CURRENT AFFAIRS
OCTOBER 2016
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1. POLITY

1.1. KRISHNA WATER DISPUTES TRIBUNAL II VERDICT

Why in news?
- The Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal II headed by Justice Brijesh Kumar has turned down the demands of AP and Telangana regarding their demand for redistribution of the Krishna river water among the four riparian states, including Karnataka and Maharashtra.

Background
- Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal (KWDT I) was set up by the Central Government in 1969 under the Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 to resolve the disputes between the states of Karnataka, Maharashtra and then undivided Andhra Pradesh over sharing of Krishna river water.
- The KWDT I (Bachawat commission) in its final award in 1973, divided the share of water between the three states as Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra.
- In April 2004, KWDT II, was constituted by the Government of India following requests by all three states mainly over the issue of Alamatti dam height issue.
- The KWDT II gave its draft verdict on 31 December 2010. The KWDT II set the next review of water allocations after the year 2050.

What is the current case?
- Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in their current petition have sought fresh allocation of Krishna River water among all four riparian states.
- According to them, Section 89 in the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 calls for redistribution of Krishna water among all the four riparian States not just between both of them.

The judgment
- The tribunal observed that the section 89 of AP reorganisation act 2014 was not applicable to Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- Allocations made on the basis of water utilisations outside the Krishna basin were valid on historic grounds.
- AP and Telangana have to share water that was allocated to the undivided AP, nothing more or nothing less.
- A claim made by Telangana that AP was bifurcated because of inequitable allocation of the Krishna river water was thrashed by the tribunal.
- The tribunal said that AP was divided not because of unequal distribution of water, but to fulfill the political aspirations of the people of TG.

Way forward
- One solution can be to bring water under concurrent list and according to Mihir shah report central water authority can be constituted to manage rivers.
- Centre can play the role of impartial arbitrator. This role cannot be done by courts as this is a political question with political consequences.
- A Parliamentary Standing Committee on Water Resources too has stated the need for bringing the subject in the Concurrent List.
- It also urged the Centre to initiate “earnest” efforts to build a national consensus for bringing water in the Concurrent List of Constitution so that a comprehensive plan can be prepared for water conservation.

1.2. RIGHT TO CHOOSE

Why in news?
- Recently, Patna High Court in the Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies v State of Bihar (2016) holds the imposition of “prohibition” in Bihar as unconstitutional.
Background

- The Bihar government issued a notification under the Bihar Excise Act, 1915 banning the manufacture, sale, and distribution, as well as the possession and consumption of alcohol.
- It also reversed the burden of proof, requiring the accused to prove her innocence to avoid imprisonment.
- Supreme Court, however, has stayed the operation of the Patna High Court judgment, allowing the continuation of a draconian prohibition law in Bihar.

Significance of Patna High Court judgement

- For the first time, a constitutional court has addressed the question of imposition of prohibition in terms of its impact on the right to life and liberty of a citizen.
- This implies that the debate was not just about the right to business and trade of manufacturers and dealers, but individual liberty as well.

Concerns related to approach of SC vis-à-vis Right to Choose

- The Supreme Court’s jurisprudence on the scope of Right to life under Article 21 has largely been about incorporating socioeconomic rights contained in Part IV. But it has not focused on the individual’s right to determine what the “good life” itself is.
- There have been stray mentions of the right to choose by Supreme Court without fully articulating what they mean by it.
  ✓ For instance, The Supreme Court overturned Naz Foundation in Suresh Kumar Koushal v Naz Foundation (2014), refusing to even engage with the argument that LGBTQ persons may have rights.
  ✓ This after Delhi High Court’s judgement decriminalised voluntary homosexual acts on the premise (among other things) that it was a violation of the right to privacy of the individual, which is part of the right to life of a person. The right to privacy here is framed specifically in terms of choice of sexual partners.

Way forward

- In its role as the ultimate arbiter of the rule of law and fundamental rights, it is time the Supreme Court re-examines its whole approach to Article 21.
- For instance, it can adopt a more straightforward approach to this issue, by reading a right to choose as something that is essential to leading a meaningful life.

1.3. ELECTIONS IN INDIA

1.3.1 RELIGION AND ELECTIONS

Why in news?

The seven-judge Constitution Bench of Supreme Court is re-considering its 1995 verdict and has questioned whether the practice of using the mass religious appeal by leaders to canvas votes for candidates amounts to a corrupt electoral practice.

Background

- SC is looking into the various means by which misuse of religion or faith of the masses for electoral gains can be categorised as a corrupt practice.
• It was also looking into electoral practices of political parties and candidates to rope in clerics or priests to flex their religious sway over particular religious community to swing votes.
• SC in its 1995 verdict held that canvassing votes in name of ‘Hindutva/Hinduism’ wasn’t a corrupt electoral practice under Sec 123 of RoPA, as Hinduism was not a religion but a way of life in India.
• S. 123(3) of the RPA regards ‘any appeal by a candidate or his agent to vote or refrain from voting for any person on the ground of his religion, race, caste, community or language’ as an electoral offence.

Why it should over-rule the 1995 judgment:
• Seeking votes in the name of religion could affect the secular concept of elections in our democracy, and hence such a thing could not be allowed.
• Fundamentalism of any colour or kind must be curbed with a heavy hand to preserve and promote the secular creed of the nation.
• The bench observed that the “right to contest is a statutory right. Secularism is a basic feature.” So court is obliged to give a preference to it.
• Seeking votes in name of religion may exclude some sections cause a deep feeling of insecurity among minorities, free thinkers, atheists etc.,
• According to Justice S.A. Bobde, a judge on the Bench, the voters are pushed to either identify or differentiate between their religious identity and the faith of the candidate in question
• Against Unity and Diversity: the word ‘Hindutva’ is used and understood as a synonym of ‘Indianisation’, i.e., development of uniform culture by obliterating the differences between all the cultures coexisting in the country

Why it should maintain status quo
• Judicial overreach: it was for parliament to revisit provision 123 (3).
  ✓ Interpretation contrary to the earlier ruling that Hinduism is a way of life would have the unintended consequence of the court sanitisng the whole poll process, which should be left to the parliament.
  ✓ Poll process is heavily interlinked with caste and religious issues. So this is a political question and parliament itself has to solve this.
• Close to Reality: Democratic processes involving caste and religion are reality. Imposing this as corruption, may not be in touch with reality. This may lead to wide scale flouting. The change should be incremental and it should come from the society itself.
• Many inconsistencies which need parliament legislation: For instance, Section 123 is silent about whether a Jain or an atheist can seek votes in name of any religion.

Way forward
• India is a secular country with lot of regional variations even among Hindu religion. ‘Hindutva’ should be understood in spirit rather than mis-using it for own political benefits.
• We see our neighbours and middle-east torn by religious conflicts. To avoid that the fundamental values of tolerance and peace etc., should be explicitly described as core value components of ‘Hindutva’ by SC to prevent further misuse.

1.3.2. E-POSTAL BALLOT SYSTEM FOR ARMED FORCES
• The service personnel especially the armed force members serving in the border and remote areas are not able to cast their votes in the elections in their native places. The present system of Postal ballot and proxy voting is inefficient causing delays.
• Earlier the SC had also asked the government and Election Commission to devise an effective mechanism to resolve this issue in Neela Gokhale vs. Union of India (2013)
• In light of this, the EC has come up with an e-Postal ballot system. Under this, a blank postal ballot paper would be transmitted to the service personnel electronically. They can cast their vote on it and post it to the Returning officer.
• This one-way electronic transmission will help in considerably cutting short the delay.
• Two-way electronic transmission has not been recommended by the Election Commission for security and secrecy reasons.
What is a referendum?

- Referendums are instruments of direct democracy where citizens get to directly vote on specific and important issues rather than for representatives who will make a choice on their behalf on those issues.
- They are perceived to be a better democratic instrument especially in modern states where people have a better say in the decision making.

1.4. RELEVANCE AND SUITABILITY OF ‘REFERENDUM’

Why in news?

- The Brexit referendum, on whether Britain should stay in the European Union, concluded on June 23 with 52 per cent (of 72.2 per cent of the electorate that turned out) voting to “Leave”.
- Recently, the October 2 referendum called by the Colombian government to ratify the accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) resulted in a “No” vote favoured by 50.3 per cent of the less than 38 per cent of the electorate that turned out.
- Last year, in a referendum on Scottish’s stay in UK, Scotland voted to remain with Britain in a close verdict.

Is it a right democratic tool?

In light of growing acceptance of referendums across the world, especially in western European countries, the demand to have referendums in India has also initiated.

Argument for

- It is a form of true democracy as it gives the power to the people directly.
- Referendums tend to add legitimacy to difficult legislative choices as it is more risky to take unpopular decisions without that stamp of legitimacy.
- Increasing demands for referendums (32 in 18 countries of EU) shows the growing frustration of people on various issues. Earlier this used to take the form of protests, uprising and even violence. Now, the change can be brought peacefully.

Argument Against

- Tyranny of the majority: For example in a referendum on whether to build mosque minarets in Switzerland in 2009, the people voted against building those. This was mainly because the majority of people were convinced that it was an Islamic invasion even though there were just a total of 4 in the entire country.
- It reduces complex questions to simple ‘yes or no’ answers. Arguments without sufficient backing of evidences are enough to drive popular sentiments and demagoguery e.g. In Brexit, the popular opinion that migrants are responsible for their economic hardships made them vote. However, there wasn’t evidence to support this argument.
- Many times key legislations may go against the popular opinion but the wisdom of the elected legislators could make them happen e.g. against racial discrimination, abolishing death penalty etc

Way Forward

- Decisions that profoundly affect not only the present but also succeeding generations should not be taken in a rush, or through one-time referendums.
- A mechanism can be developed that calls for referendums on select Bills and Acts based on a large quantum of public signatures seeking to vote on them. This could go a long way in not just sensitising the public towards important laws but also for a means of getting popular approval for them. E.g. a question on whether public welfare legislation like Aadhar should be made mandatory to avail social services could be put in a referendum.

1.5. UNITED GROUP IN RAJYA SABHA

Why in news?

- Recently Vice-President of India formally recognised a group of 22 MPs belonging to parties with less than four MPs and certain independents as a consolidated block — the United Group in Rajya sabha.
Background

- This is only the third time in the history of Indian Parliament that this is happening.
- In 1983, the first such consolidated group was called United Associations of Members was recognised by the then Rajya Sabha Chairman.
- In 1990, the then chairman of Rajya Sabha recognised organised group of Parliamentarians and was renamed as the United Group.

Implications of the decision

- The united group will be the third largest group of MPs in the Rajya Sabha, after the Congress and the BJP.
- The group will find a place in the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) that decides time allotment.
- Time allotted to parties to speak on debates depends entirely on their strength in the House. Earlier due to their lean status numerically members of this bloc had just three minutes of speech time. Thus, the formation of the United Group would allow for enhanced deliberation and debates in the Rajya Sabha.

1.6. EK BHARAT SHRESHTHA BHARAT INITIATIVE

Why in news?

“Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat” was launched by Hon’ble Prime Minister recently.

About the Initiative

- It is an innovative measure that will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between the States through the knowledge of the culture, traditions and practices of different States & UTs, for strengthening the unity and integrity of India.
- All States and UTs will be covered under the programme.
- According to the scheme, two states will undertake a unique partnership for one year which would be marked by cultural and student exchanges. 6 MoUs between two States each were also signed on the occasion of launch, under this initiative.
- Students of a particular state would travel to another state to learn each other’s culture.
- District level pairings will also be done and it would be independent of the State level pairings.
- The activity will be very useful to link various States and Districts in annual programmes that will connect people through exchanges in areas of culture, tourism, language, education trade etc.
- Citizens will also be able to experience the cultural diversity of a much larger number of States/UTs while realising that India is one.

Significance

- The idea of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat will help in building a better nation through by enabling people to imbibe the innate chord of binding and brotherhood.
- It will help to induce a sense of responsibility and ownership for the nation as a whole through these close cross-cultural interactions.

Conclusion

Although it is still unclear about the specific provisions of the scheme, the idea sounds highly inspiring and futuristic. The government has formed a committee to work out the modalities of the scheme in consultation with the states.
1.7. BENAMI TRANSACTIONS (PROHIBITION) AMENDMENT ACT, 2016

Why in news?

- The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act will come into force on November 1, 2016.
- Following this, the existing Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act will be renamed as the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act (PBPT Act).

Background

- Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act 1988 had several loopholes such as lack of proper implementation machinery, absence of appellate mechanism, lack of provision with centre for vesting confiscated property etc.
- The current government had introduced Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Bill in July 2016 in parliament. This bill has been now passed in both the houses of parliament and will come into effect from 1 November 2016.

Features of the bill

- **Objective**: The main aim is to route the unaccounted money into the financial system and seize Benami properties and punish those who are involved in these properties.
- The Act defines benami transactions, prohibits them and further provides that violation of the PBPT Act is punishable with imprisonment up to 7 years and fine.
- It also prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamidar by the real owner.
- Properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the Government without payment of compensation.
- An appellate mechanism has been provided under the PBPT Act in the form of Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal.
- The Adjudicating Authority and the Appellate Tribunal have been notified on similar lines from Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).

Significance

- This law will have long term impacts on real estate industry in the country.
  - It will increase the practice of including the correct name in property transactions. This in turn would bring transparency in residential market.
  - The stringent law would also bring down the prices of real estate because such transactions are done by cash rich investors to park their unaccounted wealth in real estate.
- It will also boost the confidence of lenders esp banks and also private individuals.

1.8. SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACE

Why in news?

- A review meeting on implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 held recently.
- It was observed that there were various short comings in terms of manner and results of the implementation.

Steps proposed for better implementation

- The Ministry of WCD will set up an inter-ministerial committee headed by a senior official of the WCD Ministry.
- This committee will review the progress of disposal of complaints of sexual harassment, get a standardized training module prepared.
The committee will also make sure that the heads of Internal Complaints Committee of all ministries/departments are given training on how to handle the complaints.

The ministry will be establishing a secure electronic platform for any woman employee of the government to file a complaint under the Act directly to the Ministry of WCD.

This will enable a monitorable and transparent system of grievance redressal under the Act.

Monthly reporting to WCD ministry on the number of complaints received, disposed, pending and action taken etc.

It was also decided that the Act, the rights of a woman official and the responsibility of the ICC must be given adequate publicity through different methods including the websites of the ministries/ departments/ attached offices.

Way forward

It was often observed that harassment of women continues over a period of time and it is only after it becomes unbearable that a woman comes out to complain. This should be stopped.

Women should be encouraged to report the matters of sexual harassment as soon as possible. This can be achieved through better work culture, better awareness about issue and availability of redressal forums.

The Internal Complaints Committee should decide on the complaint in the shortest possible time.

It is often seen that aggressor is transferred and the matter get hushed. This culture should be curbed and fair investigation should take place.

There should be harsher punishments when the complaint is found to be true.

The e-platform is a welcome step for enhancing transparency and better mode of registering grievance in short time.

1.9. WESTERN ZONAL COUNCIL MEETING

Why in news?

The 22nd meeting of the Western Zonal Council was held in October, 2016 under the Chairmanship of Union Home Minister.

The Zonal Councils are mandated to discuss and make recommendations on economy and social planning, border disputes, inter-State transport and linguistic minorities related issues.

Significance

Zonal councils help to develop the habit of cooperative working among these States. Various aspects and agenda discussed in the meeting will enhance the comity between the states.

The zonal councils also facilitate to create healthy inter-State and Centre-State environment with a view to solving inter-State problems and fostering balanced socio economic development of the respective zones.

About Zonal Council

The idea of zonal councils emerged during the course of debate on the report of the States Re-organisation Commission 1956.

In the light of the vision of Pandit Nehru, five Zonal Councils were set up under the States Re-organisation Act, 1956. (Zonal councils are not constitutional bodies, they are statutory bodies)

- The Northern Zonal Council
- The Central Zonal Council
- The Eastern Zonal Council
- The Western Zonal Council
- The Southern Zonal Council

The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya and (vii) Nagaland (viii) Sikkim are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.
1.10. PARITY ISSUES RELATED TO ARMY

About the issue: There are two kinds of inequalities around army:

- Between combat and non-combat officers
- Between military and civilian officers

Combat vs Non-Combat officers

- The promotion of officers from combat support arms like engineers, logistics, signals etc are not at par with the promotions in combat services.
- In an unprecedented move, recently the Supreme Court ordered the army to pay financial compensation of Rs 20,000 to each of 141 officers from combat support arms, who continue being denied promotion despite a verdict from the apex court.
- The case relates to a discriminatory promotion policy instituted by the army in 2009, which the SC found biased in favour of officers from two arms — infantry and artillery — whose officers dominated decision-making during that period.

Way forward

- There is a need to avoid a situation where officers refuse to serve in logistics due to low promotions there.
- Further, a less meritorious officer should not get precedence over other only for the reason that he is from combat arm. This is against meritocracy.

Military vs Civilian Officers

- There is widespread disparity in the pay and allowances of officers. For example, the difference in the status and salary of an Army Brigadier and DIG of police has continuously reduced since third Central Pay Commission. Now, the Seventh CPC recommendation has placed a brigadier’s allowances below those of the DIG. This is despite the fact that only 5% of army officers become brigadiers and that too after 26 years of service, whereas more than 90% of IPS officers become DIGs after 14 years.
- There are similar issues with respect to disability pension, non-functional upgrade etc.
- A lowered pay status compared to civilian counterparts with much less period of service leads to operational problems for the armed forces working in a multi-cadre environment as the civil authorities refuse to listen to them. This affects the morale of the forces and needs to be rectified.

Suggestions

- Including the representatives of armed forces in Central Pay Commission or to constitute a separate Armed Forces Pay Commission
- An expert committee should be formed to inquire into the change in status and command and control issues of the armed forces, vis-a-vis the bureaucracy, and recommend course corrections in a time-bound manner. This is necessary to honour the military and give it what is rightfully theirs.
- In a latest move, the defence ministry has decided to have re-look over this matter.
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- Post processed videos are uploaded on student’s online platform within 24-48 hours of the live class.
- The uploaded Class videos can be viewed any number of times
2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

2.1. CHINA-PAK AXIS

Key Concern Areas

- UNSC and NSG Membership- China opposed India’s admission into the Permanent Membership of the UNSC and India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Whereas, it insisted Pakistan to be admitted to UNSC forgetting its reputation as a nuclear proliferator.
- Infrastructure investment- China has been investing in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which will connect Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province with the port of Gwadar in Pakistan.
- Terrorism- China’s has been shielding Pakistan’s notorious Jihadi terrorist outfit chief, Massod Azhar from being listed as a ‘Global Terrorist’ by the UN. It does not go along with China aspiring to be a Superpower and claiming to be a ‘responsible stakeholder’ in global security.
- Encouragement to Military Adventurism- China is not only a part of the overall Pakistan problem for India but now with the CPEC as the prized strategic objective of China, the stakes for China to encourage Pakistan’s military adventurism against India gets considerably raised.

Way forward for India

- Both India and China want a new international status that commensurate with their size, strength and potential.
- To restore a semblance of equality in the relationship it is necessary to build up economic and security capabilities and begin to close the power gap with China.
- Such cooperation between the two countries could allow them to rebalance global influences and develop a better negotiating position in the world.
- India’s foreign policy formulations and perspectives on China and Pakistan need no longer be considered as separate foreign policy planning domains but viewed as one hyphenated strategic entity.

2.2. INDIA-BHUTAN

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet approved a new agreement for a free trade regime between India and Bhutan.
- The previous Agreement on Trade, Commerce and Transit between India and Bhutan was signed on July 29, 2006 for a period of ten years.

About the new Agreement

- The new agreement provides for
  ✓ A free trade regime between two countries.
  ✓ Duty free transit of Bhutanese merchandise for trade with third countries.
  ✓ Bilateral trade between will continue to be transacted in Indian Rupees and Bhutanese Ngultrums.
- The new agreement removed requirement of having an annual consultation between India and Bhutan for the transit of goods of both countries along with the goods originating in third country.

2.3. INDIA-ASEAN

Why in News?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the 14th Asean-India Summit and 11th East Asia Summit in Vientiane, the capital of Laos.

History and Evolution of the India-ASEAN Relations after its Independence in 1947, India followed a policy of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and became a champion of decolonisation, including in Southeast Asia.
However, during the 1970s, India’s perceived tilt towards the Soviet Union led Southeast Asia to drift away from India as both followed different economic and political ideologies.

- In a major shift away from policies of the Cold War era, India adopted the “Look East Policy” (LEP) soon after economic liberalisation in 1991 to increase economic and commercial ties with East and Southeast Asian nations such as China. Over the years the policy has also concentrated on building closer ties on the strategic and security aspects in the region.
- Phases of LEP:
  - Phase I lasted between 1991 and 2002, when the primary thrust was toward renewed political and economic relations with ASEAN countries.
  - During Phase II (2003 to 2012), the scope of the LEP was broadened to include China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand.
  - The new phase of LEP would focus on extensive economic and security issues, including joint efforts to protect the Sea Lanes of Communications and launch coordinated counter-terrorism activities.
- One of the major consequences of India’s engagement with ASEAN has been the ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (AIFTA), which was seen as an essential step towards deeper economic integration.
  - Its initial framework was signed on 8 October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia and the final agreement was signed on 13 August 2009, coming into effect from 1 January 2010.
  - The FTA reduced tariff barriers to trade between India and the ASEAN countries, and included specific provisions for services trade and investment facilitation.
- India was accorded full ASEAN Dialogue Partner Status in 1995, followed by its membership in the ASEAN Regional Forum. The India-ASEAN Relations soon broadened its cooperation into political as well as security arenas. India also joined the East Asian Summit (EAS) in 2005.
- ASEAN has been a strategic partner of India since 2012. India and ASEAN have 30 dialogue mechanisms which meet regularly.
- India’s engagement with the ASEAN and wider Asia-Pacific region has acquired further momentum following the enunciation of the ‘Act-East Policy’ (AEP) at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit in Myanmar in November 2014.
- Under the AEP, India not only expected to bolster its economic engagements with the region; it yearned to emerge as a potential security balancer as well.
- Commerce, Culture and Connectivity are the three pillars of India’s robust engagement with ASEAN.
- Enhancing the connectivity in all its dimensions – physical, digital, economy, institutional and cultural- has been at the heart of India’s strategic partnership with ASEAN.

### Importance of ASEAN for India

- **Economically:** India is one of the strategic partners of ASEAN. With a total population of 1.8 billion and a combined GDP of $3.8 trillion, ASEAN and India together form an important economic space in the world.
- **Geopolitically**
  - India expects to benefit geopolitically as well from its rejuvenated affinity with ASEAN and other regional countries.
  - India has attempted to demonstrate its ability to play a dynamic role in the region. India sent a strong signal to China by mentioning the importance of maintaining freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.
- **Maritime Importance:** Freedom of navigation in the South China Sea is essential for India in order to ensure that its sea-bound trade continues uninterrupted.

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**East Asia Summit (EAS)**

- The East Asia Summit is the premier leaders-led forum in the Asia-Pacific. Since its inception in 2005, it has played a significant role in the strategic, geopolitical and economic evolution of East Asia.
- Apart from the 10 ASEAN Member states, East Asia Summit includes India, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, New Zealand, United States and Russia.
- India, being a founding member of the East Asia Summit, is committed to strengthening the East Asia Summit and making it more effective for dealing with contemporary challenges.
During the visit the following agreements were signed:

- **MoU in the field of Industrial Property Cooperation between Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and Intellectual Property Office of Singapore.**
- **MoU on Collaboration in the Field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training between the National Skill Development Corporation and ITE Education Services, Singapore.**
- **MoU on Collaboration in the Field of Technical and Vocational Education and Training between the Government of Assam and ITE Education Services, Singapore.**
- **The agreements were signed for “smart cities drive” and “skill India program” during the bilateral visit as Singapore has expertise in both the fields.**

## 2.4. INDIA-SINGAPORE

**Why in news?**

Prime Minister of the Republic of Singapore Mr. Lee Hsien Loong visited India recently.

**Significance of Singapore for India**

- India and Singapore has a wide ranging relationship that is as strategic as well as economic.
- Singapore has been developing close links with Indian states like West Bengal, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. Hence, economic partnership is increasing.

- ASEAN is important for extending cooperation in areas such as maritime security including freedom of navigation, drug trafficking and cybercrime.

- **Security Aspect:** There are diverse areas on which India and ASEAN are jointly working, e.g. non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, human and drug trafficking, cybercrimes and piracy in the Malacca Straits, etc.

- **Connectivity Aspect**
  - The envisaged highway (under construction) and rail connectivity to energy giants like, Nepal and Myanmar and further to Thailand, will improve people to people contact, thus enhancing the sphere of economic cooperation and interdependence.
  - The highly underdeveloped NE States of India, which lie at the gateway to a region offering unlimited economic opportunities, will witness an economic transformation.

- **Energy security**
  - ASEAN countries, particularly Myanmar, Vietnam and Malaysia can potentially contribute to India’s energy security.
  - Oil and natural gas deposits in the South China Sea region.

**Trade relation with ASEAN**

- Trade between India and ASEAN stood at US$ 65.04 billion in 2015-16 and comprises 10.12% of India’s total trade with the world.
- The ASEAN-India economic integration process has got a fillip with the creation of the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area in July 2015, following the entry into force of the ASEAN-India Trade in Services and Investment Agreements.
- Conclusion of a balanced Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement will further boost our trade and investment ties with the region.

**Important Issues Highlighted by PM during the EAS**

The two most significant issues highlighted by PM Modi during his address at EAS were: Recommending strongest action against those states that use terrorism as an instrument of state policy and outlining India’s principled stand on the South China Sea issue.

- PM Modi commented that most countries in the South Asian region were pursuing a peaceful path to economic prosperity “But, there is one country in India’s neighbourhood whose competitive advantage rests solely in producing and exporting terrorism.”
- For India’s principled stand on the South China Sea issue, he said that the lanes of communication passing through the sea were “main arteries of global merchandise trade”.
- India supports freedom of navigation and over flight, and unimpeded commerce, based on the principles of international law, as reflected notably in the UNCLOS.
Both countries are seeking to explore other areas such as tourism and skill development. Singapore has been backing a greater role for India in the Indo-Pacific region. The landscape in ASEAN is changing. In such a situation, Singapore’s voice is likely to become even more crucial and the India-Singapore strategic partnership is likely to further strengthen.

2.5. INDIA-RUSSIA

Why in news?
- The Russian President visited India for the 17th bilateral summit between India and Russia.
- PM Modi highlighted the “special and privileged strategic partnership” between India and Russia by quoting that, “An old friend is better than two new friends.”

Key Highlights of the Bilateral Summit
- **Cross Border Terrorism**- Condemned unequivocally and sealed a deal on ‘information security’ to counter terrorism, drug trafficking and other illegal cross-border activities.
- **Defence Sector**- Agreement to buy Russia’s most advanced S-400 ‘Triumf’ anti-missile defence system, to manufacture Kamov-226T utility helicopters and four improved Krivak or Talwar class stealth.
- **Regional Integration and Trade**- Emphasize on implementation of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- **Infrastructure and Technology**- Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) to invest in a sub-fund under the National Infrastructure Investment Fund (NIIF) of India.
- **Nuclear Power Project**- Modi and Putin both jointed declared the second unit of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (Units 5 and 6).
- **Russian Largest FDI in India**- Russian oil firm Rosneft and United Capital Partners signed an agreement to acquire Essar Energy Holdings Ltd’s refining and retail assets at $10.9 billion, making it Russia’s largest foreign direct investment in India.

2.6. BIMSTEC

Why in news?
- The Summit was held in Goa in October 2016. The next meeting will be held in Nepal for the Fourth BIMSTEC Summit in 2017.
- **Focus Areas** of Summit were Regional connectivity, terrorism, development of the region, Cooperation in various sectors, promoting people-to-people contacts and tourism.
- In this regard, BIMSTEC countries have issued Leaders Retreat Outcome Document.

Key Highlights of document
- **For countering terror**
  - Strongly condemned the recent terror attacks in the region and called for strong measures for the states that encourage, support and provide sanctuary to terrorists.
  - Called for early ratification of the BIMSTEC Convention on Cooperation in combating International terrorism, criminal matters, transnational organized crime and drug trafficking.
- **Cooperation for Environment** - Agreement on greater efforts towards the conservation of the mountain eco-systems, bio-diversity and agreed for implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.
- **Enhancing people to people contact** - Proposed for establishment of BIMSTEC Buddhist Circuit and BIMSTEC Heritage Sites, decided to expedite the establishment of the BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Commission and BIMSTEC Cultural Industries Observatory in Bhutan.

About BIMSTEC
- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional organization.
- It came into being on 6 June 1997 through the Bangkok Declaration.
- It comprises of seven Member States lying in the littoral and adjacent areas of the Bay of Bengal.
- **Five deriving from South Asia**, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and two from Southeast Asia, including Myanmar and Thailand.
• **Fisheries and Food Security** - Cooperation in sustainable development of fisheries in Bay of Bengal region.

• **Eliminating Poverty** - Reaffirmation to the commitment to effective implementation of the BIMSTEC Poverty Plan of Action.

• **For Trade** - Commitment to the early conclusion of BIMSTEC Free Trade Area negotiations was renewed along with directing the Trade Negotiating Committee (TNC) and Working Groups to expedite the finalization of its constituent agreements.

• **Exploring other areas of development** - Agreement to explore ways to deepen cooperation in areas such as aquacultures, hydrography, seabed mineral exploration, coastal shipping, eco-tourism and renewable ocean energy with the objective of promoting holistic and sustainable development of the region.

### Relevance of BIMSTEC

• Earlier also, Bay of Bengal had emerged as a vehicle for regional cooperation as **BBIN grouping - Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and India** after Pakistan’s reluctance to sign on to the South Asian connectivity agreements at the SAARC summit, 2014.

• Now, with the collapse of the SAARC summit in Islamabad, 2016 the Bay of Bengal has turned into a zone of regional cooperation.

• Further, with rich history of maritime commerce across the Bay of Bengal and being high-end tourist destination there exist enormous possibilities for regional economic cooperation among the members of the BIMSTEC and **SAARC (minus Pakistan)**.

### 2.7. BRICS

#### 2.7.1. EIGHTH BRICS SUMMIT

**Why in news?**

- The Eighth BRICS Summit, held at Goa under the theme "Building Responsive, Inclusive and Collective Solutions."
- The summit concluded with adaptation of Goa Declaration. The ninth BRICS Summit will be hosted by China in 2017.

**Key Highlights of Goa declaration**

**On world Security** - Strongly condemned terrorism in all its forms, committed to increase effectiveness of the UN counter terrorism framework. Also, called for need for adaptation of Comprehensive Convention on Terrorism (CCIT) in the UN General Assembly.

**On SDGs** - Welcomed adoption of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals.

**On UN Reforms** - Reiterated urgent need to reforms of the United Nations, including International UN Security Council to increase representation of developing countries.

**On New Development Bank** - BRICS members were satisfied with the approval of the first batch of loans by the New Development Bank (NDB), particularly in renewable energy projects in BRICS countries.

#### About BRICS

- BRICS is the acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- It was established in 2009. Originally it was known as BRIC before the inclusion of South Africa in 2011.
- The first formal summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia.
- They are distinguished by their large, fast-growing economies and significant influence on regional and global affairs.

#### #5GoalsfromGoa

For Positive direction and strong momentum of Intra- BRICS engagement

1. Institution building must remain a focus area
2. Transform quantum and quality of trade & investment linkages among BRICS
3. Focus on key priorities of our economic transformations
4. Secure our Societies from terror
5. Thriving people to people exchanges
• It is a framework for the provision of support through liquidity and precautionary instruments in response to actual or potential short-term balance of payments pressures.

## 2.7.2. BRICS RATING AGENCY

### Key Facts
- BRICS have agreed to set up an independent rating agency based on market-oriented principles in order to further strengthen the global governance architecture.
- BRICS institution-building is critical for transforming the global financial architecture to one based on the principles of fairness and equity.
- The BRICS countries have already set up New Development Bank (NDB), which became operational last year, to meet funding requirements of the members.
- There are concerns that the methodologies of the big three global agencies- S&P Global Ratings, Fitch Ratings and Moody's Investors Service- is biased against developing countries, reflected by their poor rating of these economies.
- Despite having deep capital buffers, the ratings of multilateral banks like the BRICS-promoted NDB are affected due to the parent countries' sovereign ratings.
- Further, under the present pricing model of rating agencies, the company or institution issuing bonds pays the rating agency to be rated, known as issuer-pays model. This is an ethical issue of moral hazard in this model of rating.

## 2.7.3. MoU BETWEEN EXIM BANK AND NEW DEVELOPMENT BANK

### Why in news?
- Union Cabinet signed a pact between Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) and BRICS-promoted New Development Bank (NDB).
- It is a non-binding umbrella agreement which aims at establishing a cooperation framework in accordance with the national laws and regulations, along with skills transfer and knowledge sharing amongst the signatories.

### Benefits of MoU
- It will enhance trade and economic relations among the BRICS countries.
- It is strategically relevant for cooperation for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth.
- It will help India play an enhanced international role.

## 2.8. NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

### Why in news?
The United Nations’ highest court rejected nuclear disarmament cases filed by the Pacific nation of the Marshall Islands against Britain, India and Pakistan.

### Reasons for rejection of the case
Marshall Islands had failed to prove that a legal dispute over disarmament existed between it and the three nuclear powers. The court rejected it saying it that it lacks jurisdiction.

### Nuclear facts
- There are 16,400 nuclear weapons on Earth today.
- Five states are declared as nuclear weapon zones under the Non-Proliferation Treaty: US, UK, France, Russia and China.
- Many other countries have been suspected of developing nuclear weapons including India, Pakistan, Israel, Iraq, Iran, Libya, Syria and Korea.
- The only nuclear bombs ever to be used were by the US against Japan in 1945.
Arguments for Nuclear disarmament

- **Strategic excuse**, most nations equipped with nuclear weapons claim that they rely on them for strategic defense, and they are vulnerable to various attacks without these destructive weapons which is not true in multipolar world.
- **Economically**, nuclear weapons programs divert public funds from health care, education, disaster relief and other vital services. It is time to redirect money towards meeting human needs.
- **Environmentally**, nuclear weapons are the only devices ever created that have the capacity to destroy all complex life forms on Earth.
- **Security concerns**, nuclear weapons pose a direct and constant threat to people everywhere. Far from keeping the peace, they breed fear and mistrust among nations.
- **Humanitarian Issues**, the abolition of nuclear weapons is an urgent humanitarian necessity. Any use of nuclear weapons would have catastrophic consequences.
- **Nuclear Terrorism** – There is danger that nuclear weapons in politically unstable countries like Pakistan or Russia may fall into the hands of rogue terrorist elements.

**India’s Stand on Nuclear disarmament**

India attaches the highest priority to nuclear disarmament and shares common concerns with the co-sponsors, that the international community has not been able to take forward multilateral nuclear disarmament negotiations.

**Way Forward**

- Nuclear disarmament will create moral suasion for nuclear weapons states to disarm, and establish an international norm prohibiting nuclear weapons’ development, possession and use.
- The states having nuclear weapons should participate fully in the negotiations to come out with a better policy formulation for the world.

2.9. DISARMAMENT AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

**Why in News?**

- Un general assembly’s disarmament and security committee voted for negotiations to begin next year on a new international treaty to prohibit nuclear weapons.
- Four of the five UN Security Council nuclear powers – Britain, France, Russia and the United States — voted against the draft resolution while China abstained besides India and Pakistan.

**Why is it important?**

- It moves diplomatic and legal action beyond the veto power of nuclear-dependent governments that want to keep their privileges under the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- The new multilateral treaty will for the first time provide a comprehensive approach to prohibiting activities such as the use, deployment, production, transporting, stockpiling and financing of nuclear weapons.
- It will also extend the NPT’s nuclear disarmament obligation by creating a clear, unequivocal legal obligation to eliminate existing arsenals that will apply to non-NPT as well as all NPT states.

**About NPT**

- Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT, is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.
- It came into being in 1970. In 1995 it was extended indefinitely.
- The treaty recognises five permanent UNSC members: the US, Russia, the UK, France and China.
- Four UN member states have never joined NPT: India, Israel, Pakistan and South Sudan.
2.10. MoU BETWEEN INDIA AND AARDO

Why in news?

About the MoU
- The capacity building programs in the field of rural development will be organized every year during the triennium at various Institutions in India.
- The duration of each training programme shall be of two to three weeks.
- Significance:
  ✓ It will promote cooperation among African and Asian countries.
  ✓ It will help in the direction of eradicating thirst, hunger, illiteracy, disease and poverty in the region.

About AARDO
- The AARDO is an autonomous, inter-Governmental organization established in 1962, headquarter in New Delhi.
- AARDO currently has 31 countries of the African - Asian Region under its fold.
- India is one of the Founder Members of the Organization and is the largest contributor among the members.

2.11. MALDIVES QUILTS COMMONWEALTH

Why in news?
- The Maldives quit Commonwealth over allegation of corruption and deteriorating human rights.
- The country becomes the latest to leave the Commonwealth after Gambia which quit in October 2013.

Background
- Maldives government was put on notice thrice and given six months to address concerns including the detention and prosecution of opposition leaders.
- Evidences were found of curbing fundamental rights, targeted persecution of opposition leaders and misuse of state institutions (including the judiciary, legislature and the police) to restrict, crush and punish dissent.
- Imprisonment of previous Maldives President was found illegal and the current president was ordered to pay him compensation.

Reasons to quit as given by Maldives
- The foreign ministry claimed that it was treated “unjustly and unfairly” by the organization.
- It was used “in the name of democracy promotion, to increase the Commonwealth’s own relevance and leverage in international politics”.
- It argued that the decision to penalize the Maldives was unjustified, as the inquiry commission had found the transfer of power in the Maldives was consistent with the constitutional provisions.

2.12. INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Why in news?
Burundi, South Africa and Gambia have quit ICC. Kenya and Uganda now, intend to follow the suit.

Why is it important?
- The withdrawal makes South Africa the first state to quit the 1998 Rome Statute that established the court.

About ICC
- It is the world’s first legal body with permanent international jurisdiction to prosecute genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.
- The 124-member ICC is based in The Hague.
• South Africa’s proposed withdrawal from the International Criminal Court shows startling disregard for justice from a country long seen as a global leader on accountability for victims of the gravest crimes.

ICC: Areas of Concern

• Lack of Jurisdiction- ICC does not have jurisdiction over some of the most powerful nations in the world such as US, Russia, China and Israel.
• Narrow Mandate- It does not investigate rights violations of five permanent members of the UN Security Council: the US, Great Britain, France, Russia and China.
• No free authority- its authority is dependent on the cooperation of the international community.
• Politicized Prosecution and Unaccountable Prosecutors despite having safeguards in place against politically motivated prosecutions.
• Ambiguity between State Sovereignty vs Universal Jurisdiction- Ambiguities arise in the relationship between the legal and political underpinnings of the ICC because the Court is weakened by policies that remain dominated by a sovereign model, despite operating principally within a universalist legal framework.

What needs to be done?

• There are many ambiguities in Rome Statute which needs to be removed.
• Support from permanent members of the UN Security Council which holds veto powers over the cases of the ICC.
• Focus on increasing the capacity of the ICC to ensure that it can conduct its existing investigations and cases effectively.
• A clear action plan with proper funding mechanism.
• Strengthening investigation and prosecution with transparency and accountability measures.
• Support for participation and effective representation of the victims.

2.13. UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Why in news?

Russia lost its bid to retain a seat on the UN Human Rights Council due to allegations of war crimes in relation to its policies in Syria.

Why is it important?

It was the first time since the UNHRC’s creation a decade ago that one of the Security Council’s five permanent members failed to be elected to the council.

Possible Impacts after ousting Russia

• It is unlikely to create any significant change in Russian foreign policy toward Syria.
• It may further fuel already tense relations between Russia and the West, particularly the United States, and worsen the human rights situation in Russia itself.
• Russia’s ousting from the UNHRC is inconsistent with Saudi Arabia’s successful reelection to the council. Despite harsh criticism regarding Saudi Arabia’s actions in the Yemeni civil war, the country kept its place on the Human Rights Council. It underscores the use of human rights as a tool of Western intervention.

About UN Human Rights Council

• The council is 47-member body in based in Geneva.
• It was created in 2006 to promote human rights globally.
• Members of the council work to engage countries on improving human rights.
• They make decisions ranging from exposing violations to recommending that the Security Council make a referral to the International Criminal Court.
• The council doesn’t have the authority to take action but can exert significant pressure on the violating country and set up special rapporteurs with the mandate to investigate and report human-rights abuses.
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• A current affairs classroom course of PT 365 & Mains 365 of year 2018/2019 (for students enrolling in 2019 program)
3. ECONOMY

3.1. IDEA OF BAD BANK

Background

- The problem of non-performing assets in Indian banks particularly the PSBs has assumed large proportions.
- Government along with RBI has made many efforts to solve this issue. In this light another suggestion is the formation of a Bad Bank.

What is a Bad Bank

- Bad Bank would be set up as a separate entity that would buy the NPAs from other banks to free up their books for fresh lending. In the meanwhile, it would work towards suitably disposing off the toxic assets.
- The concept was pioneered at the Pittsburgh-headquartered Mellon Bank in 1988 and has been successfully implemented in many western European countries post the 2007 financial crisis like Ireland, Sweden, France etc.

Advantages of Bad Bank

- The present method of recapitalization can have only partial success due to limitations of Indian financial capabilities. Further it will not clear up the bad assets but would only give some more life to projects.
- Bad Bank would essentially help in clearing the books of banks and this could make the banks more attractive to buyers.
- The segregation would help in managing NPAs more effectively. The organizational requirements and skill sets are very different in a restructuring and winding up situation than in a lending situation. The segregation could thus help in putting the best suited processes and practices in a Bad Bank while the ‘normal banks’ could continue to focus on lending.

Issues

- Raghuram Rajan was of the view that this concept may not be relevant for India since much of the assets backing the banks’ loans are viable or can be made viable. E.g. a large chunk of projects stalled due to extraneous factors like problems in land acquisition or environmental clearance. They just need restructuring and additional funding.
- There are issues with respect to composition and management of the Bad Bank.
  - A majority stakes with government would render the Bad Bank with the same issues of governance and capitalization as PSBs.
  - On the other hand, a private majority shareholding could invite criticism of favouritism and corruption if the loans are not priced appropriately when transferred to a ‘bad bank’.

Way Forward

- This must be complemented with other steps. The government must infuse more capital into the better-performing PSBs.
- It must also create, through an act of Parliament, an apex Loan Resolution Authority for tackling bad loans at PSBs. The authority would vet restructuring of the bigger loans at PSBs. This would mitigate the paralysis that has set in at the PSBs because of the fear factor and get funds flowing into stalled projects.
- Resolution of bad loans and restoring the health of PSBs is among the biggest challenges the economy faces today. A bad bank cannot be the sole response.
3.2. PUBLIC DEBT MANAGEMENT CELL (PDMC)

Why in news?
- The Finance Ministry has set up a Public Debt Management Cell (PDMC).

What is it?
- It is an interim arrangement and will be upgraded to a statutory Public Debt Management Agency (PDMA) in about two years.
- Its main purpose is to allow separation of debt management functions from RBI to PDMA in a gradual and seamless manner, without causing market disruptions.
- PDMC will have 15 experienced debt managers from Ministry and RBI for the required expertise.
- A joint implementation committee chaired by Joint secretary (Budget) will oversee the transition process of PDMC to PDMA.

About Public Debt Management Agency (PDMA)
- Public Debt Management Agency (PDMA) is a proposed specialized independent agency that manages the internal and external liabilities of the Central Government in a holistic manner.
- The government has now made clear that PDMA will be formed in 2 years.

Need for PDMA
- Presently the market borrowing is managed by RBI but external debt by central government directly. Establishing a debt management office would consolidate all debt management functions in a single agency and bring in holistic management of the internal and external liabilities.
- There is a severe conflict of interest in the RBI responsibility of setting the short term interest rate (i.e. the task of monetary policy) and selling bonds for the government. If the Central Bank tries to be an effective debt manager, it would lean towards selling bonds at high prices, i.e. keeping interest rates low. This leads to an inflationary bias in monetary policy.
- Management of government debt, regulation of banks and monetary policy are all interlinked which could be better coordinated by an agency like PDMA.
- Some functions that are crucial to managing public debt are not carried out. For instance, no agency undertakes cash and investment management, information relating to contingent and other liabilities are not consolidated. This will be taken care of by PDMA.

Challenges
- In India sovereign debt management is not merely an exercise for resource mobilization but has a wider socio-economic impact. It thus requires a broader outlook which might not be given by an independent agency.
- PDMA’s focus is only on central government but RBI can harmonise the Debt management of both union and State governments.
- The conflict of interest would still be present as government is the majority shareholder in PSBs.

Key Functions of PDMC
- It will only have advisory functions to avoid conflict with statutory functions of the RBI.
- It will plan government borrowings as well as manage its liabilities.
- It will further monitor cash balances, foster a liquid and efficient market for government securities and advise government on matters related to investment, capital market operations, fixing interest rates on small savings etc.
- It will develop an Integrated Debt Database System (IDMS) as a centralised database for all liabilities of government, on a near real-time basis and undertake requisite preparatory work for PDMA.
3.3. PROJECT INSIGHT

About

- Project Insight is an initiative of the finance ministry to widen the tax base by detecting tax evaders using technology.
- Various pilot projects have come up in recent years. The full programme will be implemented next year.

Key Features

- The Project will essentially use the data gathered by various pilot projects in terms of non-filers monitoring, non-PAN monitoring for Banks, Sub-registrars etc. for different kinds of taxes.
- The tax departments will also set up a new centralized processing centre for compliance management.
- It will handle preliminary verification, generation of bulk letters/notices and follow-up arising from information collated through Project Insight.
- Through implementation of reporting compliance management system, it will ensure that third party reporting by entities like banks and other financial institutions is timely and accurate.
- It will also set up a streamlined data exchange mechanism for other government departments.
- The project adds to the list of efforts made by government towards curbing black money like GST implementation, amendment to India-Mauritius DTAA and the recently concluded Income Disclosure Scheme.

Significance

- This integrated platform would play a key role in widening of tax base and data mining to track tax evaders.
- This will help in catching tax evaders in a non-intrusive manner like search and seizure.
- It will not only promote voluntary compliance but also enable taxpayers to resolve simple compliance related issues in an online manner without visiting the Income tax office.
- The new technical infrastructure will also be leveraged for implementation of Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act Inter Governmental Agreement (FATCA IGA) and Common Reporting Standard (CRS).

3.4. IMF’S RECENT GROWTH FORECAST

Key Projections on World economy

- It has maintained its forecast for a weak global growth. The weakening is mainly caused by poor business environment and draw down of goods inventories.
- The IMF said advanced economies as a whole will see a weakening of growth in 2016, down 0.2 percentage point from July to 1.6 per cent, while emerging market and developing economies will see a 0.1 percentage point gain in growth to 4.2 per cent.

On Indian Economy

- Indian economy is expected to grow faster than any other emerging economy at 7.5 per cent as against China’s 6.3 per cent.
- IMF said India’s economy has benefited from lower commodity prices, and inflation has declined more than expected. Yet, it cautioned that underlying inflationary pressures arising from bottlenecks in the food storage and distribution sector point to the need for further structural reforms to ensure that consumer price inflation remains within the target band over the medium term.
- Growth will also benefit from recent policy reforms like constitutional amendment enabling implementation of the national GST, adoption of inflation targets, and removal of foreign direct investment (FDI) ceilings.
- The contribution of net exports has been revised downward, as import growth is expected to accelerate amid stronger domestic demand.
3.5. INDIGENOUS DEFENCE PRODUCTION: DASSAULT RELIANCE AEROSPACE JV

About

- Reliance’ Group has formed a Joint Venture with French Aerospace giant Dassault Aviation.
- The JV would be a key player in execution of the offset obligations which was a part of the Rafale fighter jet deal. The deal has a 50% offset clause.
- It will set up a facility at Nagpur to complete the supply chain for the Rafale fighter jet in India.
- The facility will be planned, designed and structured with French assistance.

Significance

- It is expected to create 1,500 direct jobs and many more indirect jobs for suppliers and sub-contractors.
- The high levels of technology transfer would benefit the entire aerospace sector.
- The strategic partnership will also focus on promoting research and development projects under the IDDM program (Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured), a new initiative of India’s Defence Ministry.

About IDDM

- All defence acquisition proposals were required to be classified under one of five categories under the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP) 2016 until a sixth category of Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured (IDDM) was added this year.
- The category is expected to bring significant investments in R&D and will ensure the scientific talent in India is engaged in cutting-edge technologies in defence.

3.6. INDIAN BRIDGE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Why in news?

- The Indian Bridge Management System was launched recently.
- IBMS is being developed to create an inventory of all bridges in the country and rate their structural condition so that timely repair and rehabilitation work can be carried out based on the criticality of the structure.
- This will help in improving the transport efficiency as well as reducing accidents.

Working Mechanism

- Every bridge in the country is assigned a unique National Identity Number based on the state and RTO zone. It is also given a Bridge Location number based on its exact location which is ascertained by GPS.
- The Bridges are also classified according to their engineering characteristics and structural components and assigned a Bridge Classification and Structural Rating Number respectively.
- The bridges are also being assigned Socio-Economic Bridge Rating Number which will decide the importance of the structure in relation to its contribution to daily socio-economic activity of the area in its vicinity.
- Based on this inventory IBMS will analyse data and identify bridges that need attention.

3.7. INDIA’S FIRST MEDI-PARK

About

- HLL Lifecare Ltd, a mini-ratna company, would be setting up a medical devices manufacturing park (Medipark) at Chengalpattu, a town in the outskirts of Chennai.
- It will be completed in seven years, being developed in different phases.

Significance

- The Medipark would be the first manufacturing cluster in the medical technology sector in the country, and would play a key role in the development of medical devices and technology industry and allied disciplines.
India imports about 70% of its medical equipments and devices. It is almost completely dependent on imports for high-end items like imaging equipment, pace makers, and breathing and respiration equipment. Domestic manufacturing of the devices and equipment would bring down the cost and make healthcare more affordable.

As part of India’s Make in India initiative this will generate direct employment for about 3000 people and indirect employment for many more thousands once it is operational.

### 3.8. POWER TRANSMISSION PLANNING

**Why in News**

- The Mata Prasad committee, constituted by Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), in its recently released report has suggested an overhaul in transmission planning to facilitate transfer of power on economic principles.

**Key Suggestions**

- Transmission planning should be aligned to meet customer aspirations in contrast to the long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs) arrangement. Transmission planning can also be done on the basis of projected load of the states and anticipated generation scenario based on economic principles of merit order operation.
- In case of renewable energy sources, the transmission system may be planned by the central transmission utility (CTU) based on estimated capacity additions in perspective plan and renewable purchase obligations of each state. This is crucial as the Centre has already launched renewable energy capacity addition of 175 Gw by 2032.
- To promote the power market, the transmission corridor allocation should be suitably made. 5% of each flow gate may be reserved for day-ahead collective transactions, which may be released for the contingency market in case of non-utilisation of the corridor by power exchanges. This would be annually reviewed.
- The committee has emphasised the need for the creation of a central repository of generators in the Central Electricity Authority of India (CEA), where any generation project developer proposing to set up a new generation plant must register itself. This will not only provide vital data for the transmission planning process but will alleviate problems due to uncoordinated generation additions.
- The committee has also made a strong case for hand-holding of states by CEA and CTU for accurate demand forecasting.

**Significance**
The recommendations would be help in better long-term planning of transmission system which plays a key role in India’s power infrastructure.

### 3.9. REGULATION OF PENSION PRODUCTS

**Why in news?**

- The Finance Ministry has set up a high-level committee to consolidate the regulation of pension products that is currently being done by three different watchdogs including the insurance and stock market regulators.

**Background**

- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) was set up with the intent of regulating all pension products. However, insurers and mutual funds continue to sell pension products outside its watch. This creates confusion among consumers looking to build a retirement nest egg.
- Pension products floated by insurance companies come under the purview of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA) while those sold by mutual funds are overseen by the SEBI. However, since their prime focus is on insurance and mutual funds/capital markets respectively, pension regulation done by them is only a piecemeal work.
About PFRDA

- The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is a pension regulatory authority which was established in 2003.
- It is authorized by Ministry of Finance, Department of Financial Services.
- It promotes old age income security by establishing, developing and regulating pension funds and protects the interests of subscribers to schemes of pension funds and related matters.

3.10. ETHANOL PRICING REVISION

Why in news?

- The government has moved towards a new pricing mechanism for sugar-extracted ethanol which is used for blending in petrol. The government had initiated the ethanol blending programme way back in 2003 with an aim to cut import dependence on crude oil. Initially the quantity was fixed at 5% which was slowly supposed to be raised to 10%.
- However, this could not be done on account of the various constraints faced by the Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) like state specific issues, supplier related issues including pricing issues of ethanol etc.

Implications

- Moving towards a free-market structure, the price of ethanol will now be determined on the basis of prevalent price of sugar in the open market as also demand-supply situation.
- The prices of ethanol will be reviewed and suitably revised by the government at any time during the ethanol supply depending upon the prevailing economic situation and other relevant factors.

3.11. AGRO IRRADIATION CENTERS

Why in news?

- India and Russia have agreed to collaborate in setting up integrated irradiation centres in India.
- In the first phase, seven centres will be set up in Maharashtra, which will begin with the upgradation of the current centre at Rahuri in Ahmednagar district.
- An agro irradiation center is one where food products are subjected to a low dosage of radiation to treat them for germs and insects, thereby increasing their longevity and shelf life. (in box)

Significance

- In India post-harvest losses in food grains, fruits and vegetables are extremely high amounting to around 40-50%. This is primarily due to insect infestation, microbiological contamination, physiological changes due to sprouting and ripening, and poor shelf life. This could be controlled by irradiation.
- Irradiation doses are recommended by the IAEA and the final product is absolutely safe. It does not reduce the nutritional value of food products and does not change their organoleptic properties or appearance.

3.12. NATIONAL SC/ST HUB AND ZERO DEFECT-ZERO EFFECT SCHEME LAUNCHED

Why in news?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the National SC/ST hub and the Zero Defect, Zero Effect (ZED) scheme for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

National SC/ST Hub

- The objective of the SC/ST Hub is to provide professional support to entrepreneurs from the SC/ST and also promote enterprise culture and entrepreneurship among them.
It will work towards strengthening market access/linkage, capacity building, monitoring, sharing industry-best practices and leveraging financial support schemes.

It would also enable Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to fulfill the procurement target set by the government. The Public Procurement Policy 2012 stipulates that 4 per cent of procurement done by Ministries, Departments and CPSEs would have to be from enterprises owned by SC/ST entrepreneurs.

The ministry has made an initial allocation of Rs 490 crore for the period 2016-2020 for the Hub.

**Zero Defect-Zero Effect (ZED) Scheme**

- ZED Scheme aims to rate and handhold all MSMEs to deliver top quality products using clean technology. It will have sector-specific parameters for each industry.
- The slogan of Zero Defect, Zero Effect (ZED) was first mentioned by PM Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech in 2014. It was given for producing high quality manufacturing products with a minimal negative impact on environment.
- The scheme will also be cornerstone of the Central Government’s flagship Make in India programme, which is aimed at turning India into a global manufacturing hub, generating jobs, boosting growth and increase incomes.
- Further, it will promote development and implementation of clean technology products.

### 3.13. OPTIONS IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE

**Why in news?**

SEBI recently allowed options trading in selected commodities, including farm produce.

**What is it?**

An option is a financial derivative wherein one party sells its contract to another party, wherein the selling party offers the buyer the right, but not the obligation, to buy or sell a security at a predetermined price and date.

**Overview**

- Security to farmers as they will benefit from a stable price regime since assured prices are only set for wheat, rice and sugarcane by the government.
- Additionally, options give the farmers the right to buy and sell in the future but there is no obligation to do so. Hence, there is flexibility in decision-making.

**Concerns**

- There are concerns that if speculators dominate trading, the impact on prices could be significant.
- Given the experience with futures trading where cartelisation and price-rigging led to speculative excesses (SEBI had to actually ban new contracts in chana and bar select players from castorseed), the impact of the introduction of options in essential commodities needs to be watched closely.
- It is hard to see how farmers, who are a disaggregated lot and deal in small, insignificant quantities of their produce, will master the nuances of options trading.

### 3.14. GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS INDEX

**Why in news**

India’s position **improved to 39th rank** in the World Economic Forum’s latest Global Competitiveness Index.

**Key facts**

- India improved 16 places to 39, making it the fastest riser up the ranks among 138 countries surveyed.
- India’s competitiveness improved across the board, particularly in goods market efficiency (60), business sophistication (35) and innovation (29).
India is also the second most competitive country among BRICS nations (China on 28th).

**Recent reform efforts** by the government that help improve rank are
- Improving public institutions (up 16 places).
- Opening the economy to foreign investors and international trade (up 4).
- Increasing transparency in the financial system (up 15).

WEF observed that India still needs to tackle **problems** like
- Labour market deficiencies,
- Large public enterprises that reduce economic efficiency,
- The financial market,
- Lack of infrastructure.

### 3.15. MINING SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM (MSS)

**Why in news?**
Union Minister of State for Power, Coal, New & Renewable Energy and Mines, launched the Mining Surveillance System (MSS) in New Delhi.

**What is it?**
- MSS is a satellite based monitoring system developed under Digital India Programme by Ministry of Mines, through Indian Bureau of Mines (IBM in coordination with Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics (BISAG), Gandhinagar and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY).
- It is one of the first surveillance systems developed in the world using space technology.
- The current system of monitoring of illegal mining activity is based on local complaints and unconfirmed information with no robust mechanism to monitor the action taken on such complaints.
- In such a situation, the MSS aims to establish responsive mineral administration through public participation by curbing instances of illegal mining activity using automatic remote sensing detection technology.

**Operation of the system**
- In the MSS, the maps of the mining leases are geo-referenced and are superimposed on the latest satellite remote sensing scenes obtained from CARTOSAT & USGS (United States Geological Survey).
- A check for illegality in operation is conducted and reported back using a user-friendly mobile app, which has been designed keeping public participation in mind, wherein the citizens can use it to report any unusual mining activity.
- An executive dashboard works as a decision support system using which officials can track the current status of mapping of the mining leases, reasons for triggers, the status of inspections related to triggers generated, the penalty levied etc. for all major mineral mining leases across the country.

**Benefits**
- States like Karnataka, which witnessed frequent instances of illegal mining in the past, will gain from the technology in the following manner.
  - It will lead to transparency as the public can access to the system.
  - It is a bias-free and independent system since it has scope for minimal human interference.
  - It is characterized by quick response and action since there will be regular monitoring of mining areas, which will also have a deterrence effect.
  - Effective follow-up on action taken on triggers.
3.16. CENTRAL ASSISTANCE UNDER AIBP

Why in news?

- Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation released the first installment of Rs. 1500 crore to the states as central assistance for 99 prioritized irrigation projects under Accelerated Irrigation Benefits Program (AIBP).
- This amount has been released for 50 projects in the states of Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan and Telangana.
- These irrigation projects will cover drought prone districts of the states to increase production and are also aimed at containing incidents of suicide by farmers.
- A High Level Empowered Committee (HLEC) comprising Finance Minister, Minister (WR, RD & GR), Minister of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmer’s Welfare, Minister of Rural Development, Vice Chairman of NITI Aayog has been constituted to review the progress of the identified 99 projects.
- The HLEC will also monitor other components under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana and provide policy guidance for mid-term course correction.

Background

- Of the nearly 142 million hectares of net sown area, only about 64 million hectares, less than half, has assured access to irrigation facilities. The rest still depend on rainwater.
- Moreover, even within the overall irrigated land, nearly 60 per cent is based on pumped ground-water, banking on free or highly-subsidised power provided to farmers in most states, thereby putting further pressure on a fast-depleting critical resource.

Areas of concern

- One of the major reasons for the projects to remain incomplete is inadequate release of funds by central government.
- Other issues include time and cost overruns in most of the projects, problems in land acquisition and technical difficulties like constructing tunnels in some places.
- A government survey of the projects has shown utilisation gaps – the difference between the irrigation potential created and the area actually being irrigated – of between 25 to 55 per cent. That means these projects are serving substantially lower area and lesser number of farmers that they are meant to do.

Other Steps taken by the Govt.

- A dedicated irrigation fund has been created 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 now asked the Central Water Commission and other agencies to take up 50 out of the 143 completed 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.

Way forward

- There should be provisions for online monitoring as well as physical monitoring of the projects for ensuring their completion.
3.17. AGRICULTURAL MARKETING AND FARM FRIENDLY REFORMS INDEX

What is it?

- The NITI Aayog launched the first ever “Agricultural Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index” to rank States and Union Territories.

Features and ranking

- The indicators used to assess represent competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in agri markets.
- The rankings are based on implementation of seven provisions proposed under model APMC Act, joining eNAM initiative, special treatment to fruits and vegetables for marketing and level of taxes in mandis.
- The other parameters included in the index are relaxation in restrictions related to lease of farm land to tenant farmers, and the freedom farmers have to fell and transport trees on their own land, which allows them to diversify their incomes.
- The index has a score, ranging from “0” implying no reforms to value “100” implying complete reforms in the selected areas and states and Union Territories have been ranked in terms of the score on the index.
- Maharashtra achieved first rank in implementation of various reforms as it implemented most of the marketing reforms and offered best environment for doing agribusiness.
- Gujarat ranked second closely followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
- Puducherry got the lowest rank followed by Delhi and Jammu & Kashmir.
- Almost two third states including U.P., Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and J&K could not reach halfway mark of reforms score.
- Some states and UTs either did not adopt APMC Act or revoked it. They include Bihar, Kerala, Manipur, Daman and Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Andaman and Nicobar. They are not included in the ranking.

Proposed agricultural reforms

- NITI Aayog has also identified three key areas for agricultural reform, which reveal ease of doing agribusiness as well as opportunities for farmers to benefit from modern trade and commerce and have wider option for sale of her/his produce.
- The reforms are:
  - Agricultural market reforms: So that the benefits that can be accrued from agriculture are tapped by embracing marketing principles that ensure best possible reforms.
  - Land lease reforms: Relaxation in restrictions related to lease in and lease out agricultural land and change in law to recognise tenant and safeguard land owners’ liberalisation.
  - Reforms related to forestry on private land – felling and transit of trees: The reforms lay stress on the untapped scope of agro forestry in supplementing farmers’ income. Reforms also represent freedom given to farmers for felling and transit of trees grown on private land to diversify farm business.
Way forward

- The states can use the index as a yardstick and improve on the indicators where they are lagging behind as it is aimed at helping states identify and address problems in the farm sector, which suffers from low growth, low incomes and agrarian distress.
- The states should be encouraged to adopt the mentioned reforms as they aim to overhaul the agricultural sector, which will ultimately be beneficial for farmers.

3.18. REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY SCHEME ‘UDAN’

About

- UDAN is an innovative scheme to develop the regional aviation market.
- The objective of the scheme was “Ude Desh Ka Aam Naagrik”.

Key Features

- UDAN will be applicable on flights which cover between 200 km and 800 km with no lower limit set for hilly, remote, island and security sensitive regions.
- The scheme seeks to reserve a minimum number of UDAN seats i.e. seats at subsidized rates and also cap the fare for short distance flights.
- This would be achieved through two means:
  - A financial stimulus in the form of concessions from Central and State governments and airport operators like tax concessions, exemptions from parking and landing charges etc.
  - A Viability Gap Funding to the interested airlines to kick-off operations from such airports so that the passenger fares are kept affordable.
    - The VGF would be provided by a market based model. The operators would submit their proposals to the implementing agencies would then be offered for competitive bidding through a reverse bidding mechanism and the route would be awarded to the participant quoting the lowest VGF per Seat.
    - Such support would be withdrawn after a three year period, as by that time, the route is expected to become self-sustainable.
- A Regional Connectivity Fund would be created to meet the VGF requirements under the scheme. The RCF levy per departure will be applied to certain domestic flights along with 20% contribution from states.
- For balanced regional growth, the allocations under the scheme would be equitably spread across the five geographical regions of the country viz. North, West, South, East and North-east.
- The selection of airports where UDAN operations would start would be done in consultation with State Government and after confirmation of their concessions.
- The scheme UDAN envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.
- The scheme would be in operation for a period of 10 years.

Significance

- The scheme would ensure affordability, connectivity, growth and development.
- This would help in generating employment. As per the International Civil Aviation Organisation that every rupee invested in civil aviation add Rs 3.5 to the economy and every job created directly generates 6.1 jobs indirectly.
- It provides an additional business opportunity by increasing the potential for moving existing perishable cargo, fragile goods and high-value export-oriented products by air.
- The state governments would reap the benefit of development of remote areas, enhance trade and commerce and more tourism expansion through the introduction of small aircrafts and helicopters.
- For incumbent airlines there was the promise of new routes and more passengers while for and start-up airlines there is the opportunity of new, scalable business.
- Commercialising the ‘un-served’ and ‘under-served’ airports (416 in total) will “democratise” publicly-owned sites which have hitherto been reserved for elite use. The average citizen would get a participative stake in their use and development.
Criticisms

- Airlines represent luxury. In a poor country like India it seems a case of misplaced priorities when governments and passengers have to bear the cost of additional subsidies to connect regional air routes.
- India is the fastest growing aviation market in terms of passenger traffic. Between January and September 2016, passenger traffic within India grew 23.17%. Aviation regulator’s data showed that all the licensed airlines overshot their regional connectivity quota. In other words, they flew more than what is mandated by regulations. It suggests that from this stage market dynamics may drive regional connectivity. State subsidies, therefore, are best used elsewhere.
- The assumption that three years would be enough to make a route sustainable might be misplaced. It does not take into account a scenario of fuel cost increase that would significantly change the air cost dynamics.

The environment for airlines to operate is already highly taxed (taxes on ATF is among the highest in the world). So another levy to fund the regional connectivity scheme is annoying airlines further.

3.19. EASTERN DEDICATED FREIGHT CORRIDOR

About

- It is an under construction freight corridor by Indian railways connecting Indian states from Punjab to west Bengal.
- It is 1,840 km long and extends from Ludhiana in Punjab to Kolkata in West Bengal as a series of projects with three sections.

Why in News

- Recently, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IRBD), part of the World Bank Group, signed an agreement with the Union government to lend $650 million to DFCCIL for the third phase of Eastern Dedicated Freight Corridor.
- The first two phases of the EDFC are already being implemented by the DFCCIL with the help of financial assistance provided by the World Bank in the form of loans worth $975 million and $1,100 million respectively.

Significance of the Project

- It will enhance rail transport capacity, improve service quality and boost freight carriage on the corridor.
- It will directly benefit the power and heavy manufacturing industries located in the Northern and Eastern parts of India as these industries depend heavily on a smooth railway network for the efficient transportation of their raw materials along with the distribution of bulk and consumer goods.
- In addition to this, railway passengers would also be benefitted as the existing passengers lines would get decongested.
- It will help in developing institutional capacity of DFCCIL to build, maintain and operate the entire Dedicated Freight Corridor network.

3.20. TRENDS IN CSR SPENDING

Highlights

- The latest figures on Corporate Social Responsibility show that Indian corporate world has spent Rs 8,345 crore as part of their CSR obligation in 2015-16.
- This is a 28% jump over the Rs 6,526 crore spent in the previous year.
- Education and health continues to be favourite sectors.
- Prime Minister’s National Relief Fund along with other funds set up by the Central and the state governments has been the biggest gainer with a jump of 418%.
Issues

- While the compliance rate has increased, the unspent amount has increased. This shows that a large number of companies failed to meet their social obligation and did not spend the prescribed amount on CSR.
- Corporate is really not spending on CSR as much as they should as 28% growth indicates against 41% by PSUs.
- They are not owning and driving change rather than make a passive contribution to PM’s Relief Fund. A lot of companies find it better to do the CSR in a passive way as it saves their time and human resources.
- Other reasons cited by companies for the unspent amount are- lack of being able to identify the right opportunity or project and not being able to find an implementing agency.

About CSR

- S.135 of the Companies Act was amended in 2013 to introduce the CSR provisions. The CSR Rules, 2014 govern the process.
- The Regulations mandate companies to spend at least 2 per cent of the average net profit (earned over the last three years) towards various social causes.

3.21. URJA GANGA PROJECT

About

- Recently Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of Urja Ganga, the highly ambitious gas pipeline project in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- It aims to provide piped cooking (PNG) gas to residents of the eastern region of the country and CNG gas for the vehicles.

Key Features

- The project envisages laying a 2,050-km pipeline connecting Jagdishpur (UP) to Haldia (West Bengal) by 2018. It will include five states including UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha.
- The project is being implemented by state-run gas utility GAIL.
- The project augments existing GAIL’s network of trunk pipelines covering the length of around 11,000 km by 2540 km.
- Seven East India cities Varanasi, Jamshedpur, Patna, Ranchi, Kolkata, Bhubaneswar, Cuttack – will be the major beneficiary of this network development.

Significance

- The project is considered as a major step towards collective growth and development of the Eastern region of India. Under it, overall 20 lakh households will get PNG connections.
- From Varanasi’s perspective, 50,000 households and 20,000 vehicles will get cleaner and cheaper fuel PNG and CNG gas respectively.
- Besides, LNG terminal at Dhamra will provide clean fuel to the Industrial Development of the Eastern states of Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha.
- 25 industrial clusters in these 5 states will be developed using gas from this pipeline. Besides, 40 districts and 2600 villages will benefit from this project.
- It will also help in revival of defunct fertilizer plants in Barauni in Bihar, Gorakhpur in UP, Sindri in Jharkhand and Durgapur in West Bengal by supplying gas.
- It will also help in bringing natural gas based crematoriums at cremation grounds including Manikarnika and Harishchandra ghats in Varanasi. This will be good for environment.
### 3.22. DBT FOR KEROSENE

**About**
- After the success of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) in LPG/Cooking gas, the government is planning to launch DBT in Kerosene as well.
- It has initiated the process by a pilot programme in 4 districts of Jharkhand.
- Under the DBTK Scheme, PDS kerosene is being sold at non-subsidised price, and, subsidy, as admissible, is being transferred to consumers directly into their bank accounts.
- This initiative of the governments is aimed at rationalising subsidy, cut subsidy leakages and reduce administrative costs. It, thus, seeks to benefit all stakeholders.

**Challenges in Implementation**
- Lack of a streamlined and unified digital consumer database: The LPG consumers were all under Public Sector Oil marketing companies which made it easier to compile a consumer data. However, in case of Kerosene the consumer data is with individual states under their PDS system. Thus, coordination among the large number of State-level actors, especially in the case of a non-digitised PDS beneficiary database, can create barriers.
- Differences between center and states: While the Centre burns the fiscal impact of subsidy, the States determine the beneficiaries and quantum of subsidy. This is an important political currency for State governments. Thus, states must be aligned to this idea for its successful implementation.
- The price difference between diesel and unsubsidized kerosene will still be high enough to give an incentive to the middlemen to divert the fuel as a diesel substitute.
- Another challenge is in ensuring that the subsidy is accessible to its major beneficiaries- poor households. Presently, the bank branches are not readily available in remote locations which increase the cost of withdrawing money.

**Way Forward**
- Studies show that kerosene is predominantly used as a lighting fuel in rural India, with less than 1 per cent of households using it as a primary cooking fuel.
- Thus, there is need to move towards solar-assisted solutions for lightening and LPG for cooking. This would be economically beneficial to government as well as households in the long-run.

### Mains 2015

**Q.** In what way could replacement of price subsidy with Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) change the scenario of subsidies in India? Discuss.

### 3.23. EASE OF DOING BUSINESS RANKINGS

**Background**
- The World Bank ranks the economies on their ease of doing business. A high ease of doing business ranking means the regulatory environment is more conducive to the starting and operation of a local firm.
- The rankings are determined by sorting the aggregate distance to frontier scores on 10 topics, each consisting of several indicators, giving equal weight to each topic.
- India has ranked poorly on this ranking for past few years. In the recent rankings for 2017, it has moved one rank up to the 130th position.
- This marginal improvement came on the back of slight improvement in four indicators- getting electricity, enforcing contracts, trading across borders and registering property.
Positives from the Report

- The report praises the various reforms taken by the present Indian government.
- It recognizes reforms under four of the 10 headers which is highest ever achieved by India.
- The ‘distance to frontier’ (DTF) score-used by the WB to measure the distance between each economy and the best performance in that category-has improved for seven of those 10 headers.
- The report especially lauds India for achieving significant reductions in time and cost to provide electricity connections to businesses.

Should the marginal improvement be a matter of concern?

- India has improved by only one position. This is being looked by many as a matter of concern on account of two reasons:
  - India has taken a number of economic reforms in the past year like enactment of bankruptcy code, GST, introduction of single window system for building plan approvals and online ESIC (Employees’ State Insurance Corporation) and EPFO (Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation) registrations etc. Thus, a better ranking was expected.
  - Further, the present government aims to bring India in the top 50 economies in the Ease of Doing Business by 2018. The target seems extremely challenging now.
- However, the report does not truly represent the status of economic reforms taken by India. For instance:
  - The Report accounts for reforms undertaken by 1st June 2016 only. As a result some of the key reforms like Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code were not included. India hopes to get a better ranking next year.
  - Second, one particular change in the ranking methodology seems to have done considerable damage to India’s improvement prospects. India ranks fourth from the bottom under the header “paying taxes”. Inclusion of new criterion ‘post-filing index’ has much to contribute to this.
  - Third, the rankings cover only the two cities of Delhi and Mumbai. However, the reforms are being carried on all across India. In fact, states like Andhra Pradesh, Telangana have done remarkable efforts in economic reforms.
  - Fourth, there is increasing competition from other countries who are trying to improve their rankings as well. In fact, the report mentions that the number of countries that have implemented at least one reform have increased from 122 to 137. Thus, even though India might have improved its ease of doing business, it is not reflected in the ranking in the same sense.
- Further, even this ranking process has its limitations. The report clubs all the economies together. E.g. the emerging markets with advanced economies, the war-torn with peaceful ones etc. Such an approach gives a grand ranking system but is hardly useful in predicting, for instance, the flow of capital. Thus, while India may lag behind many countries in EoDB, it may still be a better destination for FDI etc.

Way forward

- We need to learn from other countries like Georgia and Kazakhstan who have done extremely well in the rankings in a matter of few years. E.g. Georgia has improved from 100 to 16 in last 10 years.
- The DIPP is planning to appoint external agencies to help departments carry forward reforms, hold stakeholders consultations, and monitor implementation of reforms.
3.24. NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

Why in news?

- Oliver Hart from Harvard and MIT professor Bengt Holmstrom won this year's Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics for their study of contracts and human behaviour in business.

What is Contract Theory?

- How contracts are designed defines our incentives in various situations in the real world. Contracts can be
  - formal or informal, depending on whether they are enforced by law or social norms
  - complete or incomplete, which is based on whether they take into account all possibilities that lay in the future
- Contract theory is, partly at least, an attempt to understand the nuances in our contracts and how those contracts could be better constructed.
- The two economists provided "a comprehensive framework for analysing many diverse issues in contractual design, like performance-based pay for top executives, deductibles and co-pays in insurance, and the privatisation of public-sector activities."
- It has become especially relevant in the years after the 2008 financial crisis, which was blamed on the short-term risk encouraged by huge cash bonuses paid to investment bankers.
- It also touches on themes of moral hazard, which arises where those that take the risks don't share in the costs of failure.

Significance

- Contract theory has greatly influenced many fields, ranging from corporate governance to constitutional law.
- Contract Theory generates precise hypotheses that can be confronted with empirical data and lays an intellectual foundation for the design of various policies and institutions, from bankruptcy legislation to political constitutions.

The use of contract theory in public policy is something that the Indian government needs to learn, be it the design of telecom auctions or the public distribution system.
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4. SOCIAL

4.1. GENDER RELATED ISSUES

4.1.1. INDIA RANKS 87 IN WEF GENDER GAP REPORT

Why in news?
- The World Economic Forum’s (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report 2016 was released recently.
- India has substantially improved its rank in the Global Gender Gap index — moving from 108th to 87th position within a year, according to a report released by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

About the report
- The WEF measures the gender gap index of the countries by taking four factors into account: economy, health, education and political representation.
- In the latest edition, the report finds that progress towards parity in the key economic pillar of gender has slowed dramatically with the gap—which stands at 59%—now larger than at any point since 2008.
- Globally, the leading four nations continue to be Scandinavian: Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, in that order.

India’s performance
- India is ranked 87 out of 144, improving from its 108 position in 2015.
- It has closed its gender gap by 2% in a year: its gap now stands at 68% across the four pillars.
- The major improvement, however, has been in education, where it has managed to close its gap entirely in primary and secondary education.
- India is also among a group of countries that have made key investments in women’s education but have generally not removed barriers to women’s participation in the workforce.

GLOBAL TOP 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Global Gender Gap Index</th>
<th>Global rank</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: 2016 rank out of 144 countries

At a glance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>India</th>
<th>Out of 144 countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Key indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2016</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP ($ billions)</td>
<td>2013.34</td>
<td>2013.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (in constant 2005 PPP)</td>
<td>5,730</td>
<td>5,730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population (thousands)</td>
<td>1,310,693.53</td>
<td>1,310,693.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth rate (%)</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population sex ratio (female/male)</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human capital optimization (%)</td>
<td>57.73</td>
<td>57.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2. JANANI SURAKSHA YOJNA

Why in News
- A latest study conducted by researchers from NCAER says that JSY has helped in reducing the socioeconomic inequalities as well as it has led to an enhancement in the utilisation of health services among all groups especially among the poorer and underserved sections in the rural areas.
- The study was conducted using data from two rounds of the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) — conducted in 2004-05 and 2011-12, providing a before-after scenario for comparison.

About
- The JSY was launched in 2005 as part of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) to improve maternal and neonatal health by promotion of institutional deliveries (childbirth in hospitals).
JSY is a 100 % centrally sponsored scheme and it integrates cash assistance with delivery and post-delivery care.

It is implemented through ASHA, the accredited social health activist, acting as an effective link between the Government and the poor pregnant women under this scheme.

**How it helps in Reducing Socio-Economic Disparities**

- First, the increase in utilisation of all three maternal healthcare services between the two rounds was remarkably higher among illiterate or less educated and poor women.
- Secondly, the usage of all three maternal healthcare services by the OBC, Dalit, Adivasis and Muslim women increased between the surveys.
- There was generally a narrowing of the gap between the less educated and more educated women and between the poorer and richer women.

#### 4.1.3. CHANGES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT

**About**

- The Supreme Court has struck down the words “adult male” from the pertinent provision in the DV Act to lay down that a woman can also file a complaint against another woman, accusing her of domestic violence.

**Reasoning of Court**

- Since the perpetrators and abettors of domestic violence can also be women, insulating them would frustrate the objectives of the Act. Under this immunity females and minors can continue to commit domestic violence.
- It discriminates between persons similarly situated and, thus, violates A.14 of the Constitution.

**Significance of the Change**

- It makes DV gender neutral which according to some experts (including the bench) would help in serving the purpose of the law in a better way.
- However, there are concerns from some corners that it would encourage husbands to file counter cases against their wives through their mothers or sisters.
- There are also apprehensions about putting juveniles under the Act. There is no criminal provision under DV Act and thus no question of dealing with juvenile Board.
- Relief under DV Act is almost always financial -maintenance, compensation and alternate residences – which can all be claimed only against an adult.

#### 4.1.4. MUSLIM PERSONAL LAW: NEED FOR REFORMS

**Background**

- The Supreme Court is presently hearing a case by Petitioner Shayara Bano who has challenged the constitutionality of Section 2 of the *Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937*, in so far as it seeks to recognise and validate polygamy, triple talaq and ‘nikah halala’.
- The central government also got involved in the process as the Court had asked for its response on the matter.
- The Government, in its affidavit, supports the petition saying that these practices are not "integral to the practices of Islam or essential religious practices". Thus, they must be reformed keeping in light the rights of women.

**Triple Talaq & Nikal Halala**

- 'Talaq-e-bidat' is a Muslim man divorcing his wife by pronouncing more than one talaq in a single 'tuhr' (the period between two menstruations), or in a 'tuhr' after coitus, or pronouncing an irrevocable instantaneous divorce at one go i.e. unilateral triple-talaq.
**Nikah Halala** is the temporary marriage a victim of instant talaq is forced to undergo with another man to remarry her first husband. This second marriage also needs to be consummated.

- The practice has been described as inhuman and uncivilized by social activists including many Muslim groups.
- The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB), however, has lent support to the practice saying that it is a way to save marriages. It says that the mandatory nature of *Nikah halala* deters the husband from giving hasty divorces. The argument, however, does not go down well with the activists who question the suffering and exploitation of women in the process.
- Further, the activists say that the practices are not of Islamic origin and many Islamic countries have abolished them.
- The practice of instant triple talaq has already been invalidated by the SC in 2002 in *Shamim Ara case*. By that decision *Nikah Halala* is also rendered redundant.

**Feasibility of a total ban on Polygamy**

- Census data and studies show that bigamy continues to prevail among the Hindus despite the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 outlawing it, and Section 494 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) declaring it a punishable offence.
- This is mainly due to the non-cognizable nature of s.494. It means that the police can take cognizance of the offence of bigamy only on a complaint by the victim i.e. the first wife in this case. This doesn’t always happen due to social norms, pressure and lack of awareness.
- The same problem would come in way of implementing anti-polygamy provisions in case of Muslims.

**Way Forward**

- Some Muslim groups perceive these reformative measures as an attempt to initiate Uniform Civil Code and impose majoritarianism on them. The government must alleviate these fears.
- The AIMPLB is against these reforms. However, it hasn’t been able to put convincing arguments in support of their stand.
- It must be kept in mind that gender equality is a sacred principle of our constitution and modern society. The present day situations are different from the times when these practices originated. It is, thus, the right time to make necessary changes.

*(To read more on UCC and challenges associated with its implementation please refer to October 2015 edition)*

### 4.2. VULNERABLE SECTIONS

#### 4.2.1. ELDERLY IN INDIA

**Why in news**

According to a recent survey 65 per cent of the elderly in India are dependent on others for their financial requirements and undergo financial crisis.

**Key findings of the survey**

- Pension was the main source of income for 38 per cent of the respondents.
- More than 80% of the respondent’s major problems were related to healthcare issues, where financial status plays a key role.
- Senior citizens aged over 70 are marginalized and isolated to a large extent.
- Older persons in the category of 60-70 years are looked after well by their children, but with further advancement in their age, children find it difficult because of their own growing age and ever-increasing responsibilities towards their own children.
- Financially insecure old people expect social security, free health care and subsidies so that they can lead a comfortable and respectable life in old age.
Rights of the Elderly

- Parents cannot be evicted from a house without due process of law if they have been staying there from before. There is three enactments that can be applied.
  - Under section 125 of the CrPC, a magistrate can order a child to maintain his old parents under the Maintenance of Parents Act.
  - The Hindu Adoptions and Maintenance Act say an aged parent can demand maintenance from children in the same way that a wife can demand it from her husband.
  - The Domestic Violence Act too provides parents with the right to seek relief from any kind of abuse.
- A National Policy on older persons was announced in January 1999 which identified a number of areas of intervention-financial security, healthcare and nutrition, shelter, education, welfare, protection of life and property for the wellbeing of older persons in the country.
- A National Council for Older Persons (NCOP) was constituted by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to operationalize the National Policy on older persons.

4.2.2. VAYOSHRESHTHA SAMMAN

Why in news?

Union Government Presented ‘Vayoshreshtha Samman’ to Older Persons & Institutions on International Day of Older Persons

Aim

National Awards are intended to show case the Government’s concern for senior citizens and its commitment towards them with the aim of strengthening their legitimate place in the society.

About the award

- Vayoshreshtha Samman is a Scheme of National Awards instituted by the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (D/o Social Justice & Empowerment) initially in 2005.
- It was upgraded to the status of National Awards in 2013
- Among other awards KA was awarded best state in implementing the maintenance and welfare of parents and senior citizens act, 2007 and providing services and facilities to senior citizens.

About International day of older persons

- International Day of Older Persons is observed on 1st of October every year pursuant to the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly to observe the year 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons with the theme, “a society for all ages”.

4.2.3. AMENDMENTS TO THE HIV AND AIDS (PREVENTION AND CONTROL) BILL, 2014

Why in news?

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval to introduce official amendments to the HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Bill, 2014.
- The Bill was first introduced in Parliament by the UPA government in its last days in 2014.

Features of bill now

- The provisions of the Bill seek to address HIV-related discrimination, strengthen the existing programme by bringing in legal accountability and establish formal mechanisms for inquiring into complaints and redressing grievances.

Need

- There are approximately 21 lakh persons estimated to be living with HIV in India.
- Although, the prevalence of HIV is decreasing over the last decade but percentage of HIV patients receiving Anti-Retroviral therapy (ART) treatment are merely 28.82% against global percentage of 41%.
- Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are the four high-prevalence states and account for about 55% of the total cases in the country.
The Bill also aims to **enhance access to health care services** by ensuring informed consent and confidentiality for HIV-related testing, treatment and clinical research.

- The Bill lists various grounds on which discrimination against HIV positive persons is prohibited.
- It also places obligations on establishments to safeguard rights of persons living with HIV aids create mechanisms for **redressing complaints**.
- The Bill also prohibits any individual from publishing information or advocating feelings of hatred against HIV positive persons and those living with them.
- The Bill also provides for **Guardianship for minors**.
- The Bill requires that **no person shall be compelled to disclose his HIV status** except with his informed consent, and if required by a court order.
- The Bill also suggests, that the Central and State governments shall take measures to:
  - Prevent the spread of HIV or AIDS.
  - Provide anti-retroviral therapy.
  - Facilitate their access to welfare schemes especially for women and children.
  - Formulate HIV or AIDS education communication programmes.
  - Lay guidelines for the care and treatment of children with HIV or AIDS.
- The Bill suggests that cases relating to HIV positive persons shall be **disposed off by the court on a priority basis** and duly ensuring the confidentiality.
- The Bill makes provision for **appointment of an ombudsman** by State Governments to inquire into complaints related to the violation of the Act and penal actions in case of non-compliance.

**Significance**

- The bill aims at achieving the target of "Ending the epidemic by 2030" as per the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Recognising that HIV/AIDS often causes children to be orphaned, and extended families are reluctant to shoulder their responsibility, the Bill says that any person aged between 12 and 18 years with sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family can act as a guardian. This is a welcome step for taking care of abandoned HIV children.
- The bill also provides for an Ombudsman which is a right step in bringing transparency and efficiency to the entire process.
- The Bill brings a rights-based approach to AIDS treatment, making it imperative for both the central and state governments to provide treatment “as far as possible”.
- Although the Bill lays down that treatment is the right of the patient, it stops short of making it a legal right and therefore, a patient who is denied ART treatment cannot ordinarily drag any government to court.
- Thus steps should be taken to make this a legal right.

### 4.3. HEALTH AND DISEASES

#### 4.3.1. DENGUE AND CHIKUNGUNYA

**Why in news?**

- There was a sharp increase in the incidence of chikungunya in the country in 2015 over the previous year. Dengue cases have also steadily risen, from 75,808 in 2013 to 99,913 last year, with the death toll rising from 193 to 220 during this period.
- The dengue map for 2015 shows that Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, West Bengal and Gujarat were the worst-affected. On chikungunya, Karnataka needs special help, as it has a disproportionately higher incidence compared to other States.

**Neglected tropical diseases**

- According to WHO, Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of communicable diseases that prevail in tropical and subtropical conditions in 149 countries and affect more than one billion people, costing developing economies billions of dollars every year.
• Dengue and chikungunya are such fast emerging pandemic-prone viral disease in many parts of the world. They flourish in urban poor areas, suburbs and the countryside in tropical and subtropical countries.

Causes

• **Climate change and erratic weather:**
  o This year, the unseasonal rain in February prolonged the season for mosquitoes. Climate changes make the environment conducive to mosquito breeding.
  o Variable and erratic weather coupled with the climate change has become the root cause for the spread of the mosquito borne diseases like dengue and Chikungunya.

• **Causalities due to comorbidity:**
  o Comorbidity is the presence of one or more additional diseases or disorders co-occurring with (that is, concomitant or concurrent with) a primary disease or disorder.
  o Casualties this year have mostly been due to co-morbidities of dengue and chikungunya rather than the viral fever itself.

• **Poor urban planning:**
  o Poor urban planning make people dwell in the slums which are often without basic amenities.
  o Unhygienic food and lack of proper houses make them more prone to water borne diseases.

• **Poor health infrastructure:**
  o India’s investment in health services remains one of the lowest in the world.

• **Lack of affordable healthcare facilities:**
  o Doctor to patient ratio is extremely poor in the villages. Costly healthcare services in cities deter village people from travelling to cities for treatment in initial stages of the diseases.

Solutions

• **Environmental management:**
  o Environmental management ought to be the mainstay of vector control and involves destroying, altering, removing or recycling non-essential containers that provide egg, larval or pupal habitats.
  o Clean environment makes sure that whatever the adverse weather changes, the mosquito does not breed.

• **Improved city infrastructure:**
  o It is important to have urban dwelling with proper waste management facilities.
  o There should be installation of reliable piped water supply to communities dwelling especially in slum areas to reduce the need for storage.
  o Strict legislation and regulation can significantly change planning and construction of buildings.

• **Biological and chemical control:**
  o Biological control is based on the introduction of organisms that prey upon, compete with or reduce populations of the target species.
  o Frequent sprays of chemical to curb such diseases are other way to reduce the cases.

• **Community participation:**
  o Mobilising the community to participate in sanitation campaigns holds the key, although families that live in deprived neighbourhoods will need generous municipal assistance, improved civic facilities and access to free health care.

• **Advance planning:**
  o It is necessary to embark on comprehensive public health initiatives in July, instead of waiting till October and trying to deal with a surge of sick people using a creaking healthcare system.

Lessons from prior successful initiatives

• **India:**
  o Experiments with bio-vector control - in Puducherry and later in Kheda district of Gujarat - showed a dramatic reduction in vector-borne diseases.
  o In these cases, what was done was aggressive cleaning of the environment to make sure there was no stagnant water in drains and use of fish larvae to eradicate the mosquito.
• Singapore:
  o Singapore has one of the highest burdens of infections transmitted by Aedes mosquitoes; dengue haemorrhagic fever appeared in the 1960s and became a major cause of child deaths.
  o It achieved significant control through integrated vector management that entailed: Advocacy, social mobilisation and legislation; collaboration within the health sector and across other sectors; evidence based decision-making and capacity building of providers and communities.
  o It has come down heavily on the construction sector for not complying with vector control guidelines.
• Sri Lanka:
  o There are several aspects to the Sri Lankan experience that could help evaluate the efforts of India’s States in their battle to control disease-spreading vectors. Better results were achieved by the island nation through integration of different approaches.
  o This includes focussing on mosquito control in irrigation and agriculture, introducing new classes of insecticides for residual spraying within houses, and scaling up distribution of insecticide-treated bed nets even in areas caught up in conflict.
  o Mobile centres for access to diagnostics and treatment also helped halt disease transmission.

4.3.2. LEPROSY

What is Leprosy?

• Leprosy, also known as Hansen’s disease, is a chronic infectious disease caused by Mycobacterium leprae.
• The disease mainly affects the skin, the peripheral nerves, mucosal surfaces of the upper respiratory tract and the eyes.
• Leprosy is known to occur at all ages ranging from early infancy to very old age. Leprosy is curable and early treatment averts most disabilities.

Transmission

• The exact mechanism of transmission of leprosy is not known. At least until recently, the most widely held belief was that the disease was transmitted by contact between cases of leprosy and healthy persons.
• More recently the possibility of transmission by the respiratory route is gaining ground. There are also other possibilities such as transmission through insects which cannot be completely ruled out.

Leprosy and India

• India was officially declared to have eliminated leprosy in 2005 when new cases fell to less than 1 per 10,000, yet India still accounts for the largest number of leprosy affected people in the world (58 per cent).
• The adversities suffered by leprosy patients are multi-faceted, ranging from medical, social and psychological to economic and legal.
• Therefore, lack of awareness, myths, socio-cultural beliefs, and the stigma attached to leprosy are perhaps the most pressing problems before public health activists today.

Recent initiatives

• Leprosy Case Detection Campaign –
  o The campaign, spearheaded by the National Leprosy Elimination Programme, covered 149 districts across 19 states and mobilized almost 300 000 health workers.
  o A record 320 million Indians have been screened in a door-to-door leprosy detection campaign, revealing thousands of “hidden” cases.
  o It involved volunteers from the Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) project.
• Introduction of Made-in-India Leprosy Vaccine –
  o A novel vaccine, developed in India, is to be launched on a pilot basis in five districts in Bihar and Gujarat.
  o If it yields positive results, the leprosy vaccine programme will be extended to other high-prevalence districts.

Milestones in NLEP
• 1955 - National Leprosy Control Programme (NLCP) launched
• 1983 - National Leprosy Eradication Programme launched
• 1983 - Introduction of Multidrug therapy (MDT) in Phases
• 2005 - Elimination of Leprosy at National Level
WHO’s global strategy to end leprosy –
  o The strategy aims to, by 2020, reduce to zero the number of children diagnosed with leprosy and related physical deformities; reduce the rate of newly-diagnosed leprosy patients with visible deformities to less than one per million; and ensure that all legislation that allows for discrimination on the basis of leprosy is overturned.
  o The new global strategy is guided by the principles of initiating action, ensuring accountability and promoting inclusivity.

Way Forward

- Leprosy is one of the most misunderstood diseases of the world; it poses some unique challenges in its control and elimination. A careful examination of the theoretical and practical approaches of the past can provide vital insights for the future.
- To reduce the burden, it is important to develop a holistic and multi-pronged approach that includes key policy changes, a public education campaign, sustainable livelihood programmes, skill training workshops and bringing in other medical stakeholders to generate employment, identify interventions to dispel stigma and mainstream the affected people.
- After achieving the target of elimination at all levels, the emphasis must shift to more policy level changes and sustaining quality of services.
- For instance, there is a need to pass The Repealing and Amending (Fourth) Elimination Discrimination Against Persons Affected by Leprosy (EDPAL) Bill, 2015 and implement the key recommendations of the Law Commission on rights and special privileges.

4.3.3. GLOBAL TB REPORT

Why in news?
The Global TB Report 2016, recently released, has revised the estimates for the tuberculosis (TB) burden in India upwards.

Key Findings of the report
- India has 27 per cent of the global burden of incident tuberculosis and 34 per cent of global TB deaths.
- In 2015, estimate of incidence TB is 2.8 million cases.
- India diagnosed and notified 1.7 million incident TB patients in 2015.
- The estimate of the number of TB deaths is 4,78,000 — making TB one of the leading causes of death in India.
- Further, of the estimated 79,000 cases of multidrug resistant (MDR) TB, about 31,000 were diagnosed.

Associated facts
- The Mycobacterium tuberculosis bacterium causes TB.
- It is spread through the air when a person with TB (whose lungs are affected) coughs, sneezes, spits, laughs or talks.
- Since antibiotics began to be used to fight TB, some strains have become resistant to drugs.
- Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) arises when an antibiotic fails to kill all of the bacteria that it targets, with the surviving bacteria developing resistance to that antibiotic and often others at the same time.

4.4. EDUCATION

4.4.1. NATIONAL ACADEMIC DEPOSITORY

- HRD minister inaugurated the National Academic Depository (NAD), a digital depository of academic awards
- It aims to replicate digitization and dematerialization of financial security depositories for the educational awards,
- The awards will be verified, authenticated, accessed and retrieved in a digital depository
- It is a move to enhance transparency and authenticity
• NAD will develop an online portfolio of all education certificates across Academic Institutes, which can be submitted easily for employment, higher education, and loans
• NAD will also integrate directly with Boards / Universities which issue Certificates and hence, will ensure authenticity of certificate records

4.4.2. NEW DELHI DECLARATION ON EDUCATION

Why in news
BRICS nations adopted the 'New Delhi Declaration on Education at 4th meeting of BRICS Ministers of Education

Key points
• The main aim is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all.
• Develop an enabling framework to promote research cooperation and knowledge transfer among BRICS countries.
• Facilitate mobility of students and scholars, and encourage exchange of teaching faculty.
• Share information on higher education systems, approval and recognition processes, quality assurance and accreditation, and prevalent procedures and practices for evaluation and recognition of qualifications to facilitate academic mobility.
• Identify a nodal institution within each country and create an institutional network to share ICT policies, Open Educational Resources and other e-resources, including e-Libraries, among BRICS member countries.
• Use information and communication technologies (ICTs) for improving access to education, enhancing the quality of teaching-learning process, teacher development, and strengthening educational planning and management
• Expand technical and vocational education and skills development programmes, for facilitating acquisition of skills and competencies by young people and adults for enhancing their employability and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship
• Initiate actions to formulate country-specific targets within the broader scope of the SDG4 and corresponding targets.
• Share the best practices available in BRICS countries on collaboration in education, research and innovation through the BRICS Network University.

4.5. MISCELLANEOUS

4.5.1. LIQUOR BAN

Why in news?
• Supreme Court upheld the Kerala Govt.’s decision to prohibit liquor in December 2015, however, in Oct., 2016 Kerala Govt (LDF) has sought for reversal in its policy of banning liquor. The Bihar Excise & Prohibition Act, 2016 that had come into force from October 2, 2016 proposing total liquor ban and its stricter provisions.

Arguments For
• Strict state regulation is aligned with the preservation of DPSP (Article 47) that places a responsibility on all state governments to “at least contain, if not curtail, consumption of alcohol” (Article 47).
• It helps in bringing healthy familial relations –
  ✓ Alcohol impacts family resources and leaves women and children as its most vulnerable victims. It may reduce cases of domestic violence.
  ✓ A social stigma at least as far as the family unit is concerned is still attached to the consumption of alcohol.

According to the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre of Thiruvananthapuram, 44% of Kerala’s road accidents, 19% of stays in government hospitals and 80% divorces are linked to alcohol abuse. According to recent survey by IISC Bangalore, researchers claim that more than 60% of accidents in India is caused due to alcoholic drinks taken by the driver.
• **Health implications:** Alcohol, especially in large quantities, can damage people’s kidneys and livers, and can eventually lead to death.

• **Reduction in crime:** Some argue that there is a direct correlation between alcohol consumption and an increase in crime. Violent crimes, assault, and disorderly conduct are most common with persons who are intoxicated.

• **Argument against:** Historical evidence shows that prohibition does not encourage or enable people to quit drinking. Rather, prohibition tends to drive the trade underground and creates a market for **smuggling of illicit liquor** and production of spurious liquor.

• **Loss to state exchequer:**
  - The sale of alcohol contributes to the economy of the state through the tax directly and through the tourism, indirectly. Eg. Tamil Nadu nearly Rs.30,000 crore, or over a quarter of its revenue in 2015-16, came from taxes on the sale of alcohol and excise on manufacturing spirits.
  - This income has enabled successive regimes from 2006 onwards to splurge on social sector schemes, especially the trademark programmes to supply free rice to nearly all ration card holders, distribute consumer goods and maintain its pioneering nutritious noon meal scheme for all children in government and aided schools and anganwadis.

• **Restricts freedom of choice:** Also, people should have the freedom of choice to decide to drink alcohol or not, as long as that freedom does not infringe on the freedoms of other people. Therefore, a law prohibiting alcohol would remove the freedom of choice.

**Way ahead**

• Addiction is a treatable disease, not a moral failing and there are many proven strategies which can reduce its burden.

• The desire to address the serious social problems caused by a minority of those who consume alcohol by prohibition is a distortion of reality.

• There is a need of effective counselling interventions for those who wish to control their drinking rather than complete ban.

### 4.5.2. SWACHH BHARAT MISSION: 2ND ANNIVERSARY

#### Why in news?

- **Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh** are the first states to have become open defecation free (ODF) in **urban areas**.
- The State of **Himachal Pradesh** has been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF), making it the second State in the country after **Sikkim** to achieve the feat in **rural areas**.

#### Efforts by the government to make it a success

- Cash incentive for building toilets are being provided by the government.
- Creating solid waste management facilities.
- Efforts and focus on bringing behavioral changes. For instance-

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**States that have experimented with liquor bans**

- Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Tamil Nadu, Mizoram and Manipur are all states that have experimented with partial or complete ban on liquor.
- But change in governments as well as a negative feedback from the public have forced political parties to reverse the decision.
- Widespread smuggling and sale of illicit liquor have also been the reasons for such bans to collapse.

**States where total ban is imposed**

- **Gujarat**, after its formation in 1960 out of Bombay State, continued the ban even after independence and still enforces it to this day. But massive industry of illicit liquor widely prevalent in the state.

- **Nagaland**, a complete ban has been in effect since 1989. However, still numerous illegal bars and shops continue to operate in the state. Smuggling of alcohol from neighbouring Assam has also been reported.

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**About Swachh Bharat Mission**

- It was launched on 2 October 2014 to make India clean and open defecation free by 2019, Mahatma Gandhi’s 150th birth anniversary.
- The programme is divided into two categories – Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) and Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban).
- The Ministry for Drinking Water and Sanitation is looking at the rural part of the scheme.
- The Urban Development Ministry is implementing the programme in urban areas.
✓ Roping in celebrities to promote toilet use.
✓ City surveys to instill a sense of competition among cities.
✓ Using technology like Hike Messenger Group which has local administrators from the respective states showcasing their achievements in implementing the scheme.

- Creation of a portal by the ministry where all the information is available about the projects.

**Swachh Bharat Abhiyan: Progress Report**

- In rural areas, approximately 100,000 villages have also been declared ODF.
- A total of 405 out of the 4,041 cities and towns have so far claimed to have become ODF.
- The mission has managed to construct 36% of individual toilets, 30% community toilets and 9% public toilets.
- The government has set a target of making 334 more cities ODF by March next year.
- Progress of the mission is slow in terms of toilet coverage in rural and urban areas but definitely environment is created to clean India.
- It has slowly developed into a people’s movement with greater awareness and participation.
- Interdepartmental coordination is increased.
- Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra showed the most improvement while Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Bihar reported no change. Other states showed marginal improvement.
- Some of the worst-performing states Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Jharkhand.

**Challenges to the mission**

- **Swachha Bharat Kosh**, a fund created for SBM programs hasn’t taken off well.
- Private participation by way of CSR is less as interested private companies do not have detailed project report.
- Lack of funds
- Municipal bodies are not fully engaged with citizens or even the mission.
- Struggle involved in bringing behavioral changes in rural population.

### 4.5.3 OPEN DEFECATION IN INDIA

**What is it?**

- Open defecation refers to the practice whereby people go out in fields, bushes, forests, open bodies of water, or other open spaces rather than using the toilet to defecate.
- The practice is rampant in India and the country is home to the world’s largest population of people who defecate in the open and excrete close to 65,000 tonnes of faeces into the environment each day.

**Problems associated with open defecation**

- **Malnutrition**- About 43 per cent of children in India suffer from some degree of malnutrition.
- **Diarrhoea and worm infection** are two major health conditions that affect school-age children impacting their learning abilities.
- Open defecation puts at **risk the dignity of women** in India. Women feel constrained to relieve themselves only under the cover of dark for reasons of privacy to protect their dignity and make them more prone to physical attacks.

**Key Facts**

- **Swachhta Status Report in 2015**, reports for more than half of the rural population (52.1 per cent) of the country still defecates in open.
- As per **UNICEF report** Around 564 million people defecate in the open.
- **India** accounts for 90 per cent of the people in South Asia and 59 per cent of the 1.1 billion people in the world who practice open defecation.
• **Cripples national development** - workers produce less, live shorter lives, save and invest less, and are less able to send their children to school.

**Challenges faced**

• **Traditional practice** - it is deeply ingrained in society. Sanitation is not a socially acceptable topic, and hence, people do not discuss it.

• **Poverty** - many of the poorest people will not prioritize toilets and besides, many are living in rented homes without toilets.

• **Lack of acceptance** - society does not view the lack of a toilet as unacceptable. Building and owning a toilet is not perceived an aspiration.

• **Seen as government’s responsibility** - construction of toilets is still seen as the government’s responsibility, rather than a priority that individual households should take responsibility.

• **Gap between knowledge and practice** - even when people are aware of the health risks related to poor sanitation.

**Way forward**

The challenge is to motivate people to see a toilet as fundamental to their social standing, status and well-being. The success of Swachh Bharat Mission is dependent upon behavioral changes and thus there is a need to engage with the community and facilitate the efforts by the people and involved organisations.

### 4.5.4. SUGAR TAX

**Why in News?**

A tax on sugary drinks to increase the retail price by 20 per cent or more according to a new report from the World Health Organization.

**Why this move?**

• A tax on sugary beverages raising their price would result in a proportionate reduction in their consumption, that would advance the fight against obesity, which has more than doubled since 1980. About half a billion adults were obese in 2014, roughly 11 percent of men and 15 percent of women.

• Excess calories contribute to overweight and obesity as they can be readily converted to body fat and stored within various tissues. Overconsumption is likely exacerbated by an increase in the serving sizes of sugar-sweetened beverages over the last several decades.

• Recent evidence further suggests an association between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and preventable mortality from diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer, with the majority of deaths occurring in low and middle-income countries.

**Recommendations to Governments**

• Subsidize what people pay for fresh fruits and vegetables to improve diets.

• Increase income for governments to pay for health services.

• Fund information campaigns.

**Success story**

• The best-known success story is in Mexico, which passed a sugary-drink tax in 2013, prompting a substantial drop in consumption.

• Hungary has imposed a tax on packaged products with high sugars, salt or caffeine levels.

**Situation in India**

• The actual numbers of people living with diabetes, at over 60 million in 2013.

• If implemented, like the tobacco tax, which reportedly helped decrease tobacco consumption, such a tax might be able to cut down the consumption of sugary drinks among children and would be a positive step towards preventing obesity.
The Union Ministry of Health has been contemplating the regulation of advertising, and increasing the tax on both junk food and sweetened beverages, it is yet to take an actual step. Kerala has done so recently with a tax on some types of foods.

4.5.5. INDIA MOVES UP IN THE WORLD GIVING INDEX

Why in news?
Charities Aid Foundations (CAF) released 7th World Giving Index.

About the report
- It is released by Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), which is an international non-profit organization promoting effective giving and philanthropy.
- This year, 140 countries were surveyed, representing around 96% of the world’s population.
- Myanmar tops the CAF World Giving Index for the third year running, followed by USA and Australia.
- India received a 29% overall score in the world giving index.

Findings about India
- The proportion of Indians participating in helping a stranger has increased by 6 percentage points to 43% whilst those donating have increased from 20% in 2014 to 22% during 2015.
- But even with 203 million people donating money, 401 million people helping a stranger and 200 million people volunteering time, India ranks 91 in the index.
- This is because in terms of numbers India is among the highest but when taken as a percentage of the total population, India lags behind.

4.5.6. RAJASTHAN DRIVE TO END CHILD MARRIAGES

Key facts
- Under the banner of “Sajha Abhiyan” of the Rajasthan government, UNFPA and UNICEF, a district-level Abhiyan Yatra was started for complete elimination of child marriages in the State.
- As part of “Sajha Abhiyan multiple stakeholders, interventions and sectors are converging to address child marriage in the State as a unified force.
- The yatra will bring the community on a united platform to work towards making the State child marriage-free.
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5. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

5.1. NOBEL PRIZE IN MEDICINE/PHYSIOLOGY

Why in News?
Yoshinori Ohsumi, a Japanese cell biologist was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for “his discoveries of mechanisms for autophagy”.

About Autophagy
- Autophagy is a Greek term for “self-eating”.
- It is a fundamental process for degrading and recycling cellular components.
- This discovery of the mechanism of autophagy will aid in the fight against diseases such as cancer, Parkinson’s disease and Alzheimer’s.

5.2. NOBEL PRIZE IN PHYSICS 2016

Why in News?
The Nobel Prize 2016 in Physics was awarded to David J. Thouless, F. Duncan M. Haldane and J. Michael Kosterlitz for “theoretical discoveries of topological phase transitions and topological phases of matter.”

What is it?
- Topology refers to the study of geometrical properties and spatial relations unaffected by the continuous change of shape or size of figures.
- It is referred to as the modern version of geometry.
- The scientists studied different phases (such as solid, liquid and gas) of different materials. These phases were characterized using topology.

**Significance**

- The study is being applauded as the meeting point of topology and phase transitions.
- It will help make the study of phase transitions easier.

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**5.3. NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY 2016**

**Why in News?**

- The Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2016 was awarded to Frenchman Jean-Pierre Sauvage, British-born Fraser Stoddart and Dutch scientist Bernard “Ben” Feringa for “developing miniscule machines at the molecular level.”
Significance

- These molecular machines with controllable movements can perform a task when energy is added.
- Machines will eventually prove to be invaluable - doing things no other machines can do.

5.4. SOLUTION TO MARINE OIL SPILLS

- Indian researchers have developed a membrane with exceptional hydrophobic and high oil-loving (oleophilic) properties.
- The membrane acts like a filter. When water-oil mixture is passed through the membrane, the oil permeates by rapid absorption while water is retained above the membrane. The oil permeation is 100 percent in the case of oil-water mixture.
- Water-oil emulsification takes place in the seas when water gets mixed with oil under high water current conditions. The membrane is effective in separating oil and water from an emulsion and in solving the problem of oil spills.

5.5. HIMANSH

Why in News?

A high-altitude research station in Himalaya called HIMANSH has been established by the National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences at 13,500 ft (4000m) in a remote region in Sipti in Himachal Pradesh.
Objective
The centre has been established as a part of Indian government’s initiative to study and quantify the Himalayan glacier responses towards the climate change.

Significance of HIMANSH

- Help researchers to quantify the glacier melting and its relation to changing climate.
- For undertaking surveys using Terrestrial Laser Scanners (TLS) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV).
- Help in digitizing the glacier motion and snow cover variations with utmost precision.
- Some of the glacier that are already being studied under this project include Bada Shigri, Samudra Tapu, Sutri Dhaka, Batal, Gepang Gath and Kunzam.

5.6. HYPERELASTIC BONE

Why in News?
Researchers from Northwestern University in Illinois have developed a 3D printable ink that produces a synthetic bone implant that rapidly induces bone regeneration and growth.

Hyperelastic vs autograft

- An autograft is an option where a bone piece is taken from the patient’s body usually from hip or rib, and implanted where it’s needed elsewhere in the same patient’s skeleton.
- Hyperelastic bone is a synthetic material that can be implanted under the skin for new bone to grow on, or used to replace lost bone matter altogether.

Significance

- Hyperealstic bone is made of hydroxyapatite, a naturally occurring mineral in our bones and teeth will provide strength to create bones.
- The hyperelastic material can be easily customised to any shape.
- This discovery is a breakthrough in reconstructive surgery.

5.7. GSAT 18 SATELLITE LAUNCHED

Why in News?

- India’s latest communication satellite, GSAT 18 was successfully launched from the spaceport of Kourou in French Guiana, South America.
- It is been built by ISRO and ISRO’s Master Control Facility at Hassan, Karnataka is controlling the satellite.
- The Master Facility will also perform the initial raising manoeuvres using the Liquid Apogee Motor (LAM) of the satellite, placing it in a circular Geostationary Orbit.

Challenges

India does not have any launcher capable of carrying heavier satellites like GSAT-18. However, Indian scientists are developing GSLV –III to overcome the challenge.

5.8. ICGS SHIPS COMMISSIONED

Why in News?

- Two Indian Coast Guard Ships: Aryaman and Atulya have been commissioned into the service.
What is it?
- These coast guard ships are eighteenth and nineteenth in the series of twenty fast Patrol Vehicles (FPVs).
- Aryaman and Atulya have been built by Cochin Shipyard Limited.
- Atulya will be based at Kochi while Aryaman will be based at Vishakhapatnam.
- Special features include Integrated Bridge Management System (IBMS) and Integrated Machinery Control System (IMCS).
- Integrated bridge system (IBS) is a kind of navigation management system which links other systems to provide all the details pertaining to ship’s navigation at one place. (in box)

Significance
- The ships are equipped with state-of-the-art machinery, navigational equipment and advanced communication.
- They can be used for various jobs such as surveillance, search, rescue and interdiction.

5.9. INDIA SHOWS SECOND HIGHEST GROWTH IN SCIENCE RESEARCH

Why in News?
- According to Nature Index 2016 Rising Stars report, India ranks second position, only behind China, among countries with the highest increase in their contribution to high-quality scientific research.
- The Indian institutions that made to the top 100 highest performers across the globe include Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR), Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and Indian Institute of Technology (IITs).

Significance
- The report reflects India’s emergence as one of the world’s largest economies.
- The report shows that India is moving in the right direction and hopefully, it will stimulate not only the government and individual scientists, but also young people in schools to take science more seriously.

Hurdles to Scientific Research in India
- The academic ambience in many universities does not encourage the research pursuits of faculties. Research management is another very serious problem.
- Students drifting to other job-oriented courses after graduation in science is prevalent in India owing to the widespread impression among them that unlike professional courses, a career in basic science is not lucrative.
- Lack of investment: India currently spends around one per cent of its GDP on research and development. In contrast, China spent about $209 billion on research and development in 2015, or 2.1 per cent of its GDP.

Way Forward
- India needs to grow an attractive environment for research, so that students and academics who leave the country for higher studies and research opportunities have an incentive to return.

5.10. BIOTECH-KISAN AND CATTLE GENOMICS

Why in News?
- The Ministry of Science and Technology has launched two farmer-centric initiatives known as Biotech-KISAN and Cattle Genomics.

Biotech-KISAN (Krishi Innovation Science Application Network)
- For Farmers: The Biotech-KISAN is a Farmer centric scheme launched by of the Department of Biotechnology, where scientists will work in sync with farmers to understand problems and find solutions.
• **By Farmers:** Developed in consultation with the farmers. Biotech-KISAN aims to link farmers, scientists and science institutions across the country in a network that identifies and helps solve their problems in a cooperative manner.

• **Empower women:** The scheme includes the Mahila Biotech-KISAN fellowships, for training and education in farm practices, for women farmers. The Scheme also aims to support the women farmers/entrepreneur in their small enterprises, making her a grass root innovator.

• **Connects Globally:** Biotech-KISAN will connect farmers to best global practices; training workshops will be held in India and other countries.

• **Hubs and Spoke.** In each of these 15 regions, a Farmer organisation will be the hub connected to different science labs, Krishi Vigyan Kendra and State Agriculture Universities co-located in the region. The hub will reach out to the farmers in the region and connect them to scientists and institutions.

**Cattle Genomics**

• Through this programme, the government aims to improve the genetic health of the cattle population through genomic selection. Genomic selection will ensure high-yielding, disease-resistant, resilient livestock.

• Genome sequencing of indigenous cattle breeds from all registered cattle breeds of India by involving various stakeholders is to start soon.

• The programme also envisages development of high-density DNA chips. This will reduce the cost and time interval for future breeding programmes and productivity of indigenous cattle would be enhanced.

**5.11. INDIAN RESEARCHERS PRODUCES STABLE SOLAR CELLS**

**Why in news?**

• In a first, a researcher from Pune’s Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) has successfully produced a stable, high-efficiency, all-inorganic perovskite nanocrystal solar cells.

**Significance**

• Silicone-based solar cells available currently are extremely expensive, so research to reduce their cost and increase efficiency is going on.

• Traditional research on solar cells has been around a hybrid organic-inorganic halide-perovskite material which has a high efficiency of 22%, but is stable under ambient conditions for a very short time.

• In earlier efforts on such a material the scientific community was developing bigger size crystals which made the product undesirable. Materials with perovskite structure have been the frontrunners in order to make solar cells cost-effective.

• The researcher was able to remove the organic element and introduce nanocrystals of cesium to develop a completely inorganic material which was also thermally stable.

**What was done?**

• The team replaced methyl ammonium, the organic component, with cesium to produce the material of cesium lead iodide. The size and developed nanocrystals was reduced which made the now all-inorganic material stable.

• Reducing the size of material to nanometer range, increases the surface to volume ratio tremendously, resulting into high surface energy making the high-temperature cubic phase crystal structure stable even at room temperature

• The nano-crystals were assembled as a thin film having 10.77 per cent efficiency to convert sunlight to electricity and produce a high voltage of 1.23 volts

• The team was also able to prepare a long-range charge conducting film using this material which demonstrates that the material could be amenable to be used to develop an opto-electronic device.
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6. SECURITY

6.1. COMPREHENSIVE CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM (CCIT)

Why in news?

In her speech at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Indian Foreign Minister appealed the global community for early adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).

What is it?

- CCIT, drafted by India in 1996, is a proposed treaty which provides a comprehensive legal framework against terrorism.
- It includes following major objectives:
  - To have a universal definition of terrorism that all 193-members of the UNGA will adopt into their own criminal law
  - To ban all terror groups and shut down terror camps
  - To prosecute all terrorists under special laws
  - To make cross-border terrorism an extraditable offence worldwide.

Hurdles in adoption of CCIT

It is yet to be adopted by the UN General Assembly. The challenges in adopting a comprehensive policy against terrorism include:

- Difference in threat perception- Even though India has been affected from terrorism since long, the developed world took cognisance of the threat only after 9/11.
- Difference in states capability to combat terrorism, issues related to ensuring human rights and rule of law have also added to the complexity in adopting a comprehensive policy.

Impact of CCIT

Although consensus eludes towards adoption of the terrorism convention, but discussions have yielded the following:

- International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, adopted on 15 December 1997;
- International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism, adopted on 9 December 1999; and
- United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted in 2006.

6.2. BITCOINS SEIZED

Why in news?

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) is set to freeze about 500 Bitcoins in the accounts of traffickers.

Why is it important?

- It is the first ever seizure of the virtual, unregulated currency in a criminal probe in the country.
- While criminal probe agencies have seized a variety of assets like cash and immovable assets in their respective investigations all these years, Bitcoins have never been frozen as part of the tainted assets seizure.

About Bitcoins

- Bitcoin is a form of digital currency, created and held electronically. No one controls it.
- Bitcoins aren’t printed, like dollars or euros — they’re produced by people, and increasingly businesses, running computers all around the world, using software that solves mathematical problems.
Background

- It involves trafficking of drugs and narcotic supplements over the cryptic form of internet called ‘Darknet’ using the illegal payment method of Bitcoins to escape from detection by investigative agencies.
- ‘Darknet’ refers to a secret internet network which can only be accessed with specific software, configurations and authorization. It is difficult to track using usual communications protocols and ports.

6.3. AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING AND CONTROL SYSTEM

Why in News?

DRDO developed a multisensor airborne early warning and control (AEW&C) system on a carrier jet, providing an airborne surveillance system in collaboration with CAB (Centre for Airborne Systems) for the Indian Air Force.

Why is it important?

It is the first native AEW system developed by DRDO and CAB. It was completely developed and built using the native technology platform, EMB-145.

Utility of AEW&C for Indian Air Force

- Detection and tracking, identification and classification of threats through its ‘sharp-seeing and listening’ radar that can look out deep across enemy territory.
- Guidance and interception control,
- Display of air situation picture and multisensor data integration.

AEW&C system platform details

- The jet platform selected for system is modified version of the Embraer EMB-145 from Brazil.
- It has additional power unit to power onboard mission systems. It can also support the in-flight re-fuelling system for extended endurance of the mission.
- It has 240° coverage through two radiating planar arrays which are fixed in back-to-back arrangement in an active antenna array unit (AAAU).
- The AAAU is designed to fit 10x2 antenna array panels, 160 Transmit Receive Multi Modules (TRMM) and all the supporting devices, including power supply units and control units.
- Each TRMM is made of eight compactly fused transmit receive modules to ensure high density installation of 160 TRMMs.

6.4. SIT COMBING P-NOTES DATE TO CURB BLACK MONEY

Why in news?

The special investigation team (SIT) on black money asked the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) to furnish the details including complete transfer trail, beneficiary owners of all those investing through participatory notes (P-Notes).

What are P-Notes?

- P-Notes or Participatory Notes are Overseas Derivative Instruments that have Indian stocks as their underlying assets.
- They allow foreign investors to buy stocks listed on Indian exchanges without being registered.
- The instrument gained popularity as FII’s, to avoid the formalities of registering and to remain anonymous, started betting on stocks through this route.
Government concerns

- The primary reason why P-Notes are worrying is because of the anonymous nature of the instrument as these investors could be beyond the reach of Indian regulators.
- Further, there is a view that it is being used in money laundering with wealthy Indians, like the promoters of companies, using it to bring back unaccounted funds and to manipulate their stock prices.

Why data combing it important?

- This is the first time the government-constituted body has sought such massive amount of data, which includes the list of beneficial owners and transfer trials of investors taking the P-Note route to invest in domestic equity and debt markets, to bring back unaccounted money.
- SIT suspects some links between the individuals linked to offshore companies floated by Panama law firm Mossack Fonseca.
- A major chunk of outstanding ODIs (offshore derivative instruments) invested in India – 31.31 per cent – are from Cayman Islands having a negligible population.
- Currently, the P-Note assets in the country are around Rs 2.1 lakh crore – 8.4 per cent of the total FPI assets, coming down from about 50% in 2007.

6.5. CYBER SECURITY IN BANKS: DEBIT CARD DATA THEFT ISSUE

Background

- It was recently revealed that around 19 Indian Banks faced a series of data theft in last 6 months. It is the biggest debit card fraud in Indian history.
- The Banks have recalled and blocked more than 32 lakh debit cards.
- This has led to banking fraud of around Rs. 1.3 crores. The potential loss could be much more than this.
- The probe by National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), which has oversight over all the retail transactions, found a malware-induced security breach in the systems of Hitachi Payment Services, which provides ATMs, point of sale and other services in India.

Implications

- The government and RBI are putting efforts to harness digital revolution to bring about socio-economic changes. For example,
  - steps towards increasing financial inclusion,
  - better targeting of subsidies through the direct benefit payments model,
  - improving economic efficiency by lowering transaction costs, and
  - moving toward a cashless economy so as to reduce the circulation of black money and curb tax evasion.
- The fraud, thus, exposes the vulnerability of Indian retail financial structure.
- It shakes the faith and confidence of the people in the financial structure.
- If not tackled immediately with effective means this could be a huge setback for the government.

RBI's efforts to address the issue cyber crimes

- In June 2016, RBI issued instructions on a cyber security framework in banks, asking them to put in place a board-approved cyber security policy, prepare a cyber crisis management plan, and make arrangement for continuous surveillance.
- The circular also asked banks to share unusual cyber security incidents with RBI.
- RBI has set up an expert panel on IT Examination and Cyber Security to provide assistance in banks’ cyber security initiatives
- It also proposes to cover, by 2017-18, all banks under a detailed IT examination programme launched recently.

Other measures needed

- It is the duty of the banks to integrate inter-generational legacy systems across branches, ATMs and online banking networks into one seamless and secure whole.
There is a need to put cyber security at top priority of banks. Top managements at lenders should reappraise their cyber culture, heed warnings and alerts promptly, and address shortcomings.

Concluding Remarks

Going Digital is an opportunity and also a threat, but it is still necessary to adopt it because of the convenience it brings. But we need better fraud management and security in place.

6.6. CYBER SECURITY PLATFORM TO FUND STARTUPS

Why in news

- Indian government and NASSCOM have come together to create a platform for cyber security products and solution companies.
- It aims to create a special fund for cyber security start-ups.
- It will be the first platform for homegrown cyber security companies.

Significance

- To build local solutions to tackle internet security challenges.
- To promote indigenous expertise in the field
- To help local firms get a larger share of the country’s digital security technology budget.

6.7. RANGE OF BRAHMOS TO BE DOUBLED

Why in News?

- India and Russia have approved the proposal to double the range of BrahMos, world’s first supersonic missile. The range of the missile was limited to 290km

What is it?

- Russia and India teamed up in 1998 to develop this missile on the lines of Russia Yakont anti-ship missile.
- For ranges to be higher than 300km, the country must be a member of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- Following India’s accession to MTCR, the range of the missile will be increased to 600 km.
- Extending the range of the missile will enhance its stand-off capability and its operational radius. With extended range, speed and accuracy, Brahmos is a force to rely on.

6.8. INDIA-CHINA JOINT ARMY EXERCISE

- The Indian and Chinese armies held the second joint exercise “Sino-India Cooperation 2016“ as part of the ongoing initiative to enhance interaction and cooperation between India and China.
- It was sequel to the first exercise held on February 6, 2016 under the provisions of Border Defense Cooperation Agreement, 2013.
- The joint exercise, compliments the hand in hand series of the India-China joint exercises and the effort of both the nations to enhance cooperation and maintain peace and tranquility along the border areas of India and China.
- The exercise increases the confidence of the border population in case of natural calamity and also increased the level of trust and cooperation between the two border guarding forces along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh.
7. ENVIRONMENT

7.1. NEW URBAN AGENDA - HABITAT – III

Why in news?
- The New Urban Agenda was officially adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (referred as “Habitat III”) held recently in Quito, Ecuador.
- The UN’s Habitat conferences are held in a bi-decennial cycle, with previous editions being held in Vancouver (1976) and Istanbul (1996).

What is New Urban Agenda?
- It is a set of 175 commitments that countries need to adhere to tackle the staggering challenges of urbanization.
- It sets the global vision of sustainable urbanization for the next 20 years.
- It is a roadmap for building cities that can serve as engines of prosperity and centres of cultural and social well-being while protecting the environment.
- It also provides guidance for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and provides the underpinning for actions to address climate change.

Constituents of the New Urban Agenda
In the New Urban Agenda, leaders have committed to:
- **Provide basic services for all citizens**: These services include: access to housing, safe drinking water and sanitation, nutritious food, healthcare and family planning, education, culture and access to communication technologies.
- **Ensure that all citizens have access to equal opportunities and face no discrimination**: The New Urban Agenda calls on city authorities to take into account the needs of women, youth and children, people with disabilities, marginalized groups, older persons, indigenous people, among other groups.
- **Promote measures that support cleaner cities**: In the Agenda, leaders have committed to increase their use of renewable energy, provide better and greener public transport, and sustainably manage their natural resources.
- **Strengthen resilience in cities to reduce the risk and the impact of disasters**: Some of the measures include: better urban planning, quality infrastructure and improving local responses.
- **Take action to address climate change by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions**: Leaders have committed to involve not just the local government but all actors of society to take climate action taking into account the Paris Agreement on climate change which seeks to limit the increase in global temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius.
- **Fully respect the rights of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons regardless of their migration status**: Leaders have recognized that migration poses challenges but it also brings significant contributions to urban life. Because of this, they have committed to establish measures that help migrants, refugees and IDPs make positive contributions to societies.
- **Improve connectivity and support innovative and green initiatives**: This includes establishing partnerships with businesses and civil society to find sustainable solutions to urban challenges.
- **Promote safe, accessible and green public spaces**
  - Human interaction should be facilitated by urban planning, which is why the Agenda calls for an increase in public spaces such as sidewalks, cycling lanes, gardens, squares and parks.
  - Sustainable urban design plays a key role in ensuring the liveability and prosperity of a city.

Significance of New Urban Agenda
- More than half of the world’s population now lives in cities. So it makes sense that the New Urban Agenda will significantly shape the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Sustainability is at the core of the “New Urban Agenda” with a substantial focus on various “transformative commitments for sustainable urban development”, linking it further with themes like social inclusion, urban prosperity and resilience.
- It commits to a “vision of cities for all” where “all inhabitants” are able to “inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements.”
Relevance for India

India was also one of the signatories. For India, the New Urban Agenda is significant because of the following reasons:

- Though the pace of urbanization was slow until now, with only 31.16% of Indians living in cities, it is expected to accelerate.
- It took 40 years for 230 million Indians to become urban citizens. For the next 250 million, it is expected to take only 20 years.
- Presently, cities are anything but liveable, crumbling under congestion, pollution and lack of basic facilities for a huge segment of the population—65 million people—who live in slums.
- The Agenda provides a vision wherein government initiatives like Smart Cities, AMRUT and ‘Housing For All’ can be seamlessly integrated.

Concerns

- Since it is a non-binding document without concrete mechanisms for implementation, its ability to effect change is limited.
- The agenda is built around a series of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11, which aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. However, the New Urban Agenda has been criticised for lacking direct links to the targets set out within Goal 11.
- Under the umbrella of smart cities, using open data networks for better urban planning provided an optimistic, technology-based future for cities. However, questions about the security, ethics, and oversight of large-scale information gathering remain largely unanswered.

Way Forward

- All countries will need to step up their commitments if the aspirations set out in Habitat III are to be achieved. Key concepts, such as integrated planning and models for local-national government cooperation, will need further work.
- With the New Urban Agenda as a road map, it is hoped that we can rise to the challenge of creating more liveable, resilient and sustainable cities. Because without global urban transformation, we cannot achieve sustainable development as a whole.
- As for India, UN Habitat plans to review country-level progress on its New Urban Agenda in Kuala Lumpur in 2018. India’s performance on improving the quality of life in its cities will be watched.

7.2. KIGALI AGREEMENT

Why in news?

- 197 countries have struck a new landmark deal at Kigali in Rwanda to reduce the emissions of category of greenhouse gases (GHGs) which leads to hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs)
- Its reduction could prevent up to 0.5 degrees Celsius of global warming by year 2100.

Significance

- The Kigali Amendment amends the 1987 Montreal Protocol to now include gases responsible for global warming.
- The Kigali Agreement or amended Montreal Protocol for HFCs reduction will be binding on countries from 2019.
- It also has provisions for penalties for non-compliance.
- It is considered absolutely vital for reaching the Paris Agreement target of keeping global temperature rise to below 2-degree Celsius compared to pre-industrial times.

What is the Montreal Protocol on Substances?

- The treaty was originally signed in 1987 and substantially amended in 1990 and 1992 is aimed at reducing the production and consumption of ozone depleting substances in order to protect the earth’s fragile ozone layer.
- This agreement was one of the few success of multilateral negotiations.
• Under it, developed countries will also provide enhanced funding support estimated at billions of dollars globally. The exact amount of additional funding from developed countries will be agreed at the next Meeting of the Parties in Montreal in 2017.

**Different timelines**

All signatory countries have been divided into three groups with different timelines to go about reductions of HFCs. This agreement shows a new form of grouping:

• **First group**: It includes richest countries like US and those in European Union (EU). They will freeze production and consumption of HFCs by 2018. They will reduce them to about 15% of 2012 levels by 2036.

• **Second group**: It includes countries like China, Brazil and all of Africa etc. They will freeze HFC use by 2024 and cut it to 20% of 2021 levels by 2045.

• **Third group**: It includes countries India, Pakistan, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia etc. They will be freezing HFC use by 2028 and reducing it to about 15% of 2025 levels by 2047.

**Steps taken by India: Eliminating use of HFC-23**

• Earlier this week, India announced domestic action on HFC-23 (trifluoro-methane), a super greenhouse gas with a GWP of 14,800, which is produced as a byproduct of HCFC-22 (chloro-difluoro-methane). Currently, HCFC-22 is the most commonly used refrigerant in India.

• India has mandated five manufacturers — who fully control the domestic market — to capture and incinerate HFC-23 so that it is not released into the atmosphere. This action will eliminate release of HFC-23 equivalent to about 100 million tonne of Carbon dioxide emissions over the next 15 years.

• It also directed the companies to create and maintain sufficient storage capacity to ensure that all HFC-23 is stored

• Companies have been asked to internalize the cost of this environmental externality and create sufficient storage facility to take care of down time and run the incinerators to ensure that HFC-23 is not released in the atmosphere.

**7.3. ANTARCTIC CIRCUMPOLAR EXPEDITION**

**Why in news?**

More than 50 researchers from 30 countries are to carry out the first scientific full circumnavigation of Antarctica in an attempt to measure pollution and climate change.

**What is it?**

ACE is the first project of the newly-created Swiss Polar Institute (SPI) to "enhance international relations and collaboration between countries, as well as to spark the interest of a new generation of young scientists in polar research."
Significance

- The Antarctic Circumpolar Expedition (ACE) will be the first scientific mission to study all the major islands in the Antarctic ocean, as well as the Antarctic land mass.
  - Antarctica acts as global thermometer for any ecological change.
  - A better understanding of Antarctica is critical, not just for its preservation, but for the whole planet.
- Global collaboration – More than 50 researchers from 30 countries have collaborated for the expedition.
- Pollution and biodiversity: ACE will help to make strategies to reduce pollution in Antarctic region which is important for entire world.
  - Help to map the effect of pollutants on whales, penguins and albatrosses in the Southern Ocean. Information on whales is important for the conservation and management of the Antarctic marine environment.
  - Investigate the extent to which micro plastics have reached the Southern Ocean ecosystem and whether they have entered the food web.
- Biodiversity: the rise in sea water will affect the aquatic habitants of the Antarctic sea and impact on beaches and places near the sea where humans live will be impacted too.
- Climatology: Scientists will also take ice core samples and study biodiversity on the continent in an attempt to reveal conditions before the onset of the Industrial Revolution.
  - Our understanding of Monsoon, ENSO, Madden Julian oscillation etc will be enhanced.

7.4. NDMA’S GUIDELINES ON CROWD MANAGEMENT, SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

Why in news?

Recently NDMA has released crowd management guidelines to ‘Reduce risks this festive season’.

Necessity for guidelines

- An undercurrent of uncertainty prevails at huge gatherings.
- A crowd can become a stampede - a man-made disaster - in a moment and can result in casualties.
- A crowd can give in to baseless rumours or may just follow a herd-like mentality.
- Also the risk of fire is high especially during Ram leela celebrations of Dussehra.
- Once triggered, it is very difficult to contain this fluid mass of people. It is, therefore, important that the organisers of these pandles and Dussehra celebrations take simple precautions to ensure safety.

Guidelines

- Free movement: The first step is to regulate traffic in areas surrounding the pandles and Dussehra grounds.
  - For pedestrians, route maps for reaching the venue and emergency exit route should be put up at strategic points.
  - Barricading to ensure the movement of people in a queue is key to control a burgeoning crowd.
  - Unauthorised parking and makeshift stalls eating into pedestrian space also need to be taken care of.
- Monitoring: CCTV cameras to monitor movement and police presence to reduce the risk of snatching and other petty crimes should also be on the organisers' agenda.
- Medical emergencies can occur in claustrophobic spaces. An ambulance and health care professionals on stand-by can save lives in exigencies.
- For participants:
  - Familiarising with exit routes, staying calm and following instructions will help prevent stampede-like situations.
In case a stampede breaks out, protect chest by placing your hands like a boxer and keep moving in the direction of the crowd.

Stay alert to open spaces and move sideways wherever the crowd gets thinner. Stay away from walls, barricades or bottlenecks such as doorways.

Stay on your feet and get up quickly if you fall. If you can't get up, use your arms to cover your head and curl up like a foetus so that your exposure area is reduced.

- **Fire related**: Unplanned and unauthorised electrical wiring at pandals, LPG cylinders at food stalls and crackers hidden in the Ravana effigies pose the danger of a fire breaking out.
- Organisers should ensure authorised use of electricity, fire safety extinguishers and other arrangements meeting safety guidelines. A list of neighbourhood hospitals would come in handy.

### 7.5. WWF’S LIVING PLANET REPORT 2016

#### Why in News?
- Global population of mammals, fish, amphibians and reptiles declined by 58 percent between 1970 and 2012, according to World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) report.

#### Highlights
- The report is compiled with data from the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) to measure the abundance of biodiversity.
- The index tracks about 14,200 populations of 3700 species of vertebrates.
- Biodiversity population is expected to fall 67 percent by 2020, if the current situation persists.
- Rivers and lakes are the worst hit with animal population down by 81 percent since 1970.
- The report points out we have ushered in the era of **Anthropocene** – a geological period dominated by humans.
- The report warns that increased human pressure could trigger human-nature conflicts.
- It can increase the risk of water and food insecurity and competition over natural resources.

#### Causes
- The report states that food production to meet the complex demands of an expanding human population is the primary factor responsible for the destruction of habitats and overexploitation of wildlife. At present, agriculture occupies about one-third of the Earth’s total land area and accounts for almost 70% of water use.
- Forest areas are cleared up farming and logging. As of now, only 15 percent of the Earth’s land area is protected for nature.
- Poaching and exploitation for food is another major factor, due to unsustainable fishing and hunting.
- Pollution is another problem. Many sea animals are being harmed due to high levels of pollutants.
- Pollutants also travel down the food cycle and harm other animals.

#### The Upside
- Population of endangered species like tigers are known to be increasing. The Giant Panda has recently been removed from the list of endangered species.
- The Paris Climate Treaty 2015 which has been ratified by most nations also holds hope of bringing positive climate change.
- Additionally, the UN sustainable development goals for 2030 will help proper implementation of sustainable development policies.
7.5.1. ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH – HUMAN-INFLUENCED AGE

Why in news?

- An expert group at the World Geological Congress in Cape Town recommended that the new Anthropocene epoch, start from the mid-20th century, be officially declared. The approval process is likely to take at least two years and requires ratification by three other academic bodies.

What is Anthropocene?

- The Anthropocene, coined in 2000 by the Nobel prize-winning scientist Paul Crutzen, is a proposed epoch that begins when human activities started to have a significant global impact on Earth’s geology and ecosystems.
- Neither the International Commission on Stratigraphy nor the International Union of Geological Sciences has yet officially approved the term as a recognized subdivision of geological time.
- An epoch is a subdivision of the geologic timescale that is longer than an age and shorter than a period.
- Epochs are most commonly used for the younger Cenozoic Era, where a greater collection of fossils has been found and paleontologists have more detailed knowledge of the events that occurred during those times.
- We are currently living in the Holocene Epoch of the Quaternary Period.
- The Holocene epoch began 12,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age. All human civilisations have developed during this climatically and geologically stable period.

Evidences of the Anthropocene

Since the 1950s, human beings have begun to alter the earth’s surface and atmosphere in unalterable ways. Human activity has:

- Pushed extinction rates: The Earth is on course to see 75% of species become extinct in the next few centuries if current trends continue.
- Doubled the nitrogen and phosphorous in our soils in the past century with fertiliser use. This is likely to be the largest impact on the nitrogen cycle in 2.5bn years.
- Left a permanent layer of airborne particulates in sediment and glacial ice such as black carbon from fossil fuel burning.

Need for recognition

- It sends out the statement that humans have fundamentally changed the planet to the point it will preserve sediments for millions of years to come that record a world that is now fundamentally different to the one that preceded it.
- For the first time since the dawn of Darwinian theory — which showed human beings as just another character on the evolutionary stage — the world, literally, is of our own making.
- The significant geological changes, which usually take thousands of years, have occurred in less than a century and the long-term impact of an inhospitable planet may well be something we deal with sooner than expected.

Concerns in declaring Anthropocene as a separate epoch

- The Anthropocene is in many ways different to traditional geological units and so is harder to define using traditional techniques.
- Many would argue that it is too short a timescale and there is need to wait and make judgment once the planet has gone through this pulse of rapid change and has stabilised into a new state.
Way forward

- The Anthropocene marks a new period in which human’s collective activities dominate the planetary machinery. This name change stresses the enormity of humanity’s responsibility as stewards of the Earth.
- The hope now is that mankind and its leaders can collectively and consciously take their new responsibility seriously.

### 7.6. INDIA RATIFIES PARIS CLIMATE DEAL AT U.N.

**Key facts**

- India is the 62nd country to ratify the agreement and accounts for 4.1 per cent of the emissions.
- Ratified on 147th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, also observed as the International Day of Nonviolence by UN.
- The Paris Agreement entered into force on 4 November 2016, thirty days after the date on which at least 55 Parties to the Convention accounting in total for at least an estimated 55% of the total global greenhouse gas emissions have deposited their instruments of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession with the Depositary.

### 7.7. NEERDHUR

**Why in news?**

- Recently National Environmental and Engineering Research Institute (Neeri) and CSIR has developed ‘Neerdhur’, a novel **multi-fuel domestic cooking stove**.

**Benefits**

- Apart from wood, other fuel like coal, cow dung and agricultural residue can also be used in it.
- **Saves 50% fuel** and has high thermal efficiency.
- **Wood usage is halved** and helps save the pressure on environment
- Neerdhur has been **approved and certified** by Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) and meets the emission **parameters of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**.
- Will help in improvement of women’s health in rural areas.

### 7.8. INTERNAL CARBON PRICE

**Why in news**

Mahindra & Mahindra became first Indian firm to announce an internal Carbon Price of $10 per ton of carbon emitted.

**What is internal carbon price?**

It is an internationally recognised business tool that enables companies to create resources which are invested in low carbon technologies, which help reduce future emissions and lower operating costs.

**Significance**

- Help accelerate innovation and drive our investments in energy efficient and renewable technologies.
- Taking advantage of low-carbon investment opportunities while managing carbon risk.
• Some of the global companies that have announced carbon pricing are Unilever, Microsoft, Google.
• Mahindra partnered with the World Bank and IFC led Carbon Pricing Leadership Coalition along with the World Resources Institute, India to enhance its understanding of the Carbon price mechanism.

7.9. INDIA’S FIRST ‘GREEN CORRIDOR’

Why in news?
• The 114-km-long Manmadurai–Rameswaram stretch of Southern Railway became India’s first ‘Green corridor’.
• All the trains in this route will have bio-toilets and there would be zero discharge of human waste on tracks in the section.
• Rameswaram railway station had already been developed as a ‘Green Station’ to handle the bio-toilets in the coaches.

About Bio toilets
• Indian Railway had developed the environment friendly ‘IR-DRDO Bio-toilets’, in association with Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
• Indian railways aims to install human waste discharge free bio-toilets in all its coaches and the same would be completed by September 2019.
• It will help in proving cleanliness and hygiene besides preventing corrosion of the tracks.
• It is part of the Swachh Bharat Mission.

7.10. KASHMIR’S RED STAG

Why in news
• IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) all set to declare Kashmiri Red Stag or Hangul as a 'critically endangered' species.
• Earlier it was considered as a subspecies of red deer. Hence, IUCN categorized it as ‘Least Concern’ by clubbing with European and other 'red deer’ species of the world.

Benefit after reclassification
At the local scale, this would certainly attract the immediate attention of biologists, park managers and policy makers to invest more efforts, time and funds to safeguard the dwindling population of Hangul in India which has regional and international value.

About Hangul
• Kashmiri Red Stag or Hangul is known for its giant antlers bearing 11 to 16 points.
• Only one viable population left today in the wild is largely confined to the Greater Dachigam Landscape (1,000 sq.km.), encompassing the Dachigam National Park (NP) and adjoining protected areas.
• It is one of three critically endangered species in Jammu and Kashmir. The other two are markhor, the Tibetan antelope or ‘chiru’. It was designated as State Animal of Jammu & Kashmir in 1980’s.
• It is listed under Schedule-I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and J&K Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1978 and has also been listed among the top 15 species of high conservation priority by the Government of India.
7.11. WORLD’S LARGEST MARINE PARK

Why in news

- EU and 24 countries sign long-awaited landmark deal agreement to protect 1.1m sq km of water in Southern Ocean.

Key facts

- It will be world’s largest marine park covering more than 1.5m sq km of the Ross Sea around Antarctica.
- It will be set aside as a no-take “general protection zone”, where no fishing will be allowed.
- The protections are set to expire in 35 years.
- The agreement was signed at meeting of Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).
- The agreement was facing opposition from China and Russia, which have fishing industries in the region.
- It is the first marine park created in international waters.

Significance

- It will set a precedent for further moves to help the world achieve the IUCN’s recommendation that 30% of the world’s oceans be protected.
- This is important not just for the incredible diversity of life that it will protect, but also for the contribution it makes to building the resilience of the world’s ocean in the face of climate change.

About Ross Sea:

- It is sometimes called the "Last Ocean" because it is largely untouched by humans and hence the least altered marine ecosystem on Earth
- Its nutrient-rich waters are the most productive in the Antarctic, leading to huge plankton and krill blooms that support vast numbers of fish, seals, penguins, and whales.
- Home to high concentrations of wildlife and an incredible array of animals, many found nowhere else on the planet.
- Ross Sea is a living laboratory providing scientists with the last chance to understand how a healthy marine ecosystem functions.

7.12. SEAWEED FARMING

Why in news?

Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI) has transferred seaweed cultivation technology to the Andaman administration.

About seaweed

- It gained prominence during 13th century, after the discovery of agar-agar in Japan and Alginic Acid in European continent.
- It is considered as the medicinal food of the 21st century.

Seaweed culture in India

- In India the Gulf of Mannar, Gulf of Kutch, Calh Bay, Hanshadweep and Bay islands are the important areas for seaweed culture.
- Research programmes on seaweed resources and their culture were taken up by the Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute and Central Salt and Marine Chemicals Research Institute.
Many seaweeds are *rich in vitamins and minerals* and are eaten in various parts of the world.

- China produces over half of the world’s seaweed harvest and Indonesia 27% of world production.
- Most of that seaweed ends up in our food, though there is a growing market in seaweed-based cosmetics and drugs.

**Benefits**

- It is widely perceived as one of the *most environmentally benign types of aquaculture activity*, as it does not require additional feed or fertilisers.
- Seaweed cultivation also *filters undesired nutrients* and improves the marine environment and *reduce eutrophication*.
- Indirectly, seaweed farming has *reduced over-fishing* in many regions, providing coastal communities with an alternative livelihood.
- It has been actively promoted by government in many developing countries where communities have reduced access to *alternative livelihoods* or are involved in destructive fishing methods like dynamite fishing. In some places, *women* have become economically active for the first time.
- Seaweed is also used in landscaping or to *combat beach erosion*.

### 7.13. REPORT ON PALAEO CHANNEL OF NORTH WEST INDIA

- The committee studied piles of *sediments, their shapes and features* which appeared to have been brought by a "big river" and are reminiscent to ones found in present-day Ghaggar, Ganga and Yamuna.
- The report is an assertion of the assumption that River Saraswati *originated from Adibadri in Himalaya to culminate in the Arabian Sea* through the Runn of Kutch.
- It is based on the *study of the land texture* of states of North-West India And has also taken account of the *geological changes* that had occurred in the past.
- The river had *two branches*:
  - Western branch - present-day Ghaggar-Patialiwalivulets
  - Eastern branch - Markanda and Sarsuti (also known as Tons-Yamuna )
- The confluence of the branches was near Shatrapa, 25 km south of Patiala.

Paleo-channels are deposits of unconsolidated sediments or semi-consolidated sedimentary rocks deposited in ancient, currently inactive river and stream channel systems.
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8. CULTURE

8.1. RASHTRIYA SANSKRITI MAHOTSAV

Why in News?

- Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav 2016 has been established by the Ministry of Culture in Delhi.
- The Seven Zonal Culture Centres under the Ministry have been given the task of organizing the Mahotsav in Delhi as well as taking it to different cities.

What is it?

- The Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav was conceived by the Ministry of Culture in 2015 with the intent to showcase the rich cultural heritage in all its rich and varied dimensions.
- The Mahotsav showcases Handicrafts, Cuisine, Painting, Sculpture, Photography, Documentation and Performing Arts-Folk, Tribal Classical and Contemporary- all in one place.
- The Mahotsav will go to different cities under the banner of the slogan- “Ek Bhaarat, Shreshth Bhaarat”.
- Demonstration of the process of creation of the wares based on the crafts will be done by master craftsmen.
- Photo exhibitions are to be held to draw public attention to the irreparable damage done to national heritage. Exhibition will be part of “Swacch Bahrat Abhiyan”

8.2. NOBEL PRIZE IN LITERATURE 2016

Why in News?

- The Nobel Prize in Literature 2016 has been awarded to Bob Dylan for “for having created new poetic expressions within the great American song tradition”.
- He is the first songwriter to win this award.

More About Bob Dylan’s Work

- Born as Robert Allen Zimmerman in 1941 in Duluth, Minnesota, Dylan taught himself to play the harmonica, guitar and piano
- Armed with harmonica and acoustic guitar, Dylan confronted social injustice, war and racism, quickly becoming a prominent civil rights campaigner.

Nobel Peace Prize 2016

- The Nobel Peace Prize 2016 has been awarded to Columbian President Juan Manuel Santos.
- The Nobel academy chose the Columbian president for his efforts to end 52 years of civil war in Columbia.

8.3. DEENDAYAL UPADHYAY

Why in News?

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated a yearlong celebration of Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaay’s birth centenary in Kohzikode on September 24. He was born on 25th September 1916 and died on 11th February, 1968.
- The yearlong celebration includes welfare schemes, research, workshops, seminars and books in all Indian languages and English.

More About Deen Dayal Upadhaya

- Deen Dayal Upadhaya was an Indian philosopher, economist, sociologist, historian, journalist and political scientist.
• It is only under his leadership that the Jana Sangh first tasted power in half a dozen states in 1967.
• Deendayal Upadhyay belied in the theory of “integral humanism”. It refers to accepting the seeming differences among various entities and aspects of life, but at the same time seeking to discover the unity underlying them.
• According to him, the ideal of the Indian state is Dharma Rajya which does not recognise any individual or body as sovereign. The concept of Dharma Rajya is duty oriented and the rights of the people are inviolate.
• He propagated decentralisation of planning, diversity in social and culture ideas and encouraged village based industries. He has also written many books including Samrat Chadragupt and Jagatguru Shankaracharya, an analysis of Five Year plans in India.

8.4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF SARDAR VALLABHBHAI PATEL

Why in news
• The government has recently launched a series of initiatives to promote inter-state unity and unity in diversity. The contributions of Sardar Patel have been kept at the forefront of these initiatives by the government.
• A digital exhibition “Uniting India: Sardar Patel” was also launched by the central government.

Key Contributions
• He was a leading member of Congress and was instrumental in shaping the Indian freedom struggle along with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.
• He played a pioneer role in the success of peasant movement in Gujarat. He was an important satyagrahi in the Kheda (1918) and Bardoli (1928) satyagraha.
• He was the president of the Congress at the crucial Karanchi session of 1931.
• He played an instrumental role in developing the Indian Civil Service after independence. An administrator by instinct, he reposed his faith in them, while many others were skeptical.
• He was the most important person in the political integration of India after independence. He helped in integrating more than 560 princely states with India. In his absence the country would be divided into a number of small and big units.
• The Governor-General of India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, along with Nehru and Patel formed the triumvirate which ruled India from 1948 to 1950. Prime Minister Nehru was intensely popular with the masses, but Patel enjoyed the loyalty and the faith of rank and file Congressmen, state leaders and India's civil services.
• He was the chairman of the committees responsible for minorities, tribal and excluded areas, fundamental rights and provincial constitutions.

Mains 1997
Q. How did Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel succeed in avoiding the evil consequences of the doctrine of lapse of paramountcy and in integrating Indian States? (250 words)

Mains 2013 (A similar question can be asked)
Q. Discuss the contribution of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad to pre-and post-independent India. (200 words)

8.5. HARIKATHA

Why in News?
• Various organisations across India are organising shows in order to revive Harikatha— the traditional art of storytelling in Hinduism.

What is Harikatha?
• Harikatha is a form of hindu religious discourse.
The main aim of Harikatha is to imbibe righteousness and truth in the minds of the people. It has its roots in the kirtan tradition of Maharashtra. It includes music, storytelling, dance, drama and philosophy. Its main feature is narration of ‘upakathas’ (side-stories) in a lighter vein. It is not a secular art and is essentially religious and didactic. Any religious topic can be its theme such as life story of a saint.

8.6. ALPANA FOLK ART

Why in News?
- INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) has joined hands with the Daricha Foundation to revive the lost fold art of Bengal – Alpana. INTACH is also exploring the ways to make revenue for girls through Alpana.

What is Alpana?
- Alpana is a folk art of Bengal was mainly done on the floor and the walls of the house.
- The painting was done with hands (fingers are the brush) and the paint is mainly a paste comprising of rice flour.
- The motifs drawn are ritualistic images from mythology and scriptures.
- Alpana was drawn by women of the house before the sunset.
- It is considered to ward off evil spirits and was specifically drawn on special occasions such as festivals or weddings.

8.7. KABADDI WORLD CUP

Why in News?
- India beat Iran in the finals of Kabaddi World Cup 2016 to win the third consecutive title.

Kabaddi
- Kabaddi is a contact sport that originated in ancient India.
- It has been mentioned in Indian mythology as well.
- It is known by different regional names in different parts of the Indian sub-continent.
- It is known as sadugudu in Tamil Nadu, Kabaddi in Karnataka, Hadudu in Bengal, Bhavatik in Maldives, Kaundi in Punjab region and chedugudu in Andhra Pradesh.
- Modern Kabaddi is therefore a synthesis of different forms of Kabaddi under different names.
- There are mainly four forms of Kabaddi played in India: Sanjeevani Kabaddi, Gaminee style, Amar style and Punjabi Kabaddi.
- The Kabaddi Federation of India was founded in 1950.
- The sport received international exposure during 1936 Berlin Olympics.
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☑ All India Test Series Included

Answer Writing Program for Philosophy (QIP)
Overall Quality Improvement for Philosophy Optional

Daily Tests:
☑ Having Simple Questions (Easier than UPSC standard).
☑ Focus on Concept Building & Language.
☑ Introduction-Conclusion and overall answer format.
☑ Doubt clearing session after every class.

Mini Test:
☑ After certain topics, mini tests based completely on UPSC pattern.
☑ Copies will be evaluated within one week.
9. ETHICS

9.1. VERMIN ISSUE

Why in news?

- The Centre approved the culling of wild animals such as nilgai, wild boar, rhesus monkey within specified territories of Uttarakhand, Bihar and Himachal Pradesh by declaring them “vermin” under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.
- The centre issued these notifications at various instances since December 2015. It will be in effect for a year.

Issue at Hand

- Once declared at vermin, it will be “open season” for hunters who will use the meat of these animals.
- An RTI revealed that proper scientific study about the population of each of these wild animals in the specified areas have not been carried out.

Ethical Questions/Issues involved

- Resorting to culling shows the human tendency to kill/violence in case of monetary loss or otherwise.
- It remains unclear whether it is ethically justifiable to cull animals for the protection of man, property and croplands when it is humans only who have destroyed their habitat.
- It creates a dilemma about whether culling is the permanent solution when no scientific studies of the population dynamics of the animals have been carried out.

What needs to be done?

- Scientific studies must be carried out to know the root cause of the problem. Likewise in Karnataka, rhesus monkey attacking human habitats for food is not because of rise in population but because of non-availability of food.
- Efforts should be made to restore the natural habitat of these animals.
- Supervised culling should be carried out in order to prevent hunters from taking advantage of the situation.
- Sterilisation and vaccination of the wild animals must be done in order to solve the population issue.
- Temporary culling may be carried out in order to control population issues among these wild animals. However, it is not a feasible long-term solution.

Who is a Vermin?

- Any animal declared as vermin can be killed or hunted down without inviting any jail term or punishment.
- By law, every state is allowed to provide a list of animals to be declared as vermin to the centre.
- Those animals that are declared as vermin who are a threat to crop, property or humans.
- Animals under Schedule V of the Wildlife Protection Act are vermins. Animals that come under Schedule V are: common crow, fruit bats, mice and rats.

9.2. PEACE VERSUS JUSTICE

Why in news?

Afghanistan peace agreement

- A peace agreement was signed by the Afghan President that opens the door to the militant faction of Hezb-i-Islami, led by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, playing an active role in politics.
- Ghani as President has tried talks with Taliban with the help of Pakistan, which failed. So, to achieve peace, the rhetoric of unity and co-opting earlier warlords is his only option.

Colombia v/s FARC

- President Santos differed from his predecessors in the realisation that there was no military solution to this conflict, leading to negotiations with the rebels four years ago with Cuba’s mediation.
- He conducted a referendum on a peace agreement, which got a ‘NO’ vote with very thin majority.
**Analysis**

“True peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice.” - Martin Luther King Jr.

**Historical Background:**

- Throughout history, mass atrocities have come to an end through limited means. The scourge of large-scale torture, rape and murder was either stopped by the tireless and creative work of diplomats (Ex: Nazi war crimes – Nuremberg trials Germany) or came to a natural end — sadly, usually when one side wiped out the other. (Ex: Hindus, Ahmadiyya Muslims etc., in Pakistan or Yazidis by ISIS)
- The survivors of such ousted regimes had to strive for peace without any redress for the crimes inflicted upon them by their own governments. (Ex: Syrians and Iraqis after civil war)

**Present condition**

- **Changed Paradigms:** Legal principles derived from Nuremberg, Tokyo, other subsequent World War II trials are the evidences for the same.
- **International Tribunals:**
  - The International Criminal Court (ICC) — is the first and only permanent international court to prosecute the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes (or atrocity crimes).
  - The first international instance was the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

**Diplomacy / Peace over justice**

- **Commonly followed approach has** remained making compromises on justice with powerful perpetrators of mass atrocities.
- The immediate concern of ending the violence often resulted in amnesties for war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- It proved, sometimes, as an obstacle to peace while calling for justice.
- Aggressive regime change through humanitarian and international justice interventions makes ending slaugthers more difficult. Criminal tyrants, Terrorist groups and governments, for the most part, only use violence to achieve political ends.
- **Lessons from history:** The history shows that it is diplomacy is what stops mass atrocities. As per Ian Pasley of British Parliament, “Justice must be secondary to achieving peace through reconciliation and diplomacy, the wheels of justice must be allowed to turn at their own pace, but that must not impede the peace process.”

**Rationale behind peace over justice**

**Afghan case**

- First step toward making similar peace deals with the Taliban and other groups.
- A chance for the Taliban and other militant groups to show what their decision is:
  - To be with people and join the respected caravan of peace, like Hezb-i-Islami, or
  - confront the people and continue the bloodshed

**Colombian case**

- Colombia missed an opportunity to end its five-decade-long civil war.
Had a ‘YES’ vote been recorded in Sunday’s referendum on a peace agreement:
- It would have immediately set in motion the process of disarming the rebels.
- Most of FARC’s rank and file would be allowed to lead civilian lives.
- The leadership will be judged in special tribunals with reduced sentences.

Criminal prosecution / Justice over peace

- The approach has remained to establish just peace as in the cessation of violence, but peace of the lasting variety (shown in the diagram). And justice is important for this.
- Lessons from History: History gives evidence that “peace” obtained through diplomacy alone is usually temporary and quick to fold. The “diplomacy is paramount” mentality, furthermore, can be perilous.

Rationale behind Justice over Peace

Afghan case
- Hekmatyar is unlikely to face any punishment for his alleged role in past abuses.
- Hekmatyar’s return “will compound the culture of impunity”.
- Not addressing the wrongs of criminal perpetrators provides a foothold for conflicts to resurface or new ones to spawn.

Columbian case
- Peace negotiations with rebels can end violence, but it seldom fosters transition to democratic, just societies.

Conclusion

States cannot be rewarded for using crime and violence to obtain their political ends. Such State behavior encourages continual blackmail whereby governments threaten more torture and death unless their demands are met, as Libya’s Gadhafi attempted to do and Syria’s Bashar Al-Assad is currently doing. Hence, Peace remains the only option. Clubbing it with strong system for justice delegitimizes and devalues the calculus of “violence for political gain”.

Way forward

- Pragmatic Approach:
  - The concepts of “rule of law” and “criminal justice” only came about in modern human history and took centuries to form.
  - The concepts of “international crimes”, and more importantly, “individual criminal responsibility” for their commissions, is even newer.
  - It is both whimsical and unproductive to demand that all instances of crime face the blind application of law overnight. With a mixture of time, prodding, and consistent use, criminal law shall be uniformly applied to the powerful and not so powerful countries alike.
- Diplomacy and International action: Traditional diplomacy and international prosecutions both have roles to play and must act in concert, either in ongoing or post-conflict settings.
- Co-existing Peace and Justice:
  - The two goals of peace and justice, rather than being exclusive, are mutually reinforcing.
  - Peace, as enduring and long-term peace, should go beyond the immediate goal of ending a conflict and should rely on justice and accountability to ensure sustainability.
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Syllabus will be covered in 25 classes
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Includes:
- Classroom Mini-Test
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LIVE/ONLINE Classes available
10. ALSO IN NEWS

10.1. POLITY

10.1.1 CPGRAMS

Why in news?

- Government recently awarded the **Certificates of Appreciation** to the good performing ministries/Departments based on their performance in the Centralized Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS).
- This is a great initiative for motivation towards redress of public grievances as Grievance Redress Mechanism is part and parcel of the machinery of any administration.
- Award Scheme is expected to bring a sense of competitiveness in Ministries/Departments to address public grievances.

What is CPGRAMS?

- The CPGRAMS is an online web enabled application to facilitate speedy redress of public grievances as it allows for online lodging and status tracking of grievances by the citizens.
- The system is flexible enough to be extended to multiple levels as per the requirement of concerned Ministry/Department/Govt. Organization for speedy forwarding and redress of grievance.
- The Public Grievance Portal has evolved during the last few years aiming at the following objectives:
  - To serve as a platform for dissemination of information related to Public Grievances and to monitor the redress of these Grievances.
  - To enable the citizen to lodge and keep track of the status of his/her grievance online.
  - To enable Ministries/Departments/Organisations to scrutinize and take action without delay.
  - To reduce/eliminate physical forwarding of complaints to the Ministries/Departments Concerned.

10.1.2. EMPLOYEES ONLINE MOBILE APP

- Recently, The Department of Personnel & Training (DoPT) under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions has launched Employees Online (EO) mobile App.

Features of EO App

- IAS officers working across the country will be able to access details of their Annual Performance Appraisal Reports, Immovable Property Returns, postings, domestic and foreign training, among others, at their finger tip.
- The EO App will **reduce speculations regarding transfers and postings** in the Government of India.
- It will also check on the number of repeated RTI applications filed by citizens to seek governance-related information as most of the details will be put online for public in a real-time basis.
- **Significance**: EO App stands correct for the spirit of maximum Governance, minimum Government. It is another step towards transparency and e-governance. It will make the system **completely transparent**.

10.1.3. FIRST NATIONAL DAY OF AYURVEDA CELEBRATED

- First ever National Ayurveda Day was celebrated across the country on 28th October this year.
- The National Dhanwantry Ayurveda Awards were also given on the occasion.
- A Seminar on “Prevention and Control of Diabetes through Ayurveda” was also held. The role of Ayurveda in prevention and treatment of diabetes was highlighted.
10.2. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

10.2.1. INDIA’S SPEECH AT UNGA

Why in News?
It was considered as a well-crafted speech that touched on issues like SDGs as well as those of concern to India like terrorism.

Significance of speech
- **Diplomacy over war** - India diplomatically isolated Pakistan at UNGA meet. India gave a strong message about intolerance of terrorist activities in the country.
- **No compromise over Kashmir** - India unequivocally called for Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India.
- **Stand for rights violations in Baloch** - India took Baloch agenda forward, thus explaining the rationale behind its decision to grant political asylum to Brahmdagh Bugti. It was a clear signal to Pakistan that India will help in making Balochistan an issue on the international map.
- **No talks until terror** - India imposed “no terror” pre-conditions for dialogue for the country and urged the UN to pass the India-proposed Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) - it provides a legal framework making it imperative for all signatories to deny funds and safe havens to terrorist groups.
- **Priority to SDGs** - India’s commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was appreciated for its efforts Swacch bharat Mission, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Jan Dhan Yojana and skill India program.

10.3. ECONOMY

10.3.1. OPEC’S DECISION TO TRIM COLLECTIVE OUTPUT

- OPEC countries took a collective decision in Algiers to cut down collective output by about 700,000 barrels a day from 33 million barrels a day.
- This is the first time the OPEC has decided to cut production since the last oil price slump during the financial crisis eight years ago.
- This was done in the light of continuous fall of global oil prices and imbalance in demand-supply gap, which adversely affected the economies of the countries of the cartel.
- Saudi Arabia, the cartel’s largest producer, which was initially against reduction in production, had a fiscal deficit of 16% of its GDP in 2015 and had to make its first overseas borrowing in more than a decade.
- However, Iran has been exempted from immediate production caps since international sanctions on Iran have only been lifted recently.

10.3.2. JUSTICE REDDY COMMITTEE ON OROP SUBMITS REPORT

- The one-man judicial committee on One Rank One Pension (OROP) comprising of Justice Reddy submitted its report after evaluating the anomalies arising out of the implementation of the OROP to the Defence Minister.
- The OROP scheme envisions equal pension to military personnel retiring in the same rank with the same length of service, regardless of the date of retirement.

10.3.3. INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD

- The Centre has constituted a four-member Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) under the Chairmanship of MS Sahoo.
- The main activity of IBBI would be to regulate the functioning of insolvency professionals, insolvency professional agencies and information utilities under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016, notified by the Center earlier.
- While the Centre has for now set up the IBBI with four members, going forward this will be expanded to 10 (including the Chairman)
10.3.4. SAGAR PORT

- The central government has recently approved Rs.515 crore grant for making the Sagar port.
- It is a proposed Rs. 12,000 crore deep sea port at Sagar islands in West Bengal.
- The Kolkata and Haldia ports cannot handle big ships due to the shallow depth of the Hooghly River. Thus, an alternative port in West Bengal is needed.

10.3.5. AUTOMATION THREATENS 69% OF JOBS IN INDIA: WORLD BANK

- According to a World Bank research, technology could fundamentally disrupt the traditional economic path in the world especially the developing countries.
- It says that due to the increasing technological developments like robotics, artificial intelligence, and ubiquitous high speed networks, the need for traditional low-skilled labour would reduce.
- This becomes particularly concerning for India as it has the largest share of unskilled and low-skilled labour force in the world.
- As a result about 69% jobs in India (and 77% in China) are threatened by the automation of work.
- The WB says that the traditional economic path from increasing productivity of agriculture to light manufacturing and then to full-scale industrialisation may not be possible for all developing countries.

10.4. SCIENCE AND TECH

10.4.1. POINT NEMO- THE POINT OF INACCESSIBILITY ON EARTH

- The furthest point from land also known as the "oceanic pole of inaccessibility" is nicknamed as Point Nemo, meaning "no-one" in Latin and was first discovered in 1992.
- This remote oceanic location is 2,688 kilometers from the nearest land—Ducie Island.
- As Point Nemo lies in the South Pacific Gyre and the region is so isolated from land masses that wind does not carry much organic matter, there is little to feed for survival.
- Thus, no material falls from above as "marine snow", turning the seafloor lifeless and making the region, one of the least biologically active regions of the world ocean.
- In this extreme environment, some bacteria thrive, gaining their energy from chemicals released by the eruptions as the region marks the boundary of the Pacific and Nazca tectonic plates, which are gradually moving apart.

10.5. ENVIRONMENT

10.5.1. INDIAN ROLLER BIRD

- The increased poaching of Indian roller, a Schedule IV protected bird is making the species go endangered.
- This Indian Roller or Neelkanth is a state bird of various states like Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. It is displayed during Dussehra festival in Telangana.
- The bird is protected under Sch. IV of WPA 1972 under which capturing and displaying of the bird is strictly illegal, attracting a penalty of Rs 25,000 or imprisonment up to three years or both.

10.5.2. INDIA AND SRI LANKA JOINT EXERCISE TO PREVENT OIL SPILL

Why in news?

- Sri Lanka and India held joint oil spill prevention exercise onboard the Indian Coast Guard Ship "Samudra Paheredar", which is on a two-day official visit to the island country.
- As both India and Sri Lanka are located close to one of the busiest network of international shipping lanes, the readiness is of paramount importance for both countries to take remedial action against oil spills.
- Oil spills from vessels that occur as a result of sudden collisions with oil platforms and various other related reasons, had posed a significant threat on the marine environment to date.
10.5.3. NEW SPECIES OF PIKA DISCOVERED

- It is a mammal belonging to the rabbit and hare family.
- Found in the Sikkim Himalayas.
- This new species has been named Ochotona sikimaria.
- Pikas live in the mountains or in temperate regions.
- Pikas do not hibernate unlike other mammalian species inhabiting such cold climates.
- Pikas are a keystone species and ecosystem engineers.
- Although this new specie looks similar to the Mountain Pika, genetically it is completely different. Hence elevated this sub-species to a different species.
- Pikas are considered indicators of climate change based on studies in North America.

10.5.4. T. N. TOPS LIST OF ENDEMIC FLOWERING PLANTS

- Almost one of every four species of flowering plants found in India is endemic to the country, a recent publication by the Botanical Survey of India (BSI) has revealed.
- Tamil Nadu accounts for the highest number of flowering plants species with 410, followed by Kerala with 357 and Maharashtra with 278.
- Of the 18,259 flowering plants reported in the country, 4,303 (over 23 per cent) are endemic to India.
- Western Ghats tops the list with about 2,116 species, followed by the Eastern Himalayas with 466 species.
- Among the most widely exploited endemic plants in country is red sandal wood, which is found only in the southern parts of the Eastern Ghats. This plant is classified as critically endangered under International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

10.5.5. SCIENTISTS FIND 500 US SEABED VENTS OF METHANE

- US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA's) Deepwater Exploration discovered 500 new deep-sea vents of methane all along the US’s western seaboard. This brings the count to 1,000 known vents.
- Worldwide, scientists are trying to see if rising ocean temperatures cause more leaks.
- Methane naturally escapes from the sea floor in many places around the world and can stoke global warming if it reaches the atmosphere.

About
- Hydrothermal vents and cold seeps are places where chemical-rich fluids emanate from the seafloor, often providing the energy to sustain lush communities of life in some very harsh environments.
- Below the photic zone many microbes have evolved chemosynthetic processes that create organic matter by using oxygen in seawater to oxidize hydrogen sulfide, methane, and other chemicals present in vent and seep fluids.
- Organisms living in such areas are often called extremophiles for the extreme nature of their living conditions.

10.5.6. SMOOTH-COATED OTTER

- Smooth-coated otter was sighted for the first time in the mangrove forest adjacent to the Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary in Krishna district.
- Presence of the otter is a key indicator for rise of the mangrove cover.
- It is distributed throughout south Asia and southeast Asia.
- Listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.