

OFFICERS'

Pulse

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Coverage.

The Hindu
PIB
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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 & Social Issues

Draft data protection bill

What is it about?

- It is a bill to protect citizens' personal data.

Why in the news?

- Justice B.N. Srikrishna panel submitted its report on data protection as well as the draft 'The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018'.

Some Contentious Issues in the bill

- Exceptions for use of data and data Localisation requirements by the government.
- Every offence under it is cognizable and non-bailable creating more problems including acting as a sort of trade barrier, thus hampering business.



DigiYatra

What is DigiYatra?

- A facility developed by the Ministry of Civil Aviation
- The DigiYatra initiative envisages providing airline travellers in India, a pioneering 'digitally unified flying experience' across all stages of their journey
- This will also facilitate walk-through security scanners swiftly owing to advanced biometric security solutions.
- The platform will be built on 4 key pillars, like Connected Passengers, Connected Airports, Connected Flying and Connected Systems

Introduction of the initiative

- It is initially being introduced in Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Varanasi and Vijayawada airports but will be introduced elsewhere.

How does it work?

- A passenger needs to enroll in to DigiYatra program through AirSewa app and a DigiYatra verified passenger will get hassle free entry at airport through E-Gates.
- The ID verification will be done by the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS)-approved Government ID.
- At the entry gate a single token for the passenger will be created.

Benefits

- It aims at giving the traveler a hassle-free airport experience right from entering the place till the boarding gate, thus cutting down long queues that are so infamous in almost all airports in India.
- Plan their trips efficiently by identifying price trends and estimate future airfares at the time of ticket booking
- Optionally link their Aadhaar to airlines and other ecosystem players at the time of booking for faster airport entry and automated check-ins without requiring any paper-based interventions
- Walk-through security scanners swiftly owing to advanced biometric security solutions
- Receive relevant information pertaining to various facilities, protocols, airline timings, queue lengths at airports etc
- Engage in customised digital offerings at experience zones
- Get real time notifications about congestion and delays to have greater visibility on the next step of journey
- Conveniently navigate through the airport using digital guidance systems, interactive kiosks and augmented reality apps
- Stay connected during flights and indulge in immersive experiences. Also book in-flight services and destination-based offerings digitally

- Get a prompt when their luggage reaches the baggage claim belt
- Submit grievances, share experiences and provide feedback



Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill

Background

- The Bill amends the IPC, Cr. PC, the Indian Evidence Act and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. The Bill, once passed by the RS, will replace the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance promulgated in April 2018.
- Amidst the increasingly disturbing trend of the rapes happening in the country and due to increased pressure from various quarters of the civil society, this amendment bill was passed.

Key Features

- The minimum punishment for the rape of a girl under 12 will be 20 years of rigorous imprisonment, the maximum being the death sentence or life imprisonment, gang rape attracts life term or death.
- The minimum punishment for rape of a girl under 16 will be 20 years of rigorous imprisonment, extendable to life imprisonment, gang rape attracts life term.
- The minimum punishment under the Bill for the rape of a girl over 16 is 10 years, extendable to life (under Section 376, IPC).
- The Bill also provides for investigation of rape cases within two months from FIR registration.
- No provision for anticipatory bail in the case of rape of a girl below 16. Further, fast track special courts for rape cases would be set up.

Conclusion:

- Considering the quantum and brutality of rapes happening in the country, this is a move in the right direction.

Anti-lynching Bill

What is lynching?

- It is an unlawful murder of a person by an angry mob of people.

Why in the news?

- Recently there is an exponential rise in such cases creating serious law and order problems, some involving the use of paramilitary and military force to bring the affected areas under control. The latest being 5 members of the Nathjogi nomadic tribe being killed in Dhule, Maharashtra, on the suspicion of being child kidnappers.
- The proposed Bill seeks death punishment to all those who involve in lynching.

NOTA

What is NOTA?

- "NOTA" or 'None of the Above' has been provided as an option to the voters in elections.
- The apex court directed the Election Commission to have an option of 'None of The Above' (NOTA) on the electronic voting machines (EVMs) and ballot papers in a major electoral reform in 2013.
- Earlier, in order to cast a negative ballot, a voter had to inform the presiding officer at the polling booth. A NOTA vote doesn't require the involvement of the presiding officer.

Why in the news?

- Supreme Court reserves its ruling on a PIL, which is backed by the Centre, to scrap the option of NOTA from RS polls.

Context

- CJI Dipak Mishra noted that NOTA is meant only for universal adult suffrage and direct elections and not polls held by the system of proportional representation by means of the single transferable vote as done in the Rajya Sabha.

But...

- However, the Election Commission contends that a person, along with a right to vote, also has the right not to vote even in an open ballot system.



Status of NRC

Background

- Close to 40 lakh people have been left out in the recently updated NRC cutting across all divides including former President FA Ahmed's nephew, grandchildren of freedom fighters like Bahadur Gaonburah, among others.
- Linguistic and religious minority organisations said there were scores of people whose ancestors figured in the 1951 NRC, but were missing from the updated register 67 years later.
- Many were marked as 'D' voters (Doubtful voters) in this exercise.

What's in the news?

- The Supreme Court directed authorities to not initiate any action against 40 lakh persons left out of the draft Assam National Register of Citizens (NRC) published on July 30.
- The court ordered the government, in consultation with State NRC Coordinator to frame a fair and standard operating procedure (SOP) to deal with the claims and objections of those who did not find their names in the draft NRC.

About NRC

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam aims at identifying the native people of Assam from the vast number of illegal immigrants that have crossed into Assam from Bangladesh mainly.

Why NRC was updated?

- Assam has long demanded the need for this exercise to protect the interests of its people and protecting the Assamese identity.
- The issue is a very sensitive topic in the region and a cause of insurgency in Assam, where Assamese and Bodo communities fear being minorities in their own lands due to influx of Bengalis/Bangladeshis.
- However, Indian Bengalis fear that in the exercise, they may be evicted from the state as it is quite difficult to differentiate between Indian Bengalis and Bangladeshis although they have settled in Assam for many years.

UIDAI & Aadhaar

What are UIDAI and Aadhaar?

- Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), under the Ministry of Electronics & IT issues a 12-digit unique identity number called Aadhaar that can be obtained by residents of India, based on their biometric and demographic data.

- Aadhaar is currently the world's largest biometric ID system.

Why in the news?

- UIDAI has asked people to refrain from posting their Aadhaar number on public platforms such as social media, sending mail, etc.
- It said that the Aadhaar number is a personally sensitive information like bank account number, passport number and PAN number, which should be shared only on a need basis for a legitimate use for establishing identity and for legitimate transactions.
- This comes at a time when reports of data leakage on one side and assurances by former UIDAI chief claiming Aadhaar as fool-proof on the other side exist, leading to confusion among people.

Citizenship Amendment Bill

What is the amendment about?

- The Bill proposes citizenship to six persecuted minorities — Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists — who came to India from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh before December 31, 2014.

Why in the news?

- The tenure of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) examining the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 has been extended till the last week of the winter session of Parliament, when it is expected to submit its report following Speaker's approval.



Opposition

- There is stiff opposition to the Bill in Assam as it also seeks to grant citizenship to Hindus from Bangladesh. The final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was published on Monday and 40 lakhs of the 3.9 crore applicants did not make it to the list.
- Several political and civil society groups in Assam have said the Bill would pave the way for giving citizenship to illegal Hindu

immigrants from Bangladesh in Assam — in violation of the Assam Accord of 1985.

Assurances

- JPC Chairman has assured that all stakeholders will be consulted before filing the report.

PIL & Judicial Pendency

What is PIL?

- The acronym for Public Interest Litigation, PIL is a Judicial Innovation of the Supreme Court in order to ensure quick and effective legal solutions to an issue that requires immediate attention concerning the public, by-passing ordinary judicial procedures.

Why in the news?

- Comes under the backdrop of a BJP MP raising the issue whether PILs are contributing to the piling of cases in various courts of the country at Question hour in Lok Sabha.
- Answering the question, Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad said that PILs are intended to secure citizens' rights and pull up corrupt public servants and not a device to get legislative work done, which is the exclusive domain of the parliament, by the judiciary.

Population growth rate

Indian scenario

- India's population growth rate is highly skewed: Northern states (BIMARU) belt show increased fertility rates while the Southern states have reduced fertility rates.
- An accurate analysis of the population growth rate will help in the government to formulate various policies so as to address any issues that arise such as inter-state migrations, social sector policies such as employment, health, etc.
- Hence the exercise is important for a country like India, which has a population disproportionate to its available resources.

What's in the news?

- It is suggested that the population growth rate of India, currently the second most populous country in the world expected to overtake China around 2025 may be overestimated with the application of existing models of estimation of growth rate.

Why is the present model flawed?

- The present models don't account for education, which has shown strong

correlation with decreased fertility levels, which in turn lead to a decrease in population growth and account only for age, sex.

- Other factors such as mortality, migration rates also influence population growth rate of a region.

Adultery law & a woman's dignity

Adultery

- It is the willful sexual intercourse between a man and a woman where either one is married and the other unmarried.
- Countries apply family/ criminal law on its commitment according to their views and definition of adultery.

Why in the news?

- A petition to declare the Sec. 497 of the Indian Penal Code that makes adultery an offence as null and void has been presented to a 5-member judges' bench with the CJI.
- The very provisions that seem to make a woman a private possession of her husband and that adultery committed with the consent of the husband is not treated as a crime is the ground to strike down the provisions.
- Adultery is a ground for divorce but criminal law can't be applied when the act is consensual, according to the suit.
- Only Men can be punished for committing it in India currently.

Benami Transactions

What are Benami Transactions?

- The acquiring of any economic asset by a person in another person's name so as to escape legal obligations is termed as a benami transaction. It misuses/ abuses legal loopholes in the system to make an illegal activity appear fully legal.



Why in the news?

- In the absence of special courts to hear benami transaction cases, assets worth more than INR 5000 crore from at least 100 confirmed cases remain hanging despite the IT dept attaching the assets.

About the Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act

- Provides for establishment of courts to hear benami cases that have to be disposed in 6 months timeframe.

Pope's declaration

Who is the pope?

- The pope is also called as the supreme pontiff, is the Bishop of Rome and therefore *ex officio* the leader of the worldwide Catholic Church.
- The pope is considered one of the world's most powerful people because of his extensive diplomatic and cultural influence

Why in news?

- Calling 'death penalty' an attack on the dignity of human, the pope, said that it was unacceptable.
- Seeking to work with various countries for its abolition, the church maintained that while it may have been accepted in the past to protect common good, the present understanding is that a person's dignity isn't lost even in the most serious crimes committed.

Quota in promotion for SCs/STs

Context

- A Supreme Court ruling in 2006 (Nagaraj ruling) said that government cannot introduce a quota in promotion for its SC/ST employees unless they prove that the particular Dalit community is backward, inadequately represented and such a reservation in promotion would not affect the overall efficiency of public administration. The opinion of the government should also be based on quantifiable data.
- The government conveyed its limitation in providing accurate data and hence, on the broad assumption of the historical deprivations, the ruling may be reconsidered.

Why in the news?

- Referring to millennia old deprivation, discrimination against SC/STs and their poor representation, the government-initiated steps to seek quotas in promotion

in public employment of about 22.5% (15+7.5%).

- The govt contended that it needed to show 'affirmative action' by giving 'equality of opportunity' to them and hence presumed backward.

WHO on Swachh Bharat

WHO

- The acronym for World Health Organisation.
- WHO is an agency of the United Nations that specializes in international public health
- Established in 1948, with its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland.

Why in the news?

- The rural component of the mission SBM-Gramin has been lauded by the World Health Organisation (WHO) which estimates an increase in rural health life quality.
- It projects elimination of almost 3 lakh deaths due to common diseases such as diarrhoea and protein-energy malnutrition.
- These have been possible due to drastic reduction in cases of Open defecation, which is a main cause for prevalence of diseases like diarrhea, jaundice, hepatitis, etc.
- The report further estimated that 14 million Disability Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) can be avoided between 2014 and 2019.



About SBM-G

- The Swachh Bharat Mission- Gramin, aims at improving the levels of cleanliness through Solid and Liquid Waste Management activities and making villages Open Defecation Free (ODF), clean and sanitized in Rural India.

- This has direct positive consequences mainly affecting the health of the public as a whole, making them healthier, more socially aware.

Sports varsity Bill

A new Sports University

- The university is to come up in Manipur at a cost of INR 524 crore.
- It is envisioned to promote sports education in the areas of sports sciences, sports technology, sports management and sports coaching.

- The proposed university would also function as the national training center for select sports disciplines by adopting best international practices.
- The university will not be autonomous but would be able to establish Campuses throughout the country and outside India.
- MoUs with University of Canberra and Victoria University for development of curriculum, research facilities and laboratories etc. have been signed.

Why in the news?

- A Bill to establish a National Sports University to promote sports education was passed by the Lok Sabha.

Economy

FASTags

What are FASTags?

- A FASTag is a reloadable tag that automatically deducts toll charges and allows a vehicle to pass through a toll gate without stopping for the payment.
- It uses radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to make cashless payments through a prepaid account linked to it.



The Present System

- In the present system at toll plazas, considerable time is spent by vehicles to buy toll tickets to use the roads. For long distance journeys such as those by commercial vehicles such as buses and trucks, this leads to increased travel time.
- FASTags are aimed to eliminate this problem, thus offering a near-zero time stop at toll booths.

How does it work?

- The tag is fixed to the windscreen of a vehicle and an RFID antenna in the canopy of the toll gate scans the QR code and the tag identification number, following which the boom barrier lifts to allow a vehicle to pass through.
- The tag, which is valid for five years, comes in seven different colours — violet, orange, yellow, green, pink, blue, black. Each color is assigned to a particular category of vehicles.
- These are issued by banks that have an understanding with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) or can be obtained from toll plaza kiosks.

Advantages

- Quick, reliable and efficient road transport solution that can be used across the country thus reducing travel time for goods, services, people, thus bringing down logistics costs.
- Such tags are aimed at providing Non-stop seamless accessibility by roads across the length and breadth of the country.

Issues

- Lack of dedicated lanes to serve FASTag vehicles, thus there is no improvement to saving time and costs at toll booths.

Domestic Gold council

Context

- India is giving high priority to trade activities, especially exports in-order to boost its revenue.
- Jewellery making is a key area of interest for Indian exports as India is well known for its jewellery making industry.
- India is also one of the highest consumers of gold in the region.
- Exports from India in the field of jewellery is showing consistent growth.

A domestic gold council

- Amidst this background, the commerce minister, Suresh Prabhu convened the setup of a Domestic Council for Gold to aid exports of jewellery and to create an ecosystem to harness the true potential for jewellery-making in the country.

Purpose

- To address the problems faced by the jewellery manufacturing sector.
- To create clusters of jewellery production and export.
- Creation of huge job opportunities.

Additional Notes

- The proposed council will represent all the jewelers of India who will be the electoral college. They will form different interest groups and elect those who will sit in the council.
- The artisans will be helped by jewellery designers to come out with products with better value, which will be ultimately exported by big companies, thus earning valuable foreign exchange.

GDPR

What is GDPR?

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) sets rules relating to the protection of people's fundamental rights (including the right to privacy) and freedoms regarding the processing of personal data, applicable in the European Union.
- Flouting of rules attract hefty fines on companies.

Why in the news?

- Indian firms are growing, and spreading their wings globally. Hence, they must prepare for the obligations of a multinational organisation, and for those that do intend to conduct business within Europe, that they have prepared themselves to be GDPR-compliant.

What travel industry can do?

- The travel industry's experience in data security can provide tremendous benefit to those who wish to be GDPR compliant, where they comply with strict privacy norms involving transparency in data processing, privacy, security issues, understanding of data protection measures among others.
- This can encourage other sectors such as India's telecom, retail, insurance and banking that evince interest in European markets.



Power sector issues

Government's role in power sector issues

- The power generation in India is led by thermal power. Hence any issues regarding the procurement of coal, working of power plants, front end and back end linkages call for immediate attention by the government.

What is the plan?

- The govt is setting up a high-level empowered committee headed by Cabinet Secretary with representatives from the Ministry of Railways, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Power, Ministry of Coal, and the lenders having major exposure to the power sector to resolve the stress and revive such assets.

What are the focus areas?

- Various issues in the thermal power sector with a view to resolve them and take steps to maximise the efficiency of investment, including changes in the fuel allocation policy, regulatory framework, mechanisms to facilitate sale of power, payment security mechanisms, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), asset restructuring

company (ARC) regulations and any other measures proposed for revival of stressed assets so as to avoid such investments becoming NPA (Non-Performing assets).

Shell Company

What is a shell company?

- A shell corporation is a corporation without active business operations or significant assets but may have a bank account or may hold passive investments or be the registered owner of assets, such as intellectual property.
- These types of corporations are not all necessarily illegal, but they are sometimes used illegitimately, such as to disguise business ownership from law enforcement or the public.
- They are often created to avoid/evade taxes, for money laundering and many big companies create shell corporations to avoid attracting legal actions for the same.
- Legitimate reasons for a shell corporation include such things as a start-up using the business entity as a vehicle to raise funds, conduct a hostile takeover or to go public.



Why in the news?

- As a result of the presence of significant numbers of Shell companies, the government has sought to identify and shut them.
- The active firms perform normal financial activities such as trading/providing services and make their statutory filing on time unlike shell companies.
- Shell companies are a known front in black money transactions, hence the government aims to curb such activities.
- Maximum number of companies are registered in Maharashtra, Delhi and West Bengal.

Indian Pharmacy Export

PHARMAEXCIL

- Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council (PHARMAEXCIL), is the facilitator for Indian pharmaceutical exports set up by Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- Pharma drugs export is a major contributor to India's exports, the pharmaceutical business is valued at \$17.3 Billion
- North America, especially the US is the biggest importer of drugs from India.

Why in the news?

- The import of Indian pharma drugs to the US is in the decline and Indian Drug exporters are looking at other markets beyond US as potential targets for their exports.
- This comes at a backdrop when the US has tightened its norms through strict regulations, tough policy approach and pricing issues.
- Emerging markets identified for exporting Indian made drugs are Commonwealth of Independent States and Latin America.

Private sector defence

What's in the news?

- In a major step towards boosting private sector participation in domestic defence manufacturing, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) approved the implementation of Strategic Partnership guidelines on Monday.
- This model has four segments viz., submarines, single engine fighter aircraft, helicopters and armored carriers/main battle tanks, which would be specifically opened up for the private sector.
- According to this, one Indian private company would be selected in each segment which would tie-up with shortlisted global equipment manufacturers to manufacture the platforms in India under technology transfer.

Significance of the move

- Such partnership aims to enhance indigenous capabilities and create a vibrant ecosystem in the defence sector including manufacturing capabilities.

Women in agriculture

Indian Context

- In India, agriculture is increasingly being carried out by women, as men move out of their native places seeking jobs.

Census statistics

- According to the Census 2011, 55% of women workers were agricultural labourers and 24% were cultivators. However, only 12.8% of the operational holdings were owned by women, and 25%

this land belonged to the marginal and small holdings categories.

Economic Survey Recommendations

- Some recommendations made by the economic survey include women friendly initiatives such as earmarking at least 30% of the budget allocation for women beneficiaries in all ongoing schemes/programmes and development activities, initiating women-centric activities and focusing on women self-help groups to connect them to micro-credit through capacity-building activities.

Why in the news?

- A total of 8 women farmers from Assam, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Karnataka and AP have been selected to visit the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Philippines to learn about new rice farming techniques,
- This is an initiative by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), in order to raise the profile of women farmers.

Unsecured Loans

What are unsecured loans?

- Unsecured loans are loans that are approved without the need for collateral.
- Instead of pledging assets, borrowers qualify based on their credit history and income.

Why in the news?

- Share of unsecured loans (Such as personal loans and dues on credit cards) in retail credit is high, constituting almost a third of the retail portfolio.
- Banks' unsecured loans are at a record high, contributing 32% to the retail loan basket, which at 25% of the total loan book, is almost at its peak due to corporate credit growth being sluggish, as a result of which lenders have been on a retail lending spree

RBI data

- RBI data shows that while overall credit growth as on May 25 was 10.9% year-on-year, retail loans grew 18.6% and outstanding dues on credit cards grew 33.1%

Core industries

What are the Core Industries?

- Core industries are considered as the key movers of industrial growth in India.
- It consists of 8 sectors:
 - Electricity
 - Coal

- Cement
- Crude oil
- Natural Gas
- Fertilizers
- Steel
- Petroleum refinery products.

Why in the news?

- Core industrial growth accelerated in June to 6.7% due to increase in growth of the petroleum products and steel sectors at 12.06% and 4.42% respectively.
- However, growth in the coal sector slowed to 11.5%, while the crude oil and natural gas sectors both contracted, by 3.4% and 2.74%, respectively.
- Additionally, fertilizers saw growth slowing sharply in June to 0.93% and growth in the cement sector increased 13.18%

Safeguard Duty

What is Safeguard Duty?

- When imports of a particular product increase unexpectedly to a point that they cause or threaten to cause serious injury to domestic producers of like or directly competitive products, a safeguard which is a form of temporary relief is used.
- Safeguards usually take the form of increased duties to higher than bound rate or standard rates or quantitative restrictions on imports.
- Safeguards give domestic producers a period of grace to become more competitive vis-à-vis imports.

Solar Cell Manufacturing

- India has huge potential in solar power to meet its growing energy requirements.
- Countries such as China and Malaysia, also key countries that manufacture solar cells are able to sell such equipment at prices below what Indian firms can offer. Hence, the imposition of the tariff to protect India's firms from such cheap imports.

Why in the news?

- To protect indigenous solar cell manufacturers, the government has decided putting into effect a safeguard duty of 25% on import of solar cells from China and Malaysia between July 30, 2018, and July 29, 2019.
- The duty reduces to 20% for six months from July 30, 2019, and further to 15% in the subsequent half year.

Downside of introducing safeguard duty

- However, in the absence of cheap imports, the pricing of energy harnessed due to this will also increase, adding to costs.
- It could affect existing projects dependent on cheap imports and is likely to increase the bid tariffs to INR 2.9-3.1 per unit for the upcoming bids of photovoltaic cells/panels.



RBI raises rates

Repo rate

- Repo rate is the rate of interest which is applied by RBI to commercial banks when the latter borrows from RBI

What's in the news?

- Perceiving inflation, the RBI raised interest rates for the second time in as many months by 25 basis points, setting its benchmark repo rate at 6.5%.
- This was due to increased domestic inflation driven by an increase in crude oil prices.

Effects

- When RBI increases the repo rates, it means that it wants to cut down spending by banks and thus, makes borrowing more expensive. The banks consequently raise their rates of interests while lending to borrowers and hence makes loans more expensive.

PSU Categorization

Categorization of PSUs

PSU companies are divided into three categories

- Maharatna
- Navratna
- Miniratna (Category 1 & Category 2)

Current status

- There are currently 7 Maharatnas, 17 Navratnas and 53 Miniratnas-I and 16 Miniratna-II.

Basis of categorization

- Maharatna: Three years with an annual net profit of over Rs. 2,500 crores + Net worth

of Rs. 10,000 crores + Turnover of Rs. 25,000 crores. Eg: Coal India Limited, GAIL, BHEL

- Navratna: A score of 60 (out of 100), based on six parameters which include net profit, net worth, total manpower cost, total cost of production, cost of services, PBDIT (Profit Before Depreciation, Interest and Taxes), capital employed, etc. Eg: BEL, HAL, BPCL, HPCL
- Miniratna I: Have made profits continuously for the last three years or earned a net profit of Rs. 30 crore or more in one of the three years. Eg: AAI, Antrix Corporation Limited
- Miniratna II: Have made profits for the last three years continuously and should have a positive net worth. Eg: Bharat Pumps & Compressors Limited, National Film Development Corporation Limited

Why in the news?

- Coal India Limited, a Maharatna Enterprise has been asked to adopt global norms, conventions and standards by the Ministry of Coal.

Nipah Fever

About Nipah Fever

- First detected in a village called Nipah in Malaysia and later on in Bangladesh.
- The fruit bat is the natural host to the nipah virus, that triggers a deadly fever when transmitted to humans, who have contracted it through contact with fruits that have been in contact with bats.

- The fever is highly contagious and can result in death.

Why in the news?

- Kerala had recently been struck by the deadly nipah viral fever that claimed many lives and the worst affected districts were Malappuram and Kozhikode in North Kerala.
- Due to swift measures taken by the government that included spreading awareness and educating the masses about the methods of infection, symptoms, effective treatments and preventive measures helped in containing the spread of the disease.

Social Sector Spending

- It indicates the results of government expenditure on health and education in the society.
- While the state has yet to realize true economic benefits due to education as a result of various impediments, expenditure on social infrastructure has yielded positive dividends and improved the quality of public health.



International Relations

UAE launches amnesty scheme

Why in the news?

- There are many foreign workers staying illegally past their permitted duration of stay in the country as a result of expiration of the work permits/ plain illegal migration mostly Pakistanis, Afghans, Bangladeshis, Indians, Nepalis and Filipinos.

Significance for India

- Indians constitute the largest share of the expatriate community in the UAE.
- The scheme allows such illegal workers amnesty where they won't be arrested but efforts will be made to send them back safely home without paying any fines or allow them to find a job legally in 6 months.

Mattala Airport Project

Why in the news?

- India and Sri Lanka have formed a joint-venture through the Airports Authority of India and Airport and Airline Services Sri Lanka respectively on a 70:30 partnership to run the Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport in Hambantota, Sri Lanka.
- India is pumping about USD 225 Mn and shall lease the airport for 40 years.

The empty airport

- Considered the world emptiest international airport with presently nil international flights, the project was termed as a colossal waste of public money in Sri Lanka due to its Non-viability.
- Sri Lanka has two international airports: Colombo and Mattala-Hambantota.
- While the former is a regional hub, the latter, located in a commercially non-viable area has been unsuccessful in attracting commercial flights.



India's Interests

- Despite its non-viable outlook, India agreed to operate the airport due to strategic reasons as a counter to Chinese activities in the Hambantota port located nearby.
- The airport, was funded by Chinese EXIM bank but accumulated losses, due to which Sri Lanka is now struggling to repay China.

Chinese Aggression: Doklam

- China in recent years has increasingly shown an aggressive stance especially in terms of border disputes with almost all its neighbours and India has been vigilant of possible Chinese aggressions.

Doklam issue

- The Doklam issue refers to the military border standoff between the Indian Armed Forces and the People's Liberation Army of China over Chinese construction of a road in Doklam near a trijunction border area.
- In June 2017, Chinese troops with construction vehicles and equipment began extending an existing road southward in Doklam, a territory which is claimed by both China as well as Bhutan.
- On 18 June 2017, around 270 Indian troops, with weapons and two bulldozers, entered Doklam to stop the Chinese troops from constructing the road. On 28 August, both India and China announced that they had withdrawn all their troops from the face-off site in Doklam.



Why in the news?

- MEA Sushma Swaraj, has said that the Doklam issue had been solved by diplomatic means without causing any loss to India's interests.
- While acknowledging that Bhutan and China have border disputes, the Doklam site, which concerns India, Bhutan and China has been resolved.

'Made in India' tank engines

Why in the news?

- Indigenously made battle tank engines, V-46-6 and V92S2, that power the T-72 Ajeya tank and the T-90 Bhisma tank, were handed by the Defence Minister to the Vice Chief of Army Staff.

About the tanks

- These tanks were manufactured by the Engine Factory Avadi (EFA), a unit of Ordnance Factory Board in Chennai.
- Established in 1987, more than 12000 tanks were produced till date.



Significance

- The development signifies self-reliance and capability on the part of the army to produce various armor and armaments that are competent enough to deter any hostility and aggression shown by an enemy.
- It reduces the country's dependence on foreign countries for various services and goods and can save huge costs/expenditure that can be used to achieve other government commitments.

TB meningitis

Tuberculosis

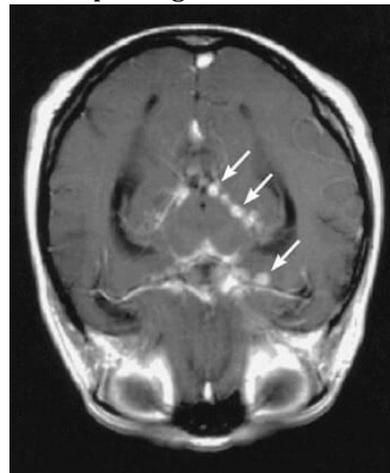
- Tuberculosis (TB) is a disease caused by a germ called Mycobacterium tuberculosis.
- Contagious and spreads through air when infected person coughs or sneezes.
- Affects the Respiratory system, especially the lungs.
- It is prevalent among 1/3rd of the human population on earth.
- The increasing multi-drug resistance of the bacteria towards the conventional TB drugs pose a special challenge.

TB Meningitis

- Tuberculous meningitis is tuberculosis infection of the meninges—the system

of membranes which envelop the central nervous system.

- TB Meningitis is the most severe form of TB.
- The current method of diagnosis of TB meningitis is made by analysing CSF collected by lumbar puncture.
- The currently used diagnostic methods: microscopy and culture of cerebrospinal fluid suffer from huge limitations in terms of poor sensitivity and long turnaround time of up to eight weeks.



Why in the news?

- A new diagnostic test for TB meningitis with nearly 100% sensitivity and about 91% specificity has been developed.

How does it work?

- The test is based on a derivative of a DNA aptamer that shows high binding affinity and high specificity to a TB antigen (HspX).
- Besides higher binding affinity, there is significantly higher load of the HspX antigen in cerebrospinal fluid samples, leading to higher sensitivity.

Adoption of the new method

- A quick point-of-care diagnostic test for TB meningitis that uses the DNA aptamer has already been adapted to a sensor format and is being evaluated on clinical samples which takes half an hour for the entire procedure.

CRISPR

What is CRISPR?

- CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats) is basically the hallmark of a bacterial defense system that forms the basis for CRISPR-Cas9 genome editing technology.

- It is the technology that uses gene editing techniques to repair damaged cells.
- Since genes are nothing but a sequential repetition of molecules in DNA/RNA, which are the building blocks of all multicellular organisms, any damage anywhere in the chain can be identified and 'edited' to correct it.
- This shows potential to revive or regenerate damaged body parts aside from acquiring greater immunity.

Why in the news?

- There has been concern due to recent findings about the CRISPR that uses gene editing to repair cells.
- Some recent studies indicate that this technology edited cells could initiate cancer by damaging a key protein that blocks cancer growth, P53.



MPT63 Protein

What about it?

- Research on MPT63, a protein secreted by *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* the bacteria that causes TB as a potential drug target is being carried out.
- The stability, delivery efficiency and specificity of a biologically-derived drug are often optimized by combining it with a nanoparticle onto the target to achieve best known results. This is increasingly being refined so that drug delivery is most effective for all diseases, including TB.

Significance

- Scientists may have found a lead to find a cure to TB.
- While further research is being carried out in this direction, it shows promise in the eventual discovery of a potential cure to this deadly disease that burdens India's health significantly.

An 'ISRO-like' ocean mission

Context

- India has been allotted a site of 75,000 square kilometers in the Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB) by the UN International Sea Bed Authority for exploitation of polymetallic nodules (PMN)- a rich source of many important metals found on the sea floor.

Ocean Mission

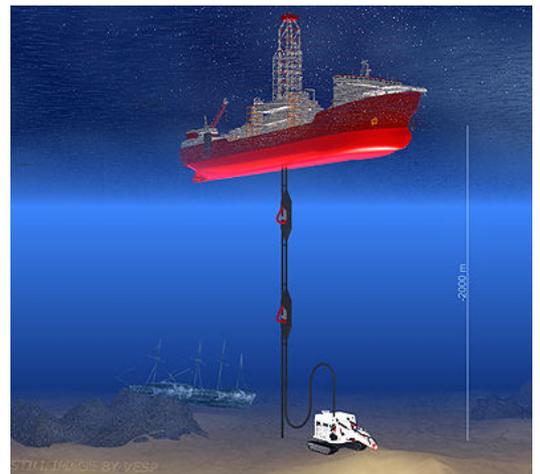
- Recent successes in various space missions have encouraged the Indian government to invest in the research of the oceans.
- The project titled DOM- Deep Ocean Mission is under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

Why in the news?

- Focus is on technologies for deep-sea mining, underwater vehicles, underwater robotics and ocean climate change advisory services, etc.

Significance

- Such research will enable us to develop suitable technology to harness these besides potential hydrocarbon reserves located beneath the ocean.



Ban on oxytocin

What is Oxytocin?

- It is a hormone that has a key role in social bonding, sexual reproduction in both sexes, and pre and post childbirth.
- It is released into the bloodstream by the Pituitary gland in response to stretching of the cervix and uterus during labor and with stimulation of the nipples from breastfeeding.
- It is also used as a medication to assist childbirth.
- However, it is being misused in agriculture and dairying to increase yields, leading to health risks.

Why in the news?

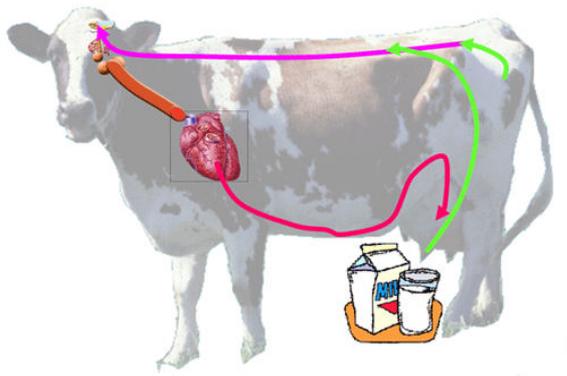
- The government had induced a ban in order to stop its misuse but ended up

creating a shortage of its availability to those who urgently required it.

Impact of the ban

- Oxytocin, a hormone naturally present in the body but manufactured synthetically to meet deficient people especially pregnant mothers is in short supply due to government induced ban.
- This has created a lot of confusion in hospitals and brought about challenges to the health of pregnant mothers.

OXYTOCIN



West Nile Fever

West Nile Virus & Fever

- Transmission of West Nile Virus to humans is often due to the bites from infected mosquitoes such as Culex and Monsonia.
- Mosquitoes become infected when they feed on infected birds.

Infection

- Infection with West Nile virus is either asymptomatic (no symptoms) in around 80% of infected people, or can lead to West

Nile fever or severe West Nile disease. About 20% of people who become infected with West Nile virus will develop West Nile fever.

Symptoms

- Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, and body aches, nausea, vomiting, occasionally with a skin rash (on the trunk of the body) and swollen lymph glands.

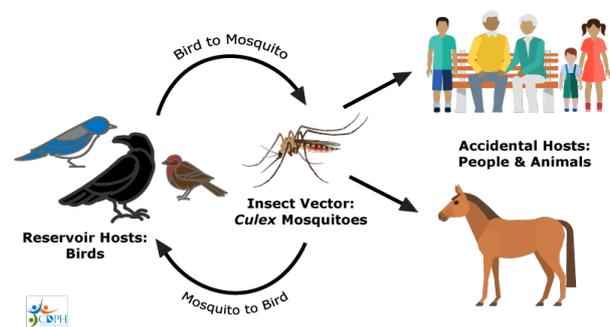
Treatment

- Treatment exists for patients with neuro-invasive West Nile virus, often involving hospitalization, intravenous fluids, respiratory support, and prevention of secondary infections.
- No vaccine is available for humans.

Why in the news?

- Even as the city limps back to normalcy after the Nipah virus outbreak that claimed lives, a new suspected case of the West Nile Disease is being looked into.
- Samples have been sent to National Institute of Virology, Pune for confirmation.

West Nile Virus Transmission Cycle



Environment

Invasive Alien Species

What is an Invasive Species?

- According to the Convention on Biological Diversity, an invasive alien species is a species that is established outside of its natural past or present distribution, whose introduction and/or spread threaten biological diversity”
- They are the 2nd most common threat associated with species that have gone completely extinct, and are the most common threat associated with extinctions of amphibians, reptiles and mammals.
- Invasive species can be plants, animals, and other organisms (e.g., microbes).
- Human actions are the primary means of invasive species introductions

What are they?

- It is referred to the recent discovery of alien species, those that are not native to an area flourishing in these areas that are beyond their nativity.

Why in news?

- It has been found that India is one of the ‘hotspots’ of naturalized plant species and among the seven regions in the world that have the highest number of invasive species.

Situation in India

- The list of naturalized exotic or alien species, range from the common guava (*Psidium guajava*) to prolific invasive-s such as lantana (*Lantana camara*)
- Tamil Nadu, followed by Kerala has the highest number of invasive species. Lakshadweep has the least.

International Tiger Day

What is the International Tiger Day about?

- Created in 2010 at the Saint Petersburg Tiger Summit, when 13 ‘Tiger-Range’ countries came together.
- it is an annual celebration to raise awareness for tiger conservation, held on 29 July.
- Its global goal to double the number of wild tigers by the year 2022.

India’s Tiger records

- The national animal of India, tiger, is an endangered species.
- About 70% of world’s tigers are in India and 2% of India’s land area comprise of tiger reserves.

- Despite these, tiger deaths due to human activities like poaching, etc. remain a key concern.
- Also, in concern is lack of adequate infrastructure like man power & capacity building of forest staff.

Why in the news?

- India has shown good results in its tiger conservation measures in recent times, leading to increase in their numbers.
- The first successful inter-state translocation of a pair of tigers was carried out from tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh to Satkosia in Odisha.
- Such success stories were highlighted on Global Tiger Day on 29 July.

Development projects pose threat to habitats.

- Even though recent successes of India’s tiger conservation measures deserve credit, anthropogenic activities such as infrastructural projects cutting through ecologically sensitive areas such as tiger reserves, sanctuaries, biological hotspots like the eastern ghats are causing increased threats to the biodiversity and the environment at large.
- The lack of monitoring institutions for these anthropogenic activities so that they don’t damage the environment is a main issue.
- This comes into light after a slew of development projects such as the river linking project of MP-UP (Ken-Betwa link) for irrigation, road laying projects in Telangana/ AP.

Postal cover released to mark Global Tiger Day.

- Highlighting the events of tiger conservation measures and their successes besides promoting the initiative, India Post released special 6500 covers at a cost of 25 rupees per cover in Bandipur, Karnataka.
- Saving the national animal from the brink of extinction, tiger conservation measures have come a long way and now shows promise in revival of tiger populations.
- The western ghats boast of a region of a huge tiger conservation area that includes reserves such as Bandipur, Nagarhole, Wayanad, Mudumalai, Sathyamangalam, that span across Karnataka, Kerala and TN.

Arsenic contamination

Arsenic

- It is a toxic metalloid that can cause various health problems including death.
- Due to its usage in industries/its presence in certain raw materials, untreated effluents containing it, when released into the environment causes serious contamination of ground water, leading to bio accumulation, eventually having the highest effects of the pollution and humans.
- This problem is acute in Eastern UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

Why in the news?

- Recent studies show the increase in arsenic content in ground water and its presence in paddy.

Findings

- It pointed out that arsenic concentrations decreased from the root to the grain and the highest concentration was observed in the initial or vegetative state in the first 28 days. It reduced during the reproductive stage (29-56 days) and again increased in the ripening stage.
- It also pointed out that the uptake of arsenic is faster in young roots in a vegetative state than in older tissues with a higher concentration of iron in root soil in the reproductive phase.

Idukki reservoir

About the reservoir

- The Idukki reservoir has three dams - Idukki, Kulamavu and Cheruthoni.
- Idukki dam is a curvature arch dam constructed across the Periyar River in Kerala.
- It is India's first arch dam built in 1973, and the largest in Asia

Why in the news?

- Due to heavy rains, the Idukki reservoir, across the river Periyar in Kerala observed the water level at 2395 ft, prompting the state to issue 'orange alert'
- This is a signal of caution in the downstream areas including Idukki, Pathanamthitta and Ernakulam. Districts.
- If the water level inches towards 2400 ft, 'red alert' would be issued to warn people in the flood plains of a possible opening of the dam to release excess water thereby causing flooding.



Dal Lake

Dal Lake

- Dal lake in Srinagar is an urban lake, which is the second largest in J&K
- It is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir and is coined as the Jewel in the crown of Kashmir or Srinagar's Jewel.
- The lake is also an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting.
- The lake has 'floating gardens' known as "Rad" in Kashmiri, blossom with lotus flowers.

Why in the news?

- Due to its rapid shrinking as a result of human activities, steps to save the iconic Dal and Wular lakes have been sought.

Environmental Damage

- The water quality of the lake had deteriorated due to intense pollution caused by untreated sewage and solid waste released into the water body.
- Further, increased pollution, encroachments have clogged inflows and hindered circulation leading to its shrinkage.
- The Governor has appointed the Dredging Corporation as the nodal consulting agency to formulate a plan for dredging parts of the land masses in the interiors of the lake.
- The possibility of installing holding tanks and bio-digesters to make sure that houseboats do not discharge sewage will also be examined.



Miscellaneous

Fields Medal

About Field's Medal

- Coined as the 'Nobel Prize in the Mathematics' field, the award is given to the brightest in the field of mathematics every four years.

Awardees this year

- This year's recipients, announced on Wednesday at the International Congress of Mathematicians in Rio de Janeiro, include one of the youngest ever: Peter Scholze, a professor of mathematics at the University of Bonn, who is 30 years old.
- The other Fields medalists this year are Caucher Birkar, 40, of the University of Cambridge in England; Alessio Figalli, 34, of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in

Zurich; and **Indian-origin** Akshay Venkatesh, 36, of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, USA.



News in-depth

The Hindu Editorials

The narrow and the transformative

Why in News?

- The SC is hearing critical cases related to Section 377 of IPC and Sabarimala Issue, which have immense cultural significance.

Narrow Vs Transformative

- The school of thought that advocates narrow approach demands that its reasoning should be limited to technical points of law, avoid constitutional questions, decide only the case before it, and avoid establishing a precedent. The role of the court, in short, is to do everything it can to lower the stakes and take a pragmatic, problem-solving approach to the conflict.
- A rival philosophy of constitutional adjudication to this is the Transformative approach which holds that the Constitution is a transformative document, whose goal is to erase and remedy long-standing legacies of injustice. Therefore, it is more ideal-oriented and expansive than the former.

Section 377 Judgment

What is the issue?

- Section 377 of the IPC is an archaic British law that dates back to 1861 and criminalises sexual activities against the order of nature.
- In 2009, in a landmark judgment, the Delhi High Court described Section 377 as a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Following this, religious groups moved the Supreme Court for a direction against the verdict.
- The Supreme Court in 2013 overruled the Delhi High Court's order and reinforced criminalisation of homosexuality stating that Parliament's job was to scrap laws. This judgment by the apex court was highly criticised by the LGBTQ community in India and was seen as a setback for human rights.
- In January 2018, the Supreme Court said a larger group of judges would re-consider

the previous judgment and examine Section 377's constitutional validity.

Narrow Approach

- In the Section 377 hearings, the government stated that it would not oppose the "reading down" of Section 377 as long as it was confined to same-sex relations between consenting adults in private. Government counsel urged the court to limit itself to simple decriminalisation, and nothing more.

Transformative approach

- In the 377 hearings, for example, the transformative approach was articulated by counsel representing mental health professionals, who argued that decades of social exclusion and ostracism of the LGBT community could not be remedied simply by "decriminalisation".
- Rather, it would require a declaration by the court that no institution, public or private, would henceforth be permitted to discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation or deny any person their civil rights.
- This would be a small step towards removing the structural and institutional barriers that continued to stand between the LGBT community and equal moral membership in the community.

Sabarimala hearings

What is the issue?

- The SC is hearing a plea seeking the entry of women in the age group 10-50 into the Sabarimala temple in Kerala.
- The five-judge constitutional bench is also examining the submission that believers of Lord Ayyappa of Sabarimala constituted a "Separate religious denomination" whose practice of not allowing women of particular age group inside the temple was protected by the constitution.

Narrow Approach

- Arguments before the court have been pitched upon the touchstone of religious

freedom and non-discrimination, the court may hold that the present rule exceeds the scope of the parent law, and is therefore invalid on purely statutory grounds.

- This would enable the court to avoid reaching any determination on whether Sabarimala is entitled to invoke the authority of religion (in this case, Lord Ayyappa's vow of celibacy) in order to deny

A good beginning

Why in News?

- The draft legislation on data protection was recently submitted by a committee of experts chaired by Justice B.N. Srikrishna to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Key Provisions of the Bill-

- It seeks to codify the relationship between individuals and firms/state institutions as one between "data principals" (whose information is collected) and "data fiduciaries" (those processing the data) so that privacy is safeguarded by design.
- Rights of the individual: The Bill sets out certain rights of the individual. These include the right to obtain confirmation from the fiduciary on whether its personal data has been processed.
- Obligations of the data fiduciary: The Bill sets out the obligations of the entity who has access to the personal data (data fiduciary). These include- implementation of policies with regard to the processing of data, and maintaining transparency, implementing security safeguards, grievance redressal etc.
- The Bill provides for the establishment of a Data Protection Authority. Orders of the Authority can be appealed to an Appellate Tribunal established by the central government and appeals from the Tribunal will go to the Supreme Court.
- The Bill allows processing of data by fiduciaries if consent is provided. However, in certain circumstances, processing of data may be permitted without consent of the individual.
- Exemptions: The Bill provides exemptions from compliance with its provisions, for

Layers of protection: on changes in Anti-corruption law

Introduction

- Parliament passed the amendments to the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988,

girls/women between the ages of 10 and 50 the right to worship at the shrine.

Transformative Approach

- If this approach is taken the court may hold that religion cannot be invoked to shield a discriminatory practice from constitutional scrutiny; and that, at the end of the day, constitutional morality must prevail over precepts that are rooted in any particular religion.

certain reasons including: (i) state security, (ii) prevention, investigation, or prosecution of any offence, or (iii) personal, domestic, or journalistic purposes.

- Offences and Penalties: Under the Bill, the Authority may levy penalties for various offences by the fiduciary including (i) failure to perform its duties, (ii) data processing in violation of the Bill, and (iii) failure to comply with directions issued by the Authority.
- Amendments to other laws: The Bill makes consequential amendments to the Information Technology Act, 2000. It also amends the Right to Information Act, 2005, and to permit non-disclosure of personal information where harm to the individual outweighs public good.

Critical Assessment

- The draft bill is a welcome step forward, but there are some grey areas.
- The exemptions granted to state institutions from acquiring informed consent from principals or processing personal data in many cases appear to be too blanket, such as those pertaining to the "security of the state". These are hold-all phrases, and checks are vital.
- The BN Krishna report had recommended a law to provide for "parliamentary oversight and judicial approval of non-consensual access to personal data".
- Without such an enabling law, the exemptions provided in the bill will fall short of securing accountability from the state for activities such as dragnet surveillance.

recently to enhance transparency and accountability of the Government.

- The amendment made some changes to move towards enhanced combating of corruption but also has some defects leading to criticism from various sections.

Need for Amendment

- The current amendments made to the PCA, 1988, had been initiated in 2013 due to most of its contentious sections.
- Section 13 (1) d, under which public servant can be blamed for securing a pecuniary advantage for another person “without any public interest”.
- Thus, it led to the prosecution of honest officials being prosecuted even when they gained nothing and merely exercised their power or discretion in favour of someone.
- Citizens or public giving bribe are spared from the punishment as it is not included as an offence.
- Wide context of criminal misconduct creates more space for reduction in prosecution or punishment when the corrupt officials try to place themselves in lowest possible crime

Provisions of the Anti-Corruption Bill

Bribery

- Giving bribe is an offence, punishable by a 7-year jail term.
- Exception to persons who are forced to give a bribe.
- Exception only if they report to a law enforcement authority within a week or 7 days from giving a bribe.

Criminal Misconduct

- Originally it used to cover offences including taking bribe habitually, getting anything free or at a concession, obtaining pecuniary advantage for oneself or for another without public interest.
- Under the amendment to the act, criminal misconduct will now include only two offences (already mentioned above):
 - Misappropriating of property entrusted to the public servant.
 - Amassing assets disproportionate to known sources of income.

Pre-Investigation Approval

- A police officer or investigating authority will need prior approval of relevant authority or government to begin investigation.
- The same does not apply when the accused is caught red-handed.

Sanction for Prosecution

- A sanction is needed for prosecuting former officials for offences done while in office.
- The decision on sanction request is to be made less than three months which may be extended by a month.
- Centre may notify about the guidelines.

Forfeiture of Property

- This section was introduced for the Special Court to attach and confiscate property, which was earlier done under a 1944 ordinance through civil courts.

What Happens Next

- Narrowing the offences under criminal misconduct to 2 will have a positive effect on honest public officials.
- Citizen liability for offering a bribe to a public servant is in line with the United Nations Convention against Corruption.
- India ratified this convention in May, 2011.
- Penal provisions can empower the people to refuse to pay a bribe.

Drawbacks

- Introduction of a prior approval norm to start an investigation on a person charged with bribery.
- A prior sanction to prosecution already exists in law.
- Creating another layer of protection in terms of approval to investigation makes the essence of making PCA stronger incomprehensible.
- There is no mention of the problem of refusal to take the complaint by the Police officers or any other agency.
- It will demoralise people against complaining about corrupt officials and also land them in getting harassed by those.
- Absence of strong legislative measures like penal provisions, setting an Ombudsman like Lokpal or Lokayukta, assuring citizens, time bound services and whistle blowers protection, etc.

Conclusion

- The core area of protection of honest Public officials can be achieved by the PC bill 2018.
- Unfair prosecution of honest public officials tampered their reputation and discouraged them from making bold decisions in governance and administration.
- But a genuine drive against corruption needs well defined legislative measures which is either started or yet to be started.

God cannot be Privatised

Introduction

- The Supreme Court's Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra has been hearing a batch of petitions challenging the ban the entry of women of certain age groups in to the Sabarimala temple.
- Menstruating women at 10 to 50 years of age are banned from entering the temple considering menstruation to impurity.
- The hearing gained importance following the government's release of Institutions of eminence drawing a relation of religion with education.

SC's Observation

- Temples are 'a public place of worship' and there is no concept of 'private mandirs'.
- It is considered a public place as it draws funds from the consolidated fund and people from all over the world comes to visit them.
- Article 25 (1) which is a fundamental constitutional right mandates freedom of conscience and right to practice religion.
- In a public place of worship, a woman can enter where a man can enter.
- A woman is a creation of God, and if not, God then be it Nature. Menstruation should not be the reason to exclude them from offering their prayers.

Acts favouring Ban

- Rule 3 (b) of Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965 is considered to be effecting the ban.
- It allows a 'religious denomination' to ban entry of women of 10 to 50 years of age.
- Directly in violation to the Fundamentals rights of equality and gender justice.

Public or Private

- Drawing funds from consolidated fund alone doesn't make temples public places as there are many temples which doesn't get any fund from it.
- Public institutions like scientific research stations, government offices which get funded by public money are not open to all.
- The concept of temples taking public funds has to be seen in a broader context.

Public place of Worship

- Temples are definitely public places of worship as they are allowed to collect money from the public.
- They collect money in the name of Gods whom cannot be privatised.
- Any attempt to claim right to privacy will lead to privatisation of God.

'Public' and 'God'

- The idea of Public means 'accessible to all' and God is the best example as he is the most public entity.
- Since God is meant to be present everywhere and accessible to all, praying to him doesn't need a permit of license from anybody.
- This raises the concern of the relation between the landowners and its use.
- The land can be a private property, but a temple raised on it cannot be.
- Being the most public entity, God cannot be privatised.
- Like god, even the rituals cannot be privatised as it made to the public entity, God.

Discriminating effect

- The problem of sabarimala temple is not about the right to pray or the right to worship and right to enter the temple.
- It is only the denial of menstruating women of 10 to 50 years age group which draws segregation within women.
- There is a clear discrimination of menstruating and non-menstruating women hurting the dignity of the women.

Outside Sabarimala

- But the same deity is worshipped by the women of the same age group in all other places other than sabarimala.
- Even in houses women of all age worships making it clear God is not a private entity and cannot be owned by individual or group of powerful peoples.
- The concept of banning of women in Sabarimala cannot be justified and sabarimala cannot claim to be a private place.

God and Education

- Education is one basic right which stands similar to god and prayer.
- Places of education such as schools, colleges are known to be temples of education.
- Right to basic education is a constitutional right and this basic right is now mostly in private hands denying access to the most needed underprivileged.

Conclusion

- The public discussion around Sabarimala will help in opening the temples of education to the millions who are denied on many accounts.
- Like God, Temples and other places of worship, Education, Air, Water are also necessary public entities.
- These should never be privatised in order to ensure the fundamental rights of the people are honoured.

The case for Increasing the Retirement Age of Judges

Introduction

- The idea of increasing the retirement age of judges of High Court and Supreme Court has been gaining some importance in recent times.
- This issue had been featured in the Venkatachaliah Report or Report of the National Commission to review the working of the Constitution as early as 2002 itself.
- 114th amendment in 2010, proposed to increase High Court Judges age to 65 also did not materialise.

Reality Check

- According to National Judicial Data Grid, more than 2.84 crore cases are pending in the Sub-ordinate Courts.
- 43 lakh cases before High Courts and 57,987 cases before Supreme Courts are pending to be cleared.
- The Judge-population ratio in India is among the lowest in the world at 19.66 judges per million people as of today.
- Judges in the High Court retires at the age of 62 and Judges of Supreme Court retires at 65.

Western Case

- Retirement age of 70 or tenures for life are the common one in western liberal democracies.
- In the Supreme Court of the United States, and in Constitutional Courts in Austria and Greece, Judges are appointed for life.
- In Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway and Australia, the retirement age for judges is 70 years.
- In Canada it is 75 and in Germany they retire at 68.
- Judge-Population ratio-
 - In 2016, United Kingdom had 51 judges per million people and the United States had 107.

- Australia had 41 and Canada had 75 judges per million people.

Benefits of Increasing Retirement Age

- Senior serving judges will bring with them the years of experience which in turn helps in fast tracking cases.
- Increasing retirement age along with increasing the number of judges will help in dealing with enormous pendency of cases.
- Advanced economies have higher litigation –to –population ratios.
- Indian economy is growing at a stable rate and with this the ratio of litigation –to –population ratio will increase exponentially.
- This can be handled well by increasing retirement age that would not be lost due to early retirement at 62 or 65.

Robust decision

- The issue of increasing the retirement age of judges requires serious and immediate consideration beyond political bias.
- Legislations provide ways for retired judges to head tribunals set up by the government till the age of 70.
- When legislation provides such kind of service till 70 years of age, it can also be extended to sitting judge whose tenure can be extended till the age of 70.

Positive Consequences

- Increasing the age of retirement has significant advantages in many fronts.
- It will ensure the continued presence of a strong talent pool of experienced judges.
- New judges can be appointed without displacing existing judges.
- It will address the problem of mounting arrears of unsolved pending cases.
- It will be a buffer against litigation explosion which is about to happen in the future.
- It will make post-retirement assignments attractive and, as a consequence,

strengthen the rule of law and the independence of judiciary.

Conclusion

- The increasing age of retirement of judges of both SC and HC will severely boost the confidence and faith of the people on

Longevity Science

Introduction

- With the advancement in science and technology and huge funding from various sources, the extension of years of living with quality is the serious puzzle for the scientist to solve.
- With time, cells in the body malfunction, the organ system starts to fail, bones becomes brittle and breaks and our senses began to diminish until the heart stops its work one day.
- These are inevitable, but did not stop researchers from engaging in the exploration in the possibilities to enhance life without compromising its quality.

Searching the Answer

- The answer to the puzzle could be in our genes which codes the characters and functions of every cell of the body.
- A start-up called Rejuvenate Bio, claims to make pet dogs through “targeted gene therapies” and this strategy will allow it to enter the \$70 billion pet market quickly and to create a large valuable anti-ageing data set, before moving to humans.
- A non-profit organisation, ‘Betterhumans’, is directly on target. It strives to radically extend healthy lifespan, end human diseases, and improve human cognition and wellbeing.
- Betterhumans collected 60 DNA samples of super-centenarians (105-119 years of age), and sequenced 45 samples that have been made public to help researchers in this field.

Old Age and Disease

- Researchers analysed the relationship between age of survival, morbidity and disability among centenarians (100-104 years of age) and super-centenarians.
- Inference is the older the age group, the later the onset of diseases such as cancer, dementia and even cognitive and functional decline.

The big five at 10

Why in News?

Judiciary only if they deliver the expected outcome.

- This is the first step towards ensuring the sustenance of democracy and respecting the sanctity of the institution.
- It finally will bring the Indian Judiciary in line with the norms of the world countries.

- According to scientist, *diseases of old age are simply the side effects of living.*
- There are 7 types of age-related damages that occur in our cells which occur at later stage in the case of old age groups.
 - Cell loss and Atrophy.
 - Divison-Obsessed cells.
 - Death-Resistant cells.
 - Mitochondrial mutations.
 - Intercellular Junk.
 - Extracellular Junk.
 - Extracellular matrix Stiffening.

Longevity factor

- Therapies are on the developing stages to remove, repair, replace or render harmless the damage caused by those cells.
- Many new Start -Ups and giants like Google and Apple are venturing in to this field which if successful would open a huge demand in the global market.

Ethical Concerns

- Humans represent only 0.01% of all life on earth but are responsible for the destruction of 83% of wild mammals.
- Targeted cell therapy to increase longevity catering only the rich raises ethical concerns.
- Equal accessibility to all, diminishing natural resources and human beings impact on biodiversity are some other concerns.

Conclusion

- The goals might sound fancy but most of the current research into longevity is backed by science.
- The process of ageing is enhanced already by choking air pollution, water and plastics dumped in food through fish products.
- But the ethical issues cannot be left aside as there is already an increasing bias in almost every sphere and the underprivileged are pushed to the periphery.

- The 10th BRICS summit was recently held at Johannesburg South Africa.

What is BRICS?

- BRICS is acronym for an association of five major emerging national economies viz, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. It was established in 2009. Originally it was known as BRIC before inclusion of South Africa in 2011. The first formal summit was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia in 2009.
- The BRICS Leaders' Summit is convened annually with discussions representing spheres of political and socio-economic coordination, in which member countries have identified several business opportunities, economic complementarities and areas of cooperation.
- The Chairship of the forum is rotated annually among the members, in accordance with the acronym B-R-I-C-S.
- As a partnership, it represents over 40% of the world's population and accounts for 22% of global GDP. Its initial goals were primarily the reform of global financial governance, the democratisation of the United Nations, and expansion of the Security Council.

BRICS Plus

- China introduced the "BRICS Plus" format at the Xiamen summit last year by inviting a few countries from different regions.
- South Africa emulated it, arranging the attendance of top-level representation of five nations of its choice: Argentina, Jamaica, Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt.
- The precise role of "BRICS Plus" countries will take time to evolve. An immediate benefit is the immense opportunities it provides for networking among leaders.

Key Highlights of the Johannesburg Declaration

- The BRICS seek to project stability and predictability in a rules-based order threatened by US President Trump
- The grouping sought to contrast recent US policies vis-à-vis global rules and norms and project the grouping as a guardian of order, embracing globalization and recognizing the need to act against climate change.
- The BRICS grouping is about far more than the yearly presidential summits
- The declaration lists 72 BRICS-related meetings that took place during South

Africa's BRICS presidency. In this sense, the BRICS grouping differs from other outfits such as the G7, which possess a far lower degree of institutionalization.

- It points to broader cooperation in areas related to the 4th Industrial Revolution.
- The BRICS have established the Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR) to discuss the challenges and opportunities that will emerge in the context of robotics, artificial intelligence, the blockchain, nanotechnology, quantum computing, biotechnology, The Internet of Things, 3D printing and autonomous vehicles.
- In this context, the BRICS countries have established the "BRICS Networks of Science Parks, Technology Business Incubators and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises".
- New Development Bank (NDB) regional office set up in Brazil
- The NDB is expanding its operations. The Johannesburg Declaration announces the creation of the Project Preparation Fund and welcomes the upcoming establishment of the Americas Regional Office in São Paulo, Brazil, which, alongside the Africa Regional Centre, will help the NDB consolidate its presence in those continents.
- The grouping promises to do more to overcome intra-BRICS obstacles
- The summit saw further consolidation of the business pillar. The BRICS Business Council has been actively enhancing trade and economic cooperation in diverse sectors ranging from manufacturing and energy to financial services and regional aviation.
- Besides, the leaders renewed their commitment to an inclusive and "people-centered approach" on development. The steady progress in interactions through sports, films, education, culture and tourism has been commendable.

India's Contribution

- To Delhi's satisfaction, four paragraphs in the summit declaration were devoted to the problem of international terrorism. But no decision was taken to set up the BRICS credit rating agency that India favours.
- The India-South Africa partnership helped to ensure that the Johannesburg Declaration was balanced and well-rounded in its orientation.

A Balancing Act

Why in News?

- Parliament has passed the Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill.

Background

- The Parliament has passed Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Bill 2018 to enhance transparency and accountability of the government. The Bill amends various provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act (PCA), 1988.
- The primary objective of these amendments is to tone down law enforcement excesses without diluting the authority of agencies like the CBI; or, in other words, to strike a balance between enforcement overzealousness and the need for stringent action against corrupt public servants.

Key Highlights

- The bill redefines criminal misconduct to cover just the misappropriation of property and the possession of disproportionate assets. It narrows definitions and penalties for a range of offences and outlines powers and procedures for seizing the property of public servants accused of corruption.
- Giving bribe made punishable offence: The Bill introduces the offence of 'giving a bribe' as a direct offence. A person who is compelled to give bribe who reports the matter to law enforcement authorities within seven days will not be charged with this offence.
- Prior approval for investigation: It makes mandatory for taking prior approval of
-

Numbing numbers

Why in News?

- The 2nd draft of the NRC was recently released.

What is NRC?

- It is a list of Indian citizens which is meant to decide who is a bona fide Indian citizen and those who fail to enlist in the register will be deemed illegal migrants. First list was made in 1951 across India according to the census of that year.
- It is for the first time that it is being updated and that too only in Assam. Now, it is not linked to census but one has to link oneself to a family member whose name had appeared either in the NRC of 1951, or to any of the state's electoral rolls prepared

relevant Government or competent authority to conduct any investigation into offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant.

- The bill set trail time period within two if it is handled by a special judge. In case of delays, the reasons for it must be recorded for every extension of six months obtained.
- The Bill modifies definitions and penalties for offences related to taking a bribe, being a habitual offender and abetting offence. It also introduces powers for attachment and forfeiture of property of public servants accused of corruption.

Critical Assessment

- One of the amendments, which mandates prior government approval of the Central or State government to initiate an investigation into corruption charges, is being considered as ambitious besides details of the expanded new procedure are not yet known. The Central Vigilance Commissioner may have to step in with some practical guidelines. The exercise involved here is enormous, given the size of India's bureaucracy.
- Another major change is the deletion of the whole of the clause defining 'criminal misconduct' as the acquisition of a 'valuable thing' or 'pecuniary advantage' in a dishonest manner. The deleted clause was the sole effective weapon against a misbehaving senior official. This deletion is disappointing because corruption in high places is sophisticated and takes place in a highly clandestine manner.

till midnight of 24th march 1971. The year of 1971 is chosen as it was agreed in Assam accord 1985.

Background

- The issue has its roots in the anti-foreigner movement or 'Axom Andolan' that was launched in June 1979 by the All-Assam Students' Union (AASU). After years of mass protests that at times resulted in violence, including the Nellie massacre of 1983, the Assam Peace Accord was signed between the Rajiv Gandhi government, the AASU and the Asom Gana Sangram Parishad in 1985.
- Anyone who entered the State after the midnight of March 24, 1971, was

considered a foreigner. The State government was to “detect and deport” illegal Bangladeshi immigrants. However, successive governments in the State have failed to make progress in detecting and deporting foreigners as laid down in the Accord.

- In 2005, another agreement was signed among the Centre, the state government and the AASU. It mandated an update of the NRC.

SC on NRC

- The publication of the first draft of the NRC by December 31, 2017, was ordered by the Supreme Court. The top court has been hearing this case since July 2009 when Assam Public Works moved the court to

Friends or Seoul-mates?

Why in News?

- South Korean President Moon Jae-in’s four-day state visit to India early last month came at a time when Mr. Moon’s administration is seeking to upgrade India-South Korea relations.

New Southern Policy

- It is a new policy aimed at deepening ties with Southeast Asia, as South Korea seeks to curb its reliance on traditional trading partners like China and the United States. The “New Southern Policy” aims to better connect South Korea to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) grouping and India and expand the economic influence of Asia’s fourth-largest economy in the region home to more than half a billion people.
- During his tour to three ASEAN countries, President Moon outlined his “3P” vision to build a people-centered, peace-loving and mutually prosperous community through the New Southern Policy

Rationale

- To escape the power politics in Northeast Asia, South Korean policymakers believe that Seoul should diversify its relations with other major powers in the region, including India which they see as a viable alternative partner.

A Fundamental Error

Introduction

- A nine- judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India on 24th August, 2017

intervene in detecting and deporting foreigners.

Way Forward

- Upwards of four million, the number of those excluded from the second draft of the National Register of Citizens. To begin with, the claims of those left out in the NRC must be heard carefully, humanely.
- While the modalities of a standard operating procedure for claims and objections are being worked out, to be placed before the Supreme Court by mid-August, the window for contestation could be extended by a month.
- Home Ministry has also tweaked rules to enable applicants to move the Foreigners’ Tribunal, where earlier only the state could haul up a suspected alien before it.

India -South Korea Relations

- There are multiple dimensions to the uptick in India-South Korea strategic ties, including working together on ensuring freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce in the Indo-Pacific region; South Korea backing India’s bid for Nuclear Suppliers Group membership, especially when New Delhi has faced sustained opposition from China; and both nations working with third countries on a tripartite basis for regional development, exemplified by plans for capacity-building programmes in Afghanistan.

Recent developments

- South Korea set up a state-run research center on India and ASEAN under the Korea National Diplomacy Academy, which is tasked with establishing a theoretical foundation for the vision to diversify strategic partnerships across the Asian region.
- During the recent vision the President of South Korea remarked that his government wished to elevate relations with India to the same level as with other major powers in the world — namely, the U.S., China, Japan and Russia.

unanimously affirmed the right to privacy as a fundamental right under article 19.

- The court imposed upon the government a clear obligation to make a law safeguarding

a person's informational privacy, commonly referred to as data protection.

- The government had tasked a committee headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna to formulate such a law on July, 2017, which produced a set of recommendations and a draft law.
- The Personal Data Protection Bill, a draft law on the recommendations of the committee, despite being bound by the right to privacy judgement, undermines the legal principles within the judgement and also re-interprets them.

Where did it overstep

- The privacy judgement of 2017 expressly stated the importance of the individual as the beneficiary of fundamental rights.
- It rejected the argument that the right to privacy dissolves in the face of collective shared notions of the economic development.
- Both these key judgements are not favoured by the committee's report which holds to the principle of "common good and the economy" comes first and the 'individuals' second.
- In justifying the above, the report runs in to difficulties as it attempts to put together a regulatory agenda that promotes expansion of digital economy and state control with principle of right to privacy judgement.

Concept of 'State'

- The report's conception of State starts the trouble where it states the State's purpose falls under the two planks to serve the common good.
 - The State is the facilitator of human progress.
 - The State is commanded by the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP)
- The fundamental rights with help protect individuals against state's action comes second to that of DPSP.
- This ignores the very structure of the constitution in which the chapter guaranteeing enforceable Fundamental Rights precedes the non-enforceable DPSP.
- The report thus makes the State convenient in achieving its regulatory control over the public which is not an objective laid out in the privacy judgement of 2017.

Report's Justification of "State comes first"

- To see the individual as an atomised unit, standing apart from the collective, neither flows from our constitutional framework

nor accurately grasps the true nature of litigations on rights.

- Rights are not deontological ones, meaning a normative ethical position that judges the morality of an action based on rules.
- Just for the sake of exercising rights, an action should not be done without considering the outcome.
- The construction of a right itself is not because it translates itself into an individual good, but because such good creates a collective culture where certain reasons for state action are unacceptable.

From the SC's Privacy Judgement

- Constitutions like our own are means by which individuals, the people of India create 'the state', a new entity to serve their interests and be accountable to them.
- The Individual is the focal point of the Constitution because it is in the realisation of individual rights that the collective wellbeing of the community is determined.
- Liberty, which is the family to which right to privacy belong is valuable in democracy not only as a means but as an end in itself.
- These judgements fall in stark contrast to the Committee report's conception of State and primacy of Individuals.

Jargon laden

- The language used in the report such as 'deontological categories' increased the complexity in reaching to the masses.
- A technical document published only in English, with such complex language alienates ordinary Indians from engaging with a subject of real importance to each of us.

Reframing the Right

- A nine - judge Bench where all the nine judges pronounced unanimous judgement upholding the right to privacy as a Fundamental Right is a rare case.
- Such a judgement becomes more critical where concerns of the liberty of individuals and attempt to correct an imbalance of power exist.
- The justice B.N. SriKrishna Committee report poses a danger to such a high constitutional principle by not disobeying it, but by disregarding it.
- By re-framing & re-interpreting the right to privacy the report tries to take away the most important assurance and grant provided by Supreme Court, the most celebrated 'right to privacy'.

Conclusion

- The current attempt to tamper the right to privacy and disregarding the judgement on privacy will entrench the position of the

The Public-Private Gap in Health Care

Introduction

- It is a hard reality to accept that not all medical interventions made by the scientific community to enhance quality life are available to every citizen who needed it.
- The gap between what is technologically possible and what government hospitals generally provide widened with the technological interventions made in the medical care starting in the 1980s.
- The recent controversy about the working of organ transplant programme in the State of Tamil Nadu brought back the focus on to the annoying question of Medical Rationing in India.

NITI Aayog's Document

- The 'Three Year Action Agenda, 2017-18 to 2019-20, a framework by NITI Aayog to enhance the development strategy and infuse more transparency.
- It included health care and recommended the Government to prioritise preventive care rather than curative care.
- It also advised the Government to pay attention to better the administration of the entire health sector instead of focussing only on the provision of health care.
- The two sectors, private for who can afford it and public hospitals for who cannot afford will continue to function in the similar way.

Medical Rationing

- The idea of public health on the whole is on the principle of equality for all, where as the policies have not matched the goal.
- Medical interventions made from time to time to enhance quality of life are not accessible to all sections of the people, especially the weaker sections.
- Expensive nature of these interventions makes it accessible only to the rich and the affluent class who can pay for them.
- This is known as Medical Rationing and the token provision of these interventions provided in a few government hospitals is merely an attempt to cover the rationing and appear fair on the outside.

Hollow policies

- Transplanting a human organ is not a simple process which merely needs an

two entities which already wield the most power over the ordinary Indians- the corporate and the Government.

expensive infrastructure and trained human resources.

- For the continuing functioning and success of the transplanted organs itself, expensive medication is needed, making the overall transplantation process highly expensive.
- The new Ayushman Bharat health scheme aims to provide secondary and tertiary care to those who are socio-economically deprived.
- It provides a health insurance cap of 5 lakh rupees per family which is not enough to access many interventions in the health sector mainly the highly expensive Organ Transplantation process.
- In India, the out of pocket medical expenses are about 70% of all medical expenditure and this particular intervention is only affordable to one who can pay.

Inequitable Medical Rationing

- Provision of Health care in India is not egalitarian or believing in the principle that all people deserve equal rights in it, but the current state of it also makes it inequitable in delivery.
- The claims of cheap and quality medical services in the country compared to the West is false considering the Subsidies provided by the Government to the private players, especially the Corporate Hospitals.
- Subsidies which are eventually the taxpayer's money, is clearly evidence of shifting of poor's money to service the rich who are the only category accessing medical services from the private.
- The new Ayushman Bharat scheme furthers this process where poor patient's benefit in private players is a question but the profitability of the private players is not deniable.
- 'Negative lists' of medical interventions which cannot be covered under the scheme are not provided by them to the poor, thus institutionalising the Medical Rationing.
- Foreign Investments and private hospital chains have entered every segment in India like the primary, secondary and tertiary medical care, profiting from the taxpayer's money.

Public Distrust

- The detrimental effect of inequitable medical rationing is the distrust of public towards the Government and the medical experts of the public sector.
- The poor expects the services for government hospitals the way that rich gets from the private sector.
- But with present policies and infrastructure and manpower shortages in the public sector and the inequitable medical rationing, it is simply not possible.
- Without a sound policy, the morale of the public hospital medical personnel is low.
- The perception that private doctors are better skilled than the public will have a

Reconsider the Ban: On Oxytocin

Why in News?

- The Union Health Ministry's ban on the retail sale and private manufacture of oxytocin, expected to kick off on September 1st.

What is Oxytocin?

- Oxytocin is a hormone secreted by the pituitary gland. It plays a role in reproduction, childbirth and lactation. It is used for both humans and animals to accelerate normal labour.
- It acts directly on the uterus to induce rhythmic contractions. In certain animals especially, farm animals, is used to achieve 'Milk Let Down'. Oxytocin is believed to stimulate the mammary gland and induce milk production in farm animals.

What is the issue?

- Oxytocin stimulates lactation in cattle, dairy farmers inject the drug indiscriminately to increase milk production. This has spawned several unlicensed facilities that manufacture the drug for veterinary use.
- One of the concerns was that oxytocin leads to infertility in dairy animals, and some studies show this to be true. It has also been linked to mastitis, a painful inflammation of the udder. Milk consumers worry about exposure to it through dairy products.

Steps taken by the Govt

- India had halted retail sales of oxytocin as a prescription-only drug in 2014 but failed to curb illegal sales and the volume of imports was unclear.
- Drug Technical Advisory Board (DTAB) in February 2018 had recommended import ban of oxytocin. It also had recommended that sale be limited to registered

serious damage to the public healthcare sector.

Conclusion

- Attempts by doctors in public hospitals to provide these interventions to the poor hits a road-block without continuing commitment from the policy makers.
- The only pressure group, the electorate can ensure at least equitable medical care provided to all sections of the people.
- For now, the two levels of medical care, public and private will have their fair share in denying the poor the benefit of new medical interventions.

government hospitals and clinics and barcode system should be used on all forms of the drug to ensure tracking and prevent abuse.

- Earlier this year the govt. had banned imports of hormone oxytocin to stop its misuse in the livestock industry, where it causes hormonal imbalances and shortens the lives of milch animals.
- Recently the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has banned the manufacture and sale of Oxytocin drug formulations for domestic use in the private sector to prevent its misuse.

Critical Analysis

- In a Lok Sabha answer in 2015, the National Dairy Research Institute was quoted as saying there was no evidence that oxytocin led to infertility. A 2014 study by researchers at the National Institute of Nutrition concluded that oxytocin content in buffalo milk did not alter with injections.
- The drug, a synthetic version of a human hormone, is a life-saver for women. Doctors use it to induce labour in pregnant women and to stem the postpartum bleeding. So critical is its role in maternal health that the World Health Organization recommends it as the drug of choice in postpartum hemorrhage. Oxytocin is therefore important to Indian women, 45,000 of whom die due to causes related to childbirth each year.
- If only a single public sector unit manufactures Oxytocin, as the government plans, it could lead to drug shortages and price hikes. The right approach would have been to strengthen regulation and crack down on illegal production

Scaled up solution for a future of water scarcity.

Why in News?

- While bottom-up conservation movements have helped locally, India's water problems are huge, there is a need to look at Large-scale non-invasive schemes.

Water Scarcity in India

- Recently, the NITI Aayog released a report that highlighted the gravity of India's water situation. The country is facing its worst water crisis in history and if no action is taken to address this, the demand for water would far outstrip its supply by 2030. In fact, even by 2020, it is expected that 21 Indian cities will run out of groundwater.

Factors causing water scarcity

- **Climate change** - Exceptionally hot summers and shortened winters are resulting in retreating Himalayan glaciers, which feed most of India's northern rivers. The erratic monsoons are further worsening the situation throughout the country
- **Pollution** - All water bodies in India within or near populated areas are contaminated with organic and hazardous pollutants. Bengaluru's Bellandur Lake is a case in point. The water body is so toxic that methane fires regularly break out on its surface. Due to such pollution levels, not a single Indian city can provide clean tap water throughout the day.
- **Poor Farming Practices** - One of the major reasons for the increasing stress on water tables is the prevalence of poor farming practices across India. By some estimates, Indian agriculture accounts for about 90 per cent of the country's annual domestic water consumption. Due to a lack of reliable irrigation sources, farmers usually depend on underground sources of water. Over the last three decades, there has been an explosive growth of private tube-well construction across Indian farms. Since farmers are provided with free electricity, it often leads to excessive pumping.

Large Scale Schemes

- Large-scale schemes that can provide a perennial supply of water to large populations in cities and towns, engage the

natural landscape, sustain ecological balance and have major economic and health benefits.

- They differ in scale from the small, community-driven projects of check dams, water harvesting and lakes and can service large populations. Unlike large-scale dams, these projects work with nature rather than against it. They can be used around the globe.

River floodplains

- Research shows that floodplains of rivers are exceptional aquifers where any withdrawal is compensated by gravity flow from a large surrounding area and can be used as a source of providing water to cities. Since recharge is by rainfall and during late floods, the water quality is good.
- Example-The Delhi Palla floodplain project on the Yamuna is an example of this. By utilizing 20 sq.km of the river length and running at half its capacity, it provides water to almost a million people daily. Piezometers and a control system have been installed to monitor water levels and other parameters through the year, to ensure sustainable withdrawal. Besides, it provides huge revenue to the Delhi Jal Board.

Natural mineral water

- Forested hills are a result of evolution over millions of years. They are not polluted and sit on a treasure of underground aquifers that contain natural mineral water comparable to that found in a mountain spring.
- Research shows that the water in these aquifers is comparable to several international natural spring mineral waters. It also shows that if a scheme of 'conserve and use' is applied correctly, it would allow a forest to be sustained as a mineral water sanctuary.
- Example-The Aravalli forested hills can provide mineral water to all major towns of Rajasthan. This water can substantially improve the health of citizens and preserve forests at the same time.

To What End this Exercise?

Introduction

- The final draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was released by the Assam state Government recently on July 30.

- It created crisis in Assam as nearly 40 lakh people of the Assam were excluded from the draft which makes their citizenship status in future a puzzle.
- Assam is the only state in the country to have a separate registry for citizens.

Roots of the NRC

- The recent talks of the NRC started by the Public Interest Litigation filed in the Supreme Court (SC) by the Assam Public Works seeking the removal of “illegal voters” from electoral rolls of Assam.
- It gained traction only by 2013 when the SC directed the Union and the State Government of Assam to speed up the process setting a dead line of 2016.
- The first NRC was framed in 1951 and it was considered to be faulty and the present exercise was supposed to be done based on the 2003 rules.

Assam Accord

- The Assam Accord was signed between the Union Government and the All Assam Students’ Union in 1985 to end the agitation against the so called “outsiders”, whom have to identified and removed.
- These outsiders were the people who had entered the state after 1971 from Bangladesh and the Accord in itself is a defined one which marked the cut-off date to March 25, 1971.
- The current NRC was supposed to be prepared as a consequence of the Assam Accord and after prolonged delay its deadline has been set to 2018.
- 3.3 crore residents of Assam were required to submit documents form a list prescribed by the government to prove that they were citizens of India in accordance with the rules, a process in reality suffering huge practical difficulties.

Enlarging Lacunae

- The Supreme Court which comes as saviour of the citizens’ rights did not played its role this time making the process non-transparent.
- Non –transparent “family tree verification”, where usually the process used to be robust failed miserably at many fronts. In numerous cases, the names of parent are on the list but the children are being left out.
- Arbitrary rejection of gram panchayat certificates which almost lead to exclusion of 45 lakh residents raising doubt on the authority of the gram panchayats and other legal concerns.

- Rejection of gram panchayats certificates which had a judicial backing in the Manowara Bewa v. Union of India case, 2017, leading to the certificates invalid to seek inclusion in the NRC.
- Women were the most affected in this rejection as they relied on these certificates to establish marital relationship and currently the fate of lakhs of people depending on these remains uncertain and they had to search for fresh evidence again to get included in the NRC.

SC’s Role

- The SC’s notion of setting a deadline and directing the government to prepare NRC within it instead of ensuring a legal clarity over the manner, in which claims of citizenship could be decided, raises the problem of litigations which might arise in the future.
- Even after perfecting the NRC, the exclusion list will run into several lakhs and the immediate consequence of the NRC will render them homeless and no citizenship making their future a big problem to be solved.

Who takes the Onus

- The SC mentioned no solution or care to the expected lakhs of people with their citizenship stripped off.
- Will it allow Government to adopt the crude communal ways to push them out or will they take responsibility for the protection of the basic rights of them is a big question.
- Another angle of washing their hands on the whole matter is also open and will the government rough enough to practise enough is another matter of debate.

The hard-drafted citizenship

- Citing the importance and the difficulty in constituting the provisions relating to the Citizenship, B.R. Ambedkar referred it as ‘head ache’.
- He referred so because of the committee working on multiple drafts and rejecting many to settle to the currently constituted Article 5.
- Vallabhbhai Patel said that India’s constitution-making process, and especially its citizenship clause was going to be scrutinised all over the world.
- It is because Indian Nationals are not defined by any specific race or ethnicity but only completely diverse population unified by a single spirit.

Conclusion

- What makes the NRC really important is that, after 70 years, the Citizenship status of India is again going to be scrutinised by the world. The south Asia has seen many crises over citizenship over the past decade.
- The current crisis over NRC is directly due to the SC which directed the union and the

Prudent Increase: On RBI's Rate Hike

Introduction

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Monetary Policy Committee meets from time to time to discuss the lending rates and stability of the economy.
- The recent decision of the committee to raise benchmark interest rates also known as repo rate by 25 basis points is considered a long-term approach.
- This is a increase for the second time in two months and a direct consequence to the rising inflation.

Monetary Policy Committee

- It was mooted by the Urjit Patel Committee.
- It consists of 6 members including the Governor of RBI, holding the Chair of the committee.
- It was devised to frame monetary policy of the country which once rested completely in one person, the Governor of RBI.
- The committee suggested that monetary policy should be rule-based and not discretion-based.
- The decision is taken by majority views where all the members have equal vote and Governor votes in case of a tie.
- Targeting inflation is the core objective of the central bank, and it will be answerable to law-makers if it failed to achieve the target.

Benchmark Interest Rates

- A benchmark is the standard rate used widely by others for settling financial obligations and an Interest rate benchmark is the rate that is used as a standard or base to pay interest rate for deposits and loans.
- Repo rate is the rate at which RBI lends money to the Banks and reverse repo is the rate at which Banks lend to the RBI.
- Increase in Repo will eventually make the loans disbursed from the Banks to the customers costly.
- Also increasing interest rates sucks the money from circulation decreasing

state to act on illegal voters who crossed the border and entered Assam after 1971.

- Supreme Court should act fair and transparently. Apart from ensuring timely drafting of NRC, the consequence of it should also be kept in mind before engaging in implementation of NRC if passed.

spending and increasing savings, likely to control Inflation.

Reasons for increasing repo

- There has been a mounting rise in the general prices of commodities leading to Inflation.
- Volatility in crude oil prices, softening for a short period and again fluctuating due to vulnerability in the geopolitical tensions and supply disruptions is the main reason to Inflation.
- Other factors leading to Inflationary outlook are-
 - Volatile global financial markets
 - Possibility of fiscal deficit due to hike in Minimum support price to the kharif crops
 - Impact of upward revisions of house rent allowance paid by State governments
 - Shortage of monsoon by 6% of the long period average and deficient over 1/5th of the country's 36 sub-divisions.
- This shortage has resulted in a drop in total sown area under kharif which may result in low paddy output and CPI inflation.

Output gap

- An output gap is an indicator of the difference between the actual output and the maximum potential output of the economy expressed in terms of percentage to the Gross domestic product.
- RBI's survey of household inflation expectations reveals households eyeing an increase in prices of commodities.
- Domestic economic activity have strengthened now to a point where there was a closure of the output gap but there has been increase in input cost and selling price over the April-June quarter.

Taking the Cue

- The signs could not be clearer than this with retail inflation accelerating to 5% in June, and RBI increasing its projections for

the second half of the current fiscal year to 4.8% and 5% to April-June, 2019.

- These risks are the direct response of the domestic market to the shocks and instability of the global markets.
- Rising trade protectionism threatens to impact investment flows, disrupt global supply chains and hurt all-round productivity.
- Depreciations in the value of most currencies against the strengthening of dollar have echoed on major advance and emerging economies, spreading inflation across these markets.

On the right Track

- Increasing the benchmark interest rates for the second time in two months' time increases the interest rate for borrowers especially home loan takers.

- Even some criticses the current increase might hurt the investor sentiments where loans are costly and have a change of impacting growth.
- The monetary policy committee with its primary role of targeting inflation was on the right track with the decision to raise borrowing costs while retaining a neutral polity stance.

Conclusion

- Inflation or the general increase in the price level of goods and services is widely accepted as a hidden tax on the poor and the committee took the right decision in fighting it.
- Containment of the price gains have to be the purpose for the creation of a monetary policy and the developments in functioning of the MPC are all good with a long-term approach.

Kurukshetra – Part II

Deepening grass root democracy in sixth schedule areas

- Article 243M of the 73rd Amendment has exempt application of provisions relating to Panchayats in certain areas like Fifth Schedule areas, Sixth Schedule Areas, 1996 (PESA) and other tribal areas.
- However, the parliament may extend the provisions to such areas with such exceptions and modifications.

5th Schedule Areas

Areas in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Telangana and Odisha.

- Based on the recommendation of Bhuria Committee the PESA was enacted in 5th schedule areas. However, it has not been extended to 6th schedule areas.

Sixth Schedule Areas and Other Tribal Areas

- Some areas of Mizoram and Meghalaya are covered under the provisions of the 6th schedule.
- In Assam, Bodoland, North Cachar and Karbi Anglong districts are covered under 6th schedule.
- The whole of Nagaland, hill area of Manipur and 6 districts of Mizoram are covered by state laws governing Village Councils and hills areas of Manipur have District councils.
- Parts of hill district of Darjeeling in West Bengal are covered by Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.

Existing Practices of Governance

- Sixth schedule areas and other tribal areas are exempt under Article 243M containing provisions relating to administration of tribal areas in states of Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal.
- There are Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) and Autonomous Regional Councils (ARCs) in these areas have long traditions of self-management systems relating to land, forest, shifting cultivation, village or town administration, public health etc.
- The District and Regional Councils have judicial, executive and financial powers in their respective areas.
- Sixth schedule empowers the Governor of concerned states with regard to constitution of District and Regional Councils, their dissolution, electoral representation in council areas, enlarge or

diminish or review decisions of District and Regional Councils, arbitration and appoint a commission.

- There is a separate system for governance in each state
 - Syiem in Khasi hills, Doloi in Jaintia hills and Nokma in Garo hills are traditional councils considered as subordinate officials of ADCs
 - Village courts or village councils are traditional forms of delivery system of justice in Nagaland. It resolves any matters of village dispute with regard to land, law and order etc.
 - Kuki-Impi of Kukis in Manipur.

Issues

- The main issue is lack of deepened decentralized governance.
- Village councils do not exist in council areas of Manipur and Assam.
- In Nagaland and Manipur, the Village Councils are often headed by traditional Village Chiefs.
- In Manipur, elections to District Councils have not been held in decades.
- The government has powers to extend the tenure of councils and to supersede them which reduce the powers of the council.
- Parallel structures exist at village level in Nagaland.
- Though elections are conducted through State Election Commission there is no law mandating the conduct of elections of by state Election Commission elections are not held prior to end of term.
- In Tripura, the District Council has too much control over the Village Committee which is against the spirit of rural self-management government system
- The philosophy of Sixth Schedule aims at protection of tribal areas and their interests by constitutionally mandating district or regional local self-government institutions with the task of protecting tribal culture and customs and undertaking developmental tasks for them.
- In reality, the objectives have not been realized fully in practice. The District Councils are entrusted more powers than a District Panchayat however these institutes are not well empowered and

equipped to handle the issues of tribes with requisite autonomy.

It would only be appropriate to incorporate the principles of decentralized governance within the legal framework.

The 2nd Administrative Reforms Commission in its 7th report titled Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution has dealt specially with Conflicts in the North East focused on

- Autonomous District Councils in Sixth Schedule
- Village-level self-governance
- Tribe-specific councils in Assam

Demand for Greater Autonomy

- The Constitution mandates the panchayat to prepare plan for economic development and social justice on 29 subjects listed in 11th schedule.
- The powers of ADCs are not similar in Sixth Schedule areas and other areas as. For example, in Manipur, the ADCs in other areas are weaker than the ones in Sixth Schedule areas as they have to depend on states for financial support.
- Though tribal system is egalitarian in nature, the people's participation especially women is negligible. For example, in Mizoram, the representation of women in majority of District and Village Councils is below 10%.
- Women are not entitled to participate in traditional village councils like Village Putu Menden and Gaon Bura traditional systems.
- The 73rd Amendment provides for one third representation of women in panchayats and there are success stories of women engaged in rural governance.
- A study conducted in Mizoram in 2007 concluded that people were not happy with existing system of governance and supported the introduction of Panchayati Raj system.
- When the features of panchayats like state finance commission, state election commission and preparation of plans are integrated with existing traditional systems it would establish de facto rural government.

Towards Decentralized Democracy

The rural governance structure in North-Eastern States is different from the rest of the country. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has made some efforts to strengthen grassroots democracy in this region by the following ways

- Consultation process has been initiated with the concerned states

- Draft amendments to laws of ADCs and VCs were made to deepen the process of democracy.

- Recognition of Gram Sabha and Ward Sabha, make Village Councils accountable to Gram Sabha
- Reservation for women
- Specific functions of Village Councils and Gram Sabhas under the law
- Regular elections through independent State Election Commission
- Regular meeting of Gram Sabha
- Rationalization of control of state government over District and Village Councils
- Constitution of State Finance Commission

- The laws relating to Village Councils and District Councils of three Autonomous District Councils of Mizoram namely Chakma, Lai and Mara were amended to include provisions like

- A term of five years instead of three years
- Conduct of election through State Election Commission
- Reservation for at least one seat in every Village Council for women
- Transparency in supersession
- Mandatory election in case of supersession within 6 months
- Accountability of Village Councils to Gram Sabha and functions of Gram Sabha specified under law
- Authorization of State Finance Commission to recommend devolution of funds to District Council and Village Council
- Two seats of the nominated seats of the District Councils shall be women

Conclusion

- The ADCs, DCs and VCs in North Eastern regions with some exceptions are not upto the expectations of the people.
- There is no effective people's participation in socio-economic development of the region.
- Though central government has made efforts to deepen democracy still more concreted efforts need to be made.
- The PESA legislation is important as it blends traditional practices of tribal areas with development activities.

- The experience from PESA legislation can provide guidance in blending traditions with development in sixth schedule areas and other tribal areas.

Programme Delivery through Panchayats

- Panchayats function more or less like political bodies and not as institutions of self-governance.
- An assessment by Planning Commission showed that gram sabha meetings were held regularly only in few places and in most cases participation in such meetings was low.
- Poor and marginalised people can be involved and transparency can be achieved by empowering the gram sabhas and strengthening their control over panchayats.
- However, most of the state acts and policies do not provide power for gram sabhas and no procedures have been laid down regarding their functioning.
- A study has found that there is widespread corruption in the panchayats and the panchayat leaders siphon money allocated for development schemes and commissions are paid to secretaries, engineer and staff at block and zilla panchayat.
- People have backward sections (SC/ST) do not have much say in their own political party as posts as held by upper castes.

The efficiency and delivery mechanism of panchayats can be improved by adopting the following ways

Involve Them in Social Sector

- Panchayats are busy implementing the construction-oriented schemes which promote contractor-labour relationship.
- Panchayats should be engaged in education, health, SHGs, nutrition etc which requires people to come together as equals and work through consensus.

Encourage Them to Use Fiscal Powers

- Panchayats receive more than 95% of funds through government funding and how these funds are used is also not properly audited makes them irresponsible and corrupt.
- The panchayats have powers to levy taxes on property, business, markets, fairs etc and only very few village people are aware of this provision.

- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has to address the issues and make more efforts in extending deepened democracy through Panchayati Raj in sixth schedule areas and other tribal areas of North East.

- Panchayat heads have reported that it is difficult to levy tax on their own constituency and therefore the current funding pattern needs to be reconsidered.
- The panchayats should be encouraged to raise local resources for development and then receive matching grants from the government.
- The dependency on citizens for funds makes panchayats to utilize funds more efficiently for poverty reduction and promotion of human development.

Grants from FFC

- The Fourteenth Finance Commission has recommended distribution of grants to village local bodies to the tune of Rs. 2 lakh crore for a five year period starting from 2015.
- The grants are of two types- basic grants and performance grants.
- Performance grants are awarded based on
 - Making available reliable data on receipt and expenditure through audited accounts.
 - Improvement in own revenues
- Panchayats have not been assigned enough powers to levy tax and wherever powers are given is not being exercised.
- Zero tax through panchayats has been reported in Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Punjab and Rajasthan.
- So capacity building should focus on empowering the panchayats to increase their revenue and submit utilisation reports regularly

Timely and credible audit

- Panchayats incur large expenditures and their funds are audited by Local Fund Audit but there are several problems like
 - There are huge arrears and in some case accounts haven't been audited for more than 10 years.
 - The quality of reports is poor therefore the utility of it is doubtful.
- There are complaints of corruption and a general impression that audit reports can be bought.
- Elected non-officials are not held accountable but officials are for any lapses

in their reports which lead to irresponsible behavior.

- These are serious issues that need addressed for improving financial accountability of panchayats.

Grade panchayats

- The quality of work done by panchayats should be closely monitored by a team of journalists, civil society members, panchayat leaders from neighbouring districts and stakeholders.
- The panchayats should be graded and future funds should be based on their grade.
- The accountability of local bodies can be strengthened by strengthening financial management and audit procedures.
- It is possible to measure performance of panchayats and to what extent they are inclusive and participative through a carefully designed methodology.
- In UP, a study evolved some criteria for ranking twenty panchayats and most of the panchayats were in the unsatisfactory or very unsatisfactory category.

Improve social capital

- There are fundamental social and cultural differences between states and within different states of a religion.
- For instance, in Karnataka, the south along with coast performs better than the north with respect to women's status like education and social mobility.
- Government schemes are believed to be more successful in south-west Karnataka like Mysore and Shimoga.
- The reason for this is the strong potential for collective action that exists there.
- Communities are able to put greater pressure on teachers and other field level workers to do their duties and this has helped them achieve higher quality of education in rural areas and will result in better social capital.

Encourage transparency

- The four key features associated with success in peoples' empowerment are transparency, participation, inclusion and ownership.

Strengthening of Panchayats through Devolution

- Panchayats are a form of direct democracy distinct from the representative democracy due to the proximity to the community.

- People will have less incentive to work as a group if there is no transparency regarding functioning.
- Transparency in panchayats can be increased by holding open meetings, sharing the minutes of meeting with the community and publicly naming people who fail to follow rules or pay their taxes.
- For instance in Thailand malnutrition was reduced by 25% after weighing of children was done every month in village fairs where all parents participated.
- In India, anganwadi workers conceal malnutrition as there is no community pressure on them.
- For instance, the overall percentage of severely malnourished children aged between 0 and 3 in Jharkhand as per government data is 0.5% as against 16% reported by UNICEF.
- The field officials are able to escape from accountability due to lack of transparency and lack of pressure from gram sabhas to do honest reporting.

Improve governance

- Effective panchayats would also require effective district and block level administration.
- Building capabilities of local panchayats should go on simultaneously with better accountability and performance from local bureaucracy.
- Professional and responsive public administration is an asset for both social sector as well as enabling panchayats to play their mandated roles.

Conclusion

- Decentralization of administrative and financial functions can be done after putting in place some critical accountability mechanisms to ensure that decentralization does not lead to favouritism, nepotism, corruption, abuse of power or abdication of responsibilities.
- A common weakness associated with decentralization is to delegate authority to act without adequate provisions for guidance or adequate audit and oversight mechanisms to ensure compliance with integrity and transparency.

- The objectives of panchayat include organizing common men in the process of developing themselves through their own

efforts in continuing basis, at the same time enhancing their capacity and self-reliance.

- The panchayats were added to the constitution in part IX in 1993 through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.
- They key objectives of 73rd Constitutional Amendment envisage citizen participation with service delivery.
- The present panchayats are part of the state governance structure and states have a constitutional obligation to keep the panchayats functioning.
- Local governments function under provisions of the state list of Schedules VII under Article 246.
- The state legislatures are supposed to devolve responsibilities, power and authority to panchayat to enable them to function as institutions of self-government.
- The state legislature may authorize the panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate certain taxes, duties, tolls and fees etc. provide grants-in-aid and also assign to them revenues of certain state level taxes.
- Article 243 I necessitate the states to constitute a State Finance Commission every 5 years and assign the task of reviewing the financial position of panchayats and making recommendations on sharing and assignment of various taxes, duties, tolls, fees etc. and grants-in-aid given to panchayats from the consolidated fund of the state.

Present scenario

- It has been 25 years since part IX was incorporated into the constitution.
- Conformity Acts have been enacted by all states.
- Regular elections are held every five years and the State Finance Commission have been constituted by all states.
- However, in spite of all these developments the panchayats are starved of finances impeding their growth and effective functioning.

Mismatch

- There is a mismatch between the functional responsibilities and financial powers delegated to the panchayats. This mismatch is leading to severe fiscal stress at local level.
- Panchayats' own revenue are not enough even to meet their O&M requirements and are dependent on the higher tiers of government to finance them.
- The role of SFCs in this context becomes critical in examining the entire range of

subjects concerning assignment of taxes, transfer of power etc. for improving the financial health of panchayats.

- Panchayats receive substantial funds through the centrally sponsored schemes (CSSs) and additional central assistances (ACAs).

Implementing agency

- Panchayats have been seen as implementing agency for schemes of line ministries like Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).
- The panchayats at all levels are given specific roles and responsibilities for planning and implementation of the scheme.
- Several important flagship programmes of the union are executed through the panchayats.

The Context

- In 2004, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was created with the mandate to oversee the fulfillment of provisions in part IX and Article 243 ZD related to district planning committee.
- In 2005-06, the ministry introduced the Panchayats Empowerment and Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) to
 - Motivate states to empower the panchayats
 - Motivate panchayats to put in place accountability framework to bring in transparency and efficiency.
- Incentive funds under this scheme are given to the states based on their performance as measured by a Devolution Index or 4Fs index
 - Index of framework
 - Functions
 - Finances
 - Functionaries
- The devolution index for several years since 2006-07 was based on concept paper presented during Fifth Round Table of ministers in charge of Panchayati Raj and then for a few years the Indian Institute of Public Administration conducted study to compute devolution index.
- In 2012-13, the study added two more dimensions to the index namely
 - Accountability
 - Capacity building

The Study

- The following objectives were set for the study

- To evaluate the performance of states/UTs in terms of devolution of 3Fs in addition to strengthening institutional framework as well as capacity of panchayats.
- To examine the accountability framework for panchayats, put in place by states/UTs.
- To create cumulative and incremental indices to measure the devolution, frameworks for capacity building and accountability of panchayats.
- To rank states and UTs along the above indices.
- The study assesses the enabling environment that the states have created for the panchayats to function as institutions of self-government.
- The analysis begins with test whether the states/UTs have fulfilled the 5 mandatory constitutional provisions.
 - Establishment of state election commission (Article 243K)
 - Holding regular panchayat election (Article 243E)
 - Reservation of seats for SCs/STs and women (243D)
 - Establishment of State Finance Commission at regular intervals (243I)
 - Setting up of district planning committees (243ZD)

The Method

- A structured questionnaire with few open-ended questions was provided to collect data from all state governments and it was cross checked with data from the field.

Devolution Index

- The Devolution Index presents the overall scores and ranks for states/UTs in identified dimensions.

The Result

- Maharashtra ranked first, followed by Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Rajasthan.

PESA in Tribal Areas

- Since independence persistent efforts have been made to introduce rural local self-government on the lines portrayed by Mahatma Gandhi.
- However, the state governments showed little interest to empower village level institutions and transfer of power was negligible.
- After 40 years the government has realized that without the functional participation of people through panchayats, development of rural and tribal areas will not be sustainable.
- The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was passed which made it mandatory for all states to have panchayats and it provided uniformity and formal structure to these traditional institutions of self-governance.
- The 73rd Amendment has initiated a fundamental restructuring of governance and administrative system based on philosophy of decentralization and power to people.
- The objectives of the new panchayat raj is to execute and implement schemes and programmes to meet the real local needs, to mobilize people, to channelize their energies towards rural reconstruction through the new institutions.

Regional imbalance

- The southern and western parts of the country have carried out the reforms with vigor and zeal as they are economically sound, socially vibrant and have active civil societies.
- The northern states with greatest degree of poverty, inequality and schisms of caste and low pace of governance have resulted in weak panchayats.

Implementation of PESA

- Tribal communities have remained comparatively isolated from mainstream development process and they have a well-knit, cohesive social structure and value system.
- They have several indigenous traditional institutions to resolve their conflict and manage their resources and socio-political life.
- In 1996, the Working Group of the 9th Fiver Year Plan suggested participatory planning as a prerequisite for growth and equity in tribal areas.
- Dilip Singh Bhuria committee was formed to look into various dimensions of self-rule of tribal areas and constitutional requirement for extension of panchayats to schedule areas.

- The part IX of constitution dealing with panchayats has been extended to tribal areas by an act of parliament called Panchayats Extension to Scheduled V Areas Act (PESA) 1996.
- Under PESA special treatment has been provided for the social, cultural and economic aspects of the tribal life.

Gram Sabha

- One of the highlighting features of PESA is this provision: Gram Sabhas shall be competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and customary mode of dispute resolution.
- The Central Act of 1996 provides powers to Gram Sabhas like
 - Approval of plans, programmes and projects for socio economic development prior to their implementation.
 - Identification of beneficiaries of anti-poverty programmes
 - Certify utilization of fund by the panchayat
- PESA has mandated that Gram Sabhas and Panchayats shall have following powers
 - To be consulted on matters of land acquisition and resettlement
 - Grant prospecting license for mining lease for minor minerals
 - Planning and management of minor water bodies
 - The power to enforce prohibition or to restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicant
 - The power to prevent alienation of land and to restore any unlawfully alienated land of a schedule tribe
 - The powers to manage village markets
 - The power to exercise control over money lending to schedule tribes
 - The power to exercise controls over institutions and functionaries in all social sectors
 - The power to control local plans and resources
- The PESA mandates that the state legislation may endow panchayats with powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government.
- It contains safeguards to prevent the panchayats at higher levels from assuming powers and authority of panchayats at lower level.

- The PESA has been recognized by many activists and scholars as progressive law as it gives crucial rights to village level communities to manage their lives and resources.

Issues

- In scheduled areas, the village level situation is different from the high expectations created by the act.
- The issue of tribal non-tribal leadership has created new political equations.
- Despite the provisions provided in PESA, there is a gap between macro level decisions and grassroots level reality.
- The main actors in panchayats are traditional leader, new entrants, local bureaucracy, non-tribal society and government departments' like –forest and revenue.
- The traditional leadership looks at the decentralized process as a rival parallel institution and challenge to their natural stronghold.
- The entrants are not fully acquainted with the provisions of PESA.
- It is necessary to create coordination between traditional systems with new scheme.
- Amendments have been made in Acts for mining lease, minor forest produce etc but still there are dilemmas of sharing the stronghold in implementation process.
- Non-tribal leadership has been strong and have established good network with local bureaucracy and influence decision making process in their favour by negating with tribal leadership.

Methodology and Context

- The centrality of issue is to gauge the implementation of PESA in their gram panchayats and its impact upon the governance after implementation of PESA in their socio-economic and political life.

Exposure towards PESA

- It is a matter of concern as majority of respondents had very little exposure towards special status of panchayats in fifth schedule areas.

Gram Sabhas

- There is very less knowledge about the special rights of gram sabhas in scheduled areas among gram Sabha members.
- The provision regarding composition of more than one-gram Sabha in one-gram panchayat is known to less than half of panchayat raj representatives.

- The presence of government officials is regular as government schemes are initiated and decisions and programmes of government are percolated to gram Sabha.
- Only more than one third respondents try to know the problems of villagers and put them in gram Sabha meetings.
- Half of the representatives feel that the wishes and suggestions are considered by gram panchayat.
- The selection of village development through gram Sabha is endorsed by almost two third of respondents.
- However, sarpanch has still a very important say in selection and operation of village development work.

Gram Panchayat

- Gram Panchayat is the main executing institution of all the work at grassroots level.
- The majority of respondents attended gram panchayat meetings regularly and inspected the ongoing construction work in village.
- Almost half of all respondents present a very negative picture as gram panchayat has no role in solving village problems even after repeatedly airing the problem in gram panchayat meeting.

Natural Resource Management

- Management of natural resources according to indigenous knowledge of tribal is one of the main activities under PESA and less than half of respondents know about this.
- Fifty per cent tribal villages have the availability of forest and minor forest produce.
- All the respondents are of the view that government has control over the forests.
- Majority of villages have water bodies and a committee system is functional to manage these water bodies however many respondents find no arrangement for water body in their villages.

Protection of Cultural Identity

- Overwhelming majority of the respondents believe in local traditions and rituals.
- People do not know that gram Sabha has the responsibility of conservation and protection of traditions, rituals and cultural identity. These issues are discussed superficially and by fewer numbers of respondents.
- A majority of the respondents found gram Sabha is no harm to local culture and traditions and they consider the present panchayat system different from the earlier one.
- Illiteracy is one of the crucial problems faced by panchayat members.
- Training has not been carried out to make the panchayat representatives aware of the importance of PESA and procedural aspects of Panchayati raj. They received training related to working of panchayat, basics of panchayat and understanding of rules and regulations.
- Positive efforts are needed for improvement as the level of understanding and exposure among tribal representatives is comparatively low.

Conclusion

- In recent years, many reports- 'The Report of Expert Group of the Planning Commission on Development Challenges in Extremist Affected Areas' (2008), 'The Sixth Report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission' (2007), 'The Balchandra Mungekar Committee Report' (2009) etc. have clearly underlined the dismal situation of the implementation of PESA.
- Therefore, there is an urgent need to opt for an effective device whereby maximum people can be informed, made aware and motivated to come forward for the proper implementation and execution of PESA.
- The culture of silence among tribal should be broken and should strive for capacity building, sensitization and orientation to improve the tribal self-rule scenario.

Constitution (123rd) Amendment Bill, 2017

Introduction

- Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha passed the constitution (123rd) Amendment bill recently.
- It improves the status of National commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) to a Constitutional Body.
- Brings NCBC in equal status to the National commission for Scheduled Caste (NCSC) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).
- So far it is a statutory body created under the provisions of National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993.

What powers do the Amendments grant?

- The amendment gives some teeth to the NCBC.
- It will have all powers of a civil court while inquiring or investigating in to case referred to it on any matters of the socially and educationally backward classes.
- Apart from recommending socially and educationally backward community to the Other Backward Classes list, it is also entitled to do the following-
- To participate and advice on the socio-economic development of the socially and educationally backward classes.
- To evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and the state.

Why is it so Important?

- In 2015, SC quashed the Governments inclusion of Jats under the reservation of OBC and cited the Government's act of setting aside the recommendations of NCBC to keep away Jats from OBC list.
- The current amendment to the commission by making the body a constitutional one, places the responsibility over the government to consider the commission's recommendation.
- The federal relations in framing the OBC list also changed.
- Like the SC/ST list, which is provided by the centre, the OBC list in which both centre and states had a equal role in determining who comes under OBC is now tilted towards the Centre.
- The concerned Minister had assured the States role in identifying and recommending list of classes to be included

to the OBC, but to the final decision to include it lies with the centre.

Concern's around the composition of the NCBC

- An amendment moved by Rajya sabha in 2017, resulted in the increase of members from 3 to 5 and inclusion of a women member and a member from minority community.
- It might have a president, vice-president and three other members whose qualifications, tenure, allowance and other terms are not yet been framed.
- These rules if framed and moved under the amendment would have provided more safeguard to the commission in itself.

Challenges to face

- The amendments give more powers to the commission which boost the morale of the members of the backward and other backward classes in getting their grievance redressed.
- But with the commission gaining constitutional status, a number of classes are already eyeing to be included in the socially and educationally backward classes.
- A commission on sub-categorisation under Justice Rohini Singh has been formed by the Government last year to find the criteria and conditions to classes which can be subordinate to the OBC list.
- This will eventually increase the number of classes to be included in the OBC list raising concerns over the limited reservation of 27% by the Mandal Commission.
- Also, the Supreme Court judgement not to increase the total reservation limit above 50% raises doubt over the capacity of the widening OBC list to get benefit within this 50%.
- Tamil Nadu is the only state having reservation of 69% safeguarded by the constitution, violating the SC's judgement.
- This conflict of limited reservation against the increasing communities under the socially and educationally backward classes will eventually raise a fresh debate over the relaxation of the 50% cap on total reservation.

Political nexus

- There was a huge uproar over the amendments made to the Scheduled Caste

and Scheduled Tribe (prevention of atrocities) act.

- Created tensions across all parties when they misinterpreted the amendments moved by the parliament and protested in unison.
- This led to the reverting back of the SC/ST act to its original form where almost all the parties acted for this reversal and eventually the legislature acting against the SC.
- Similarly, with the greater number of classes getting included in to the OBC list, it may make the political parties to force the legislature to frame a law increasing the reservation limit.
- This may bring in a tussle between judiciary and legislature, and it can also lead to a healthy debate over the reservation cap of 50% set by the Judiciary.

Will the Commission's Status Honoured?

- Even though the amendment makes the Commission on backward classes a constitutional body, its suggestions to include certain classes or communities in the OBC list is only of recommendatory nature.
- But the moral obligation of the government is that it cannot turn down the recommendations of a constitutional body, giving credibility to the recommendations which has not been given earlier when the body is a statutory one.
- The working of the body is not yet defined. But if it works in similar lines to the other constitutional bodies, it acts the following way-
 - The Commission may make the report which is sent to the president.
 - The president tables it at the floor of both the houses of the parliament.

RBI Hikes Rates

Introduction

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s Monetary Policy Committee for the 2nd consecutive time in a span of 8 weeks increased the benchmark lending rates of repo rate and reverse repo by 25 basis points.
- The 6-membered Monetary Policy committee headed by the RBI governor Urjit Patel increased the repo rate to 6.50% and reverse repo to 6.25%.

- The two houses will scrutinize and question the actions taken by the Government.

- Thus, this process ensures the objective of the protection of the interests of socially and educationally backward classes by the commission to be attained.

SC's Role

- Previously there had been tensions within several communities who had been constantly fighting to reservations under the OBC list.
- Protests starting from silent marches turned out later in to violent blood shed at many instances, forcing to Government to concede to their demands at times.
- SC acted as a shock absorber where it provided the platform for a healthy debate and discussion over what has to be done and limited the role of legislature in creating a list where an expert body already exist.
- It highlighted the presence of an expert body like NCST or NCBC whose role should not be taken over by the legislature.

Conclusion

- The constitutional status of the NCBC will eventually lead to the rise of not only increasing the reservation cap, but also will question the mechanism of the reservation system in the country.
- With right kind of composition of the Commission, it will provide a boost to the depressed and underprivileged in the OBC classes whose grievances will not go unheard of.
- This amendment sets the right tone to provide welfare to the needy and puts more focus on the importance of identification of the beneficiaries.

- Repo or repurchase option is the rate at which the RBI lends money to the Banks and reverse repo is the rate banks lend to the RBI.
- The increase will affect Home loan, Auto loan and other borrowers from the banks due to increase in interest rates.

Why it is increased?

- The RBI governor cited inflationary concerns which is hardening at 4.8% now from 4.7% in June 2017.

- Inflation stood above 4% for 8 consecutive months which is above the target fixed by the MPC.
- Rising crude oil prices, Global uncertainty in financial markets, protectionism and the current trade war are some reasons.
- The ongoing trade war is likely to turn in to a currency war in future raising more concerns.
- Higher Minimum Support Price (MSP) to the Kharif crops which could have a impact in future when the government procures the commodities.

Is it Pre-emptive?

- The Inflationary trend over a period of 8 months is likely due to the increase in prices form the fuel and lighting sector, clothing and some essential manufacturing products.
- This is abnormal form the usual trend where food inflation occurs during summer and this time the monsoon is better.
- Core inflation too hardened in the previous months and forward projections for the fiscal year 19 is around 5%.
- Taking a cue from all the above facts, the MPC's decision to increase the rate is to remain ahead of the curve when a situation of Inflation occurs in the future.

Neutral Policy

- RBI Governor stated during the rate hike, that the policy tends to remain neutral.
- This is against the actions of the committee, where it increases the rates and tends to act hawkish or increasing interest rates.
- By stating neutral, the committee choose to retain more flexibility within it so that in future it can increase the rates.
- There could be higher fiscal deficit in the future with the General elections and the state elections approaching.
- With the end of the kharif season, procurement of agricultural commodities will add the fiscal woes.
- This entire factor makes the committee's stating the policy as neutral, a right one and holds the investor's faith in the market.

Draft e-Commerce Policy

Introduction

- A draft e-Commerce Policy had been posted in the public domain open to suggestions from the public by the commerce ministry.
- The policy has been formulated by a body involving all stake holders from Commerce,

Is it Justifying?

- Previously during 2011-12 and 2012-13 the economy faced steady growth and a soft rate by the RBI lead to massive loans from banks.
- This led to a crisis of Non -performing assets generated by the Banks which is still troubling the Indian financial system.
- Bank's lack of credit repair mechanism and a soft or low rate of credit when added to a growing economy will again lead to the same situation of bad assets.
- Current scenario resembles the same and with the RBI's decision of not providing easy credit makes the investors to work hard for the credit.
- It will hold effective when the economy starts running and the investors will get returns despite the tight interest rates of credit.

Role of MPC

- The monetary policy committee is a consequence of an agreement between the RBI and the Government where the monetary policy will be under the management of the Government.
- Inflation targeting became the prime and exclusive domain of the RBI under the MPC.
- Earlier there is said to be RBI's dependence or consultation with the finance ministry in deciding the rates.
- Now the voting pattern is visible, members of the MPC posts their individual opinion in the RBI's website infusing more transparency and independency in inflation targeting.

Conclusion

- With Inflation Targeting being the prime mandate of the MPC, the current hike in the interest rates will be fruitful when economy starts it full production.
- A better credit repair mechanism by Banks with effective implementation of law will help the MPC to maintain the inflation rate within the target of 4%.

Industry, Information Technology and Electronics and Communication, etc.

- First policy to regulate e-Commerce in India.

Need for the Policy

- e-Commerce currently comprises only 3-4% of the \$700 billion retail sector in India.

- It grows at a rate of 4 times the retail industry and is expected to attain 50% of the retail sector Industry by 2030.
- With the digitization and a leap towards digital literacy infused by the government's digital India programme, it may grow faster than predicted.

Areas of Importance

- Some clause dealing with deep discounting and a sunset clause to prevent deep pocket players like Walmart and Amazon are areas of debate.
- Large part of the policy deals with the regulation of the e-Commerce and also regarding ownership rights.
- Protection of Nascent Indian players over the foreign players and limit of foreign investment are the other concerns.

Concerns

- A think-tank headed by Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu have been discussing about the draft policy and what kind of shape it should finally have.
- Markets are growing and Indians are at the receiving end where deep pocket players are wielding the power over nascent Indian players.
- Whether the company should be Indian owned or from foreign players.
- Should the choice be completely left to the user or should the government regulate it.
- Data protection and privacy concerns are the other concerns.

Data Protection

- Data protection and privacy are hot debatable areas where around 70% of the e-tail market is controlled by deep pocket foreign players, the Amazon and the Walmart.
- Such vast amount of data should be kept in India.
- It should be accessible by the Government when they assume it is needed stating security concerns.

The Balance

- The policy should strive to find a balance between consumers and the businesses.
- By the inclusion of a "sunset clause" large players like amazon and walmart are denied to offer deep discounts which are allowed to nascent Indian players.

STA – 1 Status for India

- 3rd Asian country after Japan and Korea for Strategic Trade Authorisation-1 status

- This protection will impact the consumers or the buyers which needs to be balanced.

Regulatory Overreach

- Most parts of the policy deals with setting up a regulatory architecture.
- Moving towards online grievance redress instead of consumer courts.
- This can have a regulatory over reach where only the e-tail sector is brought under regulation when the retail sector is left alone.
- The nature of regulatory body, whether to function under a ministry or a commerce body or to be independent is another question to solve.

Capital Issue

- 49% FDI is allowed in inventory-based e-commerce model and so the power still rests with the domestic players.
- Also, there is a special right to the original promoter or shareholder of a company.
- He can continue to control the company decision even after selling its share, where the buyers of the company have only limited powers.
- The real issue is not favouring FDI to the fund starving Indian start-ups, but the lack of credit funding to such start-ups in the country.

What needs to be done to make the policy Holistic?

- Government should not dictate on terms like how much and which must be discounted.
- Accessing foreign capital or dearth of domestic funding need to be looked upon.
- Domestic financial markets need to be strengthened to finance local players.
- Discounts are a matter of the company instead of a bureau to control the prices of products.

Conclusion

- Government must ensure they are not abusing the industry by side-stepping in to their domain.
- Instead they must take actions on those offering products less than their prices to distort the competition.
- Closure of retail chain of stores as a result of such distortion needs to be addressed.

- Paves way to high technological product services to New Delhi:

1. Civil space
2. Defence sector

- India is 37th country designated STA status (sole country in STA which is not a member of NSG)
- By STA, India adheres to all export control regimes

What STA-1 status mean for India?

- First country in South East Asia and in the world getting STA without being NSG's member. (Generally given STA only if member in all 4 regimes).
- US considers India as a special ally.
- Allows certain equipment and technologies to be given to India.
- Israel which identifies itself to US status isn't given STA.
- Tells China that India meets all requirements to join as NSG member
- Takes India-US corporation (strategic & defence) to a new level.

Why is it important to India & to what happens now?

- Can import large segment of technologies of dual use, defence and civil space.
- Dual use technologies allow 90% of weapons to arrive in India without need for licensing, as its status been upgraded from STA-2 to STA-1.
- Israel, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea, Hong Kong are all placed in STA-2 and by placing in STA-1 technology import by India can bypass the U.S. Congress and other time-consuming processes.
- India was given Major Defence Partner Status (2016) by US, unique status created for India.
- It is considered as recognition to the India's role in non-proliferation and U.S partnering to that.

Why was the exception made for India by Trump administration?

- Indo-US is robust & dynamic.
- All bilateral agreements are for the good of both. On U. S's part this is to create jobs in the US, a direct act to get re-elected.
- Job creation is critical for any administration.
- Apart from expanding relations, U.S lost in securing multi-role combat aircraft carriers deal previously when Rafael deal was secured by France.
- U.S not ready to lose again over 110 new aircrafts and so prepared to secure trade deals.

Why the STA Route?

- U.S laws are complicated which makes countries placed under STA-2 or others to comply with their state laws.
- It lost Rafael deal due to International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR) which is under the administration of state.
- Export Administration Rules (EAR) under the Bureau of International settlements, Commerce department is another rule which needs to be cleared to aid export.
- By putting in India in STA-1, U.S could bypass all these blocks and exporting its arms and ammunitions to worlds large market, India.

No one-sided deal

- Every bilateral agreement is mutually beneficial and U.S is no philanthropist nation.
- For India, major takeaways are access to new technology, upgradation, domestic manufacturing of arms, becoming part of value supply chain.
- In 2005, one of the objectives of the Bush Administration is cited to make India a Global power.
- The rise of china is also relevant to the current action of United States's special treatment to India.

Will the STA Limits India's Choices?

- Indigenisation or Make in India needs technology from other countries and advantage of STA cannot be ruled out.
- Getting technologies from the western countries does not limit India's options with the Russia and Iran.
- Western sensors mounted on Soviet Weapon system is a unique example to this.
- STA status to India is more a political message rather than technology transfer in arms.
- India should not get carried away and will not reduce its diversity in arms procurement.

Trump's Effect or India's Effort

- The current developments in the upgradation of status cannot be credited only to Trump.
- Post nuclear test, India have been working on various fronts like lobbying in the Congress and playing the Diaspora route.
- India was denied technology earlier, but the current scenario is also due to India raising its export control status enabling its technology protection standards.
- If trade is the only objective of U.S, it would not have waited for the STA status of India.

- It was the increase in the capacity of India, which made it happen.

India's Growth

- Indian Diaspora's strong presence in the United States eventually resulted in the growth of the relations between the two nations.
- Even if companies in U.S like Lockheed martin which denied manufacturing in India, third party manufacturing countries like Israel can be invited to do that.
- India is the only country with which the United States has least problems.

Future Prospects

- Convergence of Interests like the vision on Indo-Pacific, defence trade, Disaster relief, etc, is some.
- 2+2 dialogue will be commenced shortly in September 2018.

Exploring Shale Oil

Introduction

- The Union cabinet has decided to allow the simultaneous exploitation of conventional oil and natural gas and unconventional hydrocarbon resources like coal bed methane and shale oil.
- At present only, conventional hydrocarbons can be exploited.
- The move is to reduce dependence on foreign countries and increase forex savings.
- It will also boost domestic production and spur investment by many industries.

What is shale gas?

- A natural gas produced from rocky structure and is different from natural gas formed from sand and limestone.
- Shale is a sedimentary rock which contains bituminous substance like kerogen.
- Shale is rich in organic material and is usually mature petroleum source rocks.
- Under high temperature and pressure, these rocks produce the gas which is cleaner than Liquefied petroleum gas.

Shale Oil

- When the shale sedimentary rocks are heated greatly, by a chemical process called 'pyrolysis', the kerogen petroleum comes out as shale oil.
- Shale oil is formed by the accumulation of mud, silt and organic waste for millions of years.
- High temperature and pressure turn these compounds to shale oil.
- Gas found around this oil is called shale gas.

- Signing of COMCASA (Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement) and BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement) will bring the countries closer.
- These will eventually encourage manufacturers like Lockheed martin in U.S to manufacture in India.

Conclusion

- India was the receiver of harsh sanctions at the hands of the United States 20 years before due to nuclear experiment then.
- It had worked hard in non-proliferation and gained the trust of world nations which helped it secure the elite status it currently holds.
- Apart from bilateral commitment, the STA status upgrade also involves a Chinese angle which can never be denied.

Extracting process

- The shale rocks are highly porous with no permeability.
- Permeability is needed for the oil generated to flow through the rocks.
- Hydro-fracturing of rocks or controlled artificial fracturing which involves drilling a hole in to the area of shale deposits and pumping water through it is used for shale extraction.
- This creates permeability and the gases escapes through the hole and collected at the surface.
- Shale oil is obtained by 2 processes-

1st method

- Shale rocks are mined out and broken in to pieces and transported to the processing plant.
- Heated at 500-degree Celsius or 930-degree Fahrenheit.
- Oil comes out as steam from these rocks.

2nd -Situ technique

- Oil shale is broken by explosion which leads air and gas to enter the rocks.
- Rock is heated with techniques like electrical heating.
- Brings out kerogen like crude oil from the rocks.

Origin

- The 1970s are years of revolution in the production of crude oil.
- All the Gulf countries including the Arab nations are energy centres.
- Continuous availability of the hydrocarbons for approximately 60 years

increased the importance of these countries.

- But the depletion of conventional crude reserves raised concerns and the world countries looked for alternatives.
- U.S is currently the frontrunner and largest producer of shale gas in the world.
- Till the 20th century, with the conventional methods of extraction of shale products, it was quite difficult and expensive.
- With the help of technology, U.S in 21st century improved production where the cost of production is around U.S \$ 40 per barrel.

Necessity of shale

- Increasing population and expanding industry generated greater pressure on energy resources.
- Exploitation of the limited conventional energy sources at an alarming level created the need for an alternative.
- Shale is not a new concept but its production is expensive.

Countries and Possibilities

- USA exploits shale gas which caters to 20% of its energy needs.
- Russia, even though have not emerged as a successful exploiter of the resources, have the prospects to shine.
- Middle East country will not choose to explore shale as it will add up to their existing reserves and reducing the prices of their petroleum products.
- India on the other hand has no point in going for shale oil and gas.
- It causes increased geological cost and environmental cost considering the process of exploration it.

Scope of Shale in India

- ONGC estimated the resource of shale in the country to 187.5 trillion cubic feet.
- It cited 5 basin areas as reserve site like Cambay, Krishna-Godavari, Cauvery, Ganga and Assam.
- Central mining planning and design institute estimated around 45.8 trillion cubic feet in the central Gondwana land.
- The United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimated technically recoverable shale reserves to 6.1 trillion cubic feet from Cambay and KG basin.
- Estimates around 62 million barrels from Cambay basin alone.

Success story of U.S

- It took nearly 3 decades for U.S to develop a sound technology driven exploration of shale gas and oil with investing millions of dollars.
- The introduction of shale which met their energy demands led to reduction of prices of petroleum products.

India's strategy

- The coal bed methane project is in pilot level.
- India considers oil and coal as primary source where oil is for mobile units and coal for static industries.
- The future goal is to produce renewable energy targets and to produce electricity from it ensuring energy security.
- The shale gas is only of an intermediate goal which cannot be avoided.
- Coal bed methane is only in the pilot level which is estimated to be abundant in Gondwana coal sediments.

Shale's role in future

- Shale is the best hope for the energy future.
- It could trigger revolution in global energy landscapes.
- It would make producers to become consumers.
- Rise in accessibility of shale driven by technology will change the global scenario.

Estimation of Reserves

- As per the United States Energy Information Administration (EIA), June 2013 report, it estimates around 7,299 Trillion Cubic Feet.
- China, Argentina, Algeria, U.S and Canada top the list whereas India holds a reserve of 95 million TCF.

Conclusion

- Experts believe that the shale gas and oil can change the pattern of the global order in trade.
- A small group of countries which are the current supplier can be replaced by a new group of suppliers of energy.
- Will shift the balance of trade to the countries with shale.
- With its merits it also got the demerit of the process which causes large destruction to the environment.
- Its effect on the ecology could not be relaxed as the process involves large scale drilling affecting environment at large

Monetary Policy Review

Monetary Policy Committee

- The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee of the Central Bank in India (Reserve Bank of India), headed by its Governor, which is entrusted with the task of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (repo rate) to contain inflation within the specified target level.

Functions of the MPC

- Under the Monetary Policy Framework Agreement, the RBI will be responsible for containing inflation targets at 4% (with a standard deviation of 2%) in the medium term. This target is set under the RBI Act 1934, according to which the Central Government determines the inflation target in terms of the Consumer Price Index, once in every five years in consultation with the RBI.

Third Bi-monthly MPR

- The RBI has hiked its key short-term lending rate by 25 basis points (bps) to 6.50 per cent at its third bi-monthly monetary policy review. RBI had increased the benchmark short-term lending rate (repo rate) by 0.25 per cent to 6.25 per cent in its last policy review in June on inflationary concerns.
- The decision of the MPC is consistent with the neutral stance of monetary policy in consonance with the objective of achieving the medium-term target for consumer price index (CPI) inflation of 4 per cent within a band of +/- 2 per cent while supporting growth.
- Raised rates but the Neutral stance of the RBI indicates that the RBI considers the present situation calls for making monetary instruments costlier at the same time it wants to keep the options open for either reducing, increasing or maintaining the benchmark rate.
- In the current MPR, it has been reflected that there were certain factors that indicated that the benchmark rates be maintained at the same level, such as Global cooling of oil prices, GST rate cut, Good Monsoon et whereas there were other factors that pushed for increasing the rates, these include:
 - MSP for various crops have been hiked, this may cause the Inflation levels to rise.

- Core Inflation i.e. Inflation minus Food and Fuel has increased to a level of 6%. This implies that cost of health care, education and normal products have gone up.
- The volatility of the Financial markets
- Concerns about Fiscal slippage since many states have reported that their revenues may not be good.
- Household Inflation expectation is rising, Manufacturing firms have indicated in their survey that their input prices are going up.
- Overall the MPC felt that while there are chances of Inflation staying stable there are far too many factors that may push the Inflation level above 5% in the first quarter of 2019. Therefore, keeping the long-term effect in mind, it decided to hike rates since monetary policy always has a lag effect and its impact is visible in six to nine months.

Global Scenario

- The multilateral trading system is under attack, bilateralism, as well as protectionism, is on the rise. The manner in which the US has increased tariffs on imports from China and many other countries has triggered a sort of trade war. China has also retaliated, as a result, the global trade scenario has become uncertain.
- The Logical outcome of a trade war between countries which are heavily dependent on exports is that it may escalate into a ' Currency war '. If this happens it will cause long-term uncertainty, Productivity losses, GDP and investments will also suffer.

Impact of the recent rate Hike

- Stock markets have reacted sharply, However, there has not been a sharp reaction on the currency side.
- The subdued impact on the currency is probably because the US Fed has not raised rates and postponed any such decision until September. Besides, there are also talks of US renewing its sanctions on Iran, which means good news for foreign

exchange liability, since oil prices will probably not go up.

- Bond yields remain by and large stable after the monetary policy announcement, this is because the central bank had assured of a liquidity surplus situation in the market. A spike in bond yield would have an adverse impact on the on the cost of borrowing of the govt bond yield programme and therefore have a negative impact on the fiscal deficit.
- There are fears that the hike in rates may force banks to raise lending rates which

may have an adverse impact on sectors dependent on retail loans.

- Output gap in our economy is closing this implies that companies in the manufacturing sector are investing more and creating capacities to produce more. This along with GST rate cut may be successful in countering the negative impact of the high-interest rates to some extent, therefore the net impact of the recent hike in rates may not be substantial.

National Register of Citizens

Why in News?

- The Assam govt recently published the second and final draft of NRC. About 2.9 crore names out of 3.29 crore applications have found a place in the NRC, whereas some 40 lac names have been left out. This draft of the NRC is however not final and people can still appeal against the non-inclusion of their names in the NRC.

What is NRC?

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the list of Indian citizens of Assam. It was prepared in 1951, following the census of 1951. For a person's name to be included in the updated NRC list of 2018, he/ she will have to furnish:
 - Existence of name in the legacy data: The legacy data is the collective list of the NRC data of 1951 and the electoral rolls up to midnight of 24 March 1971.
 - Proving linkage with the person whose name appears in the legacy data
- The objective behind updating and publishing the 1951 NRC is to compile a list of the names of genuine Indian citizens residing in Assam and, in the process, detect foreigners who may have illegally entered the state after March 24, 1971.

Background

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985. The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation which was a popular movement against illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. According to this accord

- All those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote.
- Those who had done so after 1971 were to be deported
- The entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship.

- The provisions of the Assam Accord created new citizenship criteria applicable to the state alone and not the rest of the country. In order to reflect this change, an amendment was passed in 1987 which added Section 6A to the citizenship act of 1955.

Recent Developments

- It was only in May 2005 that the first step towards updating the NRC of 1951 was taken, when a tripartite meeting between the Centre, the Assam government and AASU was held to review the progress made in the implementation of the Assam Accord.
- At that meeting, it was decided that the Assam government will take up and complete within two years the process of updating the NRC of 1951 by including the names that appear in the 1971 voters' lists and those of their descendants.
- The issue was again raised by AASU at the April 2009 review meeting, on which occasion the Assam government gave an assurance that it would start the process of updating the NRC. Following the assurance, in June 2010 a pilot project was initiated. However, the project was suspended following violent protests.

- In 2014 The Supreme Court, brushing aside the delaying tactics of the Union and state governments, ordered them to begin the process of updating of the NRC in Assam. Accordingly, the Ministry of Home Affairs, in consultation with the Ministry of Law and Justice, issued the notification for starting the work of updating the NRC and appointed a State Coordinator for the NRC in 2014.

Objection and Claims

- The fact that only some of the names of the members of a single family appeared on the list while others did not have also raised doubts about the rigor of the verification process.
- Given that a proper documentation system does not exist in the country, for most of those whose names do not appear in the NRC, procuring the required documents, especially birth certificates, in order to prove their relationships with persons whose names have appeared in the legacy documents and thus establish their citizenship is fraught with difficulties.
- The Union Government has assured that no coercive action will be taken against the

people who did not feature in the final draft. Further, they can file their claims and objections, and there will be no deportation or curtailment of any rights of these people.

The rationale behind the NRC

- Once the draft is finalised, it will provide a much-needed perspective on the extent of illegal migration that has taken place into Assam in particular and the country in general. Since the days of the Assam agitation against illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, there have been wild speculations about their actual number. An updated NRC is likely to put an end to such speculations and provide a verified dataset to carry out meaningful debates and implement calibrated policy measures.
- The issue of illegal migrants has remained an emotive one in Assam since independence. The publication of an updated NRC will vindicate the long-held argument of large sections of the people of Assam that unabated infiltration from Bangladesh has indeed taken place and that it has upset the demographic profile of the state's population, especially in the border districts.

Rural Sanitation Survey

Background

- The Swachh Bharat Mission marks a paradigm shift in its approach to Sanitation. It is the first sanitation programme in the country to measure outcomes (ODF) instead of output (toilets) alone. The SBM's emphasis on behavior change in rural sanitation at the grassroots also leads to rigorous verification and sustainability of the benefits accrued to rural communities under the progress made.
- Under the Swachh Bharat Mission, the largest behavioral-change programme in the world, the rural sanitation coverage of India has now risen to 85%. Through the mobilization of rural communities, 7.4 crore toilets have been built across rural India, and as an outcome, over 3.8 lakh villages and 391 districts have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF).
- This is significant because, under the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), sanitation coverage has increased to more than double the coverage at the time of the launch of the Mission.

Jan Andolan

- The primary focus under the programme is on the construction of toilet however adequate emphasis is being given on behavioral change through campaigns, Information dispersal, interpersonal communication and people's participation.
- The SBM is a people's movement, a true Jan Andolan, and it is this people's participation that has led to the success being witnessed under the Mission. The Mission is on track to achieve an ODF India by October 2019. However, there is a need to focus on continued progress and behavioral change, even beyond the set deadline.

Health Benefits

- If there is proper sanitation, the burden of disease will automatically come down and out of pocket expenditure towards health will also be reduced.
- According to a UNICEF study which considered the households in ODF, as well as Non-ODF villages, found that in the case of the ODF villages the households could save up to 50,000 rupees per annum as compared to households in non-ODF villages.

- According to WHO, 1, 18,000 children die every year from diarrhoea caused due to improper sanitation. In addition to this poor sanitation also causes mental and physical stunting in children apart from numerous other diseases. Therefore, proper sanitation is key is essential for overall health as well as the future of the nation.

Volunteers

- One of the drawbacks of the previous sanitation programmes was that there were not enough foot soldiers or volunteers who could interact with the people. Under the SBM the govt has insisted that every village shall have at least two-foot soldiers or Swachch Grahis who will be trained to engage with the community in a constructive way.
- At the same time, the Govt is also trying to look at motivated youth and members of NSS, NCC, Yuva Kendras etc to come forward and participate in the Jan Andolan. For this, the Swachch Bharat Internship programme has also been launched.

Construction of Toilets

- Under the SBM two pit toilets have been proposed. One pit is used at a time after the first pit is filled up which generally takes 3-4 years for a family of 4 it is closed off and the second pit is connected. This, in turn, takes 3-4 years to be filled by this time the fecal matter in the first pit is converted to manure, which can then be put to use by the family.

Funding

US-China Trade War

Background

- The US administration under President Donald Trump has taken various protectionist measures in an attempt to bring down its trade deficit from around 800 billion USD annually, out which its Trade deficit with China stands at 308 billion USD.
- Earlier in March 2018, the Trump administration had announced tariffs of 25% and 10% on all steel and aluminum imports citing national security issue. The US had also announced additional tariffs of 25% on Chinese imports worth approximately \$50 billion, accusing it of intellectual property theft and unfair trade practices. China, in turn, retaliated with a

- India has an incentive-based sanitation programme that is household which constructs latrines are provided with some kind of financial support. The Union Cabinet recently gave its nod for raising funds up to ₹15,000 crore as extra-budgetary resources (EBR) for Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) during 2018-19 through NABARD.
- However, it is to be noted that beyond 2019, private sectors, banks, SHGs etc. will have to come in with alternative financing arrangement for water supply and toilet construction.

Way Forward

- Initial efforts at improved sanitation started right after independence. The first proper sanitation programme was launched in 1986 from then up to 2011-12 the growth of Sanitation access was about 1%.
- The Swachch Bharat Mission which was started in 2014 gave a huge boost to Sanitation in India, and at this point, India is well on its way of meeting its target of achieving universal sanitation coverage by 2nd October 2019.
- However, beyond the target period, there needs to be continued behavioral change as well as financial support from the private sector so that the level of Sanitation is maintained, in addition to this there is a need for R&D for better Fecal sludge management, SLWM, menstrual hygiene management etc.

number of tariffs on US goods, thus sparking off a trade war.

- The primary aim was to counter the growing presence of China in the global market which had grown because of OBOR, and other investments in various countries. Since the Chinese economy is highly dependent on exports, a hike in tariffs would hurt Chinese interests and at the same time would reduce the trade deficit between the two countries.
- Another bone of contention between US and China is the reduced cost of production in China which enables it to sell at a faster pace, on the other hand, the US economy is facing trouble both in terms of manufacturing goods and creating jobs.

India's Stand

- India had notified higher tariffs on 29 items imported from the United States (US). This is was in retaliation against the US announcement imposing tariffs on steel and aluminum items — 25% and 10% respectively — imported from all countries except Canada and Mexico to compensate for revenue loss.
- Recently India has decided to postpone the implementation of tariffs to September. This development is being considered as a step taken by India so as to not further fuel the trade war. Besides India was not majorly affected by the hike in tariffs in the US because its exports are low.
- India is trying to negotiate a bilateral treaty with the US, to receive exemptions from the tariffs. India has an important geographical advantage in being close to China, hence the USA would like to keep India as an ally. Besides, the trade surplus that India has with the USA will be narrowed due to the procurement of Boeing aircraft. India is also bringing about defence deals which are in favour of USA, thus it is felt by experts that the US does not see India as a threat and hence will not bring in a tariff structure that is highly detrimental for India.

WTO' Stand

- WTO has a major role in promoting global export competitiveness. In case a country decides to hike its tariffs, the exporting country can approach the WTO and file a complaint against the erring nation. The WTO can then ask the country to change its

policies such that they comply with the multilateral trading system.

- Many countries such as China and EU have decided to approach the WTO against the USA, however, if the US refuses to comply with the WTO's decision the global intergovernmental organisation will begin to lose its relevance, as a result, countries may begin to withdraw from the WTO, thus the present situation is being considered as a threat to the global multilateral regime.

Devaluation of Yuan

- China is evaluating the potential impact of a gradual yuan depreciation as a tool in trade negotiations with the U.S., as well as using it to offset the impact of any trade deal that curbs exports.
- While a weaker yuan could help China's export industries in the event of widespread tariffs in the U.S., a devaluation comes with plenty of risks. It would encourage Trump to follow through on his threat to brand China a currency manipulator, make it more difficult for Chinese companies to service their mountain of offshore debt, and undermine recent efforts by the government to move toward a more market-oriented exchange rate system.
- It would also expose China to the risk of heightened financial-market volatility, something authorities have worked hard to avoid in recent years. When China unexpectedly devalued the yuan by about 2 per cent in August 2015, the move fueled capital outflows and sent shock-waves through global markets.