

OFFICERS'

Pulse

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Coverage.

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At a Glance & In Depth.

Polity and Social Issues
Economy
International Relations
Environment
Science and Tech
Culture..

**CURRENT AFFAIRS
WEEKLY**

THE **PULSE** OF UPSC AT
YOUR FINGER TIPS.



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News @ a glance

Polity and social issues

Electoral bonds

Why it is in news?

- Former Chief Election Commissioner said in a recent interview Electoral bonds are a damp squib
- He said so because he feels electoral bonds have failed to tackle black money paid to political parties.
- It had emerged as a “greater method of camouflage”, he said.

What is it?

- An electoral bond is designed to be a bearer instrument like a Promissory Note — in effect, it will be similar to a bank note that is payable to the bearer on demand and free of interest.
- It can be purchased by any citizen of India or a body incorporated in India.

How do you use it?

- The bonds will be issued in multiples of ₹1,000, ₹10,000, ₹1 lakh, ₹10 lakh and ₹1 crore and will be available at specified branches of State Bank of India.
- They can be bought by the donor with a KYC-compliant account.
- Donors can donate the bonds to their party of choice which can then be cashed in via the party's verified account within 15 days

What are the other conditions?

- Every party that is registered under section 29A of the Representation of the Peoples Act, 1951 (43 of 1951) and has secured at least one per cent of the votes polled in the most recent Lok Sabha or State election will be allotted a verified account by the Election Commission of India.
- Electoral bond transactions can be made only via this account.
- The bonds will be available for purchase for a period of 10 days each in the beginning of every quarter, i.e. in January, April, July and

October as specified by the Central Government.

- An additional period of 30 days shall be specified by the Central Government in the year of Lok Sabha elections.
- A donor will get a tax deduction and the recipient, or the political party, will get tax exemption, provided returns are filed by the political party.

Charter of Patient's rights

Why it is in news?

- The Jan Swasthya Abhiyan (JSA), a national platform working on health and healthcare services, urged the Ministry of Health to immediately implement the Charter of Patients' Rights and ensure the inclusion of the entire range of patients' rights without any dilution.
- The adoption of the charter is urgent to ensure that the many violations of patients' rights are immediately addressed to stop loss of health and even lives," the pressure group said in a press release.

About Charter of Patient's Rights: Right to Information

- Physicians or their qualified assistants are required to provide adequate information about your illness, its diagnosis (provisional or confirmed, as it may be), proposed investigation and possible complications to the patient.
- If the patient is not in a state to understand this, the physician or their assistant is required to provide the information to the caretaker.
- This has to be done in a simple language that the patient or caretaker will understand.
- Apart from this, patients have the right to know the identity and professional status

of every doctor and assistant as well as the primary doctor who is treating them.

- Information regarding costs of treatment needs to be given in writing.

Right to records and reports

- Patients or their respective caretakers have the right to access the originals or copies of case papers, indoor patient records and investigation reports. Investigation reports have to be made available to them within 24 hours of admission or 72 hours of discharge.
- The hospital is responsible for providing a discharge summary or a death summary, in the case of a death, to the caretakers or kin of the patient with original copies of investigations.

Right to emergency medical care

- In an emergency situation, you can avail medical care in any government or private hospital.
- Under Article 21 of the Constitution, which ensures that every person has the right to life and personal liberty, you have the right to prompt emergency care by doctors without compromise on quality or safety and without having to pay full or an advanced fee to the hospital.

Right to informed consent

- If a hospital decides upon carrying an invasive investigation or surgery or chemotherapy on a patient, they require to do so after completing an appropriate policy procedure.
- The doctor primarily in charge of a patient has to explain the risks, consequences and procedure of the investigation or surgery in detail and a simple language before providing the protocol consent form to the patient or to the responsible caretaker.

Right to confidentiality, human dignity and privacy

- Now this one is a fairly known right, especially if you follow TV shows about hospitals or doctors.
- The code of ethics dictates doctors to hold information about the illness and treatment plan for the patient in strict confidentiality from everyone except the patient and their caretakers.

- Unless it is an exceptional case where sharing this information is “in the interest of protecting other or due to public health considerations.”
- In the case of a female patient, she has the right to demand the presence of another woman if the medical practitioner checking or treating her is male. Having said this, the hospital is responsible for upholding the dignity of every patient, irrespective of their gender.

Right to non-discrimination

- The above point brings us to the rights of a patient being upheld without discrimination based on their illness, condition, HIV status or on their gender, age, religion, caste, ethnicity, sexual orientation, linguistic or geographical or social origins.
- Based on the above characteristics, no person can be subjected to discriminatory treatment, and the staff of the hospital is responsible for ensuring this.

Right to safety and quality care according to standards

- Here is a brief list of provisions that come under the list of quality care standards-
- Safety and security.
- Cleanliness, infection control measures and sanitation facilities and safe drinking water.
- Healthcare that abides by the latest standards, norms and guidelines under the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals (NABH).
- To be attended to, treated and cared for in a professional manner and with the principles of medical ethics.
- Right to seek redressal by patient or caretakers.

Right to choose alternative treatment options if available

- Hospital staff and doctors are responsible for clarifying all treatment options to the patient/caretakers.
- After a thorough study of their choices, the patient/caretakers can choose to opt for a treatment that may or may not be the doctor’s primary recommendation.
- This also means that once the patient/caretakers choose this alternative

treatment, they will shoulder the responsibility of its consequences.

Right to a second opinion

- Doctors and the hospital must respect your decision if you choose to seek a second opinion from a doctor/hospital of your choice.
- They are responsible for handing over all record documents and other relevant information should you choose to approach a different doctor.
- The hospital can neither stop you nor discourage you from going elsewhere, only give a detailed explanation of the health condition and repercussions in case of delay in treatment.
- In case you choose to come back to the first hospital after getting your second opinion, the hospital still cannot compromise on the quality of healthcare services.

Right to transparency in rates, and care according to prescribed rates wherever relevant

- The patient has the right to have a written account of the costs they will have to bear for the treatment they are receiving.
- As evidence for this, hospitals are required to have printed brochures and prominent display boards bearing the names and rates of medical procedures that are available with them.
- Detailed schedules of key rates need to be displayed in conspicuous places and need to be in both, English as well as the local language.
- Patients have the right to get medicines, devices and implants at rates decided by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) and other relevant authorities. Patients have the right to receive health care services that cost within the range prescribed by the Central and State governments, at the time of receiving it.

Right to choose the source for obtaining medicines or tests

- As a patient or a caretaker, you have the right to choose which registered pharmacy you wish to buy your medical supplies from.

- This also includes getting an investigation procedure (like a blood test, for example) from any diagnostic centre or laboratory registered under the National Accreditation Board for Laboratories (NABL).

Right to proper referral and transfer, which is free from perverse commercial influences

- If a patient must be transferred from one healthcare centre to another, a proper and detailed justification must be given to them/caretakers along with various options of the new healthcare centre. They must also be given a list of treatments/medicines that need to be continued after the transfer. This step cannot be taken unless the patient or their caretaker accept it.
- These decisions cannot be influenced by reasons like “kickbacks, commissions, incentives, or other perverse business practices.”

Right to protection for patients involved in clinical trials

- According to the MoHFW, “All clinical trials must be conducted in compliance with the protocols and Good Clinical Practice Guidelines issued by Services, Govt. of India as well as all applicable statutory provisions of Amended Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and Rules, 1945 Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, Directorate General of Health.”
- These points include consent by the patient, written prescription of drugs or intervention, privacy etc.

Right to protection of participants involved in biomedical and health research

- In case a patient is involved in a biomedical or health research procedure, their consent needs to be taken in a written format.
- Their right to dignity, privacy and confidentiality needs to be upheld even during the research.
- If the participant suffers direct physical, psychological, social, legal or economic harm, they are eligible for financial or other assistance by the hospital.
- Whatever benefits the hospital gets from the research must be made available to

relevant individuals, communities and the general population.

Right to be discharged, Right to receive the body of a deceased person from the hospital

- “A patient has the right to be discharged and cannot be detained in a hospital, on procedural grounds such as [a] dispute in payment of hospital charges. Similarly, caretakers have the right to the dead body of a patient who had been treated in a hospital, and the dead body cannot be detailed on procedural grounds, including non-payment/dispute regarding payment of hospital charges against wishes of the caretakers,” says the MoHFW.

Right to Patient Education

- The list of things that a patient needs to be informed about by the hospital. These need to be addressed in the language that the patient/caretaker understands.
- Major facts about their condition
- Healthy living practices
- Their rights and responsibilities
- Health insurance schemes relevant to them
- Relevant entitlements (for charitable hospitals)
- How to seek redressal of grievances

Right to be heard and seek redressal

- Every patient has the right to address his grievances and give feedback about the healthcare and treatment they received at the hospital or from a particular doctor/assistant.

Toilets for schoolgirls

Why it is in news?

- ASER report for the year 2018 was released recently.

Report findings:

- An average of **34.96% schools** in the eight north-eastern states had usable toilets for girls in 2018 compared to 36.66% in 2016
- With 75.7% schools – a marginal increase from 75% in 2016 – **having usable toilets for girls, Sikkim perform better than the national average of 66.4% last year**
- **Nagaland was the next best State with 47%**, an increase from 40.9% in 2016, followed by Mizoram with the highest percentile increase from 25.3% to 34.9% in these two years.

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- The other five states performed poorly, the steepest drop for Assam being 38.3% from 54.2% in 2016. Manipur had 9.1% schools having fewer usable toilets for girls, followed by Meghalaya (8.6%), Arunachal Pradesh (7.6%) and Tripura (7.3%).

Bhopal gas tragedy

Why it is in news?

- Supreme Court to hear petition on Bhopal gas leak payout.
- The Supreme Court decided to examine in April a curative petition by the government for more compensation to the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy, over and above the \$470 million paid by Union Carbide.

About Bhopal gas tragedy:

- The **Bhopal gas tragedy**, was a gas leak incident on the night of 2–3 December 1984 at the Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL) pesticide plant in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India.
- It is considered to be the world's worst industrial disaster. Over 500,000 people were exposed **to methyl isocyanate (MIC) gas**
- The highly toxic substance made its way into and around the small towns located near the plant.
- Estimates vary on the death toll. The official immediate death toll was 2,259. The government of Madhya Pradesh confirmed a total of 3,787 deaths related to the gas release.
- A government affidavit in 2006 stated that the leak caused 558,125 injuries, including 38,478 temporary partial injuries and approximately 3,900 severely and permanently disabling injuries.
- Others estimate that 8,000 died within two weeks, and another 8,000 or more have since died from gas-related diseases.
- The cause of the disaster remains under debate. The Indian government and local activists argue that slack management and deferred maintenance created a situation where routine pipe maintenance caused a backflow of water into a MIC tank, triggering the disaster.
- Union Carbide Corporation (UCC) argues water entered the tank through an act of sabotage.

Job on compassionate grounds

Why it is in news?

- A Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud observed that **compassionate appointment is an exception to the general rule that appointment to any public post** in the service of the state has to be made on the basis of principles which accord with Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution.

About the ruling:

- The court said it was the **“immediacy of the need”** which furnishes the basis for the state to allow the benefit of compassionate appointment.
- Where the **authority finds that the financial and other circumstances of the family are such that in the absence of immediate assistance**, it would be reduced to being indigent, an application from a dependent member of the family could be considered.
- The Supreme Court set aside the High Court decision, and said that **the scheme must take into account the welfare measures provided by the government, including the family pension**.

Institute of Eminence

Why it is in news?

- The Centre has decided to put off on Institutes of Eminence as the search panel recommended more institutes for the tag of “Institutes of Eminence”.

About Institutes of Eminence:

- The scheme is aimed at developing world-class institutions which would put India on the global education map.
- Institutions were offered greater autonomy and freedom to decide fees, course durations and structures.
- The 10 selected public institutions would also receive a grant of ₹1000 crore, while the 10 private institutions would not receive any financial assistance

Model code of Conduct

Why it is in news?

- The Election Commission of India has written to the Cabinet Secretary, asking to

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai comply with procedures and norms when communicating with the constitutional body.

- Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, the **Election** Commission of India (ECI) has rebuked Union Ministries for violating protocols while seeking approval for decisions to be announced after the Model Code of Conduct kicks in.
- The Commission has taken “a serious note of the way in which officers of various Central government departments are sending references” without following due procedure, and urged the Cabinet Secretary to ensure strict compliance.
- References to Constitutional and statutory bodies like the EC have to be done in the form of a letter to its Secretary, Principal Secretary or Deputy Election Commissioner (Deputy EC). Simply sending an office memorandum from junior officials to the EC is not acceptable, The Election Commission of India said in its letter to the Cabinet Secretary
- Writing to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) or the Election Commissioners (EC) is not permitted, except in rare “important cases” where the head of a department feels that something has to be brought to the personal notice of the CEC or ECs, said Election Commission of India

About Model Code of Conduct:

- Election Commission of India's Model Code of Conduct is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for conduct of political parties and candidates during elections mainly with respect to speeches, polling day, polling booths, portfolios, election manifestos, processions and general conduct.
- These set of norms has been evolved with the consensus of political parties who have consented to abide by the principles embodied in the said code in its letter and spirit.
- The Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately on announcement of the election schedule by the commission for the need of ensuring free and fair elections.
- Much of it is designed to avert communal clashes and corrupt practices. For example,

politicians should not make hate speeches, putting one community against another or make promises about new projects that may sway a voter.

Main points

- The main points of the code of conduct are:
- Government bodies are not to participate in any recruitment process during the electoral process.
- The contesting candidates and their campaigners must respect the home life of their rivals and should not disturb them by holding road shows or demonstrations in front of their houses. The code tells the candidates to keep it.
- The election campaign rallies and road shows must not hinder the road traffic.
- Candidates are asked to refrain from distributing liquor to voters. It is a widely known fact in India that during election campaigning, liquor may be distributed to the voters.
- The election code in force hinders the government or ruling party leaders from launching new welfare programmes like construction of roads, provision of drinking water facilities etc. or any ribbon-cutting ceremonies.
- The code instructs that public spaces like meeting grounds, helipads, government guest houses and bungalows should be equally shared among the contesting candidates. These public spaces should not be monopolized by a few candidates.
- On polling day, all party candidates should cooperate with the poll-duty officials at the voting booths for an orderly voting process. Candidates should not display their election symbols near and around the poll booths on the polling day. No one should enter the booths without a valid pass from the Election Commission.
- There will be poll observers to whom any complaints can be reported or submitted.
- The ruling party should not use its seat of power for the campaign purposes.
- The ruling party ministers should not make any ad-hoc appointment of officials, which may influence the voters in favour of the party in power.

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- Before using loud speakers during their poll campaigning, candidates and political parties must obtain permission or license from the local authorities. The candidates should inform the local police for conducting election rallies to enable the police authorities to make required security arrangements.

MGNREGA

Why it is in news?

- According to the Centre, the states may have to fund MGNREGA wages.
- The financial statement of MGNREGA scheme shows that as on January 30, 19 States and Union Territories had liabilities.
- Nationally, the scheme has a negative net balance of ₹4,101 crore.
- The Rural Development Ministry received a supplementary additional allocation of ₹6,084 crore. However, this is not adequate as after paying off liabilities, states would be left with a small amount.
- The fund crunch has already resulted in extensive wage payment delays. MGNREGA data shows that 81% of Fund Transfer Orders (FTOs) generated in January 2019 and 43% of FTOs from December 2018 still remain unprocessed by the Centre.
- This might necessitate states to fund MGNREGA themselves. West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka are among the States that are likely to use their own funds to pay workers

About MNREGA:

- The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), also known as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MNREGS) is Indian legislation enacted on August 25, 2005
- The MGNREGA provides a legal guarantee for one hundred days of employment in every financial year to adult members of any rural household willing to do public work-related unskilled manual work at the statutory minimum wage. The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), Govt of India is monitoring the entire implementation of this scheme in association with state governments

- This act was introduced with an aim of improving the purchasing power of the rural people, primarily semi or un-skilled work to people living below poverty line in rural India. It attempts to bridge the gap between the rich and poor in the country.
- Roughly one-third of the stipulated work force must be women.
- Adult members of rural households submit their name, age and address with photo to the Gram Panchayat.
- The Gram Panchayat registers households after making enquiry and issues a job card. The job card contains the details of adult member enrolled and his /her photo. Registered person can submit an application for work in writing (for at least fourteen days of continuous work) either to Panchayat or to Programme Officer.
- The Panchayat/Programme officer will accept the valid application and issue dated receipt of application, letter providing work will be sent to the applicant and also displayed at Panchayat office.
- The employment will be provided within a radius of 5 km: if it is above 5 km extra wage will be paid.

Key facts about MNREGA

- MGNREGA guarantees hundred days of wage employment in a financial year, to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
- Individual beneficiary oriented works can be taken up on the cards of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, small or marginal farmers or beneficiaries of land reforms or beneficiaries under the Indira Awaas Yojana of the Government of India.
- Within 15 days of submitting the application or from the day work is demanded, wage employment will be provided to the applicant.
- Right to get unemployment allowance in case employment is not provided within fifteen days of submitting the application or from the date when work is sought.
- Receipt of wages within fifteen days of work done.
- Variety of permissible works which can be taken up by the Gram Panchayaths.

- MGNREGA focuses on the economic and social empowerment of women.
- MGNREGA provides “Green” and “Decent” work.
- Social Audit of MGNREGA works is mandatory, which lends to accountability and transparency.
- MGNREGA works address the climate change vulnerability and protect the farmers from such risks and conserve natural resources.
- The Gram Sabha is the principal forum for wage seekers to raise their voices and make demands. It is the Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat which approves the shelf of works under MGNREGA and fix their priority.

National Statistical Commission

Why it is in news?

- Two members of the Commission resigned recently citing reasons like side-lining of the Commission by the Central Government

About National Statistical Commission:

- A Commission set up by the Government in January 2000 under the Chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan reviewed the statistical system and the entire gamut of Official Statistics in the country.
- The Rangarajan Commission submitted its report to the Government in August 2001. One of the key recommendations of this Commission was to establish a permanent National Commission on Statistics to serve as a nodal and empowered body for all core statistical activities of the country, evolve, monitor and enforce statistical priorities and standards and to ensure statistical co-ordination among the different agencies involved.
- The Rangarajan Commission also recommended that the Commission be set up initially through a Government order.
- In line with **the recommendations of the Rangarajan Commission**, on 1st June 2005, the Government of India resolved to set up a **National Statistical Commission (NSC)**.

- **The Commission has a part-time Chairperson, four part-time Members and an ex-officio Member.**
- **The Chief Statistician of India, the post created specifically as the Head of the National Statistical Office is the Secretary of the Commission.**
- **He is also the Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.**

Present Composition of NSC

Present Members of the NSC (As on 6th November 2018)

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Tenure
1	Vacant	Chairperson	
2	Vacant	Member	
3	Vacant	Member	
4	Shri P.C. Mohanan *He would be discharging the duties of Chairperson, NSC*	Member	21.06.2017 to 20.06.2020
5	Dr. J.V. Meenakshi	Member	28.05.2017 to 27.05.2020
6	Shri Amitabh Kant, CEO NITI Aayog	Ex-Officio Member	
7	Sh.Pravin Srivastava, Chief Statistician of India & Secretary MOSPI	Secretary to the NSC	

Kumbh Mela

Why it is in news?

- Ministry of Culture in its press release said” **The Kumbh contributes to infrastructure Development at Prayagraj City (Allahabad)**“

About Kumbh Mela:

- Kumbh Mela is a religious gathering of Hindu devotees along a holy river for bathing and prayers.
- The largest congregation on Earth is inscribed on the **representative list of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of India.**
- It is held every 12 years at four places by rotation: **Haridwar, Allahabad (Prayag), Nasik and Ujjain.** Each of these sites **celebrate the occasion along a holy river- Ganga in Haridwar, Triveni Sangam- confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, Shipra in Ujjain and Godavari in Nasik.**
- The mini versions of the event, **Ardh Kumbh Mela is held at only two places, Haridwar and Allahabad,** every sixth year between two Poorna Kumbha Melas.
- The recent Ardh Kumbh Mela takes place in 2019 on the holy banks of Triveni Sangam in Allahabad.

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- The auspicious occasion falls in the month of Magh, according to Hindu calendar that is mostly between January-Februarys.
- According to astrological calculations the occurrence happens when Jupiter is in Aries, Sun and Moon in Capricorn; or Jupiter in Taurus and Sun in Capricorn.
- Also, a Mini Kumbh Mela in the Hindu month of Magh (January- February) Mela is held every year in Allahabad only.

First Cash and Carry Store

Why it is in news?

- Common Services Centres (CSCs) under Digital India mission are providing Citizen Centric Services.
- CSCs are delivering many government and non-government services to citizens in rural India across the country.
- In its endeavor to promote rural marketing and create employment, CSC has launched its **first Cash and Carry store in Kanth Tehsil of Moradabad district, Uttar Pradesh.**
- **Efforts are on to have one cash & carry store in every block.** The store currently has products of Godrej, Patanjali, JIVA, Crompton, i-Ball. The store also offers free membership benefits to other CSC VLEs and government employees.

About Cash and Carry procedure:

- The main features of cash and carry are summarized best by the following definitions:
- Cash and carry is a form of trade in which goods are sold from a wholesale warehouse operated either on a self-service basis or on the basis of samples (with the customer selecting from specimen articles using a manual or computerized ordering system but not serving himself) or a combination of the two.
- Customers (retailers, professional users, caterers, institutional buyers, etc.) settle the invoice on the spot in cash and carry the goods away themselves.
- There are significant differences between "classical" sales at the wholesale stage and the cash and carry wholesaler: namely cash and carry customers arrange the transport

of the goods themselves and pay for the goods in cash, and not on credit.

About Common Service Centres:

- Common Services Centre (CSC) programme is an initiative of the Ministry of Electronics & IT (MeitY), Government of India.
- CSCs are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.
- CSCs are more than service delivery points in rural India.
- They are positioned as change agents, promoting rural entrepreneurship and building rural capacities and livelihoods.
- They are enablers of community participation and collective action for engendering social change through a bottom-up approach with key focus on the rural citizen.
- CSC e-Governance Services India Limited is a Special Purpose Vehicle (CSC SPV) incorporated under the Companies Act, 1956 by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), Government of India, to monitor the implementation of the Common Services Centers Scheme.
- It provides a centralized collaborative framework for delivery of services to citizens through CSCs, besides ensuring systemic viability and sustainability of the scheme.

Identifying nomadic & semi-nomadic communities

Why it is in news?

- The Centre announced its plans to set up a committee under NITI Aayog to identify denotified, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities — which still remain unclassified — in its interim budget.
- The government will also set up a welfare development board under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment for

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai implementing welfare and development programmes for these communities.

About Denotified communities:

- These communities once branded as criminals under the colonial Criminal Tribes Act of 1871, the communities were 'denotified' in 1952.
- They continue to face stigma till this day.
- These communities are hard to reach, less visible, and therefore, frequently left out.
- The communities which have not been categorised as SC/ST/OBC do not get access to any welfare schemes. The earlier commissions — Renke and Idate — had tried to identify and list these communities. The major recommendations of the commissions have not been implemented till date.

Reimbursable Advisory Services

Why it is in news?

- India has availed the service of World Bank's "Reimbursable Advisory Service Public Transport Services"

About Reimbursable Advisory Services (RAS) :

- RAS are programs offered by the World Bank to its clients in middle and high-income countries. Unlike lending products, RAS is an instrument developed to deliver specific assistance to eligible clients requiring services that cannot be fully funded from the Bank's country program.
- Under RAS programs, the World Bank works with countries at their request, providing technical advice, analytical services, and implementation support. The Bank is then reimbursed for the costs of delivering these advisory services.
- Reimbursable Advisory Services are flexible and easily adapted to meet country needs, and can take many forms, including the following: Policy advice; Analytical and diagnostic work; Donor aid coordination; Impact evaluation; Program implementation support; Delivery of training; Knowledge sharing and peer learning.

Economy

New FDI rules

Background

- In December 2018, the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion issued a clarification to the existing rules pertaining to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in e-commerce companies.
 - From February 1, 2019, Vendors that have **any stake** owned by an e-commerce company cannot sell their products on that e-commerce company's portal.
 - Any vendor who purchases **25% or more** of its inventory from an e-commerce group company will be considered to be controlled by that e-commerce company, and thereby barred from selling on its portal.
 - The e-commerce firm will not be allowed to influence the price of a product sold on its portal by giving incentives to particular vendors.
 - No seller can sell its products **exclusively** on any marketplace platform, and all vendors on the e-commerce platform should be provided services in a fair and non-discriminatory manner. Services include fulfilment, logistics, warehousing, advertisement, payments, and financing among others.

Context for these changes

- E-commerce companies can operate under two different models in India.
 - **Marketplace based model** where the e-commerce firm simply acts as a platform that connects buyers and sellers. FDI is allowed in e-commerce companies in this model.
 - **Inventory based model** where the inventory of goods sold on the portal is owned or controlled by the e-commerce company and is sold to the consumers directly. FDI is not allowed under this model.
- **(Note:** As for retail policy governing brick-and-mortar stores, while 100% FDI is allowed in single-brand retailing through the automatic route, in multi-brand retailing, up to 51% of FDI is permitted,

subject to government approval. Only in the trading — including through e-commerce — of locally produced food products, is up to 100% FDI allowed with government permission)

- The tightening of the e-commerce rules must be seen in the context of alleged misuse of this marketplace model by many an e-commerce firm. These firms are alleged to use a circuitous mechanism to get around the restrictions in a marketplace model.
- Large e-commerce companies such as Amazon and Flipkart, while not owning inventory themselves, have been providing a platform for their group companies such as CloudTail and WS Retail respectively.

Why in News?

- The government has said it would not be extending the deadline for implementation of the new rules governing FDI in e-commerce. The new rules will come into effect on Feb 1 as per plan.
- Large e-commerce firms such as Amazon and Flipkart have repeatedly approached the Centre seeking either dilution of the rules or extension of the deadline.
- The decision not to extend the deadline has been welcomed by traders' bodies and home-grown platforms such as Snapdeal and ShopClues.
- They said the move was a win for small enterprises, moving them a step closer to a level-playing field.

RBI lifts PCA

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)

- The PCA framework specifies the trigger points or the level in which the RBI will intervene with corrective action if a commercial bank's financial condition worsens below a mark. It is to ensure that banks don't go bust.
- The parameters that invite corrective action from the central bank are:
 - Capital to Risk weighted Asset Ratio (CRAR)
 - Net Non-Performing Assets (NPA)
 - Return on Assets (RoA)
- RBI has placed 11 state-run banks under prompt corrective action.

What will happen when a bank brought under PCA?

- When these parameters reach the set trigger points for a bank, the RBI will initiate certain structured and discretionary actions for the bank including
 - Restriction on dividend distribution/remittance of profits;
 - Requirement on promoters/owners/parents to bring in more capital;
 - Restrictions on branch expansion;
 - Higher provisioning requirement; and,
 - Restrictions on management compensation.

Applicability

- The PCA framework is applicable only to commercial banks and not extended to co-operative banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and FMIIs.

Why in News?

- The RBI has decided to allow three public sector banks — Bank of India, Bank of Maharashtra and Oriental Bank of Commerce — to exit the PCA framework following capital infusion by the government and a decline in net NPA.
- The RBI conducted a review following a demand made by government to lift the restrictions in order to boost credit growth.
- With these three lenders out of PCA, there are another eight public sector banks which are still facing restrictions which were imposed due to deteriorating financial health.

Govt. revises up GDP growth to 7.2%

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in its First Revised Estimates of National Income, Consumption Expenditure, Saving and Capital Formation, 2017-18, has revised its forecast for GDP growth for 2017-18 to 7.2% from the earlier estimate of 6.7%.
- It also revised the actual growth rate in 2016-17 to 8.2% from the 7.1% estimated earlier.
- The estimates of GDP and other aggregates for 2015-16 and 2016-17 have undergone revision on account of the use of the latest

data available on agricultural production, industrial production, and government expenditure (replacing the Revised Estimates with Actual for 2016-17) and also more comprehensive data available from various source agencies.

Criticism

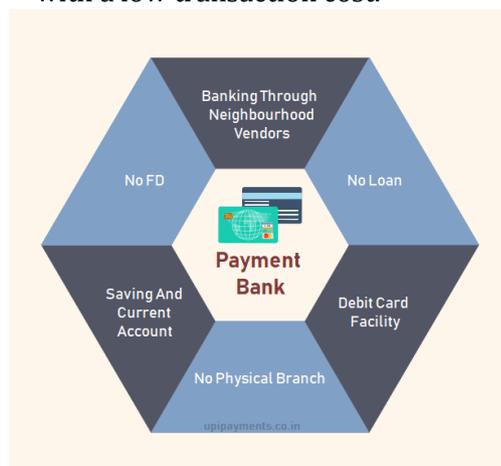
- However, the revisions have been criticised by some economists, who say the numbers do not match up to the ground realities.
- This is especially the case in the demonetisation year of 2016-17, which shows a strong growth in sectors that were widely agreed to have been badly hit by the exercise.
- On demand side, the main factor for the increase in growth rate is the increase in private final consumption expenditure, which has increased 1 percentage point. Experts said that it is inconsistent with the idea of people having less cash to make purchases.
- The main driver of the upward revision on the output side in 2016-17 was the construction sector, which has been revised upwards by 4.7 percentage points. Construction is also a sector which has a large informal sector component and all earlier analyses had indicated that demonetisation adversely affected the informal sectors.

India Post Payments Bank

What is a Payment Bank?

- Payment banks are the new age banks with limited facility. These banks mostly operate through the small vendors and shopkeepers. They exist in between the mobile wallet and regular banks.
- A payment bank provides following services to its customers.
 - Accept deposits (currently restricted upto Rs.1 lakh)
 - Remittance services
 - Mobile payments
 - Fund transfers
 - Debit card and associated services
 - Net Banking services
 - Sell third-party financial products like insurance and mutual funds
- The RBI expects payment banks to target India's migrant labourers, low-income

households and small businesses, offering savings accounts and remittance services with a low transaction cost.



How is it different from regular banks?

- As per RBI guidelines, payments banks can't accept fixed or recurring deposits.
- Payment banks **cannot offer loans**.

Why in News?

- Speaking at a special function organized to mark the completion of two years of India Post Payments Bank (IPPB) since its pilot launch, Union Minister of Finance Piyush Goyal congratulated the Department of Posts and IPPB for their tremendous efforts in spreading the activities of the bank.
- He said that by leveraging all 1.55 lakh Post offices across the country, IPPB would be able to provide banking services to the last man in the rural and remote areas.
- Launched on 1st September, 2018 across 650 districts, the IPPB has rolled out 1.25 lakhs access points across the country. Significantly approximate 1.10 lakh of these Access Points are located in the rural areas. The number of Access Points of IPPB is nearly twice the number of bank branches in rural India.

Government's 4R's gains

What's in the news?

- Finance Minister Piyush Goyal has reviewed the performance of Public Sector Banks (PSBs). The review was against the backdrop of visible signs of strengthening of the financial of PSBs as a result of Government's comprehensive **4R's approach** of recognition, resolution, recapitalisation and reforms.

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- On the back of recapitalisation of PSBs by over Rs. 2.6 lakh crore and recovery of over Rs. 2.8 lakh crore since clean-up began in 2015, and comprehensive reforms for better underwriting of loans, PSBs committed to significantly step up the level of domestic credit growth from 9.1% year-on-year at the end the second quarter of the current financial year.
- Amidst a number of positives, Finance Minister highlighted the need for each and every PSB to ensure that recent gains are sustained and better service delivered to all stakeholders.
- PCA banks were advised to maintain the trend of improvement in performance, with a view to bringing them out of the PCA framework at the earliest.
- Banks were asked to leverage the pipeline of Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) to provide better access to financial inclusion products and services to accelerate the realisation of a digitalised, financially included and insured society.

FMCG sector: Double-digit growth

What's in the news?

- According to the latest study by market research firm Nielsen, the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is expected to clock double digit growth in the current year.
- It is expected to grow between 11% and 12% in 2019, which is a tad lower than the 13.8% growth in 2018.
- The growth in the current year will be primarily on the back of conducive macroeconomic environment, rural consumption, sustained benefits of GST regime and election impact.
- The market research firm, however, added that crude prices in global markets and exchange rates would be the factors to watch out for.

Significance of FMCG sector

- The FMCG sector is the 4th largest sector in the Indian economy with Household and Personal Care accounting for 50% of FMCG sales in India.
- The FMCG sector has grown from US\$ 31.6 billion in 2011 to US\$ 52.75 billion in 2017-

18 and is further expected to reach US\$ 103.7 billion by 2020.

- Growing awareness, easier access and changing lifestyles have been the key growth drivers for the sector.

Farm support as central scheme

What's in the news?

- India Ratings and Research agency (Ind-Ra) has recently said that any step announced by the government in the Interim Budget aimed at supporting the incomes of farmers would be better done as a centrally sponsored scheme rather than a debt waiver.
- According to its estimates, in case the FY20 interim budget announces an income support of Rs 8,000 per acre per annum for marginal and small farmers, a marginal farmer and a small farmer would receive Rs 7,515 and Rs 27,942 per annum on average, respectively.
- If it is rolled out as a core centrally sponsored scheme, the cost to the government exchequer would be 0.43% of GDP, while the cost to the combined state government exchequer would be 0.27% of GDP.
- This is significantly lower than the amount conceptualised under the universal basic income scheme for the poor proposed in the Economic Survey 2016-17 and would cost the central government about Rs 1.47 lakh crore or 0.70% of GDP.
- However, only Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand have some fiscal space to accommodate such expenditure.
- In addition to the fiscal challenge, the implementation of such a scheme will depend on a proper land record. The government of Telangana was able to successfully implement the Rythu Bandhu scheme because the State had such records.

MoU with NCAER

What's in the news?

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) and National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to use new data technologies, knowledge generation and

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai knowledge sharing, and capacity building in the field of Official Statistics.

- The MoU would lead to strengthening and better monitoring of data quality and timeliness of various statistical products and services generated by the Ministry including, GDP, Economic Census, Price Statistics, Index of Industrial Production (IIP), and Annual Survey of Industries (ASI), etc.
- The following are the key activities envisaged under the MoU:
 - a. Using technology for survey instruments and processing of data for large scale surveys and data analytics.
 - b. Creation of a national data warehouse to integrate administrative statistical datasets available up to the local Government level.
 - c. Leveraging administrative data to improve the quality and coverage of core statistics with technical support and collaboration with data producers.
 - d. Development of new ICT based framework for measurement of social and economic indicators in the emerging knowledge based economy.
 - e. Capacity building for statistical activities including big data analytics, technical reporting etc.

IEA's Report: The Future of Rail

About International Energy Agency

- The IEA is an inter-governmental organisation that works to ensure reliable, affordable and clean energy for its 30-member countries and 8 association countries. India is an associate country in IEA.
- Its mission is guided by four main areas of focus: energy security, economic development, environmental awareness and engagement worldwide.
- India has been the focus of many recent IEA analyses and reports for instance through the special focus chapter on the Indian Power sector of the Energy Technology

Perspectives (ETP) publication and the World Energy Outlook (WEO).

Why in News?

- Minister of Railways & Coal, Piyush Goyal has launched the report "The Future of Rail" of International Energy Agency.
- "The Future of Rail" the first-of-a-kind report analyses the current and future importance of rail around the world through the perspective of its energy and environmental implications. The report reviews the impact of existing plans and regulations on the future of rail, and explores the key policies that could help to realise an enhanced future rail.
- This first ever global report has a focus on India, elaborating on the unique social and economic role of rail in India, together with its great enduring potential, to show how India can extend and update its networks to harness rail at a scope and scale that is unparalleled.

Lab to Land programme

What's in the news?

- Union Minister of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Radha Mohan Singh said that Farmers' Welfare is an integral part of New India. In this direction, various initiatives have been taken by the Agriculture Universities and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR).
- Addressing a conference, the minister said the ICAR has supplemented the Government's "Soil Health Card" initiative and has developed a mini Lab "Mridaparikshak" for soil testing. For problems related to climate change, 45 Integrated Farming System Models (IFS) have been created by including all the 15 agro-climatic regions to benefit small and marginal farmers.
- He informed that various policy initiatives taken by the government have resulted in record production of food grains and horticulture crops in the country in the current year. The food grain production rose by 7.5% to 284.83 million tonnes in 2017-18 from 265.04 million tonnes in 2013-14.
- In 2017-18, pulse production stood at 25.23 million tonnes, which is close to the

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai self-dependency mark. As a result, its import fell to 5.65 lakh tonnes in 2017-18 from 10 lakh tonnes in 2016-17, thereby saving Rs 9775 crore in foreign exchange.

- The minister said for the advancement of agriculture, Agriculture universities and ICAR have readily adopted e-mode of payments. Farmers have access to farmer advisory- **mKisan portal**, toll free helpline, data centre and mobile app for various breeds. **Pusa Krishi**- technology mobile app, **PulseExpert** mobile app for pulse crops has been released.
- He said that the Government has further strengthened the Lab to Land program in order to make research and techniques accessible at farmers' field and it is also being implemented at the level of Lab to Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurs to Farmers.
- In order to increase employment opportunities in agriculture, ICAR has been supporting more than 150 Agri Start-Ups and these start-ups are progressing successfully.

Report on unemployment data

Unemployment rate at four-decade high: NSSO

- A newspaper report cited the NSSO's periodic labour force survey — that is yet to be released — said the unemployment rate was 6.1% in 2017-18. The only year of comparable data when the unemployment rate was higher was in 1972-73. It was at 2.2% in 2011-12.
- The data showed that joblessness was higher in urban India (7.8%) than in rural India (5.3%). Within this, it stood at 17.4% for rural males and 13.6% for rural females. In urban India, joblessness was at 18.7% among males and a huge 27.2% among females.
- Importantly, the data reportedly showed that the labour force participation rate (LFPR), the measure of people working or looking for jobs, declined from 39.5% in 2011-12 to 36.9% in 2017-18.

Report confirms crisis

- The NSSO report is a matter of much controversy, with the two members of the National Statistical Commission have resigned citing the delay in its release.

- According to labour economists, job-seekers and workers' representatives, the NSSO data is a validation of trends seen on the ground. They said the government's failure to release the NSSO report was the latest sign of a complete lack of transparency regarding jobs data.
- This phenomenon of unemployment rising while the LFPR dipped is a cause for serious worry, explaining that it probably shows

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai that people are simply giving up on finding jobs and have stopped seeking work.

'Unemployment data based on draft report'

- However, NITI Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar said the leaked unemployment report was only a draft and not approved by the government.
- NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant said India is creating adequate number of jobs for new entrants, but probably not creating high quality jobs.

International Relations

Foreign Troops in Afghanistan

US in afghan

- Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, the US, invaded Afghanistan with the aim of dismantling the Al Qaeda network, removing Taliban from power and creating a viable democratic state.
- 17 years later, US had spent more than a trillion dollars and the death of tens of thousands, violence continues in an inconclusive war in Afghanistan.
- Recently Trump has announced withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan.

Peace pact

- There has been series of peace talks involving Taliban.
- The Taliban's demands for peace in Afghanistan have been that all foreign troops must leave, full Islamic law and customs must be implemented, and the political system must not conflict with the Sharia.
- The recent draft peace pact between US and Taliban was discussed in Qatar.
- It states that foreign troops will leave Afghanistan within 18 months of agreement being signed.

Why in news?

- Taliban officials and US negotiators had 6 days long peace talks in Qatar.

India's Stance

- India earlier said that that any peace talks should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, and Afghan-controlled and with participation of the government of Afghanistan.
- Reversing that stand it participated with two retired officials in the Moscow meeting.
- This is because US, Russia, China and even the Afghan government have all indicated that they are ready to talk with the Taliban.
- India's engagement demonstrates commitment to the idea of a stable, independent and peaceful Afghanistan.

India-Australia Extradition Treaty

About

- Extradition is a process which involves one governmental authority formally turning over an alleged criminal to another governmental authority for prosecution for a criminal charge.
- Every state does not have any obligation to surrender an alleged criminal to a foreign state, because one principle of sovereignty is that every state has legal authority over the people within its borders.
- Thus, to ensure extradition, extradition treaties exist between nations.
- India has extradition treaty with various nations around the world.
- In absence of an extradition treaty, India can request the other country, it is a matter for the foreign country to consider, in accordance with its domestic laws and procedures, whether the country can agree to India's extradition request.

Australian Treaty

- India and Australia signed an extradition treaty in 2008, but it came into force only in 2011.
- Under this treaty, both countries decided to recognise extraditable offences which are punishable by an imprisonment of at least one year or severe penalty.
- Now both the countries are in a plan to renew the extradition treaty and update to a new one related to current scenario.
- The new treaty will be more focused on narcotics, human trafficking, spies and terrorism.

Why in news?

- India and Australia re planning to sign a new extradition treaty.

S-400 missile

Overview

- S-400 Triumf is one of the world's most advanced air defence systems.

- The system is a large complex of radars, control systems and different types of missiles.
- It can simultaneously track numerous incoming objects in a radius of a few hundred kilometers, the objects may include all kinds of aircraft, missiles and UAVs.
- It can employ appropriate missile systems to launch the counter attack and to neutralise the objects.
- India and Russia signed the \$5.2-billion deal for the S-400 system despite pressure from the U.S. and threats of sanctions.

India-Russia

- India's defense ties with the erstwhile Soviet Union and later with Russia were a major pillar of bilateral ties.
- Recent defense agreements have sent a strong message that New Delhi continues to view relations with Moscow an indispensable element of India's foreign policy.
- Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) is built in India with Russian cooperation.
- India and Russia are engaged in several multilateral efforts that are greatly favoured by Russia such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.
- There is also an idea been developed for establishing a transportation connect between Chennai and Vladivostok in Russia.

Indus Water Treaty

About

- The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-sharing arrangement signed by then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then President of Pakistan Ayub Khan in 1960 at Karachi.
- It covers the water distribution and sharing rights of six rivers Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.
- The agreement was brought with the help of World Bank.

The Agreement

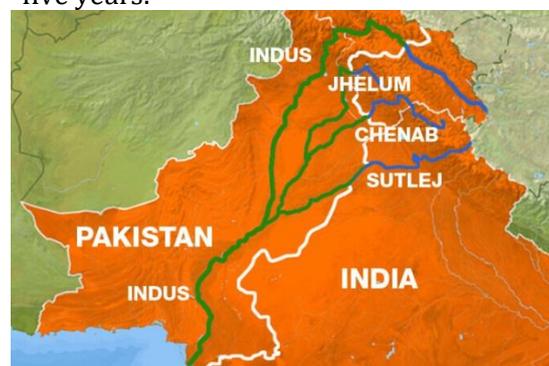
- Under the Treaty, all the waters of the Eastern Rivers – Sutlej, Beas, and Ravi – were allocated to India.

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- Pakistan received unrestricted use of the Western Rivers – Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab.
- The treaty says that India can use the water in western rivers in “non-consumptive” needs. Here non-consumptive means we can use it for irrigation, electricity production etc.
- A Permanent Indus Commission was established to implement the Treaty.

Why in news?

- The Pakistan officials will visit the Chenab basin for inspection as per the Indus water treaty, 1960.
- As per the treaty, officials from both sides are mandated to inspect sites and works on both sides of the Indus basin in a block of five years.



Mauritius PM In Republic Day

Overview

- Mauritius Prime Minister P.K. Jugnauth and his wife, Kobita visited India to attend the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) in Varanasi.
- The couple also witnessed the republic day function held at Mumbai.
- The Indian government recognised them with the status of “Special Guests”.
- It is very significant that, usually government announces the status of “Special Guests” to a foreign head of state or government or royalty as chief guest at the Republic Day function in New Delhi.

Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD)

- Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD) is celebrated to strengthen the engagement of the overseas Indian community with the Government of India and reconnect them with their home country.
- The 15th PBD Convention is being held on 21-23 January 2019 in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- The theme of PBD Convention 2019 is "Role of Indian Diaspora in building New India".

- The partner state of 2019 is Uttar Pradesh.
- The usual date of January 9 has been changed to 21 to 23 January 2019 to help the diaspora to participate in Kumbh Mela and Republic Day celebrations.
- Prime Minister of Mauritius Mr. Pravind Jugnauth is the chief guest of the PBD convention.

Why in news?

- Mauritius PM P.K. Jugnauth gets a rare honour of status of "Special Guests" from Indian government in republic day celebrations held in Mumbai.

PISA 2021

Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA)

- It was introduced in 2000 by the OECD to test the learning levels of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science. The test is carried out every three years.
- Students are assessed in reading, mathematics, science and collaborative problem-solving.
- Participation in PISA allows benchmarking performance against a wide range of countries.
- PISA gives proof of functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory.

Indian Scenario

- India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries.
- India missed the application deadline for the 2018 assessment.
- The Union Human Resources Development Ministry has signed an agreement with Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) for India's Participation in Programme for International Student Assessment- PISA 2021.
- The students will be selected by PISA through random sampling. The schools run by Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan (KVS), Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS) and schools in the UT of Chandigarh would be participating.
- It would lead to recognition and acceptability of Indian students and prepare them for the global economy in the 21st century.

OECD

- It was formed in 1961, after the signing of OECD convention by US, Canada and members of Organisation of European Economic Cooperation (OEEC).
- India, China and Brazil are key partners of the organisation and contribute to its work in a sustained and comprehensive manner.
- 36 OECD member countries worldwide regularly turn to one another to identify problems, discuss and analyse them, and promote policies to solve them.

Why in news?

- India and OECD sign agreement to enable India's participation in Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) to be held in 2021.

Kashmir-meet in UK

Overview

- The meeting being organised at the House of Commons in UK by the "All Party Parliamentary Group on Pakistan" (APPG-Pakistan) which includes both Conservative and Labour Party MPs.
- The meeting would be followed by an exhibition in London by Pakistan which as it says will replicate the human rights violation in India in UK.
- Pakistani Foreign Minister is likely to be in London for these events.

India's response

- India has registered a strong protest with the UK to stop the hosting of a Pakistan backed conference on Kashmir which is to be held inside the British parliament in London.
- UK has said that it will not interfere in the matter.
- It also said that UK Members of Parliament are independent of government and it is for individual members to decide who they meet and for what purpose.
- India has raised the issue of "anti-India" groups within the U.K. several times in the past.
- The British government turned down an Indian request to cancel a pro-Khalistani rally in London demanding a referendum.
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Pakistan on Kashmir had presented a report to the

British parliament after a visit to Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

- This could deteriorate the bilateral relations between India and UK.

Why in news?

- India asks UK to stop Kashmir event in London.

Khalistan Movement

- The Khalistan movement is a Sikh nationalist movement that wants to create an independent state for Sikh people, via armed struggle or political, inside the current North-Western Republic of India. Such a state existed in Punjab from 1709 to 1849.
- The idea of Khalistan was an idea first created in 1940s, remained stagnant but is now revived.

India-China Relations

About

- There has been significant progress in export of agricultural and allied products from India to China.
- This is seen an increase after the informal Wuhan summit between President, Xi Jinping and Prime Minister, Narendra Modi.
- Since that Summit, the protocol on exports of non-basmati rice and fish meal & oil was signed.
- India and China signed the protocol for exports of Indian tobacco leaves to China.
- This is because international quality tobacco is available in India at low prices and there is good potential for export of Indian tobacco to China.
- The revival of the phytosanitary protocol with China will pave the way for revival of Indian tobacco exports to China and prove economically beneficial to Indian farmers.
- India also requested China to seek other resources such as okra, soyabean, bovine meat and dairy products from India.

Why in news?

- Commerce Secretary Dr. Anup Wadhawan held a bilateral meeting with Mr. Wang Shouwen, Vice Minister of China's Ministry of Commerce.
- It was majorly to discuss the progress made under RCEP negotiations and efforts to strengthen bilateral trade.

Phytosanitary certificate

- An inspection certificate issued by a competent governmental authority to show that a particular shipment has been treated to be free from harmful pests and plant diseases.

- The certificate is issued before the customs clearance for export and import.

RCEP

- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the countries of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) namely Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam and the six states with which ASEAN has free trade agreements (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).

Indian Students Arrested in USA

Overview

- Number of Indian students were arrested in USA, based on fraudulent student visa program charges.
- As per the information obtained from USA homeland security, it is said to be observed that number of Indians, who got student visa for studying in University of Farmington.
- The officials confirmed that university is said to be fake and there are no faculty or classes in it.
- The illegal agents had used this to admit Indian students into it, who wanted themselves to be enrolled in the "pay to stay" scheme in student visa.

Pay to stay

- The "pay to stay" scheme allowed them to maintain their student visa (F-1) status and obtain work permits as part of the Curricular Practical Training (CPT) option open to qualified F-1 visa students.
- The student's intent was to fraudulently maintain their student visa status and to obtain work authorisation under the CPT programme.
- The official also said that each student knew that the university programme was not approved by the Department of Homeland Security.
- It is said that 600 arrest warrants have been issued in this case.
- The American Telugu Association has come up with legal counselling for the Indian students.

Why in news?

- 8 Indian students were arrested in the on fraudulent student visa program charges in USA.

Science & Technology

Facebook to unify chat apps

Why in news?

- The New York Times reported that Facebook has planned to integrate chats within WhatsApp, Messenger and Instagram.

More on the report:

- WhatsApp's end-to-end encryption, the hallmark of users' privacy may be challenged if Facebook integrates the popular mobile messaging platform with the less-secure Instagram and Messenger.
- WhatsApp chats are currently end-to-end encrypted by default. Facebook Messenger offers the feature if you turn on "Secret Conversations".
- Instagram does not currently offer any form of end-to-end encryption for its chats.
- By integrating there may be sharing of data which may lead to compromise in privacy and data manipulation.

Zearalenone in cereals

What is Zearalenone?

- Zearalenone *is a fungal toxin infesting cereals* such as wheat, maize and barley. It attacks crops while they are growing, but can also develop when cereals are stored without being dried fully.

How Zearalenone affects?

- **Zearalenone behaves like oestrogen, the female sex hormone**, and could cause endocrine disturbances in humans.
- Its nasty effects in animals, such as pigs, are documented. When fed with mouldy corn, pigs develop inflamed vaginas, infertility and other symptoms.
- This is why countries like Brazil regulate zearalenone levels in animal feed. In humans, the data are fuzzier.

Why in News?

- While numerous studies document this toxin in cereals across the world, no data existed for India until now.
- This month, a Journal of Food Science study detected zearalenone in wheat, rice, corn and oats from markets in Uttar Pradesh.

How did it come about?

- Fungal toxins are commonly found in food, and can be a public health concern. India regulates the levels of some of these, including **aflatoxin, deoxynivalenol, ergot and patulin**.
- The first three infest cereals, while patulin is found in apples. Each of these toxins has been associated with disease outbreaks.
- For example, in 1974, a hepatitis outbreak in Rajasthan and Gujarat, which made 398 people sick and killed 106, was linked to aflatoxin in maize. Meanwhile, chronic aflatoxin consumption has been shown to cause liver cancer.
- Given this, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) classifies aflatoxin as a Group 1 carcinogen, meaning there is enough evidence for its carcinogenicity.
- In zearalenone's case, there is no strong evidence of toxicity in humans so far, though several research groups are investigating. As a result, the IARC classifies it as a Group 3 carcinogen, which means evidence is not sufficient for an evaluation yet.

What can be done?

- More data are needed from cereals in other States, and from other storage conditions, before India decides to set limits.
- Since zearalenone favours cool climates, such contamination could be limited to a few States.
- Also, strong epidemiological data linking human zearalenone levels with diseases such as breast cancer are important.
- The latest findings are an excellent starting point, since nothing was known about the chemical in India so far. It is time to build upon it.

Microplastic fibres in groundwater

What are microplastics?

- Plastic pieces that **are less than 5mm in length** are called microplastics.
- Microplastics can be formed by fragmentation of large plastic waste material.

- Microfibres from washing of textiles, microbeads used in cosmetics and even paint from land run-offs can dump microplastics in the ocean.

Biomagnification of Microplastics:

- Biomagnification refers to increasing concentration of a substance, such as a toxic chemical, in the tissues of organisms at successively higher levels in a food chain.
- Zooplanktons are the lowest link in the food chain. Microplastics are ingested directly by the zooplankton.
- The zooplankton with microplastics is consumed by fish.
- Microplastics finally reach the seal, which consumes the fish.

Harmful effects of Microplastics:

- Microplastics can settle in the stomach and lead to reduction in feeding capacity of organisms.
- Microplastics are detrimental to the intestinal function and reproductive system.

Why in news?

- The study, published in the journal Groundwater, identified microplastic fibres, along with a variety of medicines and household contaminants, in two aquifer systems in the U.S.

Details of the study:

- The world's surface waters are already contaminated with microplastics but their presence in groundwater systems is recently being explored.
- Fractured limestone aquifers are a groundwater source that accounts for 25% of the global drinking water supply.
- It is estimated that 6.3 billion metric tonnes of plastic waste have been produced since the 1940s, and 79% of that is now in landfills or the natural environment.

Drug-loaded microparticles for Parkinson's

About Parkinson's disease:

- Parkinson's is a complex disease.
- It is a degenerative disorder; it results from nerve cells in the brain producing insufficient dopamine, a chemical partly involved in regulating movement.

- Its symptoms are- difficulty in walking, or feeling lethargic.
- It currently does not have any cure.

Degenerative disease is the result of a continuous process based on degenerative cell changes, affecting tissues or organs, which will increasingly deteriorate over time.

Why in news?

- Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi have successfully fabricated disc-shaped microparticles, merely 15 micrometres in size, made up of two compartments for carrying dual drugs without having drug-drug interactions.

Challenges faced so far:

- The dopamine (neurotransmitter chemical) deficiency caused by the disease can, however, be overcome by providing drugs which are capable of crossing the blood-brain barrier.
- But most of the time only 1% of the drug (levodopa) reaches the brain after being orally taken.
- Using dual drugs (levodopa with carbidopa) have increased the fraction of drug reaching the brain, but low half-life has posed challenges.
- Also, continuous intake of levodopa has in some cases caused serious side effects such as (LID) Levodopa-induced dyskinesia, (Dyskinesia- abnormality or impairment of voluntary movement).

Half life: This is the period of time required for the concentration or amount of drug in the body to be reduced by one-half. We usually consider the half-life of a drug in relation to the amount of the drug in plasma. A drug's plasma half-life depends on how quickly the drug is eliminated from the plasma.

Importance of the research:

- With a long list of problems staring at Parkinson's disease management, now researchers from Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi have tasted success.
- They have fabricated disc-shaped microparticles, merely 15 micrometres in size, made up of two compartments for carrying dual drugs without having drug-drug interactions.
- The particles are made entirely of biodegradable and biocompatible polymers.

pollution and climate change, global influenza pandemic etc.

- They have made disc-shaped particles as they have a superior ability to attach to the intestinal lining, thereby increasing the bioavailability of the drug, crucial for oral drug delivery system.
- The drugs get absorbed in the small intestine area and then travel via blood to the blood–brain barrier.
- Now, carbidopa acts as a helping hand and allows levedopa to cross the crucial barrier, reach the target zone in the brain and effectively manage the dopamine deficiency.
- Also, more than 80% of the drug was released within five hours in the simulated gastric fluid, which is highly beneficial from a pharmacological point of view.
- Usually a person takes multiple pills a day to efficiently manage the symptoms of Parkinson's disease.
- This can be replaced by just one pill as these microparticles can deliver the required dose in a sustained manner and reduce the pill burden and side-effects for elderly patients who are more likely to forget their doses and face end of dose 'wearing-off' symptoms.

NCDs as top killers

What are NCDs?

- Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), also known as chronic diseases, tend to be of long duration and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behaviours factors.
- The main types of NCDs are cardiovascular diseases (like heart attacks and stroke), cancers, chronic respiratory diseases (such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma) and diabetes.

Why in news?

- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) mainly cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer continue to be the top killers in the South-East Asia Region, claiming 8.5 million lives each year, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO).
- Containing the NCDs has been listed by the WHO as its health goal for this year along with reducing mortality related to air

Key observations:

- Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease, are collectively responsible for over 70% of all deaths worldwide, or 41 million people. These include 15 million people dying prematurely, aged between 30 and 69.
- One third of these deaths are premature and occur before the age of 70, affecting economically productive individuals.
- The four 'major' NCDs are caused, to a large extent, by four modifiable behavioural risk factors: tobacco use, unhealthy diet, insufficient physical activity and harmful use of alcohol.
- The NCDs disproportionately affect the poor, impoverish families, and place a growing burden on health care systems.

What needs to be done?

- Consuming fibre and whole grains can reduce health risks from non-communicable diseases such as heart disease. Eating fibre-rich foods reduces the incidence of coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer by 16% to 24%.
- A higher fibre intake is also associated with lower bodyweight, systolic blood pressure and total cholesterol when compared with lower intake.
- Doctors also recommend — eat less and enjoy your food by eating slowly, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables, avoid oversized portions which causes weight gain, at least half of your grains should be whole grains, limit consumption of food high in trans fats.

New Delhi superbug gene

What is Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) or superbugs?

- Antimicrobial resistance happens when microorganisms such as viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites change when they are exposed to antimicrobial drugs.
- These microorganisms are also termed as "superbugs". As a result, the medicines or drugs become ineffective and infections

persist in the body further increasing the risk of spread to others.

Threats:

- AMR has become one of the biggest threats to global health and endangers other major priorities, such as human development.
- All around the world, many common infections have become resistant to antimicrobial medicines used to treat them which resulted in longer illnesses and more deaths.
- At the same time, not enough new antimicrobial drugs especially antibiotics are being developed to replace older and increasingly ineffective ones.

Why in news?

- In a significant find in the global spread of multi-drug resistant (MDR) bacteria, scientists have found a “superbug” gene first detected in over a decade back in one of the last “pristine” places on Earth that is some 12,870 km away.
- Soil samples taken in Svalbard a Norwegian archipelago between mainland Norway and the North Pole have now confirmed the spread of blaNDM-1 (called New Delhi Metallo-beta-lactamase-1) into the High Arctic.
- Carried in the gut of animals and people, blaNDM-1 and other ARGs were found in Arctic soils that were likely spread through the faecal matter of birds, other wildlife and human visitors to the area.

Rajasthan Zika strain

About Zika Virus:

- Zika virus is the virus that causes the infection known as zika fever or zika virus disease.
- The virus is a member of the **Flaviviridae virus** family and the genus **Flavivirus**.
- It was named ‘zika’ because the virus was isolated for the first time in the Zika Forest which is in Uganda.
- The zika virus is related to the yellow fever, dengue, West Nile and the Japanese encephalitis viruses.
- **Transmission:** It is transmitted primarily by infected *Aedes aegypti* mosquitoes, which also transmits dengue. It can also

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai spread through blood transfusion and sexual contact.

- **Symptoms:** They are similar to other viral infections such as dengue, and include fever, skin rashes, conjunctivitis, muscle and joint pain, malaise, and headache.
- **Threats:** Pregnant women infected with Zika virus may give birth to babies with severe brain damage or serious birth defects i.e. neurological disorders and foetal deformation known as **Microcephaly** in which infants are born with abnormally smaller heads. Besides there is also possible link between virus and **Guillain-Barré syndrome** (a condition in which the body’s immune system attacks part of the nervous system) is also suspected.
- **Treatment and Prevention:** There is no specific treatment or vaccine currently available to treat Zika. The best form of prevention is protection against mosquito bites and clearing stagnant water where mosquitoes breed.

Why in news?

- The Zika virus that infected 159 people in an outbreak in Rajasthan last year, could have been circulating in India for several years and is endemic to Asia, according to a new study published in the journal *Infection, Genetics and Evolution*.
- The study, led by authors from Pune’s National Institute of Virology (NIV), an institute under the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), is the first to sequence full Zika virus genomes from India.

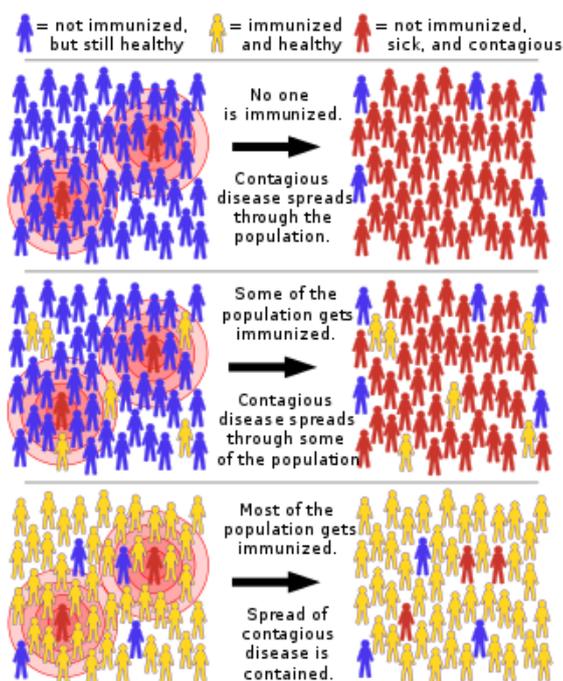
Confers herd immunity:

- The finding that the outbreak was caused by an endemic virus is quite important.
- It suggests that people in the region may have been previously exposed to the virus, building herd immunity that may limit future outbreaks.
- The new study shows that while a part of the population may be immune to microcephaly, new approach is needed in handling Indian Zika virus.

What is herd immunity?

- Herd immunity is a form of indirect protection from infectious disease that

occurs when a large percentage of a population has become immune to an infection, thereby providing a measure of protection for individuals who are not immune.



150 years of periodic table

What is a periodic table?

- Russian scientist **Dmitry Mendeleev** published the first periodic such table in 1869.
- The table **organizes all chemical elements by the number of protons in a given atom** and other properties.
- There are seven rows, called periods, and 18 columns, called groups, in the table.
- Elements in the same group share similar properties. Those in the same period have the same number of atomic orbitals.
- Most elements on the table are metals divided into six broad categories – alkali metals, alkaline earths, basic metals, transition metals, lanthanides and actinides.
- They are located on the left, separated from the non-metals on the right by a zig-zag line.
- Lanthanides and actinides, often called “inner transition metals”, are commonly hived off as a separate section under the

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai main table as including all 30 – including Uranium – would make the table too wide.

- The table is a useful tool for people to derive relationships between the different properties of the elements. It can also help predict the properties of new elements that have yet to be discovered or created.

Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Period	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
1	1 H																	2 He
2	3 Li	4 Be											5 B	6 C	7 N	8 O	9 F	10 Ne
3	11 Na	12 Mg											13 Al	14 Si	15 P	16 S	17 Cl	18 Ar
4	19 K	20 Ca	21 Sc	22 Ti	23 V	24 Cr	25 Mn	26 Fe	27 Co	28 Ni	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br	36 Kr
5	37 Rb	38 Sr	39 Y	40 Zr	41 Nb	42 Mo	43 Tc	44 Ru	45 Rh	46 Pd	47 Ag	48 Cd	49 In	50 Sn	51 Sb	52 Te	53 I	54 Xe
6	55 Cs	56 Ba	57 La	72 Hf	73 Ta	74 W	75 Re	76 Os	77 Ir	78 Pt	79 Au	80 Hg	81 Tl	82 Pb	83 Bi	84 Po	85 At	86 Rn
7	87 Fr	88 Ra	89 Ac	104 Rf	105 Db	106 Sg	107 Bh	108 Hs	109 Mt	110 Ds	111 Rg	112 Cn	113 Nh	114 Fl	115 Mc	116 Lv	117 Ts	118 Og

Who maintains periodic table?

- The International Union of Pure Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) is responsible for maintaining the periodic table.
- IUPAC is an international federation of National Adhering Organizations that represents chemists in individual countries. It is a member of the International Council for Science (ICSU).
- Headquarters of IUPAC is in Zürich, Switzerland.
- Established in 1919 as the successor of the International Congress of Applied Chemistry for the advancement of chemistry.
- Its members, the National Adhering Organizations, can be national chemistry societies, national academies of sciences, or other bodies representing chemists.
- The IUPAC's Inter-divisional Committee on Nomenclature and Symbols (IUPAC nomenclature) is the recognized world authority in developing standards for the naming of the chemical elements and compounds.

UNESCO initiative-1001 Inventions:

- UNESCO has also launched its educational initiative, 1001 Inventions: Journeys from Alchemy to Chemistry.
- Consisting of educational material and science experiments to help young people improve their understanding of chemistry and its numerous uses, the initiative will be brought to schools around the world during 2019.

Why in news?

- To celebrate the *150th anniversary of the organisation of the periodic table*, UNESCO has launched the *International Year Of The Periodic Table*.

CMB-Bharat project

Why in news?

- A three-week long program entitled, 'Cosmology – The next decade', was held on Jan 2019 at ICTS-TIFR, Bengaluru.
- It discussed about project Cosmic Microwave Background-Bharat, that helps in listening to the faintest murmurs of the early universe.

What is CMB?

- The CMB is **electromagnetic radiation** as a remnant from an early stage of the universe in Big Bang cosmology.
- It is the **radiation left over from an early stage** in the development of the Universe.
- Moreover, the discovery of CMB is **landmark evidence of the Big Bang** origin of the universe.
- In addition to, CMB is a cosmic background radiation that is fundamental to observational cosmology because it is the oldest light in the Universe and can be found in all directions.
- It fills up all space that is an important source of data on the early universe because it is the **oldest electromagnetic radiation in the universe**, dating to the epoch of recombination
- Subsequent to the discovery of the CMB, hundreds of cosmic microwave background experiments conducted to measure and characterize the signatures of the radiation.

CMB-Bharath Significance:

- CMB-Bharat is a proposal for comprehensive next generation Cosmic Microwave Background (CMB) mission in international collaboration with major Indian contribution.
- The "ultra-high goal" was the first clear signature of quantum gravity and ultrahigh energy physics in the very early universe.
- The "high" goals of discovering about neutrino species, their total mass and mass hierarchy; map all dark matter and most baryons in the observable universe,

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai

- It helps to generate rich galactic, extragalactic astrophysics datasets and even the cosmological model.
- CMB-Bharat mission presents an unique opportunity for India to lead in fundamental that proves spectacular success.

Celestial billboard

Why in news?

- StartRocket, a Russian start-up aiming to put billboards in space.
- The firm plans to turn hundreds of tiny satellites into a massive display visible from the earth — something its CEO, Vlad Sitnikov, said would make him the first man to draw in space since the ancient Greeks grouped stars into constellations.

More information on the plan:

- "New ages demand new gods," the advertising expert said, adding that the world is no longer ruled by Greek deities but by brands and events.
- From space hotels to asteroid mining, the ambitious project is the latest in a series of ventures, often backed by capital and technology from Silicon Valley, looking at outer space as a new business frontier.
- Mr. Sitnikov said he came up with the space billboard idea last year after U.S.-New Zealand rocket propulsion company Rocket Lab launched a shiny disco ball called Humanity Star into orbit, where it remained visible to the human eye for months.
- To work out technical details he teamed up with experts from Skoltech, a Moscow private university, he said. The team aims to put 200 tiny satellites, known as CubeSats, at an altitude of about 500 kilometers in the lower orbit by 2021.
- The satellites, each equipped with a sun-reflecting sail, would fly close together to comprise the pixels of a giant screen that could be switched on and off to display short words or logos.
- Production costs alone are expected to be more than \$150 million, he said. The firm plans to charge about \$200,000 for every eight hours of advertising.

- The display would look roughly the size of a half moon and be visible for six minutes at a time, potentially from anywhere.

Need for regulation:

- But since it was announced in January, the initiative has angered astronomers and raised questions about the need to better regulate who owns the skies — and what is in them.
- It also seems that these advertising companies are targeting big cities where light pollution is already high.
- It will also give way to fight among the nations on who owns the sky.



Kisan Gandhi

Why in news?

- The Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) was awarded First Prize for its Tableau, Kisan Gandhi in the Republic Day Parade – 2019.

About the tableau:

- The ICAR tableau displayed the importance of dairy farming, use of indigenous breeds and livestock based organic agriculture for rural prosperity.
- The ICAR tableau Kisan Gandhi portrayed the Gandhiji's vision to improve agriculture and livestock for the prosperity of rural communities.
- To gain more insight, Gandhiji attended a training program on dairy farming for fifteen days in 1927 at Bangalore Centre of the ICAR – National Dairy Research Institute.
- He also visited and appreciated the 'Indore method' of composting at the Institute of Plant Industry, Indore in 1935.
- The Gandhian philosophy included promotion of Swadeshi breeds, organic agriculture and goat milk for better health.

About Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR):

- ICAR is an autonomous body responsible for co-ordinating agricultural education and research in India.
- It is the largest network of agricultural research and education institutes in the world.
- It reports to the Department of Agricultural Research and Education under the Union Ministry of Agriculture.
- The Union Minister of Agriculture serves as its president.

National Agricultural Higher Education Project

Why in news?

- Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) launches National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) to attract talent and strengthen higher agricultural education in the country.

About National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP):

- Skilled human resources in agriculture must become the basis of agricultural advancement and in view of this, the government has given special emphasis on the upliftment of agricultural education.
- ICAR has recently launched Rs 1100 crore ambitious National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP) to attract talent and strengthen higher agricultural education in the country.
- This project will be **funded by the World Bank and the Indian Government** on a 50:50 basis.
- In addition, a four-year degree in Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Forestry has been declared a professional degree.
- Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) has been set up in Barhi, Jharkhand on the lines of IARI, Pusa New Delhi, and another IARI is being set up in Assam.
- In order to promote the participation of students in agricultural business, Student READY (Rural Entrepreneurship Awareness Development Yojana) scheme is being run, under which practical experience of agriculture and entrepreneurship is provided to undergraduate students.

Environment

Minimising conflict

Why in News?

- According to a study published in Tropical Conservation Science, Monoculture plantations of Eucalyptus and Acacia in Karnataka have become crucial elephant habitats and need to be protected along with natural forest patches to minimise human–elephant conflict.

Highlights

- During the day, elephants preferred monoculture refuges (of acacia, teak and eucalyptus) and forest fragments, and avoided other habitats including coffee and human habitations.
- Across the years, while the elephants' use of monoculture refuges and coffee have increased, their use of forest fragments have drastically decreased (from 15% to 2%).
- The study states that in areas where natural forests have been wiped out, monocultures, which serve as refuge for elephants and help them move between habitats, could help minimize human–elephant conflict and promote coexistence between people and elephants.

What are Monoculture Plantations?

- In agriculture, "monoculture" describes the practice of relying on a very small number of genetic variants, or cultivars of a food crop for commercial agricultural.
- Continuous monoculture, or monocropping, where the same species is grown year after year, can lead to the quicker buildup of pests and diseases, and then rapid spread where a uniform crop is susceptible to a pathogen.
- The practice has been criticized for its environmental effects and for putting the food supply chain at risk.

About Acacia and Eucalyptus Plantations

- Allelopathy is the chemical inhibition of one plant (or other organism) by another, due to the release into the environment of substances acting as germination or growth inhibitors.
- Plants like Acacia, Eucalyptus show allelopathy and nutrient depletion from soil faster than other slow growing plants.
- According to various studies, these plants cause serious damage to the water table.

This is because the usage of water by these species is higher than agriculture crops.

- In 2017, an official ban on cultivation and propagation of eucalyptus trees by anybody across Karnataka was put in place by amending the Karnataka Tree Preservation Act

Chilika Lake

Why in News?

- The two-day National Chilika Bird Festival was held at on the banks of Chilika lake in Odisha.

About Chilika Lake

- **Chilika Lake** is a brackish water lagoon, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam districts of Odisha state on the east coast of **India**, at the mouth of the Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal.
- It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest coastal lagoon in the World .
- Chilika Lake has been recognised as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Nalbana Bird Sanctuary

- Nalbana Island is the core area of the Ramsar designated wetlands of Chilika. It was notified in 1987 and declared a bird sanctuary in 1973 under the Wildlife Protection Act.

Significance

- Chilika, which lies in the Central Asian Flyway for birds, is a major stopover site for migratory birds from the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions during their onward and return migration along the east coast.
- Habitats such as mudflats, floating and submerged vegetation, reed beds, open waters with varying depth and salinity attract a variety of migratory and resident bird species.

Ramsar Convention

- The Convention on Wetlands, called the Ramsar Convention, is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.
- The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975. Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world's

geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties”

- The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides administrative services to the Ramsar Convention. The Convention Secretariat follows IUCN procedures and policies as applicable.

Satkosia Tiger Reserve

Why in News?

- Two elephants are being brought from the Similipal Tiger Reserve to strengthen Patrolling in the Satkosia Tiger Reserve, before approaching the NTCA for resuming the ambitious tiger reintroduction programme in Satkosia.

Tiger Re-introduction Programme

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has planned to reintroduce tigers in three tiger reserves, where their number have dwindled to the minimum.
- Tiger restocking will happen at the Satkosia forest in Odisha, the western part of Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand and Buxa in West Bengal.
- For Satkosia reintroduction, the Madhya Pradesh government has given in-principle approval to take out three pairs of breeding tigers from Panna.
- Earlier the Tiger reintroduction programme was carried out successfully in Sariska and Panna Tiger Reserves, where their numbers have improved significantly.

NTCA

- The National Tiger Conservation Authority is a statutory body under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change constituted under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, as amended in 2006, for strengthening tiger conservation.
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority has been fulfilling its mandate within the ambit of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 for strengthening tiger conservation in the country by retaining an oversight through advisories/normative guidelines, based on appraisal of tiger status, ongoing conservation initiatives and recommendations of specially constituted Committees.

Project Tiger

- ‘Project Tiger’ is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme of the Environment, Forests and Climate Change, providing funding support to tiger range States, for in-situ

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai conservation of tigers in designated tiger reserves, and has put the endangered tiger on an assured path of recovery by saving it from extinction, as revealed by the recent findings of the All India tiger estimation using the refined methodology.

Global tiger forum

Why in News?

- According to experts from the Global Tiger Forum India’s current capacity to host tigers ranges from 2,500-3,000 tigers.

Challenges of Tiger Conservation

- **Habitat and loss of prey species-** Large-scale habitat destruction and decimation of prey populations are the major long-term threats to the existence of the dwindling tiger population in the country.
- **Hunting, poaching and illegal trade-** Hunting for sport probably caused the greatest decline in tiger populations until the 1930s, today Poaching is the largest immediate threat to the remaining tiger population.
- **Conflict with humans-**As tigers continue to lose their habitat and prey species, they are increasingly coming into conflict with humans as they attack domestic animals – and sometimes people. In retaliation, tigers are often killed by angry villagers.
- **Tiger Translocation-** Recent attempts at translocating tigers to unpopulated reserves, such as Satkosia in Orissa, have ended badly, with one of the tigers dying.

Global Tiger Forum

- The Global Tiger Forum (GTF) is the only inter- governmental international body established with members from willing countries to embark on a global campaign to protect the Tiger.
- Utilizing co-operative policies, common approaches, technical expertise, scientific modules and other appropriate programmes and controls the GTF is focused on saving the remaining 5 sub-species of Tigers distributed over 13 Tiger Range countries of the world.

Tiger Range Countries

- Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Russia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, India, Nepal and China.

Tx2

- In 2010, at the Tiger Summit in St Petersburg, Nepal and the 12 other tiger range countries committed to the most

ambitious and visionary species conservation goal ever set: TX2 – to double wild tiger numbers by 2022. WWF was a driving force behind the Tiger Summit and remains a major force behind TX2.

Global Tiger Initiative

- The Global Tiger Initiative (GTI) was launched in 2008 as a global alliance of governments, international organizations, civil society, the conservation and scientific communities and the private sector, with the aim of working together to save wild tigers from extinction. In 2013, the scope was broadened to include Snow Leopards.
- The GTI's founding partners included the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Smithsonian Institution, Save the Tiger Fund, and International Tiger Coalition (representing more than 40 non-government organizations). The initiative is led by the 13 tiger range countries (TRCs).

Tiger Conservation

Why In News?

- The 3rd Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation was held in New Delhi.

About the Conference

- The conference is organised by the Global Tiger Forum which is an implementing arm of the Global Tiger Initiative Council (GTIC), in collaboration with National Tiger Conservation Authority (Government of India), WWF, Wildlife Conservation Trust (WCT) and Wildlife Trust of India (WTI).
- The conference aims to take stock of the progress against resolution adopted by tiger range countries in 2010 at St. Petersburg, Russia.
- This is measured against Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as decided by the Global Tiger Range countries. Global and National Tiger Recovery Programs (GTRP/NTRP) were formulated by respective tiger range countries as a consequence of this historic decision.

Global Tiger Recovery Programme

- The historic Russian summit drew world leaders and produced the groundbreaking Global Tiger Recovery Programme (GTRP), a worldwide plan to bring the species back from the brink of extinction.
- The GTRP adopted St. Petersburg which outlines the priorities for national, regional, and global actions needed for

National Clean Air Programme

Why In News?

- A recent report by, the NGO Greenpeace highlights the lacunae in the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

Key Points

- The Greenpeace report titled, Airpocalypse III, analysed air pollution data of 313 cities and towns for the year 2017.
- Of these 313 cities, 241 (77%) had PM10 levels beyond the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).
- While 102 of these cities were included in the NCAP, the remaining 139 cities were left out.

National Clean Air Programme

- The government has formulated National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) as a medium-term national level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.
- The overall objective is to augment and evolve effective ambient air quality monitoring network across the country besides ensuring comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
- Goal of NCAP is to meet the prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated time frame. The tentative national level target of 20%–30% reduction of PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀ concentration by 2024 in atleast 102 cities is proposed under the NCAP taking 2017 as the base year for the comparison of concentration.
- The NCAP focuses on collaborative and participatory approach covering all sources of pollution and coordination between relevant Central Ministries, State Governments, local bodies and other stakeholders.
- In order to ensure use of new technologies to combat the rising challenge of air pollution in India, a separate component on 'Technology Assessment Cell' has been envisaged under NCAP to evaluate the technologies for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.

National Ambient Air Quality Standards

- National Ambient Air Quality Standards are the standards for ambient air quality set by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)

that is applicable nationwide. The CPCB has been conferred this power by the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

AQI

- A new National Air Quality Index (AQI) has been launched in October 2014 to disseminate information on air quality in an easily understandable form for the general public.
- The measurement of air quality is based on eight pollutants, namely, PM₁₀, PM_{2.5}, NO₂, SO₂, CO, O₃, NH₃, and Pb for which short-term (up to 24-hourly averaging period) National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed and the worst reading in these pollutants represents the AQI for that city.

International Standards

- The 2005 World Health Organization's "WHO Air quality guidelines" offer global guidance on thresholds and limits for 4 key air pollutants that pose health risks - particulate matter (PM), ozone (O₃), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) and sulfur dioxide (SO₂).

Greenpeace

- **Greenpeace** is a non-governmental environmental organization with offices in over 39 countries and with an international coordinating body in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Greenpeace uses direct action, lobbying, research, and ecotage to achieve its goals.
- The global organization does not accept funding from governments, corporations, or political parties, relying on three million individual supporters and foundation grants.
- Greenpeace has a general consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and is a founding member of the INGO Accountability Charter, an international non-governmental organization that intends to foster accountability and transparency of non-governmental organizations.

Livestock causing Global Warming

Why in News?

- A recent study published in the journal 'Scientific Reports', highlights the role of Cow Urine in global warming.

Key Points

- According to the Study Cow urine is a source of nitrous oxide emissions (N₂O), a

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai gas that is 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.

- Most times, when cow urine is used in degraded pastures, which are also seen in vast tracts of land in India, N₂O emissions are tripled.
- The study advocates for land restoration, since Degraded pastures not only affect food security and the livelihood of farmers today, but affect the livelihood of future farmers because they emit more gases that cause global warming,

Significance for India

- India hosts the world's largest livestock population, as well as significant tracts of degraded land, the finding are therefore crucial for studying livestock emission studies in India.

Polar vortex

Why In News?

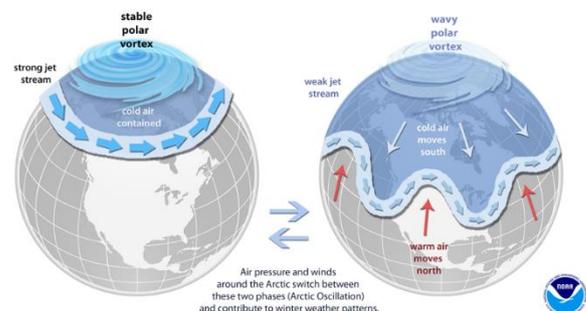
- Many parts of the northern United states experiences record cold temperatures, which has been attributed to the Polar Vortex.

Polar Vortex

- The polar vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding the Earth's North and South poles.
- The term vortex refers to the counter-clockwise flow of air that helps keep the colder air close to the poles. Often during winter in the Northern Hemisphere, the polar vortex will become less stable and expand, sending cold Arctic air southward over the United States with the jet stream, resulting in record cold temperatures.

The Science Behind the Polar Vortex

The polar vortex is a large area of low pressure and cold air surrounding the Earth's North and South poles. The term vortex refers to the counter-clockwise flow of air that helps keep the colder air close to the poles (left globe). Often during winter in the Northern Hemisphere, the polar vortex will become less stable and expand, sending cold Arctic air southward over the United States with the jet stream (right globe). The polar vortex is nothing new — in fact, it's thought that the term first appeared in an 1853 issue of E. Littell's *Living Age*.



Carnot Prize

Why in News?

- The Union Minister of Railways and Coal, Piyush Goyal has been awarded the Carnot

Prize 2018 for the transformational changes brought by him during his tenure as Union Minister of Power.

Highlights

- The Minister has been given the award in recognition of the transformational changes that were brought in during his tenure.
- These include fast-track electrification of nearly 18,000 villages in some of the most remote and inaccessible parts of the country, rolling out a comprehensive power sector reform plan UDAY, the world's largest LED bulb distribution program, and the world's largest renewable energy expansion programme.
- The Kleinman Center for Energy Policy also acknowledged India's "solid footing to reach a 40 percent renewable mix by 2030".

About the Carnot Prize

- Carnot Prize awarded by the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy, University of Pennsylvania is considered as one of the most prestigious awards in the energy sector.
- The prize, which is given annually, recognises distinguished contributions to energy policy through scholarship or practice.
- The prize has been named after French scientist Sadi Carnot, who in 1824 published Reflections on the Motive Power of Fire, which became the basis for the second Law of Thermodynamics.

Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen)

Why In News?

- The Swachh Bharat Mission Grameen (SBMG) of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, held a National Workshop on Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM) in New Delhi.

Highlights

- The workshop emphasized the importance of Fecal Sludge Management (FSM) for

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai rural census towns and large dense villages and Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resource-dhan (GOBAR-DHAN) in rural areas.

- Innovative Solid Waste Management initiatives from across the country were shared by the States.
- This included transforming waste into construction bricks and fuel during the harsh winters in Leh district in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Kerala showcased the "Green Protocol" being implemented in Thiruvananthapuram district using the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse and Recycle) to minimize waste generation.

GOBAR-DHAN Yojana

- Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation has launched the GOBAR (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources) - DHAN scheme. The scheme is being implemented as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).
- The Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) comprises two main components for creating clean villages - creating open defecation free (ODF) villages and managing solid and liquid waste in villages.
- With over 3.5 lakh villages, 374 districts and 16 States/UTs of the country being declared ODF, the stage is set for ODF-plus activities, including measures to enhance Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM).
- The GOBAR-DHAN scheme, with its focus on keeping villages clean, increasing the income of rural households, and generation of energy from cattle waste, is an important element of this ODF-plus strategy.
- The scheme aims to positively impact village cleanliness and generate wealth and energy from cattle and organic waste. The scheme also aims at creating new rural livelihood opportunities and enhancing income for farmers and other rural people.

Culture

70th Republic Day

Why in news?

- India has celebrated the 70th Republic Day. Republic day in India is celebrated every year on 26th of January to honour the Constitution of India as it came into force on the same day in the year 1950.

What is Republic Day?

- The Constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950, a date specially chosen to coincide with the anniversary of 'Purna Swaraj Diwas'. January 26, 1930 was marked as 'Purna Swaraj Diwas', or the day the nation would attain complete freedom from its colonisers by the Congress.



Significance of 70th Republic day events:

- Theme: 'life of Gandhi'** which is a tribute to the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.
- Chief Guest:** President Cyril Ramaphosa, President of the Republic of South Africa. This is the second time a South African leader is Chief Guest at Republic Day Nelson Mandela was the chief guest in 1995
- Mauritius Prime Minister got a rare honour- He was called as the "special guest"** to the event; Usually India hosted a foreign guest as chief guest and this kind of special guest status is unprecedented.
- he 70th Republic Day parade had the **highest number of women officers participating** in the celebrations with Lt. Bhavana Kasturi leading a contingent of 144 male personnel. This is the first time in

the history of Indian Army that a woman had led the Army services corps.

- An all-women contingent of Assam Rifles, India's oldest paramilitary force had participated for the first time. The contingent was opened for women in 2012.
- The weapons which showcased for the first time in a Republic day parade are M777 and K-9 Vajra ultra light howitzers along with the Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) missile of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).
- For the first time in the Republic Day parade, 32 aircraft did fly using a mix of traditional and biofuel.
- Four former Indian National Army (INA) soldiers had participated for the first time in the parade, under the **theme 'Veterans: Accelerators in Nation's Growth'**. All of them were over the age of 90 INA was an armed force formed by Indian nationalist Rash Behari Bose in 1942 in Southeast Asia during World War II.
- '**Sankhnaad**', a martial tune created for the Indian armed forces, played for the first time on the 70th Republic Day parade. *Since Independence, the Indian defence forces have been playing 'martial tune' created by the Britishers.* 'Sankhnaad' is based on Indian classical music.

Folk dance by Tableaux Artists

Why in news?

- The Vice President, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu, witnessed folk and classical dances presented by Tableaux Artists who participated in Republic Day Parade from 10 States.

About the performance:

- Artists from Tamil Nadu presented the Karakkatam folk dance, while Taakala Folk Dance was performed by artists from Maharashtra.
- North Eastern states Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Sikkim and Tripura presented Monpa, Satoiya Nitya, Tamang Seto and Mamita folk dances.

- Artists from Jammu Kashmir performed the Fusim Dance reflecting the composite culture of the State.
- The artistes from Gujarat performed Misra Raas, while Hudka Chhudka from Uttarakhand and Bhangra from Punjab were also performed.

National Salt Satyagraha Memorial

Why in news?

- Prime Minister dedicated the National Salt Satyagraha Memorial at Dandi in Navsari district, Gujarat to the nation on Mahatma Gandhi's death anniversary.

About the memorial:

- At the memorial site, PM also unveiled statues of Mahatma Gandhi and 80 Satyagrahis who had marched with him during the historic Dandi Salt March in 1930 to make salt from sea water against the British law.
- The memorial also has 24-narrative murals depicting various events and stories from the historic 1930 Salt March.
- Solar trees are installed to meet the energy requirements of the memorial complex.

About Dandi March:

- The Salt March began on March 12, 1930 and continued till April 6, 1930. It was a 24-day non-violent march led by Mahatma Gandhi.
- During that time, the British had prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt. Indians were also forced to buy the staple diet ingredient from the British, who, not only exercised monopoly over its manufacture and sale but also levied a heavy salt tax.
- The Salt March was a collective beginning of a mass resistance movement against the British tyranny.
- Upon reaching the seashore in *Dandi*, Mahatma Gandhi broke the law by producing illegal salt.
- This later turned into a mass civil disobedience movement throughout India as millions broke salt laws by either making salt or buying illegal salt.

Jaipur Literature Festival

Why in news?

- The Jaipur literature festival 2019, was organised in royal Diggi palace Jaipur from January 24 2019 to January 28 2019.

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- Around 300 speakers visited Jaipur literature festival 2018-2019.

About Jaipur Literature Festival:

- The Jaipur Literature Festival is an annual literary festival, which takes place in the Indian city of Jaipur each January.
- It was founded in 2006, and from 2008 has been produced by Teamwork Arts.

Highlights of the event:

- The speakers highlighted the fact that Islam as a religion which originated in the medieval era took various forms.
- In India, Muslims themselves adopted the composite culture.
- Wahhabism, which is a militant form of Islam never found much scope in India because Islam in India was influenced by Bhakthi and Sufi movement, both of which preached love as a means to attain God.

Harappan civilization

Why in news?

- Researches from a university in Pune and South Korean archaeologists have found almost human remains in Rakhigarhi in Haryana.
- They excavation aims to find out how Harappans looked and it also aims to settle the debate of whether Harappans came from the West or they were the locals.



About Rakhigarhi:

- Rakhigarhi is one of the largest sites of the Harappan civilisation and it gradually evolved from 6000 BCE to 2500 BCE, besides protecting it from encroachment by the locals since the village is settled exactly on top of it.
- Industrial centre of Indus valley civilisation.
- A seal and a potsherd, both inscribed with the Harappan script.

Basic features of Indus Valley Civilization:

- The Indus Valley civilization is the first known Urban Culture in India.
- Majority of the sites developed on the banks of river Indus, Ghaggar and its tributaries.
- This civilisation is credited for building cities complete with: town planning, sanitation, drainage system and broad well-laid roads.
- They also built double storied houses of burnt-bricks complete with bathroom, kitchen, and a well.
- Their Walled cities had important buildings such as, the Great Bath, Granaries and the Assembly Halls.
- Harappans used to worship plants, animals and the forces of nature.
- They also worshipped male god resembling Lord Shiva of later times and a mother goddess.
- They also probably believed in life after death and also in charms and spells.
- Their Seals were engraved with animal figures (e.g. humped bull, elephant and rhinoceros). This suggests that these animals were considered sacred.
- The image of 'Peepal' tree is found depicted on many seals.
- Harappan script is yet to be deciphered. Hence, our knowledge of Harappan civilization is solely based on archaeological evidence alone.
- Harappans were the first people to cultivate cotton. They knew the art of spinning & weaving.

Sanyas Diksha at Prayagraj Kumbh

What is Sanyas Diksha?

- Diksha means initiation; Sanyasa diksha is a ritual to initiate sainthood in Hindu religion.

Why in news?

- For the first time at Prayagraj Kumbh, about 800 saints including one's from abroad were given Sanyas Diksha.
- All religious ceremonies were completed on the bank of river Ganga.
- The ceremony was initiated with the shaving of the head of saints and taking a holy dip in the River.

About Prayagraj Kumbha Mela:

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- Prayagraj Kumbh Mela 2019, a religious fair that will be held from January 15, 2019 to March 4, 2019.
- The Kumbh Mela (the festival of the sacred pitcher) is anchored in Hindu mythology.
- It is the largest public gathering and collective act of faith, anywhere in the world. The Mela draws tens of millions of pilgrims over the course of approximately 55 auspicious days to bathe at the sacred confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna, and the mystical Sarasvati. Primarily, this congregation includes Ascetics, Saints, Sadhus, Sadhvis, Kalpvasis, and Pilgrims from all walks of life.
- Kumbh Mela is a religious pilgrimage that is celebrated four times over a course of 12 years.
- The geographical location of Kumbh Mela spans over four locations in India and the Mela site keeps rotating between one of the four pilgrimage places on four sacred rivers as listed below:
 - Haridwar on the Ganges in Uttarakhand.
 - Ujjain on the Shipra in Madhya Pradesh.
 - Nashik on the Godavari in Maharashtra.
 - Prayagraj at the confluence of the Ganges, the Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvati in Uttar Pradesh.

'Rag Rag Mein Ganga'

Why in news?

- Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, launched travelogue program "Rag Rag Mein Ganga" and quiz show "Meri Ganga" on Doordarshan.

More about the program:

- The travelogue series "Rag Rag Mein Ganga" has been made by Doordarshan in collaboration with National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).
- The 21 episode series, covering River Ganga's journey from Gomukh to Gangasagar, has been shot using state-of-the-art techniques including Drone

Cameras and Go-Pro Cameras in HD Format.

- The show relays the message of the need of rejuvenating River Ganga while also informing about the efforts of the Government to clean Ganga – presented in a unique and interesting format.

1st Swadesh Darshan project

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

- Ministry/Department: Ministry of Tourism
- Objective: To develop theme based tourist circuits in the country
- Scheme:
- Tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner
- They will be developed by synergizing efforts to focus on concerns and needs of all stakeholders to enrich tourist experience and enhance employment opportunities
- Under this scheme, 13 thematic circuits have been identified for development

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- They are Buddhist Circuit, North-East India Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Desert Circuit, Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Ramayana Circuit and Heritage Circuit
- The scheme is 100% centrally funded for the project components undertaken for public funding
- It also leverages Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.

Why in news?

- Shri. K.J. Alphons, Union Minister for Tourism inaugurated the project “Development of North East Circuit: Rangpo- Rorathang- Aritar- Phadamchen- Nathang-Sherathang- Tsongmo- Gangtok- Phodong- Mangan- Lachung-Yumthang- Lachen- Thangu-Gurudongmer- Mangan- Gangtok-Tuminlingee- Singtam” implemented under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Miscellaneous

App for R-Day Highlights

Why In News?

- The Defence Ministry launched the 'RDP INDIA 2019' App.

Key Points

- The app provides live streaming of the parade and contains information about it, including the order of the march, details of the tableaux presented by different States and Ministries, cultural performances by children, fly past and names of recipients of Pradhan Mantri Rashtriya Bal Puraskar, 2019.
- This new initiative is in sync with the Digital India campaign of the government.

Auction of Mementos

Why In News?

- The physical auction of Mementos received by the Prime Minister, was organised by National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, under the aegis of Ministry of Culture.

Key Points

- Exclusive items that were auctioned included statues, photographs, paintings and articles such as angavastram, shawls, commemorative coins, traditional musical instruments, hats, pagris and jackets etc. to name a few.
- The proceeds contribute towards the project Namami Gange.

About Namami Gange

- The Namami Gange is an integrated conservation mission, approved as 'Flagship Programme' by the Union Government, To accomplish the Twin objectives of effective abatement of pollution and the conservation and rejuvenation of National River Ganga

Night at the Museum

Why in News?

- In a unique initiative, National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi, to begin 'Night at the Museum' starting on 30th Jan.

Key Points

- The first edition of this event is organised in collaboration with the India Art Fair from 8:00pm to 11:00pm. NGMA shall conduct guided tour of its prestigious permanent collection which is on display at

the permanent gallery.

- Highlight objects include works of art of Amrita Sher-Gil, Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Ravi Verma, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy to name a few.
- NGMA aims to conduct Night at the Museum as a regular activity and organise it on the last working day of every month.

National Gallery of Modern Art

- The Gallery is the premier institution of its kind in India. It is run and administered as a subordinate office to the Department of Culture, Government of India.
- The NGMA has two branches one at Mumbai and the other at Bengaluru.
- The gallery is a repository of the cultural ethos of the country and showcases the changing art forms through the passage of the last hundred and fifty years starting from about 1857 in the field of Visual and Plastic arts.

Pariksha Pe Charcha 2.0

Why In News?

- The second edition of Pariksha Pe Charcha was recently held at Talkatora Stadium in Delhi where 2000 students, teachers and parents gathered to interact with the Prime Minister.

Highlight

- During the interaction, Prime Minister interacted with students, parents and teachers and responded to their queries on a host of subjects related to exams
- .He discussed ways to handle exam stress and encouraged parents to be a factor of motivation and encouragement for their children.

Vande Bharat Express

Why in News?

- Minister of Railways & Coal, Shri Piyush Goyal announced the name Vande Bharat Express for Train 18, acknowledging its made-in-India status.

Key Points

- Since the launch of Rajdhani trains, Vande Bharat Express is the next major leap for Indian Railways in terms of speed and convenience. It is India's first semi-high-speed train equipped with world class

program.

passenger amenities.

- It can achieve high speeds (max speed of 160 kmph) due to faster acceleration & deceleration and will reduced journey time by 25% to 45%.
- Scheduled commute between New Delhi & Varanasi will take approximately 8 hours making it 40-50% faster than the fastest train currently connecting these two cities.
- It has been provided with 'State of the Art' passenger amenities like On-board wifi entertainment, GPS based passenger information system, CCTVs, bio-vacuum toilets, rotating chairs in executive class, etc. at par with global standards. It also has provision of Divyang friendly facilities.
- It has intelligent braking system with power regeneration for better energy efficiency thereby making it cost, energy and environment efficient.
- This train set has been manufactured by Integral Coach Factory (ICF) in the period of 18 months under 'Make in India'

Romain Rolland Prize

Why In News?

- Munpin theriyathavanin vaazhkai, the Tamil translation of the French novel *La vie d'un homme inconnu* (The Life of an Unknown Man) by Andreï Makine has won the prestigious Romain Rolland Prize by the French Embassy at Jaipur Literary Festival.

About Romain Rolland

- Romain Rolland (29 January 1866 – 30 December 1944) was a French dramatist, novelist, essayist, art historian and mystic who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1915.

Rolland Romain Prize

- Romain Rolland Book Prize aims to award the best translation of a French title (Francophone area) into any Indian language, including English.

News in-depth

General Studies-2

A new year in diplomacy

About

- India is going to see an eventful diplomatic tie in 2019, with various changes in ties around the world.
- With regional groupings gaining more momentum than the international ones, the starting of another cold war is on lines.
- With problems of large extent within its boundaries also, India is in a critical situation to overcome both the internal and external problems that surrounds it.

Changing ties

- The nations around the world are trying to spread their influence across the boundaries, which might lead to instability.
- Russia's capture of three Ukrainian naval ships and over 20 crew members in the disputed Azov Sea has refocused international attention on the conflict on Europe's eastern corridors and Azov sea.
- Similarly, china using its Belt and road initiative increased its influence throughout various parts of Asia.
- Increasing tensions of trade war between china and USA has invariably affected the economies of other countries.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

- BRI is an ambitious China's ambitious development strategy and framework that aims to boost its connectivity and trade that will that will connect Asia, Africa, Middle East and Europe.
- It was proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013.
- It comprises two components
 - Silk Road Economic Belt
 - Maritime Silk Road.
- The initiative is part of China's revived 21st century Silk Road diplomacy that

seeks to push it to take a bigger role in global affairs as a major global power.

- It is basically investment and trade promotion scheme aiming to deepen economic connections between China and rest of the world.

Indian Scenario

- Russia which is considered as all-weather friend to India since independence, has come into picture with Russia's increase in strategic partnership with china.
- Japan has also increased its ties with china, which could affect India in a longer run.
- In 2018, China had initiated certain moves to create a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor on the lines of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- The Chinese Navy is also poised to challenge India's position in the Indian Ocean. Chinese submarines already outnumber India's here.
- China is also preparing to put pressure on India by seeking control of the Kyaukpyu Port on the Arakan Coast in Myanmar and planning kra canal that connects the Andaman Sea with the Gulf of Thailand.
- With informal summits like wuhan, India might indulge in more positive ties with china in 2019.
- Pakistan facilitated China's involvement in Afghanistan, in order to create stability in the region.
- The China Pakistan Economic Corridor is growing at rapid phase.
- India will also need to use all its resources to assist Bangladesh to limit the influence of radical Islamist groups there.

Internal Issues

- The major part of internal security problems arises from the regions of Kashmir and northeast.
- While, Pakistan sponsored terror groups being a major reason for disturbances in Kashmir, governments new citizenship amendment bill has been the source for violence in north east.
- Apart from security issues, other major problems that are to be solved in 2019, are said to be farmer distress, attack on marginalised section of people, cow vigilantism, mob lynching etc.

Way forward

- Considering the difficult external and internal situation, the path to peace may be hard.
- On the external affairs part, India must increase its positive diplomatic ties with various countries with more engaging formal and informal summits.
- In terms of internal affairs, the problems must be addressed by the government by carefully analysing the historical background and future implications of the issue.

Brexit crisis

European Union

- The EU is a political, trade and economic union founded in 1957.
- There are 51 countries in Europe, out of which 28 countries have signed a treaty to become a part of European Union.
- The EU treaty provided for a European Parliament and European Council which consisted of representatives of the member-states.
- In 2012, the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for advancing the causes of peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.
- Maastricht Treaty converted the EU into a monetary union.
- Lisbon Treaty strengthened political, foreign affairs and security integration of policies of countries of European Union.

Brexit

- It is the abbreviation of "British Exit" from the European Union (EU).
- Britain has had a troubled relationship with the EU since the beginning and has made various attempts in the past to break away from it.
- This is the second time U.K. has sought a referendum on this issue.
- In 1975 Prime Minister Harold Wilson called a referendum after considerable opposition rose from within the country on U.K. staying with the European Economic Community, the precursor of the EU.
- With 67 per cent of those who voted preferring to 'Remain', U.K. stayed on.
- In the 2016 referendum, 51.9% of voters favored exit of Britain from EU.
- It is the first time since the EU was founded in 1957 that a member country is leaving.
- 29th March, 2019: Brexit Day – UK ends its membership of the European Union, leaves the European Union
- 30th March, 2019: UK moves into a "transition period".

Reasons for Brexit

- It was said that EU's policies were too protectionist and did not favour competitiveness to the extent that would be beneficial for the British economy.
- Half of British legal migrants come from EU. There is this feeling that they have a negative impact on UK born workers.
- EU has been pushing for creation of an Ever-Closer Union which would accord greater decision-making powers to European Parliament, while, limiting the authority of British Parliament.
- The process of leaving the EU formally began on March 29, 2017, when British Prime Minister Theresa May triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty.
- Article 50 gives any EU member state the right to quit unilaterally, and outlines the procedure for doing so. It gives the leaving country two years to negotiate an exit deal and once it's set in motion it can't be stopped except by unanimous consent of all member states.

Chequers Plan

- After series of negotiations, Ms. May proposed the “Chequers Plan”, to deal with the future relationship between the UK and EU.
- It proposed making a “common rulebook” for goods between the UK and EU, some shared customs arrangements and a joint institutional framework to manage relations.

Irish issue

- Ireland is an island to the west of Britain and has two major regions (north and south) with distinct demographic features.
- “Protestant majority Northern Ireland” (a U.K. territory) and “Catholic majority Irish Republic” (an independent country in the south), have had serious ethnic tensions within and between them.
- Numerous agreements and EU’s integrated markets system has thus far been a significant influence in resolving these tense and violent trends.
- The Belfast or good Friday Agreement was a major political development in the Northern Ireland peace process of the 1990s and has provided Northern Ireland’s divided society with a political framework to resolve its differences.

Backstop Issue

- The “Irish backstop” which is proposed intends to prevent the recreation of a hard border between the Republic of Ireland, which remains in the EU, and Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK.
- So, the backstop is an insurance policy, that, in the event that if EU and UK cannot reach an agreement, Northern Ireland will remain within the European Union’s regulatory and customs arrangements indefinitely to prevent the emergence of a hard border.
- The UK will have to abide by rules set by the EU in order to be part of a “customs union”, but will have no say in what those rules are the way it does at present as a full member of the Union.
- Most worryingly for many members of the British parliament, any future changes to this status will have to be approved by both parties.

- This is said to be opposed by political parties in UK.
- Because of this issue, the Brexit deal is still pending in British parliament and Brexit might be further delayed.

Hard border
 A border between countries that is strongly controlled and protected by officials, police, or soldiers and other physical infrastructure such as camera, fences etc.

Brexit Implications on India

Positive Impacts	Negative Impacts
Many Indian companies are listed on the London Stock Exchange and many have European headquarters in London. Brexit will take away this advantage.	Brexit might give a boost to trade ties between India and the UK.
India will have to adjust to a changing world order.	Britain will now be free to discuss a bilateral trade pact with India.
The impact of Brexit will be negative in the short-term on account of volatility in the exchange rate, uncertainty in the markets and the terms on which Britain will leave the EU.	Britain will need a steady inflow of talented labour, and India fits the perfectly due to its English-speaking population.

Way forward

- With British parliament rejecting the backstop agreement, UK is in a critical situation to make an alternative deal with EU as soon as possible.
- Otherwise the alternative arrangement might be delaying the date of Brexit by getting the approval of other 27 countries in European union.

Tug of War between Judiciary and Maharashtra Government

Background

- In 2005, the Maharashtra government imposed a ban on dance performances in

bars, with the exception of hotels rated three stars and above.

- Affected parties filed petitions in the Bombay High Court challenging the ban. The High Court held against the government, resulting in an appeal to the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court lifted ban on Dance Bars in Maharashtra in 2013
- Maharashtra Assembly passed Maharashtra Prohibition of Obscene Dances in Hotels, Restaurants and Bar Rooms and Protection of Dignity of Women Act, 2016 imposing harsh regulations on dance bars to be run in Maharashtra making it difficult for dance bars to be in business.
- This move lead to loss of livelihood of substantial section of women from under-privileged socio-economic background.
- By one estimate, the strict regulations put more than 75,000 dancers out of work, reportedly driving a large percentage of them to prostitution.
- Maharashtra's crackdown on dance bars has damaged hotel businesses and thrown the lives of thousands of women into uncertainty.
- As the Supreme Court observed, no licences have been given for new dance bars since 2005, when the ban was enforced.

Recent update

- The Supreme Court recently, diluted a tough Maharashtra government law that effectively prevented the reopening of dance bars shut since 2005, making it easier for owners to operate and patrons to visit them.
- A bench headed by Justice A. K. Sikri upheld the Maharashtra Prohibition of Obscene Dance in Hotels, Restaurants and Bar Rooms and Protection of Dignity of Women (working therein) Act, 2016 but scrapped or diluted many of its provisions.
- The court removed the requirement of a partition between the dancing area and the bar/restaurant area and the ban on serving alcohol in the dance area.
- The requirement of applicants to have "good character" with no history of criminal record was also struck down.
- The SC order allows tips for dancers, but prohibits showering money on them. Dance bars can operate between 6pm and 11.30pm.

- The court also struck down the rule requiring them to install CCTV cameras inside, on the grounds that it violates privacy.
- The court mandated written contract with employees, deposit of the remuneration in their bank accounts, and submission of the contract with the licensing authority.
- The employment need not be monthly, and could be based per performance.
- The court also struck down a condition by which dance bars could not be within 1km of an educational institution or a religious place citing the reason that "then no place in Mumbai licence would be granted" asking Maharashtra government to prescribe reasonable distance from educational and religious institutions.

Powerplay between Maharashtra State Government and Judiciary:

Response Time

- Through each iteration of this case, the Maharashtra government has responded more swiftly to judicial decisions than the Supreme Court has to the government's attempts to sidestep them.
- The final judicial decision in the first round took just short of eight years, while the government's response took about 11 months.
- In the second round, the court took a year and three months to make its decision; the government responded in six months.
- In the third round, the court has taken just short of three years. The government's response time is to be seen.
- This shows callousness in the attitude of both the institutions in deciding a case where thousands of marginal, underprivileged women's livelihood are involved.

Workload:

- The courts are overburdened with cases and courts also must provide an opportunity for a fair hearing, deliberate, and set out reasons for their decisions.
- Courts will also typically not consider cases unilaterally, but are dependent on parties to bring proceedings in search of a remedy.
- Whereas, The ban on dance bars has also received a huge level of cross-party political support in Maharashtra, despite the regime changes from 2005.
- This shows that legislation has often been enacted unopposed, without any

meaningful discussion on the floor of the House.

- For eg: The amendments of 2014, for example, were approved by the Maharashtra Cabinet on a Thursday, and sailed through the Vidhan Sabha and Vidhan Parishad within minutes on the following day.
- This gives Legislature of Maharashtra to act in a more speedy and effective manner that courts fail to do.

Conclusion:

- This case outlines the vulnerability of what is otherwise seen as an all-powerful Supreme Court, especially when it depends on the government to comply with its decisions in some positive way, such as by issuing dance bar licenses.
- This case shows even when the courts exercise the putatively “negative” function of striking down legislation or rules, the level of compliance with their decisions often lies in the hands of the executive.
- This case shows failure in the part of Courts in monitoring compliance with its orders, while the court cannot direct the enactment of legislation, it can monitor compliance with an order to issue licenses to qualified applicants.

Capable even if disabled

Context

- In India, the Supreme Court’s ruling recently, in *V. Surendra Mohan v. Union of India* is considered by disabled people rights activist as the darkest movement in Disable People’s Rights Movement.
- The Court had to rule on the legality of the Tamil Nadu government’s policy of reserving the post of civil judge only for people whose percentage of blindness does not exceed 40-50%.
- It resulting in the exclusion of the applicant who was 70% blind. It held that the government’s decision was rational and reasonable.
- It ruled that a judicial officer has to possess a reasonable amount of sight and hearing to discharge her functions.
- It accepted the claim that impaired vision makes it impossible to perform the functions required of judicial officers, such as assessing the demeanour of witnesses and reading and analysing evidence.

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- It also accepted that asking a blind judicial officer to perform such administrative functions as recording dying declarations and conducting inquiries can result in avoidable complications.

Arguments against the judgement:

- The view that a totally blind person cannot thrive as a judge is belied by several examples of successful judges who are blind.
- One is former South African Constitutional Court judge Zak Yacoob, who has repudiated the notion that one needs to be sighted to assess a witness’s demeanour as being nonsensical, to U.S. Court of Appeals DC Circuit judge David S. Tatel, who thinks that it is neither fair nor accurate to impose low expectations on what blind lawyers can do.
- There is also former San Diego County Court judge David Szumowski, who has described the view that a blind person lacks the wherewithal to become a judge as an unfair characterisation, to Yousaf Saleem who, last year, became Pakistan’s first blind civil judge.
- How, some contend, can a blind person be reasonably expected to thrive as a judge without being excessively dependent and inefficient?
- However, as the Supreme Court itself noted in 2017 “A lawyer can be just as effective in a wheelchair, as long as she has access to the courtroom and the legal library, as well as to whatever other places and material or equipment that are necessary for her to do her job well.”
- The Court’s unreasoned assertion is an outcome of their ignorance about the capabilities of the disabled.
- However, as Laura Wolk notes, ignorance simply cannot be an excuse in 2019.
- It is simply unacceptable to condemn disabled legal professionals, possessing the intellectual wherewithal to be a judge, to the status of outcasts only because the judges delivering the judgment in this case appear simply not to have bothered to notice the competence of the millions of disabled people who inhabit this world.

Way forward

- Disabled People’s Rights Activist views the recent judgment as regressive in a post-modern society.

- Supreme Court considers that blindness makes a person intrinsically incapable of becoming a judicial officer, when it arrogates to itself the power to stamp a badge of incompetence on thousands of disabled people about whom it knows nothing, its declaration cuts to the core of their confidence about the fairness and robustness of our judicial system.
- Disabled people rights activist believes that how we choose to respond to this institutional display of pure and simple discrimination dressed up as legal reasoning will be reflective of what kind of a society we hope to be.

Thinking differently about healthcare:

Context:

- The public health system looks at the social ecology and determinants focusing on optimising wellness. Healthcare services, on the other hand, primarily focus on preventing morbidity and mortality.
- In India, public health and health services have been synonymous. This integration has reduced the growth of a comprehensive public health system, which is critical to overcome some of the systemic challenges in healthcare.

Need of a comprehensive health system.

- A stark increase in population growth, along with rising life expectancy, provides the burden of chronic diseases.
- Lack of health literacy among masses.
- Lack of interdisciplinary workforce
- India currently spends a little over 1% of GDP on health, far below other nations.
- It needs many reformative steps from government to get a robust public health system.

A diverse curriculum

- India's public health workforce comes from an estimated 51 colleges that offer a graduate programme in public health. This number is much lower compared to other countries.
- In addition to the quantitative problem, India also lacks in the quality of healthcare services which is critical to prevent morbidity and mortality.
- Public health tracks range from research, global health, health communication, urban planning, health policy, environmental

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai science, behavioural sciences, healthcare management, financing, and behavioural economics.

- In the U.S., it is routine for public health graduates to come from engineering, social work, medicine, finance, law, architecture and anthropology.
- This diversity is needed in a curriculum that enables graduates to become key stakeholders in the health system.

Investment in health infrastructure:

- Investments in health and social services tend to take precedence over public health expenditure. While benefits from population-level investments are usually long term but sustained, they tend to accrue much later than the tenure a government.
- This is a reason for reluctance in investing in public health as opposed to other health and social services.

Preventive health care:

- A recent study showed that a \$1 investment in the taxation of sugary beverages can yield returns of \$55 in the long term.
- Another study showed a \$9 Return on Investment (ROI) for every dollar spent on early childhood health, while tobacco prevention programmes yield a 1,900% ROI for every dollar spent.
- The impact of saving valuable revenue through prevention is indispensable for growing economies like India.

Problem of health literacy

- Legislation is often shaped by public perception. While it is ideal for legislation to be informed by research, it is rarely the case.
- It is health literacy through health communication that shapes this perception. Health communication, an integral arm of public health, aims to disseminate critical information to improve the health literacy of the population.
- India has a serious problem with health literacy and it is the responsibility of public health professionals to close this gap.
- Health literacy is an independent determinant of better health outcome.

Policy interventions:

- Equally important is a system of evaluating national programmes. While many programmes fail due to improper implementation and evaluation.

- Programme planning, implementation and evaluation matrices will determine effectiveness of the policies, so valuable time and money can be saved.

A council for public health:

- A central body along the lines of a council for public health is proposed to synergistically work with agencies such as the public works department, the narcotics bureau, water management, food safety, sanitation, urban and rural planning, housing and infrastructure to promote population-level health.
- In many ways, these agencies serve to bring in many facets of existing State and federal agencies and force them to see through the lens of public health.
- The proposed council for public health should also work closely with academic institutions to develop curriculum and provide license and accreditation to schools to promote interdisciplinary curriculum in public health.

Conclusion:

- While the proposed, comprehensive insurance programme Ayushman Bharat caters to a subset of the population, systemic reforms in public health will shift the entire population to better health.
- With the infusion of technology driving costs on the secondary and tertiary end, it is going to be paramount for India to reinvigorate its public health system to maximise prevention.

Presidential Address to the joint sitting of two Houses of Parliament

- 2019 is an important milestone. India celebrates the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Nation.
- 13th April this year marks 100 years of the tragic massacre at Jallianwala Bagh. Tribute to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for a bright future for us.
- Nation celebrates 70th anniversary of the Constitution Day this year.
- 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Devji this year. He taught us to lead our lives with the spirit of service and goodwill.
- Nation is following the dreams of Gandhiji to build an inclusive society based on ethics and principles.
- Nation is moving ahead guided by the ideals of social and economic justice as

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enshrined in the Constitution by Baba Saheb Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar.

- After the elections, Government assumed charge and vowed to build a new India. A New India with no place for imperfect, corrupt and inertia ridden systems.
- Ideals of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya's Antyodaya have been the touchstone of Government's work

HEALTH AND SANITATION

Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

- Under the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, more than 9 crore toilets have been constructed.
- Coverage of rural sanitation that was less than 40 percent in 2014, has increased to 98 percent.
- According to an assessment, because of the toilets built, numerous poor persons have been spared of various kind of diseases and more than 3 lakh lives have been saved.

Ujjwala Yojana

- Many of mothers, sisters and daughters used to suffer from various illnesses because of smoke filled kitchens, which also affected health of the entire family; and much of their effort and time were spent in collecting firewood.
- Government has provided more than 6 crore cooking gas connections to such sisters and daughters under the Ujjwala Yojana.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Abhiyan

- Under the world's biggest health care scheme, 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Abhiyan', 50 crore poor are eligible for availing treatment up to Rs 5 lakh per year per family in case of a serious illness.
- In a short period of four months, more than 10 lakh poor have already availed free treatment from hospitals under this scheme.
- For a premium of just one rupee a month under 'Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana' and 90 paise a day under 'Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana', as many as 21 crore poor brothers and sisters have been provided with insurance coverage.

National Nutrition Mission

- Government has launched the National Nutrition Mission for persons suffering from malnutrition and to eliminate the factors responsible for malnutrition.

Mission Indradhanush

- 'Mission Indradhanush' has been launched by the Government to provide immunization facilities to children and pregnant women living in remote and tribal areas.
- As a result, the country has moved rapidly towards the target of "Universal Immunization".

HOUSING

Rural housing

- In the last four-and-a-half years, 1 crore and 30 lakh homes have been constructed under the rural housing schemes of the Government, whereas in the five years preceding 2014, only 25 lakh houses had been constructed.

RERA(Real Estate Regulatory Authority)

- By enacting RERA law, Government has ensured that construction of houses is completed and they are handed over to the buyers as scheduled so that the hard-earned money of buyers does not get stuck.
- After enactment of this law, about 35 thousand 'Real Estate Projects' have been registered where lakhs of houses are being constructed and handed over to families.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana

- Under 'Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana', the Government is also giving interest subsidy of 6 and a half per cent to the persons belonging to low income group.

Pradhan Mantri Saubhagya Yojana

- Today every village has been electrified. Under 'Pradhan Mantri Saubhagya Yojana', 2 crore and 47 lakh homes have been provided electricity connection.

DISABILITY FRIENDLY INITIATIVES

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment established by Atalji had started the tradition of organizing camps to assist the Divyangjans.
- In the past four-and-a-half years, Government has been organising 140 camps on an average every month where Divyangjans are receiving assistive equipment. During this period, assistive equipment worth Rs 700 crore have been distributed to about 12 lakh Divyangjans in a fully transparent manner.
- Government under the 'Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan' has made about 1,000 Government buildings and more than 650 railway stations fully accessible to Divyangjans.

- Government started working on a uniform sign language for Divyangjan applicable throughout the country.
- Through the enactment of 'The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016', Government has provided them with equal opportunity in education, social security and employment.

RESERVATION TO THE POOR

- A historic decision has been taken in the last Winter Session of Parliament to pass the 103rd Amendment to the Constitution to extend the benefit of reservation to the poor belonging to the general category.

FOR THE ASPIRATIONS AND DREAMS OF YOUNG INDIANS OF 21ST CENTURY

Kaushal Vikas Abhiyan

- Keeping in mind the desire of the youth to be self-reliant, the Kaushal Vikas Abhiyan was launched. Under this Abhiyan, in the last four years, on an average one crore youth have been trained every year in different skills.

Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana

- Under the 'Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana', which facilitates credit for professional and business requirements, loans worth more than Rs. 7 lakh crore have been disbursed to the youth without any guarantee. More than 15 crore people have benefitted and over 4 crore 26 lakh first time borrowers have started their business under this scheme.

Start Up India

- Under 'Start Up India' and 'Stand Up India', Government has provided financial assistance to make the youth self-reliant. As a result, in the world of start-ups, India now figures as a frontline country.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana

- The Government has linked creation of jobs with tax incentives under 'Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana'.
- Under this scheme, when a young person gets a new job, the EPS and EPF contribution of 12 per cent payable by the employer is being paid by the Government for the first three years. More than 1 crore youth have already benefitted from this scheme.

New Institutions

- 7 IITs, 7 IIMs, 14 IIITs, 1 NIT and 4 NIDs are being established. It has been decided to enhance the amount of scholarship and fellowship by more than 25 percent to

encourage research activities in the country.

- Opening up of 103 Kendriya Vidyalayas and setting up of, Eklavya Model Awasiya Vidyalayas in all talukas having a majority tribal population and 62 new Navodaya Vidyalayas.
- The Government is setting up more than 5,000 'Atal Tinkering Labs' for taking ideas to innovation.

Khelo India

- Government is making efforts to identify talented sportspersons from different corners of this country under the youth centric 'Khelo India' programme.

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

- Under the 'Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana', the maximum benefit has been availed by women. Out of the 15 crore Mudra loans provided so far throughout the country, 73 percent have been disbursed to women entrepreneurs.
- Under the 'Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana', about 6 crore women have become members of Self-Help Groups.
- Government has provided loans worth more than Rs 75 thousand crore to such Self-Help Groups. This amount is two and a half times more than the loans given in the four years preceding 2014.
- It has been made mandatory for the major Government companies to purchase at least 3 percent of their material from the enterprises owned by women entrepreneurs.
- Women officers recruited under the Short Service Commission in the armed forces to be considered for permanent commission through a transparent selection process just like their male counterparts.
- Enhanced maternity leave from 12 weeks to 26 weeks.

FARMER WELFARE

- Government is striving day and night to attain the goal of doubling farmers income. Better facilities and assistance to farmers for the agriculture activities from purchase of equipment and seed to transportation of produce and its sale.
- Providing the farmers with fair price for their crops, access to new markets and helping them with additional sources of income.
- Government has taken the historic decision of fixing the Minimum Support Price - MSP

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of 22 crops at one and a half times higher than the production cost of the crop.

- The number of Krishi Vigyan Kendras is being increased across the country to assist the farmers with scientific methods of farming.
- More than 17 crore Soil Health Cards have been distributed to inform the farmers about the health of the soil.
- 100 percent Neem coating of urea has been done to facilitate its availability and to prevent its misuse.
- Government is completing 99 incomplete old irrigation projects so that farmers do not face any hurdle in irrigation. 71 of these projects will be completed by the next few months. Micro-irrigation is also being promoted by the Government to ensure full utilization of every drop of water.
- Crop insurance is being provided to farmers at low premium under the 'Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana' to safeguard them from potential crisis due to crop damage.
- A campaign has been launched to link online, more than 1,500 Agricultural Mandis to facilitate market access to farmers. Cold storage capacities are being increased at a fast pace to minimise crop damage from the field to the market and to ensure proper storage.
- The 'Waste to Wealth' campaign is being implemented to ensure that farmers generate additional income out of the crop residue from their field.
- Under the Blue Revolution scheme, Government is providing training to fishermen in deep sea fishing and financial assistance for buying modern fishing trawlers.

NAMAMI GANGE

- Under the 'Namami Gange Mission', projects worth Rs 25,500 crore have been approved so far.
- Government is engaged with the task of cleaning up of the river Ganga by diverting dozens of major drains, stopping flow of industrial effluents and by setting up several Sewage Treatment Plants in the cities.

DIGITAL INDIA

- In 2014, only 59 village panchayats in the country had digital connectivity. Today, 1 lakh 16 thousand village panchayats are connected with optical fibre and about 40

thousand village panchayats have been provided with wi-fi hotspots.

- In 2014 there were only 84 thousand Common Service Centres. Today, their number has increased to more than 3 lakhs.
- Of these, 2 lakh and 12 thousand centres have been set up in village panchayats.

COOPERATIVE FEDERALISM

- Government has worked continuously to strengthen the spirit of Cooperative Federalism enshrined in the Constitution.
- In line with this objective, Government took the decision to provide the States with 10 percent additional share in taxes as per the recommendations of the Finance Commission.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

- 34 crore bank accounts have been opened in the country because of 'Jan Dhan Yojana' and almost every family is now connected to the banking system.
- According to an international agency, of all the bank accounts opened in the world from 2014 to 2017, 55 percent were opened in India alone.
- Today, Rs 88 thousand crore deposited in Jan Dhan accounts is a testimony to the changing saving habits.
- It is only because of the Jan Dhan scheme that wages from MGNREGA, benefits from different insurance schemes, scholarships, pensions and most other Government benefits are being credited directly into the bank accounts of the poor through DBT.

ACTION AGAINST CORRUPTION AND BLACK MONEY

- Approved constitution of a Special Investigation Team- SIT on black money.
- New agreements were signed with several countries known as tax havens, and several others were signed with many other countries to rectify deficiencies in existing agreements.
- New laws were enacted for sectors thriving on black money, and those were brought under the ambit of taxation.
- Government also provided an opportunity to voluntarily disclose unaccounted income and wealth.
- Demonetisation was a defining moment in the Government's war on corruption and black money.
- The registration of 3 lakh 38 thousand dubious shell companies responsible for

flow of black money have been annulled by the Government.

- Assets worth more than Rs 50 thousand crore are being confiscated under the Benami Property Act, Prevention of Money Laundering Act and the law against fugitive economic offenders.
- Whereas prior to 2014, 3.8 crore people had filed their tax return, this number has increased and more than 6.8 crore people have come forward to file their tax returns. Today, the tax payer is confident that each paisa contributed by him or her is being spent honestly on nation building.
- As a result of the expansion in Direct Benefit Transfer in the last four and a half years, more than Rs 6 lakh 5 thousand crore have been directly transferred to the bank accounts of beneficiaries. Because of this, about Rs. 1 lakh 10 thousand crore have been saved from falling into wrong hands.
- Government has removed about 8 crore fictitious names which were being used by middlemen to misappropriate the rightful benefits of genuine beneficiaries.

GST

- Now with the implementation of a comprehensive tax reform like the GST, the concept of 'One Nation-One Tax-One Market' has been realised.

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS

- As a result of reforms, India's position has improved by 65 places in the Ease of Doing Business ranking, from 142 in 2014 to 77 now.

ECONOMY

- During the last four and a half years, the economy of the country has been growing at a rate of 7.3 percent on an average.
- India is playing a significant role in international trade. While India's contribution to the world GDP was 2.6 percent in 2014, it has increased to 3.3 percent in 2017 as per the latest reports. India has emerged as the 6th largest economy in the world.

MAKE IN INDIA

- Now India is the 2nd largest manufacturer of mobile phones in the world.
- Recently, the milestone of converting diesel locomotives into 10 thousand horsepower electric engines has also been established by India.

- As a part of Make in India initiative, Asia's largest MedTech Zone is being established in Andhra Pradesh.
- Defence Corridors are being established in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, which will not only strengthen our security through establishment of production facilities for defence equipment, but also provide employment to the youth.
- Soon, the passengers will also be able to avail the ultra-modern facilities of our fastest train till date – 'Vande Bharat Express'.

CIVIL AVIATION

- This sector has seen a double digit growth during the last four years.
- More than 12 crore and 30 lakh people travelled by air during 2017-18 and this number is increasing constantly.
- Under the 'Udan scheme', 12 lakh seats have been made available to people at lower tariffs.
- This has provided the common person with an opportunity of air travel.

INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH EAST

- Under the Udan Yojana, 19 new airports are being built in Eastern India and of these 5 are coming up in the North East.
- The construction of Pakyong airport in Sikkim and Veer SurendraSai Airport at Jharsuguda in Odisha has been completed.
- The work of reconstruction of fertilizers plants at Gorakhpur in Uttar Pradesh, Barauni in Bihar and Sindri in Jharkhand, which were closed for several years, is progressing rapidly.
- The 'Urja Ganga Pariyojana' started with an approximate outlay of Rs.13 thousand crores will help expand the industries based on gas pipeline in several cities of Eastern India.
- Similarly, the work on the 'Gas Cracker Project' which is important for Assam and Paradip Oil Refinery in Odisha has also been expedited.
- The DholaSadiya Bridge named after BhupenHazarika, linking Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has already been dedicated to the nation.
- Out of the 18 thousand villages electrified by the Government, about 13 thousand villages are in Eastern India and out of these 5 thousand villages are in the remote areas of the North-East.

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- Almost all the railway lines of the North-East have been converted to broad-gauge.
- Efforts are underway to provide rail connectivity to the capital cities of all the 8 States. For this, the work on 15 new rail lines is under progress at a cost of approximately Rs.50 thousand crores.

STRENGTHENING THE NATIONAL SECURITY

- Through the surgical strike on cross border terror posts, India has shown its new policy and strategy.
- Last year India joined the handful of countries that possess the Nuclear Triad capability.
- Not only has Government fulfilled the demand for One Rank One Pension that had been pending for 4 decades, but it has also disbursed arrears amounting to more than Rs 10,700 crore to 20 lakh ex-servicemen.
- After a gap of many decades, the Indian Air Force is preparing to welcome, in the coming months, its new generation ultra-modern fighter aircraft Rafale and strengthen its strike capability.
- In the last few years, a record number of youngsters in the Maoist areas have come forward to join the mainstream.
- The Police Memorial, which was dedicated to the nation last year seeks to honour their sacrifice and also preserves the memories of their sacrifice for the future generations.

DEVELOPMENT OF JAMMU, KASHMIR & LADAKH

- As a result of the efforts of Government, an environment favourable to development has been created in the State.
- Recently, in Jammu and Kashmir, elections to Urban Local Bodies after an interval of 13 years and in Panchayats after 7 years have been conducted peacefully with more than 70 per cent voters participating enthusiastically.
- Committed to the development of Jammu and Kashmir, Government announced a package of Rs.80 thousand crores. Under the package, projects related to infrastructure, health and education sectors worth more than Rs.66 thousand crores have been approved so far.

HONOURING THE BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

- Government has dedicated to the nation the 'National Salt Satyagraha Memorial' at Dandi on the death anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.

- KrantiMandir, a museum in Delhi dedicated to NetajiSubhash Chandra Bose has been opened to public this month.
- The Government has also instituted NetajiSubhash Chandra Bose Disaster Management Award in his honour.
- The Government has developed 5 sacred places associated with Baba SahebAmbedkar as “Panchteerth”.
- The nation has paid tribute to the Iron Man of India Sardar Patel, by building the ‘Statue of Unity’, which is the tallest statue in the world.
- Government is setting up museums in various States in the memory of the country’s tribal freedom fighters.

NATIONAL AWARDS

- Government has conferred the Bharat Ratna on Mahamana Madan Mohan Malaviya and Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 2015. This year it has been decided to confer Bharat Ratna on Nanaji Deshmukh, Bhupen Hazarika and Pranab Mukherjee.
- By conferring national awards on the basis of merit and without any discrimination to those citizens, who have worked selflessly for the welfare of the people, Government has demonstrated country’s commitment towards the ideals of sacrifice and service.

PRAKASH PARV OF GURU GOVIND SINGH JI

- In our tradition, the Saints and Gurus occupy the highest position.

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- This month, to commemorate the Prakash Parv of Guru Govind Singh ji, the Government has released a special coin.

INDIA AT GLOBAL PLATFORM:

- It is a measure of Government’s diplomatic success that today India’s voice is heard with respect at international fora.
- Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas organized recently in Varanasi has reinforced this fact.
- At the initiative of India, 21st June was declared as International Yoga Day by the United Nations and is now being celebrated with great enthusiasm across the world.
- During the last four years, more than 2 Lakh 26 thousand Indians stranded abroad have been rescued and brought back to the country.
- The United Nations Award for India’s efforts in the field of environment conservation has made every Indian proud.
- It is a matter of pride for all of us that India is providing leadership to the global solar revolution and last year the first summit of the International Solar Alliance was successfully organized in Delhi.
- In 2022, India will host the G-20 Summit. Hosting the summit in the year marking the 75th anniversary celebration of our independence will further enhance India’s global influence.

General Studies 3

Model for malaria control

Introduction:

- As per World Health Organisation's World Malaria Report of 2018, India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden: it saw a 24% decrease in 2017 compared to 2016.
- This shows that India has assumed a leadership role in advancing global efforts to end malaria.
- The country's success provides hope to the other highest-burden countries to tackle malaria head-on.

Steps taken by India in malaria control:

- India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.
- The turning point in India's fight against malaria came at the East Asia Summit in 2015, when it **pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030**.
- Following this public declaration, India launched the five-year **National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination**.
- This marked a shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination". The plan provides a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.
- The plan requires more than ₹10,000 crore. Adequate investment combined with coordinated action between governments, civil society and philanthropic donors is imperative to achieve this goal.
- Since health is a State subject, State governments across the country shoulder a special responsibility in tackling the disease.

DAMaN initiative:

- Among states, Odisha's Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative is significant. DAMaN has been accorded priority in the State's health agenda.

- The initiative aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State.**
- The initiative has in-built innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic (showing no symptoms) malaria.
- The programme is jointly implemented by Indian Council of Medical Research-National Institute of Malaria Research (ICMR-NIMR), National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVBDCP), Odisha and Medicines for Malaria Venture (MMV).
- In 2017, accredited social health activists (ASHAs) helped distribute approximately 11 million bed nets, which was enough to protect all the residents in areas that were at highest risk. This included residential hostels in schools.
- As a result of its sustained efforts, Odisha recorded a **80% decline in malaria cases and deaths in 2017**.
- There is financial commitment for a five-year period to sustain and build on the impact created by the initiative.

Way forward:

- The new country-driven 'high burden to high impact' plan to reduce disease burden in the 11 countries reflects the global sentiment that business as usual is no longer an option when it comes to fighting the disease.
- By prioritising malaria elimination, India, and especially Odisha, is showing the world the way.

Heading towards strategic instability

Introduction:

- In late 2018, the government decided to set up three new agencies: the Defence Cyber Agency, the Defence Space Agency and the Special Operations Division, in order to address the new age challenges to national security.
- While this is indeed a useful step in the right direction, it is far from what the Naresh Chandra Task Force and the Chiefs of Staff Committee, both of which had

suggested the formation of three separate joint commands to deal with new challenges to India's national security in the cyber, space and special operations domains.

- Is India adequately prepared for the new age wars in general or is it still preparing for the last war it fought, and won?

High-tech innovations:

- There is a revolution in military affairs that seems to have attracted the attention of strategic analysts and policy planners across the world.
- The current focus in **military thinking across the world is increasingly moving away from traditional heavy-duty military hardware to high-tech innovations such as artificial intelligence (AI)**, big data analytics, satellite jammers, hypersonic strike technology, advanced cyber capabilities and spectrum denial and high-energy lasers.
- In the light of the unprecedented capabilities that these systems offer, there is also an **increased focus on developing suitable command and control** as well as doctrinal concepts to accommodate and calibrate them.
- Already, the world is witnessing increased tension between the nuclear power possessed countries; US withdrawal from IRNF treaty- All these issues combined with advancement of technology is a cause of concern in international security.

Fears of conflict:

- There is an inherent paradox vis-à-vis high technology-enabled military system.
- While on the one hand, it is imperative for states to redesign their systems in the light of these new technologies, especially the digital and cyber components, this also makes the cyber- and digital-enabled systems vulnerable to covert cyberattacks.
- More so, given that such surreptitious attacks might take place in the early stages of a conflict, ensuing confusion and scare might lead to uncontrolled escalation with little time for assessment and judgement.
- The biggest fear about these technologies, the implications of which we don't fully

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai understand yet, is their potential to increase the risks of intentional and inadvertent nuclear use.

- The inherent distrust among the nations combined with AI taking military decision will put the world in a disaster.

Way forward:

- With advancement in military technology day-by-day there is also an urgent need to develop separate domain of control for cybersecurity, space and special operation so that the forces which are there to save humanity does not go against it.

Gold rush

Introduction

- The price of gold in the Indian market has reached its highest-ever level, hitting the Rs 33,800 mark in the midst of increasing demand from buyers and lagging supply in the global market.
- And it is not just the rupee that is witnessing a fall in value against gold. A similar trend has been seen in the price of other major emerging market currencies as well when their worth is measured against the yellow metal.

Reasons for the price rise

- The increase in the price of gold worldwide should be seen against the backdrop of rising uncertainties that threaten to derail the global economy. Western central banks have been tightening their monetary policy stances for a while now, leading to increasing fears that this could put an end to the decade-long recovery since the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.
- The U.S.-China trade war and the lowered rate of Chinese economic growth have added to fears of a global economic slowdown. Furthermore, as stock markets around the world continue to trade sideways with increased volatility, investors seeking financial safety have turned to gold and boosted its price. Many central banks have been trying to hoard gold to restore confidence in their currencies.

Central banks on gold-buying spree in 2018

- According to the latest report by World Gold Council (WGC), central banks bought 651.5 tonnes of gold in 2018, which was

74% higher than the previous year and also the second highest yearly total on record.

- The surge in central bank buying is attributed to concerns related to slowdown in global growth, heightened geopolitical tensions, and financial market volatility.
- Meanwhile, global gold demand reached 4,345.1 tonnes in 2018, up 4%, when compared to 2017 and in line with the five-year average demand of 4,347.5 tonnes.
- The gold demand in India was 760.4 tonnes in 2018, a marginal dip of 1.4% compared to the previous year's demand of 771.2 tonnes.

Other factors

- Apart from these short-term influences, there are other long-term factors at play as the price of gold looks to shoot up towards new highs.
- The fall in price after 2012 led to a fall in capital spending by gold miners, which has meant that supply has failed to keep up with growing demand.

Way Forward

- The depreciation in the value of national currencies against gold is also an indication of the increase in inflationary pressures across the globe.
- What could put a premature end to gold's rally is the easing of policy by global central banks. While this will restore investor confidence in the global economy, it carries with it risks linked to debt-fuelled growth.

Shot in the arm

Introduction

- The Supreme Court has recently uphold the validity of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016 (IBC) in its entirety.
- This judgement could have a major impact on the country's economic landscape.

What is the issue?

- The IBC has been severely tested in the two years since its enactment, with the Centre being forced to amend a couple of its provisions in order to plug some loopholes that enabled defaulting borrowers to challenge the legislation.
- One of the major challenges mounted against the IBC was by operational creditors, who are owed money by the company in the normal course of

operations for supply of goods and services.

- In the payment waterfall prescribed under Section 53 of the IBC in the event of liquidation of the company or its sale to another entity, their dues rank below those of financial creditors, workmen and employees.
- This was challenged by the operational creditors, who wanted equal treatment with financial creditors in the waterfall mechanism.

SC's judgement

- Several landmark cases that were referred to the National Company Law Tribunal under the IBC remain stuck there as a result of its operational creditors seeking equal treatment.
- With the Supreme Court now ruling that there are "intelligible differentia" between operational and financial creditors, an avenue that defaulters used to hinder proceedings has been closed.
- The apex court has also clarified that a mere relationship with an ineligible person cannot disqualify someone from becoming a bidder for a troubled asset. It has to be proved that such a person is connected with the business activity of the resolution applicant.

Conclusion

- The court used strong words to emphasize that the experiment conducted in enacting the Code is proving to be largely successful. The defaulter's paradise is lost.
- This constitutes a clear signal of its backing for the IBC which, despite all the challenges that it has faced, has been successful in sending a message to recalcitrant defaulters that there can be no more business-as-usual when they default.

Highlights of Interim Budget 2019-20 BUDGET SUMMARY WITH MAJOR HIGHLIGHTS OF THE INTERIM BUDGET 2019-20

- Interim Budget 2019-20 was presented in Parliament on Feb 1 by the Union Minister for Finance, Corporate Affairs, Railways & Coal, Piyush Goyal.

Major Schemes

- New Scheme- namely "Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN)" to

extend direct income support at the rate of Rs. 6,000 per year to farmer families, having cultivable land upto 2 hectares is announced.

- The scheme was announced with an outlay of Rs.75,000 crore for the FY 2019-20 and Rs.20,000 crore in the Revised Estimates of FY 2018-19.
- Under this Government of India funded Scheme, Rs.2,000 each will be transferred to the bank accounts of around 12 crore Small and Marginal farmer families, in three equal instalments.
- This programme would be made effective from 1st December 2018 and the first instalment for the period up to 31st March 2019 would be paid during this year itself.
- To provide sustained and focused attention towards development of Fisheries, the Government has decided to create a **separate Department of Fisheries**.
- India is the second largest fish producing nation in the world accounting for 6.3% of global production. The fisheries sector contributes 1% to GDP and provides livelihood to about 1.45 crore people at the primary level.
- The Finance Minister announced **2% interest subvention** to the farmers pursuing the activities of animal husbandry and fisheries, who avail loan through Kisan Credit Card. Further, in case of timely repayment of loan, they will also get an additional 3% interest subvention.
- The Budgetary allocation of the Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Ministry has been raised by around 2.5 times from Rs 58,358 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 1,41,174.37 crore in 2019-20.
 - Micro Irrigation Fund – Rs 5000 crore
 - Dairy Processing & Infrastructure Development Fund (DIDF) – Rs 10,881 crore
 - Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund – Rs 2000 crore
 - Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FIDF) – Rs 7522.48 crore
 - Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) – Rs 2477.52 crore

- Allocation of Rs.750 crore for Rashtriya Gokul Mission has been announced for the current year itself. Setting up of "**Rashtriya Kamdhenu Aayog**" to upscale sustainable genetic upgradation of cow resources and to enhance production and productivity of cows has also been announced. The Aayog will also look after effective implementation of laws and welfare schemes for cow.
- To provide pensionary benefits to at least 10 crore labourers and workers in the unorganised sector with monthly income up to Rs. 15,000 a new Scheme called '**Pradhan Mantri Shram-Yogi Maandhan**' is announced. A sum of Rs.500 crore has been allocated for the Scheme. The scheme will also be implemented from the current year.
- This pension yojana shall provide them an assured monthly pension of Rs. 3,000 from the age of 60 years on a monthly contribution of a small affordable amount during their working age.
- An unorganised sector worker joining pension yojana at the age of 29 years will have to contribute only Rs. 100 per month till the age of 60 years. A worker joining the pension yojana at 18 years, will have to contribute as little as Rs. 55 per month only. The Government will deposit equal matching share in the pension account of the worker every month.

Tax Benefits

- Individual taxpayers having taxable annual income up to **Rs.5 lakhs** will get full tax rebate and therefore will not be required to pay any income tax.
- Persons having gross income up to **Rs. 6.50 lakhs** are not required to pay any income tax if they make investments in provident funds, specified savings and insurance etc.
- Additional deductions such as interest on home loan up to Rs. 2 lakh, interest on education loans, National Pension Scheme contributions, medical insurance and medical expenditure on senior citizens etc, are also provided for in the Interim Budget 2019-20.
- For salaried persons, **Standard Deduction** is being raised from the current Rs.40,000 to Rs.50,000.

- Exemption on levy of income tax on notional rent on a second self-occupied house is also now proposed. Currently, income tax on notional rent is payable if one has more than one self-occupied house.

Inflation

- The Finance Minister said that the Government has been successful in bringing down **average inflation to 4.6%** over last five years, which is lower than the inflation during the tenure of any other Government.
- Inflation in December 2018 was down to 2.19% only.

Fiscal Deficit and Tax collections

- The fiscal deficit has been brought down to **3.4% in 2018-19** RE from the high of almost 6% seven years ago. The Interim Budget has pegged the fiscal deficit for the year 2019-20 at 3.4% of GDP.
- The Current Account Deficit (CAD) is likely to be only **2.5% of GDP** this year.
- The Revenue deficit in 2018-19 was budgeted at Rs. 4,16,034 crore, **2.2 % of GDP**. On the other hand, the Current Account Deficit widened to **2.7 % of GDP** in first half of 2018-19 from 1.9 % of GDP in 2017-18, mainly on account of higher trade deficit arising from higher petroleum, oil and lubricants imports.
- The Gross Tax Revenue of the Central Government is budgeted at Rs. 25,52,131 crore in BE 2019-20. This reflects a growth of Rs. 3,03,956 crore (13.5 %) over RE 2018-19.
- Direct taxes are expected to reach Rs. 13,80,000 crore in BE 2019-20 compared to Rs. 12,00,000 crore in RE 2018-19 indicating an increase of 15 % over RE. It is expected that direct taxes would be 6.6 % of GDP at the end of 2019-20.
- Indirect taxes are budgeted at Rs. 11,66,188 crore in BE 2019-20 showing an increase of 11.8 % over RE estimates (Rs. 10,42,833 crore). The increase is mainly on account of improvement in GST collections anticipated in 2019-20.
- The total expenditure has risen by Rs. 3,26,965 crore or approximately 13.30%, from Rs. 24,57,235 crore in 2018-19 RE to Rs. 27,84,200 crore in 2019-20 BE. The

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Capital Expenditure for 2019-20 BE is estimated to be Rs. 3,36,292 crore.

- Regarding **Disinvestment** proceeds, the Government is confident of crossing the target of Rs. 80,000 crore this year and have kept a target of Rs. 90,000 crore in BE 2019-20.
- Fiscal Indicators – Rolling Targets as a Percentage of GDP

		Revised	Budget	(Projections)	
		Estimates	Estimates	2020-21	2021-22
		2018-19	2019-20		
1.	Fiscal Deficit	3.4	3.4	3.0	3.0
2.	Revenue Deficit	2.2	2.2	1.7	1.5
3.	Primary Deficit	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
4.	Gross Tax Revenue	11.9	12.1	12.1	12.2
5.	Non-tax Revenue	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3
6.	Central Government debt	48.9	47.3	45.4	43.4

Enhanced allocations for major Schemes

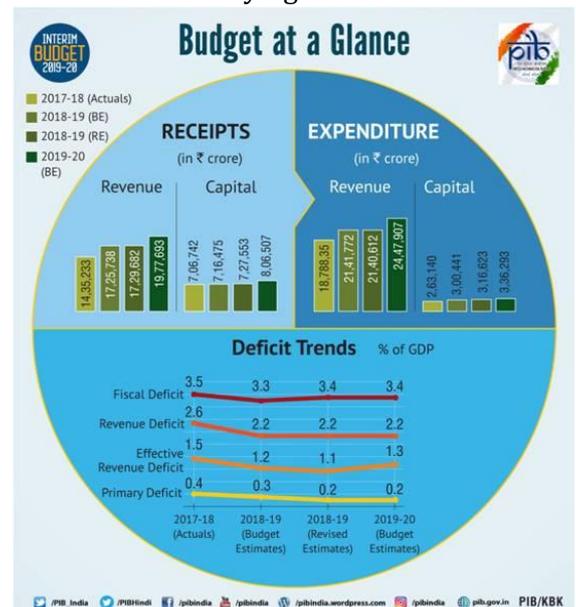
- Announcing an allocation of Rs.60,000 crores for MGNREGA for Budget Estimates 2019-20, the Finance Minister said that additional allocations will be made, if required.
- Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) is being allocated Rs.19,000 crore in BE 2019-20 as against Rs.15,500 crore in RE 2018-19. During the period 2014-18, a total number of 1.53 crore houses have been built under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana.
- Mr. Goyal also said that 14 of the 21 AIIMS operating or being established in the country presently have been announced since 2014. He also announced setting up of a new - the 22nd AIIMS in Haryana.
- Allocation for Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) is being increased from Rs.23,357 crore in RE 2018-19 to Rs.27,584 crore in BE 2019-20.
- A Welfare Development Board to frame special strategies for the benefit of the hard-to-reach De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic communities will be set up under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. A Committee under NITI Aayog will also be set up to complete the task of identifying De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic communities not yet formally classified.
- The Finance Minister announced that a **National Artificial Intelligence Portal** will also be developed soon as a part of the National Programme on 'Artificial Intelligence'.

- The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion will now be renamed as the **Department for Promotion of Industries and Internal Trade**.
- The Finance Minister announced that for the first time, the country's **Defence Budget** will be of over Rs.3 lakh crore.
- Domestic air traffic passengers have doubled during the last five years, leading to large number of jobs also being created. The number of operational airports has crossed 100 with the commissioning of the Pakyong airport in Sikkim. Arunachal Pradesh came on the air map recently and Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram have come on India's rail map for the first time.
- Capital support from the budget for **Indian Railways** is proposed at Rs.64,587 crore in 2019-20 (BE). The Railways' overall capital expenditure programme is of Rs. 1,58,658 crore. The Finance Minister announced that the Operating Ratio is expected to improve from 98.4% in 2017-18 to 96.2% in 2018-19 (RE) and further to 95% in 2019-20 (BE).



- India's installed solar generation capacity has grown over ten times in last five years. India's commitment to promote renewable energy is reflected in setting up the International Solar Alliance, the first treaty based international inter-governmental organisation headquartered in India. This sector is now creating lakhs of new age jobs.

- The Finance Minister announced that in Entertainment industry, which is a major employment generator, regulatory provisions will now rely more on self-declarations. To promote entertainment industry, the Single window clearance for ease of shooting films, now available only to foreigners, will also be made available to Indian filmmakers. The government will also introduce anti-camcording provisions in the Cinematograph Act to control the menace of piracy.
- The minister said that we are poised to become a Five Trillion Dollar Economy in the next five years and aspire to become a Ten Trillion Dollar Economy in the next 8 years.
- Goyal said that he is proposing, through the Finance Bill, necessary amendments to levy Stamp duties on one instrument relating to one transaction and get collected at one place through the Stock Exchanges. The duty so collected will be shared with the State Governments seamlessly on the basis of domicile of buying client.



- The Finance Minister pointed out that after completion of the fiscal deficit consolidation programme, the Government would now focus on Debt consolidation.
- India's **Debt to GDP ratio** was 46.5% in year 2017-18. The FRBM Act prescribes that the Debt to GDP ratio of the Government of India should be brought down to 40% by 2024-25.

The Budget for New India will energise the nation, says PM

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi has lauded the budget as the budget for New India which will energise the nation.
- PM said that over 12 crore farmers and their families, over 3 crores middle class taxpayers professionals and their families and 30-40 crore labourers will gain thanks to the Budget for New India.
- About the pro-farmer initiatives in the budget, he lamented that for years, many initiatives have been initiated for farmers but sadly, lot of farmers never came under the ambit of these schemes. He said that PM Kisan Nidhi is a historic step for farmer welfare which will help the farmers who have under 5 acres of land. PM added that the animal husbandry sector, fisheries have been taken care of in the Budget for New India.

Higher budget allocation for Space technology

- The Finance minister said that seventh dimension of our vision for the next decade aims at the Outer Skies.
- Our space programme – Gaganyaan, India becoming the launch-pad of satellites for the World and placing an Indian astronaut into space by 2022 reflect this dimension of our vision, the Minister said.
- Budget allocation for some major schemes of Department of Space:

Scheme	2017-18 Actuals	2018-19 BE	2018-19 RE	2019-20 BE
Space Technology	5,948	6,576	6,993	7,483
Space Applications	1,540	1,746	1,595	1,885
INSAT Satellite Systems	565	412	1,330	884

Highest Ever Growth in Minimum Wages of Labours

- During the last 5 years, the minimum wages of labours of all classes have been

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai increased by 42% which is the highest increase so far. The high growth and formalisation of the economy has led to the expansion of employment opportunities as shown in EPFO membership, which has increased by nearly 2 crore in 2 years reflecting formalisation of the economy and job creations.

- Goyal said that the 7th Pay Commission recommendations were implemented and New Pension Scheme (NPS) has been liberalized. The Government's contribution in NPS had been increased 10% to 14%. The limit of gratuity payment has been increased from Rs. 10 lakh to Rs. 20 lakh. The minimum pension for all labours has been fixed at Rs. 1,000 per month. The honorarium of all classes of labours under Anganwadi and Asha scheme has been increased by about 50%.

Anti-black money measures

- The anti-black money measures taken by the Government in the form of Black Money Law, the Fugitive Criminal Offenders Act, and Demonetisation, have brought undisclosed income of about Rs 1,30,000 crore to tax. These measures have also led to seizure and attachment of assets worth approximately Rs 50,000 crore, and compelled holders of large cash currency to disclose their source of earnings.
- The Minister said that there is 18% growth in direct tax collection in 2017-18 and increase in tax base by as many as 1.06 crore people filing income tax returns for the first time in FY 2017-18 is mainly on account of demonetization.

One Lakh villages to go digital over next five years

- Piyush Goyal said the Government will make one lakh villages into Digital Villages over next five years. This will be achieved by expanding the Common Service Centres (CSCs).
- Currently, more than 3 lakh CSCs employing about 12 lakh people, are digitally delivering several services to the citizens.
- The Finance Minister said mobile tariff in India is now possibly the lowest in the world, catapulting India as the world leader in the consumption of mobile data. Monthly

Government Unveils vision for the Next Decade

- The Government has unveiled its vision for the next decade, listing thereby ten most important dimensions in 2030.
- The dimensions of Vision-2030 outlined by Mr. Goyal are as follows-
 1. To create physical and social infrastructure for ten trillion dollar economy and to provide ease of living.
 2. Digital India led by the youths with innumerable start-ups and million of jobs.
 3. To make India pollution free by focusing on Electrical Vehicles and renewables.
 4. Rural industrialisation using modern technologies to generate massive employment.
 5. Clean rivers, with safe drinking water to all Indians and efficient use of water in irrigation using micro-irrigation techniques.
 6. Besides scaling up Sagarmala, India's coastline and ocean waters will power development.
 7. Through our space programme – Gaganyaan, India becoming the launch-pad of satellites for the World.
 8. Self sufficiency in food production and producing food in the most organic way.
 9. A healthy India by 2030 and a distress free health care and wellness system for all. Ayushman Bharat and women participation would be an important component in it.
 10. Employees working with elected Government, transforming India into Minimum Government Maximum Governance nation.

consumption of mobile data increased by over 50 times in the last five years. The cost of data and voice calls in India is now possibly the lowest in the world.

- The 'Make in India' programme has seen India emerging as the new destination for mobile phone manufacturing industry. Under Make in India, mobile and parts manufacturing companies have increased from 2 to more than 268 providing huge job opportunities.

Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women

- An amount of Rs.1330 Crore has been provided in the Interim Budget for the Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women.
- While taking several welfare initiatives for women, the emphasis of the Government has been to move from 'women's development' to 'women led development'.
- The Government embarked upon the programme to deliver 8 crore free LPG connections under the Ujjawala Yojana. 6 crores connections have already been given and the remaining will get free gas connections by next year.
- More than 70% of the beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana are women who are getting affordable and collateral-free loans to start their own businesses.

Measures to strengthen MSMEs

- While a Scheme of sanctioning loans upto Rs. 1 crore in 59 minutes has been launched, GST-Registered SME units will get 2% interest rebate on incremental loan of Rs. 1 crore. 25% sourcing by all the Government Undertakings will now have to be from SMEs. Of this, the material to the extent of at least 3% will be sourced from women owned SMEs.
- The Finance Minister said that the Government e-Marketplace (GeM), created two years ago, has transformed public procurement by making it fully transparent, inclusive and efficient. MSMEs have an opportunity to sell their products through GeM.
- Transactions of over Rs.17,500 crore have taken place, resulting in savings of 25-28% on an average. The GeM platform is now being extended to all CPSEs.

Removing the roots of farmers' distress

Introduction

- Agrarian distress, in the present context, is mainly in terms of low agricultural prices and, consequently, poor farm incomes. Low productivity in agriculture and related supply side factors are equally important.

An issue that is connected is the declining average size of farm holdings and the viability of this size for raising farm incomes. Here are possible solutions.

Prices and incomes

- In the last two years, inflation in agriculture was much lower than overall inflation. The consumer price index (CPI) also shows that the rise in prices for agriculture was much lower than general inflation in recent years. Market prices for several agricultural commodities have been lower than those of MSP.
- When output increases well beyond the market demand at a price remunerative to producers, market prices decline. In a strange way, it is the success in increasing production that has resulted in this adverse consequence.
- Few schemes have been suggested to address the problem of managing declining output prices when output increases significantly. **'Price deficiency compensation'** is one such mechanism which amounts to paying the difference between market price and the MSP. However, market prices may continue to fall as supply exceeds normal demand.
- At the other extreme is the **'open procurement system'** that has been in vogue quite effectively in the case of rice and wheat, where procurement is open ended at the MSP.
- The option of **limited procurement** for price stabilisation may provide a middle way. Under this scheme, the government will procure the 'excess', leaving the normal production level to clear the market at a remunerative price. Thus, procurement will continue until the market price rises to touch the MSP.
- The suggested 'limited procurement system' will not work if the MSP is fixed at a level to which the market price will never rise. There are costs involved which will go up as production increases above the average level. The government can sell the procured grain in later years or use them in welfare programmes.
- Some States have introduced **farm support schemes**, examples being the Rythu Bandhu Scheme (Telangana) and the

KALIA scheme (Odisha). One problem with the Telangana model is that it does not cover tenants, who are the actual cultivators. Basically, these schemes are income support schemes which will be in operation year after year.

Need for sustainable solution

- Thus, raising the MSP, price deficiency payments or income support schemes can only be a partial solution to the problem of providing remunerative returns to farmers.
- A sustainable solution is market reforms to enable better price discovery combined with long-term trade policies favourable to exports. The creation of a competitive, stable and unified national market is needed for farmers to get better prices.
- For better price for farmers, agriculture has to go beyond farming and develop a value chain comprising farming, wholesaling, warehousing, logistics, processing and retailing.

Low productivity

- The next issue is the low productivity of Indian agriculture. Basics such as seeds, fertilizers, credit, land and water management and technology are important. Similarly, investment in infrastructure and research and development are needed.
- Water is the leading input in agriculture. More than 60% of irrigation water is consumed by two crops: rice and sugarcane. It is not investment alone but efficiency in water management in both canal and groundwater that is important. India uses upto three times the water used to produce one tonne of grain in countries such as Brazil, China and the U.S. This implies that water-use efficiency can be improved significantly with better use of technologies that include drip irrigation.
- Yields of several crops are lower in India when compared to several other countries. Technology can help to reduce 'yield gaps' and thus improve productivity.

Land size

- Another major issue relates to the shrinking size of farms which is also responsible for low incomes and farmers' distress. The average size of farm holdings declined from 2.3 hectares in 1970-71 to

1.08 hectares in 2015-16. The share of small and marginal farmers increased from 70% in 1980-81 to 86% in 2015-16. The average size of marginal holdings is only 0.38 hectares (less than one acre) in 2015-16.

- We need to have policies for land consolidation along with land development activities in order to tackle the challenge of the low average size of holdings. Farmers can voluntarily come together and pool land to gain the benefits of size. Through consolidation, farmers can reap the economies of scale both in input procurement and output marketing.

Conclusion

- Farmers' distress is due to low prices and low productivity. The suggestions such as limited procurement, measures to improve low productivity, and consolidation of land holdings to gain the benefits of size, can help in reducing agrarian distress. We need a long-term policy to tackle the situation.

The case for minimum basic income

Introduction

- As the country moving towards the general election, the debate on rolling out "universal basic income" whereby every Indian citizen gets money paid into their bank account has resurfaced again.

Encouraging results

- A pilot project conducted between 2010 and 2013, covering 6,000 beneficiaries in Delhi and Madhya Pradesh, yielded encouraging results. It confirmed that at high levels of impoverishment, even the smallest income supplement can improve nutrient intake, school enrolment and attendance of female students, and reduce incidence of indebtedness.
- This evidence challenges the commonly held views that welfare payments are an affront to the dignity of the beneficiaries and that they are used for questionable purposes, such as for buying alcohol.
- There are other questions, too: Why income support and why now? What are the operational and design imperatives? And how much fiscal space can be opened up in a sustainable and serious way?

Why income support?

- The reforms since 1991 have largely bypassed agriculture and other segments of the economy that engage poor and rural Indians. While incomplete economic liberalisation and technological advances have led to growth in national income, all individuals have not gained equally. The disproportionate share of gains from the reforms have gone to middle-class and rich Indians.
- This unevenness in development calls for a superior economic growth model. Until that happens, redistributive policy interventions such as income transfers can improve equity.
- Besides equity, there's also an urgent need to address rural distress, which is largely a consequence of policy failures such as ineffective procurement and perverse trade and pricing policies that have in times of bumper harvests led to gluts, depressed market prices, and aggravated farmer losses. So, it is only fair that the government pays reparations to farmers in some form.
- Last year, the Budget had promised compensatory payments to farmers equal to the gap between depressed market prices and the MSPs announced. But MSP-based payments distort price signals to farmers on what to produce and how much in the subsequent season.
- Income support schemes like Rythu Bandhu and KALIA are superior policy interventions. Plus, they do not suffer from the moral hazard and limited reach of farm loan waivers. Waivers penalise farmers who repay loans on time and benefit only borrowers from banks.
- The advantage of a minimum income guarantee is that it will also cover the urban poor, who are not covered in these schemes. While job guarantee programmes, such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, lock up beneficiaries in low-productivity work, income supplements allow them to continue to look for better employment options.

Opening up fiscal space

- And are these schemes feasible politically, operationally and fiscally? Income supplements can be transferred into Jan

Dhan or Post Office accounts. Beneficiaries can be selected through the Socio-Economic Caste Census.

- Increasing the fiscal deficit hurts the poor, for it sparks off inflation and cannot be the way to fund income transfers. Therefore the government need to look for alternate ways to fund such transfers.
- Streamlining distortionary and demerit subsidies, such as on urea (Rs 70,000 crore annually), can open up significant fiscal space. Healthcare, education, water conservation, environment and other merit subsidies need to be preserved and improved and should not be reduced to fund income transfers.
- If the wealth tax that the government had abolished in 2015 is reintroduced as a fair and easy-to-collect levy on the super-rich, an income support scheme for the poor will be easier.
- Taxpayers must realise that agri-prices, and therefore farm incomes, are not free market-driven. They are kept artificially low, through pricing policy instruments, so

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai that inflation does not erode the rest of the population's purchasing power.

Investment over subsidies

- Many experts also argue that a reconfiguration of public policy is needed to replace agricultural subsidies by capital formation or 'investment'. For three and a half decades now subsidies have progressively replaced public investment for agriculture. Having once been less than half that of investment it is now five times as large.
- The impact of public investment on both the yield of land and rural poverty is far greater than that of fertilizer, electricity, irrigation and interest rate subsidy.

An alternative approach

- A better solution to structural inequality than UBI is **universal basic capital**, or UBC, which has begun to pop up in international policy circles. In this alternative approach, people own the wealth they generate as shareholders of their collective enterprises. Amul, SEWA, Grameen, and others have shown a way.

KURUKSHETRA JANUARY 2019

EMPOWERING RURAL YOUTH

Introduction

- The population of youth comprises about 40% of the total population of India.
- Empowerment of rural youth is directly related to the empowerment of villages.
- However, in present time there is an issue that, after getting higher education, rural youth does not want to live in village. He migrates to cities even though his standard of living there is much lower as compared to the village.
- This causes double damage to the country. On one hand there is an unnecessary burden on the already limited infrastructure and resources of the urban area, while on the other hand, his own village becomes a victim of neglect.

Empowerment of rural youth

Boost to empowerment

- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Rural)** has kindled in the rural youth to live in the village and contribute to local development by providing the rural youth housing facilities as in a city.
- The 14th central finance commission has increased the grant for village panchayats to Rs 2,00,292.20 crore for the development of villages for a period of five years which is three times the grant sanctioned by the 13th finance commission.
- Dependency on Agriculture as a major employment avenue of rural youth has reduced, and the income of the rural households is now supplemented by activities like small scale manufacturing, construction, food processing, semi-skilled or unskilled services.
- Agricultural clinics, agro business centres and common service centres are also helping in the socio economic empowerment of rural youth.

- **Micro, small and medium enterprises** has the potential to provide employment to 10 crore youth of the country by 2022.
- **Department of Industrial policy and promotion** had launched a startup tour program under which a mobile banking is sent to second/third tier towns to identify and promote entrepreneurial talents there.
- **MGNREGA** aims to provide at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to households whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work
- **Through Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana**, availability of at least one, all weather road link is being ensured for every eligible settlement in all districts of the country.
- **Deen Dayal Antyodaya Yojana (DAY)** uplifts the urban poor folks by enhancing sustainable livelihood opportunities through skill development. The scheme is integration of the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) and National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM).
- **Under Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gramin Kaushalya Yojana**, 5.73 lakh rural youth have been trained from 2014-15 to February 2018. DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families.
- **Pradhan Mantri Yuva Udyamiat Vikas Abhiyan (PM-YUVA)** aims to provide entrepreneurship education and training across the country in Universities, Colleges, schools, Industrial Training Centers (ITIs) and Entrepreneurship Development Centers (EDCs) for five years.
- **MUDRA Yojana** is one through which crores of youth has gained employment. It provides loans upto 10 lakh to the non-corporate, non-farm small/micro enterprises.

Empowerment of youth through skilling

Some of the government initiatives in this regard are:

- **National apprenticeship promotion scheme (NAPS)** is a new scheme of Government of India to promote apprenticeship that consists of Basic Training and On-the-Job Training/Practical Training at workplace in the industry. State apprenticeship promotion scheme (SAAs) and regional directorates of apprenticeship (RDATs) act as implementing agencies in their respective state /regions.
- **Startup village entrepreneurship programme (SVEP)** is the sub-scheme under the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NRLM) to help rural households including women to set-up enterprises.
- **Rural self-employment training institutes (RSETIs)** is an initiative of Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) to have dedicated infrastructure in each district of the country to impart training and skill up gradation of rural youth towards entrepreneurship development.
- **National employability enhancement mission (NEEM)** is an initiative by Ministry of Human Resource Development, to enhance employability through on the Job Practical Training. This initiative has been taken by the Government of India in collaboration with AICTE.
- **National skill development corporation (NSDC)** is a not-for-profit public limited company that was set up by Ministry of Finance as Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. The Government of India through Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49% of the share capital of NSDC, while the private sector has the balance 51% of the share capital.
- Facebook training on digital marketing.
- **Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PKVY)** is an exclusive program to train Indians seeking jobs abroad while addressing

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai requirements in communication, trade specific knowledge and skills along with cultural orientation.

- **National council for vocational education and training (NCVET)** is a merger of National Council for Vocational Training (NCVT) and the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA).It regulates the functioning of vocational education and training.

Educational initiatives for rural youth

- Empowerment through education has two key strands .First, education is a powerful driver for effecting cultural change. Second, education helps individuals prepare themselves for the challenges they might later face in life.

Initiatives taken in education for youth empowerment:

- **Samgra Shiksha amagra Shiksha** is a programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class 12. It subsumes the three Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
- **Saakshar Bharat programme** goes beyond '3' R's (i.e. Reading, Writing & Arithmetic),for it also seeks to create awareness of social disparities and a person's deprivation on the means for its amelioration and general well-being.
- **Jan Shikshan Sanstans (JSSs)** are established to provide vocational training to non-literate, neo-literate, as well as school drop outs by identifying skills as would have a market in the region of their establishment.
- **National scholarship portal (NSP)** of Government of India -SMART System is one-stop solution through which various services starting from student application, application receipt, processing, sanction and disbursal of various scholarships to Students are enabled. This initiative aims at providing a Simplified, Mission-oriented,

Accountable, Responsive & Transparent 'SMART' System for faster & effective disposal of Scholarships applications and delivery of funds directly into beneficiaries account without any leakages.

Schemes under All India council for technical education (AICTE):

- Post graduate scholarship
- Prime Minister's special scholarship scheme (PMSSS)
- **Pragati scholarship** implemented by AICTE and disbursed every year among meritorious girl students for pursuing technical education.
- **Saksham scholarship** invites applications from students with disabilities who are entering into a diploma/degree level technical course at an AICTE approved institution.
- AICTE -travel grant scheme.
- National doctoral fellowship (NDF)
- Support to students for participating in competition abroad (SSPCA)
- Post-doctoral research fellow scheme.
- Junior research fellowship

Financial inclusion for rural youth

- The United Nations development programme (UNDP) recognized the Role of financial inclusion in achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) which include alleviation of poverty, creation of jobs, gender equality, good health etc.
- According to the organization for economic cooperation and development (OECD), financial literacy is: understanding of financial products and concepts by consumers/investors, their ability and confidence to appreciate financial risks and opportunities, capability to make informed choices, and enable them to take other effective action to improve their financial well-being.
- While the total number of savings bank accounts witnessed a phenomenal growth of over 20 times, savings bank deposits increased by more than 7 times during the period 2010-2018, via PMJDY.

Policy implications and conclusions

- The rural youth have to be extended proper skilling support. DDU-GKY model may follow the BRAC, Bangladesh while extending pre placement and post placement support to the youth and the unemployed in India.
- BRAC's training programme is very successful in terms of placement close to 80% as it conducts door to door survey.
- Further major policy thrust should be on encouraging more business correspondents (deposits), certified credit counsellors (loans), trade electronic receivables discounting system and scope for digital lending to MSMEs.
- RBI and banks should co-ordinate with institutions such as State education boards, CBSE, UGC, AICTE to include financial inclusion as a mandatory subject at different educational levels right from school to higher levels of education.
- There should be less emphasis on collaterals (Bank side), more emphasis on timely repayment of loans without expecting loan waivers (Borrower's side). In this way we can achieve not just financial inclusion but economic inclusion too.

NABARD: building capacity of rural youth

- National bank for agriculture and rural development (NABARD) is an apex development bank.
- It plays an important role in skill formation and capacity building of the young men and women in rural areas.
- It was approved by the Parliament through Act 61 of 1981.
- During last 36 years, NABARD has made meaningful intervention for achieving rural development through micro finance, inclusive growth, rural infrastructure, climate change and scaling up farmer producer organisations (FPOs).

Some of the initiatives of NABARD in empowering rural youth are as under:

▪ **Capacity building through Microfinance movement:**

- NABARD has launched the self-help group bank linkage programme (SHG-BLP) in 1992 with a target of linking 500 SHGs in a year's time.
- Since 2006, NABARD has started enabling graduation of SHG members to the next higher level of livelihoods through the Micro enterprise development programme (MEDPs). It served as a skill specific and location specific skill building measures for matured SHG members.
- To combine skill training with right selection of trainees, proper hand holding and motivation, timely credit, marketing and mentoring support, since 2015 livelihood enterprise development programme (LEDP) came into being.
- Similarly, joint liability group (JLG) emerged as one of the easiest and collateral free mode of purveying institutional credit to the landless and tenant farmers/artisans by the formal banking system. As on 31st March 2018, a total of 9.49 lakh JLGs have been promoted and linked with banks.

▪ **Capacity building in farm sector**

- **Farmer clubs** forges linkages of farmers with banks and agricultural technologies.
- Vikas volunteer Vahini in 2005 got renamed as farmers club programme.
- In the year 1998-99, NABARD introduced Kisan credit card (KCC) scheme in conjunction with commercial banks, regional rural banks to smoothen credit delivery system.
- **Agri-clinic and agri business centre (ACABC):** The Agriculture graduates can set up their own agri

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai clinic or agri business centre and offer extension services to farmers.

- **Tribal development fund:** Under this assistance is given to tribal households to have wadi (small orchard), allied and off farm activities.
- NABARD has been promoting non-farm sector activities as alternate livelihood options such as small, cottage and village industries, handloom, handicrafts and other rural crafts and service sector.
- Rural entrepreneurship development programme (REDP) is one of the important non-farm sector (NFS) promotional programmes supported by NABARD for creating sustainable employment for educated unemployed rural youth.
- **Bankers institute of rural development (BIRD)** offers training, Research and Consultancy services to its customers and undertake other related activities in the field of agriculture and rural development banking.
- **Gramya Vikas Nidhi** was introduced during 2016-17 by NABARD for supporting promotional activities under off farm sector activities.
- **Agribusiness incubation centres** nurture innovative early stage enterprises that have high growth potential to become agribusiness by adding value and linking to producers and markets.

Skilling youth through Suryamitra

- NISE is conducting "Suryamitra" training program to provide skilled technicians for installation, commissioning, operation and maintenance in the field of solar technology.
- The objective of this program is to provide employability and entrepreneurship to

rural and urban youth and women and train the 10+2 passed, ITI /diploma holders as field technicians to execute national solar mission (NSM) programmes across the country.

- It is also a part of Make in India.
- It has fixed a price of Rs 150 per visit as visiting charges for Suryamitra services as per MNRE advised rates.
- It is a residential program which is 100% funded by Government of India and implemented by NISE across the country.
- At the end of the program, the host institute arranges for placement of the Suryamitra by inviting solar industries, EPC companies etc.
- To achieve and maintain the target of 100 GW solar power plants for 25 years, India requires about 6.5 lakh personnel, trained in solar energy sector (estimated by CII).
- Surya mitra mobile app has been launched to connect Suryamitras with entrepreneurship and larger section of society.

NISE

- The National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE) is an autonomous institution of Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- It is the apex National R&D institution in the field of Solar Energy.

ICTs for empowering rural youth

- Young people who are given early access to information and communication technology ICT tend to become early adopters of the technologies, spurring Innovation and economic growth.

ICT empowering agriculture

- **Skymet** provides weather forecast and weather related solutions to Indians.
- **Agrostar** provides a complete range of agri solutions at the fingertips of farmers.
- **Ekgaon** provides utility services for farmers, rural businesses, under-served rural women and the large urban migrant labour population.

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- **CropIn** tags farming land and conveys the information through an Android-based app to various companies.
- **Eruvaka** is on-farm diagnostic equipment for aquaculture farmers to reduce their risk and increase productivity.
- **BHUVAN** is a web mapping service which allows users to explore a 2D/3D representation of the surface of the Earth.

Prominent applications for use of rural population:

- **CHAMAN** is a coordinated programme on Horticulture Assessment and Management using geo informatics. It manages inflation and helps in digital inventory of horticulture zones.
- **FASAL** stands for forecasting agricultural output using space, agro-meteorology and land based observation. It monitors crop health.
- **NADAMS** national agricultural drought assessment and monitoring system.

ICT improving market efficiency

- **Dristeehaat kiosk** trains operators using ICT.

ICT in education and employment

- ICT kiosk based rural education has a significant role to play in adult education.

ICT in health services

- Video conferencing software can allow for basic health consultations, where bringing doctors and rural patients physically together are costly enough.

Opportunities in value chain and food processing

- India being primarily an agriculture based economy investing in the future of rural youth through creating opportunities in agribusiness value chain ,food processing and entrepreneurship would be the right strategy to achieve rural economic growth and development goals.
- Food processing involves any type of value addition to agricultural produce including primary processing such as grading, sorting and packaging to improve marketability of food products.

- Whereas secondary food processing involves the value addition by transforming raw produce from its original state to a more valuable state with enhanced food quality, safety and shelf life.
- **The Village adoption program (VAP)** is a unique program designed by NIFTEM to empower rural youth and promote entrepreneurship in food processing. The team consists of students from Btech, Mtech and MBA programmes of food related disciplines.

Sanitation: the journey so far

- To make the country “open defecation free” by October 2, 2019 -a promise made by the Prime minister, the statistics reveal that the coverage of toilets has zoomed to 93% by the end of September, 2018.
- 2.48 lakh Villages, 203 districts and five states-Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Uttarakhand and Haryana are now open defecation free.
- Eliminating open defecation is not only about building latrines but requires adequate methods for behavioral change and sufficient water supply is a pre-requisite do either sustainable or safe use of adequate, low cost latrines.
- Chief of WASH (water, sanitation, Hygiene) UNICEF India said: “in a fully open defecation free (ODF) community, considering medical costs and mortality averted, the value of time saving, financial savings for each household is Rs 50,000 per year.
- At this juncture, there is a need for a program of epidemiological research on environment health impacts in the country related to water and sanitation, soil and ecology in order to create proper understanding.

Swachh Bharat mission: Success story Initiatives from Murshidabad and Kanchipuram

- Innovative triggering methods were used such as **Gandhigiri** by offering flowers or

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai sweets to those who resist and **Nazardari** teams visited homes to motivate people about toilet usage and cleanliness.

- Nirmal tea stall, Nirmal barber shop, Safai Abhiyan, Para baithak (community sitting) by NRLM to discuss sanitation, oath taking at assembly by students.
- Students started writing letter to their parents pleading for toilets.
- Under MUKTI project, the district identified places of open defecation and made plans to transform and beautify places by land reclamation, plantation and greenery through MGNREGS.
- Competitions were carried out in drawing, oratory ,essay writing and painting ,the topics being cleanliness, importance of toilet usage and safe sanitation practices.

Innovative entrepreneurship among rural youth

- **Skill development of rural youth (STRY):** It is aimed at imparting skill-based training to rural youth on agro-based vocational areas & allied areas to promote employment of rural areas and creation of skilled manpower to perform farm and non-farm operations.
- **USTTAD:** The Ministry of Minority Affairs has launched a new scheme ‘Upgrading The Skills And Training In Traditional Arts/ Crafts For Development’ (USTTAD), which aims to preserve traditional arts and crafts of minorities and build capacity of traditional crafts ,persons and artisans.

Empowering rural youth for nation building

- Rural youth instead of merely depending on Government jobs, a larger number of youth are turning to the private sector and self-employment. Thanks to major initiatives launched by the government such as skill India and MUDRA.
- Illiteracy of our farmers was the greatest drawback in our quest for rural economic

prosperity and therefore great emphasis has to be put on education.

- There is a need to impart proper education to women as ignorant mother's can't rear a good family.
- The youth should come together in their crusade against poverty, unemployment, social evils and other such maladies.
- While one should be assertive about claiming one's fundamental rights, one should be equally conscious of one's fundamental duties as enshrined in the constitution of India.

Government initiatives for youth in North East and J&K

North East

- The Skill Ministry has planned state skill development mission for few of the north eastern states under the chairmanship of the CM and the steering committee with industry representatives.
- The mission is working to train youth with the help of Government ITIs and private agencies on areas like hospitality, tourism, nursing, para medics, designing and garments, automobile, soft skills for employability in any sector.
- Department of North East region along with north eastern development finance corporation Ltd is also setting up a fund worth RS 100 crore to promote startups in the N-E states, offer subsidy incentives in NER for units generating employment.
- STINER -Science & technology interventions in the north east region aims to bring relevant technologies developed by the academic, scientific and research

Officers IAS Academy, Chennai institutions to the artisans and farmers especially women.

Jammu and Kashmir

- **UDAAN** is a unique partnership between corporates, NSDC and the youth who are graduate, post graduate and three year diploma engineers to provide skills and job opportunities.
- **Sadbhavna** (Harmony): Under this the Indian army runs programmes for youth of J&K, runs national integration tour, vocational training centres.
- ISRO signed an MoU with the central University of Jammu for setting up of the Satish Dhawan centre for space science in the university for tapping potential of space applications for the region of J & K in various fields like disaster management, health, education, communication, weather forecasting, land use planning etc.

Conclusion

- With these schemes and initiatives the youth of the rural areas got a good opportunity to start a small trade or restart the business once closed due to lack of funds.
- At this time, when India is governed by the targets laid down in sustainable development goals, development without the active involvement of youth may not be possible.
- Promoting entrepreneurship in food processing and value addition among rural youth is an important way to reduce the income disparities between rural and urban people.