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JULY 2016
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1. POLITY

1.1. SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

Why in news?
Prime Minister has re-emphasized on the idea of holding Simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State assemblies.

Need

- **Governance**
  - Allows governments to devote four years for governance.
  - If elections are frequent winning elections becomes the first priority of all politicians during elections.
  - As a result, running an administration and attending to people’s grievances take a back-seat for politicians and the bureaucracy rules the roost.

- **Legislative working**
  - Results in logjam in assemblies/ Lok Sabha as every party wants to be in the spotlight.
  - Vicious circle of continuous elections affects stability. If local elections are included there is always an election taking place in our country.

- **Economy**
  - Reduce the huge economic burden of frequent elections.
  - Pace of economic development is hampered as Model code of conduct is in operation wherein new welfare schemes and measures are usually not announced.

Challenges

- It is almost impossible to achieve in practice as Assemblies might get dissolved at an untimely manner due to political realities. Earlier dissolution, which breaches the principle of simultaneous elections, is brought about by several methods like
  - The PM or CM advises the president or the governor, as the case may be, to prematurely dissolve the Lok Sabha or state assembly and force snap elections to gain electoral advantage.
  - By passing the no-confidence motion against a government or defeating the government’s confidence motion.
  - Central government has misused its powers under Article 356 by imposing the president’s rule in states ruled by opposition parties and dissolving assemblies resulting in premature elections.
- According to Article 85 and Article 174, elections to Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies have to be held within six months (respectively) of dissolving either of them. This is not feasible if elections are held only at fixed durations. Also, if elections are not held within six months, it would be a travesty of democracy.
- Founding fathers of the Constitution envisaged a federal polity of a sui-generis nature. So, multi-party system with elections is the most fundamental manifestation of this will of the popular sovereign.
- Frequent elections bring the politicians back to the voters and enhance the answerability and accountability of politicians to the public.
- Will keep the politicians in touch with ‘pulse of the public’ and the result of elections at various levels can ensure the government the necessary ‘course correction’.
- May mix up issues of local and national issues in the minds of the voters, This may give a boost to regional and local issues, while national issues can take a set-back.
- The issue of logistics and requirement of security personnel, election and administrative officials: there is a dearth of enough officials to conduct simultaneous elections throughout the country in one go.

Examples from the World
Law commission had recommended an amendment of the rule of no-confidence motion (Rule 198 of Rules and Conduct of Business of the Lok Sabha), on the lines of the German Constitution:

- In this system the opposition party leader moves both the no-confidence motion and a confidence motion, and he would become the new leader if both the motions are passed.
- In this way premature dissolution would be avoided without diluting the cardinal principle of democracy. It will also be consistent with the notion of collective responsibility of the government to the House as mentioned in Article 75 (3) of the Constitution.
- Simultaneous elections are also held successfully in South Africa and Sweden.
1.2. CHILD LABOUR (PROHIBITION AND REGULATION) AMENDMENT BILL, 2016

Why in news?

The Lok Sabha passed the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2016. Earlier it was passed by Rajya Sabha.

Salient features

- The Bill amends the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, which prohibits the employment of children younger than 14 in 83 hazardous occupations and processes.
- The amendment:
  - Extends this ban on employment of children under 14 across all sectors,
  - Prohibits the employment of adolescents aged 14-18 years in hazardous occupations and
  - Introduces more stringent jail term and fines for offenders: a jail term of six months to two years and a fine upto Rs 50,000
- The bill brings down the list of hazardous occupations from the earlier 83 to just three: mining, inflammable substances, and hazardous processes under the Factories Act, and the centre will decide which processes are hazardous.
- The Bill has a provision of creating Rehabilitation Fund has also been made for the rehabilitation of children.

Pros

- The Bill is aligned with the statutes of the International Labour Organization (ILO) convention.
- Since there is complete ban on child labour (children under age 14), they can get compulsory primary education in light of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
- It takes into account the realities of family enterprises where children help their parents in miscellaneous ways. But as UNICEF India commented, this could lead to more children working in unregulated conditions.
- The number of child laborers decreased by 65% - from 1.26 crore to 82.2 lakh (aged between 5 – 14 years) between Census 2001 to and Census 2011. This is due to programmes like RTE, MNREGA, Mid Day Meal scheme. So the scourge of child labour can only be eliminated with overall development and creation of opinion, along with rehabilitation. The Child Labour Bill and penalties are only a spoke in the wheel.
- 50% of child labour is in Bihar, UP, Rajasthan, MP and Maharashtra. Over 20% is in UP alone. So special focus is needed here.

Cons

- Children under 14 years will be allowed to work in family businesses, outside of school hours and during holidays, and in entertainment and sports. This can be blatantly misused by many and lead to "victimization of children" in their poverty.
- The definition of ‘family’ has not been defined.
- Even in family enterprises, there is no skilling done. It is mostly against child’s will and is almost slavery. So care has to be taken while implementing the law to not go against the spirit of the law.
- Dilution of penalties against parents and guardians who “force” children into child labour can go against the spirit of the law, i.e., to prevent child labour.

According to the 2001 census, there were 12.6 million child workers between the ages of 5 and 14 in India. In 2011, this number fell to 4.35 million. The National Sample Survey Office's survey of 2009-10 put the number at 4.98 million.
1.3. THE LOKPAL AND LOKAYUKTAS (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2016

- During Monsoon session of the parliament, Lok Sabha has approved an amendment to the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act, 2013.
- **Amendment**: It will allow extension of the time given to public servants and trustees and board members of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) receiving government funds of more than Rs. 1 crore or foreign funding of more than Rs 10 lakh to declare their assets and those of their spouses.
- **Impact**: It will provide immediate relief to public servants facing the July 31 deadline to declare their assets.

**Background**

- According to the rules notified under the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, every public servant shall file declaration, information and annual returns pertaining to his assets and liabilities as well as those of his spouse and dependent children as on March 31 on or before July 31 of that year.
- The extension given now is the fifth since the Act came into force in January 2014.

1.4. CAMPA BILL

**Why in News?**

- Eight years after this bill was introduced, the Rajya Sabha has passed the Compensatory Afforestation Management and Planning Authority bill. This bill has already been passed by Lok Sabha.

**Criticism**

- Afforestation doesn't mean just planting of trees; it should also specify which type of trees. For example, the Bhadra eco-system in Karnataka has been annihilated by the planting of non-native trees.
- As per civil society groups, bill in its present form is fundamentally opposed to Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006 and **did not address legal rights of scheduled tribes and other traditional forest dwellers (OTFDs)**.
- FRA legally recognizes and vests forest rights of STs and OTFDs in about 1,77,000 villages over 40 million hectares of forest land. All these beneficiaries should have been included in CAMPA Bill as well.
- Under the Bill, **forest bureaucracy dominates both the national and state level CAMPA authorities** with no representation to tribals and forest dwellers.
- The CAF bill is totally silent about rights and compensation of local communities.
- Funds should be used to **further strengthen local rights and empower communities** to restore forests and degraded lands.
- Using CAMPA funds to support community-based afforestation will also lead to major positive social and ecological outcomes.

**Note**: To know the provisions of the bill, please refer the April, 2016 Vision Current Affairs. Here, we have presented the criticism part of the bill.

1.5. INTER-STATE COUNCIL MEETING

**Why in News?**

- Recently, the eleventh meeting of the Inter-State Council (ISC) was held after a gap of 10 years.

**What is ISC?**

- Article 263 provides the establishment of an Inter-State Council to effect coordination between the states and between Centre and states.
It is not a permanent constitutional body for coordination between the States of the Union. It can be established 'at any time' if it appears to the President that the public interests would be served by the establishment of such a Council.

First time it was set up on the recommendation of the Sarkaria Commission and established the ISC by a presidential ordinance on May 28, 1990.

The ISC is proposed to meet thrice a year, but in 26 years, it has met only 11 times.

**Composition**

- Prime Minister acts as the chairman of the council.
- **Members:**
  - Union Ministers of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers nominated by the Prime Minister.
  - Chief Ministers of all states.
  - Chief Ministers of Union Territories having a Legislative Assembly and Administrators of UTs not having a Legislative Assembly.

**Issues Discussed during the meeting**

- Consideration of the recommendations of the Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations.
- Use of Aadhaar as an identifier and use of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) for providing subsidies, benefits and Public services.
- Improving quality of school education with focus on improving learning outcomes, incentivizing better performance.
- Internal security.

**Significance**

- The forum is the most significant platform to strengthen Centre-state and inter-state relations and discuss policies.
- This works as an instrument for cooperation, coordination and evolution of common policies.
- It can act to bridge trust deficit between centre and states.

### 1.6. NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (NHRC)

**Why in News?**

- Recently NHRC chairperson Justice H.L. Dattu called NHRC “a toothless tiger”.
- Also Supreme Court bench proposed to consider the grievances of the NHRC due to which it become difficult for the statutory body to discharge its functions.

**Issues faced by NHRC**

- NHRC investigates matters related to human right violations and then recommends remedial measures. However its recommendations are not binding and thus not taken seriously by state authorities which results in no or delayed implementation.
- Paucity of resources – human, financial and material that results in inefficient and ineffective functioning.
- NHRC cannot investigate a case if complaint was made more than one year after the incident.

**About NHRC**

- It is a statutory body established in 1993 under the provisions of Protection of Human Rights Act 1993.
- This apex body is responsible for protecting and promoting human rights related to life, liberty, equality and dignity of individuals as guaranteed by the constitution of India and international covenants.
- It consists of a Chairman and 4 members. Chairman should be a retired Chief Justice of India. Members should be either sitting or retired judges of the Supreme Court or a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court and 2 persons having practical knowledge in the field of human rights.
- Ex officio members are the chairpersons of National Commission for Scheduled Caste, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Minorities and National Commission for Women.
• The act does not extend to the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Hence NHRC cannot investigate incidents of human rights violation there.
• NHRC powers with respect to investigating cases of human rights violation by armed forces are limited.
• Protection of human rights act 1993 does not categorically empower NHRC to investigate matters of human rights violation by private parties.
• NHRC do not have any kind of contempt powers thus it cannot penalize authorities who do not implement its recommendations in a time bound manner.
• Staff often involved in executing NHRC functions are not experts or experienced in the field of human rights as they are often drawn from various Government departments on deputation.
• Non-judicial posts are often filled by retired bureaucrats in place of relevant experts in the field.

Way Forward
• The functioning of protection of human rights act needs to be revised as 15 years has passed since its passage and current demands and challenges needs to be accommodated.
• Various structural as well as functional changes need to be made so as to make NHRC’s functioning efficient and effective.
• The commission needs to be given more teeth (i.e. empowered) and its recommendations must be implemented by the government in a time bound manner.
• Independent recruitment and management of staff.
• Be allowed to independently investigate complaints against armed forces personnel.
• Separate body to investigate cases where police are allegedly involved in human rights violation.

1.7. ADVERTISING STANDARDS COUNCIL OF INDIA (ASCI)

What is it?
• A self-regulatory voluntary organization of the advertising industry in India, founded in 1985.
• The three main constituents of the industry viz. advertisers, advertising agencies and media came together to form this independent NGO.
• The aim of ASCI is to maintain and enhance the public’s confidence in advertising. Their mandate is that all advertising material must be truthful, legal and honest, decent and not objectify women, safe for consumers esp children and fair to their competitors.
• It deliberates upon individual complaints against any advertisements for its compliance with ASCI code and other laws.

Why in news?
• ASCI and Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) have signed a MoU to check misleading advertisements in the food and beverages sector.

Important points about the MoU
• ASCI gets a suo motu monitoring mandate by FSSAI to process complaints against misleading advertisements of food and beverages along with the complaints from FSSAI.
• The review will include violation of the Food Safety Standards Act 2006 and regulations related to advertisements making misleading, unsubstantiated or false claims.
• ASCI would report to FSSAI about the non-compliance as per provisions of the FSS Act.
1.8. ARUNACHAL PRADESH GOVERNMENT RESTORED

Why in News?

- Supreme Court had restored the Congress government in Arunachal Pradesh and declared all decisions of Governor as “unconstitutional”.
- Governor’s decision had led to imposition of President’s rule in the state and later formation of a new government.

Details

- This judgment is historic since it is the first time the Supreme Court has restored a government after it was dismissed and a new government was sworn in.
- SC directed that a Governor cannot have the freedom to determine when and in which situation he can take a decision at his own discretion without the aid and advice of the Chief Minister and his Council of Ministers.
- The court said that a Governor is not an elected representative, but only an executive nominee whose powers flow from the aid and advice of the Cabinet.
- As per the judgment, Governor can act without the aid and advice only when a government has lost its majority in a floor test.
- Judgment also ruled that the Governor is not the conscience-keeper of the “Legislative Assembly” and that he had to stay away from the business of the Assembly.
- The court said that the Constitution does not assign any role to a Governor to interfere in the activities of the Assembly.
- Hence it would be outside the domain of his powers to fix a date for an Assembly session or to decide how the Assembly functions.

Impact

- The main significance of this verdict is that it provides clarity on the Governor’s role.
- The Governor has no authority to resolve disputes within a political party.
- He has no discretionary power to advance an Assembly session without the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers nor can he fix its agenda.
- In future, Judgment will be helpful in avoiding the misuse of the Governor’s power under Article 356.

Note: For more details on this issue, please refer Vision February, 2016 Current Affairs.

1.9. SC RULING ON SPEAKER’S POWER TO DISQUALIFY MEMBERS

Why in News?

- As part of judgment on the Arunachal Pradesh crisis, SC observed that a Speaker should refrain from deciding the disqualification of MLAs for defection under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution while a notice of resolution for his own removal from the office of Speaker is pending.

Impact

- A Speaker under the threat of losing his position, may choose to disqualify the MLAs to alter the composition of the House in his favour.
- Hence, this ruling will act as a safeguard against a Speaker using the disqualification proceedings of legislators for his own political ends.
1.10. SC RULING: POWER OF PARDON

- Constitutional bench of Supreme Court held that power of the executive to grant pardon to convicts cannot be exercised by the Supreme court unless there is a violation of fundamental rights.
- SC also observed that Article 32 (the right to Constitutional remedies whereby individuals may seek redressal for the violation of their fundamental rights) can be only invoked when there is violation of any fundamental right or where the Court takes up certain grievance which falls in the realm of public interest litigation.

Related Info

Pardoning power of President and Governor:

- The President’s powers to pardon in Article 72 are different from those granted to the Governor in Article 161. The President enjoys extensive powers under Article 72 as compared to what is available to the State Governor.
- In case where the convict is sentenced to death penalty, only the President can exercise the right to pardon him/her. The governor does not have the right to pardon death sentences, she can only suspend, commute or provide remission in case of death sentences.
- The President has the right to pardon punishments of sentences given under Court Martial, whereas the governor does not have this power.
- Both the President and Governor have concurrent powers in cases of suspension, commutation and remission of a death sentence.

1.11. FUNDS MEANT FOR SCHEDULED CASTES UNDERUTILIZED

- As per the latest annual report by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), almost all states have failed to honour their budgetary commitments toward the SC community.
- The Central Govt. guidelines to States clearly mentions that only the schemes which ensure direct benefits to individuals or families belonging to SCs should be included under Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP).
- Many States have generally allocated funds to the Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) at par with the Scheduled Castes (SC) population of the States.
- However, as per the Commission, the actual expenditures under SCSP is only between 2% and 8% of allocation in most States except West Bengal, Karnataka and Telangana and the unspent SCSP fund is often re-appropriated.
- State officials on the other hand blame the commission for “faulty auditing” and claim that it was difficult to segregate funds for SCs, as infrastructure schemes such as roads, toilet, schools and drinking water also cover beneficiaries from the community.

1.12. SUPREME COURT RULES OUT CONSECUTIVE LIFE TERMS

- A five judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has held that there is no point in awarding life sentences twice and thrice over to those found guilty of heinous crimes.
- Interpreting Section 31 (sentence in cases of conviction of several offences at one trial) of the Criminal Procedure Code, the Constitution Bench clarified that like any human being, a convict too has only one life and cannot serve consecutive sentences of life imprisonment.
- The Supreme Court explained that in cases where a prisoner twice sentenced to life gets remission or his first life sentence is commuted, the second life sentence
immediately kicks in and deprives him of the ability to enjoy the benefit of the remission or commutation of the first life sentence.

- In another case, if an offender is given life imprisonment coupled with 'term' sentences of fixed years, say seven or 10 years, the court laid down that in such cases the convict would complete his term sentence before graduating to his life sentence.
- The court finally held that instead of life terms running consecutively, they would superimpose over each other so that any remission or commutation granted by the competent authority in one case does not ipso facto result in remission of the sentence for the other.

1.13. SC ACCEPTS STRUCTURAL REFORMS IN BCCI

Background

- The SC appointed Lodha Committee, on January 4 2016.
- The committee recommended sweeping reforms and an administrative shake-up at the troubled BCCI following which the BCCI and some of the State cricket associations, former players and cricket administrators approached the apex court with regard to the implementation of Lodha panel recommendations.
- The court dismissed BCCI’s plea, and upheld the committee’s major proposals.

Recommendations Accepted

- SC rejected the BCCI’s objection against recommendation of one-State-one-vote. It said that States that have more than one cricket association will have voting rights on a rotational basis.
- This means that states with more than one cricket association, as in the case of Gujarat (Saurashtra, Gujarat and Baroda) and Maharashtra (Mumbai, Maharashtra and Vidarbha), will have voting rights on a “rotational basis”—one at a time.
- The SC order also barred serving civil servants and ministers from being on BCCI’s board or that of their respective state associations.
- The SC also accepted a recommendation which stipulated that office-bearers of BCCI must not be over 70 years of age.
- It accepted the recommendation that one person should hold one post in cricket administration to avoid any conflict of interest and scrapping of all other administrative committees in the BCCI after the CAG nominee comes in.
- The court also upheld the term-limit recommended by the committee. Each of the office-bearers, would have a three-year term and could contest a maximum of three terms, with a mandatory cooling-off period after each term.
- SC accepted the recommendation that there should be a players association in the BCCI and SC ordered BCCI to establish a players’ association and fund it.
- SC accepted the committee’s proposed recommendation that a nominee from the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) be made a part of BCCI’s managing committee.

Recommendations left to decision of parliament

- The SC left it to Parliament to decide whether the functioning of the BCCI can be brought under RTI as recommended by the Lodha panel.
- SC also left parliament to decide whether to legalise betting in cricket or not.

Recommendations left to board

- Board to decide whether there is need for any change in the existing agreement relating to broadcasting rights.
It left it to the Board to decide whether a franchise member should be in the Board to avoid any conflict of interest.

Board to also decide the extent of funding of players association in the BCCI.

SC requested the three-member Lodha panel, to oversee the transition of administrative structure in the BCCI which has to take place within six months.

**Way Forward**

- The SC order effectively overhauls the BCCI’s organisational set-up, memberships and functioning for the sake of transparency and accountability.
- Prima facie it looks like judicial activism, but considering the sad state of affairs in BCCI, SC order was need of the hour to bring transparency and accountability in the functioning of BCCI.
- The judgement has implications for sport in general. The BCCI is the best-run sports body in the country, and generates its own funds. Yet it needed straightening out.
- There should be a call to apply the Supreme Court’s rulings in general in other sports bodies too, that rely on government hand outs and run by politicians as personal fiefdoms.

[Note- For more details please refer January 2016, current affairs.]

1.14. **SUPREME COURT WARNS JUDGES AGAINST JUDICIAL OVERREACH**

**Why in news?**

- Recently, the Supreme Court cautioned judges against judicial overreach and said that judges must remain within the limits of the law and not peddle individual perceptions and notions of justice.

**What is the difference between judicial activism and judicial overreach?**

- Under our constitutional scheme, judiciary has to enforce the laws laid down by the legislature in accordance with our constitution for which it has wide powers ranging, from issuing writs of certain nature to the entertainment of petitions by special leave etc.
- Further, new innovations like the concept of PIL in recent times, has led to an enormous expansion of unaccountable judicial power in the nation’s politics.
- Thus the exercise of judicial powers in a manner which leads to redefinition of power equations between different organs of the state and the judiciary is called as judicial activism.
- However, judicial activism doesn’t necessary mean that judiciary is inclined to expand its powers. Its more about the positive role played by the judiciary owing to the factors like a near collapse of responsible government, a legislative vacuum due to coalition governments and public confidence in the judiciary.
- Judicial Activism when overtly exercised results in usurping the powers of the Executive or the Legislature, which are the other two important organs of governance and is called as Judicial overreach.
- The power to legislate is squarely conferred on the Legislature by the Constitution. No such legislative power is given to the Courts by the Constitution. Judicial Activism cannot be used for filling up the lacunae in Legislation or for providing rights or creating liabilities not provided by the Legislation.

**What did the Supreme Court say in its recent judgement?**

- The court said that judges should not peddle individual perceptions and notions of justice. A judge’s solemn pledge has to remain embedded to Constitution and the laws.
- The apex court said if a judge considered himself or herself a “candle of hope” and took decisions under the influence of such a notion, it might do more harm than good to the society.
- While using the power one has to bear in mind that ‘discipline’ and ‘restriction’ are the two basic golden virtues within which a judge functions as per the Supreme Court.
Way Forward

- There is a very fine line between Judicial activism and overreach. It would be would be in the best interest of our country if judges understand this and restrain themselves from crossing this line too often.
- The judiciary cannot rule the nation by legislating as well as executing through its judgements. Its simply not meant to do that. It can rightly be argued that a legitimate judicial intervention is the one which clearly falls within the permissible scope of judicial review.
- Purely political questions and policy matters not involving decision of a core legal issue should therefore remain outside the domain of judiciary.

1.15. SUPREME COURT RULING ON AFSPA

Recent SC Ruling

- Recently SC ruled that every death caused by armed forces in a disturbed area involving either a common person or an insurgent must be thoroughly enquired into so as to find out whether the killing was extra-judicial or not.
- Thus there is no absolute immunity for armed forces personnel who commit a crime even in a disturbed area.
- Supreme Court was hearing the plea demanding probe into 1528 deaths alleged to be fake or extra-judicial encounters by the armed forces in the state of Manipur.

About AFSPA

- Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act was enacted in the year 1958 by the parliament of India grants extra-ordinary powers and immunity to the armed forces to bring back order in the disturbed areas.
- Some of these extra-ordinary powers include:
  - Fire upon anyone after giving warning who is acting against law & order in the disturbed area.
  - Arrest anyone without warrant.
  - Stop and search any vehicle or vessel.
  - Armed forces personnel have legal immunity for their actions.
- Presently AFSPA is enforced in the 6 states of North East and J&K. Tripura recently decided to lift this act.

Arguments against AFSPA

- It has been alleged that immunity granted by the act has led the armed forces to misuse the powers given to them by this act and commit offences like fake encounters and sexual assault.
- This gross human rights violation weakens people's faith in the democracy and leads to vicious circle syndrome.
- It leads to suspension of fundamental rights and liberties guaranteed to the citizens by the constitution. Thus weakens democracy.
- It has been alleged that the sweeping powers without accountability has resulted in making armed forces unprofessional and insensitive.
- Critics argue that this act has failed in its objective of restoring normalcy in disturbed areas although being in existence for about 50 years.
- Government of Tripura recently decided to lift this controversial act from the state. However power to lift this act lies with the Governor or the Centre.
Arguments in favour of AFSPA

- It is essential for the armed forces to function effectively in insurgency and militancy affected areas.
- Provisions of this act have played a crucial role in maintaining law and order in disturbed areas. Thus protecting sovereignty and security of the nation.
- Hundreds of armed forces personnel loss their lives every year at the hands of insurgents and militants. It is crucial to empower them. Withdrawal would result in poor morale.

Way Forward

- Committee to Review the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act formed in 2004, in its report, recommended the repeal of the AFSPA, calling it “a symbol of oppression, an object of hate and an instrument of discrimination”.
- This act being in effect for about 50 years has not been able to achieve its desired objective.
- Thus the strategy to deal with issues of insurgency and militancy needs to be revised where people are not alienated but plays an active participatory role.

1.16. WORLD BANK: INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

- The World Bank group has agreed to help in the development and deployment of affordable solar energy under the International Solar Alliance project. It will support it by:
  - Mobilizing $1 trillion in investments by 2030.
  - Developing a roadmap to mobilize financing for the project.
  - Working with other multilateral development banks and financial institutions to develop financing instruments to support solar energy development.
- Further it will lend more than $1 billion to support India’s ambitious initiatives to expand solar energy generation, including a $625 million grid-connected rooftop solar programme.

Significance

- Finance is the biggest challenge before the ambitious project. Inclusion of World Bank would give it the necessary stimulus.
- It will also help in getting support from other multilateral financial institutions and countries.
- This gives the project an international character and recognition.

About ISA

- International Solar Alliance brings together developing and developed countries to expand energy access by accelerating solar power deployment.
- It aims to utilize the solar energy potential of countries situated between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn which receive abundant sunshine for around 300 days a year.
- It was launched at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris in 2015 by India and France.
- Its HQ is situated in India. Further, India is providing land and $30 million to form a secretariat for the Alliance, and also support it for five years.
- Among the tasks that the Alliance would pursue are, cooperation in training, building institutions, regulatory issues, common standards, and investment including joint ventures.

1.17. FREEDOM OF SPEECH: BAN ON MURUGAN’S BOOK REVERSED

Background

- Perumal Murugan, an award-winning Tamil writer had come under sustained attack from local caste-based groups for his fictional novel *Mathorubhagan* (translated into English as *One Part Woman*) for hurting their sentiments.
• He was forced to write an ‘unconditional apology’ at the instance of police, local officials and protestors. He later publicly announced to give up writing.
• The Madras HC has rejected the demand for banning the book or prosecuting the author.

High Court Verdict
• It is a liberal and progressive judgment that emphasises and upholds the freedom of writers to write.
• The HC lambasted the practice of self-appointed super censors in the society to decide on what the people should read or watch. In Court’s opinion those professing to be hurt by a book should just avoid reading it. This should set a precedent among others.
• The Bench also reminded the state authorities, like police and the local officials, of their duty to secure freedom of expression and not to succumb to mob demands in the name of preserving law and order.

Issue of Judicial Censorship
• Indian Criminal law prescribes a two-step safeguard on freedom of speech in case of banning a book:
  ▪ First is the application of mind by the government when it bans a book under S.95 and 96 of the CrPC
  ▪ Second is the judicial review of the government’s move by a writ petition.
• The trouble is the frequent manner of straightway approaching the court for a ban. This by-passing of the two-way safeguard is being increasingly entertained by the Courts.
• This is an issue as a sole decision over the suitability of the book by the Court is not what the constitution or the law warrants. This form of analysis is heavily judge-centric, depending almost entirely on what an individual judge feels about a controversial work.
• Thus, the courts must take care of this fact as well or there will be huge uncertainty over the status of freedom of speech vis-a-vis banning a book.

1.18. RULES TO CHECK NEPOTISM BY CIVIL SERVANTS

Why in news?
To check nepotism and corruption, the central government has clarified that the civil servants shall not use their position to grant any benefit to their immediate family or any other person related to any of them by blood or marriage.

Need
The order by the department of personnel and training (DoPT) came after doubts were raised over the definition of “members of family” under the Central Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1964.

Benefits of checking Nepotism
• For impartiality, objectivity and Non-Partisanship: Rule 4(1) of the CCS (Conduct) Rules, no government servant shall use their position or influence directly or indirectly to secure employment for any member of their family in any company or firm.
• For Probit in governance and Integrity: Rule 4(3) states that, “No government servant shall in the discharge of his official duties deal with any matter or give or sanction any contract to any company or firm or any other person if any member of his family is employed in that company or firm.
• For Efficiency and Quality of service delivery: To review the performance of every official when they reach the 50-55 age bracket and complete 30 years in service.
• Also to reduce corruption: the centre last year introduced a rule to allow civil servants to be removed from service in public interest even if the evidence against them is not sufficient to initiate disciplinary proceedings.
1.19. BENEFITS TO ASYLUM SEEKERS

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved proposals for extending several benefits to “persecuted” minorities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh living in India on long-term visas.
- They can now take up self-employment, buy property, open bank accounts and get driving licences, PAN card and Aadhaar.

What is Asylum?

- Protection or safety, especially that given by a government to people who have been forced to leave their own countries for their safety or because of war.
- India is offering asylum to considerable number of refugees however India is not the signatories of the 1951 Refugee convention of the UN.
- There is a considerable increase in number of people seeking asylum in India. India does not have national asylum legislation. In India foreigners are generally dealt under
  - The Registration of Foreigners Act, 1939
  - The Foreigners Act, 1946
  - The Foreigners Order, 1948

Proposed changes

- Many members of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi and Christian communities have come to India fearing persecution in their home countries.
- The registration fees for citizenship will be reduced to Rs. 100 from Rs. 3,000-15,000.
- The Citizenship Rules, 2009, will be amended soon to help such persons get citizenship.
- The beneficiaries can buy property for self-occupation or use in self-employment.
- The beneficiaries are allowed free movement within the State of their stay, and can get their long-term visa papers transferred from one State to another.
- The government has permitted them to apply for long-term visas from the place of their current residence, even if they have moved to the present place without seeking permission.
- The government has waived the penalty on late application for extension of their short- or long-term visas.
- The Collector or District Magistrate would be empowered to authorise an officer not below the rank of Sub-divisional Magistrate for administering the oath of allegiance to the applicant.
- The powers will be delegated to the Collectors of 16 districts in Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh for two years for registration as citizens of India.

Way forward

The Centre has taken several measures in the past two years to alleviate the problems of the persecuted minorities from the neighbouring countries who have been living here for long. The proposed changes will have positive effect on the lives of the asylum seekers who have been exploited and subjected to violence.

The changes should be made applicable to all the communities irrespective of religion they belong to.

Previous Year Question

Which one of the following authorities recommends the principles governing the grant-in-aid of the revenues to the states out of the Consolidated Fund of India? Prelims 2002

(a) Finance Commission  (b) Inter-State Council
(c) Union Ministry of Finance  (d) Public Accounts Committee
1.20. NATIONAL ELECTORAL ROLL PURIFICATION 2016 (NERP 2016)

- The Election Commission of India (ECI) has launched the National Electoral Roll Purification (NERP) programme across the country to correct errors in electoral rolls and enrolment of all eligible citizens, among other things.
- It will ensure single electoral register entry for every eligible elector with unique Elector Photo Identity Card (EPIC) number, removal of all absent, shifted or dead electors’ entries and repeat entries.
- Geographic Information System (GIS) would be used to standardise sections, polling station boundaries and locations.
- The Commission has launched the intensive field implementation phase of NERP 2016 which would culminate well before the next draft publication of Electoral Rolls for annual summary revision with January 1, 2017 as qualifying date.
- Provision has been made to provide the information electronically on National Voters Service Portal (NVSP).

The NERP-2016 strives to improve the fidelity of the rolls through effective use of technology and SVEEP (Systematic Voters’ Education and Electoral Participation) strategies.

- Information Technology is being extensively used in information collection, processing, sharing and efficient decision making.
- Comprehensive training for Booth Level Officer has been done on NERP and the orientation of the members of Booth Awareness Groups (BAGs) will be done to conduct an effective SVEEP campaign.

1.21. MADHYA PRADESH BECOMES FIRST STATE TO HAVE ‘HAPPINESS DEPARTMENT’ IN MADHYA PRADESH

- Madhya Pradesh recently became the first State in the country to set up a ‘Happiness Department’, on the lines of the neighbouring country Bhutan.
- A panel of experts will be formed in the newly-constituted department which will give suggestions to ensure happiness in the lives of the people.

About Gross National happiness of Bhutan

- The Gross National Happiness (GNH) index was proposed by Bhutan in 1971 to champion a novel approach to measure prosperity by measuring spiritual, physical, social and environmental well-being of its citizens and environment.
- The four pillars of GNH are:
  ✓ Sustainable and equitable socio-economic development,
  ✓ Conservation of the environment,
  ✓ Preservation and promotion of culture,
  ✓ Good governance.
- The Centre for Bhutan Studies identifies nine indicators which were used in the survey:
  ✓ Standard of Living,
  ✓ Health of the population
  ✓ Education
  ✓ Ecosystem vitality and diversity
  ✓ Cultural vitality and diversity
  ✓ Time use and balance
  ✓ Good governance
  ✓ Community vitality
  ✓ Emotional well-being
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The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague, Netherlands, has ruled that China’s claims of historical rights over South China Sea (SCS) has no legal basis. The case was brought to the court in 2013 by the Philippines, centring on the Scarborough Shoal, but Beijing chose to boycott the proceedings.

What did the arbitration panel rule?

- The court at The Hague ruled that China’s claims to the waters within the so-called “nine-dash line”, with wide-ranging economic interests, was in breach of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).
- The court slammed China for damaging parts of the ecosystem in the Spratly islands—a contested archipelago—on account of overfishing and development of artificial islands.
- The Court also said that China violated the Philippines’ sovereign rights. It said China has caused “severe harm to the coral reef environment” by building artificial islands.

What is the ‘nine-dash’ line?

The ‘nine-dash line’ stretches hundreds of kilometers south and east of its southerly Hainan Island, covering the strategic Paracel and Spratly island chains. China buttresses its claims by citing 2,000 years of history when the two island chains were regarded as its integral parts.

Chinese response to ruling of PCA

- China rejected an international ruling on the South China Sea as “null and void” and devoid of any “binding force”.
- China is contemplating to establish a military Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in the South China Sea (SCS). The imposition of an ADIZ would require overflying planes to first notify China.
- Many Chinese experts stressed that the entire episode was a cover to enforce the US’ “Pivot of Asia” or Rebalance strategy, aimed at the containment of China.

India’s response

India has made it clear that it recognised that the tribunal had been set up within the jurisdiction of the UN’s Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) that must be given the “utmost respect”.

Why South China Sea is considered so important?

- The SCS is a busy international waterway, being one of the main arteries of the global economy and trade. More than $5 trillion of world trade ships pass through the SCS every year.
- The SCS is also resource rich, with numerous offshore oil and gas blocks.
2.2. INDIA-CAMBODIA

The Union Cabinet approved signing of the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) with Cambodia.

- It is the first Bilateral Investment Treaty in accordance with the text of the Indian Model BIT, approved by the Cabinet in December 2015.
- The treaty seeks to promote and protect investments from either country in the territory of the other country with the objective of increasing bilateral investment flows.

Bilateral investment treaty (BIT) is an agreement establishing the terms and conditions for private investment by nationals and companies of one state in another state.

2.3. INDIA-AFRICA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid historic visit to four African nations - Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya. The focus of the African tour was on deepening cooperation in areas of hydrocarbons, maritime security, trade and investment, agriculture and food.

A. India-Mozambique

During the visit both countries signed following agreements.

- MoU on drug demand reduction and prevention of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursor chemicals and related matters.
- MoU in the field of Youth Affairs and Sports.
- Long-term agreement for purchase of pulses from Mozambique.
  ✓ India will buy pulses from this African nation to meet its recurring shortfall and contain prices of this commodity.

Other areas of cooperation

Energy

- PM visit to Mozambique is significant as the country is home to a bulk of India’s Africa-bound investment.
- Energy dialogue between two sides has been steadily growing since the India Africa Forum Summit.

Security and Defence

- India will also help build capacities of Mozambique’s security forces.
- India and Mozambique agreed to cooperate to meet “strategic and security challenges” emerging in mainland Africa and the Indian Ocean region.

B. India-South Africa

India and South Africa agreed to deepen engagement in key areas of defence production, manufacturing, mining and minerals while vowing to cooperate “actively” in combating terrorism and dealing with issues at multilateral fora.

During the visit, the following Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding were signed by the two sides:

- Memorandum of Understanding on ICT.
- Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of Grassroots Innovation in the area of Science and Technology.
- Memorandum of Understanding on Tourism; and
- Programme of Cultural Cooperation
Highlights of visit

- **Push for Make in India**: PM invited defence businesses to set up a manufacturing base in India, which could service the domestic requirements of India and South Africa as well as for export to third countries.
- PM undertook a train journey to Pietermaritzburg station in memory of the 1893 incident in which Mahatma Gandhi was thrown out of a train compartment on account of his skin colour.

Importance of South Africa

- Indian diaspora: South Africa is home of 1.2 million people of Indian origin.
- South Africa is member of NSG. Its cooperation is essential for India entry in NSG.
- Both countries are member of major grouping (international forum) G-20, BRICS, ISBA and IORA.
- Both countries are actively pursuing UN Security Council reform.

C. India-Tanzania

India and Tanzania agreed to work closely, bilaterally, regionally and globally to combat the twin threats of terrorism and climate change.

List of MOUs/Agreements signed during the visit of Prime Minister:

- MoU on Cooperation in the field of water resource management and development between the two countries.
- MoU on Visa waiver agreement for Diplomatic/Official passport holders between the two countries.
- Agreement on Joint Action Plan (JAP) between National Small Industries Corporation of India (NSIC) and Small Industries Development Organization Tanzania (SIDO).
- MoU between the Government of Tanzania and the Government of India for Establishment of Vocational Training Centre at Zanzibar.
- Line of Credit of US $92 million for rehabilitation and improvement of water supply system in Zanzibar.

‘Solar Mamas’

‘Solar Mamas’, a group of rural women solar engineers from Africa who have been trained under Government of India-supported programmes to fabricate, install, use, repair and maintain solar lanterns and household solar lighting systems in their villages.

D. India-Kenya

India and Kenya decided to deepen and expand cooperation in a wide range of areas as they signed seven pacts, including in the field of defence and security and avoidance of double taxation.

Following are the list of agreements:

- Revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA).
- Bilateral agreement on exemption of Visa for holders of Diplomatic passports.
- MoU on Defence Cooperation: it will entail staff exchanges, expertise sharing, training, cooperation in hydrography and equipment supply.
• MoU on Cooperation in the field of standardisation, expertise sharing and mutual trade between Bureau of Indian Standards and Bureau of Kenya Standard.
• MoU on Cooperation in the field of National Housing Policy Development and Management.
• Line of Credit Agreement for US $15 million (first tranche of US $30 million) to IDB Capital Limited, Kenya, for development of various small and medium enterprises [SMEs] in Kenya.
• Line of Credit Agreement for US $29.95 million to the Government of Kenya for upgrade of Rift Valley Textiles Factory [RIVATEX East Africa Limited], Kenya.

India’s outreach to Africa

India is making a renewed push to regain relevance in a rapidly evolving African strategic landscape.

• India’s focus over the last few decades has largely been on capacity-building on the continent, providing more than $1 billion in technical assistance and training to personnel under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme.
• India has committed $7.5 billion to African infrastructure, covering 137 projects in more than 40 countries.
• It has also offered duty-free market access to Africa’s least developed countries. But India’s trade with Africa at around $72 billion remains far below potential. China trade with Africa is $200 billion.

Advantage for India compare to China

India has been slow to upgrade ties with Africa, and it must chart its own trajectory without competing with, or being inhibited by, China’s formidable presence in the continent.

• India’s democratic traditions make it a much more comfortable partner for the West compared to China in cooperating on Africa-related issues.
• India is viewed as a more productive partner by many in Africa because Indian companies are much better integrated into African society and encourage technology transfers to their African partners.

Maritime Security

Prime Minister spoke about shoring up maritime ties as part of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and linking India’s own “Sagar-Mala” outreach for Indian Ocean islands with the South Africa-authored “Operation Phakisa”, that focusses on Africa’s combined strengths in blue economies and ocean governance.

2.4. INDIA-PAKISTAN RIVER DISPUTE

Pakistan has decided to return to an international tribunal to settle a dispute with India over sharing waters of the Kishenganga and Ratle rivers.

Pakistan’s New Strategy: Experts in Pakistan are pointing out that unlike the previous arbitration, Pakistan will this time around take up the issue of “design” of the Kishenganga and Ratle river projects in Kashmir.

Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant Dispute time line

The Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant is a dam, which is part of a run-of-the-river hydroelectric scheme that is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin.

• In 2010, Pakistan appealed to the Hague’s Permanent Court of Arbitration (CoA), complaining that the Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant violates the Indus River Treaty by increasing the catchment of the Jhelum River and depriving Pakistan of its water rights.
• India maintained that Run-of-the-river projects are permitted by the Indus treaty within defined limits.
• The International Court of Arbitration gave its "final award" on 20 December 2013, wherein it allowed India to go ahead with the construction of the Kishanganga dam.
The "final award" specifies that 9 m³/s of natural flow of water must be maintained in Kishanganga river at all times to maintain the environment downstream.

For management of sedimentation in the dam, India planned to use the modern drawdown flushing technique that requires waters to be brought below the Dead Storage Level. This technique was accepted by the neutral expert in the Baglihar dispute with Pakistan but has been disallowed by the Court of Arbitration.

About Indus Water Treaty - 1960

The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank (then the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development). The treaty was signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960 by Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President of Pakistan Ayub Khan.

- According to this agreement, control over the three "eastern" rivers — the Beas, Ravi and Sutlej — was given to India and the three "western" rivers — the Indus, Chenab and Jhelum — to Pakistan.
- Permanent Indus Commission: The Treaty provides for exchange of data and co-operation in matters related to its provisions. For this, it establishes a Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) with each country having one commissioner in it.

Dispute resolution mechanism

The Treaty recognizes three categories of such divergence and mechanism for their resolution:

- 'Questions' to be discussed and resolved at the level of the Indus Commission, or at the level of the two governments;
- 'Differences' (that is, unresolved ‘questions’) to be referred to a Neutral Expert (NE) if they are of certain kinds (that is, broadly speaking, differences of a technical nature); and
- ‘Disputes’ (going beyond ‘differences,’ and perhaps involving interpretations of the Treaty) that are referable to a Court of Arbitration.

2.5. ASEM SUMMIT

The 11th Asia-Europe Meeting Summit took place in the Mongolian capital Ulaan Baatar.

- India is represented by Vice-President Hamid Ansari.
- The ASEM is an informal inter-regional dialogue that addresses political, security, financial, economic, social and cultural issues.

About ASEM

It was officially established on 1 March 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.

Its objective is to strengthen the relationship between the two regions in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership. There are 53 partners of ASEM. India is also part of ASEM.

The main components of the ASEM process rest on the following 3 pillars:

- Political Pillar
- Economical Pillar
- Social, Cultural & Educational Pillar
2.6. FAILED COUP IN TURKEY

A section of Turkey's military tried to overthrow President Tayyip Erdogan who has been in power since 2003. The government has blamed Fethullah Gulen, a powerful, reclusive US-based Muslim cleric whom it accuses of fomenting unrest.

Why the Turkish military revolted?

The rise of Mr. Erdogan to power in 2002 had challenged the military both ideologically and institutionally.

- In terms of ideology, Mr. Erdogan's AK Party's Islamist politics was fundamentally different from the military's Kemalist secularism.
- Mr. Erdogan's government also took a series of steps in its initial years such as limiting the jurisdiction of the military court and bringing the appointment of senior military figures under civilian control to weaken the military's influence in society and over state.
- Weakening of state: Erdogan has contributed to the weakening of the state in many ways:

A. Disastrous foreign policy

Crisis in Syria: When crisis broke out in Syria in 2011, Mr. Erdogan was one of the first leaders who called for President Bashar al-Assad's resignation. Since then he actively backed Islamist rebels in Syria.

- This was largely counterproductive. First, it deepened the Syrian civil war, sending a huge number of refugees into Turkey.
- Second, the hands of Islamic State were strengthened by the Syrian conflict. The IS is now occasionally attacking Turkey.
- Turkey's involvement in Syria had turned Russia against the country. The Russian sanctions had seriously impacted the country's Central Asia plans.

B. Islamisation

- Forced Islamisation that has sharpened the contradiction between the Islamist and secular sections.
- The military has had tensions with Mr. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) over its brand of political Islamism.

C. To rewrite the constitution

- The push to rewrite the Constitution to award more powers to himself.
- The president has also cracked down on free media and is seen as an authoritarian by many people.

Impact of coup attempt

- Thousands of people have been arrested or sacked since the failed coup.
- Rights groups believe political opponents are being rounded up under the pretext of backing the coup-plotters or the alleged mastermind, US-based cleric Fethullah Gulen.
- Turkey's president has declared a state of emergency for three months.

Role of Military in Turkey

Historically the Turkish military held considerable sway over politics.

- It's a popular institution with relative autonomy Kemalism, the country's founding ideology, and secularism.
- The military sees itself as upholders of Kemalism, the form of democratic nationalism and secularism ushered in by founding father Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in 1923.

Turkey as secular state

The Republic of Turkey was created as a secular state in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman empire at the end of first World War.
2.7. INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION (IMO)

The UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution approving an agreement to make the International Organisation for Migration part of the UN as a related organization.

- IOM, which assisted an estimated 20 million migrants in 2015, is an intergovernmental organisation with more than 9,500 staff and 450 offices worldwide.
- Founded in the wake of the World War II to resettle refugees from Europe.
- IOM was granted Permanent Observer status to the UN General Assembly in 1992, and a cooperation agreement between IOM and the UN was signed in 1996.

2.8. REVOLUTIONARY ARMED FORCES OF COLOMBIA (FARC)

The Colombian government and FARC rebels signed a ceasefire and disarmament agreement to end civil war.

- The deal establishes “a bilateral ceasefire and end to hostilities and the definitive laying down of arms”.
- The deal puts a definitive end to fighting in Latin America’s longest civil war.
- The Colombian conflict started in the 1960s as a rural uprising for land rights that spawned the communist FARC. The conflict has drawn in various leftist rebel groups, right-wing paramilitaries and drug gangs over the decades.

2.9. ARMED CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN

Armed conflict erupted in South Sudan’s capital Juba between government and opposition forces, raising the spectre of a return to civil war.

Recent conflict

- South Sudan President Salva Kiir and Vice President Riek Machar are central characters at the heart of the infighting.
- The two leaders have been embroiled in a power struggle since late 2013, when the President accused the vice president of trying to oust him through a coup.
- The current fighting between soldiers loyal to Mr. Kiir, a member of the Dinka tribe, and former rebels backing Mr. Machar, a Nuer, was triggered by a deadly altercation at a checkpoint.
U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS)

There are 2,500 Indian soldiers in the U.N. Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

About South Sudan

- In 2011, South Sudan split from its northern neighbor, Sudan, in a contentious divorce brokered by international diplomats to end one of the world’s longest civil wars.
- The split ended decades of violence and bloodshed between South Sudan, which is predominantly Christian, and its Muslim neighbor, Sudan.

2.10. OPERATION SANKAT MOCHAN

- The Union Government has started the operation ‘Sankat Mochan’ to evacuate Indian citizens stranded in South Sudan’s capital Juba.
- Operation Sankat Mochan was the first big evacuation effort in a year after Operation Rahat evacuated hundreds of citizens of India and other countries in July 2015 from Yemen.

2.11. FEED THE FUTURE INITIATIVE

Why in news?

- The Union Agriculture Ministry and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) launched the second phase of the “Feed the Future” India triangular training programme, in a bid to bring specialised agriculture training to 1,500 agricultural professionals across Africa and Asia.
- The first phase trained more than 200 professionals from Kenya, Liberia and Malawi

About FTF

- It was launched in 2010 by the United States government to address global hunger and food insecurity
- It is coordinated primarily by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).
- The main objectives of the initiative are the advancement of global agricultural development, increased food production and food security, and improved nutrition particularly for vulnerable populations such as women and children
- It has 19 focus countries across three regions Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Nepal.
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3. ECONOMY

3.1. PRADHAN MANTRI KAUSHAL VIKAS YOJANA

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet approved the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) with an outlay of Rs 12000 crore to impart skill training to one crore people over the next four years (2016-2020).
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- The objective of this Skill Certification Scheme is to enable a large number of Indian youth to take up industry-relevant skill training that will help them in securing a better livelihood.
- Individuals with prior learning experience or skills will also be assessed and certified under Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

About Scheme

- Skill training would be done based on the National Skill Qualification Framework (NSQF) and industry led standards.
- Under the scheme, a monetary reward is given to trainees on assessment and certification by third party assessment bodies.
- The average monetary reward would be around Rs.8000 per trainee.

Eligible Beneficiaries

In line with the scheme objectives, the scheme is applicable to any candidate of Indian nationality who:

- Undergoes a skill development training in an eligible sector by an eligible training provider.
- is certified during the span of one year from the date of launch of the scheme by approved assessment agencies.
- is availing of this monetary award for the first and only time during the operation of this Scheme.

Implementation

- The scheme would be implemented through NSDC training partners. Currently NSDC has 187 training partners that have over 2300 centres.
- In addition, Central / State Government affiliated training providers would also be used for training under the scheme.
- Focus under the PMKVY would be on improved curricula, better pedagogy and better trained instructors.
- Training would include soft skills, personal grooming, behavioural change for cleanliness, good work ethics.
- Skill Development Management System (SDMS) would be put in place to verify and record details of all training centres a certain quality of training locations and courses.
- Biometric system and video recording of the training process would be put in place where feasible.
- A robust grievance redressal system would be put in place to address grievances relating to implementation of the scheme.
- Mobilization would be done through skill Melas organized at the local level with participation of the state governments, municipal bodies, Pachayati Raj institutions and community based organizations.

Assessment

- Highlights of skill training would be that it would be done on the basis of demand assessed on the basis of recent skill gap studies conducted by the NSDC for the period 2013-17.
- For assessment of demand of Central Ministries/Departments/State Governments, industry and business would be consulted.
A demand aggregator platform would be launched for the purpose very soon. The target for skilling would be aligned to demand from other flagship programmes launched in recent times such as Make in India, Digital India, National Solar Mission and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. Skill training under the new scheme will primarily be focused on a first time entrants to the labour market and primarily target Class 10 and Class 12 drop outs.

Way Forward

The success of the scheme will depend on the implementation at ground level. It needs cooperation and collaboration between different departments and ministries for creating impact at grass root level.

Getting certified is just the first step, the real solution lies in job creation and employability of the skilled citizenry, if this is not realised the demographic dividend that we aspire to achieve will turn into demographic disaster.

3.2. THE NATIONAL APPRENTICESHIP PROMOTION SCHEME

Why in news?

The cabinet has approved a National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme (NAPS). The Scheme has an outlay of Rs. 10,000 crore with a target of 50 lakh apprentices to be trained by 2019-20.

Significance

- India has less than 3 lakh apprentices. This is a small proportion of over a crore people annually joining labour-force of 48 crore workers.
- The youth: it substantially improves their employability and market value as well as their capability to become self-employed.
- The industry: benefits from enhanced skills, higher productivity and better professionalism once apprentices join the workforce.
- The government: among a large number of skilling schemes, the efficacy of apprenticeship system is the highest.

Key Features of Scheme

- Union Government will directly share, 25% of the total stipend payable and 50% of total expenditure for providing basic training to an apprentice, with employers.
- It will be implemented by Director General of Training (DGT) under the aegis of Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE).
- For MSME sector: This scheme will encourage third-party agencies to provide basic training when in-house training infrastructure is not available.

Background

- The NAPS has been framed to meet objective of National Policy of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015, which focuses on apprenticeship as one of the key components.
- NAPS is a part of Labour reforms: Govt. has already amended Factory act, Apprenticeship act and labour laws act in 2014.
• **Apprenticeship (Amendment) Act**: has dismantled the outdated system of trade-wise and unit-wise regulation of apprentices under a prescriptive regime. Now the minimum target of apprentices is 2.5% and maximum is 10%.
  o Also penalties such as imprisonment and other liabilities have been removed
• **Stipend**: The stipend payable has been directly linked to minimum wages at the state level.
• **Apprenticeship portal** was recently launched by the Prime Minister to work as a platform for companies, apprentices and government.
• Curriculum of major apprenticeship courses accounting for 70% of the existing seats has been revised to make them more industry-relevant and competency-based.

**Way forward**

The reforms and schemes like this one will lead to a **self-regulated regime** which would lead to a sharp increase in the number of apprentices voluntarily trained by the industry.

### 3.3. PAYMENT AND SETTLEMENT-RBI

**Why in news?**

• RBI releases vision document for 2018.
• This document focuses on **migrating to a less-cash and more digital society**.
• The broad contours of Vision-2018 revolve around 5Cs - Coverage, Convenience, Confidence, Convergence and Cost.

**Salient features**

• To encourage greater use of electronic payments by all sections of society so as to achieve a “less-cash” society.
  o To promote electronic transactions RBI would review guidelines relating to mobile banking, white label ATM, National Electronic Funds Transfer (NEFT), and prepaid instruments which include m-wallets, prepaid cards and paper vouchers.
• RBI will help in building a **robust e-payment and settlement infrastructure**
• Strengthening of existing payment systems will be done
• RBI will review rules governing various payment and settlement channels
• RBI will increase the **supervisory mechanisms** and set an oversight framework to ensure that any newly introduced systems are resilient.
• RBI would bring in necessary amendments to the Payment and Settlement Act for greater oversight on central counter parties (CCPs) and in helping resolve issues such as insolvency of CCPs.
• The **Unified Payments Interface** will enable **interoperability** (customers to switch between service providers) and making it convenient for customers to use digital channels to make payments for a host of activities ranging from mobile bills to restaurant payments
• Usage of Aadhaar for authentication would be encouraged.

**Advantages of electronic payment systems**

• Time savings and convenience.
• Safety from money being lost, stolen, robbed etc.
• Recorded flow of money which can be trailed and taxed; hence, it discourages the growth of black economy
• User-friendly mobile payment options also available
• Availability of short term credit through Credit Cards
• All the transfers can be performed at anytime, anywhere
Limitations

- The risk of being hacked
- Internet access is still quite low in India.
- Quality of connections: If Internet connection fails, one cannot avail electronic payment / settlement
- The problem of transferring money between different payment systems. (Usually the majority of electronic payment systems do not cooperate with each other)
- The lack of anonymity

3.4. UNIFIED PAYMENT INTERFACE

Why in news?

The indigenous payment system via smartphone will go live soon giving a boost to the efforts of the RBI in moving towards a ‘less-cash’ India.

What is UPI?

- It is a common platform through which a person can transfer money from his bank account to any other bank account in the country instantly using nothing but his/her UPI ID.
- It is developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) under the guidelines of the RBI.
- The interface will be based on the Immediate Payment Service (IMPS) platform.

How will it work?

- A customer can transfer money to another person through a unique virtual address, or mobile number, or Aadhaar number. Therefore, customers do not need to know the payee's IFSC code, bank account details, etc. and this will make the process simpler.
- A customer can have multiple virtual addresses for multiple accounts in various banks. There is no account number mapper anywhere other than the customer’s own bank. This allows the customer to freely share the financial address with others.
How is it better than existing payment methods?

- Apart from doing away with the need for account details, one can also raise payment requests and ask for money. Therefore, it is being expected that apart from consumers, even merchants and companies will widely use this platform.

Significance

- India is still a cash intensive economy with cash to GDP ratio of over 12 per cent. As per estimates 95 % of consumer transactions (volumes) and 65 % (value) in India are carried out in cash. This compares with 40-50 % (volumes) and 10-20 % (value) for advanced economies. UPI is expected to change this.
- The estimated annual cost of currency operations in India is Rs 21,000 crore. By moving to a less cash economy, this cost can be significantly brought down.
- Although a large number of banks are offering mobile banking services, these are not completely interoperable, especially for merchant transactions. This has impacted the use of mobile payments for merchant or P2B (person-to-business) transactions. Full operationalisation of UPI will facilitate inter-operability in P2B payments.

3.5. THE THREE JOBS DEFICIT IN INDIA

Background

- The rapid decline in poverty in India between 2005 and 2012 was driven mainly by higher labor earnings. Over this period, wages for unskilled workers increased sharply. There was also a marked shift towards non-farm jobs.
- But the quantity and quality of jobs created raise concerns about the sustainability of poverty reduction, and the prospects for enlarging the middle class.
- Majority of those who escaped poverty moved slightly above the poverty line but did not gain entry into the middle class. They remain vulnerable to slipping back.
- The deficit in the number of jobs created after 2005, as well as in their quality, explains this vulnerability.

1. An overall deficit of jobs

- Between 2005 and 2012, of the 13 million potential entrants into the workforce every year, only 3 million got a job.
- This growing jobs deficit has the potential to turn the demographic dividend into a demographic curse.

2. A deficit of good jobs

- In this period, there was considerable dynamism in the informal segments of the economy, especially in rural areas.
- There was a substantial decline in employment in agriculture, with nearly 34 million farm jobs lost between 2005 and 2012.
- There was a boom in construction jobs, which accounted for nearly half of the expansion in non-farm employment. However, construction jobs tend to be casual.
- These jobs help people escape poverty but do not propel them into middle class. Transitions into the middle class are associated with regular, salaried jobs.
- Unless small towns and large villages, where most of India’s poor and vulnerable live, can ensure creation of regular jobs, it is difficult to build a sizeable middle class.
- In urban areas the share of regular jobs may be greater among those who are employed, but fewer people have regular jobs relative to the working age population

3. A deficit in suitable jobs for women

- Historically, India’s female labor force participation rates in urban areas have been low - hovering around 20%.
After 2005, there has been large withdrawal of women from the rural labor force also

Women are more likely to work when jobs are located close to their homes and allow multi-tasking, like farming.

They are also more likely to work when jobs offer regular wages, like manufacturing.

Or when jobs have social protection benefits attached to them, like health, education and public administration.

Unfortunately, such jobs are few and far between.

### 3.6. RETHINKING THE ROLE OF REGULATORS

In a constantly evolving world, most new technologies work in digital-physical mix. This compels us to rethink the role of regulators.

**Regulation in India**

- The regulatory approach to sectoral innovations has consistently been a wait-and-see policy.
- Industry satisfies consumer needs within an unregulated space and the regulator plays catch-up. For e.g. RBI’s regulation of NBFC’s and subsequently microfinance institutions.
- A possible explanation for this is that the concerns raised by any novel problem-solving initiative, and its actual impact on the public, can only be determined afterwards.
- This is often an excuse for the regulator to avoid anticipating the future and participating in a constructive project with the industry.

**Facilitative state model**

- Currently, regulation is largely seen as a legal issue.
- Need to transition to a dynamic regulatory environment where the regulator is equally focused on potential innovations in its sector—and to a distinctly different regulatory structure where sectoral innovators are encouraged.
- The relationship between the regulator and the regulated should move from one of industry dos and don’ts to cooperation.
- This way, the regulator will facilitate ideas as well as regulate them.

**Benefits**

- It sensitizes regulators to innovations within their sector, and raises the overall quality of policymaking.
- It reduces regulatory catch-up because the regulator has clue to the direction the industry may take, and the concerns it may pose to the public.
- This can also facilitate feedback to the state to consider the early modification of existing rules that hinder the progress of technology.
- Industry gets firsthand regulatory input before scaling up the pilot into a business model.
- Industry innovators can reduce compliance costs at a later stage when new regulations fall in place.

**Required changes**

- A route through which industry innovators can seek out regulatory involvement for early-stage innovations
- A fair procedural mechanism through which the regulator decides to guide the proposed innovation
- Appropriate non-disclosure safeguards to guarantee that business-sensitive information is not leaked
- Safeguards to protect interests of those targeted by the pilot
- An attitudinal change on the part of bureaucrats and regulators

With the pressing demand for quality solutions and the huge challenges in last-mile delivery, the facilitative state model could be particularly useful in India.
3.7. INTEREST SUBVENTION SCHEME FOR FARMERS

- The Government has approved an interest subvention scheme for farmers under which farmers will get short-term crop loans of up to Rs 3 lakh with interest subvention of 5 per cent per annum.
- Thus loans at a subsidized interest rate of 4 per cent will be available to farmers for this fiscal, provided they repay in time, or else a higher rate of 7 per cent will be charged.
- The interest subvention scheme is for public and private sector banks, in addition to cooperative banks, regional rural banks and NABARD.
- Apart from this, an interest subvention of 2 per cent in order to give relief to small and marginal farmers who would have to borrow at 9 per cent for the post harvest storage of their produce, has also been approved.
- This would make the effective interest rate for loans for post harvest storage to be 7 per cent for loans up to six months.
- Further, to provide relief to the farmers affected by natural calamities, the interest subvention of 2 per cent will be provided to banks for the first year on the restructured amount.
- The government has earmarked a sum of Rs. 18,276 Crore for this interest subvention scheme.

3.8. NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK (NDB) ISSUES FIRST GREEN BONDS

**Why in news?**

- The New Development Bank (NDB), established by the BRICS emerging nations last year, has completed the sale of its first worldwide bond in China’s interbank bond market.
- It was also the first yuan-denominated green bond sold in mainland China by a multinational financial institution.
- It raised three billion yuan ($450m) to support clean energy projects in developing countries. The green bonds will be issued with a 5-year tenor.
- Further, the bank will also issue bonds in other member currencies in order to mitigate the foreign currency risk of funded infrastructure projects and help develop local currency fund- raising markets.

### Significance

- Bond proceeds will be used to finance green projects in BRICS countries.
- It will help boost sustainable development and serve as a signal of support for capital markets in BRICS countries.
- Proceeds from the bonds will be used to fund eligible projects in areas such as renewable energy, pollution prevention and sustainable water management.

**What are green bonds?**

- A green bond is like any other regular bond but with one key difference, the money raised by the issuer are earmarked towards financing ‘green’ projects.

**What are its benefits?**

- Green bonds enhances an issuer’s reputation, as it helps in showcasing their commitment to wards sustainable development.
- It also provides issuers access to specific set of global investors who invest only in green ventures.

**What are the avenues where these funds can be invested?**

- In India, SEBI’s indicative list includes renewable and sustainable energy such as wind and solar, clean transportation, sustainable water management, climate change adaptation, energy efficiency, sustainable waste management and land use and biodiversity conservation.
Benefits to India

- The New development bank is also planning to sell bonds in **Russia and India** to fund green projects.
- India has aimed for an ambitious Solar Mission to generate **100GW of solar energy by 2022**. This would require an investment of about $100b.
- The NDB’s green bond initiative has the potential to cater to substantial long term investment needs of National Solar Mission.

3.9. NUCLEAR POWER GENERATION IN ANDHRA PRADESH

- In Andhra Pradesh, six nuclear centres could be created, in nuclear energy generation, totaling thousands of megawatts in capacity. This will be having both American and Russian participation.
- If all the projects under consideration from Russia, the U.S. and NPCIL were to actually go through, Nuclear Power Plants (NPPs) in Andhra could account for more than 30,000 MW of the Government’s goal of 63,000 MW installed capacity by 2031.
- The “American participation” of Toshiba-Westinghouse to set up six AP1000 reactors of 1,100 megawatts each, planned in Gujarat’s Mithi Virdi, could be moved to Andhra Pradesh due to “stiff protests from farmers” during the land acquisition process for 777 hectares in Gujarat.
- The State has planned its nuclear park in Kovvada where another U.S. company GE-Hitachi had also been allocated a site to provide six Economic Simplified Boiling Water Reactors (ESBWRs) of 1594 MW which has gone slow due to doubts over the technology.
- Russian-owned Rosatom could also will build its next phase of six reactors in Andhra Pradesh. The site for the next set of six Russian reactors is believed to be Kavali in Nellore district, for which announcement could be made during President Vladimir Putin’s visit to India in October.
- Another Russian project, to build 6 ‘VVER’ (Water-Water Energy) Reactors of 1000 MWe in West Bengal’s Haripur may also be moved to Andhra Pradesh due to local protests.
- Thus the losses of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and West Bengal’s could soon be Andhra Pradesh’s gain. However, there are many challenges ahead as Kovvada has seen some protests of the kind seen at Kudankulam, Mithi Virdi and Haripur owing to safety and environmental concerns.

3.10. NUCLEAR PLANTS INSURED

**Why in news?**

India’s first insurance policy covering public liability to an atomic power plant operator has been issued to Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL).

**Issue**

- The insurance policy of NPCIL has covered all atomic power plants. The total premium came around Rs. 100 crore for a risk cover of Rs. 1,500 crore.
- The insurance policy complies with **Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act**.
- The policy covers ‘right of recourse’ of NPCIL against equipment suppliers.
- It also covers liability towards public as a consequence of any nuclear accident in the plants.
- The policy was issued by the country’s largest non-life insurer – New India Assurance Company Ltd.
Background

- India has ratified the Convention on Supplementary Compensation (CSC) for Nuclear Damage.
- Indian Nuclear Insurance Pool was launched by the state-owned General Insurance Corporation-Reinsurer (GIC-Re) and other Indian insurance companies in June, 2015.
- This pool offers an insurance product for NPCIL for covering the operator’s liability under the provisions of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage (CLND) Act 2010.
- It provides for Rs. 1,500 crore as maximum liability for nuclear damage.

Significance

- NPCIL is facing an equipment sourcing crunch for two of its under-construction indigenous reactor technology-based projects in Gujarat and Rajasthan.
- Representatives of equipment vendors have made references to the looming uncertainties over the Civil Liability Nuclear Damage Act (2010), with the liability issue being flagged as a concern.
- May pave the way for firms like GE, Westinghouse and Areva setting up nuclear plants in India.

3.11. START-UP INDIA: NEW NORMS

- The government has eased the norms under which start-ups can seek benefits according to the Startup India Action Plan.
- Start-ups are now eligible for benefits by simply receiving a certificate from the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), compared with the earlier process of being vetted by an inter-ministerial board.

Benefits

- The new norms would allow more start-ups to receive benefits, while the government would be able to build a scalable model to spur growth in the new economy.
- Benefits include faster and cheaper patent examination and being eligible for the Rs 10,000-crore ‘fund of funds’.
- However, the relaxed norms will not be valid for availing of tax benefits.

Startup India Action Plan

- It offers other incentives like exemption from stringent labour laws for three years, income tax holiday on profit for three years and self-certification for regulatory compliances.

Incubation

- Out of the many applications received from start-ups, seeking tax benefits by DIPP, very few had the required documents — one of them being the incubator’s certificate on innovative business.
- So far only one start-up has managed to get the approval of the inter-ministerial board for tax benefits.
- Lack of awareness about the process and a dearth of incubators are to blame for this situation. Hand holding will be provided by DIPP to ensure that entrepreneurs know how to apply for the benefits.
- Since only 278 government-approved incubators can certify and recommend start-ups, DIPP has certified 20 private organisations, including Nasscom and iSprit, as incubators under the Startup India Action Plan.
- The move will help in growing the reach of incubators for upcoming start-ups.
- Apart from mapping potential incubation centres across the country with a special focus on Tier-II and Tier-III cities, DIPP has asked states to suggest names of educational institutions for this purpose.

India currently has the third-largest number of start-ups in the world. While there were more than four thousand technology-based start-ups, the number was expected to reach 12,000 by 2020.
3.12. RBI’S STEPS ON FCNR GET FSDC NOD

**Background**

- In 2013, the rupee was at an all-time low of 68.85 against the dollar and huge volatility in currency markets volatility on fears of tapering of quantitative easing by the US Fed.
- So RBI asked commercial banks to raise the foreign currency deposits (for ex: FCNR, offshore corporate loans etc.) to shore up reserves.
- Banks had raised about $34 billion through FCNR deposits.
- The central bank thereafter readied itself by buying forwards dollar.

**The issue**

- Most of FCNR deposits of 2013 are due this year.
- RBI estimates that the immediate effect of the maturity of these deposits would be an outflow of about $20 billion.
- RBI has taken steps like making available **swaps and forwards** to take care of the dollar requirement so that the effect on foreign exchange reserves is neutral.
- Financial Stability and Development Council has approved this step.

**Impacts**

- The banks may witness **deposit base depletion** due to sudden outflow.
- Some liquidity will be strained due to increased demand for foreign currencies vis-à-vis rupee.
- Foreign exchange reserve could see some dip in the interim as the swaps and forwards are not timed perfectly.

**What is a FCNR Account?**

An FCNR account is a term deposit account that can be maintained by NRIs and PIOs in foreign currency. Thus, FCNRs are not savings accounts but fixed deposit accounts.

**What foreign currencies can one maintain in FCNR accounts?**

Any currency which is freely convertible. For ex: US dollar, Pound Sterling (GBP), Euro, Japanese Yen, Swiss Frank, Swedish Krona etc.

**Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC):**

Was setup as apex level forum in 2010 to strengthen and institutionalize the mechanism for maintaining financial stability and enhancing inter-regulatory coordination.

The Chairman of the FSDC is the Finance Minister of India and its members include:

- The heads of the financial sector regulatory authorities (i.e, SEBI, IRDA, RBI, PFRDA).
- Finance Secretary and/or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (Ministry of Finance).
- Secretary, Department of Financial Services
- Chief Economic Adviser

3.13. INDIA’S 13TH MAJOR PORT

**Why in news?**

- The Union Cabinet has given its in-principle approval for setting up a **Major port at Enayam near Colachel** in Tamil Nadu. On completion the port will become country’s 13th major port.

**Background**

- Presently, India has 12 major and 187 non-major ports.
- Currently, around 78% of the marine traffic from the east coast ports of India is trans-shipped to Colombo, Singapore and Klang (Malaysia), as most of the Indian ports don’t have a draught to match global cargo handling efficiencies and function as a trans-shipment hub.

**Enayam port**

- Aimed to make India a destination on the global east-west trade route.
- To act as a major gateway container port for Indian cargo that is presently trans-shipped outside the country.
It will help to reduce the logistics cost for exporters/importers in South India who currently depend on trans-shipment other foreign ports, incurring additional port handling charges.

Can save about 1,500 Crores Rupees of revenues each year by preventing diversion to other countries.

The Enayam port has a natural deep draught of about 20 meters that makes it feasible for larger vessels.

It has 10 million TEUs (twenty foot equivalent units) capacity and later can be expanded to 18 million TEUs.

**Enayam port project**

For development of this port, a **Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV)** will be formed with initial equity investment from the three Major Ports in Tamil Nadu i.e., V.O.Chidambaranar Port Trust, Kamarajar Port Limited and Chennai Port Trust.

The SPV will develop the port infrastructure including construction of breakwater, dredging and reclamation, ensuring connectivity links etc.

Projects like Sagarmala will also complement the new port at Enayam.

**What are major ports?**

- Ports are under concurrent list.
- The Major Ports are administered by the central government’s shipping ministry, while those managed by other relevant departments are called minor ports.
- They handle nearly 75% of India’s cargo traffic.
- The major ports of India moving from east to west are: Haldia, Paradip, Vishakhapatnam, Ennore (private), Chennai, Tuticorin, Enayam, Kochi, Panambur Port (Mangalore), Marmagao, Nhava Sheva- Maharashtra, Mumbai Port, Kandla Port- Gujarat. Also Port Blair- Andaman.

**How important is port sector to India?**

- Cargo traffic, which recorded 1,052 million metric tonnes (MMT) in 2015, is expected to reach 1,758 MMT by 2017.
- According to the Ministry of Shipping, around 95 per cent of India’s trading by volume and 70 per cent by value is done through maritime transport.
- It also has an important role in making the ‘Make in India’ project a success and greater global engagement and integration with its trading partners.
3.14. PORT-RAIL CONNECTIVITY PROJECTS UNDER SAGARMALA

Why in news?

- **Ministry of Railways** has decided to take up 21 port-rail connectivity projects, at an estimated cost of Rs 20,000 crore, under the **port-connectivity enhancement** objective of Sagarmala which is under **Ministry of Shipping**.
- Another six projects are being considered by the **Indian Port Rail Corporation Limited (IPRCL)**.

Objectives

- To strengthen evacuation network and boost last-mile connectivity to the country’s ports.
- To simplify procedures used at ports for cargo movement.
- Help in reducing logistics cost and time for cargo movement making Indian trade more competitive.
- This also promotes usage of electronic channels for information exchange leading to quick, efficient, hassle-free and seamless cargo movement.

Background

- The National Perspective Plan for Sagarmala Programme identifies projects under the 4 major objectives of the programme - i) Port Modernization & New Port Development, ii) Port Connectivity Enhancement, iii) Port-led Industrialization and iv) Coastal Community Development.

3.15. WORLD BANK’S LOGISTICS PERFORMANCE INDEX

Why in news?


What is Logistics Performance Index (LPI)?

LPI is a measure that captures the relative ease and efficiency with which products can be moved into and within a country.

Salient Points

- India has improved its ranking, jumping 19 places from 54th in 2014 to 35th in 2016.
- India was ahead in the BRICS group, with only China ahead at 27.
- Germany and Singapore are ranked highest.
- LPI captures the extent of costs and inefficiency in moving goods internally, especially across states where internal barriers are known to exist.
- LPI does not address how easy or difficult it is to move goods to the hinterland. Domestic LPI is still low and has potential to improve.

INDIA’S LPI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2014</th>
<th>2016</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall LPI</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Efficiency of customs and border management clearance</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of trade and transport infrastructure</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of arranging competitively priced shipments</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>39</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competence and quality of logistics services</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to track and trace consignments</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency with which shipments reach consignees within scheduled or expected delivery times</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WorldBank report

- Tracking and tracing is a process of determining the current and past locations (and other information) of a unique item/good.
- Radio-frequency identification and bar codes are two common technology methods used to deliver traceability.
Significance

- Progress in India reflects balanced improvements in policies that facilitate connectivity (in Customs, for example) and improve hard trade-and transport-related infrastructure.
- Efficiency: In 2016, India’s international supply chain efficiency was at 75% of top-ranked Germany, which was 66% in 2014.
- Better prospects for ‘Make In India’ and trade.
- Improved institutional structure: Emergence of skilled professionals and Technological improvements that have enabled services such as track-and-tracing have helped India close the gap with leaders.

3.16. SKILL BANKS TO TRAIN WORKERS FOR GLOBAL MARKETS

Why in news?

In U.P and Bihar, the government is setting up 50 global skill banks (training centres) to train potential immigrant workers in 110 job roles as per international standards.

Objectives

- These training centres will impart skills across sectors such as medicine and healthcare, hospitality, IT, construction, automobile and retail trade — where job opportunities exist or are likely to arise.
- Before they emigrate, youth trained in these skill banks would also be made familiar with the respective local culture, work ethic and language of the country they obtain a job in.
- To make India “the human resource capital” of the world

Salient features

- While people can sign up for training at these banks, it can also be demand-driven. For eg., if 100 masons are wanted in a Gulf country, these banks will train people accordingly and place them.
- Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were selected first due to their high population and for having the record for the maximum migration for overseas employment.
- Train and certify worker formally so that they get a better salary and working conditions abroad.
- There are opportunities to be tapped in south-east Asia, Germany, Sweden, Norway and Canada. In the long run, ageing countries like Japan would need a lot of geriatric care-givers and Indian nurses are globally recognized for their skills.

3.17. NETWORK READINESS INDEX

- India was placed at 91st position in the recently released 2016 Networked Readiness Index (NRI) by the Geneva-based World Economic Forum (WEF).
- It measures countries’ success in creating the necessary conditions for a transition to a digitised economy and society.
- India ranked very high (8th) place in terms of affordability.
- India’s performance in terms of providing online services and allowing e-participation has so far been in line with that of peer countries, but far from the global best (57th and 40th, respectively).
- While the country has scored better in terms of political and regulatory environment (78th position), it fares worse in business and innovation environment (110th) and infrastructure (114th).

About WEF

- It was established in 1971 as a not-for-profit foundation and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- It is independent, impartial and not tied to any special interests.
- The Forum engages the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas.
3.18. MODEL SHOPS AND ESTABLISHMENT BILL 2016

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet recently cleared the Model Shops and Establishment (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Bill, 2016.

Objectives

- Provides for more Worker Welfare Measures
- Creating many more job opportunities for women and
- Providing favorable environment for doing business.

Highlights

- The law only covers Shops and Establishments Employing Ten or more Workers Except Manufacturing Units.
- The law provides freedom to operate 365 days a year and opening/closing time of establishment
- The law tries to boost the Employment Generation in general, especially for Women, as they will be permitted to work night shifts, with adequate safety and security provisions.
- It calls for better working conditions for employees such as drinking water, canteen, first-aid, lavatory and crèche facilities.
- The law also provides exemption to highly-skilled workers like those in IT and biotechnology from daily working hours (9 hours) and weekly working hours (48 hours).

Impacts

- Due to enhanced working hours, more job opportunities would be created. Moreover such jobs in Shops and Establishment are suited for women.
- Boosts up the retail market in the country and gives customer flexibility to shop any time.
- The uniformity in legal provisions across States/UTs will enable the employers to have uniform HR and leave policies.
- Model Bill would promote fair competition among the States in improving governance and ease of doing business.

3.19. PANAMA: MULTILATERAL TAX INFORMATION SHARING CONVENTION

- Panama, a popular tax haven, has decided to sign the Multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters (MAC), for co-operation in tax administration.
- However, Panama will not take up information exchange obligations automatically. It will only provide information on request to the signatory countries of the convention.
- Also, it will share information automatically with countries that have a bilateral information sharing agreement with Panama.

Impact on India

- Around 2,000 Indian names figure on the leaked Panama papers.
- India being a signatory to the MAC, can now get information from Panama on request.
- It will be a very significant step forward in implementing tax transparency and effective exchange of information.
### About Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters (MAC)

- The Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters was developed jointly by the [OECD](https://www.oecd.org) and [the Council of Europe](https://www.coe.int) in 1988 and amended by Protocol in 2010.
- The Convention is the most comprehensive multilateral instrument available for all forms of tax co-operation to **tackle tax evasion and avoidance**, and guarantees extensive safeguards for the protection of taxpayers’ rights.
- The Convention was amended in 2010 to align it to the international standard on exchange of information on request and to open it to all signatory countries.
- **98 Countries** currently participate in the Convention. This represents a wide range of countries including all G20 countries, all BRICS, all OECD countries, major financial centres and an increasing number of developing countries.

### 3.20. DRAFT POLICY FOR SECOND GENERATION ETHANOL

#### Why in news?

- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy has announced come out with [draft policy for 2nd generation ethanol](https).

#### Background

- In December 2014, the Cabinet had approved usage of non-food feedstocks besides molasses as source of ethanol to be used for blending in fuel.

#### Significance

- The policy is for using resources other than molasses for producing ethanol, since there is a shortage of molasses.
- Ministries of renewable energy and science and technology will find a way to produce second-generation ethanol from biomass, bamboo, rice straw, wheat straw, and cotton straw etc. to power vehicles.
- Based on promotion to second generation ethanol govt is planning to take up ethanol blending in petrol to 22.5 percent and in diesel to 15 percent.
- Govt. is ready to purchase the entire quantity of 2nd generation ethanol produced by the industry.
- To augment supplies of ethanol to oil marketing companies (OMCs), the policy for procurement of ethanol has been modified to smoothen the entire ethanol supply chain and to provide remunerative price of ethanol.

#### Benefits

- **Employment**: Making ethanol from bamboo in North-East, lakhs will get employment and several industries will come up, on the lines of successful industries in Italy. There is a potential to manufacture 40,000 litres of second generation ethanol here.
- **Environment-friendly**: For ex: Flex-fuel cars in Brazil run on new ethanol and pollution is minimal.
- **Boost to ethanol production could cut India’s huge crude oil imports bill, pegged at Rs 7 lakh crore per annum.**

### 3.21. INDIAN EXPORTS TREND

- India’s merchandise exports rose 1.27 per cent year-on-year in June to $22.57 billion, **reversing a trend that started in December 2014**.
- The low-base effect has helped this trend in June as exports in June 2015 had shrunk 16 per cent over June 2014.
- Exports have been falling since December 2014 because of a weak global demand and a slide in oil prices.
3.22. WORLD TRADE OUTLOOK INDICATOR (WTOI)

Why in news?

WTO has also introduced a new World Trade Outlook Indicator (WTOI) to provide “real time” information on trends in global trade.

- The WTOI gives a headline figure to show performance against trend.
- A reading of 100 would indicate trade growth in line with recent trends, a reading greater than 100 would suggest above trend growth, while a reading below 100 indicates below trend growth.
- The WTOI will be updated on a quarterly basis.

Parameters

While calculating the WTOI, WTO focuses on six key trade-related indices:

- Export orders reported by central banks and national statistics agencies in leading manufacturing economies.
- International freight tonne kilometres reported by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- Total container throughput from a dozen major shipping ports, in twenty-foot equivalent (TEU) units.
- Automotive vehicle sales and/or production figures in major markets.
- Customs data on electronic components trade, in physical units.
- Customs data on trade flows for agricultural raw materials.

Impact

- The WTOI is designed to give an early signal of the current direction of world trade.
- WTOI will signal turning points in world merchandise trade volume.
- It complements existing tools such as the WTO’s longer-term trade forecasts, and other statistical releases.

3.23. ANTRIX-DEVAS CASE

Why in news?

- The Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague ruled against the Indian government over the cancellation of a contract between Devas Multimedia and Antrix Corporation Ltd., in a decision that could cost the Centre billions of dollars in damages.
- The tribunal’s decision is the second such arbitration outcome in the Antrix-Devas controversy. An International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) tribunal in 2015 found the annulment of the agreement “unlawful” and awarded Devas damages of nearly Rs 4,400 crore.
- India has decided to appeal against the verdict.

Background

- In 2005, ISRO’s commercial arm Antrix Corporation signed an agreement with Devas to lease out satellite spectrum.
- In 2011, a leaked draft audit report noted that there were potentially a number of irregularities in the agreement.
- Shortly after the controversy, ISRO decided to annul the agreement.

The Award

- The PCA at The Hague ruled that the government’s actions in 2011 amounted to expropriation
- In annulling the contract, the country has breached treaty commitments to accord fair and equitable treatment to Devas’s foreign investors.
- This makes the government liable to pay financial compensation
3.24. STAKE SALE IN 51 FIRMS

Why in news?

- The government plans to sell minority stakes in 51 listed as well as unlisted companies including RIL, ICICI Bank, Axis Bank, L&T etc. and might exit in 3 years.

Issue

- Government holds minority stake in these companies through Specified Undertaking of UTI (SUUTI).
- **Minority stake means** a shareholding of less than 50% of a company’s equity capital which is not a controlling stake.
- SUUTI was formed in 2003 as an offshoot of erstwhile Unit Trust of India (UTI).
- SUUTI is looking at selling the investments either through an OFS, block deal, bulk deal or regular sale through stock exchanges.

Background

- The government has set up an ambitious disinvestment target of Rs.56,500 crore for 2016-17.
- Of the budgeted target, Rs.36,000 crore is to come from **minority stake sale** in PSUs and the remaining Rs 20,500 crore is estimated to come from strategic sale in both profit and loss-making companies.
- Niti Aayog gave a list of 15 PSUs (**majority stake**) in which it has recommended **strategic disinvestment** (divesting equity along with the management control) on priority.
- Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) was established for management of investment in CPSEs and oversee stake-sale process.

Impact

- Sale would help the government in meeting its ambitious disinvestment targets.
- This improves overall economic efficiency.

3.25. PATTISEEMA LIFT IRRIGATION PROJECT

Why in news?

- Pattiseema lift irrigation project interlinking rivers Godavari & Krishna, in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh has been commissioned recently.
- It is South India’s first River Integration Project.

Need

- Rayalaseema has scarcity of water and rainfall and is one of the most heavily drought hit places of South India.
- On the other hand, Godavari river is the most flooded river in the South India.
- Every year, an estimated amount of 3000 TMC of water is flooded into Bay of Bengal from river Godavari.
- Utilizing a minute amount of this wastage will make Rayalaseema drought free.

About the project

- Foundation stone for the project was laid on March 29th 2015 and it was completed in record stipulated time of one year.
This is the fastest River integration mega project ever took up in India.

The project cost is estimated at 1300 Crores.

It provides Irrigation water to 7 Lakh Acres which provides Crores of additional agricultural produce to farmers from Krishna- Godavari regions and the Rayalaseema region.

The government aims to pump about 80 TMC of water by deploying 24 heavy duty pumps from Godavari at the Pattiseema pump house during monsoons and let out the water into the Polavaram right canal.

The water from Pattiseema project will travel approx 160 Km and will join River Krishna at Vijayawada in the up waters of prakasam barrage.

In addition to the larger Polavaram project the government is also considering linking the Nagavali and Vamsadhara rivers.

### 3.26. NATRIP PROJECT

**Why in news?**

- Government has approved a revised cost estimate of Rs 3,727.30 crores for the NATRIP.

**What is NATRIP?**

- The project is required to fulfill India’s obligations as a signatory to UN Regulation on Harmonisation of Vehicle Specifications under WP-29 of 1998.
- It aims to make Indian vehicles comply with global standards of safety in line with UN Brasilia resolution by reducing the high number of causalities and road accidents (i.e. 1.46 and 5.01 lakhs, respectively in the year 2015)
- It also aims to help MSMEs for development and certification of auto-components.
- It represents a unique joint initiative between the Government of India, a number of State Governments and Indian Automotive Industry to create a state of the art Testing, Validation and R&D infrastructure in the country.
- It is also needed to support Automotive Mission Plan 2016-26 which sets the Indian automotive and component manufacturers for to scale up exports to the extent of 35-40 per cent of its overall output over the next 10 years.
3.27. NATURAL GAS DISCOVERY HAS BEEN MADE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Why in news?
- A team of scientists from India, Japan and the United States made the discovery of large, highly enriched accumulations of natural gas hydrate — an icy form of the fuel — in the Bay of Bengal.
- This is the first discovery of its kind in the Indian Ocean that has the potential to be producible.

What are gas hydrates?
- Natural gas hydrates are a naturally occurring, ice-like combination of natural gas and water found in oceans and polar regions.
- The amount of gas within the world’s gas hydrate accumulations is estimated to greatly exceed the volume of all known conventional gas resources.
- They are considered as vast resources of natural gas and are known to occur in marine sediments on continental shelf margins.
- The scientists conducted ocean drilling, conventional sediment coring, pressure coring, downhole logging and analytical activities to assess the geologic occurrence, regional context and characteristics of gas hydrate deposits in the offshore of India.

3.28. PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (PFMS)

- The government has decided to universalise the use of Public Financial Management System (PFMS) for all transactions or payments under the Central Sector Schemes.
- The government is looking to facilitate release of funds in time and monitor the usage of funds including information on its ultimate utilization.
- PFMS, managed by the Department of expenditure, is an end-to-end solution for processing payments, tracking, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting of transactions.
- It provides the scheme managers a unified platform for tracking releases and monitoring their last mile utilization.
- All Central ministries and departments have been directed to complete the full roll-out of PFMS by 31st October, 2016.
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4. SOCIAL

4.1. UNICEF: STATE OF CHILDREN’S REPORT

Why in news?

- The report highlights the plight of children world over, the progress that has been made and the road ahead.

Highlights

- According to the report, if the present state of affairs continue then by 2030, (the year to meet sustainable development goals):
  - 69 million under the age of 5 will die between 2016 and 2030.
  - 60 million children of primary school age will be out of school.
  - 750 million or three quarters of a billion would be child brides.
- Despite initiatives by different nations and governments, around 5.9 million children died before the age of 5 in 2015, mostly due to preventable diseases.
- The report also acknowledges the progress achieved towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) between 2000 and 2015.
  - Children born today are less likely to live in poverty than those born at the start of the new millennium.
  - Children born today are 40 percent more likely to survive till age 5 and more likely to go to school.
- The report also acknowledges that equity gaps have narrowed since 1990. Four regions across the world achieved gender parity in primary education.
- While the absolute gap in terms of child survival has substantially narrowed since 1990, great inequities remain between rich and poor countries.

What Needs To Be Done?

The report assesses the key issues with the objective to achieve SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) 2030. Some of the points that need to be remembered are:

- The poorer countries need to make faster progress in order to bridge the gap between poor and rich countries and to reach the 2030 goal.
- Reduction of under-5 mortality by providing proper nutrition and through prevention and treatment of infectious diseases.
- Quality care during pregnancy, labour and birth as well post-natal period. Reduction of unwanted pregnancies through awareness about various contraceptive methods.
- Targeted schemes to finance health care services for the poor and inclusion in existing national health insurance programmes. Two important strategies to deliver universal and quality health care would be expanding coverage and bridging equity gaps.
- Ending child marriage and emphasizing on education of girls. Education enables women to delay and space births, secure access to maternal and neonatal health care.
- Access to education from the very start.
- Tackling poverty. Reduction of poverty leads to better health management, proper nutrition as well as better educational opportunities.
4.2. WHO REPORT ON THE HEALTH WORKFORCE IN INDIA

Why in News?

Recently, WHO has published a study titled ‘The Health Workforce in India’, on India’s healthcare workforce on the basis of census 2001 data.

Findings of the report:

- For a population of 1.02 billion in 2001, there were just 20 lakh health workers in India.
- Of all doctors, 77.2% were allopathic and 22.8% were Ayurvedic, Homeopathic or Unani (AYUSH).
- 57% of the practitioners did not have any medical qualification.
- Nearly one-third of allopathic doctors were educated only up to Class 12.
- Among nurses and midwives, 67.1% received education only up to secondary school level.
- It was found that only 18.8% of healthcare workers had a medical qualification.
- Of all health workers, 59.2% were based in urban areas (home to just 27.8% of the population) and only 40.8% were based in rural areas (home to 72.2% of India's population.)

4.3. NATIONAL ELIGIBILITY CUM ENTRANCE TEST (NEET)

Why in news?

- The Lok Sabha passed the landmark bill awarding statutory status to the controversial National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) from the next academic session.
- Main objectives behind the move are to end the multiplicity of examinations, Have fair and transparent examinations and Adopt non-exploitative process.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956 and the Dentists Act, 1948 and replace the Ordinances that were promulgated by the government to circumvent the Supreme Court order for implementation of NEET examination this session itself.

Issues with NEET

- **MCI**: The working of MCI has been criticised all out. SC has set up special committee to oversee working of MCI. There is an apprehension over the ability of the MCI to conduct entrance examination for medical colleges.
- **Fee**: Currently students undergo exploitation particularly with regard to the capitation fees. The fee structure is not uniform among states and within states. There is a need to come up with rational fee structure acceptable by all.
- **Syllabus**: There is an opinion that the NEET, which is more based on the syllabus of the CBSE, should also take the syllabus of the state boards into account. This would ensure equitable opportunities to all students to clear the exam.
- **Language**: If NEET is conducted only in two languages, students who are from poor background and studied in regional languages under state syllabus, would lose out compared to the elite category students.
- **Quota issue**: NEET will be an Entrance Test for selection of candidates for admission to MBBS/BDS courses under 15% All India Quota seats in Medical/Dental colleges of India. States especially TN are wary about the state quota and reservation question.
There would be other issues after implementation of NEET like
  ✔ Issue of private coaching institutes making money as students will have to study everything afresh for NEET.
  ✔ Students will give too much importance to NEET preparations and that would impact their performance in higher secondary examination.
  ✔ States should not be forced to adopt NEET from 2017 and it should be left to the states to decide whether they want their own examination or choose to have uniform test.
  ✔ The process of conducting NEET should be fool proof like UPSC examination.

Features of the proposed NEET

- The Bills seeks to introduce a uniform entrance examination for all medical educational institutions.
- This would be applicable at the undergraduate and the post-graduate level.
- The provisions will apply to state government seats in government and private medical colleges.
- NEET will be conducted in Hindi, English and other languages. The health ministry has written to all the states seeking details about the number of students who appeared in local languages in the last three years so that the Centre can make plans accordingly.
- The Bill provides powers to the MCI to frame regulations with regard to: (i) the authority designated with the conduct of the exams, (ii) the manner of conducting the exams, and (iii) specifying languages other than English and Hindi in which the examinations may be conducted.
- NEET will be held on the basis of the syllabus of NCERT and the under-graduate exam will be taken up by CBSE and post-graduation by the national board of examination.
- There will be standardisation of syllabus so that issues of rural students can be taken care of.
- A Committee of judges will decide the fees for private colleges while the government will do it for government institutes.

Way forward

The implementation of NEET will have many benefits like one common examination for admission into almost all of the MBBS colleges in India, no need to apply for several entrance examinations, stress-level will be considerably reduced, substantial financial savings for parents etc. however, on the flip side the issues concerned with NEET need to be resolved.

4.4. GLOBAL NUTRITION REPORT

Rankings

- On stunting, India ranks 114 out of 132 countries, with the incidence of stunting at 38.7%.
- On wasting, India ranks 120 out of 130 countries, at 15.1%.
- On the prevalence of anaemia in women of reproductive age, India ranks 170 out of 185 countries at 48.1%.

Salient points

- India almost doubled the rate of stunting reduction in the past 10 years compared with the previous decade. This is highly significant as India is home to more than one-third of the world’s stunted children.
- India must pay attention to its growing rate of overweight and, in particular, high rate of diabetes.
- Out of six Indian states that have an independent state nutrition mission only two states have clear, measurable time-bound targets for improvements in nutrition outcomes.
- One reason the nutrition missions are not backed up by targets is likely that they are typically housed in the state health department or department of Women and Child Development. Issues that fall in the domain of other departments do not get articulated in plans or missions.
- Hence there is need for multi-sectoral missions or agencies, with clearly defined and measurable targets and monitorable action points for all sectors.
About Global Nutrition Report

- The Global Nutrition Report is an independent and comprehensive annual review of the state of the world’s nutrition.
- It is a multipartner initiative that holds a mirror up to our successes and failures at meeting intergovernmental nutrition targets.
- It documents progress on commitments made on the global stage, and it recommends actions to accelerate that progress.
- This year’s report focuses on the theme of making—and measuring—SMART commitments to nutrition and identifying what it will take to end malnutrition in all its forms by 2030.
- The World Health Organization is a Global Nutrition Report Partner.

4.5. SC SETS DEADLINE FOR BLOCKING ONLINE SEX SELECTION ADS

- The Supreme Court has slammed search engines Google, Yahoo and Microsoft for failing to keep out ads selling sex selection kits, and asked the Central government and the intermediaries to immediately come up with technical solutions to prevent such ads from popping up during routine searches.
- It ruled that these advertisements violated Section 22 of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994.
- The court has directed the government to immediately convene a meeting of technological experts from both sides on ways and means to keep off such ads from search engines.
- The Internet companies have objected it, arguing that the Internet was a “censor-free zone” and the government’s stand amounted to “pre-censorship and information blocking.”

About PCPNDT Act

- Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 was enacted to stop female foeticides and arrest the declining sex ratio. The act banned prenatal sex determination.
- It was amended in 2003 to Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection.

4.6. FAT TAX

Kerala has introduced a ‘fat tax’ of 14.5% on the consumption of junk food items like pizzas and burgers sold through branded restaurants.

Why fat tax?

The tax is aimed at making people more conscious about food choices and curbing obesity. Kerala has most people suffering from obesity after Punjab, according to a National family health survey.

Global experience on fat tax

- Denmark introduced a fat tax in 2011 but repealed it by 2013 when it found consumers shopping across the border for high fat goods.
- Hungary taxes foods high in sugar, salt and fat. Mexico taxes sugary drinks, and sweets, etc.
- In the US, battles are being fought over taxes on sugary drinks. Philadelphia became the first major city in the US to introduce a soda tax.

Critique

Unlike Bihar, which introduced a ‘luxury’ tax on samosas and sweets at the start of the year, the ‘fat’ tax will only be levied upon food sold in ‘upscale restaurants’

Data from the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) studies show that there's no major rural-urban divide in Kerala's fat and health problem, including heart diseases
4.7. HARMONISING RTE WITH MINORITY SCHOOLS

- The Kerala High Court has ruled that Section 16 of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act), that mandates schools to not detain any child before she completes elementary education, is applicable to minority educational institutions as well.
- The Court located this obligation not in the Act but under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees right to life and liberty.
- It ruled that no-detention policy (NDP) is in the “best interest” of the child and could independently be considered a fundamental right.

Harmonising RTE with Minority rights

- The generic scope of right to education seems to conflict with the specific contexts of the rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions under Article 30.
- The right under Article 30, however, is not absolute. Freedom to ‘administer’ a school cannot include ‘mal-administering’ it.
- Regulations for maintaining academic standards, ensuring proper infrastructure, health and sanitation, etc. could be imposed on minority schools as well.

4.8. SUPREME COURT DECISION ON MTPA 1971

Why in news?

- In a rare order, the Supreme Court allowed an alleged rape victim to terminate her pregnancy after law-mandated 20 weeks.
- The court accepted the recommendations by a medical board that opined her life was in danger owing to the multiple congenital anomalies in the foetus.

Background

- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, came into force, following the recommendation of the Shantilal Shah Committee Report in 1966 that stated that abortion and reproductive rights need to be regulated by law.
- The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act does not allow abortion beyond stipulated 20 weeks. However the foetus can be aborted even after 24 weeks, if there is a medical threat to the life of the mother.

Significance

- There is always an ethical question that “where does life begin?” and thereafter, pitting the rights of the unborn foetus against the rights of the pregnant mother.
- The landmark judgment by the Supreme Court in July, 2016, provides clarity on the subject as the question was on “life versus life”.
- SC allowed terminating pregnancy beyond the legally-mandated 20 weeks, as it was noted that the woman’s life was in danger.
- Questions of law and morality in abortion were treaded upon during this case, as it is understood that a 20-week-old foetus, medically has a life.
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5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

5.1. LUCA

Why in News?

- A team of scientists led by William Martin from Heinrich Heine University, Dusseldorf have discovered the ancestor of all things on earth and its name is LUCA.

About LUCA

- **LUCA stands for Last Universal Common Ancestor.**
- It is the most recent organism from which all organisms now living on Earth have a common descent. Thus, it is the most recent common ancestor (MRCA) of all current life on Earth.
- As such, it should not be assumed to be the first living organism.

Highlights of the study

- Two of three major life domains: **Bacteria and Archaea** share common genetic features with LUCA.
- Scientists went through 6.1 million protein encoded genes and **identified 355 genes that trace to the last ancestor by phylogenetic criteria.**
- LUCA is no less that **4 billion years old** and was a single cell organism.
- The study suggests that LUCA lived in a “geochemically active environment”. i.e. it did not necessarily need oxygen and can feed off hydrogen, carbon dioxide and iron.
- LUCA would have inhabited volcanically active places or areas where tectonic plates are moving apart, ocean basins, and hotspots.
- The study also suggests autotrophic or self-nourishing origin of life.
- It also proves Charles Darwin propose theory of universal common descent through an evolutionary process.

5.2. INSPIRE AWARDS

Why in News?

- The Inspire Awards have been renamed as **MANAK (Million Minds National Aspirations and Knowledge).** The Inspire Awards is part of the larger Inspire programme.

What Are the Inspire Awards?

- The **Inspire Awards** is an outreach programme of Department of Science and Technology that was started in 2010 to encourage children to develop interest in science and research through innovation.
- Every year 2 lakh students between the ages of 10-15 years are identified for the Inspire Awards. Each Inspire Award envisions an investment of Rs. 5000/- per child.
- Since its inception, it has funded 13.85 lakh students.

More on Inspire Programme

The programme aims to attract talent towards the excitement and study of science at an early age and to build the critical resource required for expanding the S&T system and the R&D base. The programme has three components:

- Scheme for Early Attraction of Talent
- Scholarship for Higher Education
- Assured Opportunity for Research Careers.
In 2016, 60 of the best ideas would be worked by professional engineers and designers for potential commercial development with intellectual property right for children.

The programme aims to bring out ideas that use science and innovation to solve problems. To be certain that this happen, the programme will employ National Innovation Fund (NIF). NIF is to make sure that recycled ideas are eliminated and original ones emerge.

5.3. AQUILA

Why in news?

Facebook successfully completed its first test flight of its solar powered internet drone Aquila.

Also, the company hopes to develop a fleet of Aquilas that can fly for at least three months at a height of 60,000 feet and communicate with each other to provide internet access.

About Aquila

Aquila project is part of the Facebook’s Connectivity Lab, a department which is creating new technologies including aircrafts, satellites and wireless communication systems.

Facebook is trying to bring internet access to areas where internet connectivity is bad or non-existent.

One of the other initiatives that the company has taken to achieve this goal is by providing pared down version of the internet in poor areas. It is called Free Basics or internet.org.

Similarly, Google’s parent company Alphabet Inc. has also invested to provide internet access to under-served areas through Project Loon. The project aims to use high-altitude balloons to create an aerial wireless network.
5.4. NEW HORIZON’S MISSION

Why in news?
- Following its historic first-ever flyby of Pluto, NASA’s New Horizons mission will now fly onward to an object deeper in the Kuiper Belt, known as 2014 MU69.
- 2014 MU69 is considered one of the early building blocks of the solar system

What is Kuiper belt?
- Kuiper belt is flat ring of icy small bodies that revolve around the Sun beyond the orbit of the planet Neptune.
- It comprises hundreds of millions of objects—presumed to be leftovers from the formation of the outer planets—whose orbits lie close to the plane of the solar system.
- The Kuiper belt is thought to be the source of most of the observed short-period comets, particularly those that orbit the Sun in less than 20 years

THREE BILLION-MILE JOURNEY TO TAKE SNAPS OF PLUTO

5.5. NASA’S JUNO SPACECRAFT

Why in news?
NASA’s Juno spacecraft has successfully entered into the orbit of Jupiter and started orbiting it.

Salient features
- The spacecraft’s name comes from Greco-Roman mythology.
- Aim
  - To understand the origin and evolution of Jupiter.
  - Investigate the existence of a solid planetary core.
  - Map Jupiter’s intense magnetic field,
  - Measure the amount of water and ammonia in the deep atmosphere and
  - Observe the planet’s aurora.
It will orbit Jupiter from pole to pole, 5,000 kilometers above planet’s cloud tops.

Mission Life: Juno will have mission life of 20 months from July 2016 to Feb 2018.

It is second spacecraft to orbit Jupiter, after Galileo probe that had orbited from 1995–2003.

Galileo probe in its mission had found evidence of subsurface saltwater on Jupiter’s moons Europa, Ganymede and Callisto.

**5.6. DWARF PLANET CERES**

**Why in News?**

- Pictures from the NASA’s Dawn Mission show permanently shadowed regions on Ceres.
- The permanently shadowed regions do not receive direct sunlight and are identified as extremely cold. They have been cold enough to trap water ice for billions of years.
- The pictures indicate that water could exist in these shadowed craters even today.

**Significance of Dawn Mission**

- The goal of the Dawn Mission is to characterize the conditions and processes of the earliest history of the giant proplanet Vesta and the dwarf planet Ceres.
- In March, 2015, Dawn Spacecraft became first probe to orbit the two solar bodies.
- It explored the giant proplanet Vesta in 2011-2012. Now, it is studying Ceres.

**More about Ceres**

- Ceres is a dwarf planet, the only one located in the inner circle of the solar system, rest all are located on the outer edges.
- It is the largest object in the asteroid belt.
5.7. YAWS FREE STATUS FOR INDIA

Why in news?
- Recently, India received the official citation from WHO and UNICEF for being YAWS-free.
- India is the first country to be officially acknowledged as being Yaws-free.
- India has achieved this important milestone of being Yaws-free much before the WHO global target year of 2020.

What is yaws?
- Yaws is a chronic infection that affects mainly the skin, bone and cartilage.
- The disease occurs mainly in poor communities in warm, humid, tropical areas
- It affects mainly children below 15 years of age.
- It is caused by the bacterium - Treponema pallidum and transmitted by skin contact.
- Yaws occurs in overcrowded communities, with limited access to basic amenities, such as water and sanitation, as well as health care.

Significance
- This has been possible because of education and early treatment of vulnerable population.
- Lessons learned from this public health milestone should guide other programmes as well.
- It will improve the health of marginalized communities and enhance their socio-economic status and contribute to India’s wider development.

5.8. SOLAR POWER TREE

Why in news?
- Union Minister for Science & Technology and Earth Sciences recently launched the ‘Solar Power Tree’.
- It has been developed by the Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CMERI), a constituent laboratory of Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR)

What is Solar Power tree?
- It is an innovative way to generate electricity using solar power in a limited space
- It has a structure like a tree with branches made of steel to hold the photovoltaic panels

Advantages
- It takes less land of only 4 sq ft for a 5 kW solar power tree as compared to 400 sq ft of land required in case of the conventional solar photovoltaic layout
- It holds the panels at a higher height - thus gets more sun (by 1 hour) in a day in comparison to that of conventional layout on ground. This could also be rotated so that the photovoltaic panels get more sunlight. Thus, it is possible to harness 10-15 per cent more power.
- It has a water sprinkler at the top for self-cleaning of panels.

5.9. CHARGE SYNDROME

Why in news?
- Scientists from the Delhi-based CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology are a step closer to bringing hope to children born with CHARGE syndrome.
- The results of a study were published recently in the journal Human Molecular Genetics.
What is Charge Syndrome?

- It is a rare disorder in which multiple life-threatening problems such as deafness and blindness, heart defects, genital problems and growth retardation and facial bone and nerve defects that cause breathing and swallowing difficulties.
- A mutation in the CHD7 gene is responsible for 60-70 per cent of all CHARGE defects. The expression of the gene peaks in the early stages of embryo development, starting from 2-4 cells.
- There is a high death rate in the very first year in children born with CHARGE.
- About 1 in 20,000 people in the world, and an estimated 50,000 in India alone, are born with CHARGE syndrome.

About the Study

- The team IGIB studied the fertilised egg of a zebrafish to better understand the CHARGE syndrome.
- Following fertilization, zebrafish embryos are transparent. This allows scientists to observe the inside of the embryo and watch in real time how various organs develop.
- Since most organs begin forming in the first 24-36 hours and are fully formed within five days, it allows researchers to study the development of an organism from egg to maturity.
- An RNA injected into a one-cell embryo interferes with the making of the CHD7 protein, thus producing a zebrafish embryo with very similar problems as the human babies with CHARGE syndrome.
- The researchers found that the CHD7 protein causes CHARGE syndrome by modifying a second gene — sox10.
- Though CHARGE syndrome is extremely complex with multiple defects, reducing the sox10 protein in CHARGE patients may go a long way in reducing their suffering and improve their chances of survival.
PHILOSOPHY/ दर्शनशास्त्र

by

ANoop KUMAR SINGh

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6. SECURITY

6.1. RED CORRIDOR

The Red Corridor is a region in the east of India that experiences considerable Naxalite–Maoist insurgency.

- The 106 districts that span 10 States — Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Telangana, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — are described as those affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and constitute the ‘Red Corridor.’

Redrawing of Red corridor

The Union government is set to reduce the number of Maoist-affected districts by about a fifth. The considerations on which the government has examined the districts with LWE features are:

- Their violence profile.
- An assessment of the kind of logistical and other support provided to armed Maoist cadres by their sympathisers and “over ground workers”, and
- The kind of positive changes brought about by development work that these districts have seen.

Financial and security assistance to LWE districts

- LWE affected districts get financial and security-related assistance from the Centre. For example, each district gets minimum Rs 30 crore under the Security Related Expenditure scheme of the Home Ministry.
- Other schemes such as the Special Infrastructure Scheme, Integrated Action Plan and civic action programme also add to the state’s coffers.

Impact of exercise

- The state governments fear that once LWE districts are removed from the list, the financial aide given to them will stop.
6.2. COMPREHENSIVE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) is a draft proposed by India in 1996 that has yet to adapted by the UN general assembly.

The original draft that was tabled in 1996 and discussed until April 2013 includes amongst key objectives:

- To have a universal definition of terrorism that all 193-members of the UNGA will adopt into their own criminal law. No good terrorist or bad terrorist.
- To ban all terror groups and shut down terror camps regardless of their stated objectives,
- To prosecute all terrorists under special laws, and
- To make cross-border terrorism an extraditable offence worldwide.

Opposition to CCIT

- US and its allies:
  ✓ Concerns over definition of terrorism.
  ✓ The U.S. has been worried about the application of the CCIT to its own military forces especially with regard to interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Latin American countries:
  ✓ Concerns over international humanitarian laws and Human rights being ignored.
- OIC countries
  ✓ The OIC feels that the convention will be used to target Pakistan and will restrict the rights of self determination groups in Palestine, Kashmir and elsewhere in the world.

Change in draft to accommodate concerns of the countries

- India has made Changes to the draft that will clarify that “the activities of armed forces during an armed conflict” will not be governed by the present convention.
- India agreed to insert the word “peoples” when speaking of rights, in order to “acknowledge the right of self-determination”.

6.3. SUPREME COURT JUDGMENT ON EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

Why in news?

The Supreme Court ruled in a recent judgment that the armed forces cannot escape investigation for excesses in the course of the discharge of their duty even in “disturbed areas”.

The Judgment

- The judgment came on a plea by hundreds of families in the north-eastern State of Manipur for a probe by a Special Investigation Team into 1,528 cases of alleged fake encounters involving the Army and the police.
- The court has sought tabulated details on 62 specific cases in which there is some evidence that the deaths involved were not genuine operational casualties but extrajudicial killings or fake encounters.
- The court has acknowledged that additional powers have been given to the armed forces to deal with terrorism effectively. However, it also made clear that this cannot be an excuse for extrajudicial killings.
- A thorough enquiry should be conducted into “encounter” killings in disturbed areas because the “alleged enemy is a citizen of our country entitled to all fundamental rights including under Article 21 of the Constitution.”
Impact of Judgment

- Human rights activities have hailed the historic judgment of the Supreme Court.
- It may give momentum to the demand for the repeal of AFSPA as a necessary step to end impunity.

Demand for Repeal of AFSPA

- The Justice Verma Commission has said in unequivocal terms that security persons who rape women should be judged under the same act that applies to the civilians.
- In 2005 the Jeevan Reddy Commission said that AFSPA should be repealed and the clauses that are required should be included in other Acts.
- Mr R. N. Ravi, former head of the Intelligence Bureau for the North East is on record that AFSPA is the biggest obstacle to peace in the region.

(For more on AFSPA refer to January-2015/May-2015 months Vision Current Affairs)

6.4. DEFENCE COMMUNICATION NETWORK

Why in news?

- India’s first integrated defence communication network was today launched here enabling the army, air force, navy and the Special Forces Command to share situational awareness for a faster decision-making process.

Features

- It is a strategic, highly secure and scalable system with a pan-India reach including Andaman and Nicobar islands and Ladakh.
- It will have high quality voice, video and data services and is capable of working on terrestrial as well as satellite mode of communication and has also been fixed onboard different military vehicles.
- It is made by HCL and is a proof of strength of the Indian industry and has reaffirmed the emphasis of the government on Make in India program.
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7. ENVIRONMENT

7.1. OIL DEGRADING BACTERIA TO UNDERGO FIELD TRIALS

Why in news?
- The Malabar Botanical Garden and Institute of Plant Sciences, Kozhikode, has joined hands with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) for field trials to establish the oil-degrading properties of three new strains of bacteria.
- The key hydrocarbon-degrading enzyme produced by the bacteria has been isolated and purified and laboratory tests have been successful.
- This active enzyme (Catechol 2, 3-dioxygenase) produced from three new strains of oil-degrading bacteria (two species of Burkholderia and one species of Pseudomonas) is going to be used in pilot plant in Kochi.

What is Bioremediation?
- It means the use of microorganisms to degrade environmental pollutants.
- Advantages of Bioremediation:
  ✓ Less expensive
  ✓ Conventional methods like mechanical removal, burial, evaporation, dispersion, and washing are expensive and can lead to incomplete decomposition, leaving residual contaminants to pollute soil and water.
  ✓ Employed in areas that are inaccessible without excavation. For ex: spills affecting ground water.
  ✓ Clean up petroleum pollutants from the environment conserving aquatic wildlife without negatively affecting bio-diversity.

Bioremediation related technologies
- Bioventing - an in situ remediation technology that uses microorganisms to biodegrade organic constituents in the groundwater system.
- Bioleaching - extraction of metals from their ores through the use of living organisms instead of using harmful chemical substances such as cyanide etc.,
- Land farming - ex-situ waste treatment process that is performed in the upper soil zone or in biotreatment cells. Contaminated soils, sediments, or sludges are transported to the Landfarming site, incorporated into the soil surface and periodically turned over (tilled) to aerate the mixture
- Composting - Aerobic bacteria and fungi decompose the organic matter into compost used as fertilizer.
- Bio-augmentation - the addition of archaea or bacterial cultures required to speed up the rate of degradation of a contaminant.
- Bio-stimulation - modification of the environment to stimulate existing bacteria capable of bioremediation.

7.2. AIR POLLUTION REPORT: IEA

Why in news?
- The “Energy and Air Pollution, World Energy Outlook Special Report” has been released in June.

Observations
- Less than 1% of India’s population lives in areas that meet WHO air quality guidelines. This could increase to almost 10 per cent by 2040, if stringent air pollution regulations are in place.
- The report identifies sources for three big pollutants:
✓ NOx (nitrates) - transport is the major contributor of nitrates.
✓ SO2 (sulfates) - power sector (thermal power stations, back-up generators) for sulfates.
✓ PM2.5 (particulate matter) – residential sector, biomass burning for cooking and heating.
• But due to new power sector regulation, SO2 is likely to be restricted to around 10 per cent relative to current situation.
• NOx emissions growth could be contained to 10 per cent in 2040 by new passenger car standards (BS VI).
• Further, efforts to promote access to clean cooking facilities (Solar cooker, PM Ujwala scheme) for poor households have to be continued to moderate PM2.5 rise to around 7 per cent.
• The report acknowledges the role of Environmental Protection Amendment Rules (EPA) 2015 in strengthening emission standards for new and existing plants.
• But even with all existing policies, absolute growth in emissions (especially PM2.5), coupled with strong population growth, means the number of premature deaths linked to outdoor air pollution will still grow significantly.

Challenges
• Weak norms and implementation.
• Though control technologies for nitrates and sulfates are installed, they are often suboptimal or operate inefficiently.

Way forward
• Ambitious long-term WHO-benchmarked air quality goal should be set.
• A clean AIR strategy for the energy sector: Avoid pollutant emissions, Innovate to reduce pollution abatement costs and reduce emissions should be made.
• Further, it calls for effective monitoring, enforcement, evaluation and communication using reliable data.
• Energy sector must work closely with a range of stakeholders to tackle air pollution successfully.

7.3. GANGOTRI GLACIER AND FLOW OF RIVER GANGA

Why in news?
• Government said that the retreat of Gangotri glacier will not impact the flow of river Ganga drastically as the river is not totally dependent on glaciers for its water even in the head-water region.

Background
• There has been a retreat of 3 km over the past 2 centuries. The rate of retreat has increased significantly since 1971 to 22 meter per year, which was less than 12 meter per year in the preceding century.
• Winter precipitation is when the glacier receives adequate snow and ice for maintaining itself. About 10-15 spells of winter snow as part of western disturbances feed the glacier.
• It has been observed that the snowfall in the region is reduced with increasing rainfall and higher temperatures transferring heat to the glacier causing it to melt faster.
• Mapping of glaciers in the Himalayan region by ISRO using satellites shows that there are nearly 35000 glaciers in Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra regions in the Himalayan and Trans Himalayan ranges.
• 87% of the glaciers show no Change while 12% retreated and 1% advanced.

Facts about Gangotri glacier:
• The terminus of the Gangotri Glacier is said to resemble a cow's mouth, and the place is called Gomukh.
• Raktvarn, Chaturangi and Kirti are the three main glacial tributaries of Gangotri.
7.4. KERALA BIRD ATLAS PROJECT

- Kerala Bird Atlas is an ambitious citizen science project, to map the distribution and abundance of birds of an entire Indian state.
- This is the first time in India that birds in an entire state are being mapped. The only similar effort was in Mysore city few years back.
- The programme is being coordinated by the Hume Centre for Ecology and Wildlife Biology, a conservation organization in the district, in association with the Bird Count India and e-bird.
- Kerala has the distinction of having six bird monitoring schemes, which includes recording common birds, heronries, water birds, pelagic (sea) birds, and forest birds.
- The project has begun in Wayanad district.
- It is envisaged as a five-year activity. By repeating the process over a period of 25 years or so, it will be possible to scientifically document changes in distribution and abundance of our birds over a period of time.
- This has huge implications on nature conservation as a whole as birds are perfect indicators of the changing ecological conditions.

7.5. GANGA CLEANING

Why in News?

- 231 projects under clean Ganga mission have been inaugurated simultaneously at various locations across the states through which the river flows.

Efforts to clean the river

- Namami Gange:
  - It focuses on pollution abatement interventions namely
    - Interception, diversion and treatment of waste water flowing through the open drains through bio-remediation
    - appropriate in-situ treatment
    - use of innovative technologies
    - sewage treatment plants (STPs)
    - effluent treatment plant (ETPs)
    - Rehabilitation and augmentation of existing STPs and immediate short term measures for arresting pollution at exit points on river front to prevent inflow of sewage etc.
  - Aims to make more than 1600 panchayats on the banks of Ganga open defecation free.
  - 8 biodiversity centers would be developed along the Ganga for restoration of identified priority species
  - It focuses not merely on the main river but also on the tributaries. Funding fully to be taken up by center.
  - Use of technology like SMS based pollution level monitoring, coordination with ISRO’s Bhuvan.
  - Structure
    - national level committee chaired by Cabinet secretary- assisted by NMCG (National mission for clean Ganga)
    - State level committee chaired by chief secretary- assisted by SPMG (State program management group)
    - District level committee chaired by District collector.

- NRGBA: established by the Central Government of India, on 20 February 2009 under Section 3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986.
It declared the Ganga as the "National River" of India.
The chair includes the Prime Minister of India and chief ministers of states through which the Ganga flows.

7.6. OZONE LAYER OVER ANTARCTIC

Why in news?

- Atmospheric scientists have seen signs of the mending of the ozone hole above the Antarctic.
- It is ascertained by the scientific fraternity that the healing is a direct result of the curb on the release of chlorofluorocarbons following from the Montreal protocol of 1987.

About Ozone hole

- The Antarctic ozone hole is an area of the Antarctic stratosphere in which the recent ozone levels have dropped to as low as 33 percent of their pre-1975 values.
- The ozone hole occurs during the Antarctic spring, from September to early December, as strong westerly winds start to circulate around the continent and create an atmospheric container. Within this polar vortex, over 50 percent of the lower stratospheric ozone is destroyed during the Antarctic spring.
- The primary cause of ozone depletion is the presence of chlorine-containing source gases primarily CFCs and related halocarbons. In the presence of UV light, these gases dissociate, releasing chlorine atoms, which then go on to catalyze ozone destruction.
- The Cl-catalyzed ozone depletion can take place in the gas phase, but it is dramatically enhanced in the presence of polar stratospheric clouds (PSCs). These polar stratospheric clouds (PSC) form during winter, in the extreme cold.
- Stratospheric chlorine is stored in reservoir compounds like chlorine nitrate and Hydro Chloric acid. During the Antarctic winter and spring, however, reactions on the surface of the polar stratospheric cloud particles convert these "reservoir" compounds into reactive free radicals (Cl and ClO).
- The role of sunlight in ozone depletion is the reason why the Antarctic ozone depletion is greatest during spring. During winter, even though PSCs are at their most abundant, there is no light over the pole to drive chemical reactions.
- Most of the ozone depletion happens in the lower layers of Stratosphere and not in the upper layers.
- In recent times, natural processes such as El Nino and volcanic eruptions have slowed down the process of healing.

7.7. REPORT ON ANIMAL AND PLANT DISCOVERIES 2015

The report is released by the Ministry of Environment and Forest with the help of the studies of scientists and experts of Botanical Survey of India (BSI) and Zoological Survey of India (ZSI).

Notable Findings of the Report

- India’s biodiversity has improved with 445 new species been added to the list in 2015.
- The figure includes 262 animal species and 183 plant species.
- The list includes 4 species of reptiles, 6 species of amphibians, 26 species of fishes, etc.
The most discoveries were made in the Eastern Himalaya region, which accounts for 19% of the total discoveries followed by the Western Ghats (18%) and Andaman and Nicobar Islands (15%).

**Notable Additions**

- **Animals**
  - Rock gecko (Hemidactylus yajurvedi) found in Kanker Chhattishgarh
  - New frog species (Fejervarya gomantaki) from the Western Ghats
  - A shiny new species of fish (Barilius ardens), from the Western Ghats

- **Plants**
  - A new species of ginger Zingiber bipinianum in the South Garo hills of Meghalaya
  - A species of mushroom (Bondarzewia zonata) collected from north Sikkim at an altitude of 2,829 m.

**About BSI and ZSI**

- The Botanical Survey of India is an institution set up by the government of India in 1890 with the objective of identifying the plant resources of this country.
- The Zoological Survey of India was established in 1916 to survey explore and research the fauna.
- The Headquarters of both the institutions are situated at Kolkata with many regional centers.

### 7.8. COMMUNITY AWARENESS BY NDRF

- The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) took a special initiative to spread awareness among the people about response during disasters.
- The trainers and instructors of NDRF reached 482 villages, towns and cities in 22 states and trained more than a lakh people in basic understanding of disaster management and combat.
- This first-of-its-kind exercise will help in sensitizing vulnerable sections to disasters, community capacity building which in turn will ensure resilience and better preparedness against disasters.
- Community capacity building is most significant in reducing adverse impact of disasters.
- This is line with the National Disaster Management Plan as well as Sendai Framework.

### 7.9. GREEN HIGHWAYS POLICY

**Why in news?**

The government recently launched the initial plantation drive on 1,500 km of National Highways at a cost of about Rs 300 crore under the National Green Highways Mission.

**What is it?**

- The Union government had last year launched Green Highways (Plantation, Transplantation, Beautification and Maintenance) Policy 2015.
- The policy aims to take care of the ecological needs, help the environment and local communities, and generate employment by planting trees along all the highways in the country.
Key features

- **Financing**: 1% of the total project cost (TPC) of National Highways will be kept aside in a **Green Highways Fund** to be used for plantation and its maintenance.
- **Strict auditing**: Release of money to the empanelled agencies only if they have achieved a survival rate of 90% in the previous year.
- The implementation and progress of plantation will be monitored via images by ISRO and audit will involve modern IT tools.
- Contracts will be given to NGOs, private cos. and govt. organisations with proven track record.

Benefits

- The community involvement in tree plantation directly benefits local people by **generating employment**. It is estimated that greening of one km of highway provides employment to ten people. Government plans to link it to MNREGA as well.
- The trees can **reduce the impact of air pollution, dust as well as noise pollution** due to their quality of acting as a natural sink.
- It will help in **arresting soil erosion** at the embankment slopes.
- Plants along highway median strips and along the edges **reduce the glare of oncoming vehicles** that can sometimes cause accidents.

### 7.10. GREEN CORRIDOR PROJECT

**Why in news?**

Recently eight states have proposed to issue tenders worth Rs 5,000 crore for the projects.

**What is green corridor project?**

- A project for evacuation of renewable energy from generation points to the load centres by creating intra-state and inter-state transmission infrastructure.
- The intra-state transmission component of the project is being implemented by the respective states and the Power Grid Corporation of India (PGCIL) is implementing inter-state component.
- It is being implemented in two parts
  - Power Grid is setting up the first corridor connecting states rich in renewable energy.
  - A second corridor would connect the solar parks in Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
- The present renewable capacity of the country is 40,000 MW. The Grid can handle 30,000 MW. An additional system for 10,000 MW would be issued by September of this year.

**Finance**

- It is a Rs. 40,000 crore transmission network project. The intra-state projects are worth Rs 11,000 crore.
- German bank KfW and the National Clean Energy Fund will pick up 40% of the tab each and the rest 20% will be with the respective states.
- These projects will be awarded through transparent bidding to speed up transmission for upcoming solar parks.

**Significance**

- Distribution network is one of the weakest links in India’s power infrastructure. This is a step towards mending that.
- This is a step towards realizing India’s target of achieving 175 GW energy from renewable sources.
- The problem of voltage fluctuation in integrating conventional grids with renewable energy grids would be taken care of by the German technology and support.
7.11. OZONE LAYER OVER ANTARCTIC SHOWS SIGNS OF HEALING

Why in news?
- Recent observations have showed signs of mending of this ozone hole.
- Atmospheric researchers have found that the ozone hole has shrunk by more than four million sq kms since 2000 which is the year when ozone depletion was at its peak.

What is Ozone Hole?
- Ozone hole is a region of exceptionally depleted ozone in the stratosphere over the Antarctic that happens at the beginning of Southern Hemisphere spring (August–October).
- The thinning increasing the penetration of UV rays on the earth surface thereby increases the risks of its adverse impacts such as skin cancer.

What has caused the healing?
- The most dominating factor in the depletion of ozone layer is the release of Chlorine from CFCs molecules. The Montreal Protocol has led to reduction in the production and release of CFCs in the atmosphere.
- According to scientists, there are three stages in the ozone recovery process:
  - Reduced rate of decline.
  - Leveling off of the depletion.
  - Ozone increase linked to reduction of the levels of CFC
- Once the CFCs reduce to a certain level, the pace of recovery process will increase automatically.

Significance
- Reduction of UV radiations has tremendous health and environmental benefits.
- It points towards the success of global efforts towards environmental protection. The success of Montreal Protocol should encourage the international community to come together with higher dedication, optimism and vigour to fight other common problems.

7.12. KENDRAPADA SHEEP

Why in news?
- Recently it was conferred ‘rare and singular species’ tag by the Union government.
- They have some rare genetic traits which lead to multiple birth syndromes in them.

What is it?
- A threatened breed of sheep found only in coastal Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapara districts of Odisha.
- It is also known as ‘Kuji Mendha’.

Significance
- Kendrapada sheep are primarily used for production of mutton. The other product of economic importance is their skin. Hence, they make a profitable livelihood source.
- However, unchecked rearing could lead to adverse impact. Thus, sheep farmers need to be sensitized on their commercial viability.
- The new status will give a boost towards their conservation efforts.
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8. CULTURE

8.1. THREE INDIAN SITES GETS INTO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

Why in News?

- The World Heritage Committee, a UNESCO body notified three Indian sites as heritage sites at its 40th session.
- The sites include Chandigarh’s magnificent Capitol Complex, Mt Khangchendzonga, and the archaeological site at Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda University) in Bihar.
- This is also the first time that India got a mixed site notified as heritage site. A mixed site is the one which exhibits qualities of both natural and cultural significance.
- It is also the first time that any country has got three sites named as World Heritage Sites in a single session.

Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP), Sikkim (Kanchenjunga Biosphere Reserve)

- It is the first and only mixed site in India to be notified as World Heritage Site.
- The park covers 25 percent of Sikkim and exhibits one of the wildest altitudinal ranges of any protected area in the world.
- It boasts of a unique topography of snow clad mountains and steep valleys. In fact, it is home to the world’s third highest peak, Mt. Khangchendzonga.
- It is inhabited by endemic, rare and threatened plant and animal species. It is home to musk deer, snow leopard and Himalayan tahr.
- It has been notified as a mixed site due to its ecological significance along with the religious and cultural practices of Buddhism.
- There are many glaciers including the Zemu glacier.
- The park also has few Lepcha tribal settlements. Lepcha is an indigenous tribal community of Sikkim. They number between 30,000 and 50,000.

Chandigarh’s Capitol Complex

- The Capitol Complex includes three buildings, three monuments and lake.
- It was designed by French architect Le Corbusier in the 1950s.
- This complex is part of 17 works of Le Corbusier spread across 7 countries including France and India, that have been included together in the list under a single entry.
- The Capitol Complex comprises of the Legislative Assembly, Secretariat, High Court, Open Hand Monument, Geometric Hill and Tower of Shadows.
- He was Swiss-French architect and urban planner, and is known as one of the pioneers of modern architecture.
- He is known for “five points for modern Architecture” and was called a functionalist and rationalist.

Nalanda Mahavihara (Nalanda University), Bihar

- It is the most ancient university of the Indian subcontinent.
- It engaged in organized transmission of knowledge over an uninterrupted period of 800 years.

Heritage Sites in India

Now, there are a total of 35 World Heritage Sites in India. Out of which, 27 are cultural, 7 natural and 1 mixed site.

What is a World Heritage Site?

- A World Heritage Site is place (such as a building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, or mountain) as notified by UNESCO for having cultural or physical significance.
- Convention Concerning the Protection of the World’s Cultural and Natural Heritage was adopted by UNESCO in 1972.
- The list of World Heritage Sites is maintained by UNESCO World Heritage Committee which comprises of 21 member states elected by the General Assembly.
It comprises the archaeological remains of a monastic and scholastic institution dating from around 3rd century BC to 13th century BC.
It includes stupas, shrines, viharas and important art works in stucco, stone and metal.
The historical development of the site testifies to the development of Buddhism into a religion and flourishing of monastic traditions.

8.2. INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION (IVC) AGE

Why in news?
- Indian researchers have used carbon dating techniques on animal remains and pottery fragments to conclude that the Indus Valley settlements could be 8,000 years old—2,500 years older than previously believed.
- This could make the Indus Valley settlements even older than the Mesopotamian and Egyptian civilisations.

Highlights of the Study
- The study was conducted in Bhirrana in Haryana
- The site shows preservation of all cultural levels, from the pre-Harappan Hakra phase through the Early Mature Harappan to the Mature Harappan time.
- Researchers used a technique known as Optically Stimulated Luminescence.
- According to the researchers, the civilisation was spread over a much larger part of India than previously believed.

Cause of decline for IVC
- Researchers also proposed a new theory for the decline of the civilization.
- The study argues that although climate change played a role, it was changes in cropping patterns and storage of grains which led to the civilization’s decline.
- Large-grained cereals like wheat and barley were cultivated during the early part of intensified monsoon
- People shifted to drought-resistant species of small millets and rice in the later part of declining monsoon.
- Because these later crops generally have much lower yield, the organised large storage system of mature Harappan period was abandoned
- It gave rise to smaller more individual household based crop processing and storage system
- It could have acted as catalyst for the de-urbanisation of the Harappan civilisation rather than an abrupt collapse.

8.3. KHASI TRIBE

Why in News?
- Megalithic stone structures and iron implements dating back to pre-historic period have been found in the ridge spread over 1.5 km in Ri-Bhoi district, Meghalaya.
- Radiocarbon dating of the megalithic structures and tools indicates that Khasis made Meghalaya their home way back in 1200 BC.
- This excavation at Lummawbuh is the first Neolithic site in Meghalaya.
About Khasi
- The Khasis are an indigenous tribe, majority of who live in the state of Meghalaya.
- What sets this tribe apart from other tribes is that the descendents are recognised from the mother and not from the father i.e it follows the matrilineal system of society.
- The Khasis have been granted the status of Scheduled Tribe.
- They practice shifting cultivation (JHUM) for their survival.

8.4. MAHASWETA DEVI

Why in News?
- Mahasweta Devi passed away at the age of 90 on July 28, 2016.

Who Was She?
- She was born in 1926 in Dhaka, British India and was one of the most prominent writers of independent India.
- She wrote about 100 novels and 20 short stories.
- She was also known for her social work that she did to uplift the extremely backward tribal community of Kheria Sabar.
- She was honoured with various literary awards such as Sahitya Akademi Award (in Bengali) for her novel Aranyer Adhikar, Jnanpith Award, Ramon Magsaysay Award as well Indian civilian awards; Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan.
- Some of her famous works of literature are: Hajar Churashir Maa, Rudali and Aranyer Adhikar. Although she wrote in Bengali, her work has been translated in English as well.

8.5. JNANPITH AWARD

Why in News?
- President conferred the 2015 Jnanpith Award (51st Jnanpith Award) on Gujarati litterateur Raghuveer Chaudhary.

Significance of the Jnanpith Award
- The Jnanpith Award recognises litterateurs who write in any one of the 22 Indian languages listed in the Schedule Eight of the Indian Constitution.
- The nomination and award is decided by the Bhartiya Jnanpith foundation.

Background of Bhartiya Jnanpith
- The Bhartiya Jnanpith organisation was founded in 1944 by Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain of Sahu Jain family.
- It was founded in order to undertake systematic research and publication of Sanskrit, Prakrit, Pali and Apabhramsha texts.
- It aimed to cover subjects like religion, philosophy, logic, ethics, grammar, astrology and poetics.

About Schedule Eight of the Indian Constitution
- The constitutional provisions relating to the Eighth Schedule occur in articles 344(1) and 351 of the Indian Constitution.
- The Eighth Schedule recognises 22 official languages other than Hindi.
- Article 344(1) talks about the constitution of a commission by the President which shall include a chairman and such other members representing the different languages specified in the Eighth Schedule. The
commission shall make recommendations to the President for progressive use of Hindi for official purposes of the Union.

- **Article 351** talks about promoting the Hindi language so that it may serve as a medium of expression without interfering with other languages in the 8th Schedule.

### 8.6. MAGSAYSAY AWARD

**Bezada Wilson**

- A renowned campaigner against manual scavenging, he is a national convenor of the Safai Karmachari Andolan.
- A Dalit activist born in Karnataka, has been felicitated for his work towards asserting the right for human dignity.
- As per reports, due to his efforts the number of total manual scavengers in the country has come down to 2 lakhs in 2013 from 15 lakhs.
- He was awarded for “asserting the inalienable right to a life of human dignity”.

**T. M KRISHNA**

- He is a carnatic music vocalist from Chennai.
- He was awarded under the category of “Eminent Leadership” for bringing “social inclusiveness in culture”.
- He is often accepted as a challenger to carnatic orthodoxy.

**About Magsaysay Award**

- The Ramon Magsaysay Award is an annual award established to perpetuate former Philippine President Ramon Magsaysay’s example of integrity in governance, courageous service to the people, and pragmatic idealism within a democratic society.
- The prize was established in April 1957 by the trustees of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund based in New York City with the concurrence of the Philippine government.