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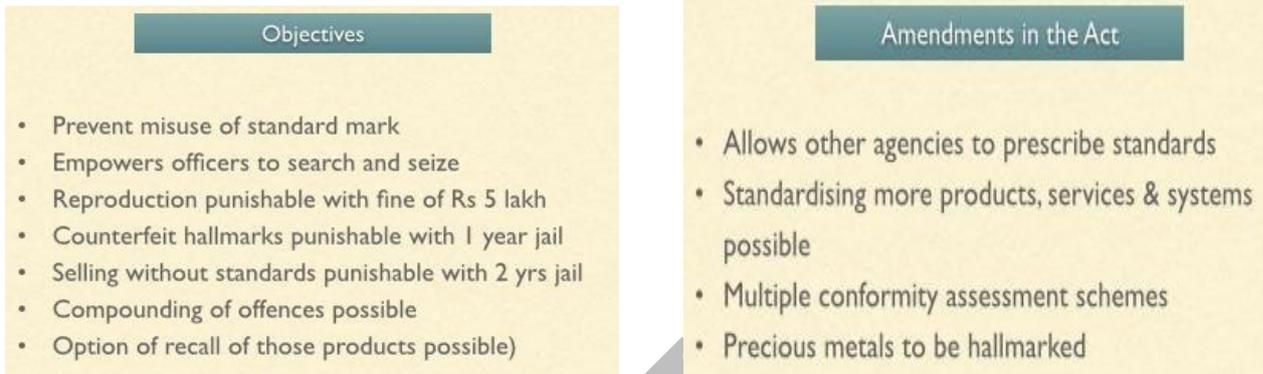
1. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1.1. THE BUREAU OF INDIAN STANDARDS BILL 2015

Why in News?

- During budget session of Parliament Rajya Sabha passed the Bureau of Indian Standards Bill, 2016. Lok Sabha had already passed the Bill.
- The new Bill will repeal the existing Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986.

Key Features:



- **Scope of the Bureau of Indian Standards:** The Bill includes goods, services and systems. Under the 1986 Act, standardization, marking and certification processes applied to certain articles and processes only.
- **Establishment of the Bureau of Indian Standards:**
 - ✓ The Bureau of Indian Standards will be a national body which will formulate, implement and certify certain standards of quality for goods, services, articles, processes and systems.
 - ✓ The Bureau will constitute technical committees of experts for the purpose of formulating such standards.
 - ✓ The Bill constitutes a Governing Council which would be responsible to look at the general superintendence, direction and management of the Bureau.
- **Certification:**
 - ✓ The Bureau would be a licensing authority for quality standards.
 - ✓ The Bureau will establish and maintain testing laboratories for quality assurance and conformity assessment of goods, articles, services, etc.
 - ✓ A hallmark will be used to certify precious metal articles including silver, gold, platinum, and palladium or their alloys.
- The Bill allows the central government to notify certain goods, articles, etc, which will need to compulsorily carry a standard mark. For example goods or articles necessary for public interest, safety of the environment, prevention of unfair trade practices, national security etc.
- The Bureau may recall a good or article that does not conform to the requirement of a particular standard.
- The penalty for improper use of the Indian standard mark will be a fine of up to 5 lakh rupees.
- When a company commits an offence under the Bill, the persons responsible for or in charge of the company will be presumed guilty irrespective of whether the offence was committed without their knowledge, consent or connivance.
- Appeals may be made to the Director General of the Bureau. A further appeal against the order of the Director General may then be made to the central government.

1.2. AADHAAR BILL, 2016

Why in News?

- The Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Bill, 2016, got Parliament's approval.
- The Bill intends to provide statutory backing to Aadhaar for targeted delivery of subsidies and services to individuals residing in India.

Features of the Bill

- Every resident is entitled to obtain an Aadhaar number. A resident is a person who has resided in India for 182 days, in the one year.
- To perform the functions related to Aadhaar card, **Unique Identification Authority (UID) will be formed.**
- **Composition of UID will be** chairperson, two part-time members and a chief executive officer. The chairperson and members should have experience of at least 10 years in matters like technology, governance, etc.
- **Important functions of the UID authority are:**
 - ✓ Specifying demographic and biometric information to be collected during enrolment.
 - ✓ Assigning Aadhaar numbers to individuals
 - ✓ Authenticating Aadhaar numbers
 - ✓ Specifying the usage of Aadhaar numbers for delivery of subsidies and services.
- Biometric information (finger print, iris scan and other biological attributes) will be used only for Aadhaar enrolment and authentication purpose and will not be shared with anyone.
- Only in **cases pertaining** interest of national security and on the order of court information will be revealed.
- A person may be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years and minimum fine of Rs. 10 lakh for unauthorised access to centralized database, including revealing any information stored.

To obtain an Aadhaar number, an individual has to submit his

- Biometric (photograph, finger print, iris scan)
- Demographic (name, date of birth, address) information.
- The Unique Identification Authority (UID) may specify other biometric and demographic information to be collected by regulations.

Benefits of this bill

- Wrong/fake beneficiaries have been a major issue with many schemes; hence it is expected to prevent leakages in the distribution system.
- It is single-most important method of decreasing massive political and bureaucratic corruption.
- It will enable delivery of much higher level of income transfers to the poor.

Issues surrounding the bill

- **Due to Introduction of the bill as money bill, it** has bypassed Rajya Sabha which could have provided valuable inputs during discussion.
- It has also seen as against the spirit of cooperative federalism because Rajya Sabha is considered as representing the voice of states.
- **Section 7** of the bill gives the government powers to make Aadhaar mandatory for a wide range of facilities and services.

BYPASSING NORMS?

The Opposition is accusing the govt. of trying to avoid scrutiny over the Aadhaar Bill by categorising it as a Money Bill

What are Money Bills?

Bills that contain provisions related to taxation, borrowing of money by the government, expenditure from or receipt to the Consolidated Fund of India

What has the Opposition riled

➔ Govt. does not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha, which cannot reject Money Bills

➔ Also, as part of the Finance Bill, the govt. has mentioned the incorporation of the RBI monetary policy committee

In clause 57, it says one can also use the identification number for any other function...In this way, it does not meet the criteria of a money bill

• Plug loopholes related to privacy

• Block sale of database of individuals



Jairam Ramesh

• Prevent disclosure of demographic information in the interests of national security which is defined "loosely"

• Provide for aggrieved individuals to approach courts

directly rather than through the Unique Identification Authority of India

• Clarify that benefits cannot be denied to those who don't have an Aadhaar number

Privacy is not a fundamental right



Arun Jaitley

- **Section 57** enables the government to impose Aadhaar identification in virtually any other context that is not mentioned in the bill.
- **Loss of privacy:** Every move of each individual can be tracked and this is against the constitutional spirit of right to privacy that comes under right to life. **Right to privacy is an essential foundation of the freedom to dissent.**
- If biometrics data are landed in unsafe hands. It may lead to mass forgery, misrepresentation and other associated frauds.
- **Weak cyber security infrastructure** put the personal data of citizen under threat and makes them vulnerable.

Challenges

- **Interoperability** between platforms in case other platforms are used to deliver benefits.
- The tendency to adopt non-verifiable alternative platforms, bypassing the Aadhaar, can lead to abuse.
- Although disbursements through DBT using Aadhaar can be quickly effected however withdrawals would **require a significantly faster pace of ensuring reliable connectivity**, covering all Panchayats.

Money Bills: Article 110 of the Constitution deals with the definition of money bills. It states that a bill is deemed to be a money bill if it contains 'only' provisions dealing with all or any of the following matters:

1. The imposition, abolition, remission, alteration or regulation of any tax,
2. The regulation of the borrowing of money by the Union government,
3. The custody of the Consolidated Fund of India or the contingency fund of India, the payment of moneys into or the withdrawal of money from any such fund,
4. The appropriation of money out of the Consolidated Fund of India,
5. Declaration of any expenditure charged on the Consolidated Fund of India or increasing the amount of any such expenditure,
6. The receipt of money on account of the Consolidated Fund of India or the public account of India or the custody or issue of such money, or the audit of the accounts of the Union or of a state,
7. Any matter incidental to any of the matters specified above.

Other provisions:

- If any question arises whether a bill is a money bill or not, the decision of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha is final.
- His decision in this regard cannot be questioned in any court of law or in the either House of Parliament or even the president.
- When a money bill is transmitted to the Rajya Sabha for recommendation and presented to the president for assent, the Speaker endorses it as a money bill.
- A money bill can only be introduced in the Lok Sabha and that too on the recommendation of the president.
- Every such bill is considered to be a government bill and can be introduced only by a minister.

Prelims 2013

What will follow if a Money Bill is substantially amended by the Rajya Sabha?

- (a) The Lok Sabha may still proceed with the Bill, accepting or not accepting the recommendations of the Rajya Sabha
- (b) The Lok Sabha cannot consider the Bill further
- (c) The Lok Sabha may send the Bill to the Rajya Sabha for reconsideration
- (d) The President may call a joint sitting for passing the Bill

Solution: Amendment in bill by Rajya Sabha do not have any impact and the Lok Sabha may still proceed with the Bill, accepting or not accepting the recommendations of the Rajya Sabha, hence option A is correct.

1.3. THE REAL ESTATE (REGULATION AND DEVELOPMENT) BILL 2013

Why in News?

- Recently, Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Bill 2013, was approved by the Rajya Sabha.

Background

- The real estate sector is the **second largest employer after agriculture** and it contributes **nine per cent to the national GDP**.
- Despite this, sector has been marked by a **lack of trust and confidence** between consumers and developers, which has had an adverse impact on investments in the sector.
- As per the Global Real Estate Transparency Index**, India falls in the 'semi-transparent' category.

Provisions

- Mandatory registration** with real estate regulatory authorities (**RERA**) of projects of at least 500 square meter area, or those comprising eight flats.
- The regulator's website should have all the necessary **public disclosure** of details related to each project.
- And also, a **quarterly progress report** will have to be made public on the website.
- Projects under construction** are also required to be registered with the RERA.
- Project developers will now be required to deposit at least 70% of their funds**, including land cost, in a **separate escrow account** to meet the cost of construction.
- A provision for imprisonment up to three years in case of promoters and up to one year in case of real estate agents and buyers for violation of orders of appellate tribunals or monetary penalties or both.
- A clear definition of carpet area** and buyers will now be paying only for the carpet area and not the super built-up area.
- Appellate tribunals** will be required to adjudicate cases **within 60 days** and regulatory authorities will have to dispose of complaints in 60 days.
- Regulatory authorities can also register projects to be developed beyond urban areas, promote a single-window system of clearances, and grade projects and promoters besides ensuring digitization of land records. They will also have to draft regulations within three months of formation.
- The builders would also be **responsible for fixing structural defects for five years** after transferring the property to a buyer.
- It will **regulate both commercial and residential projects** and set up state-level regulatory authorities to monitor real estate activity.

Significance

- It will **protect consumer interest and ensure efficiency** in all property-related transactions,
- It will also **improve accountability of developers, boost transparency** and attract more investments to the sector.
- This bill is in line with the government's urban makeover plan along with initiatives to boost affordable housing through Housing for All By 2022 and Smart City project.

Way forward

- It is important to note that this Central legislation has to be implemented by the States.
- The responsibility of providing the enabling ecosystem rests with the states, hence the real challenge is in the manner the states implement this legislation.

Key Features of Real Estate Bill

All projects to be registered with regulatory authority before selling

Disclose all project details, including approvals, plans, land status, etc

70% of buyer money to be deposited in escrow for construction

No super area; homes to be sold on carpet area only

Builder and buyer to pay same rate of interest for any delays on their part

1.4. PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWALA YOJANA (PMUY)

Why in News?

- Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on approved a scheme to give free cooking gas connections to poor women.

Background

- Poor in India have limited access to Clean fuel (LPG).
- Use of fossil fuels and conventional fuel like cow dung has a serious health implication for women and Children.
- According to WHO estimates **about 5 lakh deaths in India** due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Chullahs produce PM 2.5, particles under 2.5 microns that lodge in the lungs and cause cancer and TB.
- Biomass smoke makes people blind. One NFHS study of women showed that blindness was 8,967 per lakh population in biomass homes compared with 6,152/lakh in cleaner-fuel homes.
- Indoor air pollution is responsible for significant number of acute respiratory diseases in young children.

Features

- This is **the first ever welfare scheme** by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- **5 Crore** LPG connections will be provided to BPL families with a support of Rs 1600 each household in next three years.
- About 1.50 Crore BPL families will be benefited under the scheme in the year 2016-17.
- Connections will be given in the name of **Women beneficiaries**.
- **Identification** of BPL families will be made in consultation with State Governments and Union territories.
- **EMI Facility** will be provided for meeting the cost of stove and refill cost.

Benefits

- Providing LPG connections to BPL households will **ensure universal coverage of cooking gas**.
- It will reduce the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuels
- It will also be one more step towards empowerment of women and protect their health.
- The scheme is also expected to provide employment to rural youth in supply chain.
- It will also **reduce rural female workload of collecting firewood**, and reduce deforestation.

Challenges:

- Each BPL household would have to spend up to Rs.5,000 each year on LPG even at current subsidised prices in addition to a one-time cost of Rs.1,800 for the connection. This cost may be unaffordable to many.
- Lack of distribution systems especially in rural areas.
- There are many inclusion and exclusion errors in BPL lists as observed by various civil society members.
- Also BPL is a narrow definition of deprivation and many non-BPL households may also not be able to afford LPG connections.

Way Forward:

- There is a need to widen the net to cover more people under this scheme.
- Ensure reliable, sustained and last-mile supply : The distribution system needs to be strengthened to be able to meet the expected increase in demand, particularly in rural areas, as non-availability of fuel could push people back towards using solid fuels.
- Effective monitoring and grievance redressal systems.
- The scheme should be accompanied by a focused public relations campaign, to build awareness so that actual usage of LPG can happen.

1.5. PROHIBITION OF SOCIAL BOYCOTT

Why in News?

- Recently, the Maharashtra cabinet approved a legislation (Prohibition of Social Boycott Act, 2015) to tackle social ostracism in the name of caste, creed, community and rituals.
- Maharashtra will be **the first state** in the country to enact a law against social boycott of individuals or families by caste panchayats.

Reasons

- There have been several cases reported from villages in the state of powerful community panchayats declaring social boycott against individuals for marrying outside their caste.
- There have been instances where village communities have enforced dress codes barring women from wearing jeans, or have banned people from places of worship.

Significance

- This initiative to evolve a stringent law will go a long way to address the social menace still prevalent in many parts of the state.
- It will be helpful in rooting out evil, outdated and unconstitutional practices of caste panchayats, 'gavaki' and community panchayats.
- This legislation will play an instrumental role in restoring the values of the system where caste/community barriers cannot be detrimental to human dignity.

1.6. GARV APP

Why in News?

- Power ministry has launched the GARV (Grameen Vidyutikaran) app to provide the first hand information with respect to village electrification programme in the country.

Key Highlights:

- To speed up the work related to village electrification Grameen Vidyut Abhiyantas (GVAs or rural electrification engineers) have been appointed.
- Reports by these GVAs **are shared** through the GARV (Grameen Vidyutikaran) app with officials as well as the public.

Significance

- It will help in **monitoring** the work of power ministry and respective state authorities by the common man.
- The GARV app puts pressure on State governments for timely and quality delivery.
- This is very good step towards better accountability and transparency in ensuring village electrification.
- It also gives an opportunity to media to scrutinize the rural electrification work of ministry/state governments and seek accountability.

1.7. GRAM UDAY TO BHARAT UDAY ABHIYAN

Why in News?

- Central Government in collaboration with States and Panchayats has decided to organize a **'Gram Uday Se Bharat Uday Abhiyan'** (Village Self Governance Campaign) from 14th April to 24th April 2016.

Highlights of the Campaign:

- The campaign aims to generate nation-wide efforts to increase social harmony across villages, strengthen Panchayati Raj, promote rural development, and foster farmers' progress.

- A **'Social Harmony Programme'** will be conducted in all gram panchayats, supported collaboratively by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj and the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.
- In this programme, villagers will honour Dr. Ambedkar and resolve to strengthen social harmony.
- Information regarding various government schemes to foster social justice will be provided.
- **'Village Farmer Assemblies'** will be organized where information regarding schemes of agriculture such as the Fasal Bima Yojna, Social Health Card etc. will be provided to farmers.
- Also a **national meeting of tribal women Gram Panchayat Presidents** from Fifth Schedule Areas of 10 States will be held at Vijayawada focusing on Panchayat and tribal development.

1.8. REPORT ON MEDICAL EDUCATION GOVERNANCE

Why in News?

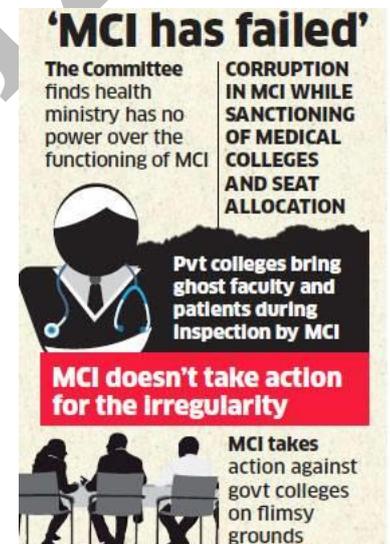
- Recently a Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has submitted its report. It pointed out serious irregularities in Medical Council of India's (MCI) functioning and has called for changes of "transformational nature".

Important Observations from the Report

- The MCI's composition is opaque, and does not have diversified stakeholders and council has only medical doctors.
- The existing minimum standard requirements mandated by the MCI are "irrational and artificially rigid standards" that are an impediment to the establishment and expansion of medical colleges.
- **High capitation fees** for getting a medical seat that goes up to Rs.50 lakhs.
- In the current system of inspections there is **no provision for constructive feedback** and the whole procedure is oriented towards penalising rather than improving.

Suggestions for improvement

- There are three areas where the committee has recommended drastic changes to MCI:
 - a) The setup of MCI as a regulatory body,
 - b) The governance of medical colleges and
 - c) To curb corruption.
- Bring diverse stakeholders such as public health experts and social scientists, health economists, health NGOs in the governing body.
- Inducting non-medical professionals of integrity and community health experts to regulatory bodies would help advance public interest.
- **Separation of Power:** Replace the existing MCI with an architecture consisting of **four independent boards** to deal with curriculum development, teacher training, and standard setting for undergraduate and post-graduate education.



Medical Council of India (MCI):

- MCI is **statutory body** for establishing uniform and high standards of medical education in India.
- It registers doctors to practice in India, in order to protect and promote the health and safety of the public by ensuring proper standards in the practice of medicine.

1.9. MINORITY STATUS OF EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES

Why in news?

- Recently, the central government reversed the stand of its predecessor Government and decided not to support minority status for Aligarh Muslim University or Jamia Millia Islamia.

Background of the issue

• AMU

- ✓ In 1967 (Azeez Basha versus Union of India case), the Supreme Court ruled that AMU was not a minority institution as it was set up by the British legislature, and not by Muslims.
- ✓ In 1981, Parliament passed an AMU Amendment Act, which accepted that AMU was set up by Muslims.
- ✓ The Allahabad High Court ruled in 2005 that the 1981 Act was ultra vires of the Constitution, and that AMU was not a minority institution.
- ✓ However, Supreme Court stayed the Allahabad HC decision, so effectively, AMU remained a minority institution.
- ✓ Recently the Centre has filed a fresh affidavit in the Supreme Court reversing the earlier position that the AMU, a Central university, cannot be granted minority status.

• Jamia Millia Islamia

- ✓ The Law Ministry is learnt to have given the advice that the government can withdraw its earlier support to the 2011 order of the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) which declared JMI a religious minority institution
- ✓ This advice is on the ground that the university was established through a central legislation and was neither started nor run by the Muslim minority.

Article 30, The Constitution Of India
Right of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions

Jamia Millia Islamia milestones

- Founded in 1920 during the Khilafat and Non-Co-operation Movements
- Registered as a society in 1939
- A deemed-to-be university in 1962
- Central university through the Jamia Millia Islamia Act, 1988
- Teachers, alumni and students seek minority status in 2006
- Jamia declared a minority institution in 2011

Issue of Minority Institution

- While a number of minority educational **institutions** exist, there are issues with regard to minority **universities**.
- For incorporating any university, a statute is needed and thus it is done by the state.
- Those against minority status for universities say that since, university is established by law and not minorities, it is not a minority institution.
- But, those in support argue that establishment is different from incorporation and for incorporation of a university, law is needed irrespective of the fact that it was established by minorities.

Government stand

- The 2005 judgement of Allahabad High Court after hearing all the arguments ruled that it is not a minority institution.
- Centre stated that conferring minority status to AMU or any institution set up by a parliamentary enactment or state enactment would be contrary to Article 15 of the Constitution, which prohibits discrimination by state on grounds of religion.
- Centre also states that minority status to AMU and Jamia Millia Islamia universities is “unconstitutional” and “illegal” since these two government-run institutions were discriminating against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes by using the minority tag.

National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI)

- National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions was established in 2005.
- It ensures rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice as provided in the Article 30 of the Constitution of India.
- The linguistic minorities are outside the purview of the NCMEI Act.
- This Commission is a quasi-judicial body and has been endowed with the powers of a Civil Court.
- It is headed by a Chairman who has been a Judge of the Delhi High Court and two members to be nominated by Central Government.
- The Commission has 3 roles namely adjudicatory function, advisory function and recommendatory powers.

1.10. PRESIDENT'S RULE IN UTTARAKHAND

What is the issue?

- The political crisis in Uttarakhand started on March 18 when nine Congress MLAs defected to the opposition and met Governor, and sought the dismissal of the Uttarakhand government.
- Although the Governor provided a deadline of 28 March for floor test but President's rule was imposed a day before citing "constitutional crisis" in the state.
- According to Article 356, President's rule can be imposed in a state if a situation has arisen in which the government of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.

Issue of Appropriation Bill in the crisis

- The Appropriation Bill is intended to give authority to Government to incur expenditure from and out of the Consolidated Fund of India.
- Being a money bill, failure of its passage amounts to no confidence of the legislature on the government and the government has to resign.
- In case of Uttarakhand, on the 18th of March Appropriation Bill was presented in the Assembly. Of the 71 member Assembly of which 67 were present, 35 voted against the Appropriation Bill and asked for division of votes.
- However, despite want of division of votes it was claimed that Appropriation Bill was passed by voice vote and the bill was not presented to the governor for his assent.
- This could imply following:
 - ✓ The Appropriation Bill sanctioning expenditure from 1st April 2016 was not approved.
 - ✓ Secondly, if the Appropriation Bill was defeated, the continuation of the Government subsequent to 18th March 2016 is unconstitutional.
- This prompted the rebel MLAs and the opposition to meet the governor who sought for dismissal of government following which the governor declared the house in suspended animation and gave the CM a deadline of 28th March to prove his majority in the house.

Role of the speaker

- The decision of the Speaker to go for a voice vote when majority members demanded a division.
- In addition, declaring the Appropriation bill passed even when majority members voted in negative.
- The decision of the speaker to disqualify members on ground of defection when the house was on suspended animation, allegedly to change the composition of the house to enable the government to survive the no confidence vote.

Supreme Case judgments related to imposition of President's rule in state

- **S R Bomai vs Union of India**
 - ✓ Art. 356 should be used "very sparingly", and not for political gains.
 - ✓ The strength of the government should be tested on the floor of the house and not as per whims of the Governor.

- ✓ Court cannot question the advice tendered by Council of ministers but it can scrutinize the ground for that advice of imposition of President's rule in the state and may take corrective steps if malafide intention is found.
- ✓ Use of Art 356 is justified only when there is breakdown of constitutional machinery and not administrative machinery.
- **Buta Singh case**
 - ✓ The governor's report could not be taken at face value and must be verified by the council of ministers before being used as the basis for imposing President's rule.

Way Forward

- Situation like those in Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand etc provide an opportunity to introspect into issues like neutrality in role of constitutional offices of Speaker and Governor. Further it is pertinent that guidance provided in various Supreme Court Cases is followed in letter and spirit.

Note: To know more about Constitutional and Judicial Provisions with respect to President's rule, please refer February 2016 current affairs.

1.11. JUDGES APPOINTMENT

Why in News?

- **A Group of Ministers (GoM) headed by External Affairs Minister** have finalized the new Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of Judges.

Background

- After quashing the proposed National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC), the Supreme Court's Constitution Bench had **asked the Centre to consult the CJI for drafting the new memorandum for appointments of judges to the higher judiciary.**

Key highlights of MoP

- For the first time, **it has been asked to include "merit and integrity" as "prime criteria" for appointment of judges to the higher judiciary.**
- Evaluation of judgments delivered by a high court judge during the last five years and initiatives undertaken for improvement of judicial administration should be a yardstick of merit for promotion as chief justice of a high court.
- **It seeks to introduce performance appraisal as a standard for appointing chief justices of high courts and Supreme Court judges.**
- It proposes that for appointment of judges in the Supreme Court, **the "prime criteria" should be "seniority as chief justice/ judge of the high court"**.
- The MoP states that up to three judges in the Supreme Court need to be appointed from among the eminent members of the Bar and distinguished jurists with proven track record in their respective fields.
- **A permanent secretariat to be set up in the Supreme Court** for maintaining records of high court judges, scheduling meetings of the SC Collegium, receiving recommendations as well as complaints in matters related to appointments.
- The Union Law Minister should seek the recommendation of the incumbent CJI for appointment of his successor at least one month prior to his retirement.
- A notice for vacancies of judges should be put up on the website of the high courts at the beginning of the year for appointments.

(Note: For complete coverage of National Judicial appointments Commission Act, please refer October, 2015 and November (16-30) 2015, Vision Current Affairs.)

MEMORANDUM OF PROCEDURE

- | | |
|--|---|
| ■ Appoint up to 3 SC judges from members of the Bar, distinguished jurists | ■ HC acting chief justice's term must be limited to 3 months |
| ■ Document reasons if a senior judge is overlooked for elevation to SC | ■ Union Law Minister must seek CJI's recommendation for appointment of his successor at least a month before his retirement |
| ■ Set up permanent secretariat to maintain records | |

1.12. SUTLEJ-YAMUNA LINK (SYL) CANAL ISSUE

Why in news?

- Supreme Court has directed the Punjab government to maintain status quo on land marked for the construction of SYL canal.
- However, going against the SC directive, Punjab assembly passed the **Punjab Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal (Rehabilitation and Re-vesting of Proprietary Rights) Bill 2016**, which seeks to return land acquired for the canal's construction to the original owners free of cost.

Background:

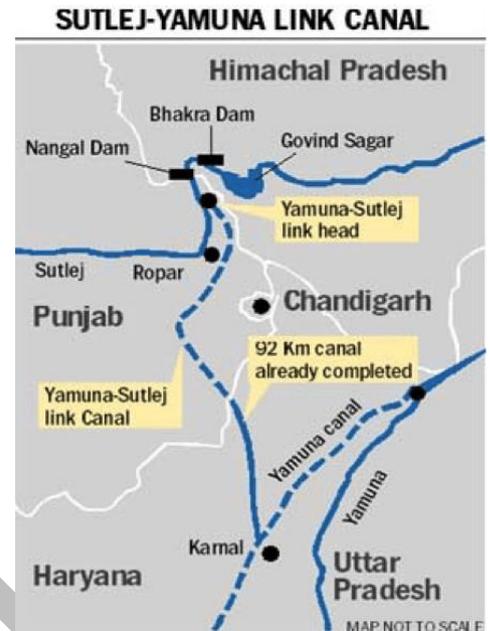
- Central government in 1976, issued a notification allocating to Haryana 3.5 million acre feet (MAF) out of undivided Punjab's 7.2 MAF.
- A canal linking the Sutlej with the Yamuna, cutting across the state, was planned in order to **enable** Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas.
- **Total length of the canal** is supposed to be 214-km. 122 km of which was to be in Punjab, and 92 km in Haryana.
- The work on this canal was started in 1982.
- However, following the protests in Punjab, the Punjab Assembly passed The Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004, terminating its water-sharing agreements.
- The above incident also affected the construction work on the canal.

Reasons of Conflict

- Punjab government argues that the SYL share of water to Haryana was based on 1920 data and now the situation has changed drastically so there is need to review it.
- Whereas Haryana government claims that it is a water deficit state and it has been deprived of its water share which has affected its agricultural output.

Way Forward

- The solution of this **issue** can be achieved only if all political parties **work together in unbiased manner and treat this as an issue of national interest**.
- At present **Punjab using 75% of its water through tube wells and only 25% by canals**, however Haryana is dependent on canal irrigation, so Punjab's political establishment (both ruling and opposition parties) should understand the need of Haryana and its people and help in the construction of canal.
- At the same time, proper rehabilitation (Home, land and employment) to the displaced people should be provided.



1.13. AMENDMENT IN "MOTION OF THANKS" BY RAJYA SABHA

Why in News?

- This is the second time in two years that the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address has been amended.
- The amendment was focused on legislation passed by **Rajasthan and Haryana governments in limiting the rights of citizens to contest panchayats elections**.
- Before 2015, there were just three occasions on which the President's Address was amended in the Rajya Sabha, once each during the tenures of Indira Gandhi, V.P. Singh and Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Significance of these amendments

- The adoption of an amendment to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address is of **vital importance for the credibility of the Government**.
- It **enforces moral accountability on the ruling party against their inaction, mal administration and inefficiencies**.
- It signifies **the importance and relevance of the Rajya Sabha in our body politic**, and its meaningful role in holding the Government to account.
- It clearly brings **out the dynamic of our Parliamentary democracy** which is dependent on a balance of strength of political parties and the composition of the House.
- Convey the dissatisfaction against the government policies, legislations and regulations.
- It highlights the issues of social importance which are not in the radar of government.

Motion of Thanks

- The **first session after each general election and the first session of every fiscal year are addressed by the president**.
- In this address, the president outlines the policies and programmes of the government in the preceding year and ensuing year.
- This address of the president which is **discussed in both the Houses of Parliament on a motion is called the 'Motion of Thanks'**.
- **At the end of the discussion, the motion is put to vote. This motion must be passed in Lower House. Otherwise, it amounts to the defeat of the government.**

2. INTERNATIONAL/INDIA AND WORLD

2.1. INDIA-PAKISTAN : SIR CREEK DISPUTE

Sir Creek: Sir Creek is a 96 km tidal estuary on the border of India and Pakistan. The creek, which opens up into the Arabian Sea, divides the Gujarat state of India from the Sindh province of Pakistan.

Sir creek dispute time line:

The Sir Creek dispute between India and Pakistan, which got its name from the British representative who negotiated the original dispute over firewood between the local rulers.

- **1908:** Dispute arises between the Rao (ruler) of Kutch and the Sindh government over the collection of firewood from the creek area.
- **1914:** The government of Bombay Province took up the resolution and gave award
 - ✓ Paragraph 9 of the 1914 resolution indicates that the boundary in Sir Creek is the green band on the eastern bank of the Creek.
 - ✓ However, paragraph 10 of the same resolution talks about the centre of the navigable channel being the boundary, incidentally as per the internationally accepted '**Rule of Thalweg**'.
- **1925:** The land boundary in the horizontal sector was demarcated by Sindh and Kutch in 1924-25 through a placement of 67 pillars.
- **1968:** India-Pakistan tribunal on Kutch border gives its award which upholds 90% of India's claim but it does not cover Sir Creek. The tribunal award relates to the area to the east of sir creek.

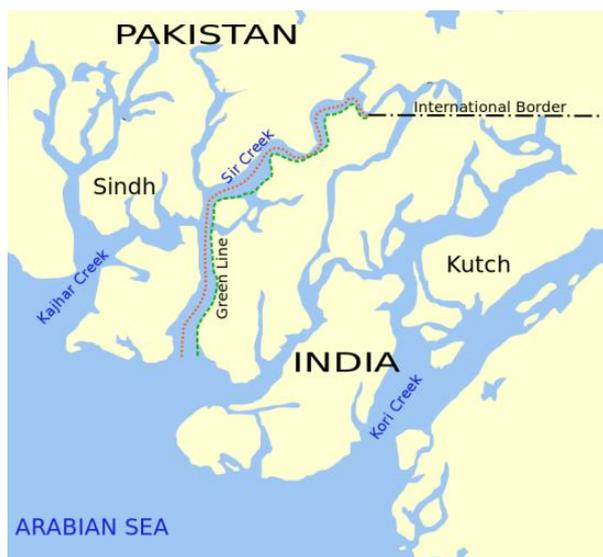


Pakistan's Position:

- Pakistan claims the entire Sir Creek, with its eastern bank defined by a "green line" and represented on a 1914 map belongs to it.
- Accepting Pakistan's premise on the "green line" would mean loss of about 250 square miles of EEZ for India.

India's Position:

- India says that the green line is an indicative line and felt the boundary should be defined by the "mid-channel" of the Creek as shown on a map dated 1925.
- India supports its stance by citing the **Thalweg doctrine in international law**. The law states that river boundaries between two states may be, if the two states agree, divided by the **mid-channel**.
- Though Pakistan does not dispute the 1925 map, it maintains that the doctrine is not applicable in this case as it most commonly applies **to non-tidal rivers, and Sir Creek is a tidal estuary**.



Significance of Sir creek

- Sir Creek itself has little value. It is a marshy wasteland. But where the boundary line runs through it will determine how much **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** one country will lose or gain.
- Much of the region is **rich in oil and gas below the sea bed**, and control over the creek would have a huge bearing on the energy potential of each nation.

Challenges due to non- resolution of Sir Creek

- **Fisherman misery:**
 - ✓ The Sir Creek area is a great fishing destination for hundreds of fishermen from both India and Pakistan.
 - ✓ Due to lack of proper maritime boundary, many of their boats stray across the perceived boundaries, and they end up being arrested by the other side.
 - ✓ The demarcation would also prevent the inadvertent crossing over of fishermen of both nations into each other's territories.
- **Drug syndicate / Smuggling:**
 - ✓ Over the year this region has become main route to smuggle drugs, arms and petroleum product to India.
 - ✓ The blurred maritime boundary is being exploited by drug syndicate.
- **Terror design:**
 - ✓ Terrorists are using disputed area to cross over Indian side.
 - ✓ In 26/11 terror attack, terrorists captured an Indian fishing vessel, Kuber, off Sir Creek, and used it to attack Mumbai.
- **Maritime boundary:**
 - ✓ The resolution of sir creek help in the determination of the maritime boundaries which are drawn as an extension of onshore reference points.
 - ✓ Maritime boundaries also help in determining the limits of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and continental shelves.

Way forward for resolution

- Designating the non-delineated area — Sir Creek and its approaches — as a zone of disengagement or a **jointly administered maritime park**.
- Given the creek's ecological sensitivity, both countries could designate the area a **maritime sensitive zone**.

2.2. INDIA AND SEYCHELLES

A. Exercise Lamitye- 2016

The Seventh Joint Military Training Exercise between the **Indian Army and the Seychelles People's Defence Forces (SPDF)** - LAMITYE 2016 was conducted at Seychelles Defence Academy (SDA), Victoria.

- Since 2001 India and Seychelles have been conducting joint military drill 'Exercise Lamitye'.
- Lamitye which means friendship in Creole (local dialect).
- The exercise is conducted biennially with the aim of **enhancing military cooperation and interoperability between the two countries**.

B. Navy's aircraft on mission in Seychelles

Indian navy has for the **first time deployed maritime reconnaissance** aircraft to Seychelles for surveillance of the **island nation's Exclusive Economic Zone**.

- The aircraft deployment, which followed earlier surveillance missions of the Seychellois EEZ by naval ships, reflects **India's increased maritime engagement in the region**.
- India has been reaching out to the smaller Indian Ocean island nations through **various Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) exercises**.
- Domain Awareness (MDA) exercises includes:
 - ✓ **Search and Rescue (SAR) support.**
 - ✓ **Oil pollution response exercises.**
 - ✓ **Assistance in legal matters.**

- Indian navy has supported countries in Indian Ocean region (IOR) such as Sri Lanka, Mauritius, Maldives and Seychelles with training, hydrographic surveys, surveillance operations and counter-terror patrols.
- India and China are locked in efforts to widen their respective spheres of influence in the strategically vital Indian Ocean.

2.3. INDIA AND JAPAN

India and Japan are in talks to collaborate on **upgrading civilian infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.

- The first project being discussed is a modest one - a 15-megawatt diesel power plant on South Andaman Island.
- To counter china's growing influence, India is building strategic relations with Japan, Australia and the United States, as well as regional powers like Vietnam.

A COUNTER TO THE DRAGON

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Andaman and Nicobar Islands are being seen by India and Japan as an asset to counter China's outreach in the Indian Ocean 	<p>SIGNIFICANCE: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are northwest of the Strait of Malacca, offering control of a so-called choke point that is one of China's greatest marine vulnerabilities</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India will for the first time accept foreign investment in the archipelago 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new collaboration is also a testimony to the big push in India-Japan relations. Japan is funding a \$744 million road building project in the northeastern Indian border region covering Mizoram, Assam and Meghalaya 	

2.4. INDIA-BANGLADESH

Teesta River dispute

Teesta originates in Sikkim, flows through West Bengal in India before entering Bangladesh. It merges with the Brahmaputra River (or Jamuna when it enters Bangladesh). The river is important for both Bangladesh and India for its agricultural use.

Teesta river agreement timeline

- In 1983, India and Bangladesh had agreed into an ad hoc sharing of the water during the dry season (October to April) with an allocation of **36 per cent for Bangladesh and 39 per cent** for India, leaving **25 per cent to be decided** later. But this deal has remained pending for more than 2 decades.
- As per an agreement of 2011 the two sides had agreed to share the river's **water 50:50**, the same as the 1996 Ganges water-sharing pact between the neighbours. This agreement was not signed due to opposition from **chief minister of West Bengal**.
- Recently Bangladesh has requested India to finalize the Teesta agreement as early as possible. India and Bangladesh had finalized contentious land boundary agreement last year so there is a chance that the river agreement will be finalized in near future.

Power agreement and internet service

Prime Ministers of India and Bangladesh commissioned international gateway of internet service in Agartala and supply of **100MW power to Bangladesh from Tripura**.

- India will supply **100 megawatt (MW) of electricity in return for 10 Gigabits per second Internet bandwidth**.
- 100MW power will be supplied from Suryamaninagar grid to the grid in Commilla of southeast Bangladesh.
- India is already supplying 500 MW of power to Bangladesh through the Bahrampur-Bheramara inter-connection.
- **Agartala** has become third station connected to submarine cable for internet bandwidth after **Chennai and Mumbai**.
- Internet gateway would immensely help out north-eastern region comprising eight states.

- North eastern region will get benefit of 10GBPS internet bandwidth from Bangladesh's submarine cable station at Cox Bazar.

'Sundarban Moitry' (Sundarbans Alliance)

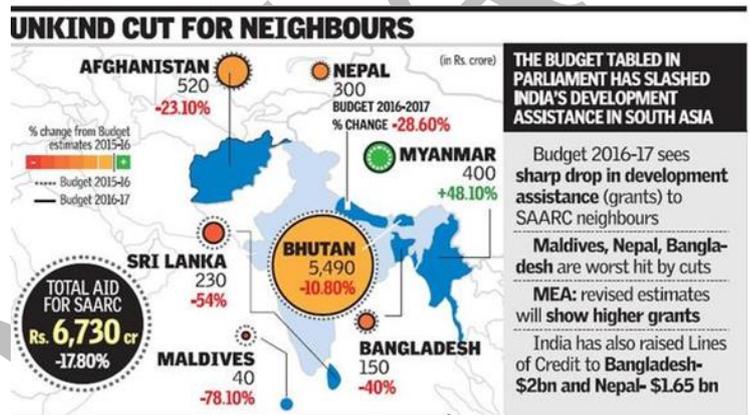
Sundarban Moitry is a joint exercise between **Border Security Force (BSF) and Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).**

- It was first exercise held between BSF and BGB in the Sundarbans border area.
- The exercise was held with the aim of finding better border managerial mechanisms for the two countries.
- Joint exercise would help the forces to understand each other and maintain a healthy relation at the border.
- Joint exercise would contribute to the prevention of cross-border crimes and expand border security activities more effectively.

2.5. INDIA'S AID DIPLOMACY

The development assistance for all SAARC countries has been significantly reduced in the 2016-17 Budget. Except Pakistan, all other six members of SAARC and Myanmar receive significant financial assistance from India.

Country	Reduction in assistance
Nepal	28.6%
Sri Lanka	54%
Maldives	78.1%
Afghanistan	23%
Bhutan	10.8%
Bangladesh	40%



Reasons for drop in assistance

Afghanistan

- Many projects that were started between 2005-2010 had been completed or were nearing completion and needed less assistance. For example, in Afghanistan, Parliament building; the Salma hydel power project was nearing completion.
- No new big projects had been announced.

Bhutan

- In Bhutan, hydel projects such as Punatsangchhu I and II or the massive 720 MW Mangdechu were in the preliminary stages of progress.
- Bhutan accounts for over 70% of India's foreign assistance.

Bangladesh

- In the case of Bangladesh lines of credit at concessional rates had replaced direct development assistance.
- As of this year, India has extended an \$862-million line of credit, while another \$2 billion is in the pipeline

Maldives and Sri Lanka

- The Budget figures in not final.
- Government is yet to draw up its plans for Maldives and Sri Lanka this year, and so the revised estimates will be more accurate.

Nepal

- Government has denied that cut in assistance is due to deteriorating relationship with Nepal.

Myanmar

- Myanmar (not a SAARC nation) saw a major 48% increase in development aid, due to the government's focus on the **Kaladan multi-mode transport corridor project, as well as the 'Trilateral Highway' project.**

Analysis

- The present government has adopted a different approach which looks at all assistance as part of Development Compact.
- Director General of the MEA-run think tank RIS (Research and Information Systems for Developing Countries) claims that **capacity building, lines of credit, bilateral trade, technology transfers, loans and direct grants** would all be counted together to show India's development aid to its neighbours and other countries.
- Reduction in aid is contrary to the NDA government's "**Neighbourhood First**" policy.
- At this juncture when China is trying to make inroad in south Asia, reduction in aid may have serious repercussions especially because aid is **an effective foreign policy instrument.**
- Government may have to face more criticism from its neighbours over the allocations in the more immediate future, with a cut in aid to SAARC nations between 2015-16 and 2016-17 totaling a whopping 17.8% overall.

2.6. RAISINA DIALOGUE 2016

What is it?

- The Raisina Dialogue is envisioned as India's flagship conference of geopolitics and geo-economics.
- It is designed to explore prospects and opportunities for **Asian integration as well as Asia's integration with the larger world.**
- The 2016 conclave focused on **Asia's physical, economic, digital connectivity** and fostering common global spaces with an emphasis on Asia.
- It is based on **India's vital role in the Indian Ocean Region** and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order.
- The conference was held jointly by **Ministry of External Affairs** and the **Observer Research Foundation (ORF)**, an independent think tank based in India.
- The theme of the conference was '**Asian connectivity**'.

Importance of conference

- The conference is being seen as the government's attempt to rival conferences around the world that attract global players such as the Shangri-La dialogue in Singapore, and the Munich Conference on national security.
- The conference was being attended by speakers from 40 countries.
- The conference provided opportunity for India to cement its role in the Indian Ocean Region.
- India's Foreign minister pointed out that that India's plans for connectivity were "cooperative rather than a unilateral approach".

2.7. BIMSTEC

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing and ratification of the Bay of Bengal Initiative on Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (**BIMSTEC**) **Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters.**

- The **Ministry of Home Affairs** has been designated as the Central Authority under Article 15 of the Convention.
- The establishment of regional arrangements for mutual assistance in criminal matters will greatly contribute to more effective cooperation in the control of criminal activities.
- The Convention aims to extend widest measures of assistance to each other through mutual cooperation for enhancing capability and effectiveness of the Member States in investigation and prosecution of crimes,

including **crimes related to terrorism, transnational organized crime, drug trafficking, money laundering and cyber-crimes.**

- The BIMSTEC comprises of seven countries viz., **Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand.**

2.8. ASHGABAT AGREEMENT

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for India to accede to the Ashgabat Agreement, an international transport and transit corridor facilitating transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.

- Accession to the Agreement would enable India to utilize this existing transport and transit corridor to facilitate trade and commercial interaction with the Eurasian region.
- Further, this would synchronize with our efforts to implement the **International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)** for enhanced connectivity.
- This move will further strengthen **trade ties between India and the Eurasian region.**

About Ashgabat Agreement

- An agreement between five countries on establishing a new international transport and transit corridor (Uzbekistan – Turkmenistan – Iran – Oman– Qatar) was signed on 25 April, 2011 in Ashgabat.
- **Qatar** had withdrawn from the agreement in 2013.
- “Ashgabat Agreement” forms the basis for developing the shortest trade route/corridor between the Central Asian countries and Iranian and Omani ports.
- **Oman, Iran, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan** are the founding members of the Ashgabat Agreement, while **Kazakhstan** joined it subsequently.

2.9. 8TH BRICS SUMMIT

India will host the **eighth annual Summit of BRICS** from October 15-16 in **Goa**.

- India assumed chairmanship of BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) from Russia on February 15 and it will last till December 31.
- India’s core-theme during BRICS chairmanship will be building **responsive, inclusive and collective solutions for the grouping.**
- The logo for the Summit is a lotus having colours from all the five member countries and a traditional ‘namaste’ in the centre.
- India will adopt a five-pronged approach during its Chairmanship. It will comprise **Institution Building, Implementation, Integration, Innovation, and Continuity with Consolidation (IIIC or I4C).**
- BRICS comprising five countries with 42 per cent of the world population and combined GDP of over USD 16 trillion.

2.10. 37TH SESSION OF THE SAARC COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

The 37th session of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation Council of Ministers was held in **Pokhara of Nepal**. The objective of session was **to review actions taken on the '36-point Kathmandu declaration'** of the 2014 SAARC Summit and **to set the agenda for the forthcoming Summit in Islamabad.**

Highlights of the session

- The meeting decided to hold the 19th Summit of the regional body in Pakistan on November 9-10 this year.
- The Council of Ministers endorsed the SAARC Standing Committee’s recommendation that the SAARC Summits be held every alternate November.
- The meeting also endorsed Pakistan’s nomination of **Amjad Hussain B Sial** for the next Secretary General of the regional body. Sial will replace Nepal’s Arjun Bahadur Thapa in February next year.

- The SAARC ministers decided to establish the **SAARC Disaster Management Centre in New Delhi of India**.
- The meeting also presented a good opportunity for high-level interaction among the officials of India, Pakistan and Nepal to discuss major bilateral issues.

2.11. PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION IN IRAN

Parliamentary election was held in Iran on 26 February 2016 to elect members of the **Islamic Consultative Assembly**. The election was held as part of a general election which also elected members of the **Assembly of Experts**.

- **The Islamic Consultative Assembly**, also called the Iranian Parliament, the **Iranian Majlis or the People's House**, is the national legislative body of Iran. The Parliament currently has 290 representatives.
- **The Assembly of Experts** (also Assembly of Experts of the Leadership) of Iran is a deliberative body of eighty eight (88) **Mujtahids (Islamic theologians)** that is charged with **electing and removing the Supreme Leader of Iran and supervising his activities**.

Results of elections

- In the 290-seat Parliament, **the reformist allies of President Hassan Rouhani won at least 85 seats**, while the moderate conservatives secured 73 seats. Together they will control the House.
- The hardliners, who were persistently opposed to Mr. Rouhani's reform agenda, won only 68 seats.
- In the 88-member Assembly of Experts, the clerics backed by reformists and centrists claimed 52 seats.

Significance of results

- This was the first election after Iran's President Mr. Rouhani secured the **historic nuclear deal with world powers last year**, ending the country's isolation in return for giving up its nuclear programme.
- Observers largely agree that the election for Iran's parliament (the Majlis) was a sweeping **victory for Iran's political moderates** and a defeat for hard-liners.
- The election results represent a clear step forward in **Iran's gradualist transformation** from a rigid Islamist theocracy into a broader religious democracy.
- Election results shows that people have endorsed Iran's nuclear deal with west and President Mr. Rouhani's plans to open up the country's economy and reach business deals with overseas companies
- Defeat of hard-liners is also important since they had opposed Iran nuclear deal and Mr. Rouhani's plans to open up the country's economy.

2.12. NEPAL AND CHINA

Nepali Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli's paid first official visit to China. The visit yielded ten agreements, including a landmark deal on transit trade as well as on connectivity and infrastructure, energy exploration and storage, banking, scholarships and training.

List of important agreements/MOUs

- The agreement on **transit through China** where China has agreed to provide the Tianjin seaport for transit of Nepali goods imported from third countries.
- The proposal on connectivity **of Nepal with the Tibet rail network**.
- Agreement on the Construction, Management and Maintenance of the Xiarwa Boundary River Bridge, (Hilsa) Humla
- Agreement on Economic and Technical to implement **Pokhara Regional International Airport Project**.
- China has agreed to upgrade two road links between Nepal and Tibet, agreed to extend the Chinese railway to Kathmandu and then to Lumbini.
- China has given its nod to a long-term **commercial oil deal** and builds an oil storage facilities for Nepal.

Analysis

Some of these agreements are projected as historic and unprecedented, particularly those related to transit through China and rail and road connectivity between Nepal and China.

Transit agreement

- Transit agreement aimed at reducing Nepal's overwhelming economic dependence on India.
- At present **98 per cent of Nepal's third country** trade goes through India and to the port of Kolkata.
- The viability of agreement is debated as Tianjin is located at a distance of 3,000 km from Nepal, as against 1,000 km from the Haldia port in India being currently used by Nepal.
- Nepal's infrastructure in its northern region to connect with the proposed Tianjin transit facility is still not in place, and will take effort and investment to be operational.

Rail connectivity

- The proposal on connectivity of Nepal with the Tibet rail network will also take time.
- The Lhasa rail line has been brought up to Xigatse. Only by 2020, as per the current Chinese plans, will this line be brought nearer the Nepal border within Tibet.
- In building Nepal -Tibet rail link, the track will have to scale mountains as high as 6,000 m, either through tunnels or winding channels, involving heavy costs, time and effort.
- Besides the constraints of costs and terrain, rail connectivity between Tibet and Nepal is also a **political issue for the Chinese authorities**. They have to decide on the extent to which Tibet can be opened up to the outside world through land connection.

Impact on India –Nepal relations

- India's relation with Nepal has deteriorated after Nepal promulgated the constitution. For almost six months there was blockade on India-Nepal border. Continuous blockade has generated anti-India feeling in Nepal. The feeling is being exploited by the present government.
- Through these agreements Nepal is trying to send a strong message to India that Nepal has a viable option in mobilizing **support from China to counter any pressure generated from India**.
- Agreement may have long term impact on India's relation with Nepal. Nepal is seen as a buffer state between India and china.
- Nepal tilt towards china may have **serious strategic implication for India**.
- There is a set pattern of the **Kathmandu regime flashing the China card** whenever it runs into difficulties with its own people and India lends support to the Nepali people's cause.
- India has yet to evolve a credible response to this Chinese push towards South Asia. China will readily and deftly exploit India's flip-flops towards its neighbours in this push. India, therefore, has to deal with **its immediate neighbours with prudence and sensitivity** and ensure that they are not alienated.

2.13. DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MYANMAR

Myanmar has sworn in Htin Kyaw as the country's first civilian President in more than 50 years.

- Mr. **Htin Kyaw's government** would be its most democratic administration since 1962 when the military seized power.
- Ms. Suu Kyi's **National League for Democracy (NLD)** won 77 per cent of the elected seats in Parliament. She cannot lead the government because of a constitutional provision that bars her since her sons are British and not Myanmar citizens.

Challenges for new government

- **Economic development:**
 - ✓ Myanmar is one of the poorest nations in Asia. In the years of isolation under the junta, economic growth stagnated, trapping millions in acute poverty.

- **From military**
 - ✓ One-quarter of seats in both Houses of Parliament are reserved for the military. This prevents any constitutional amendments without the military's approval.
 - ✓ The military also has direct control of three key Ministries: defence, home affairs and border affairs.
- **Ethnic conflict:**
 - ✓ Myanmar has been the site of serious conflicts between **Buddhist and Muslim communities, particularly in Rakhine State.**

2.14. USA PRESIDENT VISIT TO CUBA

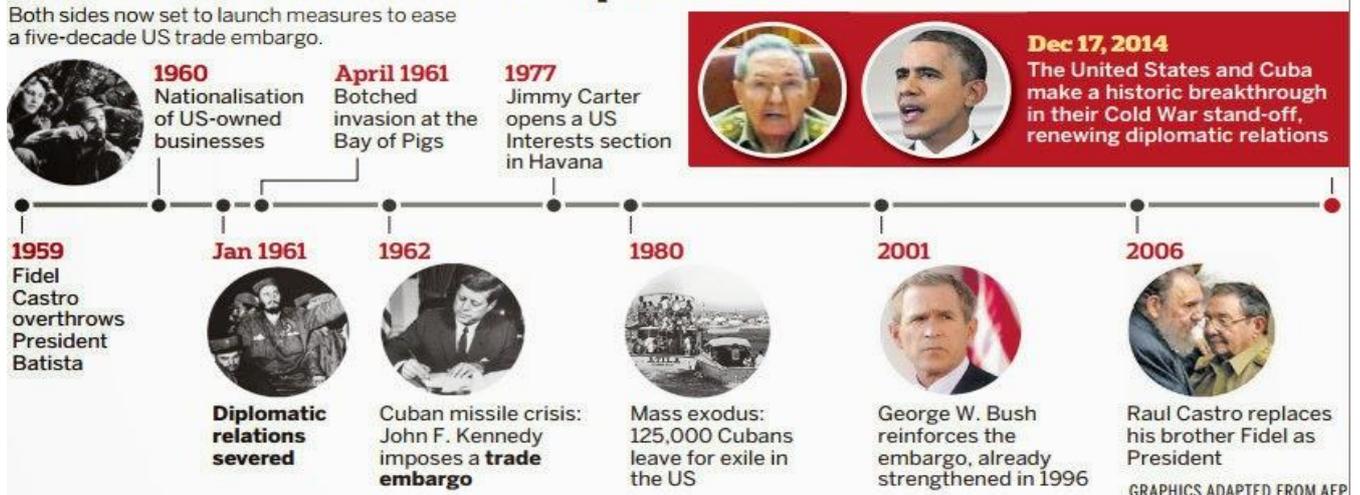
President Barack Obama paid historic visit to Cuba. President visit has opened a new chapter in U.S. engagement with the island's Communist government after decades of animosity between the former Cold War foes.

- Obama is the first serving U.S. President to visit Cuba after Calvin Coolidge in 1928.
- Visit shows that patience and creative diplomacy can work in solving even complex situations rooted deep in historical and ideological hostility

U.S.-Cuba relations since Fidel Castro seized power in a 1959 revolution

The US and Cuba in historic revival of diplomatic ties

Both sides now set to launch measures to ease a five-decade US trade embargo.



Rapprochement process since December 2014

- President Obama and his Cuban counterpart Raúl Castro began a process of rapprochement in Dec 2014.
- Washington took a number of steps, including removing Cuba from its list of nations charged with sponsoring terrorism, to restore confidence in bilateral relations.
- In July 2015, The U.S. and Cuba announced the reopening of embassies in Washington and Havana for the first time in over 50 years.

Way forward for full normalization of relations

- President Castro demanded that the embargo be lifted and Guantánamo returned to Cuba for full normalisation of relations.
- USA is still skeptical about Cuba in following matters:
 - ✓ Treatment of dissidents.
 - ✓ Human rights violations.
 - ✓ State control over economy.

2.15. GLOBAL ENERGY ARCHITECTURE PERFORMANCE INDEX REPORT

The Global Energy Architecture Performance Index Report, explored the energy architecture of 126 countries based on their ability to provide energy access across **three dimensions** of the “energy triangle” — **affordability, environmental sustainability, security and access.**

- The Energy Architecture Performance Index (EAPI), developed by the **World Economic Forum** in collaboration with Accenture.
- The list was topped by **Switzerland** followed by Norway and Sweden in the second and third place, respectively.
- Among the BRIC nations, Brazil was the top performer as it was ranked at the 25th place, followed by Russia (52nd), India (90th), and China (94).

Report about India:

- India has been ranked at the **90th place** in a list of 126 countries.
- The proportion of the population covered having grown over the past six years by 4 percentage points to 79 per cent.
- The report noted that India is facing a vast array of challenges in the power sector in order to meet its growth targets.

2.16. THE WORLD HAPPINESS REPORT, 2016

The World Happiness Report 2016, published by the **Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)**, a global initiative of the United Nations.

- The report takes following parameters into account as indicators of happiness
 - ✓ **GDP per capita**
 - ✓ **Life expectancy**
 - ✓ **Social support**
 - ✓ **Freedom to make life choices.**
- India was ranked 118 out of 156 in the list.
- **Denmark** took the top spot as the ‘happiest country’ in the world.

2.17. SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)

Nepal became a **Dialogue Partner** of the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).**

About SCO:

- The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a permanent intergovernmental organisation founded on June 15, 2001.

Member States	Acceding States	Observer States	Dialogue Partners
Kazakhstan	India	Afghanistan	Armenia
China	Pakistan	Belarus	Azerbaijan
Kyrgyzstan		Iran	Cambodia
Russia		Mangolia	Sri Lanka
Tajikistan			Turkey
Uzbekistan			Nepal

2.18. FOUR-NATION COUNTER-TERROR MECHANISM

A top General of **China's People's Liberation Army (PLA)** has proposed formation of a regional counter-terrorism mechanism to safeguard the '**One Belt One Road (OBOR)**' connectivity initiative in Eurasia.

- The proposed counter-terrorism mechanism will include **China, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan as members.**

Why counter –terror mechanism?

- **The rise of the Khorasan Province (ISIL-K) — a branch of the Islamic State in Afghanistan is threat to OBOR in Afghanistan.**
- China is threatened by terror strikes from the **East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), especially in its Xinjiang province.** ETIM have link with terror groups operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

VISION IAS

3. ECONOMY

3.1. INCOME DECLARATION SCHEME

Why in news?

- In order to bring back black money, **Income Declaration Scheme (IDS)** was announced in the Union Budget. It provides an opportunity to turn concealed income into legitimate income.
- Anyone whose income is already part of an assessment, reassessment or survey is not eligible for this scheme.
- The scheme does not provide relief to offenders (see adjoining figures).

What is Income Declaration Scheme?

- Individual taxpayers who have not disclosed income in the past would get an opportunity to disclose such income and be compliant by paying tax at the rate of 30 per cent and surcharge of 7.5 per cent and a penalty of 7.5 per cent.
- The surcharge levied at 7.5 per cent of undisclosed income will be called **'Krishi Kalyan surcharge'** and will be used for agriculture and rural economy.
- No enquiry and scrutiny under the Wealth Tax Act and Income Tax Act would be undertaken in respect of such declarations.
- Immunity from prosecution under such Acts would also be provided.
- Immunity from Benami Transaction (Prohibition) Act, 1988 is also proposed, subject to certain conditions.
- This is not an amnesty scheme like 1997 scheme as declarants would be **required to pay penalty** along with the taxes.
- Also, the declarations would have to be done on current valuations not 10 year old valuations like 1997 scheme.

Way Ahead

To curb the menace of Black Money, a multi-pronged attack is needed. The Government is trying to bring additional measures like bringing more transparency for high-value transactions, encouraging the use of plastic money, introducing tax benefits for internet banking and e-commerce. These would help not only in detecting such transaction but also facilitate timely action.

A DAMPENER

Under Income Declaration Scheme, people getting notices under sections 142 (1), 143 (2), 148, 153A or 153C of the I-T Act are not eligible to disclose previously concealed income

• The scheme will be open for 4 months from June 1

• Income Declaration Scheme shuts the door on anyone whose assessment is under scrutiny

Won't Be A Free Ride
THE BLACK MONEY SCHEME IS NOT A BLANKET WAIVER

No Reprieve For Offenders	Steep Taxation
PEOPLE who have received notices cannot take recourse to scheme	Those declaring income will face steep taxes
IF AUTHORITIES have prior information about a claimant from another country under tax information-exchange treaties, he/she will be debarred from scheme	They will have to pay 45% tax on income declared
THOSE WHO have faced a search operation from I-T department also not eligible	
THOSE HAVING any case against them in connection with Harshad Mehta securities scam can't apply	
THOSE FACING action under the NDPS Act will also not be eligible	

Why The Scheme
Armed with info, govt has cracked down on black money | People have asked for one last chance to come clean

3.2. NATIONAL AGRICULTURE MARKET

Why in news?

- National Agriculture Market (NAM) is proposed to be launched on 14th April, 2016 on pilot basis.

What is NAM?

- NAM, announced in Union Budget 2014-15, is a **pan-India electronic trading portal**, which seeks to connect existing APMCs and other market yards to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities.
- NAM is a "virtual" market but it has a physical market (mandi) at the back end.

- A budgetary provision of Rs. 200 crore has been made to be spent over 2015-16 to 2017-18 through Agri-Tech Infrastructure Fund to implement NAM.
- Department of Agriculture and Cooperation will implement NAM through Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium which will act as implementing agency.

Need to unify markets

- To ensure better prices to farmers
- To improve supply chain
- Reduce wastages
- Create a unified national market

Benefits

- Increase operational efficiency and transparency in the mandi operations
- Enhance market access and more options for farmers through warehouse based sales
- Larger national market for secondary trading for the local trader in the mandi
- Reduction in intermediation costs for bulk buyers, processors, exporters etc.
- Eliminate information asymmetry
- Will lead to common procedures for issue of licenses, levy of fee and movement of produce
- In 5-7 years, it will result into higher returns for farmers, lower transaction costs to buyers and stable prices and availability to consumers
- It will also help in emergence of value chains by promoting scientific storage and movement of agricultural goods

Pre-requisites

In order for a state to be part of NAM, it needs to undertake prior reforms in respect of

- A single license to be valid across state
- Single point levy of market fee
- Provision for electronic auction as a mode of price discovery

Way Ahead

Agriculture and intra-state trade are state subjects under 7th schedule. States must be persuaded in a manner consistent with new spirit of cooperative federalism to amend their respective APMCs acts paving the way for the creation of NAM.

3.3. HYDROCARBON EXPLORATION AND LICENSING POLICY (HELP)

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has approved the **Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP) on 10th March 2016**.
- HELP replaces the present policy regime for exploration and production of oil and gas, known as New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), which has been in existence for 18 years.

<p>Four main facets of HELP policy are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uniform license for exploration and production of all forms of hydrocarbon, • an open acreage policy, • easy to administer revenue sharing model and • marketing and pricing freedom for the crude oil and natural gas produced. 	<p>Objectives of HELP</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhance domestic oil and gas production • bring substantial investment • generate sizable employment • enhance transparency and • reduce administrative discretion
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Features of HELP

- **Uniform License:** It will enable the contractor to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources including CBM, shale gas/oil, tight gas and gas hydrates under a single license, instead of the present system of issuing separate licenses for each kind of hydrocarbons.
- **Open Acreages:** It gives the option to a hydrocarbon company to select the exploration blocks throughout the year without waiting for the formal bid round from the Government.
- **Revenue Sharing Model:** Present fiscal system of production sharing contract (PSC) is replaced by an easy to administer “revenue sharing model”.
- **Marketing and Pricing:** This policy also provides for marketing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced from these blocks. This is in tune with Government’s policy of “Minimum Government –Maximum Governance”
- A **graded system of royalty** rates have been introduced, in which royalty rates decreases from shallow water to deep-water and ultra-deep water.
- At the same time, royalty rate for on land areas have been kept intact so that revenues to the state governments are not affected.
- On the lines of NELP, cess and import duty will not be applicable on blocks awarded under the new policy.

A comparison of both the policies – HELP and NELP is given below:

Parameter	HELP	NELP
Fiscal Model	Revenue sharing	Profit sharing
Cost recovery	Not applicable	Yes
Cost efficiency	Encouraged	Neutral
Royalty	Low rates for offshore	Standard rates
Exploration Period	Onland and Shallow Water- 8 years Deepwater- 10 years	Onland and Shallow Water- 7 years Deepwater & Ultra-deepwater - 8 years
Management Committee	More focus on reservoir monitoring; no micro-management	Technical & financials examination
Revenue to Government	On production	After cost recovery i.e. from profit petroleum
Exploration in Mining Lease areas	Allowed	Not allowed
E&P activity for all hydrocarbons	Allowed	Not allowed

3.4. PSB CONSOLIDATION AND MERGER

Why in news?

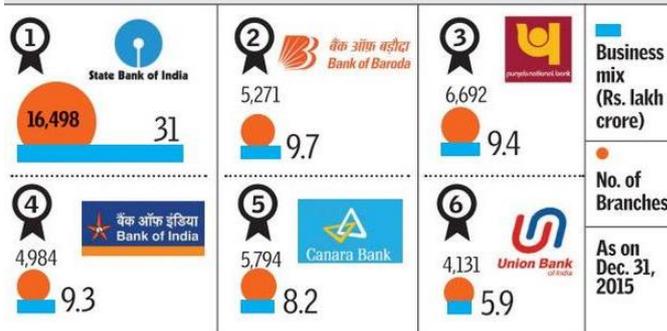
- Finance Minister said that an expert panel will be set up shortly to devise a strategy for consolidation of public sector banks.
- Consolidation was also discussed in second edition of **Gyan Sangam**-the annual banker’s conclave.

Advantages of consolidation of Banks:

- Infrastructure project requires big loans which the current banks find unable to fund owing to their smaller capital base. Consolidation will create larger banks which will be able to finance big infrastructure projects.

TOP SIX PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS

In the October-December 2015 quarter, many public sector banks including Bank of Baroda and Bank of India reported poor performance



- Consolidation will also increase capital efficiency, apart from improving the ability of **banks to recover bad loans which are rising**.

Challenges

- SBI isn't in a position to merge any bank other than its subsidiaries and other PSBs are not strong and big banks. So merging two unhealthy banks will not yield desired results.
- Banking sector is also facing challenges like lack of capital, high NPAs and low profitability etc.
- The entire rural banking model is changing with new Small Finance banks and they are expected to play a big role in financial inclusion.
- The Human resource management will be of top most concern as salary, seniority; postings etc. will create a big challenge.
- The new entities, say 5 or 6 large banks, could be a danger to financial stability. Any bank failure would create multiple problems for the system as well as for the economy.
- Time is not right as there is need to strengthen the banks by empowering them with operational flexibility be it in the area of recruitment, or in differentiation on core capabilities.
- Opposition by trade unions who may fear identity loss.

- There are 22 public sector banks in the country apart from five associate banks of State Bank of India.
- These public sector banks dominate India's banking sector with over two-thirds of assets. They also hold close to 85 per cent of the bad loans in the sector.

Road Ahead

- Merger between the banks will be based on geographical and technological synergies, human resources and business profile.
- The government will identify six to ten public sector banks which will drive the consolidation process among the state-owned banks, according to bankers. These banks will be called anchor banks.
- Large lenders like State Bank of India (SBI), Bank of Baroda (BoB), Punjab National Bank (PNB) and Canara Bank could become the anchor banks.

Way Forward

While the idea of consolidation of banks is supported by the government and Banking institutions, there are various constraints which must be tackled first. With a robust plan involving experts and by facilitating merger between the banks based on geographical and technological synergies, human resources and business profile, it can be achieved

3.5. IRRIGATION THRUST IN BUDGET

Emphasis on completion of AIBP Projects

- The government intends putting all the 89 'active' irrigation projects under the Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme (AIBP) on fast track.
- It also aims to raise the required Rs 86,500 crore to finance these both through budgetary and extra-budgetary resources including taking the market route to raise funds.
- The government has promised to complete at least 23 of the 89 projects including a few on which work had started in the mid-1970s, before the end of March 2017. Another 23, that will form phase II, are expected to be completed by 2020.

Status of AIBP projects

- Only 143 of the 297 major projects approved have been completed.
- 89 of them are in different stages of construction which will be put on fast track.
- The remaining 65, which are yet to start, are likely to be reviewed to assess whether it would be feasible to go ahead with them at all.

Reasons for delay

- AIBP suffered from inadequate central funding.
- Its scope expanded to include more and more projects.
- There were time and cost overruns in most of the projects.

Other measures

- Creation of a dedicated irrigation fund under the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), which has been asked to issue tax free bonds to borrow money.
- An initial corpus of Rs 20,000 crore has already been set up through the budget, which NABARD can leverage to mobilize further money from the market.
- The government has also asked the Central Water Commission and other agencies to take up 50 out of the 143 completed AIBP projects each year and work towards increasing their efficiencies.
- Each of these projects would now also have water user associations that will decide on how the water is distributed to every claimant in the area.
- Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) is also focusing on improving irrigation facilities.

Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Programme (AIBP)

- Government, in 1996-97, launched AIBP to provide Central Loan Assistance (CLA) to major/ medium/ minor irrigation projects in the country.
- The objective was to accelerate the implementation of those projects which were beyond resource capability of the states or were in advanced stage of completion.

3.6. DIPAM-DEPARTMENT OF INVESTMENT AND PUBLIC ASSET MANAGEMENT

- In order to revive strategic stake sale of PSUs, the Department of Disinvestment, has been renamed as the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM).
- Department of Disinvestment was carved out of the Finance Ministry in 1999.

New Responsibilities

- The government has also redefined the responsibilities to include efficient management of the government investment in CPSEs through capital restructuring, dividend, bonus shares and monetization of idle assets.
- Public asset management would also include buyback of shares.

Objectives of disinvestment

- To reduce the financial burden on the Government.
- To improve public finances.
- To introduce, competition and market discipline.
- To fund growth.
- To encourage wider share of ownership.
- To depoliticize non-essential services.

- Disinvestment is the action of an organization or government selling or liquidating an asset or subsidiary.
- There are primarily three different approaches to disinvestments
 - ✓ Minority Disinvestment: The government retains a majority stake in the company, typically greater than 51%, thus ensuring management control.
 - ✓ Majority Disinvestment: The government, post disinvestment, retains a minority stake in the company i.e. it sells off a majority stake.
 - ✓ Complete Privatisation: Complete privatisation is a form of majority disinvestment wherein 100% control of the company is passed on to a buyer.

Targets

- The government aims to collect Rs 56,500 crore through disinvestment in PSUs in the next fiscal, 2016-17.
- Of the total budgeted proceeds, Rs 36,000 crore is estimated to come from minority stake sale in PSUs.
- The remaining Rs 20,500 crore is projected to come from strategic sale in both profit and loss-making companies.

What is Strategic Sale?

According to Department of Disinvestment, In the strategic sale of a company, the transaction has two elements:

- Transfer of a block of shares to a Strategic Partner and
- Transfer of management control to the Strategic Partner

3.7. LICENSING OF VIRTUAL NETWORK OPERATORS

Why in news?

- The Telecom Commission accepted the telecom regulator's recommendation to permit Virtual Network Operators (VNOs) in the country.

Virtual Network Operator (VNO)
A VNO is an entity that does not own a telecom network infrastructure but provides telecom services by purchasing capacity from telecom carriers by entering into an agreement.

Advantages of VNO's

- The opportunity for VNO could open the doors for everyone from start-up entrepreneurs to companies with large consumer base like mutual fund houses to ecommerce firms to retail chains.
- Instead of building costly networks, they can simply pay and partner an existing mobile network operator, piggyback on that network and resell their services under their own brand.
- Globally, about 1,000 companies including Tesco, Walmart and Virgin offer mobile phone services as VNOs. For example, Walmart Family Mobile uses T-Mobile network to offer services to its customers.
- In India, companies including Future Group, Paytm and New Call Telecom are potential candidates for VNO.
- Mobile VNOs provide differentiated services to customers by targeting niche market segments such as retail, business, roaming, etc. This helps avoid direct competition with telcos and also generates additional revenues for both virtual network operators and spectrum owners.
- Consumers are set to get more choices for voice and data services at comparatively lower costs.
- Telecom companies also will have additional options to monetize unused airwaves.

Telecom Commission

- The Telecom Commission was set up by the Government of India to deal with various aspects of Telecommunications.
- The Commission consists of a Chairman, four full time members, and four part time members.
- The Telecom Commission and the Department of Telecommunications are responsible for policy formulation, licensing, wireless spectrum management, administrative monitoring of PSUs, research and development and standardization/validation of equipment etc.

3.8. NITI AAYOG REPORT ON MSP

Main objectives of the report

- To assess the impact of MSP on creating a predictable and equitable crop price regime.
- To identify regional and inter-crop variations in the implementation of MSP and reasons for the same
- To evaluate whether adoption of improved technology, appropriate investment and rural infrastructure has been aided by MSP.
- To suggest measures for creating more effective MSP.

Problems noticed in the implementation of MSP

- The procurement centers being far away resulting into heavy transportation cost.
- Non-opening of Procurement centers timely.
- The authorities insisting for revenue records.
- Lack of covered storage/godowns facility for temporary storage of produces.
- Lack of electronic weighing equipment in some places, delays in payments.

Recommendations

- Awareness among the farmers needs to be increased and the information should be timely disseminated till the lowest level.
- Delays in MSP payments have negative effects on the framers which need to be corrected.

- MSP should be announced well in advance of the sowing season so as to enable the farmers to plan their cropping.
- Improved facilities at procurement centres, such as drying yards, weighing bridges, toilets, etc. should be provided to the farmers. More godowns should be set up and maintained properly for better storage and reduction of wastage.
- There should be meaningful consultations with the State Government, both on the methodology of computation of MSP as well as on the implementation.
- The criteria of fixing MSP should be current year's data and based on more meaningful criteria rather than the historical costs.
- The Procurement Centers should be in the village itself to avoid transportation costs.
- The MSP scheme requires a complete overhaul in those States where the impact of the scheme ranges from 'nil' to 'at-best marginal' to ensure that MSP continue to as an important instrument of the Government's agricultural price policy.

Conclusion

- Regional imbalances exist in the implementation of MSP on various counts which needs to be corrected.
- On the whole, it was found that the MSP has succeeded in providing floor rate for major food grains like paddy and wheat and other produces such as Gram (black & green), spices and oilseeds (groundnut, mustard, til), sugarcane, jute and cotton, and it did not allow market prices to fall below the MSP fixed for them.
- MSP has been playing a critical role in stabilizing market prices in addition to helping the beneficiaries in adoption of modern technologies in farming.
- Almost all the beneficiaries were unanimous with the view that the MSP should continue as it insulated them from an unfavorable market conditions by assuring them a minimum return for their produces.

About MSP

- Based on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices, the Department of Agriculture and Co-operation, Government of India, declares Minimum Support Prices (MSP) for 24 crops before their sowing seasons.
- The states have devised their own mechanisms for the procurements of food grains and other agriculture produces under the MSP operations.

Observations

Generation of Annual Income: Very few farmers in Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Odisha sold their produce at MSP in the reference period. So their income was not impacted by MSP.

Awareness about MSP: The 81% of the cultivators are aware of MSP fixed for different crops. This awareness varies from 45% to 100% in the different sample States.

Medium of Awareness: Medium of awareness about MSP include self-efforts, newspapers, state officials, FCI officials, village headmen, gram sevak, teachers, traders etc. Only 7% of the farmers came to know about MSP through the State officials.

Mode of Receipt of Payments:

It was found that 32.13%, 40.29% and 27.4% of the farmers received their MSP payments in cash, Cheques or in the shape of Bank deposits respectively.

In majority of the States, like Bihar, Gujarat, MP, Odisha, and Rajasthan, no cash payment has been made to the farmers.

Time Taken in getting Payments: 20%, 7%, 8%, 51% and 14% of the farmers of the sample States received their MSP payments on the spot/same day, within 2 to 3 days of sales, after 3 days but within one week of sales, after a week but within one month of sales and after a period of one month respectively.

Medium used for Sales: 67% of the farmers sold their produces through their own arrangement whereas 21% of them sold through Brokers.

The shares of sales through the private and Government agencies were 8% and 4% respectively.

Improvement in Farming Practices:

It was found that 78% of the farmers adopted improved methods of farming such as: high yielding varieties of seeds, organic manure, chemical fertilizer, pesticides and improved methods of harvesting, etc. for increasing the production as a result to the MSP declared by the Government.

Effectiveness of MSP: It was found that 21% of the farmers of the sample States expressed their satisfaction to the MSP declared by the Government.

While 79% of them showed their dissatisfaction to MSP due to the various reasons, almost all of them (94%) wanted MSP to continue.

Aims of MSP

- The idea behind MSP is to give guaranteed price and assured market to the farmers and protect them from the price fluctuations and market imperfections.
- Protect farmers in era of globalization resulting in freer agricultural trade.
- To encourage higher investment and production of agricultural commodities.

How is MSP fixed?

- The MSP is fixed on the recommendations of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
- The CACP is a statutory body and submits separate reports recommending prices for Kharif and Rabi seasons. The Central Government after considering the report and views of the State Governments and also keeping in view the overall demand and supply situation in the country, takes the final decision.
- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs finally approves it.
- In case of sugarcane, MSP has been assigned a statutory status and as such the announced price is termed as statutory minimum price, rechristened as Fair Remunerative Price (FRP). There is statutory binding on sugar factories to pay the minimum announced price and all those transactions or purchase at prices lower than this are considered illegal.

Previous Years Prelims Questions (2015)

The Fair and Remunerative Price of Sugarcane is approved by the

- (a) Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs
- (b) Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices
- (c) Directorate of Marketing and Inspection, Ministry of Agriculture
- (d) Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee

3.9. 100 PER CENT FDI IN E-COMMERCE

E-commerce in India

- The e-commerce industry has grown rapidly in India logging a growth rate of over 60 per cent.
- Studies have pegged the size of the industry at around USD 38 billion by 2016 and it is expected to touch USD 50 billion mark in 2020.
- It is an industry that has the potential to create jobs and spur economic growth.
- This sector has attracted the maximum FDI in 2015.
- Some of the prominent e-commerce **marketplace players** in India are Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, ShopClues and Paytm - all funded by foreign investors.
- At present, 100 per cent FDI is permitted in B2B (business-to-business) transactions under the automatic route.
- Companies such as Amazon India, Flipkart, Snapdeal and many others hosted thousands of sellers, were described as **technology enablers rather than e-retailers**. They claimed to have no inventory of their own. That kept them going even with a ban on FDI in e-commerce.

New Guidelines

- Government permitted 100 per cent FDI in the **market place format of e-commerce** retailing under the automatic route.
- The government extended the definition of marketplace to include support services to sellers with respect to warehousing, logistics, order fulfillment, call Centre, payment collection and other services.
- The marketplace model of e-commerce means providing of an IT platform by an e-commerce entity on a digital and electronic network to act as a facilitator between buyer and seller.
- Further, the inventory-based model of e-commerce means an e-commerce activity where inventory of goods and services is owned by e-commerce entity and is sold to consumers directly.
- FDI has **not been permitted** in inventory-based model of e-commerce.

- The guidelines allowed e-commerce marketplace to provide several support services to sellers, but, it said that such entities will not exercise ownership over the inventory.
- The e-commerce entities providing marketplace will not directly or indirectly influence the sale price of goods or services and shall maintain level playing field.

Advantages

- It will give the much-needed clarity to undertake business with certainty in longer term attracting foreign investment in this sector.
- Enabling the marketplace operator to provide value added services.

Disadvantages

- The new regime will increase bureaucratic discretion and open the door to rent-seeking.
- It has further increased complexity of e-retail by drawing an artificial distinction between inventory based model and marketplace based e-commerce.
- The cap of 25 per cent on sales by a single vendor in a marketplace may prove to be restrictive, more so if the vendor sells high value items particularly in sale of electronic items, where a vendor may be offering exclusive access to certain items or discounts.
- The above limit of 25 percent, without a strong commercial principle, may result in firms creating newer entities to avoid being caught.
- The rule that states e-retailers “will not directly or indirectly influence the sale price of goods and services and maintain a level playing field” goes against “pricing freedom” which is central to the functioning of a market and it also faces practical difficulties in enforcing this.



LANDSCAPE OF RETAIL

A look at foreign direct investment in the Indian retail space:

BRICK-AND-MORTAR STORES

Type	FDI allowed (%)	Players
Multi-brand*	51	Tesco-Tata
Single-brand	100	H&M, IKEA
Wholesale, cash-&-carry, B2B	100	Walmart, Metro

ONLINE SEARCH

Type	FDI allowed (%)	Players
Marketplace	100	Amazon, Flipkart, Snapdeal, Paytm
B2B	100	Walmart, Alibaba
Inventory-led	Nil	NA

Conditions for FDI in e-commerce marketplace:

No vendor can do more than 25% sale on any platform

Platform owners must stay away from selling products

Guarantee and warranty of products to be sellers' responsibility

*States decide whether or not to permit FDI. The National Democratic Alliance is opposed to foreign investment in multi-brand retail, but the current government has not changed the rules made by its predecessor

Way Forward

Government should dissolve the distinction between physical- and e-retail and simplify norms that allow businesses to flourish, creating jobs as well as providing a richer array of goods and services to consumers at the lowest price.

3.10. NEED FOR PARADIGM SHIFT IN FRBM ACT

Why the Debate?

- Union Minister has recently commented that fiscal expansion or contraction should be aligned with credit contraction or expansion respectively of the economy.
- This suggests that there should be an inverse correlation between fiscal deficit (fiscal expansion) and bank credit (monetary expansion).
- This is to ensure adequate money supply to the economy in all the cycles.

Why Fiscal Deficit target should be relaxed during downturn of economy?

- Banks and financial institutions fund business and others, and it is that credit money which drives the economy.
- If, for some reason including reasons like lack of business confidence or rising NPAs, the bank credit to the economy does not adequately grow, economic growth will suffer due to lack of adequate money.
- That is when the Budget needs to step in, to pump money into the economy by incurring deficit, and, for the purpose, borrow the money lying with banks or even by printing more money, if that is needed.
- Crowding In Effect – Government spending during economy downturn will boost the economy and subsequently draw investment from private industries too.

Why Fiscal Deficit target should be adhered to?

- Frequently amending the FRBM target or not meeting them will raise concern in the mind of investor and will lead to lower investment.
- Better fiscal health will improve the credit rating of India
- Lower fiscal deficit will help to avail cheap credit for development, as higher FD fuels inflation and hence higher rate of borrowing
- It will also bring India closer to its emerging market peers making India an attractive destination for FDI.

Way Forward

- Adopting FD target as a range rather than 3% of GDP as fixed number. This would give the necessary policy space to deal with dynamic and volatile situations like global economic and financial market uncertainty, a slowdown in China, and tepid private investment demand domestically.
- Expenditure of the government should be on the creation of long term public assets.

What is FRBM Act?

- Financial Responsibility and Budget Management Act 2003 was passed to provide a legislative framework for reduction of deficit and debt of the Government to sustainable levels over a medium term.
- This was done to ensure inter-generational equity in fiscal management and long term macro-economic stability.

Salient points of the Act

- Achievement of Fiscal Deficit of 3% of GDP and eliminating Revenue Deficit.
- Prohibits borrowing by Government from RBI - Making Monetary Policy independent of Fiscal Policy.
- Prevent monetization of Government deficit - Ban on purchase of primary issues of Central government by RBI from 2006.
- Act mandates 4 Documents to be laid before Parliament:
 1. Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement:
 - a. 3 year rolling targets for 5 fiscal indicators with respect to GDP at market price and the strategy to attain them.
 - b. Five fiscal targets are: Revenue Deficit, Effective Revenue Deficit, Fiscal deficit, Tax to GDP Ratio and Total Outstanding Debt as percentage of GDP.
 2. Fiscal Policy Strategy Statement: Presented at the time of Budget and outlines the Govt. strategic priorities for ensuing financial year related to Taxation, Borrowing, Expenditure, Investment, Pricing, Guarantees etc.
 3. Macro-economic Framework Statement: Presented at the time of budget and contains the expected GDP growth rate with underlying assumption, Fiscal balance of Central Government and the external sector balance of Economy.
 4. Medium Term Expenditure Framework Statement: This has been added in 2012 and presented in Monsoon Session.

3.11. DEENDAYAL UPADHYAY SWANIYOJAN YOJANA

In News

- Deendayal Upadhyay Swaniyojan Yojana (DUSY) will soon be launched by Ministry of Rural Development to promote rural entrepreneurship under **Start Up India** campaign.

Salient features

- The main objective of Swaniyojan Yojana is to provide incentives such as financial assistance to the rural poor looking for self-employment options.
- The scheme will be integrated with MUDRA Bank Loan Yojana, innovative credit linkages and self-help groups.
- it will be funded by the existing National Rural Livelihood Mission

Local Reach
Govt set to launch Deen Dayal Upadhyay Swaniyojan Yojana
Programme being designed by rural development ministry
It will be backed by MUDRA Bank loans, innovative credit linkages & self-help groups
Ministry in talks with other govt dept including textiles, animal husbandry and food processing
Govt to hold discussions with private entities & individuals in startup space to map opportunities
Skill sets to be provided would be related to driving, plumbing, agriculture, dairy farming & horticulture

- It will provide the basic skill set required for self-employment in fields like driving, plumbing, agriculture, dairy farming, grafting and horticulture among others.
- The Ministry will also coordinate with other government departments such as textile, animal husbandry, and food processing to help rural poor setup their own business in these fields.

Way Ahead

DUSY is a rural avatar of Start Up India, It will not only provide an opportunity for gainful employment to rural youths, but it can also solve various problems associated with rural economy such as disguised unemployment in agriculture, reducing poverty, mitigate migration etc.

3.12. INDIAN PHARMACEUTICAL INDUSTRY

Why in News

- Major drug companies were pulled up by the USFDA for lapses that ranged from data manipulation, use of rejected ingredients to quality control issues.

Issues with Indian Pharma Industry

- Poor and non-transparent Regulatory environment.
- Lack of enforcement of manufacturing standards as prescribed by Indian laws and WHO standards.
- Ban of Indian drugs on ground of poor quality, adulterated drugs, hygiene and sanitation standards by developed nations like US and EU.
- Growing dependence on imports in the area of bulk drugs. Majority of the import is from China
- The R&D investment by the domestic pharma industry has gone down in the recent years.
- Poor and erratic power supply led to decline of the fermentation industry engaged in production of drugs.
- Lack of coordination among different ministries which deals with different aspects of pharma industry – like Department of Pharmaceuticals deals with drug policy, Department of Science and Technology deals with innovation etc.

Solution

- **Easier and transparent regulatory regime** in India to foster innovation while protecting the interest of consumers.
- Ethical and transparent clinical trials and faster single window approval process.
- Develop **WTO compliant regulations** that the domestic players should find easier to conform.
- Coordinated and concerted action by all the ministries.
- **Cluster scheme**: Setting up of mega parks with common effluent treatment plant, common lab, etc. so that Indian pharma industry can also enjoy economies of scale
- **Boost R&D** - More industry-academic/research institution collaborations, encouragement of open source drug discoveries in the area of neglected diseases etc

Way Forward

- Government should follow path outlined in **Pharma Vision 2020** for India to acquire global leadership in manufacture of generic drugs.
- Government also needs to provide more support and incentives than at present to MSMEs in pharma sector.

3.13. SETU BHARTAM PROJECT

- The project aims to make all national highways free from railway level crossings by 2019.
- Under the project, 208 bridges will be built at a cost of Rs 20,800 crore.
- Also, 1,500 old bridges will be reconstructed, which will cost Rs 30,000 crore.
- The ministry has also established an Indian Bridge Management System (IBMS), the aim of which is to carry out condition survey of all bridges (approx. 1,50,000) by using mobile inspection units.
- The Project is thought to not only improve road safety but also allow for faster transportation and improve infrastructure network.

3.14. DBT IN FERTILIZER SUBSIDY

Why in news?

- Government announced to introduce direct benefit transfer of fertiliser subsidy to farmers on pilot basis in few districts of the country.
- Presently, annual subsidy on fertilizers is about Rs 73,000 crores.

Issues

- A significant part of cultivation is today done by tenant farmers or sharecroppers not owning the land and without any formal lease agreements.
- Selecting criteria for capping the number of bags on which the subsidy is payable, based on a reasonable assessment of requirement.
- Capping would depend on the specific fertilizer as well as the crop and location where it is grown – making it more complicated than the DBT for LPG.

Feasibility

- In Uttar Pradesh, where the state government has created an online database of over 40 lakh farmers, each assigned a unique 'Kisan ID' identifying their village, land particulars, bank account and mobile numbers. Thus demonstrating feasibility of such transfers.
- This DBT portal was used to transfer Rs 140 crore of subsidy on seeds into the accounts of some nine lakh farmers during the recent rabi season.
- It is expected that direct benefit transfer will result in reduction in leakages, Improvement in quality of service delivery to the farmers and possible reduction in fiscal deficit.

3.15. GOOGLE TAX: EQUALIZATION LEVY ON DIGITAL ECONOMY

What is it?

- Union Budget 2016-17 has proposed “equalization levy” on “online advertising” payments to non-resident recipients.
- A govt. committee has proposed various services ranging across online **advertising**, cloud computing, **software downloads** and **web hosting** to be subjected to an 'equalization levy' of 6-8% of gross payment if the provider of service is a foreign entity without a '**permanent establishment**' in India.
- Only payments of over **Rs 1 lakh** to be covered by this levy.

Pros

- Will promote big companies to make **permanent establishments** in India
- Increase in government earnings

Cons

- A new levy will raise the cost of a whole range of services provided online.
- According to companies it will undermine the Digital India and Startup India programmes by discouraging innovation and forcing startups to cut down on advertising.
- If other nations follow India’s lead and impose similar taxes on services provided from India, India’s IT firms’ cost advantage could be significantly eroded, rendering them non competitive

Conclusion

“Equalisation levy” becomes important in the face of exponential growth of digital economy in recent times which has created new tax challenges including problem of Base Erosion and Profit Shifting.

The Road Ahead?

A govt committee has suggested framework for the proposed Equalisation Levy

This year's Budget has proposed 6% such levy based on this panel's report

To be charged on...

PAYMENT TO NON-RESIDENT COS FOR SPECIFIED SERVICES

Payment exceeding ₹1 Lakh In a year

6-8% of gross payments to these cos

...for specified services

Online advertising

For storing or distributing digital content

Use or right to use or download online music, movies, games etc

Services relating to online transactions

Online news, online search, online maps or GPS applications

Online software applications downloaded

Industry Upset

Strong opposition from Internet companies such as Google

4. SOCIAL ISSUES

4.1. POOR IMPLEMENTATION OF RTE ACT

Why in News?

- The report 'State of the Nation: RTE Section 12 (1) (c)' highlights the status of implementation of the Section 12 (1)(c) of RTE Act.
- The report is a collaborative effort of the RTE resource centre at IIM Ahmedabad, Central Square Foundation, Accountability Initiative (Centre for policy research) and Vidhi Centre for legal Policy.

What is Section 12 (1)(c) of RTE Act?

- RTE Section 12(1)(c) mandates private unaided schools (except minority and residential schools) to keep 25 percent of the seats (at entry level) reserved for children belonging to economically weaker sections.
- This was aimed to increase educational opportunities and to create inclusive schooling system.

Findings of the Report

- Even after six years of implementation of the right to education (RTE) Act, children from economically weaker section are still struggling to find their seats in schools.
- Low State Fill Rate - According to data from District Information System for Education (DISE), the state fill rate – share of available seats filled by the mandate – is a low 15.12 percent in 2014-15
- Inter-State Variation - The report shows that states amongst themselves have large variation in their seat fill rate, from zero percent in Andhra Pradesh to 44.61 percent in Delhi.
- No Implementation in majority of the states - Out of 34 states and UTs, 18 show zero schools implementing the provision. These include states like Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Kerala, West Bengal and Punjab.

Reasons of Poor Implementation

- Slow reimbursement of fees from state governments to the private schools, which takes up to two years.
- Lack of awareness about the rule among the citizens especially in the rural area.
- Unwillingness on the part of private schools and even the states to incur additional expenses.
- Most states have either unclear rules or guidelines or are not implementing this provision.
- Provision of child support and child tracking is almost non-existent after admission in school

4.2. MAHILA E-HAAT

- The Ministry of women and Child Development (WCD) launched Mahila e-Haat- Digital marketing portal for women entrepreneurs to strengthen women empowerment.

What is Mahila E-Haat?

- 'Mahila E-Haat' is an online platform, where women entrepreneurs can sell their products directly.
- Women entrepreneurs don't have to pay any fees for selling the product online.
- The portal has been set up with an investment of under Rs.10 lakh from the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh—an autonomous body under the WCD ministry for the socio-economic empowerment of women
- The only eligibility criteria to register is that the sellers—any women or women members of a self-help group—have to be above 18 years of age to eliminate the problem of child labour.

Benefits of the Move

- It will promote women entrepreneurs especially from the rural areas.
- It will benefit more than 10000 Self Help Groups and 1.25 Lakh women beneficiaries across the country.
- The entire business of e-haat can be handled through a mobile and no commission will be taken from the seller or buyer.
- No Intermediaries, More Profit - Through this initiative, a major portion of the profit will go to women entrepreneur directly by cutting down the intermediaries.

4.3. PROTECTING GOOD SAMARITANS

Why in news?

- Supreme Court recently passed an order making the Good Samaritans guidelines mandatory for all states and union territories.

What is it?

- The initiative was taken on a PIL filed by the NGO, SaveLIFE in 2012.
- The Centre had issued the guidelines to protect **Good Samaritan** i.e. a person who's a bystander or passer-by and chooses to help an accident victim or person in distress on the road.
- The SC made these guidelines binding until the government issues legislation.
- The government also issued a Standard Operating Procedure for the examination of eyewitnesses by police or in court.
- Guidelines say **there should be no criminal or civil liability** against those who help the accident victims.
- They should be **treated respectfully** and without discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion, nationality, caste or any other.
- **No compulsion to disclose identity** of good Samaritans and no harassment by police or in court.
- Also allows for the person to be examined at his/her place of convenience.
- The significance of this initiative lies in the fact that the lives of more accident victims may be saved as people will not be afraid to get involved.

4.4. TRIPLE TALAQ

Why in news?

- Supreme Court issued a notice to the centre to respond to the petition against the Triple Talaq provisions in the Muslim personal Law.
- The petition was filed by a Muslim women in the SC on Triple Talaq and others provisions in Muslim Personal Law for grant of divorce.

What is it?

- The petitioner argues
 - Seeks a writ or order declaring the practices of instantaneous divorce, bar against remarriage with divorced husband without an intervening marriage with another man, and polygamy under Muslim personal laws as illegal and unconstitutional.
 - The above is violates the Articles 14, 15, 21 and 25 of the Constitution.
 - SC has taken cognizance that laws dealing with marriage and succession are not part of religion and should be examined in the light of international covenants and treaties.
 - the practices are extremely discriminating towards women.
- Several Islamic scholars also agree that practices like Triple Talaq have no foundations in the Holy Quran and have already been banned or restricted by several countries like Saudi, Pakistan and Iran.
- Significance of the above petition lies in the need for the realization for a Universal Civil Code.

4.5. UNIVERSAL ID FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITY

Why in News?

- Centre recently announced universal ID for person with disabilities. This will be under the charge of Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

What is it?

- The ID cards will have a unique number through which all their details can be assessed and eliminate the hassle of carrying certificates for different purposes.

- It will include details like personal, bank, disability certificate, education, employment and income status of every person.
- It will be valid throughout the country and will allow the persons with disability to avail benefits of schemes and reservations.

Significance

- The migrants will not have to travel to their home states due to non-recognition of certificates etc. by other states and their details will be available online.
- Will ensure the authenticity of disability certificates as many fraudulent ones are being issued.

4.6. WOMEN TRANSFORMING INDIA CAMPAIGN

Why in News?

- Niti Aayog in collaboration with the UN in India and MyGov launched the “Women Transforming India” Initiative on **March 8th**, 2015 on the occasion of **International Women’s Day**.

What is it?

- It is designed like a contest seeking entries of women breaking new ground, empowering themselves or others and challenging stereotypes.
- It will encourage women’s leadership particularly in economic, socio-cultural and environmental fronts.
- The winning entries will get a certificate of appreciation from Niti Aayog and UN in India. Also a chance to directly interact with policy makers in the government.
- India supported the need for a stand-alone goal on gender (under SDGs) and that women have a critical role to play in all of the SDGs.
- Niti Aayog has been given the role of monitoring and coordinating all efforts across the Centre and states on the SDGs.

Significance

- It is consistent with government’s efforts to advance gender equality.
- The initiative will also sensitize citizens to gender issues.
- It will also help in furthering the Sustainable Development Goals.
- This initiative will also indirectly encourage innovation and environment protection efforts.

4.7. MGNREGA-M PLATFORM

Why in News?

- Karnataka Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Department recently developed a Mobile App called ‘MGNREGA-M Platform’ to monitor MGNREGA.

What is it all about?

- It helps officials and beneficiaries to monitor progress at all stages.
- Panchayat Development Officers (PDOs) can issue work orders and as the work progresses, information is sent to the zilla panchayat and the State government.
- The mobile phones of around 6,000 gram panchayats will receive data from the department’s central servers.
- **For example**
 - If a beneficiary decided to build a rain water harvesting plant. He does so by telling the Panchayat Development Officer and starts by feeding data through pictures.
 - He posts before and after pictures at every stage of construction including completion at the M-Platform.
 - This initiates process of payment of wages and other costs to him, electronically.

Significance

- Increases transparency, reduces fund diversion and interference by middlemen.
- Ensures automatic payment of wages to labourers by transferring data to the central server.
- **Citizen interface** - allows the labourers to communicate with officials about the progress.
- It also helps collection and comparison of data for the government.

4.8. ADOPTION AND TRAFICKING OF CHILDREN

- Supreme Court recently directed the government to frame guidelines under Juvenile Justice Act 2015, to implement guidelines for adoption.
- The Supreme Court directive came in the wake of the PIL filed by Advait Foundation, which talked about the abuse of children due to absence of foolproof adoption guidelines.
- It alleged that adoption was a huge racket in India and children were illegally taken to foreign countries and abused.
- The SC asked the new rules to be framed under Section 110 of the Juvenile Justice Act
- It also asked the Central Adoption Resource Agency(CARA) to carry out the functions of the Central Authority under the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in respect of inter-country Adoption.
- CARA is the apex body that governs adoptions and functions under the Ministry for Women and Child Development.

5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

5.1. THE SVALBARD GLOBAL SEED VAULT

What is it?

It is a secure seed bank on the Norwegian island of Spitsbergen near Longyearbyen in the remote Arctic Svalbard archipelago, about 1,300 kilometres (810 mi) from the North Pole.

Purpose

- The purpose of the Vault is to store seed samples from the world's crop collections.
- Permafrost and thick rock ensure that the seed samples will remain frozen even without power.
- It would be like an insurance policy for world's food supply, offering options for future generations to overcome the challenges of climate change and population growth.
- It would be the final back up, securing, for centuries, millions of seeds representing every important crop variety available in the world today.

5.2. TRACE GAS ORBITER (TGO) MISSION

Why in news?

- Recently Russian (Roscosmos) and European (ESA) space agency jointly launched a Mars Mission called Trace Gas Orbiter (TGO).
- The Trace Gas Orbiter carries the Entry, Descent and landing demonstrator Module (EDM), known as Schiaparelli.
- Trace Gases on Mars: Methane, Water Vapour, Nitrogen Oxides and Acetylene

Aim of mission

- To study methane and other rare gases in Mars atmosphere.
- To drop a lander (Schiaparelli) on its surface. The probe will take pictures on the way down, but it has no surface camera. It will make environmental observations until its battery dies
- The main goal is to demonstrate its descent radar, computers and algorithms.
- It will be used in the mechanism that lands the future ExoMars rover.
- Trace Gas Orbiter carries a scientific payload capable of detection and characterization of trace gases in the Martian atmosphere.

5.3. ALPHA GO

(Artificial Intelligence already covered in previous editions)

- **AlphaGo** is a computer program developed by Google **DeepMind** in London to play the board game Go.
- It is the first computer program to ever beat a professional player at the game of Go.
- It not only mastered what may be the world's most complex board game, it also changed the scope of future Artificial Intelligence (AI) research.
- AlphaGo is powered by **neural network AI engines**, which allows the program to learn by observing the data from the best Go players and then train itself to get even better.
- The fact that it can train itself to improve could be applied to other tasks, such as teaching itself to recognize faces by looking at lots of images.
- AI can also help people look through large databases and perform calculation, as it does in "complete information games" like chess or Go.
- In "incomplete information games," it could be used in situations where there are more unknown factors, such as negotiations or cybersecurity.

5.4. TOUCH DNA

- Around the world the courts are divided about Touch DNA as reliable evidence to convict someone for a crime.
- The touch DNA is a type of DNA analysis method involving amplification of tiny amounts of genetic material left behind when assailants touch victims, weapons or something else at a crime scene.

Why controversial?

- Although many hail it as a power tool that can help close cases critics such as FBI argue it is inconclusive and unreliable.
- This is because the low copy number DNA , the sample are so small –less than 100 pico grams or 16 human cells that scientists amplify them more than typical DNA samples.

5.5. TINTORANG

Why in news?

A science start-up, incubated at the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has built the world's first food-grade DNA/RNA stain.

Stain's basic use is to impart colour to tissues or cells and they also facilitate microscopic study and identification, which is of great importance for researchers.

Why important?

- Traditionally from crop improvement and food testing to forensic applications, carcinogenic and toxic nucleic acid stains are used by biologists and genome experts.
- Tintorang, developed from an undisclosed plant source being a fluorescent dye, can be used for DNA and RNA visualization, molecular diagnosis and in vivo imaging applications.

Applications:

- Applying Tintorang to diagnose diseases does not require any bacterial culture, hence the result is obtained sooner.
- Tintorang may help to bring down the time taken for lab diagnosis of critical diseases like HIV-AIDS to only one day from the present 3-45 days
- Also, the same DNA/RNA stain can be used for multiple tests as the structure of the nucleic acid is not altered by one test.
- Tintorang would be safe even on consumption, as it is a food additive and thereby would be much more safer for the scientist to use.
- Being indigenous, faster and reusable, it would reduce the cost of molecular diagnostics.

5.6. TREASORES PROJECT

Why in news?

Researches in Europe have developed a new technology - transparent electrodes and barrier material. It can be used in the next generation of flexible optoelectronics devices like tough panels, LEDs, solar cells etc .

What is it?

- **TREASORES** stands for Transparent Electrodes for large area large scale production of organic optoelectronics devices.
- Currently, Indium Tin oxide (ITO) is widely used as electrodes in opto-electrical devices.
- **Transparent Organic Electrode** -It uses electrodes made of organic polymers which are made of combination of molecules unlike ITO electrodes which are made of combination of two atoms.

- The only concern as of now is the efficiency and charge mobility (because atoms are neatly arranged in ITO electrodes unlike organic electrodes).

Advantages of using Transparent Organic Electrodes

- Organic electrodes have their building blocks as molecules which being larger than atoms are easier to work with.
- Low cost
- Better mechanical flexibility
- Broad spectral usability.
- Including TRANSPARENT BARRIERS would prevent moisture and oxygen entry from reaching sensitive organic electronic devices.
- Therefore a **combination of transparent organic electrode and barrier** could be a boon for solar industry in terms of cost and flexibility of devices.

Issues with Indium Tin oxide (ITO)

- Indium is expensive rare element.
- Indium Tin oxide devices have poor mechanical flexibility.
- Limited spectral operation i.e. it can't work in all spectrum of light.

5.7. NASA INSIGHT MISSION

Why in news?

NASA managers have decided to suspend the planned March 2016 launch of the Insight mission. The decision follows unsuccessful attempts to repair a leak in a section of a key instrument in its payload.

About INSIGHT Mission

- Insight stands for **I**nterior Exploration using **S**eismic Investigation, **G**eodesy and **H**eat Transport. It is NASA Discovery Program mission that will place a single geophysical Lander on Mars to study its deep interior.
- **Objective is** to study the processes that shaped the formation of rocky planets including Earth more than 4 billion years ago.
- **Payloads:** It contains two key instruments:
 - ✓ SEIS (Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure). It can measure ground movements as small as the diameter of an atom. For better sensitivity it needs to operate within a vacuum chamber.
 - ✓ Heat Flow and Physical Properties Package. This would hammer itself to a depth of about 16ft into the ground.

Other missions to Mars:

- **Present Missions**
 - ✓ **Opportunity** and **Curiosity** rovers exploring the Martian surface.
 - ✓ **Odyssey** and **Mars Reconnaissance** Orbiter spacecraft currently orbiting the planet.
 - ✓ Mars Atmosphere and Volatile Evolution Mission (**MAVEN**) orbiter, which is helping scientists understand what happened to the Martian atmosphere.
 - ✓ In year 2014 INDIA successfully inserted its first **orbital mission, Mangalayan** into Mars orbit.
- **Future Missions:**
 - ✓ NASA is on an ambitious journey to MARS that includes sending humans to the Red Planet, and the work remains on track.
 - ✓ ISRO plans to develop and launch a follow up mission called Mangalayan 2 between 2018 and 2020. This mission will likely consist of a Lander and Mars Rover.

5.8. ANTI-MICROBIAL RESISTANCE FUND

- Department of Biotechnology (DBT) through the Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) has invested an initial \$1,00,000 to start an India-focused seed fund.
- It will help groups in India compete for the Longitude Prize.
- **Longitude Prize** is a £ 10 million prize offered by Nesta, a U.K. charity, to any individual group anywhere in the world that develops an affordable, effective diagnostic test to detect resistance to microbes.

Importance for India

- India faces increasing instances of diseases like tuberculosis which are becoming resistant to front line drugs.
- The World Health Organisation statistics for 2014 give an estimated incidence figure of 2.2 million cases of TB for India out of a global incidence of 9 million, with instances of drug-resistant TB rapidly rising.

Reasons for rising anti-microbial resistance

- Lax monitoring
- Prolonged prescription by medical authorities that allow these drugs to be easily available
- Indiscriminate usage means that bugs are, overtime, able to resist these medicines.

5.9. IRNSS-1F

Why in news?

Recently ISRO launched India's sixth dedicated navigation satellite, the IRNSS-1F.

About IRNSS-1F:

- The satellite was launched by India's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV).
- The IRNSS-1F carrying two payloads — The navigation payload and ranging payload.
 - ✓ Navigation payload will transmit navigation service signals and will operate in the L5 band and S band.
 - ✓ The ranging payload consists of a C-band transponder that facilitates accurate determination of the range of the satellites.
- ISRO is now preparing to launch the last satellite in the IRNSS series, the IRNSS-1G, and work has already begun on it.

5.10. INDIA'S FIRST INDIGENOUS SONAR DOME

Why in news?

Recently, Defense Minister flagged off India's first indigenous composite sonar dome.

What is it?

- It was designed and produced by a Defence and Research Development Organization (DRDO) lab in Pune.
- All anti-submarine warfare (ASW) ships have a sonar array fitted to the ship structure below the waterline.
- The sonar functions as the ship's underwater eyes and ears.

What is a sonar dome?

Sonar domes are located on the hulls of submarines and surface ships. Their purpose is to house electronic equipment used for detection, navigation, and ranging.

5.11. BEDAQUILINE

Why in news?

- On World Tuberculosis Day (24th March), Union Health Minister launched Bedaquiline — new drug for Drug Resistant TB - as part of the national programme.
- The drug will be introduced in 104 districts across five States.

What is Bedaquiline?

- Bedaquiline is a bactericidal drug that belongs to a new class of antibiotics (diarylquinolines).
- Although the drug is active against many different bacteria, it has been registered specifically for the treatment of multidrug-resistant tuberculosis, MDR-TB.

- It specifically targets Mycobacterial ATP synthase, an enzyme essential for the supply of energy to Mycobacterium tuberculosis and most other mycobacteria.
- The drug is unique among the anti-tuberculosis drugs currently used in that it interferes with the function of an enzyme required by the tuberculosis bacterium to produce energy and to replicate.

Significance

- The last time a drug was introduced specifically for the treatment of TB was in the late 1960s, known as rifampicin.
- Since then, resistance to rifampicin has been increasingly reported in the world.
- This is a major concern, as it remains among the most effective anti-TB drugs available today.
- Bedaquiline has been released specifically to treat TB patients with bacteria that are resistant to rifampicin as well as to isoniazid, another core anti-TB drug, and thus suffer from MDR-TB.

5.12. PHOTODYNAMIC THERAPY

Why in news?

Scientists at the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, have found a new way to kill cancerous cells by using iron-based compounds “decorated” with organic groups. This method is called Photodynamic Therapy.

What is Photodynamic Therapy?

- It is treatment that uses drug called photosensitizer or photosensitizing agent, and a particular type of light.
- Each photosensitizer is activated by light of a specific wavelength that determines how far the light can travel into the body.
- When it is exposed to a specific wavelength of light, it produces a form of oxygen that kills nearby cells.
- Thus, doctors can use specific photosensitizers and wavelengths of light to treat different areas of the body

5.13. BAN ON COMBINATION DRUGS

What is the issue?

- The government recently **banned 344 fixed dose combinations (FDCs)** and short-listed around 600 more FDCs to be banned
- Later, Delhi High Court restrained the government from enforcing the ban until it has heard petitions from drugmakers challenging the order.

Reasons for Ban

- The **Parliamentary standing committee** on health and family welfare pointed out several loopholes in the approvals of FDCs.
- Committee also found that many of these FDCs are already banned in western countries.
- **Therapeutic Reasons** - FDCs are ineffective, hazardous or simply inappropriate as sighted in many research articles.
- FDCs could promote **addiction**, which has emerged as a serious concern in the US.

What are FDCs?

FDCs are medicines in which two or more active pharmaceutical ingredients (APIs) are combined in a fixed dose to form a single drug. Side-effects of the combined product and its effects are different from those of its individual components and sometimes the combination can contain risks that are not there in the components by themselves. The added danger is that when an adverse reaction happens in a patient, it is often difficult to place which ingredient is responsible for that reaction.

Implications of the Decision

- The ban on FDCs, linking drug prices to wholesale price index (WPI) along with bringing a larger number of medicines under price control, could wipe out **12 per cent** of the pharmaceutical sector’s turnover.

Way forward

- **Streamline the regulation** - Presently States and the Centre issue licence to 'manufacture' and 'market' a drug respectively. To ensure that consumers get the right FDCs, a streamlined system of regulation is needed.
- A '**National Health Authority**' should be formed which should regulate both the health and commercial issues in the pharma sector.
- Drug inspectorates needs to be provided with funding and infrastructure to increase their ability of testing the therapeutic attributes

5.14 SUPERFLARES

- **Solar flares** on the sun frequently shower Earth with high-energy particles causing the Aurora Borealis and, occasionally, disruptions to power networks and communications.
- An international research team suggested of a possibility of our sun turning into a **Superflare star** i.e capable of producing very high intensity Flares known as Superflares.
- Superflares have been a mystery since the Kepler mission discovered them in larger numbers 4 years ago.
- Superflares are very strong explosions observed on stars with energies up to ten thousand times that of typical solar flares.
- The magnetic fields on the surface of stars with super flares are generally stronger than ones on the surface of the Sun.
- However, of all the stars with Superflares that researchers analysed, about 10 per cent had a magnetic field with strength similar to, or weaker than, the Sun's. Thus there is a possibility that our sun might turn into a Superflare.

6. INTERNAL SECURITY/LAW AND ORDER

6.1. DISTRICT RESERVE BATTALIONS

Why in news?

The District Reserve Group (DRG), a locally raised force vested with the task to tackle Maoists has added muscle to the counter insurgency operations in south Chhattisgarh in past one year.

About DRG

- It was first set up in Kanker (north Bastar) and Narayanpur (comprising Abhujmad) districts in 2008 and after a gap of five years, the force was raised in Bijapur and Bastar districts in 2013.
- The DRG has strength close to 1,700, including officers.
- Those in the DRG are **full police officers**, with the same accountability as anyone else, and thus the state is fully responsible for their actions.
- Dubbed as **“son of soil”** because its personnel are recruited from among local youth and surrendered Naxals in Bastar division.

Advantage of DRG

- **Well conversant with the inhospitable terrain and dense forests of Bastar.**
- They are **emotionally attached to the region** as they belong to this place. They are fighting Maoists efficiently because of their inherent motivation for doing so.
- Many of the recruits in DRG are surrendered Naxals and having **served with the outlawed CPI (Maoist)**, they are aware of the movement of the ultras in forests, their schedule, habits and operational pattern.
- They are considered **immensely “flexible”** when it comes to **combat situations**. Well-trained forces follow standard operating procedures. These surrendered cadres don't follow rules, and thus are better equipped to guerilla warfare in the jungles.
- DRG's good **local information network** helps them to launch operation based on specific inputs.

Criticism of DRG

- Critics of the police point out that the concept of using surrendered Naxals as instruments of the state is modelled on the now-banned **Salwa Judum**.
- There are allegations that DRG cadres are **harassing innocent villagers** and even sexually assaulted women in villages.
- Police with the help of DRG is accused of carrying out **sweeping raids as collective punishment**, and fitting villagers to pre-decided crimes.

Conclusion

- Government has to use all **its resources to eradicated extremism**. However, in doing so government should not violate **the fundamental rights of the citizens**.
- State government has to bring more transparency in recruitment of DRG and impartially investigated any wrong doing of DRG. Naxalism cannot be defeated only with the force; **wining hearts and minds** of the people living in conflict area is very much essential.

6.2. TACKLING CROSS-BORDER TERRORISM IN SAARC NATIONS

Why in news?

- Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde of the Supreme Court has suggested setting up of a common court for SAARC member countries to deal with cross-border terror attacks like 26/11 and crimes like smuggling of fake currency notes, drugs and weapons.

Benefits

- A court consisting of **judges of all SAARC countries** in the region will perhaps ensure swifter justice as it will ensure collaboration on trans-border cases.
- It was also suggested that a common **secure website to be created for judges of SAARC Nations**. This website can provide for exchange of information on modus operandi of terror group, arms and equipment used by terrorists and their handlers.

Challenges

- Experts are of the opinion that idea will be difficult to implement as India don't have an **extradition treaty with Pakistan**.
- State (Pakistan) **agencies like ISI and army** are involved in supporting terror groups.
- **Trust deficit** between India and Pakistan.
- Pakistan has never acknowledge that **anti-India terror groups are thriving in its territory**
- Terror has become **state instrument** to control the government in Afghanistan.

6.3. 8TH INTERNATIONAL INDIA SECURITY SUMMIT

Why in news?

8th International **INDIA SECURITY SUMMIT: Securing the Nation** was organized by **ASSOCHAM**, India's Apex Chamber for Commerce and Industry.

Highlights of the summit

- **Important points highlighted by ASSOCHAM President.**
 - ✓ India's internal security remains a major area of concern, constantly facing growing challenges to its internal security arising from cybercrimes, physical crimes, economic frauds, insurgency, cross border developments.
 - ✓ It is the duty and function of the state to ensure the safety of its citizens, organizations and institutions against threats to their well-being as well as the traditional functions of law and order.
 - ✓ With more than half the global population today living in urban areas, **safe city is increasingly being considered essential in ensuring secure living and prosperity.**
- **Important points highlighted by Union Home Minister:**
 - ✓ **Cyber-crime** is the biggest challenge these days with the development and access to technology across the globe.
 - ✓ Cyber space is being **used to radicalize the minds of youth.**
 - ✓ The main problem with cyber-crime is its detection and prosecution, as it is **faceless and borderless.**
 - ✓ The Expert Group constituted has recommended for setting up an **Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) to fight against cybercrimes in the country.**
 - ✓ Earlier the crime used to originate from **land, water and air**. In the 20th century, the dimension of **space** was added to it. But now a days, the **cybercrime** is showing exponential growth in its number, which is a matter of serious concern, keeping in view the reach of mobile phones and internet across the globe including the far-flung areas
- USA ambassador to India suggested that India should accede to the Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the **Budapest Convention**.
 - ✓ The Budapest Convention is the **first international treaty** that addresses Internet and computer crime by harmonizing national laws, improving legal authorities for investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations.
 - ✓ As a Party, India would benefit from a proven framework under which nations commit to cooperate with each other to the widest extent possible with respect to cybercrime, and any crime involving electronic evidence.

- ✓ The Budapest convention is the **only multilateral convention on cyber security** – considered critical to **economic and national security of a country**.
- ✓ Developing countries including **India have not signed** it stating that the developed countries led by the **US drafted it without consulting them**.

6.4. INDIA'S CYBER SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

Two things set aside India's digital spaces from that of major powers such as the United States and China: **design and density**.

Design

- India is a **net information exporter**.
- Its information **highways point west**, carrying with them the data of millions of Indians.
- This is not a design flaw, but simply reflects **the popularity of social media platforms** and the lack of any serious effort by the Indian government to restrict the flow of data.
- **Unrestricted information flow** makes India's cyber security architecture susceptible to many perils.

Density

- Nearly **500 million Indians** use the Internet today, but they do not access the Internet from the same devices.
- Apple's market share in the U.S., for instance, is 44 per cent, but iPhones account for less than 1 per cent in India.
- The massive **gap between the security offered by the cheapest phone** in the Indian market and a high-end smart phone makes it impossible for regulators to set legal and technical standards for data protection.

Digital intrusions

India's national security architecture faces a difficult task in cyberspace due to **lack of control over hardware** used by Indian Internet users as well as the information that is carried through them. India's infrastructure is susceptible to **four kinds of digital intrusions**:

- (a) **Espionage**: Involves intruding into systems to steal information of strategic or commercial value.
- (b) **Cybercrime**: Referring to electronic fraud or other acts of serious criminal consequence.
- (c) **Attacks**: Intended at disrupting services or systems for a temporary period.
- (d) **War**: Caused by a large-scale and systematic digital assault on India's critical installations.

Lack of national security architecture

- There is no national security architecture today that can assess the nature of cyber threats and respond to them effectively.
- India's civilian institutions have their own fire-fighting agencies, and the armed forces have their own insulated platforms to counter cyber-attacks.
- Recognising the strategic dimensions of cyberspace, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) created the position of the National Cyber Security Coordinator in 2014.

What could such an agency look like?

The **asymmetric character** of digital warfare requires a **multi-agency organisation** that is technically equipped, but also bases its decision on sound strategy and regular policy inputs.

- **Permanent and semi-permanent staff that is technically proficient in cyber operations**,
 - ✓ India faces a shortage of officers trained in creating and breaking encrypted platforms as well as using digital networks for intelligence gathering.
 - ✓ Were such a National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) to be created, it should have a functional "nucleus" or secretariat.
- **The second requirement is to coordinate the agency's policy functions and operations.**

- ✓ The current cyber security policy, articulated in 2013 by the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, is basically a statement of first principles.
- ✓ The NCSA should be guided by a document outlining India's cyber strategy, much like its nuclear doctrine.
- ✓ India currently has a top layer of agencies performing cyber operations — the National Technical Research Organisation, the National Intelligence Grid, and the National Information Board etc.
- ✓ India's intelligence agencies should separately provide their consolidated inputs to aid the operations of the NCSA.
- **India should not hesitate to build its offensive cyber capabilities.**
 - ✓ This would involve the development of software designed to intrude, intercept and exploit digital networks.
 - ✓ India's cyber command should be the primary agency responsible for the creation and deployment of such weapons.

Conclusion

A fully operational cyber command will take years to complete. The government would do well to pursue a two-pronged strategy in the interim.

- Advocate restraint in cyberspace as a global norm. India is an active participant in discussions around the Tallinn Manual, which is a set of non-governmental guidelines for engagement during war.
- The government should draft recruitment guidelines to hire and train a cadre of cyber specialists.

6.5. INDIA'S CYBER SECURITY CHALLENGES

Cyberspace was primarily intended as a civilian space. It has, however, become a new domain of warfare.

Past cyber-attacks

- Stuxnet cyber-attack (2010) on an Iranian nuclear facility at Natanz
- In 2007, Estonia was almost brought to its knees through a cyberattack, presumed to be by Russian hackers.
- The past few years have seen successful attacks against the best-guarded installations of advanced nations.
- The past year also witnessed a devastating attack on Ukraine's critical infrastructure.

It is evident that no rule of law exists in cyberspace. The domain has already become a dangerous place.

Cyber security vis- a-vis terrorism

- The architecture of the Internet was designed **to promote connectivity, not security**. Cyber experts warn that the **more technologically advanced and wired a nation is**, the more vulnerable it is to a cyber-attack.
- Cybersecurity has an interesting parallel to terrorism.
 - ✓ Both are asymmetric.
 - ✓ Ensuring security of data, information, and communication is considerably harder than hacking into a system.
 - ✓ The attacker has an inherent advantage in both conventional terrorism and cyberattacks.
 - ✓ In the case of state-sponsored attacks, the challenges are of a much higher magnitude.

India's Vulnerability on cyber space

- India remains vulnerable to digital intrusions such as cyber-espionage, cybercrime, digital disruption and Distributed Denial of Service.
- Despite having a **National Cyber Security Policy (2013)**, risks to our critical infrastructure remain.
- In spite of instituting a **National Cyber Security Coordinator (2014)**, internecine rivalries between the National Technical Research Organisation (the nodal agency for cybersecurity) and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology impede cooperation.
- Lack of coordination among different government agencies.

- China's emphasis on '**cloud computing techniques**', and the involvement of its Ministry of State Security in this endeavour, suggests that it is preparing for all-out offensive cyber operations. India would be a prime target.

What India Needed

- **Bleeding edge technology:** Bleeding edge technology is a category of technologies so new that they could have a high risk of being unreliable and lead adopters to incur greater expense in order to make use of them. The term bleeding edge was formed as an allusion to the similar terms "leading edge" and "cutting edge".
- Big data analytics
- **Air gapping:** Air gapping is a security measure that involves isolating a computer or network and preventing it from establishing an external connection. An air gapped computer is physically segregated and incapable of connecting wirelessly or physically with other computers or network devices.
- Emphasis on cloud computing techniques.
- Offensive cyber operations and strengthened cyber security.

6.6. NEW GOVERNANCE ARCHITECTURE FOR ICANN

Why in news?

- The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) in a meeting at Marrakesh (Morocco) decided that the ICANN will now be governed **by a "multi-stakeholder"** (multistakeholder ICANN community) model, including businesses, individual users and members of governments across the world.
- Since this group elects ICANN's board of directors in the first place, it can be said that ICANN will now be an independent organisation, with no external oversight.

ICANN and its present governance architecture

- It is a non-profit body founded in 1998 that administrates domain names and Internet protocol addresses (IPs) globally.
- ICANN has been assigned the task to manage Internet by the US Commerce Department's **National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)** under a contract, which expires on September 30.
- **IANA** (the Internet Assigned Names Authority, the part of ICANN that handles country codes, Internet numbers and protocols) then went on being part of ICANN, despite concerns raised by a number of countries over the US's stranglehold over the Internet.
- ICANN's architecture renders it answerable only to U.S. law and courts.
- The main issue that non-U.S. actors have with the U.S. control over ICANN is that it can unilaterally interfere with the ICANN's policy process, and the Internet's root server.

Change in governance of ICANN

- The new governance architecture proposes to completely revamp old arrangement post September 30, 2016.
- ICANN will become an independent body in managing its domain names-related policy work, and the Internet's root zone file, containing information about Internet names and numbers, addresses, which are copied and replicated by other servers the world over.
- The **gatekeeper role of Internet addresses will be free from US oversight** and these functions would shift to the broader global online community.

India's position

- India's proposal is that the Internet should be managed through the multi-stakeholder approach and the governments should **have "supreme right and control"** on matters relating to international security.
- India has described the role of the government as **"an important stakeholder"** and **"a custodian of security" for the global Internet infrastructure.**

- India in its submission has said that under the new transition, the body managing the Internet should have “**accountability towards governments**” in areas where “**governments have primary responsibility, such as security and similar public policy concerns**”.

Concerns with multi-stakeholder Model

- US politicians and corporations have expressed concern that their government is “**giving away**” the Internet, and that powers such as **China and Russia may hijack control**.
- Numerous U.S.’s executive, legislative and judicial control over ICANN and the root server will not change with the current proposal.
- Multi-stakeholder models can vary in form and can **exclude key stakeholders**.
- India’s fears about multi-stakeholder governance **as decision-making being dominated by corporations**, especially U.S.-based corporations.
- With an independent status finally settled, ICANN may promote its narrow self-interest and commercial pursuits, disregarding global public interest.
- Jurisdiction over ICANN is not addressed in proposed model.
- In past, ICANN resisted attempts by the United Nations’ International Telecommunication Union to take over its job.

Way forward

- It is required is to get ICANN incorporated under international law, with host country immunities for an international organization.

6.7. OPERATION VEERANGANA

- Operation Veerangana is community based initiative of Delhi Police to curb crime against women in the city.
- Police will engage housewives to serve as their ‘eyes and ears’ and report to them about suppressed cases of sexual abuse, domestic violence and street crimes.
- Dozens of **housewives will be trained to** spot and report crimes taking place in their immediate neighborhood.
- Recently, Under ‘**Operation Nirbheek**’, police’s interaction with school students has led to dozens of girls coming forward with shocking revelations about sexual abuse by family members, teachers or unknown persons.

Why housewives

- Police chose to train housewives because they are often the 'silent observers', choosing not to report several incidents.
- The housewives often hear of sexual abuse or domestic violence — most of which do not get reported — taking place within the four walls of a home.
- Moreover, the police believe that victims are more likely to open up with housewives with whom they frequently interact.

Rise in rape cases

- In 2014, the last data by the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)** showed that the number of rapes in the country rose by 35.2 percent to 33,707 in 2013 - with Delhi reporting 1,441 rapes in 2013 - making it the city with the highest number of rapes.

6.8. TERROR ATTACK IN BELGIUM

A series of deadly explosions rocked Belgium's capital, targeting the main airport of Zaventem and the city's metro system.

- At least 34 people have been killed in bombings at the Zaventem airport and the Maelbeek metro station that took place.
- Brussels, which hosts key European Union institutions, is the de facto capital of Europe.

Islamic state (IS) Terrorist group

- The Islamic State group, which was behind the Paris attacks, claimed responsibility for the Brussels bombings.
- The Islamic State in particular has carried out a number of attacks across the world, from Paris to Ankara, in recent months.

Why public places are attacked by IS?

- The IS is **facing military setbacks** in and around the **so-called 'caliphate'**.
- There is rationale for IS to attack public places and kill innocent people
 - ✓ First, not being able to expand the territories of the 'caliphate', the **IS wants to export terrorism** to other countries so as to stay 'relevant' and find more recruits.
 - ✓ Second, and more important, the IS is fighting a war against the **civilisational values of the modern world**. By attacking the public, it wants to create panic in free and open societies, break their social cohesion and then reap the dividends.

Why Belgium?

- Belgium has been a focus for counterterrorism officials for years because of the large number of Belgian foreign fighters who have traveled to join ISIS and other terror groups in **Syria** and **Iraq**.
- **Per capita, Belgium has the highest number of foreign fighters** in Syria of any Western European nation.
- Several cities have housed Islamist cells, but the most active have been in Brussels and in the **south-western suburb of Molenbeek** in particular - an area with a high ethnic Moroccan population and a high rate of unemployment.
- The terror attack on Brussels is not about a revenge strike, but about the **intense radicalisation deeply entrenched in broader communities and neighbourhoods**.

6.9. JUSTICE VISHNU SAHAI INQUIRY COMMISSION

Why in news?

A one-man inquiry commission headed by Justice (retired) Vishnu Sahai was formed to look into **administrative lapses** in controlling the violence and **role played by media** as well as **politicians** in flaring up the Muzaffarnagar communal riots.

Findings of the commission

- Commission has blamed the **"negligence" of the local administration**, the **"failure" of the intelligence agencies** and exaggerated reporting in the **social and print media** for the communal riots.
- Whether by omission or by the terms set for it, the Sahai commission appears to have **exonerated the entire political class**.
- The Justice Sahai report gives the State government (Uttar Pradesh) a clean chit.

Criticism of report

- Civil society organizations have criticized the commission findings and accused commission for deliberately absolving politician from riots.
- Report has also stopped short of extending the line of responsibility for local administrative failures to the Secretariat.

6.10. EXERCISE FORCE 18

India hosted its first multilateral Field Training Exercise (FTX) with regional countries.

- The theme of exercise was **'Humanitarian Mine Action'** and **'Peacekeeping Operations'**.
- It was largest Multinational Field Training Exercise (FTX) ever conducted on Indian soil.
- Army units from eighteen countries (ASEAN+8 dialogue partners) were participated in exercise.
- **Exercise FORCE 18** would build common understanding and achieve interoperability amongst the 18 ASEAN Plus countries.

Importance of such exercise

- In the face of **transnational natural disasters** and other non-traditional security challenges in ASEAN region this exercise can be considered as "Watershed event".
- The exercise has added substance to **India's Act East Policy** by projecting **India's soft** as well as hard power capabilities.
- It provided an opportunity for India to further strengthen cooperation with the region in the domains of "maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster management, peacekeeping operations and military medicine".
- These type of multilateral exercise can enhance the **peace and security of the region**, and India is emerging as responsible stakeholder in regional security.
- A successful hosting of Exercise Force 18 would facilitate India in establishing itself as **a credible major power in the Asia-Pacific region**.

6.11. IRON FIST EXERCISE 2016

Iron Fist is an Indian Air Force exercise held at Pokhran, Rajasthan.

Aim: - To demonstrate a synchronized "aerial ballet" that would showcase IAF's deadly combat capability over the entire spectrum of aerial operations.

Significance

- The exercise will send a statement to India's adversaries about the preparedness of the IAF to meet the national security challenges faced by India.
- This exercise holds special significance as it represents the lethal face of the Indian Air Force in its pre-eminent role as the cutting edge of our nation's military capability.
- The Indian Air Force had demonstrated its Combat and fire power capabilities.

7. ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

7.1. CATEGORIZATION OF POLLUTING INDUSTRIES

- India's environment ministry has sought to classify industrial units in a category of colours based on their pollution potential.
- The categorisation is based on a pollution index developed by the environment ministry taking into account the emissions, effluents, hazardous waste generated, and the resources it consumes.
- They would be classified on the basis of how they score on a scale ranging between 15 to 60:

Colour	Score	Examples
Red (Heavily Polluting)	60 and above	Petrochemicals, pharmaceuticals, sugar, paper and pulp, nuclear power plants, thermal power plants, tanneries, organic chemicals, fertilizers, fire crackers
Orange	Between 30-59	Coal washeries, glass manufacturing, paints, stone crushers, aluminum and copper extraction from scrap
Green	Between 15-29	Aluminum utensils, steel furniture, soap manufacturing, tea processing
White (Non-polluting)	Below 15	Air cooler, AC units, Chalk factories, Biscuit tray units

- The classification is for entire industrial sectors and not individual units.
- The system of annual renewal of certification will also be scrapped with this. The Environment Ministry has suggested five years renewal for red category, ten years for orange and one time certification for green. White industries would not require any green clearance.

Benefits

- This would place the **heavily polluting industries under greater scrutiny**.
- Low polluting industries would be saved from unnecessary hassles of periodic renewals. Thus, it would **facilitate ease of doing business**.
- **Better site selection for new red category industries** as they will not be allowed in ecologically sensitive areas.
- Colour coding would enable **easier financing** for environmental friendly industries.

7.2. YAMUNA FLOODPLAINS

Why in news?

- Recently Art of Living (AoL) had organized a cultural event on Yamuna's floodplain.
- The event came under criticism from environmental activists and NGOs because of the damage it was likely to cause to the floodplains due to construction activities of gigantic proportions.
- While the NGT allowed the event to take place, it ordered the AoL foundation to pay a fine of Rs. 5 crore for the remedial and restoration work.

What is floodplain?

- Floodplain is the area adjacent to a river that is not always under water, but is prone to flooding. It is an extension of the riverbed and is an integral part of any river-system
- It is an ecologically sensitive area.
- In the case of the Yamuna in Delhi, the area that is likely to get submerged at least once in a 25-year period has been classified as its floodplain.

Significance of Floodplain

- **Flood protection:** As it provides more room to the river in the event of its rise
- **Improve water quality:** When inundated, it acts as natural filters removing excess sediments and nutrients.
- **Recharged Aquifers:** Outside of a river's main channel, water flow is slowed and has more time to seep into the ground where it can replenish underground water sources.
- **Improved Wildlife Habitat:** home to some of the most biologically rich habitats on Earth.
- **Recreational Industries and Eco-tourism:** fishing, hunting, camping, hiking, wildlife watching and boating - greatly enhanced by the natural processes of rivers and healthy floodplains.

Impact on Environment

- One of the important functions of the floodplains is groundwater recharge. In the process of flattening, the surface gets hardened, and it severely impacts its groundwater recharge capability.
- Change in the natural gradient of the floodplain would diminish its flood-carrying capacity.
- Cutting of trees and dumping of debris impacts aquatic and bird population.
- Increased footfall would also affect the region.

7.3. CLIMATE ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS

- Climate engineering refers to the deliberate and large scale intervention in the Earth's climate system with the aim of limiting adverse climate change.
- Generally two categories of engineering solutions:
 - **Greenhouse gas removal:** Examples
 - ✓ **Carbon capture and storage (CCS),** where some of the carbon dioxide being emitted by coal-fired power stations is recaptured by physically sucking it in and transporting it elsewhere (like oilfields) to be sequestered underground.
 - ✓ **Biochar** which is created by pyrolysis of biomass
 - ✓ **Enhanced weathering** involves a chemical approach to remove carbon dioxide involving land or ocean based techniques. Examples of land based enhanced weathering techniques are in-situ carbonation of silicates.
 - ✓ **Afforestation**
 - **Management of Sunlight:** Here the plan is to reduce global warming by cutting down the heat absorbed by our planet from the sun. Examples:
 - ✓ **Stratospheric aerosol injection (SAI):** SAI involves spraying into the stratosphere fine, light-coloured particles designed to reflect back part of the solar radiation before it reaches and warms the earth. Sulphur Dioxide gas is used for the process.
 - ✓ **Cirrus cloud manipulation:** Here the cirrus clouds are removed or thinned so that their long-wave trapping capacity is reduced and thus cools the surface.
 - ✓ **Marine cloud brightening:** The low warm clouds which are highly reflective to sunlight are modified to increase their reflectivity.
 - ✓ **Space sunshade:** Obstructing sunrays with space based mirrors
 - ✓ Using pale-coloured roofing material or growing high albedo crops.

7.4. NEW E-WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES

- Recently, the Ministry of Environment and Forests have proposed the E-waste (Management and Handling) Rules 2016 that will replace the earlier Rules of 2011

Main Features

- **Applicability**
 - ✓ Earlier it was applicable only to producers and consumers, dismantlers and recyclers. Now extended to Manufacturer, dealer, refurbishers and Producer Responsibility Organisation (PRO). This will help in preventing leakage of e-waste to informal sector.

- ✓ Earlier only Electric and Electronic equipments were covered. Now even their components and spare parts are also covered. Also Mercury containing lamps like CFLs also included.
- **Extended Producers' Responsibility (EPR):**
 - ✓ Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is a strategy designed to promote the **integration of environmental costs associated with goods** throughout their life cycles into the market price of the products.
 - ✓ Single EPR Authorization for Producers is now being made CPCB's responsibility to ensure pan India implementation.
 - ✓ Further, flexibility is given for ease of implementation of EPR provisions. Options like setting up of PRO, e-waste exchange, e-retailer, Deposit Refund Scheme are given to Producers to ensure efficient channelization of e-waste.
 - ✓ **Deposit Refund Scheme** is an additional economic instrument introduced.
 - ✓ Under **E-waste exchange** independent companies could offer services of sale and purchase of end-of-life equipments.
 - ✓ Collection is now exclusive responsibility of the Producer. There is no separate authorization needed for this as was required earlier.
 - ✓ A target based approach has been mandated for collection. This is 30% of the quantity of waste generated in first phase and will eventually move to 70% in 7 years.
- **Bulk Consumer responsibility:** They have to file annual returns. Health facilities have been added to the definition.
- **Participation of State government:** Involvement of state government for effective implantation of the rules and simultaneously ensure welfare, safety and health of the workers involved in this e-waste management sector.
- Provision on **Reduction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) during manufacturing stage** has been brought in line with existing EU regulations. A provision for withdrawal and recall of the products in case of non-compliance is added.

A Much Needed Improvement

- India produces around 8 lakh tones of e-waste annually while 151 registered recycling facilities can handle only half of them.
- Presently, the e-waste management system suffers from proliferation of the informal sector. They adopts a highly unscientific way of handling waste that is extremely hazardous to environment and health. The new rules would help in putting a check on this.
- The success of bringing the consumer in the formal chain would depend on two things:
 - ✓ Better repurchase offer than the unorganized sector; Deposit Refund Scheme would help in this
 - ✓ Easy collection method
- Stress has been laid on simplification of procedures and flexibility on the part of the producers.
- Role of state government and other stakeholders is underscored that promises better implementation.

Challenges

- The recycling capacity needs to increase. Presently it can handle only half of the waste produced.
- Segregation of urban solid waste management has to improve where many e-waste get mixed.
- Habit of Indian households to cling on to defunct gadgets and not letting them go.

Way Ahead

- A great opportunity for India to deal with this growing menace which will assume great proportions if not addressed now with full vigour.
- An awareness campaign would help in implementation as well.

7.5. NEW PLASTIC WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES

Why in news?

- Government recently amended the Plastic Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2011.

Main Changes

- **Increasing the minimum thickness of plastic carry bags** from 40 microns to 50 microns. This would increase the cost and the tendency to provide free carry bags would come down.
- **Responsibility of local bodies:** Rural areas are brought under the rules since plastic has reached rural areas as well. The *gram sabhas* have been given responsibility of implementation.
- **Extended Producer Responsibility:** Earlier, EPR was left to the discretion of the local bodies. First time, the producers and brand owners have been made responsible for collecting waste generated from their products.
- Producers are to keep a record of their vendors to whom they have supplied raw materials for manufacturing. This is to **curb manufacturing of these products in unorganised sector**.
- **Responsibility of waste generator:** All institutional generators of plastic waste shall segregate and store the waste generated by them in accordance with the Solid Waste Management Rules, and handover segregated wastes to authorized waste disposal facilities.
- **Responsibility of street vendors and retailers:** Not to provide such carry bags or fine would be imposed. Only the registered shopkeepers on payment of a registration fee to local bodies would be allowed to give out plastic carry bags on charge.
- To promote the use of plastic for road construction or energy recovery.

Why not ban plastic bags?

- As per the Environment ministry an eco-friendly product, which is a complete substitute of the plastic in all uses, has not been found till date.
- In the absence of a suitable alternative, it is impractical and undesirable to impose a blanket ban on the use of plastic all over the country.

7.6. AGASTHYAMALA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

- The Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve has recently been included in UNESCO's list of World Biosphere Reserve Network.

Notable Points

- The area falls in the **Malabar rainforests** and is one of the noted hotspot in the **Western Ghats**.
- It covers about 3500 sq kms and is part of different districts of **Tamil Nadu and Kerala**.
- **Agastya Mala**, the peak after which the reserve is named, rises up to almost 1868 metres above sea level, in Thiruvananthapuram.
- There are many endemic and endangered species of flora and fauna in the reserve including endangered Nilgiri Tahr.
- It includes the Indian eco regions of **moist deciduous forests, montane rainforests and Shola forests and grasslands**.
- There are **three wildlife sanctuaries** within the reserve- **Shendurney, Peppara, and Neyyar**.
- The **Kalakkad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve** was recently included as part of the biosphere reserve.
- It is also home to **Kanikaran**, one of the oldest surviving **ancient tribes** in the world.

UPSC PRELIMS 2005

Which one of the following is not a Biosphere Reserve?

- (a) Agasthyamalai
- (b) Nallamalai
- (c) Nilgiri
- (d) Panchmarhi

UPSC PRELIMS 2006

Where is Bundala Biosphere Reserve which has been recently added to the UNESCO's Man and Biosphere (MAB) network, located?

- (a) Russia
- (b) India
- (c) Sri Lanka
- (d) Bangladesh

- There are 18 biosphere reserves in India and 9 of them were included in the prestigious UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve Network. **Agasthyamala is the tenth one to be added to the list.** The others are Nilgiri, Gulf of Mannar, Sunderban, Nanda Devi, Nokrek, Pachmarh, Similipal, Achanakmar-Amarkantak and Great Nicobar.

7.7. FLY ASH

Why in news?

- Recently an expert panel of MoEF has expressed concerns over use of fly ash for filling mines as this can have environmental consequences in the form of:
 - ✓ Contamination of ground water due to leaching of heavy metals in fly ash
 - ✓ Reduction in recharging of ground water due to fly ash filled mine voids
 - ✓ Ash-filled voids cannot support tree species because of poor root system development which in turn results in uprooting of trees even by low velocity winds.
- Since its findings are not conclusive, it has called for a 10-year exhaustive study over this issue.

About Fly Ash

- Fly ash is one of the coal combustion products and is composed of fine particles that are driven out of the boiler with flue gases. Ash that falls at the bottom of the boiler is called bottom ash.
- Fly ash includes substantial amounts of oxides of silica, aluminum and calcium. Element like Arsenic, Boron, Chromium, lead etc are also found in trace concentrations. It, thus, poses hazards to environment and health.
- However, at the same time due to the presence of these minerals fly ash has certain unique properties. It can be used as a construction material, filling old mines, building railway embankments, and reclamation of low-lying areas.

Situation in India

- Indian coal has very high ash content - 30-40% ash content as against 10-15% in imported coal.
- Indian government has realized that this limitation can be converted into an advantage and thus steps have been taken:
 - ✓ **2009 notification of MoEF provided guidelines** on ash utilization advocated its usage within 100 km radius of thermal power plants.
 - ✓ **New and innovative uses** are also taking place- especially initiated by power companies like NTPC in collaboration with Institutes like IIT-Delhi and IIT-Kanpur e.g. Manufacture of pre-stressed railway concrete sleepers
 - ✓ **Transportation cost** :Some States like Orissa have ordered the plants to subsidize the transport costs
 - ✓ Recently Maharashtra government has decided to come up with an **export policy** for fly ash in the light of demand from places like Singapore and Dubai.
- However, India is still not able to match the potential of its fly ash use. As per a recent study by CSE only 50-60% of the fly ash generated is being utilized.
- There is a need to increase the capability, giving incentives to industry and new technology introduction in this field.

8. CULTURE

8.1. ROCK PAINTINGS DISCOVERED IN KONDANE CAVES

- 40 rock paintings were recently discovered in the Kondane caves in Raigad district in western region of Maharashtra.
- The images were found in both natural caverns and man-made caves.
- An unfinished Buddhist chaitya and a vihara were found in two man-made caves in the group. A chaitya is a Buddhist prayer hall with a stupa at one end. A vihara is a monastery.
- The Buddhist rock-cut architecture found in these caves belongs to the Hinayana phase of Buddhism.
- It is an important discovery because we were not aware of the existence of rock art images in this region of Maharashtra.
- A striking image found was that of a mythical figure, perhaps a demon. Other paintings reflected everyday life and occupations such as hunting deer.
- The style and articulation of these paintings suggest that they have been drawn during the late historical period of second century B.C. onwards.



8.2. POLICY TO ADOPT WORLD HERITAGE SITES

- UNESCO, with the help of 21 member World Heritage Committee and advisory bodies such as International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), within the framework of its Operational Guidelines, decides about the cultural and natural sites to be included on the World Heritage list.
- Such cultural and natural sites must display the necessary Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), fulfill one or more out of 10 prescribed criteria (as given below), maintain the condition of authenticity and integrity and should be in a good state of conservation.
- There are 32 sites from India declared as World Heritage sites - 25 are cultural sites and 7 are natural sites.
- The Criteria for the assessment of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) as per UNESCO's Operational Guidelines are
 - ✓ to represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;
 - ✓ to exhibit an important interchange of human values,
 - ✓ to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization
 - ✓ to be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological
 - ✓ to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction
 - ✓ to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance.
 - ✓ to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance
 - ✓ to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history,
 - ✓ to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes
 - ✓ to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity.

8.3. CHOLA SCULPTURE OF CHANDESVARAR

A sculpture of Chandesvarar, believed to belong to 10th century AD, has been found at Sundaikkai village near Umaiyalpuram near Trichy, Tamil Nadu.

Description of the sculpture

- The headgear is arranged as 'jatabhara', a hairstyle worn particularly by Shiva, usually characterised by a large number of penitential plaits worn in a bunch on the side.
- The apparel at the hip is short and wavy and is kept in place by a well draped cloth around the waist called 'idaikkattu.'
- The sculpture is found seated in 'suhasana' with one leg folded and kept on the seat, his other leg rests on a pedestal.
- He is decorated with a sacred thread, a band at the stomach, and scanty ornamentation.



About Chandesvarar

- Chandesvarar is one of the 63 Nayanars of the Saivite sect and was the first among them to find a place in temples.
- He is housed in a separate shrine on the northern side of all the Saivite temples, facing the presiding deity.
- The most distinguished shrine of Chandesvara was built by Rajaraja I at the Rajarajesvaram at Thanjavur.

Nayanars:

- The 7th to 9th centuries saw the emergence of new religious movements in south India, led by the Nayanars (saints devoted to Shiva) and Alvars (saints devoted to Vishnu) who came from all castes including those considered "untouchable".
- They were critical of the Buddhists and Jainas and preached love of Shiva or Vishnu as the path to salvation.
- They drew upon the ideals of love and heroism as found in the Sangam literature and blended them with the values of bhakti.
- There were 63 Nayanars, who belonged to different caste backgrounds such as potters, "untouchable" workers, peasants, hunters, soldiers, Brahmanas and chiefs.
- The best known among them were Appar, Sambandar, Sundarar and Manikkavasagar.
- There are two sets of compilations of their songs – Tevaram and Tiruvacakam.

8.4. PANCHTEERTH: B R AMBEDKAR

- Government of India will develop five places as "Panchteerth" in the honour of B R Ambedkar.
- Panchteerth include Amedbkar's birthplace in Mhow, the place in London where he stayed while studying in UK, 'Deeksha Bhoomi' in Nagpur, where he took education, 'Mahaparinirvan Sthal' in Delhi, and 'Chaitya Bhoomi' in Mumbai.
- In addition, the government is also building the Dr Ambedkar Foundation at 15, Janpath in Delhi.
- The Prime Minister laid the foundation stone of a memorial to be built at Alipur Road where he spent his last days.
- The Prime Minister said the vision for developing India's maritime potential, and for Inland Waterways, was first conceived by Ambedkar. So, on his birth anniversary, India would host an international event at Mumbai to help harness maritime strengths and create waterways.

8.5. SIDDI TRIBE

- The **Siddi** also known as **Sheedi, Habshi** or **Makrani**, are an ethnic group inhabiting India and Pakistan.
- They are descendants of Africans from North-East and East Africa who were brought to India as slaves, soldiers or servants.
- **Spread:** Karnataka, Gujarat and Hyderabad in India and Makran and Karachi in Pakistan as the main population centres
- Current estimated population: 20,000–55,000 individuals
- **Religion:** Siddis are primarily Sufi Muslims, although some are Hindus and others Roman Catholic Christians.
- The Siddis of Gujarat live around Gir Forest National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Although Gujarati Siddis have adopted the language and many customs of their surrounding populations, some African traditions have been preserved. These include the *Goma* music and dance form, which is sometimes called *Dhamaal*.

8.6. TODA TRIBE

- **Spread:** isolated Nilgiri plateau of Southern India.
- Small **pastoral** community with population range 700 to 900 during the last century.
- the Toda have attracted a disproportionate amount of attention because of their unlikeness to their neighbours in appearance, manners, and customs.
- During the last decade both Toda society and culture have also become the focus of an international effort at culturally sensitive environmental restoration.
- The Toda lands are now a part of The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO-designated International Biosphere Reserve and is declared UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Their sole occupation is cattle-herding and dairy-work.
- **Religion:** Centres on the buffalo
- **Threat:** Some Toda pasture land was lost due to agriculture by outsiders or afforestation by the State Government of Tamil Nadu.

8.7. ASUR TRIBE

- The members of the tribe live in Jharkhand, pockets of Bihar, West Bengal and a few other states. The 2011 Census put the number of Asurs at 22,459 in Jharkhand and 4,129 in Bihar.
- The Asurs claim to be descendants of Mahishasur, the buffalo-demon whom Goddess Durga kills after a spirited fight lasting nine nights. It's this mythology in mainstream Hinduism that's celebrated in the form of the nine-day-long Durga Puja, but observed as 'Mahishasur Dasain' among the Asurs, who hold a period of mourning during which they largely stay indoors.
- Traditionally, the Asur have been iron-smelters and slash burn cultivators. Thus, they have been nomadic.
- According to one of the theories, the Magadh Empire benefited a lot from the weapons the Asurs made.
- But forest acts and regulations have snatched away their traditional rights over the forest. This has affected their practice of iron-smelting and shifting cultivation. Now they are settled in villages.
- They are also losing the traditional skills of iron smelting.
- The Unesco has listed the Asur language as "definitely endangered" with only 7,000 speakers left.

8.8. BONDA TRIBE

- This tribe lives in the isolated hill regions of the Malkangiri district of southwestern Odisha, near the junction of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh. Their current population is 12,000.

Characteristics

- Bondas have almost no connection to the outside world. Only 6% of Bondas are literate.

- In Bonda society, the women enjoy a privileged position.
- Bonda girls largely marry boys who are at least five to ten years younger than them. Thus the girl looks after her husband as he grows up and in turn he cares for his older wife.
- The number of women among the Bonda greatly exceeds the number of men.
- Poverty became a fundamental issue among the Bonda people due to social customs regarding obligatory marriages and deaths, along with other socio-religious practices.

8.9. JAGOR FOLK DANCE

- A dance drama of **Goa** based on no continuous plot or narrative
- Performed jointly by the **Hindus and Christians**
- To offer prayer to deity to protect the village from the river water. It is faith that it averts natural calamities and quarrels among themselves.

8.10. ZARDOZI

- Zardozi is beautiful metal embroidery, which was used for the attire of the Kings and the royals in India. Persian terms Zar meaning gold and Dozi meaning embroidery.
- It involves making elaborate designs, using gold and silver threads. Precious stones, diamonds, emeralds, and pearls are also used.
- **Uses:** to adorn walls of the royal tents, scabbards, wall hangings and the paraphernalia of regal elephants and horses.
- Zardosi attained its summit in the 17th century, under the patronage of Akbar. Under the rule of Aurangzeb, the royal patronage stopped and led to the decline of craft.
- With the 18th and 19th century bringing industrialization, it suffered further setback.
- Zardosi embroidery work is mainly a specialty of Lucknow, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Delhi, Agra, Kashmir, Mumbai, Ajmer and Chennai.
- In 2013 the Geographical Indication Registry (GIR) accorded the Geographical Indication (GI) registration to the *Lucknow Zardozi*.



8.11. BAUL

- The **Baul** are a group of people from West Bengal and Bangladesh.
- Bauls are a very heterogeneous group, with many sects, but their membership mainly consists of Vaishnava Hindus and Sufi Muslims.
- They can often be identified by their distinctive clothes and musical instruments.
- Though Bauls comprise only a small fraction of the Bengali population, their influence on the culture of Bengal is considerable.
- In 2005, the Baul tradition was included in the list of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO.
- **Baul music**
 - ✓ It is a folk song performed by Baul community.
 - ✓ Its lyrics carry influences of the Hindu bhakti movements and the *suphi*, a form of Sufi song exemplified by the songs of Kabir.
 - ✓ Musical instruments used by them are *ektara*, *dotara*, *khamak*, *duggi*, *dhol* and *khol*.

9. ALSO IN NEWS

9.1. CARRIAGE BY AIR (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2015

Why in News?

- Recently, Rajya Sabha has passed the Carriage by Air (Amendment) Bill, 2015. It was passed by the Lok Sabha in December 2015.
- The bill seeks to **empower Union government to revise the limits of liability for airlines and compensation as per the Montreal Convention.**

Features

- The Bill amends the Carriage by Air Act, 1972 giving effect to the Montreal Convention, 1999.
- It intends to increase the liability limit for damage in case of delay, injury or death or even inordinate delay in flights.
- This would **enable the Indian carriers to pay compensation amount that is equivalent to the rates paid by their global counterparts.**

Montreal Convention 1999:

- India acceded to the Montreal Convention in May 2009.
- The Montreal Convention establishes airline liability in the case of death, injury or delay to passengers or in cases of delay, damage or loss of baggage and cargo.
- The Convention also provides for reviewing the limits of liability of the air carriers every five years.

9.2. RANKING ON GOVERNANCE OF STATES IN INDIA

Why in News?

- Recently, Public Affairs Centre (PAC) think tank based in Bangalore has done the governance survey and published public affairs index (PAI) with respect to governance in states.
- Survey was based on **ten themes such as Essential infrastructure, Human development, Social protection, Women and Children, Control of crime, law and order, delivery of justice, Transparency & Public Accountability, environment, fiscal management, economic freedom**

Key findings

- **Kerala and Tamil Nadu secured first and second ranking in PAI** in governance in States, while Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha are lagging on this front.
- Karnataka secured top position among all States in the category of providing adequate and effective social protection for its citizens. West Bengal, and Kerala secured second and third positions respectively in this category.
- It has been also noted that states that do well in health also do well in education and well-being of women as well.

THE RESULTS

TOP RANKING AMONG BIG STATES		LOW RANKING AMONG BIG STATES	
State	Rank	State	Rank
Kerala	1	Bihar	17
Tamil Nadu	2	Jharkhand	16
Karnataka	3	Odisha	15
Maharashtra	4	Assam	14
Gujarat	5	Madhya Pradesh	13

TOP RANKING AMONG SMALL STATES					
State	Mizoram	Himachal Pradesh	Delhi	Sikkim	Goa
Rank	1	2	3	4	5

9.3. ETHICS COMMITTEE IN LOK SABHA

Why in News?

- Lok Sabha Speaker has referred the issue of alleged unethical conduct of some MPs to the Ethics Committee of the House.

Ethics Committee:

- It was constituted in Rajya Sabha in 1997 and in Lok Sabha in 2000.
- It enforces the code of conduct of members of Parliament.

- It examines the cases of misconduct and recommends appropriate action. Thus, it is engaged in maintaining discipline and decorum in Parliament.
- Chairman of this committee is appointed by speaker and chairman of respective houses.

9.4. KAYAKALP AWARD SCHEME

Why in News?

- Recently, health ministry has felicitated the Kayakalp awardees for their work in maintaining high standards of sanitation and hygiene in public health facilities.
- The scheme **aspires to inculcate the culture of cleanliness to gain trust and confidence of community in public health facilities.**

Objective

- To promote cleanliness, hygiene and infection control practices in public health care facilities,
- To incentivize and recognize such public healthcare facilities that show exemplary performance in adhering to standard protocols of cleanliness and infection control,
- To inculcate a culture of ongoing assessment and peer review of performance related to hygiene, cleanliness and sanitation, to create and share sustainable practices related to improved cleanliness in public health facilities linked to positive health outcomes.

9.5. CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT ADVERTISEMENTS RULES

- Earlier, the Supreme Court had restrained the government from publishing the photographs of political leaders, ministers or prominent persons in government advertisements except those of the **President, PM and the CJI.**
- Recently, Supreme Court has modified its earlier order and allowed publication of **pictures of Union Ministers, Chief Ministers, Governors and State Ministers** in government advertisements.
- It was argued that if only Prime Minister's photograph is allowed in government advertisements then it would promote "personality cult" which has been described as "an anti-thesis of democracy".

9.6. WARNINGS ON TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Why in News?

- A parliamentary committee has submitted its report regarding the guidelines on displaying warning on tobacco products.

Background

- As per present provisions, warning should be displayed **on 40 per cent of the packet and on only one side.**
- Presently, India ranked 136 among 198 countries in terms of prominence of pictorial health warnings on tobacco packaging.
- As per the WHO report, almost **around 6 million people die from tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke.**
- Earlier, health ministry has recommended that pictorial warnings on cigarette packs should be increased to 85 per cent.
- However, this was opposed by the tobacco industry and put on hold after the parliamentary panel was asked to analyse the impact on the industry.

Recommendations

- Pictorial warnings to be restricted to **only 50 percent on both the sides** of cigarette packets.
- In the case of beedis, chewing tobacco and other tobacco products, the **warning should be restricted to 50 per cent of the display area and on only one side of the packet.**

- The committee noted a **lack of coordination among various government agencies** in achieving the objectives of tobacco control.

Way Forward

- Encourage use of alternative products such as nicotine gums, water pipes etc.
- Focus on changing the behavioral approach which will have a longer term impact.
- Mobilize film personalities, sportspersons to create awareness about ill effects of tobacco.
- Introduce a special surcharge on sales of tobacco products and use this money towards the treatment of cancer patients.

9.7. CHANGES IN ATAL PENSION YOJNA (APY)

- The Government has decided to give **an option to the spouse of the APY subscriber to continue contributing to APY account of the subscriber, for the remaining vesting period**, till the original subscriber would have attained the age of 60 years.
- The spouse of the subscriber shall be entitled to receive the same pension amount as that of the subscriber until the death of the spouse.
- **Present Provision:** After the premature death (death before 60 years of age) of the APY subscriber, lump-sum amount is given to spouse of the subscriber.

(For detailed information on Atal Pension Yojna, refer March 2015 current affairs.)

9.8. INFRASTRUCTURE & URBAN DEVELOPMENT: WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM REPORT

Why in news?

- World Economic Forum has published a report on **“Infrastructure & Urban Development: Building Foundations for Transparency”** with focus on India.

Key Findings of the report

- The main focus of the report is on the real estate and infrastructure sectors.
- **More than two-thirds of the respondents perceive that** the Indian IU (infrastructure and urban development) industries are more affected by corruption compared to other industries.
- On an average, Indian firms **pay 50 per cent of total project cost**, as bribes to speed up clearances for real estate and infrastructure ventures.
- **Ambiguous norms for change in land use** that are exploited by influential developers.
- **Improper land records and the need for multiple clearances** are the top reasons for project developers are paying bribes.
- **Complex and opaque process for getting permits** is the main cause of delays for project clearance.

Solutions proposed:

- **Technology:** It can be a main enabler for more transparency in two ways:
 - to make transactions visible to the public, allowing for closer monitoring by citizens social auditing)
 - To reduce human interaction in transactions, this can limit opportunities for bribery.
- **Empowering citizens for change:** It is crucial because citizens carry the cost of corruption as taxpayers and consumers.
- **From local to global:** The outcomes of the project can be used by global and local businesses, government, and society in a wider sense, and could be scaled up and transferred to other regions.
- Developing feasible solutions and collecting **local knowledge** will further enhance our understanding of anti-corruption and transparency.

9.9. BANK BOARD BUREAU

[Please refer August 2015 issue for information about Indradhanush plan]

- The bureau was announced last August as part of the seven-point Indradhanush plan to revamp public sector banks.
- The bureau will have three ex-officio members and three expert members, in addition to the Chairman.
- Former Comptroller and Auditor-General of India Vinod Rai will be its first Chairman

Function and impacts

- To recommend appointments to leadership positions and boards in public sector banks
- To advise on ways for raising funds and mergers and acquisitions to the lenders.
- It will play a critical role in reforming the troubled public sector banks by improving governance.
- With professionalization of appointment in leadership position, the BBB is first step towards Bank Investment Company as recommended by P J Nayak committee.

9.10. CAPITAL INFUSION IN BANKS

Why in news?

- RBI unlocks Rs.40, 000 crore additional capital whereas Government will infuse a capital of Rs.25,000 crore this financial year into state-owned banks.

Revised Norms which unlocks 40000 crore for banks

- The RBI has made some amendments to the **treatment of certain balance sheet items** for the purposes of **determining banks regulatory capital**.
- The revisions introduced include recognition of revaluation reserves arising from change in the carrying amount of a bank's property consequent upon its revaluation as common equity tier—I capital instead of the earlier tier 2 capital.
- Banks can recognise foreign currency reserves arising due to translation of financial statements of foreign operations to the reporting currency as common equity tier-I (CET1) capital.

Effect of norm revision

- It aligned the definition of regulatory capital with the internationally adopted Basel III capital standards.
- The move will unlock Rs 35,000 crore capital for public sector banks and Rs 5,000 crore for private sector banks.

Reason of such steps

- Huge burden of non-performing assets/bad loans over state owned banks
- Non-performing assets of public sector banks are estimated at almost Rs. 4 lakh crore

BANKING REFORMS		MEASURE IMPACT	
A bid to cross the bad debt mountain		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formation of monetary policy committee • To increase transparency and accountability of framing monetary policy • Rs 25,000 crore capital infusion in public sector banks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount seems inadequate given public banks have seen surge in bad loans. Will face challenge in raising capital. • Bank Board Bureau to be operational, roadmap for consolidation for public sector banks • Significant move to reform public sector banks. When BBB becomes operational,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listing of general insurance companies • To bring in transparency, accountability and forward looking approach through IPO 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • government will not be involved in the top management and board level appointment. Consolidation will lead to banks with bigger balancesheet which is required to finance the large infrastructure. • Paring stake in IDBI Bank below 50% • Cutting down stake in IDBI Bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • below 50% will mean the bank is at par with private banks which could increase its efficiency • 100% FDI in asset reconstruction companies through automatic route • More players will come in. This is required to absorb the surge in badloans



9.11. EMPLOYEES PROVIDENT FUND (EPF) TAX AND ROLLEBACK

- Over five crore subscribers have invested roughly Rs 8.75 lakh crore in the Provident Fund.
- Government in the Union Budget proposed to tax 60% of an individual's provident fund corpus at the time of withdrawal on retirement.
- This is applicable for provident fund contributions made post April 1, 2016 unless it is invested in annuities.
- This will encourage more private sector employees to go for pension security after retirement instead of withdrawing the entire money from the Provident Fund
- This could encourage individual investors shifting to tax-free bonds or debt mutual funds, which currently offer higher returns.
- The proposal was **rolled back** after strong protest from salaried class and opposition in parliament.

9.12. POST-HARVEST LOSSES OF FARM PRODUCE

Why in News

- The Centre is considering a fresh study on the percentage of post-harvest losses of farm products following contradictory findings.
- Government has announced 100% FDI in marketing of food products in Budget. This move has been criticized by Organisations of small retailers, street vendors and farmers.

Contradictory Findings

- A report of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)—Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology (CIPHET)-in Ludhiana showed that the cumulative percentage of post-harvest losses of cereals was low in the range of 4.65–5.99 per cent while that of pulses was between 6.36–8.41 per cent and oil seeds 3.08–9.96 per cent.
- However, an earlier paper put out by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion had quoted data from agriculture ministry to say that 25-30 per cent of fruits and vegetables and 5-7 per cent of food grains in India are wasted.

9.13. REDUCTION OF BT COTTON ROYALTY FEES BY 74%

Why in News

- Government has cut prices of genetically modified cotton seeds and slashed royalty fees by 74%,

Reason for the move

- The Agriculture Ministry in December last year issued an order to control cotton seed prices including trait or royalty value and a committee was set up to recommend the seed price.
- The government has defended the slashing of trait fees and the proposal to revoke the patent for Bollgard-II citing the accelerated resistance developed by the Pink Bollworm to genetically modified seed
- Move will benefit nearly 8 million cotton farmers in India due to lower input cost of seeds.
- Move will benefit the domestic seed companies and check the monopolistic pricing of the Monsanto which has 90 percent share in Bt cotton seeds.

Concerns

- It raises concerns about the country's intellectual property rights regime.
- Some sections of industry have termed it as arbitrary exercise of state power for not offering a methodology on how the government arrived at the trait fees.
- May impede R&D - Companies may have to reconsider their investments in seed-based R&D in the country due to the current uncertain environment

Way forward

- The dominance of any private entity like Monsanto should not be allowed to grow and perpetuate.

9.14. PROJECT BASED RATING

Why in News

- FY17 Budget proposed to develop a new credit rating system for projects.
- **Reason for the move** - Due to rising NPAs and declining credit off take in infrastructure sector

Salient Points of the New Rating System

- Rating would be assigned to infrastructure projects rather than the company executing the project
- The rating would be based on various credit enhancement structures rather than just relying on the standard perception of risk that resulted in mispriced loans.
- Rating system will be developed after discussion with the credit rating agencies to incorporate relevant factors and risks

Benefits of the move

- This will make it easier for infrastructure projects to raise funds for various stages of work.
- Will lead to correct assessment of risk for each stage of project - In an infrastructure project, the initial phase (more risky) can be funded by a certain category of investors, other mode of funding (including from banks) can come at later stage of the project which are less risky.

9.15. REFORMS IN FDI GUIDELINES

To facilitate ease of doing business for foreign investors and their domestic recipients, the Union Budget 2016-17 has proposed

- liberalisation of foreign direct investment (FDI) norms in a host of sectors and
- provision of Centre-State Investment Agreement.

What has been done and benefits

Sectors which have been included - insurance, pension, Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARC), stock exchanges, marketing of food products, listed Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSE) except banks and areas governed by financial sector regulators, falling beyond the 18 specified NBFC activities.

A. Insurance Sector

- The government had increased the composite cap (including FDI and foreign institutional investment) in the insurance sector (and automatically in the pension sector as well) to 49 per cent from the 26 per cent
- It will be through the government approval (through Foreign Investment Promotion Board or FIPB) route.

B. Banks and Financial Institutions:

- The FY'17 Budget has proposed 100 per cent FDI in ARCs through automatic route.
- Foreign portfolio investors will be allowed up to 100 per cent of each tranche in securities receipts issued by ARCs subject to sectoral caps.

Benefits - To help banks and financial institutions (FI) address the problem of huge bad loans.

C. Marketing in Food Products:

100 per cent FDI through FIPB route in marketing of food products produced and manufactured in India

Benefits - FDI in food processing

- maximum returns for farmers for their produce
- huge employment generation give impetus to food processing industry and
- Will reduce the losses and wastage of food

- create vast employment opportunities.
- Enhance food security of the nation

D. Indian Stock Exchanges - Hike in the investment limit for foreign entities in Indian stock exchanges from five per cent to 15 per cent on par with domestic institutions.

Benefits - This move is aimed at

- enhancing global competitiveness of Indian stock exchanges and
- accelerating adoption of best-in-class technology and global market practices

E. CPSE - The existing 24 per cent limit for investment by foreign portfolio investors (FPI) in CPSEs other than banks, listed in stock exchanges, will be increased to 49 per cent.

Centre State Investment Agreement – Move to Boost FDI in India

- CSIA, introduced in 2016-17 Budget, is a pact between centre and state which will allow effective implementation of Bilateral Investment Treaty which Centre signs with foreign countries

Implication of the Move

- States opting to ink these pacts with the Centre will be seen as more attractive destinations by foreign investors
- This will promote competitive and cooperative federalism

9.16. FALLING OIL PRICES AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIAN ECONOMY

Reasons

- **Demand side factors:** Eurozone's economic stagnation, Japan's slipping into recession and China's slowdown.
- **Supply side factors:** The U.S. shale boom, revival of Libya's oil production, and continuous increase in production in Iraq, OPEC decision of not cutting the production.

Positive Impacts

- Improving **trade balance** and **Current Account Deficit** of India as it **imports oil for meeting four-fifths** of its needs
- Allowed for **deregulation of diesel prices** resulting into **easing of the subsidy burden**.
- Funds saved above can be diverted to **infrastructure** creation, **social welfare programs**.
- Diesel prices have a direct bearing on prices of essential commodities as it is the preferred fuel for the transport sector. So **inflation** will **reduce** making exports more competitive.
- Companies that use crude or crude derivatives as inputs, such as manufacturers of **plastic products, synthetic textiles, tyres and paints**, will see profit margins expanding.

Negative Impacts

- Reduction in remittances from west Asian countries as their economy is slowing down.
- Increase in pollution as reduction in oil prices increased the demand of oil domestically and globally.

Conclusion

Falling oil prices present a unique opportunity for India to realign its various welfare approach to increase efficiency by way of better targeting and efficient functioning.

9.17. REFORMS IN INDIAN AGRICULTURE

Why in News

- Famous agriculturalist Ashok Gulati has said that Indian agriculture has the potential to grow with 5% per annum against present range of 3.6-4% per annum.
- Farmer suicide rate has increased in last 2 years, 2000 suicides in Telangana alone.

Reasons of poor performance of agriculture and rising farmer suicides

- **Falling farm income** - Crop has failed in multiple regions in last 2 years due to bad monsoon and other regions have very low productivity
- Absence of **credit** for small marginal and tenant farmers and rising expenditures on health and social ceremonies have put farmers on heavy burden of debt.
- **Poor price discovery** – Lack of commodities futures, fall in price of commodities and lack of government support has led to high volatility in prices, hurting the farmers
- **Rising cost of agriculture** due to high prices of seed and rising consumption of fertilizer and pesticides

Reforms which should be taken

- **Irrigation** - Irrigation is the best insurance against crop failure.
- **Encourage crop diversification**. This will act as natural insurance against failure on one crop
- **Reform in APMC Act** – This will remove corruption and middle men and ensure better prices for farmer's produce
- **Land reforms** to increase average land farm size to boost mechanization.
- Efficient delivery of crop insurance against bad weather, disaster and post-harvest losses.
- **Reform in agricultural land lease** – This will allow tenant farmers to avail insurance and credit.
- **Provide alternative sources** of livelihood to needy farm households.
- Ensuring availability of good **quality of seed** at reasonable price

Way Forward

- Government has launched various programmes like Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayi Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, Paramparagat Krishi Yojana, BGREI, RKVY, Soil Health Card Scheme, DD Kisan etc which needs to be implemented thoroughly for the intended benefits.

9.18. BACTERIUM SPECIES CAPABLE FOR BREAKING DOWN PLASTIC IDENTIFIED

- A team of Japanese researchers has identified Bacterium specie, **Ideonella sakaiensis**, capable of breaking down plastic — polyethylene terephthalate (PET).
- The bacterium uses two enzymes in sequence to break down the highly biodegradation-resistant polymer PET.
- It can almost completely break down a thin film of PET in six weeks at a temperature of 30 C.
- The details of the process in terms of complexity, length, economic viability and environmental impacts are still a matter of study.

THE BREAKDOWN

The bacterium uses two enzymes to break down a biodegradable and biodegradation-resistant PET

- Japanese researchers looked for **microorganisms** that relied on PET film as a primary source of carbon for growth
- They first **identified a microbial consortium** with a mixture of bacteria species that degraded the film surface at 30 °C
- The researchers **isolated a unique bacterium** — Ideonella sakaiensis 201-F6 — that **can almost completely degrade** a PET film in six weeks at the same temperature



HOW IT WORKS

- First, the bacterium adheres to PET and **produces a substance through hydrolysis**
- The second enzyme works with water and acts on this substance to **produce two monomers** — ethylene glycol and terephthalic acid — used to make PET through polymerisation

9.19. KAKRAPAR NUCLEAR PLANT SHUTDOWN AFTER COOLENT LEAKAGE

- The Kakrapar nuclear plant located in Gujarat was shut down after leakage of heavy water, which is used as coolant.
- The plant consists of two units of pressurised heavy water reactors of 220 MW each.
- The positive thing was that all safety systems kicked in soon after the leak was detected, the reactor shut down automatically and there was no radiological consequence.

Heavy water (Deuterium Oxide, D₂O) is used as moderator and coolant in pressurized heavy water reactors, which is part of first stage of Indian nuclear energy program.

Measurement Of The Leakage

- The Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) classified it as a **Level-1** mishap on the International Nuclear and Radiological Event Scale (INES). This is the lowest in the seven-level classification scheme
 - ✓ Level 1-3 are termed as 'incidents'
 - ✓ Level 4-7 are termed as 'accidents'
- Level 1 is treated as an anomaly in the plant. By comparison the Nuclear accident in Fukushima, Japan in 2011 was Level-7 category.
- INES is developed by International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA).

ABOUT AERB

- Atomic Energy Regulatory Board is a statutory body created by the President under s.27 of Atomic Energy Act, 1962 to carry out the regulatory and safety functions under the Act.
- It derives its regulatory powers from the rules and notifications promulgated under the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 and the Environmental (Protection) Act, 1986.

9.20. WORLD WATER DAY

Background

- World water day is observed globally on **22nd March** to mark the importance of water to human civilization and nature.
- It is part of Decade for Water (2005-2015) activity by the United Nations.
- The **theme for 2016 is 'Water and Jobs'**

Some Facts

- Decreasing availability of fresh water in India; falling from 3000 cubic metres to 1000 in last 50 years. World average is 6000 cubic metres.
- Water levels at 91 major reservoirs nationwide are the lowest in a decade—no more than 29%.
- As per a study India uses 37% more fresh water than China and half of its groundwater resources are contaminated.

Way forward

- **Suitable pricing mechanisms** need to be developed e.g. Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices has rightly mooted ceilings on the use of water and electricity per hectare. Problem is lack of political will as this is a politically sensitive issue.
- Need for a **National Water Framework Law**; idea was mooted few years ago but was seen by the States as infringement of constitutional provisions that mention water in the state list.
- MNREGA to be used for watershed management.
- River basin development approach.

UPSC MAINS 2011

- Write a short note on impact of climate change on water resources in India.

UPSC MAINS 2005

- Elucidate the factors contributing to the growing need for water harvesting in India, both rural and urban.

9.21. MICROPLASTICS/MICROBEADS

Why in News?

- A petition has been filed in National Green Tribunal (NGT) demanding ban on Microplastics.
- The NGT has issued notice to Ministry of Environment and Forest and Ministry for Water Resources and sought their reply.

What are they?

- Microplastics or Microbeads are plastic pieces or fibre which is very small, generally measuring less than 1mm.
- They have a variety of use, most notably being personal care products like toothpaste, body creams, clothing and industrial use.
- They have an ability to spread easily and provide silky texture and colours to the product. Thus adding visual appeal of the cosmetic products.

Issues With Microplastics

- They are non-biodegradable and flow through sewers to seas and oceans and **add to the huge chunk of “plastic soup” in the environment.**
- **They increase water pollution** and have a potential to disrupt the aquatic ecosystem.
- Once they enter water bodies **they accumulate as act as carriers for other pollutants.** They carry carcinogenic chemical compounds in the food chain.
- Due to their **small size they pass through the waste water treatment** filtration system as well.
- Their **unregulated production** and use aggravates the problem.
- There is an **international campaign demanding ban** on Microplastic.

9.22. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT – UNIFORM CIVIL CODE

Why in News?

- On 16th Oct 2015 Supreme Court decided to register a PIL titled “Muslim women’s quest for equality” on issue of gender discrimination which women face under Muslim personal law.
- Supreme Court’s earlier admitted a petition filed in **Saira Banu case** to declare the practice of triple talaq, nikah halala (bar against remarriage with divorced husband without an intervening marriage with another man) and polygamy under Muslim personal laws as illegal, unconstitutional, and violative of the rights to equality, dignity, life and freedom of religion under the Constitution.

What is Uniform Civil Code

- A Uniform Civil Code essentially means a common set of laws governing personal matters for all citizens of the country, irrespective of religion.
- Currently, different laws regulate these aspects for adherents of different religions.

Benefits of Uniform Civil Code

- Equality before law (Art 14) - All the laws related to marriage, inheritance, family, land etc. would be equal for all Indians.

- It will help in improving the condition of women in patriarchal society of India and will prevent them from subjugation and mistreatment met under old religious rules
- It will help in the reform of society
- It will check the human rights and fundamental rights violations by informal bodies like Khap Panchayat and Madarsas by plugging the loopholes in personal laws.
- It will also help in reducing vote bank politics.
- It will help in integration of India - A lot of the animosity is caused by preferential treatment by the law of certain religious communities.

Constitutional Articles which support Uniform Civil Code

- **Article 44** under Directive Principles of State Policy - The State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.
- **Clause (2) of Article 25** under Fundamental Rights - empowers the State to frame any law to regulate or restrict "secular activity which may be associated with religious practice"
- **Article 14** under FR - The inconsistency in personal laws has been challenged on the touchstone of Article 14, which ensures the right to equality. Litigants have contended that their right to equality is endangered by personal laws that put them at a disadvantage.

9.23. INDIGENOUS ROTAVIRUS VACCINE

Why in News?

The Health Ministry recently launched India's first indigenous rotavirus vaccine (Rotavac) as part of the **Universal Immunisation Programme**.

What is it?

- Rotavac is an oral vaccine against diarrhoea that kills nearly 80000 children and hospitalizes nearly ten lakh children under the age of five, every year.
- Rotavac has been introduced in India's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) along with Inactivated Polio Vaccine(IPV); Measles, Rubella (MR) and Adult Japanese Encephalitis(JE).
- It is being introduced in four states of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Himachal and Haryana initially and will be introduced in the rest of the country in a phased out manner.

Background

- Indigenously developed Rotavirus vaccine was launched in 2015, it has now been introduced into the UIP.
- Rota is a highly contagious virus infecting majority of children before their first year of age.
- It is a wheel shaped pathogen (hence the name) and spreads through food and drink contaminated with infected faeces.
- Symptoms include fever, nausea, vomiting and watery diarrhoea.
- Rotavac's development took 25 years. The vaccine has been developed jointly by Department of Biotechnology and Bharat Biotech.

Significance

- Will reduce infant mortality.
- Will reduce hospitalization which in turn will reduce the economic burden on the family and the country.
- Will also reduce malnutrition, delayed mental and physical development among children.

Challenges

- Like most oral vaccines efficacy only 50-60 % efficacy generally lower in India than developed countries.
- The reason could be linked to the high rate of enteric diseases of children in India.
- Doubts have been expressed on the vaccine having a fatal side effect called intussusceptions or folding of intestines. But these doubts have been invalidated.

9.24. E-MAIL INVENTOR

Ray Tomlinson, the inventor of email and the man who picked **the@** symbol for addresses, has died.

- **Raymond Samue Tomlinson** implemented the first email program on **the ARPANET system**, the precursor to the Internet, in 1971.
- He used **the @ sign to** separate the user name from the name of their machine, a scheme which has been used in email addresses ever since.

9.25. UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Surya Deva has been appointed by the Geneva-based **UNHRC** as the **Asia-Pacific representative** of the UN Working Group on the issue of **human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises**.

About UNHRC

- The **United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC)** is a United Nations System inter-governmental body whose 47 member states are responsible for promoting and protecting human rights around the world.
- **Choi Kyong-lim** is President of the Human Rights Council.

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