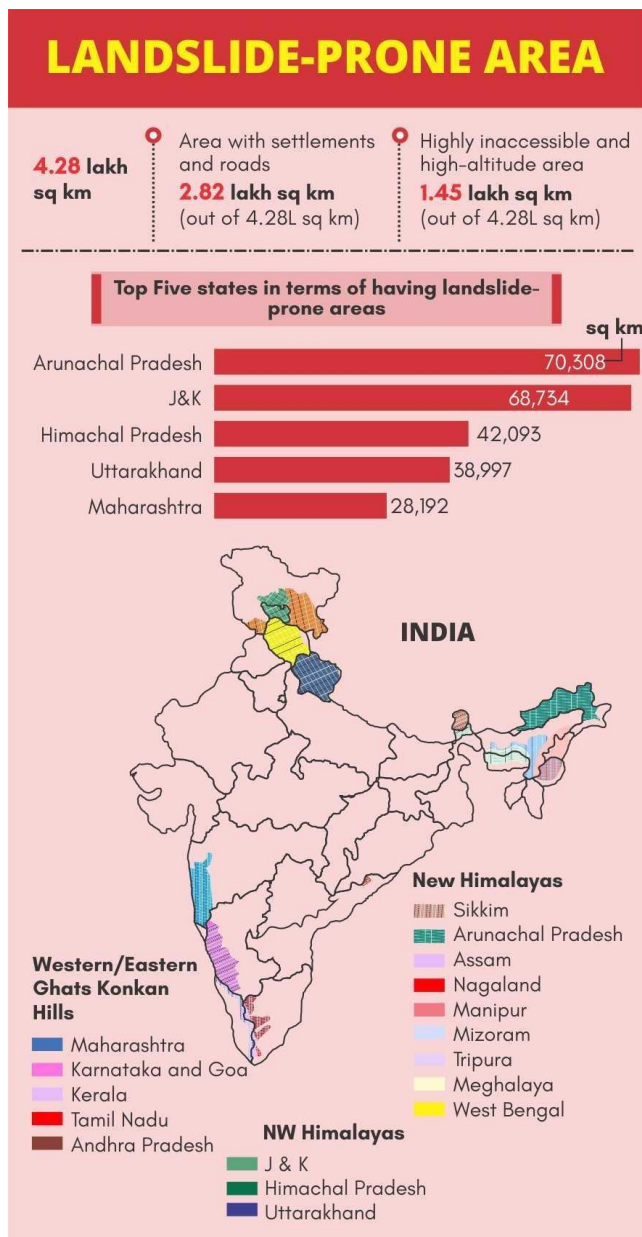
About Landslide

- **Definition**: Landslides are downward and outward movement of slope materials such

as rock debris and earth, under the influence of gravity.

- **Major reason**: Landslides are triggered by natural causes like vibrations from earthquakes and the build-up of water pressure between soil layers due to prolonged rainfall or seepage. In recent decades, manmade causes have become significant in triggering landslides, including removal of vegetation from the slopes, interference with natural drainage, leaking water or sewer pipes, modification of slopes by construction of roads, railways, buildings etc.
- Human-Triggered Fatal Landslides are increasing at the highest rate in India, where 28% construction-triggered landslide events occurred during 2004-2016, followed by China (9%), Pakistan (6%), the Philippines (5%), Nepal (5%) and Malaysia (5%).
- **Weather Induced Landslide**: Landslide occurrence peaks during the northern hemisphere summer, when cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons are more frequent and the monsoon season brings heavy rain to parts of Asia.
- **Illegal Mining**: Landslides triggered by hill-cutting are a problem in rural areas, where many people illegally collect material from hill-slopes to build homes. Fatal landslides were found to be more common in settlements, along roads and at sites rich in precious resources.
- **Earthquake-Triggered Landslides**: The landslide-prone Himalayan terrain also belongs to the maximum earthquake-prone zones where earthquakes of Modified Mercalli intensity VIII to IX can occur, and thus, are also prone to earthquake-triggered landslides.
- **Flash Flood Phenomenon**: Landslide Lead to formation of artificial lake, which can trigger flash flood in the region affected.
- **Economic Cost**: Landslides are the third most deadly natural disasters on earth with \$400 billion being spent annually on landslide disaster management. About 70

hydropower projects in Himalayas at risk of quake- triggered landslides.



- Taking up pilot projects in different regions of the country with a view to carry out **detailed studies and monitoring of selected landslides** to assess their stability status and estimate risk.
- **Setting pace setter examples** for stabilisation of slides and also setting up early warning systems depending on the risk evaluation and cost-benefit ratio.
- **Complete site specific studies** of major landslides and plan treatment measures, and encourage state governments to continue these measures.
- **Setting up of institutional mechanisms** for generating awareness and preparedness about landslide hazard among various stakeholders.
- **Enhancing landslide education, training** of professionals and capacity development of organisations working in the field of landslide management.
- **Capacity development and training** to make the response regime more effective.
- **Development of new codes and guidelines** on landslide studies and revision of existing ones.
- **Establishment of an autonomous national Centre** for landslide research, studies and management.

Geological Survey of India (GSI)

- GSI is the “nodal agency” for the Indian government for landslide data repository and landslide studies and it is engaged in all types of landslide and slope stability investigations.
- It functions under **Ministry of Mines. National Landslide Susceptibility Mapping (NLSM), 2014**
- GSI initiated the national programme to complete generation of **Landslide Susceptibility Maps** covering an area of about 1.71 lakh sq km by the end of 2018.
- Project will offer seamless landslide susceptibility maps and landslide inventory maps of the entire landslide-prone areas of India, which can be utilised by the architects of disaster management groups and perspective planners.

National Disaster Management Guidelines on Management of Landslides and Snow Avalanches

- Developing and continuously **updating the inventory of landslide incidences** affecting the country.
- **Landslide hazard zonation mapping** in macro and meso scales after identification and prioritisation of the areas in consultation with the Border Roads Organisation, state governments and local communities.

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A National Landslide Risk Mitigation Project (NLRMP) is being run at NDMA. Under this project a landslide site in Mizoram has been selected.

International Programme on Landslides (IPL),

- IPL aims to conduct international cooperative research and capacity building on landslide risk mitigation, notably in developing countries. Protection of cultural and natural heritage will be addressed for the benefit of society and the environment. The activities of IPL will contribute to the **International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)**.

Disaster Proofing Of Telecommunications

Why in News?

The recent Kerala floods witnessed a large-scale failure in communications services, calling for adequate preparedness measures in dealing with the aftermath of disasters on the part of telecom operators, policy-makers and disaster management agencies.

Consequences of Communications infrastructure failure:

- **Preventing Emergency Response:** In the immediate hours following disaster, relief efforts can be paralyzed or severely delayed if the responding agencies are unable to communicate with one another.
- **Effective coordination becomes further complicated:** the lack of an overarching command structure can create miscommunications and delays in action. This may further impact information sharing and quick decision making in such crucial times.
- **Significantly reduces the resilience of communities exposed to risk** due to lack of well-designed communications and information infrastructure, as observed during Uttarakhand, Mumbai and Chennai floods in recent past.
- **Spread of false information and confusion:** Without an organized flow of information, there may be spread of misinformation and panic at a time when organization and level-headedness are key to carrying out rescue operations as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) prescribed by Department of Telecom (DoT):

- **Telecommunication equipment** should be installed at suitable locations in disaster prone areas to be able to withstand impacts of any disaster, e.g. in flood prone areas location of exchanges/ critical equipment to be preferably at higher altitude area to avoid inundation of water.
- **Critical equipment** should not be concentrated in one building, also,

earthquake-proofing towers in known risk areas and developing a satellite-based system which can provide back-up communications and data connectivity also need to be prioritized.

- Redundant microwave, aerial or underground links and other **network elements** such as switches etc. should be **secured in alternative locations**. In hilly and remote area, satellite connectivity should be preferred.
- Novel **traffic deluge management techniques**, which differentiate urgent and delay-tolerant services, can provide connectivity for urgent services while delay-tolerant services may be redirected to a temporary facility.
- Telecommunication Service Providers (TSPs) to **identify vulnerability** of their respective telecom infrastructure and accordingly prepare plan for emergency situations. **Provision of sufficient backups** of network elements, gen-sets/batteries and fuel can prevent total failures from minor equipment damage. Low power consumption equipment should be preferred at all vulnerable / critical locations.
- Priority needs to be given to **designated users engaged in relief operations**. Public is also required to be made aware to use **alternate mode of communications** such as SMS or internet media whenever congestion in the voice calling in mobile network is experienced.
- TSPs shall **identify Main and alternate Nodal officers** at central level and at every telecom circle level and publicize their full contact details for coordination related to disaster management prominently on their website.
- TSPs shall have a **Disaster Response Task Force (DRTF)** at State level and **Rapid Damage Assessment Team (RDAT)**. DRTF teams will be responsible for immediate provisioning of emergency communication and restoration of telecom services in disaster affected areas whereas,

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RDAT shall work to determine the precise nature and extent of damage so that the planning for restoration of telecommunication services can be done in the efficient and effective manner.

- **MoUs among TSPs for restoration of Telecom services in emergencies and disaster conditions should be signed.** TSPs may enter into Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) among themselves for sharing specialized resources and Intra-circle roaming for provisioning of services.
- **Geographically dispersed servers** and use of **cloud-based platforms** to make data services more accessible.
- Operators should be mandated to **provide mobile base stations and backpack devices** in case of disaster when terrestrial network gets damaged.

How Communications Infrastructure Fails During a Disaster?

- **Physical damage to devices or components:** Cyclones, floodwaters, and seismic activity can create physical disturbances significantly damaging the communications equipment's. These have the potential to be incredibly costly and time consuming to restore, as they require maintenance or sometimes replacement of complex network hardware to re-establish communications.
- **Damage to Wireless systems:** as different wavelength signals can be cut off by heavy rain, snow, or fog. The transmitter itself can also receive damage or be knocked out of alignment with its receiver.
- **Network Congestion:** During disasters, the communications networks often become congested with exceptionally high levels of data traffic. When this happens, communications can be severely limited or even cut off completely, and important messages are often lost.

Way Forward

- Value added information along with data must be sent to the right people at the right time by establishing a reliable, dedicated and latest technology based, **National**

Disaster Communication Network (NDCN), with particular emphasis on **last-mile connectivity** to the affected community during all phases of disaster continuum.

- **Network path diversity** is one of the most effective tactics to reduce the risk of communications failure during a disaster. This is accomplished by establishing two or more network connections that use either a different type of technology or follow a different physical path, minimizing the chance that both connections will be knocked out at the same time.
- Because network connections cannot always be preserved in a disaster scenario, another effective method for maintaining and/or restoring communications in the hours immediately following the event is to establish one or more **ad-hoc network links**.
- Reconstruction and recovery in infrastructure sectors must follow the **“Build Back Better” principle** for multiple hazards.

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Conservation Of Migratory Birds And Their Habitats

Why in news?

Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has developed a National Action Plan for Conservation of

Migratory Birds and their Habitats along Central Asian Flyway (CAF) for the period 2018-23.

GOAL of NAP

- The overall **longer-term goal** of the National Action Plan is to arrest population decline and secure habitats of migratory bird species.
- In **shorter-term** the action plan seeks that by 2027, to halt the downward trends in declining meta- populations and maintain stable or increasing trends for healthy populations.
- **Objectives of NAP:** Following are the action plan's specific objectives:
 - Halt and reverse decline of migratory birds;
 - Reduce pressure on critical habitats by management based on landscape approaches;
 - Develop capacity at multiple levels to anticipate and avoid threats to habitats and species undergoing long term decline;
 - Improve database and decision-support systems to underpin science-based conservation of species and management of habitats;
 - Sensitize stakeholders to take collaborative actions on securing habitats and species; and,
 - Support trans-boundary co-operation to secure migratory bird species and habitats in range countries.

A **flyway** is a geographical region within which a single or a group of migratory species completes its annual cycle - breeding, staging and non-breeding etc. This includes breeding areas, stop-over areas and wintering areas.

- **Central Asian Flyway (CAF)**, one among the nine flyways in the world, encompasses

overlapping migration routes over 30 countries for different water birds linking their northern most breeding grounds in Russia (Siberia) to the southernmost non-breeding (wintering) grounds in West and South Asia, the Maldives and the British Indian Ocean Territory.

- India has a strategic role in the flyway, as it provides critical stopover sites to over 90% of the bird species known to use this migratory route.
- At least 370 species of migratory birds from three flyways (CAF, The East Asian – Australasian flyway, and Asian East African flyway) are reported to visit the Indian subcontinent, of which 310 predominantly use wetlands as habitats, the rest being land birds, inhabiting dispersed terrestrial areas. E.g. White-bellied Heron(Cr), Greater Adjutant(EN), Baer's Pochard(Cr), Siberian Crane(Cr), Black-necked Crane(VU), Spoon-billed Sandpiper (Cr).

Threats to Migratory Birds

- **Changing land-use** is the most important factor affecting land birds across the breeding and non-breeding grounds.
- Unsustainable taking and **climate change** are additional threats.
- **Major stresses** on population of migratory birds include habitat loss and degradation, pollution, illegal shooting and poisoning, collisions with aerial structures such as wind turbines, electrocution by power lines and increasing night light.
- Many migratory raptors are particularly at risk during migration because they gather to form major concentrations and move in large groups along their flyways, for example, at narrow land bridges or sea crossings, which can increase the potential impact of certain threats.

To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the action plan is structured in **six interrelated components**

SPECIES CONSERVATION	HABITAT CONSERVATION & SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT	CAPACITY BUILDING	COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH	RESEARCH & MONITORING	INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
National inventories of the stop-over and wintering sites of migratory birds and population status	Integrated management of priority wetlands	Region-wise capacity development	Outreach materials targeted at diverse audiences	Analysis of existing long-term datasets	Establishing CAF Secretariat in India
Formulate and implement Single Species Action Plan (SSAP) with degree of threat perception	Boundary demarcation, notification & inclusion in land use records	Develop education and awareness material, training material on population/habitat, targeted training of enforcement officials	Build a network of 'Student ambassadors'	Monitoring Population Trends	Periodic meetings with Range Countries
Lists of migratory birds being hunted, hunting seasons and trade patterns	Allocation of water for ecological functioning	Ringling Program	PRIs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Based Organization (CBOs) to act as 'knowledge hubs', custodians and stewards	Inventory, Assessment & Monitoring of Wetland Habitats	Joint Initiatives
Periodic disease surveillance	Cross-sectoral institutional arrangements	Capacity and protocols for disease surveillance	Encourage National Green Corps	National Database on CAF	
Conservation initiatives through local community participation, including citizen science groups.	Integrating CAF species & habitat conservation objectives in PA Plans	Stakeholder capacity for conservation and ownership of local sites	Awareness amongst media And publication of newsletter periodically	Management Effectiveness Tracking With Decision-Support System While Improving Knowledge base on 'Data-Deficient' sites	

Note: These are general dimensions from which points can be incorporated in other similar areas as well

Significance of NAP

- It states the national priority and specific actions required to ensure healthy populations of migratory species in India, within their range across the flyway.

- The NAP is based on **Central Asian Flyway Action Plan** which provides a common strategic framework for regional collaboration and affirmative action for protecting, conserving, restoring, and sustainably managing populations of migratory bird species and their habitats in the Indian subcontinent falling under the Central Asian Flyway region.

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Assist various stakeholders: This action plan would enable national and state level policy and decision makers, those responsible for species conservation and management of habitats, stakeholders and society at large to take coordinated actions for securing and enhancing populations of migratory birds.

- **International Commitments:** The NAP has also been drawn to support meeting national commitments related to protection and conservation of migratory birds and their habitats under the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitats (Ramsar), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES).
- The plan takes **cognizance of ongoing programmes and schemes** of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) for conservation of migratory birds and their habitats (such as wetlands and forests), as well as those of other central government ministries (such as water resources, rural development, agriculture and others), state governments, international agencies and others.

India Cooling Action Plan

Why in News?

- India became the first country to release a draft **India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP)** which focuses on Sustainable Cooling through Thermal Comfort for All.
- It was released on the occasion of 24th World Ozone Day (16 September) with theme this year being "Keep Cool and Carry on": The Montreal Protocol.

Why India's cooling needs are a concern?

- Despite India being a sub-tropical country, India's Per Capita Energy Consumption towards space cooling is 69kWh, much lower than the world average of 272kWh.
- Cooling is also intimately associated with human health, well-being and productivity. The need to ensure thermal comfort for all and access to cooling is even more important considering the tropical climate of India.
- Cooling related energy consumption is a major contributor (10%) to global CO₂ emissions.
- Rising per capita income, rapid urbanization along with currently low penetration of air conditioning may cause India's Cooling Needs to increase upto 8 times by 2037-38 as compared to the 2017-18 baseline.

demand can be reduced by 25%-30% by 2037-38 through proactive measures

- **Refrigerant-based cooling** is the most common cooling technique. According to Kigali Amendment to Montreal Protocol, India must phase down hydro fluorocarbons (used in refrigerant based cooling by 85% of their 2024-26 levels by 2047)
- Suggestions under India Cooling Action Plan:
 - **Combining active (air-conditioning) and passive cooling strategies** like better implementation of building energy codes, adoption of adaptive thermal comfort standards, increasing energy efficiency of room air- conditioners and fans
 - **Adoption of adaptive thermal comfort standards** to specify pre-setting of temperatures of air- conditioning equipment for commercially built spaces, and development of energy-efficient and renewable-energy-based cold chains for perishable foods besides other things.

About India Cooling Action Plan:

- India Cooling Action Plan **aims** to:
 - Reduction of cooling demand across sectors by 20% to 25 % by year 2037-38.
 - Training of 100,000 service sector technicians by 2022-23 under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana.
 - Reduction of refrigerant demand by 25% to 30% by year 2037-38.
- Draft India Cooling Action Plan looks at **two scenarios**:
 - **No change in current policies**: cooling requirement is projected to grow around 8 times by 2037-38 as compared to the 2017-18 baseline with the building sector leading the growth.

Intervention Scenario: the total refrigerant

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Construction And Demolition (C&D) Waste Management In India

Why in News?

The Supreme Court has created a flutter by staying construction activity in States that do not have a **solid waste management policy**.

About Construction and Demolition (C&D) waste

- It is generated during the construction, renovation, and demolition of buildings or structures. These wastes include materials such as concrete, bricks, wood and lumber, roofing, drywall, landscape and other wastes.
- There is a huge demand of aggregates in the housing and road sectors but there is significant gap in demand and supply, which can be reduced by recycling construction and demolition waste to certain specifications.
- While some of the items like bricks, tiles, wood, metal etc. are re-used and recycled, concrete and masonry, constituting about 50% of the C&D waste is not currently recycled in India
- The private contractors remove this waste to privately owned low-lying land for a price or more commonly, dump it in an unauthorized manner along roads or other public land.

Benefits of reducing the Disposal of C&D Materials

- **Environmental-** It reduces demand for **energy and water** in manufacture of building materials from mined / natural resources (thereby reducing GHGs and environmental impacts arising from mining, manufacturing and transportation).
 - Along with need for **fewer disposal facilities** it reduced the need for space for disposing it off.
- **Economical-** It can also **create employment** and economic activities in recycling industries.
 - It **reduces overall building project**

expenses through **avoided** purchase/disposal **costs** and **reducing** transportation costs by onsite reuse.

- Recycling will reduce housing costs, given the materials shortage, and should be an integral aspect of ‘**affordable housing**’. **Construction & Demolition Waste Management Rules, 2016** Among various things, following are some of the most important provisions under the guidelines-
- **At Individual level:** Every waste generator shall **segregate construction and demolition waste** and deposit at collection centre or handover it to the authorised processing facilities
 - Large generators shall **segregate the waste into four streams** such as concrete, soil, steel, wood and plastics, bricks and mortar. They shall ensure that there is **no littering or deposition** so as to prevent obstruction to the traffic or the public or drains.
- **At Local level:** The service providers shall prepare a **comprehensive waste management plan** for waste generated within their jurisdiction.
 - Service providers shall **remove all construction and demolition waste** in consultation with the concerned local authority on their own or through any agency.
- **At State level:** The concerned department in the State Government dealing with land shall **provide suitable sites for setting up of the storage, processing and recycling facilities** for C&D waste.
 - Procure and utilize 10-20% materials made from C&D waste in municipal and Government contracts.
 - Operator of the recycling facility shall obtain **authorization from State Pollution Control Board** or Pollution Control Committee.
- **At national level:** The Central Pollution

Control Board shall prepare **operational guidelines related to environmental management** of C&D waste and **Indian Roads Congress** need to prepare standards and practices pertaining to products of C&D waste in roads construction.

- The processing / recycling site shall be **away from habitation clusters, forest areas, water bodies**, monuments, National Parks, Wetlands and places of important cultural, historical or religious interest.

To make the efforts put forth in the direction of C&D waste management, following a “Sustainable Model” may further accelerate the results.

Data and Facts

- **Construction accounts for nearly 65 per cent of the total investment in infrastructure** hence it is more important to know how to effectively manage construction and demolition (C&D) waste.
- **25-30 million tonnes of C&D waste is generated annually** in India of which only **5 per cent is processed**.
- According to studies, **36 per cent of C&D waste comprises soil, sand and gravel**. With rampant sand mining having destroyed river beds, worsening the impact of floods, there is a crying need to recycle C&D waste.
- The Central Pollution Control Board’s **Waste Management Rules of 2016** and the **Guidelines in 2017** spelt out clear timelines on formulating policies, identifying sites for processing and commissioning these, but there has been no action on the ground.

Issues and Challenges

- It **impacts soil fertility** and is a **health hazard** in urban areas.
- The virtual absence of recycling also goes **against India’s commitments with respect to carbon emission reduction**.
- There is **neither strong social awareness nor enough political will** to promote recycling.
- Waste collection and segregation mechanism

is **largely unorganised** leading to scrap contamination.

- Most municipal **infrastructure is outdated and inadequate** in terms of collection, transportation and scrap yards.
- Appropriate **technologies** to maximise recovery from recycling are still nascent.

Initiatives to promote recycling of C & D waste in India

- The **Swachh Bharat Mission** envisages processing of 100% solid waste generated in cities / towns by October 2019 as a key objective, which includes Construction & Demolition wastes.
- Ministry of Urban Development directed States to set-up **environment friendly C & D recycling facilities** in all cities with a population of over 10 lakhs.
- The **Bureau of Indian Standards and Indian Roads Congress** shall be responsible for preparation of code of practices and standards for use of recycled materials and products of construction and demolition waste in respect of construction activities.
- **Building Material & Technology Promoting Council** in 2016 released “Guidelines for utilization of C & D waste in construction of dwelling units and related infrastructure in housing schemes of the Government”.
- **Central Public Works Division’s** “Guidelines for Sustainable Habitat” discusses ‘Guidelines on reuse and recycling of Construction and Demolition (C & D) waste.

‘Sustainable Model’ on C & D waste management

The key components of a ‘Sustainable Model’ on Construction and Demolition (C & D) Waste Management Rules, 2016 can include the following:

- **Practical estimation** of C & D waste generation
- **Identified sites and timely acquisition** of land for development of integrated C & D processing facilities with necessary approval

from local administration / civic bodies

- **Specifications / standards for recycled C & D waste** products for quality acceptance
- **List out and mandate use of recycled products** from C & D wastes
- **Penalty** - Landfill levy
- **Map water bodies** in a city / region – encroachment of water bodies in cities for generating ‘land’ is a common practice observed several cities
- **Research on economically viable C & D recycling** options
- **Awareness campaign** – tools for sensitization of general public.

Govt Proposes To Merge Dena Bank, Vijaya Bank And Bank Of Baroda

- **Context:** The Centre has proposed the amalgamation of state-owned Bank of Baroda, Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank to create India's third largest bank as parts of reforms in the public sector banking segment.
- The proposal will now need the approval of the boards of these individual banks. The banks' boards will shortly meet and take up the decision.

Background:

- The merger of these three state-owned banks is a part of the government's agenda of consolidation of public sector banks. The consolidation was proposed by the *Alternative Mechanism*.
- The Union Cabinet in August 2017 approved *amalgamation of Public Sector Banks through Alternative Mechanism (AM)* with an aim to facilitate consolidation among the Nationalised Banks to create strong and competitive banks.

Why merger is good?

- The merger benefits include getting economies of scale and reduction in the cost of doing business.
- Technical inefficiency is one of the main factors responsible for banking crisis. The scale of inefficiency is more in case of small banks. Hence, merger would be good.
- Mergers help small banks to gear up to international standards with innovative products and services with the accepted level of efficiency.
- Mergers help many PSBs, which are geographically concentrated, to expand their coverage beyond their outreach.
- A better and optimum size of the organization would help PSBs offer more and more products and services and help in integrated growth of the

sector.

- The size of each business entity after merger is expected to add strength to the Indian Banking System in general and Public Sector Banks in particular.
- This will also end the unhealthy and intense competition going on even among public sector banks as of now. In the global market, the Indian banks will gain greater recognition and higher rating.
- The volume of inter-bank transactions will come down, resulting in saving of considerable time in clearing and reconciliation of accounts.
- The burden on the central government to recapitalize the public sector banks again and again will come down substantially. This will also help in meeting more stringent norms under BASEL III, especially capital adequacy ratio.
- A great number of posts of CMD, ED, GM and Zonal Managers will be abolished, resulting in savings of crores of Rupee. This will also reduce unnecessary interference by board members in day to day affairs of the banks.
- After mergers, bargaining strength of bank staff will become more and visible. Bank staff may look forward to better wages and service conditions in future. The wide disparities between the staff of various banks in their service conditions and monetary benefits will narrow down.
- Customers will have access to fewer banks offering them wider range of products at a lower cost. From regulatory perspective, monitoring and control of less number of banks will be easier after mergers. This is at the macro level.

Concerns associated with merger:

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- Immediate negative impact would be from pension liability provisions (due to different employee benefit structures) and harmonisation of accounting policies for bad loans recognition.
 - There are many problems to adjust top leadership in institutions and the unions.
 - Mergers will result in shifting/closure of many ATMs, Branches and controlling offices, as it is not prudent and economical to keep so many banks concentrated in several pockets, notably in urban and metropolitan centres.
 - Mergers will result in immediate job losses on account of large number of people taking VRS on one side and slow down or stoppage of further recruitment on the other. This will worsen the unemployment situation further and may create law and order problems and social disturbances.
 - The weaknesses of the small banks may get transferred to the bigger bank also. New power centres will emerge in the changed environment. Mergers will result in clash of different organizational cultures. Conflicts will arise in the area of systems and processes too.
 - When a big bank books huge loss or crumbles, there will be a big jolt in the entire banking industry. Its repercussions will be felt everywhere.
 - Also, India right now needs more banking competition rather than more banking consolidation. In other words, it needs more banks rather than fewer banks. This does not mean that there should be a fetish about small- scale lending operations, but to know that large banks are not necessarily better banks.
- an unprecedented crisis.
- Since mergers are also about people, a huge amount of planning would be required to make the consolidation process smoother. Piecemeal consolidation will not provide a lasting solution and what is required is an integrated approach from all stakeholders including the government.

Way ahead:

- Merger is a good idea. However, this should be carried out with right banks for the right reasons. Merger is also tricky given the huge challenges banks face, including the bad loan problem that has plunged many public sector banks in

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Policy On ‘JHUM’ Cultivation

- **Context:** A recent NITI Aayog report has recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture should take up a “*mission on jhum cultivation*” to ensure inter-ministerial convergence.

fallows after 10-12 years, now they are returning in three to five years which has impacted on the quality of the soil.

Need of the hour:

- Various authorities often have divergent approaches towards shifting cultivation. This creates confusion among grass-roots level workers and jhum farmers said the report.
- Therefore, shifting cultivation fallows must be legally perceived and categorised as ‘regenerating fallows’ and credit facilities must be extended to those who practise shifting cultivation.
- Land for shifting cultivation should be recognised as “agricultural land” where farmers practise agro-forestry for the production of food rather than as forestland.

What is Jhum cultivation?

- Jhum cultivation, also known as the slash and burn agriculture, is the process of growing crops by first clearing the land of trees and vegetation and burning them thereafter. The burnt soil contains potash which increases the nutrient content of the soil.
- This practice is considered as an important mainstay of food production for a considerable population in North-East India.

Issues with Jhum Cultivation:

- The report notes that between 2000 and 2010, the land under shifting cultivation dropped by 70 %. People are returning to fallow land left after shifting in a shorter span.
- Earlier the cultivators returned to

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Technology Initiatives For Coffee Stakeholders

- **Context:** The government has launched Coffee Connect – India coffee field force app and Coffee Krishi Tharanga – digital mobile extension services for coffee stakeholders.

Coffee Connect:

- The mobile app Coffee Connect has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency.
 - This application *provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility* comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field. This includes activities like digitization of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.
 - It will also help in transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.

Coffee Krishi Tharanga:

- The Coffee KrishiTharanga services are aimed at providing customized information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability. NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project.
- The solution will help in to reach maximum growers in limited period, efficient, timely, customised advisory, improve the efficiency through digitization and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

confined to Karnataka (54%), Kerala (19%) and Tamil Nadu (8%) which form traditional coffee tracts.

- Indian coffee, grown mostly in southern states under monsoon rainfall conditions, is also termed as “*Indian monsooned coffee*”.
- *The two well known species of coffee grown are the Arabica and Robusta.* The first variety that was introduced in the Baba Budan Giri hill ranges of Karnataka in the 17th century was marketed over the years under the brand names of Kent and S.795.

Coffee Board of India:

- The Coffee Board of India is an organisation managed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the government of India to promote coffee production in India.
 - It was established by an act of Parliament in 1942.
 - Its duties included the promotion of the sale and consumption of coffee in India and abroad, conducting coffee research, financial assistance to establish small coffee growers, safeguarding working conditions for laborers, and managing the surplus pool of unsold coffee.

Coffee cultivation in India:

- Coffee is cultivated in India in about 4.54 lakh hectares by 3.66 lakh coffee farmers and 98% of them are small farmers. Its cultivation is mainly

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APSARA – U REACTOR

- **Context:** THE BHABHA Atomic Research Centre has recommissioned an upgraded version of ‘Apsara’, the country’s oldest research reactor that was decommissioned almost a decade ago. *Apsara is now operational as ‘Apsara-U’ on Trombay campus of Maharashtra.*

research in nuclear physics, material science and radiation shielding.

- This development has re-emphasised the capability of Indian scientists and Engineers to build, complex facilities for health care, science education and research.

About Apsara Nuclear reactor:

- Apsara is the oldest of India’s research reactors. The reactor was designed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Center (BARC) and built with assistance from the United Kingdom (which also provided the initial fuel supply consisting of 80% enriched uranium).
- Apsara first went critical on 4 August 1956.
- Apsara is a light water swimming pool-type reactor with a maximum power output of one megawatt thermal (MWt).
- The reactor burns enriched uranium in the form of aluminum alloyed curved plates. Fuel for the reactor is supplied under contract from the United Kingdom, provided that the fuel is safeguarded.
- The Apsara reactor is utilized for various experiments including neutron activation analysis, radiation damage studies, forensic research, neutron radiography, and shielding experiments.
- The reactor is also used for research and the production of radioisotopes.

Apsara- Upgraded:

- “Apsara-upgraded”, made indigenously, uses plate type dispersion fuel elements made of Low Enriched Uranium (LEU).
- By virtue of higher neutron flux, this reactor will increase indigenous production of radio-isotopes for medical application by about fifty percent and would also be extensively used for

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India's First Indigenous Anti-Nuclear Medical Kit

- **Context:** In a major shot in the arm for paramilitary and police forces, scientists at *Institute of Nuclear Medicine and Allied Sciences (INMAS)* claim to have developed India's first indigenous medical kit that may ensure protection from serious injuries and faster healing of wounds resulting from nuclear warfare or radioactive leakage.
- The kit has been developed for the armed, paramilitary and police forces only as they are the first ones likely to get exposed to radiation — be it during nuclear, chemical and biomedical (NCB) warfare or a rescue operation after a nuclear accident.

About the kit and its components:

- The kit has over 25 items, including radio-protectors that provide 80-90% protection against radiation and nerve gas agents, bandages that absorb radiation as well as tablets and ointments.
- Developed in India for the first time, it's a potent alternative to similar kits that were till now being procured from strategically advanced nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices.

The contents:

- **The contents include** an advanced form of Prussian blue tablets, highly effective in incorporating Radio Cesium (Cs-137) and Radio Thallium, among the most feared radioisotopes in nuclear bombs that destroy human body cells.
 - The kit also has **an Ethylenediaminetetraacetic acid (EDTA) injection** that traps uranium in the guts and blood of victims during a nuclear accident or warfare. When EDTA is injected into the veins, it “grabs” heavy metals and minerals and removes them from the

body.

- The kit also has **Ca-EDTA Respiratory Fluid**, which is the inhalation formula for chelation, or grabbing, of heavy metals and radioactive elements deposited in lungs through inhalation at nuclear accident sites.
- The kit also has **a radioactive urine/biofluid collector** which is cost-effective, easy to store and can safely dispose of the urine of a person affected by radiation. The collector has silk at its base, more than enough to jellify 500 millilitre of urine, which could be disposed of safely.
- The kit has **anti-gamma ray skin ointment** that protects and heals the radiation damage on the skin.
- Also part of the kit is the **amifostine injection**, a US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved conventional radiopharmaceutical that limits damage from gamma radiation.
- Another medicine in the form of a tablet is **Indranil 150 mg**. It is being introduced as a reserve emergency drug for services, rescue workers and places where high acute exposures are expected and lives will be at stake.

Significance of the kit:

- During radioactive accidents thousands of patients may be rushed to hospitals. In several cases, if not most, they will also have traumatic, orthopaedic, surgical injuries or burns. The blood of such patients will have radioactive elements and will require wound dressing with significantly higher absorption capacity so that nothing leaks and infects others. Such highly absorptive dressings and gauze also make it safer for the medical staff to handle radioactive patients as the

chance of their own contamination is reduced.

- The kit is a potential alternative to those being procured from nations such as the US and Russia at much higher prices. Such medicines will help everyone and not just soldiers. This will also help the victims affected in terrorist attacks.

Eyerov Tuna

- **Context:** India's first underwater robotic drone EyeROV TUNA was recently handed over to Naval Physical and Oceanographic Laboratory (NPOL) of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

Key facts:

- It has been designed and developed indigenously by Kochi-based start-up IROV Technologies Pvt Ltd (EyeROV).
- It is smart micro-ROV (Remotely Operated Vehicle) or underwater drone. This underwater drone will be used by NPOL for research and development activities which in turn would result in commercial product for defence purposes.
- It is designed to perform visual inspection and surveys of submerged structures up to depth of 100 metres.
- It is also equipped to perform variety of functions, including inspection of ship hulls, undersea cables or bridge moorings, fish farms, dams, port structure and bridge foundations and also in various underwater research operations. Its commercial use will eliminate need for costlier and riskier manual inspection by divers.

ISRO LAUNCHES TWO U.K. SATELLITES

- **Context:** ISRO's PSLV-C42 lifted off for the launch of two satellites from the United Kingdom – NovaSAR and S1-4 from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. *The two satellites, owned by Surrey Satellite Technology Ltd (SSTL) were placed in a circular orbit around the poles, 583 km from Earth.*
- The commercial arm of ISRO, Antrix Corporation earned more than ₹220 crore on this launch.
- *This would be the 44th flight of the PSLV and the third launch by ISRO this year.* The PSLV-C-42 is the lightest version of the PSLV flying in its core-alone version without the six strap-on motors.

Key facts:

- The NovaSAR is a technology demonstration mission designed to test the capabilities of a new low cost S-band SAR platform. It will be used for ship detection and maritime monitoring and also flood monitoring, besides agricultural and forestry applications.
- The S1-4 is a high-resolution Optical Earth Observation Satellite, used for surveying resources, environment monitoring, urban management and for disaster monitoring.

World's First Hydrogen Train



- Germany has rolled out the world's first hydrogen-powered train, signalling the start of a push to challenge the might of polluting diesel trains with costlier but eco-friendly technology.
- *How they operate?* Hydrogen trains are equipped with fuel cells that produce electricity through a combination of hydrogen and oxygen, a process that leaves steam and water as the only emissions. Excess energy is stored in ion lithium batteries on board the train.

radioisotopes for nuclear imaging

CYCLONE-30

- **Context:** The country's biggest cyclotron facility that will produce radioisotopes vital for diagnosis and treatment of cancer has become operational.

Key facts:

- **The machine – Cyclone-30** — is housed at the Kolkata-based Variable Energy Cyclotron Centre (VECC) under the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and will start regular production by mid-next year after supporting nuclear systems are commissioned and regulatory clearances are obtained.
- This facility will provide for affordable radio isotopes and related radiopharmaceuticals for the entire country especially, for eastern India and also have export potential for Germanium-68 and Gallium-68 generator for in-situ production of Gallium-68 and Palladium-103 isotopes, used for breast cancer diagnosis and prostate cancer treatment, respectively.

specifically for cancer detection.

- At present, many radioisotopes are imported while some are produced in nuclear research reactors such as the Apsara at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), and remaining in cyclotrons facilities run by large private hospitals. The addition of Cyclone-30 will increase the availability of radioisotopes and bring down the cost of treatment.

What are Cyclotrons?

Cyclotrons are used to produce radioisotopes for diagnostic and therapeutic use for cancer care. Radiations from these isotopes are used to destroy cancer cells.

Significance:

- With increasing number of Indians diagnosed with cancer every year, the cyclotron machine will produce

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Nasa Balloon Mission

- **Context:** Scientists have begun to analyse the photos captured by the NASA balloon mission.
- The mission recently captured the images of *noctilucent clouds or polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs)*. These images may help scientists better understand turbulence in the atmosphere, as well as in oceans, lakes and other planetary atmospheres.

They're mostly made up of ice crystals and appear like faint lines in the sky. The clouds are only visible during twilight, when the angle of the sun reflects off them and causes them to shine a bright electric blue or white colour.

- These clouds are affected by what is known as atmospheric gravity waves – caused by the convecting and uplifting of air masses, such as when air is pushed up by mountain ranges.
- The waves play major roles in transferring energy from the lower atmosphere to the mesosphere.

About the Mission:

- NASA's polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs) Turbo mission launched a giant balloon on July 8 to study PMCs at a height of 50 miles above the surface. For five days, the balloon floated through the stratosphere from its launch at Esrange, Sweden, across the Arctic to Western Nunavut, Canada.
- During its flight, cameras on board the balloon captured six million high-resolution images filling up 120 terabytes of data storage — most of which included a variety of PMC displays, revealing the processes leading to turbulence.

Objectives of the mission:

- The mission aimed at studying atmospheric motions, such as airflow over mountains or the motions caused by thunderstorms, which can cause disturbances in the atmosphere which are generated through something called gravity waves.
- Besides, with this mission, scientists want to understand the processes of matter in near-Earth space, including how matter there interacts with Earth's atmosphere and weather.

What are PMCs?

- Polar mesospheric clouds (PMCs) form 50 miles above the poles during summer.

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ASTRA BVR AIR-TO-AIR MISSILE



- **Context:** Astra, the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile (BVRAAM), was recently successfully test fired by the Indian Air Force from Su-30 aircraft.
- **Astra:**
- It is the indigenously developed Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air
- It is an all-weather, state-of-the-art missile developed by DRDO and can engage and destroy enemy aircraft at supersonic speed (1.2 Mach to 1.4 Mach) in head-on (up to 80 km) and tail-chase (up to 20 km) modes.
- The 3.8 metre tall Astra is a radar homing missile and the smallest of the DRDO-developed missiles and can be launched from different altitudes.
- It can reach up to 110 km when fired from an altitude of 15 km, 44 km when launched from an altitude of eight km and 21 km when fired from sea level.

WAYU- AIR POLLUTION MITIGATION DEVICE

About WAYU (Wind Augmentation Purifying Unit):

- WAYU is developed by Council of Scientific and Industrial Research – National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-NEERI) as a part of Technology Development Project funded by Department of Science and Technology.
- The device has the capacity to purify air in an area of 500 meter square. The device consumes only half a unit of electricity for 10 hours of running and has a maintenance cost of only Rs. 1500 per month.

How it works?

- The device works on two principles mainly Wind generation for dilution of air pollutants and Active Pollutants removal.

- The device has filters for Particulate Matter removal and activated carbon (charcoal) and UV lamps for poisonous gases removal such as VOCs and Carbon Monoxide.
- The device has one fan and filter for sucking and removing Particulate Matter. There are two UV lamps and half kg of activated carbon charcoal coated with special chemical Titanium Dioxide.

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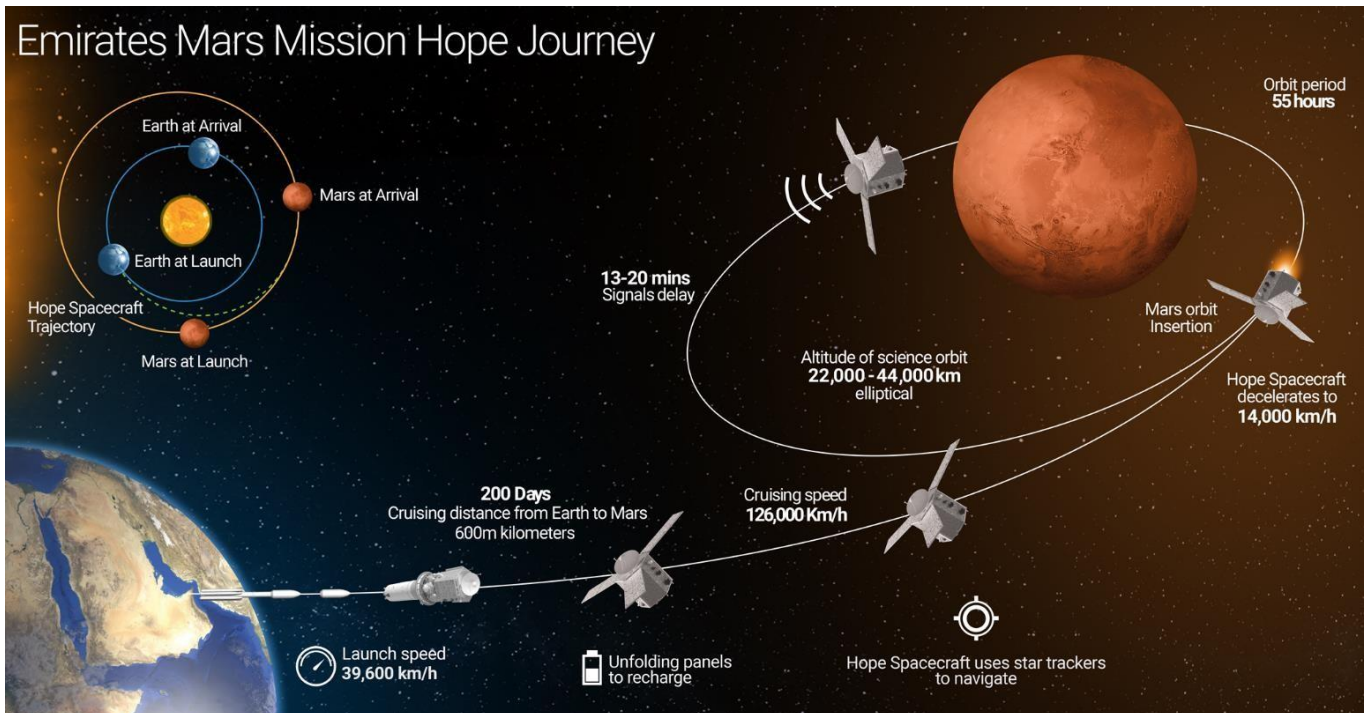
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Emirates Mars Mission – Hope Probe



Background:

- In July 2014, the UAE leadership announced the launch of the Emirates Mars Mission project by the President of the UAE. Subsequently, the President issued a decree establishing the UAE Space Agency.

HOPE Probe:

- The probe will be built by an Emirati team of engineers and experts and will be sent on a scientific voyage of discovery to the Red Planet.
- This will mark the Arab world's entry into the era of space exploration and place the UAE among the major scientific countries that have begun programmes to explore Mars.
- The probe will be sent to explore the Red Planet by 2020. Following a journey of several months, the probe is expected to enter the Red Planet's orbit in 2021, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the formation of the UAE.

- The Emirates Mars Mission project will answer scientific questions that have long puzzled scientists. These are questions about the Red Planet, which scientists have not been able to explain before because of the lack of data and information.
- The project will cover all aspects that have not been previously covered, whether scientific or knowledge-based, and it will work on drawing a clear and comprehensive picture of the Martian climate and the causes of the corrosion of its surface that has made it impossible for water to exist on the planet.
- The project will also provide insights about the weather on the Red Planet. It will observe weather phenomena such as dust storms and changes in temperature and how the atmosphere interacts with topography, from the highest volcano peaks to ice sheets to the vast deserts and the deepest canyons.

Scientific Objectives of the Probe Voyage:

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Model International Center For Transformative AI (ICTAI)

- **Context:** NITI Aayog, Intel, and Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR) are collaborating to set up a **Model International Center for Transformative Artificial Intelligence (ICTAI)** towards developing and deploying AI-led application-based research projects.
- This initiative is part of **NITI Aayog's 'National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence'** Discussion Paper that focuses on establishing ICTAI in the country through private sector collaboration.

Aims of ICTAI:

- Based in Bengaluru, the Model ICTAI aims to conduct advanced research to incubate AI-led solutions in three important areas – healthcare, agriculture and smart mobility – by bringing together the expertise of Intel and TIFR.
- It aims to experiment, discover and establish best practices in the domains of ICTAI governance, fundamental research, physical infrastructure, compute and service infrastructure needs, and talent acquisition.

Goals and objectives:

- Through this collaborative effort, the model ICTAI is chartered to develop AI foundational frameworks, tools and assets, including curated datasets and unique AI algorithms.
- The intent is to develop standards and support policy development related to information technology such as data-storage, information security, privacy, and ethics for data capture and use.
- The model Centre also plans to develop AI foundational technologies to promote applied research that can scale for national impact and will lead to the

creation of a vibrant and self-sustaining ecosystem.

- Another key area of its focus will be collaboration with industry leaders, startups, and AI services and product companies to productize technologies and IP that are developed at the model ICTAI. And finally, the goal is to support skilling and talent development for world-class AI talent.
- The learning and best practices developed through this model ICTAI will be used by NITI Aayog to set up the future ICTAIs across country.

What is artificial intelligence (AI)?

- Artificial Intelligence comes from computer systems that have been programmed to — or have learnt to — do tasks that would otherwise require human intelligence.
- Many apps and software are already making mundane work easier by doing a certain part of it for us, based on acquired intelligence.

Concerns associated:

- Automation threatens 69% of the jobs in India, while it's 77% in China, according to a World Bank research. The transition is expected to happen in a decade, according to experts.
- Therefore, if automation is not planned well and addressed holistically, it is a disaster in the making.

New opportunities:

- While there is a risk to jobs due to these trends, the good news is that a huge number of new jobs are getting created as well in areas like cybersecurity, cloud, big data, machine learning and AI.
- The new job roles that will dominate the IT workforce are within digital domains such as big data, artificial intelligence,

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Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing and cybersecurity.

- It is clearly a time of career pivot for IT professionals to make sure they are where the growth is.

Policy on AI:

- The Union ministry of electronics and information technology, in October 2017, set up an internal committee to advise the government on a policy on artificial intelligence (AI).
- The expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India. The government's main focus is to reduce cyber attacks with AI.

Need for a policy on AI:

- The artificial intelligence market is estimated to touch \$153 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 45.4% from 2016 to 2022. However, AI is widely seen as a major challenge in generation of employment as many companies are likely to depend more on it to cut down on human resources.
- Globally too, there is a growing interest in AI. In 2016, the White House initiated work on Preparing for the future of artificial intelligence; in the UK, the House of Commons committee on S&T looked at robotics and artificial intelligence while in 2017, the State Council of China started work on the next generation artificial intelligence development plan.

Seven- point strategy:

- The government has recently drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India's strategic plan to use AI.
- The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; ensuring safety and security of AI systems; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, understanding and

addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.

Way ahead:

- AI is a complex subject; it would be simplistic to look at it as all bad or all good.
- But robots and AI taking away middle-class, manufacturing jobs in the not-so-distant future is a very real prospect that will have to be addressed by governments sooner than they probably think.

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Code Of Conduct For MPs And MLAs

Why in news?

Vice President recently called on political parties to evolve a consensus on a code of conduct for their members, both inside the legislature and out of it.

What is legislative code of conduct?

A legislative code of conduct is a formal document which regulates the behavior of legislators by establishing what is to be considered to be an acceptable behavior and what is not. In other words, it is intended to promote a political culture which places considerable emphasis on the propriety, correctness, transparency, honesty of parliamentarians' behavior.

A formal code of conduct has been adopted by Germany, Israel, Japan, UK and USA, while India has a customary code of conduct.

The purpose of a Code of Conduct:

- Set public standards by which the behaviour of parliamentarians can be assessed
- Provide a basis for *assessing* proposed actions and so *guide* behaviour
- Provide an agreed foundation for responding to behaviour that is considered unacceptable
- Assure and reassure the community that the trust placed in parliamentarians is well placed.

How Code of Conduct is maintained across the world:

- First Approach: Enshrining the code in legislative framework through establishing an independent, autonomous body, outside the legislature. Here breach of the code amounts to breach of law.
- Second Approach: Establishing a body within the legislature that oversees the conduct of members e.g. a parliamentary committee or an independent parliamentary commissioner. Such a body reports to the legislature itself. This approach has been adopted in the United Kingdom.
- Third Approach: A detailed set of rules and guidelines is maintained. Each House has its

own Code of Official Conduct for Members and staff. Each House has an ethics committee, which operates independently of the other. Each committee provides interpretative and advisory rulings, has jurisdiction over the members and officers of each House, and can investigate allegations of improper conduct and can impose sanctions. Such an approach is followed by US congress.

Present Scenario in India

- A code for Union ministers was adopted in 1964, and state governments were advised to adopt it as well.
- A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ethics was constituted in both the Houses in 1997.
- A Code of Conduct for members of Rajya Sabha has been in force since 2005. There is no such code for Lok Sabha.

Code in Rajya Sabha

- Rajya Sabha follows a 14-point Code of Conduct for members of the House since 2005. These include:
 - In case of Conflict of interest, Private interests of the members should always be subordinated to the duty of their public office.
 - Members should never accept any benefit for a vote given or not given by them on the floor of the House, for introducing a Bill, for moving a resolution or desisting from moving a resolution, putting a question or abstaining from asking a question or participating in the deliberations of the House or a Parliamentary Committee.

According to the 2nd ARC, a Code of Ethics and a Code of Conduct for Ministers should include the following:

- Ministers have a duty to Parliament to account, and be held to account, for the

policies, decisions and actions of their departments and agencies.

- Ministers must ensure that no conflict arises, or appears to arise, between their public duties and their private interests.
- They must keep separate their roles as Minister and constituency member.
- They must not use government resources for party or political purposes; they must accept responsibility for decisions taken by them and not merely blame it on wrong advice.
- Ministers must uphold the political impartiality of the Civil Service and not ask civil servants to act in any way, which would conflict with the duties and responsibilities of civil servants.
- Ministers must recognize that misuse of official position or information is violation of the trust reposed in them as public functionaries.
- Ministers must ensure that public moneys are used with utmost economy and care.

Code in Lok Sabha

- The first Ethics Committee in Lok Sabha was constituted in 2000.
- The report of Ethics committee (headed by L K Advani) which was laid on the table of the Lok Sabha in 2014 recommends that:
 - The Ethics Committee shall formulate a Code of Conduct for Members and suggest amendments to the Code of Conduct from time to time.
- However, the Rules Committee (headed by Speaker) wants to adopt the style of US Congress i.e.
 - Information offered as a complaint by an individual not a Member of the House may be transmitted to the Ethical Committee only if a Member of the House certifies (countersigns) that the information is submitted in good faith and warrants the consideration of the Committee.
- The recommendations have yet not been adopted, and therefore there is no Code of Conduct for members of Lok Sabha.

in India?

- The rules of conduct of Parliament are not adequate. They are limited to throwing paper balls in protest, tearing up documents and rushing to the well of the House or against laughing in the lobby.
- After engaging in disruptive activities, MPs and MLAs seek shelter behind parliamentary privileges.
- The obstructive conduct of some MPs and MLAs is disrespectful to the House, those who elected them, and also a waste of public money.
- Many members are experts in their fields and their contributions could greatly enrich the discourse in the House but they remain absent. A code ensuring attendance of the legislatures is also required.
- Genuine debate and discussion can only take place if political representatives are well trained and well behaved.

Way forward

Codes of conduct are one of the key elements in the establishment of an ethical regime, which is essential to reconstruct the public confidence in public officials and institutions. Elected representatives hold the key to good, people-centred governance. Codifying the rules of the game can only help to fulfil this goal.

The Code of Conduct is a starting point for ensuring good conduct by Ministers. However, it is not comprehensive in its coverage and is more in the nature of a list of prohibitions; it does not amount to a Code of Ethics. It is therefore necessary that in addition to the Code of Conduct, there should be a Code of Ethics to provide guidance on how Ministers should uphold the highest standards of constitutional and ethical conduct in the performance of their duties. The Code of Ethics should also reflect the seven principles of public life -Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.

Why there should be a strict Code of Conduct

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PARAKRAM PARV

- **What is it?** To showcase the courage, valour and sacrifice of Armed Forces during Surgical Strikes conducted in 2016, ‘Parakram Parv’ is being observed from 28-30 September 2018.
- Indian Army conducted surgical strikes in 2016 which had strategic ramifications and were aimed to dissuade inimical adversary from adopting the path of violence and to ensure an environment of peace for the Nation.

century of airports. Until now, Sikkim was the only state in India remaining without a functional airport. The development not only eases connectivity to the Himalayan state but also brings it on the air-map of the world.

- The airport’s location makes it strategically relevant from the country’s security point of view. The Indian Air Force (IAF) will find this airport convenient for the landing and taking off of its aircrafts.
- The airport is not only India’s 100th functional airport but also one of the country’s five highest airports.

SIRHIND AND RAJASTHAN FEEDERS

- **Context:** Cabinet approves financial assistance worth Rs.825 Crore for relining of Sirhind Feeder Canal and relining of Rajasthan Feeder Canal. The project would mitigate water logging problem and enhance the flows/ water availability in the two canals.

Key facts:

- Sirhind and Rajasthan Feeders take off upstream of Harike Head works and flow through Punjab before crossing over to Rajasthan.
- The twin canals have a common bank and were constructed in the 1960s as lined (brick) channels to convey water to command areas in Punjab and Rajasthan.

SIKKIM’S FIRST-EVER AIRPORT INAUGURATED

Sikkim’s first-ever airport was recently inaugurated by the Prime Minister Narendra at Pakyong. The airport was constructed by the Airports Authority of India.

Significance:

- The Pakyong Airport, the country has hit a

INDIA CONTRIBUTES \$1 MN TO UN SOLAR PROJECT

- **Context:** India has contributed USD 1 million for the installation of solar panels on the roof of the imposing UN building at the world body’s headquarters in New York. The contribution will help reduce carbon footprint and promote sustainable energy. This contribution makes India first responder to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres’ call for climate action.

INDIA-BANGLADESH FRIENDSHIP PRODUCT PIPELINE PROJECT

- **Context:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina have jointly launched the construction of India- Bangladesh Friendship Product Pipeline Project through video conferencing.

Key facts:

- It is first such pipeline through which refined diesel will be supplied to Bangladesh from India.
- The project involves construction of 130- kilometre long pipeline that will connect Siliguri in West Bengal and Parbatipur in Dinajpur district of Bangladesh.

- Of the total stretch, six-kilometre will be in Indian side and remaining 124 kilometres will in Bangladesh.

EXERCISE AVIAINDRA-18

- **What is it?** Exercise Aviaindra is an Air Force level exercise between India and the Russian Federation. First Aviaindra was conducted in 2014 and has been planned as a bi-annual exercise.
- **Context:** Exercise Aviaindra 18 is being conducted at Lipetsk, Russia.
- **Significance:** The aim of the exercise is focused towards anti-terrorist operations in a bi-lateral scenario. The exercise would further enhance the co-operation and understanding each other's Concept of Operations.

MAHARASHTRA TO SET UP CYBER VARSITY

- The Maharashtra Government has taken the first step towards setting up a varsity dedicated to mitigating cyber threats. It has set aside ₹80 crore for the first round of its funding and the proposal for the project will be tabled in the State cabinet's consideration in the first week of October.

Role and functions:

- The new Cyber University will train 3,000 professionals to fight online space cyber attacks, internet crimes, and conduct cyber forensics. It will also impart training in 15 other Internet of Things (IoT) areas such as Data Analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI).
- The varsity will provide for and prepare internet professionals on the lines of the Microsoft Certified Professional Program. The courses will cost less than ₹5 lakh for courses in data analytics, cloud computing, blockchain, AI, cyber forensics and cyber investigations.

JHARKHAND GOVERNMENT INTRODUCES ELECTRIC CARS FOR OFFICIAL USE

The state government of Jharkhand has introduced electric vehicles for official use. With the development, Jharkhand has become the fifth state of India and the first state in eastern India to procure the eco-friendly vehicles for government use.

PACIFIC ASIA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION GOLD AWARDS

What?

- Kerala Tourism has won two prestigious gold awards of Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) for its innovative marketing campaigns.
- These awards were won by Kerala Tourism's Yalla Kerala print campaign and Live Inspired Posters under PATA's Travel Advertisement Print and Travel Poster categories respectively.
- Both campaign and posters were developed and designed by Stark Communications which is advertising agency of Kerala Tourism.

About PATA awards:

- These awards are given by PATA and are sponsored by Macau Government Tourism Office (MGTO).
- The Awards are presented to outstanding entries in four principal categories: Marketing; Education and Training; Environment, and Heritage and Culture.
- These awards are presented every year in recognition of the achievements of 25 separate organisations and individuals.

PARYATAN PARV

- **Context:** The second edition of 'Paryatan Parv' of the Ministry of Tourism has begun across the country.

What is Paryatan Parv?

- The Paryatan Parv will showcase the cultural diversity of the country, with cultural performances, crafts bazaar, food court showcasing folk and classical dance & music, handicrafts & handlooms and cuisine from all regions and States of the country.
- The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders is organizing “Paryatan Parv” across the country.
- The programme is being organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country and reinforcing the principle of “Tourism for All”.

RAIL SAHYOG

- Union Ministry of Railways has launched Rail Sahyog web portal (www.railsahyog.in).

Key features:

- It will provide platform for Corporates and PSUs to fund creation of amenities at railway stations through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds.
- This portal will allow companies to register their requests for contributing to create amenities at railway stations through their CSR funds. These requests will be processed by Railway officials and based on principle of first come first serve, requests will be shortlisted.
- Selected applicants will be intimated to deposit the funds with Railways or its nominated agencies like RITES or RAILTEL etc. The nominated agency will get the work executed thereafter.
- It will provide opportunity for industry, companies, associations to collaborate with Indian Railways. Fund utilized for creation of amenities will be beneficial for passengers and for neighbourhood of railway vicinity.

YUDH ABHYAS 2018

- As part of the ongoing Indo-US defence cooperation, a joint military training Exercise *Yudh Abhyas 2018 will be held at Chaubattia in Uttarakhand*. This will be the 14th edition of the joint military exercise hosted alternately by both countries.
- The joint exercise Yudh Abhyas 2018 will simulate a scenario where both nations will work together in counter insurgency and counter terrorism environment in mountainous terrain under United Nation charter.

INDO – MONGOLIAN JOINT EXERCISE: NOMADIC ELEPHANT

- **Context:** INDO-MONGOLIA joint exercise *Nomadic Elephant-2018* is being held in Ullanbaatar, Mongolia.
- **What is it?** Exercise Nomadic Elephant is an annual, bilateral exercise since 2006 which is designed to strengthen the partnership between Indian Army and Mongolian Armed Forces. The exercise will see them improve their tactical and technical skills in joint counter insurgency and counter terrorist operations in rural and urban scenario under United Nations mandate.

About Mongolia:

- Mongolia is a landlocked unitary sovereign state in East Asia.
- It is sandwiched between China to the south and Russia to the north.
- It is also the world's second-largest landlocked country behind Kazakhstan and the largest landlocked country that does not border a closed sea.

SLINEX-2018

- **Context:** India, Sri Lanka joint naval exercise SLINEX-2018 was recently held at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.
- **About:** SLINEX exercise started in

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2005 was previously held once in two years and now it has been converted to annual event this year onwards.

- SLINEX exercise is continuation of ongoing operational interaction between both navies wherein regular ships visits are being undertaken between the two countries.
- SLINEX 2017 was held at Visakhapatnam in September 2017 wherein two ships SLNS participated from Sri Lanka Navy.

KENDRIYA HINDI SAMITI

- **Context:** 31st meeting of the Central Hindi Committee was recently held in New Delhi under the chairmanship of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi.

About Kendriya Hindi Samiti:

- The Kendriya Hindi Samiti was constituted in the year 1967. Chaired by PM, it is the apex policy making body which lays the guidelines for the propagation and progressive use of Hindi as official language of the union.

EXERCISE RAPID TRIDENT

- **What is it?** Rapid Trident logoRapid Trident is an annual, multinational exercise that serves as the validation for Ukraine's Ministry of Defence unit.
- **Context:** Exercise Rapid Trident 2018 is being held in Ukraine, involving approximately 2,270 personnel from 14 nations.

MAURITIUS REMAINS TOP SOURCE OF FDI

- As per the latest data by RBI, *Mauritius was the top source of foreign direct investment (FDI) into India in 2017-18 followed by Singapore.* The total FDI in FY 18 stood at

\$37.36 billion in financial year which was marginal rise over \$36.31 billion recorded in the previous fiscal 2016-17.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL AYURVEDA CONGRESS (IAVC)

- **Context:** Fourth IAVC was recently held in Leiden, Netherlands.
- It was jointly organized by International Maharishi Ayurveda Foundation, Netherlands; All India Ayurvedic Congress, New Delhi and International Academy of Ayurveda, Pune in association with Indian Embassy in Netherlands.
- **Focus:** The congress focused on promotion and propagation of Ayurveda in Netherlands and its neighboring countries of Europe.

MARALAL CAMEL DERBY



What is it? The Maralal Camel Derby is an annual event, held midyear just outside of Maralal town. This is Kenya's best known and most prestigious camel race, attracting both local and international competitors. The event is a major draw for spectators as well as racers.

Why in News? The 2018 edition of this race was held recently in Kenya.

RAXAUL-KATHMANDU RAILWAY LINE

- **Context:** India and Nepal have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the proposed Raxaul-Kathmandu railway line.

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- The MoU is the first step forward in the ambitious rail connectivity initiative between the two countries announced in April this year.
- India's Konkan Railway has been asked to conduct a preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the new rail line in consultation with the Nepalese government.

EXERCISE KAKADU



Context: Exercise Kakadu 2018 will be held in Australia. KAKADU 2018 is the 14th edition of the exercise.

Key facts:

- Exercise KAKADU, which started in 1993, is the premier multilateral regional maritime engagement exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and supported by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
- The exercise is held biennially in Darwin and the Northern Australian Exercise Areas (NAXA).
- Exercise KAKADU derives its name from Kakadu National Park, which is a protected area in the northern territory of Australia, 171 km south-east of Darwin.
- During the exercise, professional exchanges in harbour and diverse range of activities at sea, including complex surface, sub-surface and air operations would enable sharing of best practices and honing of operational skills.

PAKAL DUL AND LOWER KALNAI HYDROPOWER PROJECTS

- **Context:** India has invited Pakistani experts to visit the sites of its two hydropower projects on the Chenab river next month to address its concerns.
- **Pakal Dul:** The 1,000 megawatt Pakal Dul hydroelectric power project on Marusadar River, a tributary of Chenab River, in Jammu and Kashmir will provide 12% free power to the state. The project will not only be the largest hydroelectric power project in the state but also the first storage unit.
- **Lower Kalnai hydroelectric power plant project** involves the construction of a 48MW (2x24MW) hydroelectric power plant. It will include the construction of a dam, tunnel, powerhouse, and substations and installation of generators and transformers and the laying of transmission lines.