drishti

Current Affairs
(Consolidation)

1-15th
January 2019

Contents

Polity and Governance

Highlights

Supreme Court Sets Deadline for Lokpal Appointment

Recently, the Supreme Court has fixed a **February-end deadline** for the **search committee on Lokpal** to recommend a panel of names for appointment of the country's first anti-graft ombudsman.

➢ Earlier in January, 2019, the government informed the Supreme Court that an **eight-member search committee** has been constituted in September, 2018, **headed by former Supreme Court judge, Justice Ranjana Prakash Desai**.

➢ The government informed SC that because of **lack of infrastructure and manpower** the search committee was not able to hold deliberations on the issue.

Background

➢ The first Bill for a Lokpal was tabled in Parliament in 1968. Institutions such as the Central Bureau of Investigation and the Central Vigilance Commission were set up in those years.

➢ Amid repeated demands for such an ombudsman, many attempts were made at legislation, with Lokpal Bills introduced in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2005 and 2008.

➢ The Act intends the LoP to be the part of the selection committee which will be headed by the **PM and will consist of the CJI and the Lok Sabha Speaker,** the leader of the largest opposition party and an eminent jurist.

➢ Though passed in 2014, the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013 was not implemented all these years because **there was no Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the 16th Lok Sabha**.

➢ However, on April 27, 2018, the Supreme Court, in a judgment, clarified that the Lokpal appointment process need not be stalled merely due to the absence of the LoP.

➢ The court has for the past several months stated the government's stand on Lokpal Appointment as unsatisfactory and has constantly urged the government to complete the Lokpal appointment.

Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013

➢ To provide for the establishment of a body of **Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States** to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

➢ It **extends to the whole of India** and shall apply to **public servants in and outside India**.

➢ The Lokpal shall inquire or cause an inquiry to be conducted into any matter involved in, or arising from, or connected with, any allegation of corruption made in a complaint in respect of the following, namely:—

○ Any person who is or has been a Prime Minister **(except for certain exceptions with respect to matters related to security, international relations etc.)**

Note:

- ❍ Any person who is or has been a Minister of the Union or an MP.
- ❍ Group A to D officers as defined in Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

➢ It shall be the duty of the Lokpal to **present annually** to the **President a report to be laid before each House of Parliament**.

➢ Every State shall establish a body to be known as the Lokayukta for the State, by a law made by the State Legislature.

Retirement Age of Judges

The Ministry of Law and Justice has said there was no proposal as of now to increase the retirement age of **Supreme Court judges from 65 to 67 and of High Court judges from 62 to 65**.

➢ The Ministry was responding to the recommendation of a **Parliamentary Standing Committee** that raising the retirement age of judges would help retain the existing judges, which in turn would help in **reducing both vacancy and pendency** of cases in short run.

➢ Another key factor highlighted by the committee was the **life expectancy, which has increased considerably** in the last few years.

Background

➢ The **Venkatachaliah Report (Report of the National Commission to review the working of the Constitution, 2002)** recommended that the retirement age of the Judges of the High Court should be increased to 65 years and that of the Judges of the Supreme Court should be increased to 68 years.

➢ The **Constitution (114th Amendment) Bill** was introduced in 2010 to increase the retirement age of High Court judges to 65. However, it was not taken up for consideration in Parliament and lapsed with the dissolution of the 15th Lok Sabha.

➢ Recently, Justice Kurian Joseph of Supreme Court also recommended increasing retirement age of judges in higher judiciary to decrease the pendency of cases.

➢ However, it has also been argued that 65 years is a good enough an age to retire, because at this age, **mental and physical wear and tear start manifesting**.

➢ As of now, out of a total **approved strength of 1,079 judges in 24 High Courts** (excluding the 25th High Court of Andhra Pradesh) across the country, **only 695 posts are filled**.

The Case in Western Democracies

➢ A retirement **age of around 70** for judges is commonplace in **most Western liberal democracies**. Some of them even opt for **tenures for life**. E.g.:
- ❍ 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**.

Need

➢ The **judge-population ratio in India is among the lowest** in the world at 19.66 judges per million (10 lakh) people as of today. In 2016, the U.K. had 51 judges per million people, the U.S. had 107, Australia had 41, and Canada had 75.

➢ It is also necessary to increase the number of judges in the pool to enable the judiciary to **deal with the enormous pendency of cases**.

➢ According to **National Judicial Data Grid data,** more than 2.84 crore cases are pending in the subordinate courts, 43 lakh cases are pending before the High Courts, and 57,987 cases are pending before the Supreme Court.

➢ Moreover, legislations provide for retired High Court and Supreme Court judges to **man tribunals till the age of 70 as chairman and 65 as members**. There is no reason why these judges should be retired so early.

➢ One aspect which has not been factored in is that as the **Indian economy grows,** the ratio of litigation to population will increase exponentially. Advanced economies such as Australia, Canada, France, the U.S., the U.K., and Japan have much **higher litigation-to-population ratios**.

Positive Consequences

➢ Senior serving judges will bring with them **years of experience**.

➢ 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**.

➢ It will be a buffer against **impending litigation explosion**.

➢ It will render **post-retirement assignments unattractive** and, as a consequence, **strengthen the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary,** both of which are crucial to sustain democracy.

Note:

Way Forward

➢ India faces the **perennial issue of backlog of cases**. Increasing the age of Judges will certainly help in addressing this issue. The retirement age of judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts could be increased, but with the **option of quitting before reaching the age of superannuation – a practice prevailing in Zimbabwe,** where a top court judge is appointed to retire at 65 years but can opt to continue till 70.

➢ Moreover, merely increasing the retirement age of the Judges is **not a solution for problems** in Indian Judiciary. Other issues like **lack of transparency (particularly in the appointment of judges), under trials of the accused, lack of information and interaction among people and courts must also be addressed**.

Dam Safety Bill, 2018

The Dam Safety Bill, 2018 was introduced in Lok Sabha on December 12, 2018.

Key Provisions of the Bill

➢ **National Committee on Dam Safety:**
  ❍ The Bill provides for the constitution of a National Committee on Dam Safety.
  ❍ The Committee will be chaired by the Chairperson, Central Water Commission and other members nominated by the central government.
  ❍ Functions of the Committee include:
    ● Formulating policies and regulations regarding dam safety standards and prevention of dam failures.
    ● Analysing causes of major dam failures and suggesting changes in dam safety practices.

➢ **National Dam Safety Authority:** The Bill provides for a National Dam Safety Authority.
  ❍ Its functions include:
    ● Implementing the policies formulated by the National Committee on Dam Safety.
    ● Resolving issues between State Dam Safety Organisations (SDSOs), or between an SDSO and any dam owner in that state.
    ● Specifying regulations for inspection and investigation of dams.
    ● Providing accreditation to agencies working on construction, design, and alteration of dams.

➢ **State Dam Safety Organisation:**
  ❍ The Bill provides for the establishment of SDSOs by the State governments.
  ❍ All specified dams situated in a State will fall under the jurisdiction of that state's SDSO.
  ❍ In certain cases the National Dam Safety Authority will act as the SDSO.
  ❍ Functions of the SDSOs include:
    ● Keeping surveillance, inspecting, and monitoring the operation and maintenance of dams.
    ● Keeping a database of all dams
    ● Recommending safety measures to owners of dams.

➢ **State Committee on Dam Safety:** The Bill provides for the constitution of State Committees on Dam Safety by the state governments.
  ❍ Functions of the Committee include:
    ● Reviewing the work of the SDSO.
    ● Ordering dam safety investigations.
    ● Recommending dam safety measures and reviewing the progress on such measures.
    ● Assessing the potential impact on upstream and downstream states. These states will also have their representatives on the State Committee.

➢ **Obligations of dam owners:** The Bill requires the owners of specified dams to provide a **dam safety unit** in each dam. This unit will inspect the dams:
  ❍ Before and after the monsoon season.
  ❍ During and after every earthquake, flood, or any other calamity or sign of distress.
  ❍ Dam owners will be required to prepare an emergency action plan, and carry out risk assessment studies at specified regular intervals.

Challenges

➢ Certain states have put a question mark over the legislative competence of the Centre in violation of federal spirit of constitution. States fear that the Centre may take control over their dams.

➢ Tamil Nadu has opposed it, fearing that the dams owned and operated by it would come under the purview of the National Dam Safety Organisation (NDSO) and that Kerala would also get access to the dam and information about it.

Note:

➢ The bill is too focused on the structural safety of dams, not so much on their operational safety.

➢ There is no provision for compensation to the victims of dam failures, which was a key recommendation of the June 2011 report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee (15th Lok Sabha) on Dam Safety Bill, 2010.

Conclusion

➢ Dam Safety Bill, 2018 is a much needed legislation to ensure the safety of man and materials in the downstream areas of the dam.

➢ The Bill is a critical adaptive measure in context of climate change, as extreme weather events like floods are expected to increase e.g. recent Kerala floods are attributed to climate change.

➢ In the spirit of cooperative federalism, and to allay the concerns of the States, there is a need for wider consultation.

Parliamentary Standing Committee Report on CBI and CAT

A Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) has raised concerns over non-filling of vacancies in the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

➢ In a **separate finding,** the PSC has observed that the **Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT)** lacks human as well as physical infrastructure. Because of this, 14 of the 17 Benches are not fully functional.

➢ The level of vacant positions in executive rank, law officers and technical officers is about 16, 28 and 56% respectively.

➢ At the top level, out of four posts of Special Director or Additional Director, three are lying vacant.

Recommendations on CBI

➢ Terms of **deputation to the CBI be made more rewarding** in order to retain capable officers and to attract best officers from the State police forces, Central paramilitary forces, Intelligence Bureau, etc.

➢ The committee recommended that the government simplify recruitment rules to **overcome the procedural bottlenecks**.

➢ The CBI and the government should **expedite approvals for setting up the International Centre of Excellence in Investigation (ICEI-CBI) at the CBI Academy in Ghaziabad,** which was announced in 2015.

  ○ ICEI-CBI was to offer world-class certified courses on investigation and prosecution in specialised and emerging domains of crime including cybercrime.

➢ With the **increasing number of cases** now being referred to the CBI pertaining to areas like **internal security, cybercrimes, corruption, financial irregularities,** the nation cannot afford to have its premier investigative agency understaffed and thus ill-prepared.

Recommendations on CAT

➢ **Strict timelines** to fill the vacancies.

➢ It suggested that the **appointment process** of tribunal members should start **well in advance** and the government should examine the reasons for members leaving service prematurely and take remedial measures.

➢ The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) and CAT should chalk out strategy to overcome the procedural hurdles in commencement of construction of buildings for Benches. It pointed out that despite allocation of funds, CAT was not carrying out construction at these sites.

Central Bureau of Investigation

➢ CBI functions under the superintendence of the Dept. of Personnel, Ministry of Personnel, Pension & Public Grievances, Government of India - which operates under the Prime Minister's office.

➢ However for investigations of offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act, its superintendence vests with the Central Vigilance Commission.

➢ It is also the nodal police agency in India which coordinates investigation on behalf of Interpol Member countries.

➢ CBI derives power to investigate from the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.

➢ In 1978, the L P Singh committee recommended enactment of a "comprehensive central legislation to remove the deficiency of not having a central investigative agency with a self-sufficient statutory charter of duties and functions".

➢ The Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2007) also suggested that "a new law should be enacted to govern the working of the CBI".

Note:

Central Administrative Tribunal
➤ The **Central Administrative Tribunal** had been established under **Article 323A** of the Constitution **(inserted by the 42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976)** for adjudication of disputes and complaints with respect to recruitment and conditions of service of persons appointed to public services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or other authorities under the control of the Government.
   ○ The **42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976 added two articles viz. 323-A and 323-B**. While article 323-A deals with Administrative Tribunals; article 323-B deals with tribunals for other matters.
➤ It was **established in 1985** by the **Administrative Tribunals Act, 1985**.
➤ The Tribunal is guided by the **principles of natural justice** in deciding cases and is not bound by the procedure, prescribed by the Civil Procedure Code.
➤ Initially the decision of the Tribunal could be **challenged before Supreme Court by filing Special Leave Petition**. However, after the Supreme Court's decision in **L. Chandra Kumar vs the Union of India & Ors (1997),** the orders of Central Administrative Tribunal are now being challenged by way of **Writ Petition under Article 226/227 of the Constitution before respective High Court** in whose territorial jurisdiction the Bench of the Tribunal is situated.
➤ The Principal seat of Central Administrative Tribunal is at **New Delhi** and it has **16 Outlying Benches scattered all over the Country**.

Aadhaar And Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018

Lok Sabha has recently passed the Aadhaar And Other Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2018.

➤ The Bill aims to amend three existing laws: the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002.
➤ The Bill is brought to modify existing laws to implement the Supreme Court's judgment (September 2018) which upheld Aadhaar but limited its use for only certain subsidies and schemes funded by the Consolidated Fund of India and disallowed private companies from seeking Aadhaar for authentication.

Provisions of the Bill

➤ **Enrolment of Children:** Permits the enrolment of children to the scheme with the consent of their parents or guardian.
   ○ Children can opt out of Aadhar on attaining majority.
➤ **Offline verification:** The Bill permits offline verification, i.e. the use of Aadhaar number to establish an identity without authentication using biometric data or other electronic means.
   ○ As per the present Act, Aadhaar number without electronic authentication cannot be used to verify the identity.
➤ **Virtual ID:** The Bill changes the definition of 'aadhaar number' to include 'virtual ID', in addition to the 12 digit number. The 16-digit Virtual ID enables one to authenticate identity without providing aadhaar number.
➤ **High Court judge can order disclosure:** The authority which can issue orders to disclose Aadhaar information is proposed to be changed as 'High Court judge' from 'District Judge'.
➤ **The right of hearing before disclosure order:** The Bill states that the holder of the Aadhar number should be heard before issuing such order.
➤ **Secretary authorized to order disclosure in the interest of national security:** The authority which can issue orders of disclosure of Aadhaar information in the interest of national security is proposed to be changed to the officer of the rank of "Secretary" from "Joint Secretary".
➤ **No denial of services due to authentication failure:** The Bill clarifies that failure in authentication of Aadhaar number due to old age, sickness, or technical reasons should not result in denial of any service, benefit or subsidy. It states that alternate means to verify identity should be used in such cases.
➤ **Civil penalties:** The Bill proposes civil penalties for collection, use, and disclosure of Aadhaar information in contravention with the violation of the provisions of the Act.
   ○ The maximum penalty proposed is ₹ 1 crore.
➤ **Section 57 Omitted:** The Bill proposes to omit Section 57 of the Aadhar Act that permitted private entities to use Aadhaar number for authenticating identity before providing services.

Note:

- ➤ **Amending Telegraph Act:** The Bill proposes to amend the Indian Telegraph Act 1855 to provide for voluntary use of Aadhaar number for identity verification by the telecom companies. However, the Bill does not say that Aadhaar has to be compulsorily used for verification.
- ➤ **Bank Accounts and Aadhar:** The Bill proposes an amendment to the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to permit voluntary use of Aadhaar for identity verification by banks before opening bank accounts. Aadhaar is specified as one of the means of identity verification, and there is no compulsion to use it.
- ➤ **UIDAI Fund:** Under the Act, all fees and revenue collected by the UIDAI shall be credited to the Consolidated Fund of India.
  - ○ The Bill removes this provision and creates the Unique Identification Authority of India Fund. The fund shall be used for expenses of the UIDAI, including salaries and allowances of its employees.

Section 66A of IT Act

The Supreme Court has sought the Centre's response to a plea alleging that **despite the striking down of draconian Section 66A of the IT Act in 2015 by the apex court,** police in various states were still invoking it in FIRs to clamp down on free speech on social media platforms.

- ➤ The petition said there had been a **huge communication gap** at the ground level and many officials may not even know about the Supreme Court verdict.
- ➤ It said trial courts and prosecutors were **not actively implementing the verdict** and the burden of terminating illegal prosecutions **based on Section 66A fell on the accused persons**.

Background

- ➤ Section 66A dealt with **information related crimes** in which sending information, by means of a computer resource or a communication device, which is inter alia offensive, derogatory and menacing is made a punishable offence.
- ➤ In **Shreya Singhal v. Union of India** judgement (2015), the Supreme Court had observed that the Section 66A had **created an offence on the basis of undefined actions:** such as **causing "inconvenience, danger, obstruction and insult", which do not fall among** the exceptions **granted under Article 19** of the Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of speech.

- ➤ The court also observed that the challenge was to **identify where to draw the line**. Traditionally, it has been drawn at incitement while terms like obstruction and insult remain subjective.
- ➤ In addition, the court had noted that **Section 66A did not have procedural safeguards** like other sections of the law with similar aims, such as:
  - ○ The need to obtain the concurrence of the Centre before action can be taken.
  - ○ Local authorities could proceed autonomously.
- ➤ The judgment had found that **Section 66A was contrary to both Articles 19 (free speech) and 21 (right to life) of the Constitution**. The entire provision was struck down by the court.
- ➤ Post judgment government had appointed an expert committee **(T.K. Viswanathan committee)** which proposed a legislation to meet the **challenge of hate speech online**.

The Constitution (124th Amendment) Bill, 2019

The Constitution (124th Amendment) Bill, 2019 that aims to provide reservation in public employment and higher education for economically weaker sections has been passed by the parliament.

- ➤ Economic reservation in jobs and education is proposed to be provided by inserting **clause (6) in Articles 15 and 16 of the Constitution**.

Provisions of Amendment Bill

- ➤ **Amendment to Article 15:** This clause enables State to make special provisions for advancement of any economically weaker section of citizens, including reservations in educational institutions.
  - ○ It states that such reservation can be made in any educational institution, including private institutions, whether aided or unaided, except minority educational institutions covered under Article 30 (1).
  - ○ It further states that the upper limit of the reservation will be 10%, which will be in addition to the existing reservations.
- ➤ **Amendment to Article 16:** The proposed Article 16 (6) enables State to make provision for reservation in appointments, in addition to the existing reservations, subject to a maximum of 10%.

Note:

➤ **Definition of "Economically weaker sections":** The central government will notify the "economically weaker sections" of citizens on the basis of family income and other indicators of economic disadvantage.

   ❍ This will be a class distinct from the already specified classes of SCs, STs, and socially and educationally backward classes.

Challenges for Introducing Economic Based Reservation

➤ **It breaches the 50% ceiling on reservations** laid down by the Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney's case.

➤ In the 1992 Indira Sawhney case, the Supreme Court said that such quotas cannot be provided for poverty alone. It has to be poverty plus social and educational backwardness and the backwardness should reflect historic injustice through generations.

➤ **The court then said that reservations beyond 50% will hit Article 14 (right to equality).** Half of jobs and seats in educational institutions must, therefore, be for the general merit category.

➤ **Equality is part of the basic structure, the court insisted.** Hence this step will also violate the Supreme Court ruling of Kesavananda Bharati which said that any amendment which offended the basic structure of Constitution would be ultra vires.

Positive Impact of Economic based Reservation

➤ **The reservation has historically been associated with caste.** And often in our imagination, there was a stigma that the upper caste put on those who had come through the reservation. By including upper castes under the sign of reservation, it dissociates caste and the stigma of reservation.

➤ 10% reservation will be in addition to the existing cap of 50% reservation for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Other Backward Classes, taking a total reservation to 60%.

Reasons for Increasing Reservation Demand

➤ The Indian economy is **not generating enough attractive jobs; nor is our education system training graduates** properly enough to participate in the economy. There has been a clamor amongst the educated upper caste groups like Rajputs for a reservation route to be opened up for them. This is in a context where public sector jobs are scarce.

➤ **Farmers Distress** has also been another reason for demand in the reservation, as the agriculture dominant upper caste is now facing an economic slowdown. To a large extent this contributed to the recent demand of Jats, Marathas, and Patidars to be included in the other backward classes (OBC) category so that they could shift away from agriculture.

Concerns

➤ **Reservations in India have become a political necessity.** Reservation is only seen as a tool to get access to the vote bank.

➤ Affirmative action was designed for those who have suffered social discrimination and historical wrong that certain caste/ tribal groups experienced for centuries, **not as a poverty alleviation, employment measure**.

➤ **It will open a Pandora's box with other communities also demanding the reservation** as the deterrence of 50% limit would be already breached.

➤ **This would also further the caste-based politics,** dividing society along caste-based lines, instead of creating a more egalitarian and integrative society, as envisaged by the Constitution.

➤ **Other groups would also claim stakes** such as gender-based reservation, religion-based reservation etc.

➤ This divisive trend for clamor for jobs, education would incite vote bank politics, threatening the cohesive structure of India in the long run.

Way Forward

➤ Equal opportunities in school education are imperative. This would address problems of unequal access, uneven completion rates, and asymmetrical dropout rates, to progressively diminish the need for reservations.

➤ It is necessary to recognize that discrimination, hence exclusion, is multi-dimensional. It is not only about caste but also about religion, gender, ethnicity and, ultimately, income.

➤ It is also essential to accept the idea that affirmative action must be limited to first-time entrants or first-generation learners. And, even with this correction, reservations cannot suffice, without an Equal Opportunities Commission to ensure implementation.

➤ Reservations served an important social purpose in independent India, to address the problems of embedded discrimination. But more of the same is no longer a solution. The answer lies in expanding educational and employment opportunities. It would ease conflict, soften divides, and progressively reduce the need for affirmative action.

Note:

Legal Status for SSC

A **Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC)** has recommended **statutory status to the Staff Selection Commission (SSC),** one of the largest recruitment agencies in the country.

➢ The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and all State Public Service Commissions either have constitutional or legal status. The SSC is the only such organisation that performs similar functions on a much larger scale, but does not enjoy a statutory status.

Staff Selection Commission
➢ The Government of India constituted the **Subordinate Services Commission in 1975** which was subsequently **re-designated as Staff Selection Commission in 1977**.
➢ The Staff Selection Commission is **an attached office** of the **Department of Personnel and Training** and comprises of Chairman, two Members and a Secretary-cum-Controller of Examinations who are appointed on such terms and conditions as may be prescribed by the Central Government.
➢ **Estimates Committee of the Parliament in its 47th Report (1967-68)** and the **First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in 1968** recommended the setting up of a Service Selection Commission for conducting examinations for recruitment to lower categories of posts.

➢ The SSC was created to ease the burden of the UPSC by taking over the recruitment for posts below the Group 'A' level.
➢ The workload and responsibilities of the SSC have increased exponentially over the years, from 9.94 lakh candidates in 2008-09 to over 2 crore in 2016-17.
➢ Moreover, the SSC has a sanctioned staff strength of 481 officers but is functioning with 75% of its sanctioned strength.
➢ Statutory status to the SSC would contribute to **greater functional autonomy, faster decision-making and efficiency** in the overall performance and delivery of results by the SSC in the recruitment process.

Tallying of VVPAT with EVMs

The Supreme Court has directed the Election Commission to respond to a plea that the counts from Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) units should be cross-verified in at least 30% randomly chosen polling stations in each Assembly and Lok Sabha constituency.

➢ At present only 10% of the VVPAT and vote counts from EVMs are cross verified.
➢ Apart from increasing the mandatory tallying of VVPAT with EVMs, the SC issued notice to EC on two other related issues:
   ○ Directions to make it mandatory for Returning Officer to order hand-counting of all the VVPAT slips of every polling station where the margin of victory is very narrow, less than 3%.
   ○ Making it mandatory for the poll panel to ask Returning Officer to order hand-counting of all VVPAT slips of all the polling stations where the discrepancy between the machine-counting total and the hand-counting total in respect of the 5% sample EVMs taken together is more than 1%.

Background

➢ The Supreme Court in its judgment in Subramanian Swamy vs ECI, 2013, had held that it was imperative that elections held through EVMs ought to implement a mechanism of voter verifiable paper audit trails so that the voter can satisfy himself that his vote was accurately recorded.
➢ The mechanism for random cross-verification of EVM and VVPAT counts was placed in order to detect any technological mischief or mal-programming of EVMs.

Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail
➢ VVPAT is an independent verification printer machine and is attached to electronic voting machines. It allows voters to verify if their vote has gone to the intended candidate.
➢ When a voter presses a button in the EVM, a paper slip is printed through the VVPAT. The slip contains the poll symbol and name of the candidate. It allows the voter to verify his/her choice.
➢ After being visible to the voter from a glass case in the VVPAT for seven seconds, the ballot slip will be cut and dropped into the drop box in the VVPAT machine and a beep will be heard.
➢ VVPAT machines can be accessed by polling officers only.

Note:

Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2018: UN

The recent study from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has shown that human trafficking is on the rise with sexual exploitation of victims as the main driver.

➢ The 2018 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons is the **fourth of its kind** mandated by the **General Assembly** through the **2010 United Nations Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons**.

➢ It covers 142 countries and provides an overview of patterns and flows of trafficking in persons at global, regional and national levels, based primarily on trafficking cases detected between 2014 and 2016.

➢ The main focus of the report was on the **impact of armed conflict on trafficking**. In conflict zones, where the rule of law is weak, and civilians have little protection from crime, armed groups and criminals take the opportunity to traffic them to offer as incentives to recruit new fighters.

Note:

Article 23 of the Constitution of India prohibits trafficking in any form. It prohibits trafficking in human beings and begar and other forms of forced labor making provisions for punishment of the contravention of such laws.

Key Findings

➢ **Victims:** Women and girls make up most trafficking victims worldwide. Almost three-quarters of them are trafficked for sexual exploitation, and 35% (women and girls) are trafficked for forced labor.

  ❍ Children now account for 30% of those being trafficked, and far more girls are detected than boys.

➢ **Factors:** Trafficking for sexual exploitation is the most prevalent form in European countries, whilst in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, forced labour is the main factor.

➢ **Region:** Victims are trafficked from most South Asian countries, including Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, and to a limited extent also from Nepal and Sri Lanka.

➢ **Detection and Reporting:** Asia and the Americas are the regions which have seen the largest increase in the numbers of victims detected, which may be explained by improved methods of detecting, recording and reporting data on trafficking — or a real increase in the number of victims.

❍ Although, there has been an **increase in the number of convictions** for trafficking in these regions, the study concluding that large areas of impunity still exist in many Asian and African countries, and **conviction rates for trafficking remain very low**.

❍ While the average numbers of reported victims had fluctuated during the earlier years for which UNODC had collected data, the global trend has shown a **steady increase since 2010**.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)

➢ UNODC is mandated to assist the Member States in their struggle against illicit drugs, crime and terrorism.

➢ It was established in **1997 through a merger** between the United Nations Drug Control Programme and the Centre for International Crime Prevention.

➢ UNODC relies on **voluntary contributions,** mainly from Governments, for 90% of its budget.

➢ In 2013, the **General Assembly designated July 30 as the World Day against Trafficking in Persons**.

Way Forward

➢ Addressing human trafficking is a key part of the **UN Sustainable Development Agenda,** requiring the Member States to monitor progress in tackling the problem, and report the number of victims by sex, age and form of exploitation.

➢ However, significant gaps in knowledge remain, with many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and some parts of East Asia still lacking sufficient capacity to record and share data on trafficking in persons.

➢ This report highlights the need to **step up technical assistance and strengthen cooperation,** to support all countries to protect victims and bring criminals to justice, and **achieve the Sustainable Development Goals**.

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

Lok Sabha has passed the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016.

Note:

Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016

➢ The Citizenship Amendment Bill was proposed for amending the Citizenship Act, 1955. Through this Bill, the government plans to change the definition of illegal migrants.

➢ Illegal migrants belonging to the **Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian religious communities** coming from **Afghanistan, Bangladesh**, and **Pakistan** will be eligible for Indian citizenship.

➢ These citizens will **gain permanent citizenship after six years of residency in India instead of 11 years** as mentioned in the Citizenship Act, 1955.

➢ Under the Act, one of the requirements for citizenship by naturalization is that the applicant must have resided in India during the last 12 months, and for 11 of the previous 14 years.

➢ The Bill allows **cancellation of Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) registration** for violation of any law.

Concerns regarding the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2016.

➢ The Bill **violates Article 14 of the Indian constitution** as it discriminates among refugees on the basis of religion (Muslim community has not been considered).

➢ The **cancellation of OCI registration** for 'violation of any law' may cover a range of violations, including minor offenses (e.g. parking in a no-parking zone) and **can be misused by the authorities**.

Proposed Suggestions

➢ **Checks and balances:** It is necessary to curtail the wide powers given to the central government to rescind the OCI card status or put checks and balances in place by appointing a committee or an ombudsman.

➢ **Remove religion as a basis:** The provision of granting citizenship only to immigrants of religion other than Muslims is against the idea of secularism as enshrined in the Indian Constitution.

➢ **Refugees:** It is necessary to keep in mind the international migrant crisis and to draw a clear demarcation between a refugee and an immigrant.

Way Forward

➢ Law should have no biases and try its utmost to provide justice and liberty to all. In past India has given shelter to refugees who were being persecuted because of their language or culture (Tamils of Sri Lanka, Bangladeshi, and Tibetan refugees). This Bill does not include such minorities. So it is necessary to broaden the scope of the law by including the term 'persecuted minorities' rather than religious minorities.

Article 14: Equality before the law and equal protection of laws. This right is available to both citizens and foreigners (except enemy aliens).

Citizenship under the Indian Constitution

➢ The Constitution deals with the citizenship from Articles 5 to 11 under Part II.

➢ It empowers the Parliament to enact a law to provide for such matters and any other matter relating to citizenship.

Illegal Immigrant

➢ According to the Citizenship Act (1955), an illegal immigrant is defined as a person who enters India without a valid passport or stays in the country after the expiry of the visa permit.

➢ Also, the immigrant who uses false documents for the immigration process.

Overseas Citizens of India

➢ OCIs are foreigners who are persons of Indian origin. For example, they may have been former Indian citizens or children of the current Indian citizen.

➢ OCIs are entitled to multipurpose, multiple entries, a lifelong visa allowing them to visit India at any time, for any length of time and for any purpose.

Citizenship by Naturalisation

➢ **By Naturalisation:** The Central Government may grant a certificate of naturalization to any person (not being an illegal migrant) if he possesses the following qualifications like:

○ he or she is not a subject or citizen of any country where citizens of India are prevented from becoming subjects or citizens of that country by naturalization

○ that, if he is a citizen of any country, he undertakes to renounce the citizenship of that country.

High-Level Panel to Safeguard Assamese Identity

The Cabinet has approved the setting up of a High Level Committee for implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord (provides for protection of the rights of indigenous people of the state).

Note:

➢ The panel will recommend how to provide constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to the indigenous people of Assam, including by reserving seats in the state assembly.

Background

➢ The government is facing criticism in Assam over the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which proposes to make minority (non-Muslim) immigrants from three neighbouring countries — Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan — eligible for Indian citizenship.

➢ But as per the Assam Accord, any person who came to the state after the midnight of March 24, 1971, will be identified as a foreigner.

➢ So the proposed Bill is seen to violate the Assam Accord by differentiating between migrants on the basis of religion.

Assam Accord

➢ It has been felt that Clause 6 of the Assam Accord has not been fully implemented, and therefore the Committee shall examine the effectiveness of actions since 1985 to implement Clause 6 of the Assam Accord.

➢ This high level committee will also look into issues of the Bodo people, especially the measures mentioned in the Memorandum of Settlement signed between the Government of India, Assam government and the Bodo Liberation Tigers Force in 2003.

　○ The Cabinet also approved the establishment of a **Bodo Museum-cum-language and cultural study center,** modernization of existing All India Radio Station and Doordarshan Kendra at Kokrajhar and naming a Superfast Train passing through BTAD as ARONAI Express.

➢ The historic Assam Accord was signed in 1985 to end a six-year-long mass movement demanding detection and deportation of illegal immigrants, mostly from Bangladesh, who threatened the culture, identity and economic future of the indigenous people of Assam.

➢ According to the accord, all those foreigners who had entered Assam between 1951 and 1961 were to be given full citizenship, including the right to vote; the entrants between 1961 and 1971 were to be denied voting rights for ten years but would enjoy all other rights of citizenship; and those who had done so after 1971 were to be deported under the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964.

Bodo Accord

➢ The Bodo Accord was signed in 2003 which resulted in the establishment of an autonomous administrative unit- Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

➢ The Bodoland Territorial Council has been divided into four districts viz. Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baska, and Udalguri.

➢ The sixth schedule of the constitution provides provisions for the administration of Tribal Areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

Sikkim Proposes Universal Basic Income

The government of Sikkim has mooted the idea to implement Universal Basic Income (UBI).

➢ If implemented Sikkim will become the first state in India to have UBI Scheme.

➢ Sikkim has indicated that it will do away with most subsidies before launching its UBI scheme.

➢ Economic survey 2016-17 has also mentioned that subsuming other schemes is an essential prerequisite for managing funds for UBI.

　○ The Budget for FY18 showed there were about 950 central sector and centrally sponsored sub-schemes in the country, which accounted for about 5% of GDP by Budget allocation.

　○ The top 11 schemes accounted for about 50% of the budgetary allocation. If the states were included, the number of schemes would be even larger.

Universal Basic Income

➢ A basic income is a regular, periodic cash payment delivered unconditionally to all citizens on an individual basis.

➢ The five broad features of such schemes are payments at periodic regular intervals (not one-off grants), payments in cash(not food vouchers or service coupons), payments to individuals, universality (all citizens included), and unconditionality (no prior condition).

International Examples

➢ **Finland** recently concluded a two-year experiment on effects of UBI on unemployed citizens, which commenced in January 2017.

Note:

- ➤ **The government of Ontario, Canada,** had announced a plan to test a kind of unconditional income guarantee and enrolled participants in three areas of the province for a guaranteed income for up to three years.
- ➤ **Netherlands and Spain:** Some cities in the Netherlands have launched municipal-level trials for UBI. Barcelona in Spain has also tested several potential changes to its anti-poverty programmes, including unconditional cash payments.

Advantages of UBI

- ➤ **Social Justice:** UBI promotes many of the basic values of a society. It promotes liberty as it allows an individual to be financially independent. It promotes efficiency by reducing waste in government transfers.
- ➤ **Poverty Reduction:** As per the economic survey 2016-17, UBI could be the fastest way of reducing poverty. UBI ensures minimum basic income to everyone.
- ➤ **Agency:** By providing cash assistance State allows individuals to take decision for themselves how they are going to use the money as the circumstances that keep individuals trapped in poverty are varied. UBI liberates citizens from paternalistic and clientelistic relationships with the state.
- ➤ **Minimum Living Standard:** UBI is an acknowledgment of society's obligation to guarantee a minimum living standard to all individuals who are part of society.
- ➤ **Administrative Efficiency:** The existing welfare schemes are riddled with misallocation, leakages, and exclusion of the poor. By replacing the plethora of separate government schemes with UBI, it will help in reducing the administrative burden on the State.
  - ○ Due to universality and unconditionality, UBI prevents misallocation and leakages.
- ➤ **Insurance against shocks:** UBI can provide a safety net against health, income and other shocks.
- ➤ **Psychological benefits:** A guaranteed income will reduce the pressures of finding a basic living on a daily basis.

Disadvantages of UBI

- ➤ **Reduces incentive to work:** A minimum guaranteed income might make people lazy and opt out of the labor market.
- ➤ **Gender disparity:** Gender norms may regulate the sharing of UBI within a household – men are likely to exercise control over the spending of the UBI. This may not be the case with other in-kind transfers.

- ➤ **Implementation:** Given the current status of financial access among the poor, a UBI may put too much stress on the banking system.
- ➤ **Exposure to market risks (cash vs. food):** Unlike food subsidies that are not subject to fluctuating market prices, a cash transfer may not address the issue of the decline in purchasing power due to inflation.

Government Re-Promulgates Triple Talaq Ordinance

The government has **re-promulgated the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Ordinance, 2019,** banning the practice of instant triple talaq (**'talaq-e-biddat'**).

- ➤ A Bill to convert the earlier ordinance, issued in September, 2018, was cleared by **the Lok Sabha in December and is pending in the Rajya Sabha**. Since the Bill could not get the Parliamentary approval, the fresh ordinance was issued.
- ➤ This ordinance makes Instant Triple Talaq or Talaq-e-biddat a cognizable offense.

Background

- ➤ In August 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that Instant Triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat is unconstitutional and illegal in Shayara Bano vs. Union of India and Ors.
- ➤ To enforce the Supreme Court ruling, the government brought the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017.
- ➤ The ordinance gives effect to amended version of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017 as presented in Rajya Sabha by the government.

Provisions in Ordinance

- ➤ Any pronouncement of Talaq by a Muslim husband upon his wife in any manner, written, spoken or electronic, will be illegal.
- ➤ Any husband who pronounces triple talaq can be punished by a jail term up to three years and will also be liable for fine.
- ➤ Muslim women will now be entitled to custody of her minor children.
- ➤ Muslim women are now entitled to receive maintenance for herself and her dependent children.
- ➤ Triple talaq is now a cognizable offense if the case is filed by married Muslim women or any person related to her by blood or marriage.

Note:

- The offense will be compoundable, i.e. there can be a compromise but only on the insistence of the wife and magistrate will determine the terms and conditions.
- The offender can be granted bail by a magistrate but only after hearing the victim wife and magistrate is satisfied that there is reasonable ground for bail.

What is instant triple talaq?

- In the practice of talaq-e-biddat, when a man pronounces talaq thrice in a sitting, or through phone, or writes in a talaq-nama or a text message, the divorce is considered immediate and irrevocable, even if the man later wishes to re-conciliate.
- However, women cannot pronounce triple talaq and are required to move a court for getting the divorce under the Sharia Act, 1937.
- There are three forms of talaq (divorce) in Islam: Ahsan, Hasan, and Talaq-e-Biddat (triple or instant talaq). Ahsan and Hasan are revocable but talaq-e-Biddat is irrevocable.
- Triple talaq is a practice mainly prevalent among India's Muslim community following the Hanafi Islamic school of law.
- Triple talaq is banned by many Islamic countries, including Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, UAE, and Indonesia.

Triple Talaq and the Indian constitution

- Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees religious freedom as Freedom of Practice and Propagation of Religion.
- Like all other Fundamental Rights, it is subject to restrictions and does not protect religious practices that can negatively affect the welfare of citizens.
- Hence, Article 25 is overridden by Article 14, which guarantees the Right to Equality as triple talaq denies a Muslim woman's equality before the law.
- Article 25 is also subject to Article 15 (1) which states that the State "shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex…" Since triple talaq does not work in the favour of women, it violates Article 15 (1) of the Constitution.

Ordinance Making Power of President

- Under the Constitution, the power to make laws rests with the legislature. However, in cases when Parliament is not in session, and **'immediate action'** is needed, the President can issue an ordinance.
- **Article 123** of the Indian constitution empowers the **President** to promulgate ordinances.
- After the ordinance is notified it is to be laid before Parliament **within 6 weeks** of its first sitting.
- Parliament could either choose to pass the ordinance, disapprove it or it may lapse within the 6 week time frame.
- As **maximum gap between two session of a house can be 6 months** therefore maximum life of an ordinance can be **6 months and 6 weeks**.
- An ordinance made when both the Houses are in session is void. Thus, the power of the President to legislate by ordinance is **not a parallel power of legislation**.
- In addition, the President may chose to withdraw the ordinance.
- **In Cooper case, (1970),** the Supreme Court held that the President's satisfaction can be questioned in a court on the ground of malafide.
- In the **D C Wadhwa case (1987)** the court ruled that successive re promulgation of ordinances with the same text without any attempt to get the bills passed by the assembly would amount to violation of the Constitution and the ordinance so re-promulgated is liable to be struck down.
  - It held that the exceptional power of law-making through ordinance cannot be used as a substitute for the legislative power of the state legislature.
- In **Krishna Kumar Singh vs. State of Bihar (2017),** the Supreme Court stated that ordinances are subject to judicial review, and do not automatically create enduring effects.

■■■

Note:

Economic Scenario

Highlights

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Financial Stability Report

The Reserve Bank of India released it's **18th Financial Stability Report (FSR). FSR is a biannual publication**.

➤ The FSR is periodic exercise for reviewing the nature, magnitude and implications of risks that may have a bearing on the **macroeconomic environment, financial institutions, markets and infrastructure**.

➤ This report also assess the resilience of the financial sector through **stress tests**.

  ○ Stress tests are used to gauge how certain unfavorable economic scenarios, such as a deep recession or financial crisis will affect a company, industry or specific portfolio. Stress tests are usually **computer-generated simulation** models that test hypothetical scenarios.

➤ It reflects the collective assessment of the **Sub-Committee of the Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)** on risks to the financial stability of the country, as also the resilience of the financial system.

Findings

➤ India's financial system **remains stable,** and the **banking sector shows signs of improvement,** even though the global economic environment and the emerging trends in financial sector pose challenges.

  ○ The reasons for these positive signs include **credit growth of banks** coupled with **improvement in the asset quality of the banks**.

  ○ Credit growth of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) has improved between March 2018 and September 2018, driven **largely by private sector banks (PVBs)**.

➤ The global growth outlook for 2018 and 2019 remains steady although the spillover risk to emerging economies because of **tightening of financial conditions in Advanced Economies, protectionist trade policies and global geopolitical tension** has significantly increased.

➤ On the domestic front, growth of **gross domestic product (GDP) showed slight moderation** while **inflation remains contained**. At present, Inflation is at 2% which falls in the comfortable range of 2% to 6%.

➤ Slowdown in GDP growth to 7.1%, but there is growth in **Gross Fixed Capital Formation** along with the dip in crude oil prices which are positive for a sustained growth.

Gross Fixed Capital Formation

➤ Gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) refers to the **net increase in physical assets (investment minus disposals)**. It does not take into account consumption (depreciation) of fixed capital.

➤ It is a component of **expenditure approach** to calculating Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

➤ GFCF is **not a measure of total investment,** because only the value of net additions to fixed assets is measured, and all kinds of financial assets, as well as stocks of inventories and other operating costs are excluded.

Note:

➢ Decline in the ratio of gross non-performing assets (GNPA) to advances since September 2015, with both public sector and private sector lenders posting drops in the key indicator of bad loans.

    ❍ However, State-owned banks continue to have higher levels of bad loans than their private sector peers and are projected to show slower improvements over the second half of the fiscal.

➢ Recommended solution is **reforms in governance,** while the weaker ones among the public sector banks need to be **supported through recapitalisation**.

➢ Data on **banking frauds** are also a cause for concern. Close to 95% of the frauds reported in the six months were credit-related, with higher exposure to PSBs.

    ❍ The graph of **both the frauds as well as the amount** involved has been on the **rise steadily** through the four years till FY18.

➢ In the wake of the crisis at infra-lender **Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services (ILFS)** and also a few years after chit fund scams, the RBI pitched for **greater coordination** between **financial sector regulators** to plug any possible gaps which may be exploited by players.

Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC)

➢ The Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) was set up by the Government as the apex level forum in **December 2010**. **It is not a statutory body**.

➢ The objective of FSDC is to strengthen and institutionalize the mechanism for maintaining financial stability, enhancing inter-regulatory coordination and promoting financial sector development.

➢ The Chairman of the Council is the **Finance Minister** and its members include the heads of all Financial Sector Regulators (RBI, SEBI, PFRDA & IRDA), Finance Secretary and/or Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Secretary, Department of Financial Services (DFS), and Chief Economic Adviser.

    ❍ **In May, 2018** government reconstituted FSDC to include the Minister of State responsible for the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA), Secretary of Department of Electronics and Information Technology, Chairperson of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) and the Revenue Secretary.

➢ **FSDC sub-committee** is headed by the **Governor of RBI**.

➢ The **Raghuram Rajan committee (2008)** on financial sector reforms first **proposed the creation of FSDC**.

Export Promotion Council (EPC) Established for MSME Sector

The **Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)** has recently established an **Export Promotion Cell (EPC)** with an aim to create a sustainable ecosystem for entire MSME development.

➢ MSME sector has a huge impact on Foreign Exchange earnings and has large export potential.

➢ As per the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIS), the share of MSME related products in the country's exports was 48.56% during 2017-18.

➢ In addition to the above, MSMEs account for about 85-90 % of leather exports; around 6% to India's manufacturing GDP (about 33%to the manufacturing output) and about 25% to the GDP from service activities.

Objective of EPC

➢ Evaluate readiness of MSMEs to export their products and services.

➢ Recognize areas that can be improved to export effectively and efficiently.

➢ **Integration** of MSME into the **global value chain**.

➢ The target of **USD 100 billion of exports** from India by **2020**.

➢ **Identify potential clusters** which can start exporting directly or through aggregators and export houses with the help of export promotion councils.

➢ Coordinate with other departments and export promotion councils for **increasing shipments of products like khadi, leather and coir**.

Governing Council Composition

➢ **Chaired by Secretary, Ministry of MSME** and Co-chaired by Development Commissioner, Ministry of MSME.

➢ The council will comprise of senior officials and members from the Ministry of MSME, Commerce, MSME Export Promotion Councils, Export Development Authorities, Commodity Boards, and other bodies.

Key Benefits to MSME

➢ Simplification of procedures.

➢ Incentives for higher production of exports.

➢ Preferential treatments to MSMEs in the market development fund.

Note:

- Simplification of duty drawback rules.
- Products of MSME exporters are displayed in international exhibitions free of cost.
- Export Promotion Programmes/Measures

Marketing Assistance And Export Promotion Scheme

- **Participation in the International Exhibitions/Fairs.**
- **Training Programmes** on Packaging for Exports.
- **Marketing Development Assistance** Scheme for MSME exporters (MSME-MDA).
  - ❍ In addition, the above scheme also provides for financial assistance up to Rs. 2 lakhs for commissioning specific market studies and assistance for initiating/ contesting anti-dumping cases are available to MSME Association limited to 50% of the total cost or Rs. 1 lakh whichever is less.
- The **Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)** was introduced in the Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2015-20 in 2015 with the objective to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in exporting goods/products which are produced /manufactured in India including products produced/manufactured by MSME Sector.
- The Government has implemented the **Niryat Bandhu Scheme with an objective to reach out to the exporters from Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)** and mentor them through orientation programmes, counselling sessions, individual facilitation, etc., on various aspects of foreign trade to enable them to get into international trade and boost exports from India.

RBI sets up MSME Panel

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has set up an eight-member expert committee under **former SEBI chairman U.K. Sinha** to understand the structural bottlenecks and **factors affecting the performance of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)**.

- The panel will suggest **long-term solutions for the economic and financial sustainability** of the MSME sector.
- Recently, RBI has also allowed a one-time restructuring of existing debt up to ₹25 crore for the MSMEs.

The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Committee

- To review the **current institutional framework** in place to support the MSME sector;

- To study the **impact of the recent economic reforms** on the sector and identify the structural problems affecting its growth;
- To examine the factors affecting the **timely and adequate availability of finance** to the sector;
- To study the **global best practices with respect to MSMEs** and recommend its adoption in India, wherever appropriate;
- To review the **existing MSME focused policies** and its impact on the sector;
- To propose **measures for leveraging technology** in accelerating the growth of the sector;
- To suggest **long-term solutions for the economic and financial sustainability** of the MSME sector;
- The Expert Committee will **submit its report by the end of June 2019**.

Problems faced by the MSME sector

- **Lack of adequate capital:** The MSMEs are presently facing the problems of credit from the banks.
- **Poor infrastructure:** MSMEs are developing rapidly but their infrastructure is very poor. With poor infrastructure, their production capacity is very low while production cost is very high.
- **Access to modern technology:** The owners of MSMEs are either not aware of advanced technologies of production or they are very expensive. Thus, their methodology is outdated and the cost of production is high.
- **Access to markets:** Their advertisement and sales promotion are comparatively weaker than the multinational companies. The ineffective advertisement and poor marketing channels lead to very poor selling and they are not able to compete with big firms.
- **Getting statutory clearances related to power, environment, labor etc:** All the laws related to all aspects of manufacturing and service concern are very complex and compliance with these laws are practically difficult.

Nandan Nilekani to Head Panel on Digital Payments

The Reserve Bank of India has appointed a **five-member panel** headed by **Nandan Nilekani** to suggest ways to **improve digital payments**. The committee will submit its report in 90 days from its first meeting.

- ➢ **Terms of reference** of the panel are
  - ○ Assess the **current levels of digital payments** in financial inclusion,
  - ○ Suggest measures to strengthen the **safety and security** of digital payments,
  - ○ Provide a road map for increasing **customer confidence** to use digital transactions, and
  - ○ Suggest a **medium-term strategy** for deepening of digital payments.
- ➢ According to a report on India's financial sector by Credit Suisse, **cash share** in India is still **estimated at 70% in value terms and digital payments currently aggregate only $200 billion,** compared with $5-trillion mobile payments in China. One way to increase digital payments is **payment integration into popular apps**.

Background

- ➢ In **August, 2016** the government had constituted the **Ratan Watal Committee on Digital Payments** to review the payment systems in the country and to recommend appropriate measures for encouraging Digital Payments.
- ➢ Payments through all electronic forms such as debit and credit cards, mobile wallets, real-time gross settlement (RTGS), national electronic funds transfer (NEFT) and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) have **seen a huge rise over the last few years,** especially since the government's **demonetization exercise in November 2016**.

Digital Payments

- ➢ As per the **Payment and Settlement Act, 2007,** digital payment is any **"electronic funds transfer"** means or any transfer of funds which is initiated by a person by way of instruction, authorization or order to a bank to debit or credit an account maintained with that bank through electronic means and includes point of sale transfers; automated teller machine transactions, direct deposits or withdrawal of funds, transfers initiated by telephone, internet and, card payment.

Types of Digital Payments

- ➢ **Unified Payment Interface (UPI)** is a payment mode which is used to make fund transfers through the mobile app.
- ➢ **AEPS (Aadhaar Enabled Payment Service)** is an Aadhaar based digital payment mode wherein customer needs only his or her Aadhaar number to pay to any merchant. AEPS allows bank to bank transactions.

- ➢ **E-Wallets** or mobile wallet is the digital version of physical wallet with more functionality. E.g.: ICICI Pockets, Freecharge, Paytm etc.
- ➢ **Cards** have been the most used digital payment modes till now. They are used for transferring funds and making digital payments. Credit cards, debit cards and prepaid cards are the main types of cards.
- ➢ **Unstructured Supplementary Service Data (USSD)** banking or *99# Banking is a mobile banking based digital payment mode. One does not need to have a smartphone or internet connection to use USSD banking. It can be used with any normal feature phone.
  - ○ The ***99#** code works as a bridge between telecom operator's server and bank's server.

Best Practices of Digital Payments
Contactless Payment

- ➢ Alternate payment channels such as **contactless and wearables** have gained acceptance with the widespread use of smartphones, mobile banking and payments applications.
  - ○ Contactless payments enable consumers to make everyday purchases quickly and safely especially for low-value transactions.
  - ○ **Mobility, Internet of things (IOT),** connected homes, entertainment, and media are expected to augment the volumes of non-cash transaction volumes significantly.

Distributed Ledger Technology

- ➢ Banks and FinTech's are exploring **blockchain technology** for cross-border payments to provide faster, inexpensive, and efficient services.

Cybersecurity Regulations

- ➢ Cyberattacks can cause **personal and commercial data to be lost or compromised** causing financial institutions financial and reputational loss. Based on estimates, cyberattacks cost the **global economy 1% of annual GDP**.
- ➢ As cyber-attacks and data breaches around the world are **rising in terms of both, frequency and intensity,** regulators are focusing on compliance with current cybersecurity and data privacy laws.
- ➢ Regulators across the world are bringing in new cybersecurity regulations and standards which could impose heavy fines, injunctions, audits, even criminal liability on firms for a data breach.

Note:

➢ However, **lack of harmonization in cybersecurity laws** in different countries is posing a challenge for multinational companies operating across the globe.

Payment Infrastructure

➢ Globally, **payments infrastructure is being transformed** to become faster and more inclusive to new players that will launch valuable offerings for retail and businesses.

➢ Payments infrastructure is expected to **converge through mergers and acquisitions** to expand the reach of the payments firms, increase their value proposition to meet changing customer expectations, and create customized solutions.

➢ Payment schemes and intermediaries are also looking for infrastructure rationalization to be able to **provide services in niche** and high demand areas of **data analytics, cloud, and Digital Customer Experience (DCX)**.

Supreme Court Upholds Monsanto's Patent Claim on Bt Cotton Seed

The Supreme Court has **allowed Monsanto Technology** to claim patent on its genetically-modified cotton seeds, giving a boost to firms developing new seed technologies.

➢ The ruling overturned an order of a Division Bench of the Delhi High Court (2018) which invalidated the patent granted to Monsanto — acquired by German firm Bayer AG — saying the gene sequence responsible for the Bt trait that eradicates pests afflicting cotton plants is a part of the seed, and hence, **cannot be patented under Section 3(j) of the Patents Act, 1970**.

Background

➢ With its ruling, the Supreme Court has also set aside an earlier order of the division bench of the Delhi high court, which had held that plant varieties and seeds cannot be patented under Indian law by companies.

➢ Mahyco Monsanto Biotech (MMB) sells GM cotton seeds under license to more than 40 Indian seed companies. These Indian seed companies in turn pay a **"trait fee"** to Monsanto which is fixed by the government.

Impact

Positive

➢ The **outcome is positive for foreign agricultural companies** such as Monsanto, Bayer, Dupont, Pioneer and Syngenta which have been concerned that they could lose patents on GM crops in India.

➢ The verdict validates that patents are integral to innovation and will encourage more companies to come out with **India specific innovations**.

➢ The ruling is expected to **encourage biotechnology firms** to step up investment in the country.

Negative

➢ The dispute has led Monsanto to withdraw its **herbicide tolerant (HT)** seeds from the process of government approval. Indian farmers who need better quality seeds (global warming adaptation measures requires both drought- and flood-resistant seeds), will be worst hit.

➢ Most international companies have stopped releasing new technology in the Indian market due to the uncertainty over patent rule. Access to advanced technology is important to help Indian farmers compete with rivals overseas because Bt cotton seed, the only lab-altered crop allowed in India, has helped transform India into the world's top cotton producer and second-largest exporter of the fiber.

Government's Response

➢ The prices of GMO seeds and the royalty to Monsanto are **already under government control** and keep seeds affordable for the Indian farmers.

➢ Till recently, every seed firm **like Nuziveedu required an annual No Objection Certificate (NOC)** from Monsanto whose job was to ensure the right processes were being followed – this was critical if Monsanto was to be responsible for any problems with the seeds, however, the government removed the annual NOC requirement; as a result, if these firms choose to not pay royalty, there is little a Monsanto can do except to file a civil suit which can take decades to resolve.

Bt Cotton

➢ **Bollgard II cotton contains two genes (Cry1Ac and Cry2Ab)** derived from the common soil bacterium Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt).

➢ India ratified the **Cartagena Protocol** which protects biodiversity from potential risks of genetically modified organisms and the products of modern biotechnology. The protocol requires setting up of a regulatory body.

Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC).

➢ Currently the top biotech regulator in India is **Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)**. The committee functions as a statutory body **under the Environment Protection Act 1986** in the Ministry of Environment & Forests (MoEF).

➢ GEAC, the apex body regulates manufacturing, use, import, export and storage of hazardous micro-organisms or genetically engineered organisms and cells in the country.

➢ GEAC is chaired by the **Special Secretary/Additional Secretary of MoEF&CC** and co-chaired by a representative from the Department of Biotechnology (DBT). Presently, **it has 24 members** and meets every month to review the applications in the areas indicated above.

Other Regulatory Agencies for GMO

➢ As per powers conferred by Sections **"Regulation of Genome Engineering Technologies in India", 8 and 25 of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**. These rules are essentially covering entire spectrum of activities involving GMOs.

➢ **Six Competent Authorities** and their composition have been notified under these Rules that includes:

❍ rDNA Advisory Committee (RDAC)

❍ Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBSC)

❍ Review Committee on Genetic Manipulation (RCGM)

❍ Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)

❍ State Biotechnology Coordination committee (SBCC)

❍ District Level Committee (DLC)

➢ While the **RDAC is advisory in function, the IBSC, RCGM, and GEAC are responsible for regulating function. SBCC and DLC are for monitoring purposes**.

Conclusion

➢ Patent protection is one of core incentives for researchers in the fields of science and technology that ensures innovation and introduction of new technologies which are **important for solving the domestic problems** of the country and more so to compete in the age of Globalised economy.

➢ However, developing countries like India need more affordable, frugal innovations and that too from the Indian research institutes and councils so that the knowledge could be distributed without barriers within India which will ultimately benefit the poor.

Merger of Vijaya Bank, Dena Bank, and Bank Of Baroda

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved the **merger of state-run Vijaya Bank, Bank of Baroda and Dena Bank**.

➢ This marks the first-ever three-way merger in the country's banking sector. The merged entity will become the third largest bank in the country, after government-owned State Bank of India and private sector lender ICICI Bank.

➢ Bank of Baroda will be the transferee bank while the other two public sector banks will be transferor banks. That means the businesses of Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank will be transferred to Bank of Baroda.

Why Amalgamation?

➢ One of the reasons for choosing these three banks was that the two stronger ones will be able to absorb the weaker entity.

➢ The amalgamation is part of the government's efforts to consolidate the banking industry with a focus on overcoming the bad loan crisis. Public sector banks are suffering from Non Performing Assets, in FY18, the banking system has reported a net loss of Rs 40,000 crore because of the sharp rise in NPAs.

➢ India has a target to meet the **Global Basel III capital norms by March 2019**. The move is a part of the steps to meet the norms.

➢ With amalgamation announcement, the government is moving closer to implementing the **Narasimham Committee (1998)** recommendation on structural reforms. The committee recommended the merger of Indian banks as it will have a **"multiplier effect" on the economy**.

➢ The Government of India has majority stakes in 21 public sector banks and owns more than two-thirds of banking assets in India. Having several government-owned Banks, doing the same business, and competing for same customers is not sensible. It also meant a lower return on the capital employed by the government which has competing demands for funds, and growing competition.

➢ With the increase in GDP, it is necessary for India to have globally stronger financial institutions.

Note:

Impact of Merger

➢ It will consolidate and strengthen the banking industry, given the fact that amalgamated bank would be the third-largest after State Bank of India and ICICI.

➢ BoB and Dena Bank have a strong presence in Gujarat. Dena Bank is also strong in Maharashtra and part of Chhattisgarh. Vijaya Bank is strong in South. The duplication of work can be avoided. Their accounts can be easily merged. The three banks operate on the same core banking platform, Finacle, this also eases up technology integration to a large extent.

➢ There is also a significant overlap among public sector banks in terms of branches, mode of operation and clients. Mergers can bring down costs through economies of scale and address the problem of fragmentation.

➢ Global network strength of Bank of Baroda will be leveraged to enable customers of Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank to have global access.

➢ Dena Bank's strength in MSME will further augment the strength of the other two to position the amalgamated bank for being an **MSME Udyami Mitra**.

Challenges

➢ Dena Bank is under the RBI's Prompt Corrective Action framework (PCA) due to its huge bad loans and weak financial ratios. The re-stabilization after the merger can take a long time as observed in the case of New Bank of India's merger with Punjab National Bank in the mid-80s.

  ○ The same was the case when the erstwhile Global Trust Bank (a private sector bank) was merged with Oriental Bank of Commerce (a public sector bank) in 2004.

➢ For investors, the merger of the Bank of Baroda with a weaker PSB, Dena bank is a concern. A complex merger with a weaker and under-capitalized PSB would put the bank's recovery efforts on the backburner. While the merger is positive for shareholders of Dena Bank, it is negative for Bank of Baroda and Vijaya Bank

➢ The merger also sends out poor signals about banking governance, here a dominant shareholder in the form of the government is dictating critical moves which will impact the minority shareholders.

➢ There is a concern among employees that amalgamation may lead to rationalization of bank branches, many branches of these banks operate in the same neighborhoods. If branches will be shut down there are fears that staff will be laid off.

Way Forward

➢ Creation of large banks to meet the requirements of the economy is the necessity. But, it is more important for the government to address the core issue impacting the Banking Sector, that is, of Governance.

➢ The Government can consider the recommendations of the **PJ Nayak Committee, 2014** on Governance of PSB which **advocated for restricted government interference in bank administration**. Protection of Banks from political interference is the real challenge, without governance reform, any other measure to tackle the crisis of bank may not turn out to be useful.

Basel III Norms

➢ Basel III norms aim at making most banking activities more capital-intensive and promoting a more resilient banking system by focusing on four vital banking parameters viz. capital, leverage, funding and liquidity.

➢ The Reserve Bank of India has extended the timeline for implementation of the Basel III capital regulations by March 31, 2019.

Narasimham Committee, 1998

➢ The merger of major banks which will have 'multiplier effect' on the industry.

➢ To improve the strength of the Indian banking system the committee recommended to raise capital adequacy norms.

➢ Review of functions of boards to adopt a professional corporate strategy to check the imbalance between government control over the banks in the form of management and ownership, and bank autonomy.

PJ Nayak Committee, 2014

➢ Conversion of PSBs into Companies as per the Companies Act.

➢ Formation of a Bank Investment Company (BIC) under the Companies Act and transfer of shares by the central government in PSBs to the BIC.

➢ BIC should be given the controlling power of boards of PSBs.

➢ Proportionate voting rights to all shareholders and reduction of government shareholding to 40%.

Note:

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)

➢ PCA norms allow the RBI to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment. It can even cap a bank's lending limit to one entity or sector.

➢ Other corrective actions that can be imposed on banks include special audit, restructuring operations and activation of the recovery plan. Banks' promoters can be asked to bring in new management, too. The RBI can also supersede the bank's board, under PCA.

➢ **When is PCA invoked?**

❍ The PCA is invoked when banks breach certain regulatory requirement like minimum capital, return on asset and quantum of non-performing assets.

Capital Adequacy Ratio (CAR)

➢ CAR is the ratio of a bank's capital in relation to its risk-weighted assets and current liabilities.

➢ The Basel III norms stipulated a capital to risk-weighted assets of 8%. However, as per RBI norms, Indian scheduled commercial banks are required to maintain a CAR of 9% while Indian public sector banks are emphasized to maintain a CAR of 12%.

Tier 1 Capital

➢ Tier 1 Capital is the core measure of a bank's financial strength from a regulator's point of view. It is composed of core capital, which consists primarily of common stock and disclosed reserves.

Government to Open Bid for Oil/Gas Licensing

The Centre has launched a new round of the auction for the 14 blocks for prospecting of oil and gas.

➢ The auction will be done under the **Open Acreage Licensing Programme (OALP)** under the liberalized **Hydrocarbon Exploration and Licensing Policy (HELP)**.

➢ The blocks on offer in OALP-II include one in deep waters of Krishna Godavari basin and five shallow water blocks — two each in Andaman and Kutch basin and one in Mahanadi basin. Eight on land blocks - four in Mahanadi basin, two in Cambay and one each in Rajasthan and Cauvery are on offer.

Procedure of Auction

➢ Under the Open Acreage Licensing Programme or OALP, **companies are allowed to put in an expression of interest (EoI) for prospecting of oil and gas in any area** that is presently not under any production or exploration license.

➢ The blocks or areas that receive EoIs at the end of a cycle are put up for auction with the originator or the firm that originally selected the area getting a 5-mark advantage.

➢ Blocks are awarded to the company which **offers the highest share of oil and gas to the government** as well as commits to doing **maximum exploration work by seismic survey and drilling exploration wells**.

Significance of Auction

➢ Increased exploration will lead to **more domestic oil and gas production,** helping India, which is the world's third largest oil importer, cutting import dependence.

➢ New blocks will bring **substantial investment in the sector** and will help in **generating employment**.

➢ It will also help in achieving the **government target of cutting oil import bill to 67% by 2022 and to half by 2030**.

Hydrocarbon Exploration Licensing Policy (HELP)

➢ The government has launched the Hydrocarbon Exploration Licensing Policy (HELP) replacing the old policy of National Exploration and Licensing Policy (NELP).

➢ Four main facets of HELP are:

❍ **uniform license** for exploration and production **of all forms of hydrocarbon**,

❍ an **open acreage policy**,

❍ easy to administer the **revenue sharing model** and

❍ **marketing and pricing freedom** for the crude oil and natural gas produced.

➢ The uniform license will **enable the contractor to explore conventional as well as unconventional oil and gas resources** including coal bed methane, shale gas/oil, tight gas, and gas hydrates.

➢ The concept of **Open Acreage Policy enables Exploration and Production (E&P) companies to choose the blocks from the designated area**.

➢ The new policy has replaced the old system of government carving out areas and bidding them out.

Note:

- It guarantees marketing and pricing freedom and moves away from production sharing model of previous policy to a revenue-sharing model, where companies offering the maximum share of oil and gas to the government are awarded the block.
- Under the new regime, **the Government will not be concerned with the cost incurred and will receive a share of the gross revenue** from the sale of oil, gas etc. This is in line with Government's policy of **"Ease of Doing Business"**.
- HELP also provides for marketing freedom for crude oil and natural gas produced from these blocks. This is in tune with Government's policy of **"Minimum Government – Maximum Governance"**.

National Data Repository

- National Data Repository (NDR) is an **integrated data repository of Exploration and Production (E&P) data of Indian sedimentary basins**.
- NDR is a **fully Government of India owned** E&P data repository.
- NDR is **hosted at Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH)**. DGH is a technical arm of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG).
- NDR offers an unique platform to all E&P Operators, E&P Service Companies, E&P Investors, Academia to delve inside diverse E&P datasets of Indian sedimentary basins.

Seismic Surveys

- Reflection seismology (or seismic reflection) is a **method of exploration geophysics** that uses the principles of seismology to estimate the properties of the earth's subsurface from reflected seismic waves.
- The method requires a **controlled seismic source of energy, such as dynamite or a specialized air gun**.

Defense Manufacturing Rules Eased

The government has simplified the approval process for the manufacturing of defense and aerospace equipment and components by private industry.

- The government has **brought the equipment under the licensing authority of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade,** Ministry of Commerce and Industry.

- The Equipment is listed in three categories — **defense aircraft, warships of all kinds, and allied items of defense equipment**.
- Defense items are covered by two different Acts — the Industries (Development and Regulation) Act, 1951, (IDRA Act) and the Arms Act, 1959.
- Items of defense aerospace and warships now do not require a license under Arms Act. Such items shall now be covered by IDRA Act.

Significance

- The most significant aspect is that warships of all kinds, surface and sub-surface, have been included in the listing.
- This move is also expected to help foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) looking for partnerships with the private sector.
- The new guidelines would give a boost to the small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Defense Procurement Procedure

- The government has appointed **Dhirendra Singh Committee** in May 2015 to review the Defense Procurement Procedure (DPP), 2013.
- Based on the recommendations of the committee Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP-2016) was brought which replaced the DPP-2013.
- DPP, 2016 focuses to boost the Make-in-India initiative by promoting indigenous design, development, and manufacturing of defense equipment, platforms, and systems.
- The government has introduced a newly incorporated procurement class called "Buy Indian (IDDM)", where IDDM stands for Indigenous Designed Developed and Manufactured. This would have the first preference in all acquisitions once the DPP comes into effect.
- Besides this, preference has been accorded to 'Buy (Indian)' and 'Buy and Make (Indian)' categories of capital acquisition over 'Buy (Global)' & 'Buy & Make (Global)' categories.

Special Partnership Model under the Defense Procurement Procedure

- Ministry of Defence has formulated the Strategic Partnership (SP) model under the Defence Procurement Procedure (DPP), covering four specific areas to promote the role of the private sector in defense manufacturing.

> ➤ The Strategic Partnership Model (SPM) is a different category in addition to the existing categories i.e. 'Buy (Indian-IDDM)'; 'Buy (Indian)'; 'Buy & Make (Indian)'; 'Buy & Make' and 'Buy (Global)'.
>
> ➤ The policy is intended to institutionalize a transparent, objective and functional mechanism to encourage participation of the private sector, in manufacturing the defense equipment such as aircraft, submarines, helicopters, and armored vehicles.
>
> ➤ The policy aims to enhance competition, increase efficiencies, facilitate faster absorption of technology, leading to the reduction in dependence on imports and greater self-reliance in defense manufacturing.

Global Economic Prospects, 2019: WB

According to **World Bank's Global Economic Prospects report titled "Darkening Skies",** the global growth is expected to slow down to 2.9% in 2019 and 2.8% in 2020.

Key Findings

➤ Global growth is **moderating** as the **recovery in trade and manufacturing activity is slowing down**.

➤ Despite ongoing negotiations, **trade tensions** among major economies like US and China remain elevated. These tensions, combined with concerns about softening global growth prospects, have affected investor sentiment and contributed to declines in prices of shares.

   ○ **US and China account for 20% of global trade and 40% of global GDP.** If they impose proposed tariffs on each other, its **impact will be felt** all around the world.

➤ The **tightening of global financing conditions, or the recent appreciation of the US dollar,** could slow down the economic activity in emerging market and developing economies (EMDEs), including in those with large current account deficits.

➤ **Brexit** appears as a possible risk for countries that are especially reliant on selling to Europe.

   ○ If the UK's exit takes place with no agreement there is a chance of **significant economic damage** to both the UK and the EU which could then affect countries in **Eastern Europe and North Africa** which are closely integrated with Europe.

➤ China's economic growth is **projected to slow down** to 6.2% each in 2019 and 2020 and 6% in 2021.

   ○ Slower growth in China can affect **developing countries that export industrial commodities, energy and metals to China**.

   ○ In 2017, China with 6.9% growth was marginally ahead of India's 6.7%, mainly because of the slowdown in the Indian economy due to **demonetisation and implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST)**.

➤ **Debt vulnerabilities in emerging market** and developing economies, particularly low-income countries, have increased.

➤ More **frequent severe weather events** would raise the possibility of volatility in international food prices, which could deepen poverty.

➤ Emerging market and developing economies should rebuild policy buffers by **boosting human capital, promoting trade integration, and addressing the challenges associated with informality**.

India Specific Findings

➤ India will continue to be the **fastest growing major economy** in the world.

➤ India's GDP is expected to grow at 7.3% in the fiscal year 2018-19, and 7.5% in the following two years, attributing it to an **increase in consumption and investment**.

➤ Domestic demand has **strengthened** under the structural reforms such as the **Goods and Services Tax (GST) harmonisation and bank recapitalisation**.

➤ The recent introduction of the GST and steps toward demonetisation can encourage a **shift from the informal to the formal sector**.

➤ Public sector banks in India, which represent roughly 70% of the banking sector assets, still report **low profitability** and high non-performing assets.

➤ Strong **domestic demand** can widen the **current account deficit** to 2.6% of GDP next year.

➤ Inflation is projected to rise above the RBI's target range of 2 to 6%, mainly **owing to energy and food prices**.

➤ Rising interest rates and currency volatility can negatively impact the economic activity.

➤ This comes in the wake of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) recently projecting the Indian economy to grow at 7.2% in 2018-19. The CSO has noted following points in its advance estimates of GDP for 2018-19:

   ○ **Farm and Industrial sectors are likely to grow faster in FY19 than in FY18.**

Note:

○ **Services** sector may **slow down**.

○ **Sluggish increase in rural wages, low farm prices** (despite hike in minimum support prices), **worsening prospect of global growth** may add to slow down.

○ However, **election related spending,** increase in disposable income from softening oil prices may increase rural demand.

Global Economic Prospects

➤ Global Economic Prospects is a **World Bank Group flagship report** that examines global economic developments and prospects, with a special focus on **emerging market and developing economies**.

➤ It is **issued twice a year,** in January and June. The **January edition includes in-depth** analyses of certain policy challenges while the **June edition contains shorter analytical pieces**.

➤ **Other reports** released by World Bank:

○ **Ease of Doing Business Report**

○ **Human Capital Index**

○ World Development Report

Electronic National Agricultural Market (e-NAM)

 First-ever inter-State transaction on e-NAM has taken place between Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

➤ The electronic National Agricultural Market (e-NAM) is a pan-India electronic trading portal which networks the existing APMC (Agricultural produce market committee) mandis to create a unified national market for agricultural commodities. It was launched in 2016.

➤ e-NAM allows trading of commodities at mandis through mobile and web applications.

➤ Small Farmers Agribusiness Consortium (SFAC) is the lead agency for implementing e-NAM under the aegis of Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, Government of India.

➤ e-NAM requires states to implement 3 changes:

○ Provide for electronic trading,

○ single trading licences that are valid in all mandis in a state.

○ a single-window levy of transaction fees.

➤ The e-NAM Portal provides a single window service for all APMC related information and services. This includes commodity arrivals & prices, buy & sell trade offers, provision to respond to trade offers, among other services.

GST Council Meeting

 Recently, 32nd Meeting of Goods and Service Tax (GST) Council took place.

➤ **Decisions made:**

○ GST Council has allowed Kerala to impose **"calamity cess"** on the intra-state supply of goods and services.

○ Kerala is the first state to impose "calamity cess" after the introduction of GST.

○ GST Council has raised the exemption limit from GST for micro, small and medium enterprise from Rs. 20 lakh to Rs. 40 lakh.

How are decisions taken at the GST Council?

➤ No decision can be taken in the Council without the concurrence of both the union or the state governments.

➤ **Decisions are taken by a 75% majority** of the weighted votes of members present and voting.

➤ **Union government's vote has a weightage of one-third** of the votes cast, while **all states together will have a weightage of two-third of the votes cast**.

Goods & Services Tax Council

➤ **Goods & Services Tax Council is a constitutional body constituted by the President** under Article 279A (1), for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to Goods and Service Tax.

➤ **The GST Council is chaired by the Union Finance Minister** and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all the States.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana

 Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY), the flagship scheme of the Central Government for employment generation has crossed the milestone of one crore beneficiaries as on January 14, 2019.

Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY)

➤ Under the scheme, **the government incentivizes employers for generation of new employment**.

➤ The Government of India **pays the full employer's contribution of 12% (towards Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' Pension Scheme),** for the new employment generated with salary up to Rs. 15,000 per month.

Note:

➢ PMRPY was announced on August 07, 2016 and is being implemented by the **Ministry of Labour and Employment through the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO)**.

➢ The entire system of PMRPY is online and AADHAAR based with no human interface in the implementation of the scheme.

➢ A direct benefit of this scheme is that workers have access to social security benefit through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance.

Angel Tax

The **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, Ministry of Commerce and Industry** has issued a clarification on "Angel Tax" levied on startups.

➢ Recently, many startups have received notices from tax authorities to file their tax returns under angel tax.

➢ **Angel tax** is a term used to refer to the **income tax payable on capital raised by startup companies** via the issue of shares where the share price is seen in excess of the fair market value of the shares sold. The excess realization is treated as income and taxed accordingly.

➢ The angel tax is levied on investments made by external investors in startups or companies. The entire investment is not taxed — only the amount that is considered above "fair value" valuations of the startup.

➢ Differing interpretations of "fair value" of a startup by tax authorities and startup owners and leave startups vulnerable to unduly high taxes.

➢ The tax was introduced in the 2012 Union Budget to arrest laundering of funds by portraying them as angel investment.

Tokenization service

The Reserve of India (RBI) has allowed **all card payment networks to offer tokenization service**.

➢ **No charges should be recovered from the customer** for availing this service.

➢ **Tokenization involves a process in which a unique token masks sensitive card details.** The token is then used to perform card transactions in **contactless mode at Point Of Sale (POS) terminals, Quick Response (QR) code payments, etc.**

➢ The RBI has allowed card payment networks to offer card tokenization services to any token requestor, that is, a third-party app provider. It extends to all use cases/channels [e.g., Near-Field Communication (NFC) / Magnetic Secure Transmission (MST)-based contactless transactions, in-app payments, QR code-based payments etc.] or token storage mechanisms (cloud, secure element, trusted execution environment etc.).

➢ All parties involved in the "payment transaction chain" will have to be registered with the central bank.

➢ A cardholder can avail of these services by registering the card on the token requestor's app and after giving 'explicit consent'.

Gold Monetisation Scheme

The Reserve Bank of India made some changes in the Gold Monetisation Scheme **by including charitable institutions and the central government,** among others.

➢ Apart from individual and joint depositors, **the scheme could now be availed by charitable institutions, the central government, the state government** or any other entity owned by the central government or the state government.

➢ Allowing government agencies to deposit gold will allow agencies to deposit what they had confiscated.

Gold Monetization Scheme

➢ Gold Monetization Schemes (GMS) was **introduced in 2015**.

➢ It facilitates the depositors of gold to earn interest on their metal accounts. Once the gold is deposited in metal account, it starts earning interest on the same.

➢ Under the scheme, **a depositor gets 2.25% interest annually** for a short-term deposit of one year to three years. Medium- and long-term deposits get **2.5% interest rate**.

➢ The gold deposited will be lent by banks to jewellers at **an interest rate little higher than the interest paid** to customer.

➢ The objective of the **Gold Monetisation scheme** is to mobilize the gold held by households and institutions in the country to put this gold into productive use.

○ In the **long run it aims to reduce the current account deficit** by reducing the country's reliance on the imports of gold to meet the domestic demand.

Note:

- It **replaced the Gold Deposit schemes and Gold Metal Loan Schemes**.
- Along with GMS, a **Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme** (an alternative to purchasing metal gold) and development of Indian Gold Coin, were also announced.
- The **Indian Gold Coin**s are the first ever national gold offerings by Government of India.
  - Such an Indian Gold Coin would help reduce the demand for coins minted outside India, and also help to recycle the gold available in the country. was also announced in 2015.
  - The coin is of 24 karat purity, and has the national emblem of **Ashok Chakra** engraved on one side and the face of **Mahatma Gandhi on the other**.
  - The Indian Gold Coin is aligned with the **'Make in India'** initiative of Government.

First Person to be Declared 'Fugitive Economic Offender'

Vijay Mallya became the **first person** to be declared a **'fugitive economic offender'** under the **Fugitive Economic Offenders' Act,** 2018 by a **special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Court**.

- **Now, a special FEOA court** can order the confiscation of an FEO's properties, including those which are benami, and the proceeds of crime in and outside India.

- Once properties are confiscated, the Union government has the right over them, and it can **dispose them after 90 days**.
- The Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018 seeks to confiscate properties of economic offenders who have left the country to avoid facing criminal prosecution.
- Offences involving amounts of Rs. 100 crore or more fall under the purview of this law.

Fugitive Economic Offender

- A fugitive economic offender has been defined as a person against whom an arrest warrant has been issued for committing any offence listed in the schedule of the proposed Bill.
- Further the person has:
  - Left the country to avoid facing prosecution.
  - Refuses to return to face prosecution.
- Some of the offences listed in the Bill are-counterfeiting government stamps or currency, cheque dishonour for insufficiency of funds, money laundering, transactions defrauding creditors etc.
- The Act allows the central government to amend the schedule through a notification.
- To declare a person an FEO, an application will be filed in a Special Court (designated under the Prevention of Money-Laundering Act, 2002) containing details of the properties to be confiscated, and any information about the person's whereabouts.

■■■

Note:

International Relations

Highlights

Bangladesh General Elections

Recently, general elections were conducted in Bangladesh.

➢ The incumbent prime minister, **Sheikh Hasina's party Awami League** including the coalition **won 288 out of the 300 directly-elected seats in the 350-member** unicameral **Jatiya Sangsad, the Bangladesh Parliament**. (50 seats are reserved for women which are elected indirectly by Member of Parliaments.)

➢ With the recent victory, **Sheikh Hasina became Bangladesh's prime minister for the third straight term**. This makes her the **longest-serving head of the government in Bangladesh**.

➢ Under Sheikh Hasina's tenure, **Bangladesh's economic growth has increased,** averaging over 7% per annum. Bangladesh has become **one of the fastest growing economies in South Asia**.

➢ Sheikh Hasina's victory is seen as a **positive development for India,** which has been a stable ally during her term. The return of a trustworthy **ally in economic cooperation and in the fight against terrorism is good for India**.

➢ The Sheikh Hasina's government **has shut down camps of terrorist groups operating in India's Northeast from** safe havens in **Bangladesh**. The insurgency has dipped in Northeastern India, with leaders of militant groups such as the United Liberation Front of Assam general secretary Anup Chetia being handed over to India.

Importance of Bangladesh

➢ Bangladesh is **key to India's plans to connect with South-East Asia,** as well as developing the landlocked Northeast.

➢ India's plans to forge a **viable alternative to the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation rests on Bangladesh,** given its location bridging South Asia and South-East Asia.

➢ India's **'neighbourhood first policy'** has focused on Bangladesh, which is a key part in **India's 'Act East Policy'** and sub-regional groupings like **BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation)** and the **BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal)**.

India-Bangladesh Relations

➢ **India was the first country to recognize Bangladesh** as a separate and independent state and established diplomatic relations with the country immediately after its independence in December 1971.

➢ India and Bangladesh **share more than 4000 km of porous border,** which is the longest land boundary that India shares with any of its neighbors.

➢ Cooperation in connectivity, energy, security and intelligence matters has intensified between the two countries.

❍ The Padma multipurpose bridge and the Akhaura-Agartala rail link will dramatically change connectivity within Bangladesh and with India.

❍ Waterways are also being revived to reduce the cost of trade.

➢ **Security & Border Management**

❍ The Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) was signed in 2011 to help both of the Border Guarding Forces for checking cross-border illegal activities and crimes as well as for maintenance of peace and tranquility along the India-Bangladesh border.

Note:

- ➢ **Power Projects**
  - ○ India is poised to export around 1100 MW of power to meet the energy deficit in Bangladesh. Power projects totaling more than 3600 MW are under implementation by Indian companies.
  - ○ India is also a partner in Bangladesh's nuclear power programme, with the beginning of construction at the Rooppur nuclear power plant.
- ➢ **Trade Ties**
  - ○ Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia with an annual turnover of around $9 billion plus an estimated informal trade of around $8-9 billion.
  - ○ Indian investment in Bangladesh has reached $3 billion. To enable the flow of Bangladeshi exports into India, duty-free entry was granted in 2011 under the South Asian Free Trade Area.
- ➢ **River water sharing**
  - ○ India and Bangladesh share 54 common rivers. A bilateral Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) is working since June 1972 to maintain liaison between the two countries to maximize benefits from common river systems.
- ➢ **Connectivity**
  - ○ The **Protocol on Inland Water Trade and Transit (PIWTT)** operational since 1972 permits movement of goods over vessels from India through the river systems of Bangladesh on eight specific routes.
- ➢ **Capacity Building and Training**
  - ○ **India offers a number of training courses for interested Bangladesh officials**/nationals including personnel of administration, police, judiciary, nuclear scientists, teachers etc.
  - ○ Capacity building under the **Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme** is an important strand in bilateral ties and people-to-people interaction.
- ➢ **New Areas of Cooperation**
  - ○ Improvement in bilateral ties has led to **newer areas of cooperation such as cyberspace**. Bangladesh has provided cyber connectivity between the international gateway at Cox's Bazar to Agartala for faster Internet connectivity in India's northeastern States.

Norway's PM Visit India

Recently, Prime Minister of Norway, Erna Solberg visited India.

- ➢ Prime Minister Solberg delivered the inaugural address at the **Raisina Dialogue** and inaugurated the India-Norway Business Summit.

Outcome of the visit

- ➢ A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on **India-Norway Ocean Dialogue** was signed and a **joint task force for the blue economy was established**.
- ➢ Both countries agreed to collaborate in **achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)** and to work together in tackling the threat of climate change.
- ➢ Both countries emphasized the need for the **reform of the United Nations including the UN Security Council**. Norway agreed that **India is a strong candidate for a permanent seat** in a reformed Security Council.
- ➢ Norway supported India's application for **membership of the Nuclear Suppliers' Group (NSG)**. Norway had also supported India's membership to export control regimes the **Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement (WA) and the Australia Group (AG)**.
- ➢ Both countries agreed to urge countries for the early finalization of the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)**.

India-Norway Relations

- ➢ India and Norway have been enjoying a cordial and friendly relationship since the **establishment of relations in 1947**.
- ➢ The two countries respect each other for their **commonly shared values such as democracy, human rights and rule of law**. In recent years, both countries have increased their engagements in the field of trade and technology.
- ➢ Norway's **Government Pension Fund Global** has made a portfolio **investment of about $12 billion in India**.
- ➢ India has signed a **Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA)** with Norway in 1986 which was revised in February 2011.
- ➢ Norway is an expert on the subject of the Ocean Economy as 70% of Norway's export is from Norway's maritime industry. Starting of **bilateral ocean dialogue have added a new dimension in India-Norway relations** and will help India to understand the know-how of the maritime industry.

Note:

- Total bilateral trade between India and Norway stands around $1.1 billion in 2015-16.
- Around **100 Norwegian companies are engaged in India** in areas such as shipbuilding, petroleum-related services, marine/sub-sea drilling equipment, hydropower, clean energy, and IT services.
- Indian companies like **Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC)** and Reliance Industries have tie-ups with Norwegian companies in the petroleum and energy sector.
- Three Arctic Missions from India have so far visited Norway, in **2007, 2008 and 2009. India's Polar Research Station "Himadri" is located at Ny Alesund, Spitsbergen Island, Norway**.

The United States and Israel Quit UNESCO

The **United States and Israel** have officially quit the UN's educational, scientific and cultural agency, UNESCO.

- The US filed its notice to withdraw in October 2017 which was followed by Israel.
- The two countries have blamed UNESCO for having an **anti-Israel bias** like **criticizing Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem, naming ancient Jewish sites as Palestinian heritage sites and granting full membership to Palestine in 2011**.
- The United States had pulled out of UNESCO in 1984 as well because it viewed the agency as mismanaged, corrupt and used to advance Soviet interests. The US rejoined in 2003.

UNESCO

- The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO),** formed in 1945, is a specialized agency of the United Nations (UN) based in Paris.
- Its declared purpose is to **contribute to peace and security by promoting international collaboration** through educational, scientific, and cultural reforms in order to increase universal respect for justice, the rule of law, and human rights along with fundamental freedom proclaimed in the United Nations Charter.
- UNESCO has **195 Members (including US and Israel)**.

Financial Action Task Force

The **Financial Action Task Force (FATF)** has identified 11 jurisdictions, **including Pakistan and Sri Lanka,** as having strategic deficiencies in anti-money laundering (AML) measures and combating of financing of terrorism (CFT).

- The other nine jurisdictions are the Bahamas, Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Serbia, Syria, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and Yemen.

FATF

- The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) was **established in July 1989** by a Group of Seven (G-7) Summit in Paris, initially to examine and develop **measures to combat money laundering**.
- In October 2001, the **FATF expanded its mandate** to incorporate efforts to **combat terrorist financing,** in addition to money laundering.
- Its objectives are to **set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing** and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.
- The Financial Action Task Force has developed a series of recommendations that are recognized as the international standard for combating of money laundering and the financing of terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.
- The Financial Action Task Force's decision-making body, the **Financial Action Task Force Plenary,** meets three times per year.
- FATF has **38 members. India is a member** along with 35 other countries and 2 regional organizations (European Commission and Gulf Cooperation Council).

Macedonia's New Name

Parliament of the **Republic of Macedonia** has voted to change their country's name to the **"Republic of North Macedonia"**.

- Macedonia agreed to change its name after signing the **Prespa Agreement with Greece in June 2018**.
- Prespa is a fresh-water lake in southeast Europe shared by Albania, Greece, and Macedonia.
- With this agreement, a long-standing dispute between the two countries came to an end.

Note:

➢ **The dispute was that the region of Greece bordering the Republic of Macedonia is also called Macedonia.**

➢ **Neighboring country Greece has objected to its name and said that it implied the Macedonian republic's territorial aspirations over the northern region of Greece.**

➢ The change of name will now allow the Republic of Macedonia to enter the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU) as its accession to both organizations was vetoed by Greece.

India-US Mini '2+2' Talks

India and the U.S. have reviewed the progress of **Industrial Security Annex (ISA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA)** agreements during the recent '2+2' intercession meeting.

➢ The agreements are significant in the context of **Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA)**.

➢ Under ARIA, around **$1.5 billion in funding will be channeled into improving US ties with partners in the Asian region** in the next five years. Though the Act frames a strategy for the US in Asia, it singles out India as an important military partner.

➢ The **inaugural 2+2 dialogue between India and U.S.** was held in September, 2018.

Industrial Security Annex (ISA)

➢ ISA agreement allows **sharing of classified information from the US government and US companies with the Indian private sector**.

➢ Till now, sharing of information was limited to the Indian government and the defence public sector undertakings.

➢ The ISA will give a boost to the **Indian private sector looking for a greater role in defence manufacturing**.

"Four Foundational Agreements" between the US and its Partners

➢ **General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)**
  ○ GSOMIA allows **militaries to share the intelligence** gathered by them.
  ○ Signed by India in 2002.

➢ **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)**
  ○ LEMOA allows both countries to **have access to each other's designated military facilities** for refueling and replenishment.
  ○ Signed by India in 2016.

➢ **Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA)**
  ○ COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement) is the India specific version of CISMOA.
  ○ Valid for 10 years, COMCASA aims to provide a legal framework for the **transfer of highly sensitive communication security equipment from the US to India** that will streamline and facilitate interoperability between their armed forces.
  ○ Signed by India in 2018.

➢ **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)**
  ○ BECA will allow India and US to share geospatial and satellite data with each other.
  ○ India has not signed BECA yet.

Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal

➢ Recently Justice AK Sikri has turned down the government's offer to nominate him to **Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT)**.

➢ This comes days after his vote helped decide the removal of Alok Verma from the post of CBI director.

Note:

Commonwealth Secretariat Arbitral Tribunal (CSAT)

➤ The Commonwealth Secretariat is the main intergovernmental agency and central institution of the Commonwealth of Nations.

➤ The Secretariat is located in **London, the United Kingdom**.

➤ It was **established in 1965,** plays the role of an arbiter in case of disputes among its 53 member-countries.

➤ The CSAT has a total of eight members, including its president. The members are picked up on the basis of regional representations from among persons of high moral character who must hold or have held high judicial office in a Commonwealth country.

➤ A CSAT member has a tenure of **four years**.

Commonwealth of Nations

➤ It is an international intergovernmental organization of countries that were mostly former territories of the British Empire and dependencies.

➤ It was established by the London Declaration in 1949.

➤ Queen Elizabeth II is the head of the Commonwealth.

➤ Many countries from Africa, Asia, Americas, Europe and the Pacific have joined the commonwealth.

➤ The current membership includes 53 countries. The membership is based on free and equal voluntary cooperation.

➤ The last country to join the Commonwealth was Rwanda in 2009.

➤ The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting is a biennial summit meeting of the heads of government from all Commonwealth nations.

Note:

Science and Technology

Highlights

Ultima Thule

NASA's New Horizons spacecraft has flown past the icy object nicknamed **Ultima Thule (TOO-lee)** in Kuiper belt.

➢ Ultima Thule is located 1.6 billion kilometers beyond Pluto and 6.4 billion kilometers from Earth.

➢ The spacecraft will fly past within 3,500 kilometers of Ultima Thule.

Ultima Thule

➢ This Kuiper Belt object was **discovered by the Hubble Space Telescope in 2014**.

➢ Officially it is known as **2014 MU69** and is nicknamed as Ultima Thule.

➢ Thule means the most distant places beyond the known world.

Significance

➢ Ultima Thule will be the **farthest object ever visited by a spacecraft**.

➢ Ultima Thule would have relics dating back to solar system's origin 4.5 billion years ago. No spacecraft has visited anything so primitive. This will help in **understanding the origins of our solar system**.

New Horizon

➢ **Launched:** Jan. 19, 2006

➢ **Pluto Flyby:** July 14, 2015

➢ **Ultima Thule Flyby:** Jan. 1, 2019

➢ **Goal:** Study Pluto, its moons, and Kuiper Belt objects.

Kuiper Belt

➢ The Kuiper Belt (also known as the Edgeworth–Kuiper belt) is a region of the Solar System that **exists beyond the eight major planets,** extending from the orbit of Neptune (at 30 AU) to approximately 50 AU from the Sun. **(1 Astronomical Unit (AU) = distance between the Earth and the Sun)**.

➢ It is similar to the asteroid belt, in that it contains many small bodies, all remnants from the Solar System's formation.

IIT Madras Team Produces Gas Hydrates

A team of Indian researchers at Indian Institute of Technology, Madras has synthesized in a lab tiny water cages containing trace amounts of methane and carbon dioxide at extremely low temperatures and pressure to simulate the conditions of deep space.

➢ These tiny cages are known as Clathrate Hydrates or Gas Hydrates.

➢ Normally, the formation of clathrate hydrates requires high pressures and moderate temperature.

➢ This discovery of hydrates is unexpected at extremely low pressures and ultracold temperatures as cages of water are not expected to form under such conditions.

➢ At low temperature, both ice and methane are in a frozen state, prolonging the experiment at a very low temperature enhanced the mobility of methane molecules and led to their insertion into the cage of water molecules to form methane hydrate.

Note:

Clathrate Hydrates

➢ Clathrate hydrates are solid cages of water containing small non-polar molecules like carbon dioxide and methane.

➢ Clathrate hydrates are formed when a gas such as methane gets trapped in well-defined cages of water molecules forming crystalline solids. In terrestrial conditions, gas hydrates are formed naturally under the seabed and glaciers under high pressure, low-temperature conditions.

➢ On earth, they are found on the ocean floor or the permafrost region of the earth.

Uses of Clathrate Hydrates

➢ Hydrates are considered as the future sources of fuel. Many countries, including India, have started projects to explore hydrates present on the ocean bed.

➢ They could be a potentially safe, efficient method for storing and transporting gases.

Significance

➢ Carbon Sequestration: Trapping carbon dioxide in hydrates can be a way to reduce to global warming in future. As one can sequester carbon dioxide gas as solid hydrates under the seabed.

➢ Sustainable Energy source: Development of technology to harvest Gas Hydrates can ensure energy security of the nation.

Gas hydrate exploration in India

➢ Under the aegis of the Ministry of Earth Sciences, a comprehensive research-oriented gas hydrates program was launched during the 11th plan (2007-12) period emphasizing scientific and technology development with following major objectives:

  ○ Understanding the nature of distribution of gas hydrates in marine sediments

  ○ Developing techniques for detection and quantification of gas hydrates

  ○ Identifying promising sites on the regional scale and estimating the resource potential

  ○ Recommending suitable sites for drilling and ground truth validation

  ○ Demonstrating occurrences of gas hydrates

  ○ Understanding the mechanism for the formation and accumulation of gas hydrates

  ○ Studying the impact of hydrate dissociation on climate and geological environment

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  ○ Developing environment-safe technology for commercial production on a pilot scale

  ○ Developing hazardless and cost-effective transportation of gas from gas hydrates and

  ○ Monitoring environmental perturbation during harvesting of gas hydrates

➢ National Centre For Polar And Ocean Research (NCAOR), Ministry of Earth Sciences has been identified as the nodal agency responsible for implementation of the scientific aspects of the study.

➢ National Gas Hydrate Programmes (NGHP)

  ○ The programme was initiated in 1997 with a Steering Committee and a Technical Committee.

  ○ National Gas Hydrate Programme (NGHP) is steered by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas and technically coordinated by Directorate General of Hydrocarbons (DGH).

UNNATI by ISRO

Indian Space and Research Organization (ISRO) has launched a training programme **UNNATI (UNispace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training by ISRO)**.

➢ UNNATI is a capacity building programme on **nanosatellite development**.

➢ The Programme provides opportunities to the **participants from developing countries** to strengthen their capabilities in assembling, integrating and testing of nanosatellites.

➢ It is an ISRO initiative to **commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE+50)**.

➢ UNNATI programme is being conducted by **U.R. Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) of ISRO** for 3 years in 3 batches and has a target to benefit 90 officials from 45 countries.

➢ The training comprises of theoretical course work on nanosatellite definition, utility, laws governing their impact on space debris, design drivers, reliability & quality assurance and hands-on training on assembly, integration, and testing of nanosatellites.

➢ The first batch of this programme has started on January 17, 2019, with 30 participants from 17 countries (Algeria, Argentina, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Brazil, Chile, Egypt, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Myanmar, Oman, Panama, and Portugal).

Note:

United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE)

➢ **UNISPACE I,** held from 14 to 27 August 1968, was the first in a series of three global UN conferences on outer space, which focused on raising awareness of the vast potential of space benefits for all humankind.

➢ **UNISPACE II** conference was held from 9 to 21 August 1982. UNISPACE II addressed the concerns of how to maintain the outer space for peaceful purposes and prevent an arms race in outer space.

➢ **UNISPACE III** conference held from 19 to 30 July 1999. UNISPACE III created a blueprint for the peaceful uses of outer space in the 21st century.

NASA Discovers a New Planet

NASA has discovered a new planet **HD 21749b orbiting a dwarf star about 53 light-years away** in the **constellation of Reticulum**.

➢ This is the third new planet discovery by the **Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS)**.

➢ HD 21749b revolve around its star in 36 days. The planet is about three times the size of the earth, which puts it in the category of a "sub-Neptune."

➢ The other two planets discovered by TESS are **Pi Mensae C** located about 60 light-years away in the **southern constellation Mensa** and **LHS3884b** located about 49 light-years away in the **constellation Indus**.

Sahayak Air Droppable Containers

The Navy has successfully tested Sahayak Air Droppable Containers that can be air-dropped to enhance its operational logistics capability at sea.

➢ The trials were undertaken from an IL-38 aircraft off the coast of Goa.

➢ Having a test payload of 50 kg, these containers are equipped to carry spares for ships up to 2,000 km away from the coast.

➢ This will reduce the requirement of ships to be close to the coast for collecting spares and stores, thereby increasing the duration of their deployment.The Sahayak Containers would enhance its operational logistics capability.

➢ These cylindrical containers have been indigenously developed by the Naval Science and Technological Laboratory and the Aeronautical Development Establishment of the Defence Research and Development Organisation.

Naval Science & Technological Laboratory (NSTL), Visakhapatnam was established on August 20, 1969 to undertake research and development of complete major naval systems (Underwater Mines, Torpedoes, Fire Control Systems, Weapon Launchers, Targets, Decoys, etc) for the Indian Navy to make it self-reliant.

Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE) is a key Aeronautical Systems Design House in Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO), under Ministry of Defence.

Since its formation in 1959, ADE has been playing an important role in the design & development of a variety of aeronautical systems required by the Indian Armed forces.

The research, design and development activities of ADE include development of Unmanned Aircraft Systems and systems for manned aircrafts including Simulators.

Two New AIIMS for Jammu and Kashmir, One for Gujarat

The Union Cabinet has approved establishment of three new All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) under the **Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana**.

➢ An **Act of Parliament in 1956** established the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) as an autonomous institution of national importance and defined its objectives and functions.

Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY)

➢ PMSSY was announced in 2003 with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/ reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country.

➢ The PMSSY is implemented by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

➢ It has two components:
  ○ Setting up new AIIMS (All India Institute of Medical Sciences)
  ○ Upgradation of government medical colleges in various states.

➢ The project cost for upgradation of each medical college institution is shared by the Centre and the state.

Note:

Human Space Flight Centre

The **Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)** has set up a **Human Space Flight Center in Bengaluru**.

➤ The center, a new management structure within the organization, will be in charge of all human-related programme at the ISRO, including the **Gaganyaan project,** that will send three astronauts to orbit the earth.

➤ **Two unmanned** flights are scheduled for **December 2020 and July 2021,** while **manned flight** is expected to take place by **December 2021**.

Gaganyaan Project

➤ India and France have announced a working group for Gaganyaan Project which aims to send an Indian astronaut into space by 2022.

➤ The human space flight programme, called the Orbital Module will have three Indian astronauts, including a woman.

➤ It will circle Earth at a low-earth-orbit at an altitude of 300-400 km from earth for 5-7 days.

➤ The payload will consist of:
  ○ Crew module - spacecraft carrying human beings.
  ○ Service module - powered by two liquid propellant engines.

➤ It will be equipped with emergency escape and emergency mission abort.

➤ GSLV Mk III, also called the LVM-3 (Launch Vehicle Mark-3) the three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle, will be used to launch Gaganyaan as it has the necessary payload capability.

Starship Starhopper

➤ The private space agency **SpaceX** has unveiled a spacecraft that will carry humans to **Mars and Moon in future**.

➤ The spacecraft is named as **"Starship Starhopper"**. The prototype, which is called Starhopper, is 8 meters in diameter.

Note:

Environment and Ecology

Highlights

- Exotic Trees Eating up Western Ghats Grasslands *(36)*
- Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) *(37)*
- Govt Launches Mission to Fight Air Pollution *(37)*
- Cinereous Vulture *(38)*
- Cyclone Pabuk *(38)*
- Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary *(38)*

Exotic Trees Eating up Western Ghats Grasslands

As per the study published recently in the international journal Biological Conservation, the **Western Ghats have lost almost one-fourth of high-altitude grasslands** over four decades, primarily due to exotic invasive trees, such as pine, acacia, and eucalyptus.

➢ **Invasive Alien Species**
  ○ Invasive alien plant species are non-native species that spread and interfere in a new ecosystem by posing a serious threat to the native biodiversity, leading to economic loss. Invasive species don't allow local species to grow and wildlife to move through.

Major Findings

➢ Most of this loss occurred on the **mountain tops of the Nilgiri, Palani and Annamalai hill ranges,** which comprise more than half of the Ghat's shola-grassland ecosystems, primarily due to the expansion of exotic trees (pine, acacia, and eucalyptus).

➢ Satellite images reveal that **60% of the shola-grassland landscape has changed;** almost 40% (516 km^2) of native high-elevation grasslands have disappeared.

➢ Even though no plantations were established between 2003 and 2017, **invasion by existing trees increased areas under exotic plantations** (acacia, pine, and eucalyptus) by 27% in the Palanis and 17% in the Nilgiris.

➢ Satellite images show how shola-grasslands across the Ghats – **from the Baba Budan Hills in Karnataka to Tamil Nadu's Ashambu Hills** – changed in extent between 1972 and 2017. Broadly, shola-grassland ecosystems in Tamil Nadu showed the highest rates of invasion.

➢ However, shola forests have remained "relatively unchanged" over these years. The Annamalai-Munnar areas have also remained stable during this time.

International Convention on Invasive Species

➢ **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** was **adopted in 1992** and came into force in 1993. It aims to prevent the introduction of, control or eradicate those alien species which threaten ecosystems, habitats or species.

Shola Forests

➢ The **Sholas are a mosaic of montane evergreen forests and grasslands**. They are found only in high altitude (>1500 meters) regions within the tropics and are limited to the southern part of the western ghats.

➢ They are characterized by undulating grassland patches, interspersed with thickets of stunted evergreen tree species, and are home to a host of endemic and endangered plants and animals. They are also vitally important in keeping water cycles alive.

Way Forward

➢ All possible efforts must be made to conserve the remaining grassland tracts, as very little research is focussed on grasslands and mechanisms to restore them are also few, unlike forests.


Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)

➢ The **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a legally binding treaty** to conserve biodiversity has been in force **since 1993**. It has **3 main objectives**:
  ○ The **conservation** of biological diversity.
  ○ The **sustainable use** of the components of biological diversity.

Note:

❍ The **fair and equitable sharing** of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources.

➢ Nearly all countries have ratified it (notably, the US has signed but not ratified).

➢ The CBD Secretariat is based in **Montreal, Canada** and it operates under the **United Nations Environment Programme**.

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI)

The Climate Change Performance Index is published by **German watch, CAN International and the New Climate Institute**.

➢ In 2019 index, no country performed well enough to reach the ranking very good, meaning that no country has yet made it to one of the top three places in the rankings. **However, Sweden leads the ranking, followed by Morocco and Lithuania**.

➢ On the basis of standardized criteria, **the index evaluates and compares the climate protection performance of 56 countries and the EU**.

➢ The ranking results are defined by a country's aggregated performance regarding 14 indicators within the four categories "GHG Emissions", "Renewable Energy" and "Energy Use", as well as on "Climate Policy", in a globally unique policy section of the index.

➢ The CCPI is an instrument designed to enhance transparency in international climate politics.

➢ **India's Score is 62.93 and has been ranked 11th in overall Index.**

➢ **India has improved its performance by 3 places compared to 2018 in the Renewable Energy category, joining the group of medium performers.**

Components of the CCPI
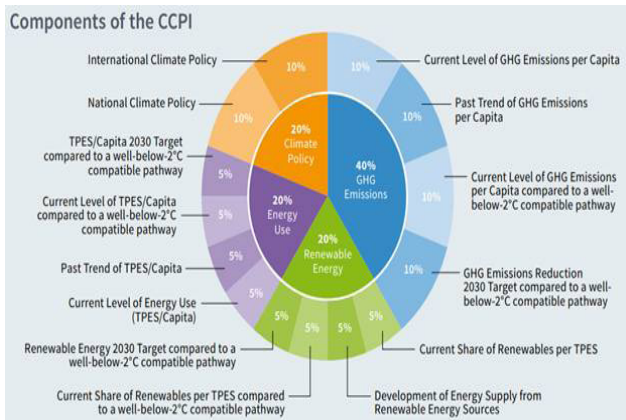
Govt Launches Mission to Fight Air Pollution

The Central government has launched a five-year action plan with a tentative target of 20-30% reduction in concentrations of **PM10 and PM2.5 by 2024,** with 2017 as the base year.

➢ Unlike earlier initiatives which focussed largely on the national capital region, this is a comprehensive **pan-India** air pollution abatement **scheme for 102 cities**.

Highlights

➢ The plan includes **102 non-attainment cities,** across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.

   ❍ The **non-attainment cities** are those that have fallen short of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for over five years. These 'non-attainment cities' were marked by CPCB and were asked to implement 42 measures aimed at mitigating air pollution as part of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).

➢ As part of the programme, the Centre also plans to scale up the **air quality monitoring network across India**. At least 4,000 monitors are needed across the country, instead of the existing 101 real-time air quality (AQ) monitors.

➢ The plan proposes a three-tier system, including real-time physical data collection, data archiving, and an action trigger system in all 102 cities, besides **extensive plantation plans,** research on **clean-technologies,** landscaping of major arterial roads, and **stringent industrial standards**.

➢ It also proposes **state-level plans of e-mobility** in the two-wheeler sector, rapid augmentation of charging infrastructure, stringent **implementation of BS-VI norms,** boosting public transportation system, and adoption of third-party audits for polluting industries.

➢ The states have been kept in the loop for implementation and global multilateral agencies have been **brought in for technical support**.

➢ The ministry (MOEFCC) will periodically review the progress of these components on the basis of appropriate indicators, which will be evolved. However, it is not binding on the state governments as it is not a legal document.

Note:

➤ It will be operationalised through inter-sectoral groups, which include the ministries of road transport and highways, petroleum and natural gas, renewable energy, and urban affairs among others.

Criticism

➤ The pollution reduction target in these cities **are not 'legally binding'** on respective states.

➤ A reduction of merely 20-30% from 2017 level by 2024 will not be sufficient to bring the air quality at desired level, i.e. the targets under action plan are **less ambitious**.

Way Forward

➤ Although, the targets appear less ambitious, the **NCAP is envisaged to be dynamic and would continue to evolve** based on the additional scientific and technical information as they emerge.

➤ This is a welcome step as it was imperative to have measurable, focused and precise targets with clear timelines and demonstrable accountability towards public health, to succeed in this national-level initiative.

Cinereous Vulture

Recently the **Cinereous vulture** was spotted in Jharkhand, as they **migrate from the mountainous regions of Europe and Asia** to warmer places, including India.

➤ While earlier records of this migratory bird have revealed that it comes to northern parts of India up to Rajasthan, but this is for the **first time they have been spotted in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand**.

➤ The Cinereous vulture (Aegypius monachus) draws its name from **"monachus",** which means **hooded (like a monk) in Latin**.

➤ In many countries, this bird is called **'monk vulture',** because of its upright standing neck feathers that resemble the hood of a monk.

➤ It is a **dark brown and broad-winged species** with a slightly wedge-shaped tail. The bald head and neck are a bluish gray, with a fluffy collar which is lighter in older birds.

➤ It is classified as **Near Threatened under the IUCN Red List**.

➤ India is home to **nine species of vultures** and with the population of these birds dwindling, the country has launched a **species-recovery plan** through conservation breeding centres in different parts of the country.

Cyclone Pabuk

The India meteorological department (IMD) had issued an orange warning for the **Andaman and Nicobar islands** as cyclonic storm **Pabuk** approached the archipelago.

➤ It **originated over the Gulf of Thailand**.

➤ An **"orange" weather warning** means people should "be prepared" and there is an increased likelihood of bad or extreme weather, which may disrupt road and air travel and threaten life and property.

➤ The only typhoon ever known to have hit **Thailand was Gay (in November 1989)**.

➤ It has been named by **Laos**.

Stage of warning	Colour code
Cyclone Alert	Yellow
Cyclone Warning	Orange
Post Landfall Outlook	Red

Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

The seasonal migration of wild animals from wildlife sanctuaries in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS) has begun.
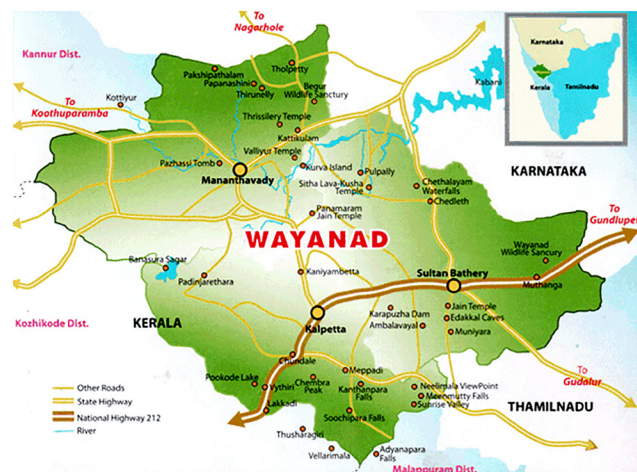
- It is part of **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve** along with Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park, Nagarhole National Park, Mukurthi National Park and Silent Valley.
- Wayanad Wildlife sanctuary is significant because of **ecological and geographic continuity with other protected areas** such as Bandipur Tiger Reserve and Nagarhole N.P., of Karnataka in north-eastern portion and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu in south-east.

- It has the **world's largest recorded population of Asiatic elephant**.
- Almost the entire Wayanad district is drained by **Kabini** and its three tributaries, the Panamaram, Mananthavady, and Kalindy rivers.
  - The Kabini River, one of the **three east flowing rivers of Kerala,** is an important tributary of the Kaveri River.

■■■

Note:

Security

Highlights

- Centre Extends AFSPA in Nagaland *(5)*

Centre Extends AFSPA in Nagaland

The entire State of **Nagaland** has been **declared 'disturbed area'** for six more months up to June 2019, under Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) 1958.

➤ In a notification, the **Ministry of Home Affairs** said that the Central government is of the opinion that the area comprising the whole of State of Nagaland is in such a disturbed and dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of civilian power is necessary.

➤ The decision has been taken as killings, loot and extortion have been going on in various parts of the State which necessitated the action.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958

➤ The **Act was enacted in 1958** to bring under control the 'disturbed areas' where the use of armed forces in aid of civil power is necessary..

➤ **Jammu & Kashmir has a similar but separate act** Armed Forces (Jammu & Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990.

➤ It is effective in the whole of **Nagaland, Assam, Manipur** (excluding seven assembly constituencies of Imphal) and **parts of Arunachal Pradesh**. The Centre revoked it in Meghalaya on April 1, 2018.

➤ The Act **empowers the Governor/Administrator of state/UT to declare an area as 'disturbed'**. Once declared, the region has to maintain the status quo for a minimum of three months (according to Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976).

➤ The Act empowers the Army and Central forces deployed in "disturbed areas" **to search premises and arrest without warrant, to use force even to the extent of causing death**.

➤ It also gives **immunity to security forces** in carrying out various operations and provides cover to forces from prosecution and legal suits without the Centre's sanction.

➤ To check arbitrariness there should be a **periodic review of 'disturbed area' every six months**.

Debate Around AFSPA

➤ AFSPA has become a controversial legislation due to the **wide-ranging power** it gives to armed forces and **alleged human rights violation** by them.

➤ The **constitutionality of AFSPA** has been questioned, given that **law and order is a state subject**.

➤ Supreme Court's Judgement: The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of AFSPA in a 1998 judgment (Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India). In this judgment, the Supreme Court held that

  ○ a suo-motu declaration can be made by the Central government, however, it is desirable that the state government should be consulted by the central government before making the declaration;

  ○ the declaration has to be for a limited duration and there should be a periodic review of the declaration after 6 months have expired;

  ○ while exercising the powers conferred upon him by AFSPA, the authorized officer should use minimal force necessary for effective action,

➤ **Jeevan Reddy Committee:** In November 2004, the Central government appointed a five-member committee headed by Justice B P Jeevan Reddy to review the provisions of the act in the northeastern states. The committee recommended that:

  ○ **AFSPA should be repealed** and appropriate provisions should be inserted in the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967

  ○ The **Unlawful Activities Act should be modified** to clearly specify the powers of the armed forces and paramilitary forces and

  ○ **Grievance cells** should be set up in **each district** where the armed forces are deployed.

➤ **Second ARC Recommendation:** The **5th report of the Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC)** on public order has also recommended the **repeal of the AFSPA**. However, these recommendations have not been implemented.

■■■

Note:

Art & Culture

Highlights

- Monuments of National Importance *(41)*
- Jallikattu Event Held in Tamil Nadu *(41)*
- Andhra Pradesh's Second Largest Petroglyph Site *(42)*
- Savitribai Phule *(43)*

Monuments of National Importance

Archaeological Survey of India has declared following monuments as the monuments of national importance:

➢ The ancient **Neemrana Baori** in Rajasthan's Alwar district;

➢ The **Group of Temples at Ranipur Jharail** in Odisha's Bolangir district;

➢ The **Vishnu Temple in Pithoragarh district,** Uttarakhand;

➢ **High Court Building in Nagpur,** Maharashtra,

➢ Two Mughal-era monuments in Agra — **Haveli of Agha Khan and Hathi Khana**.

High Court Building Nagpur

➢ The Nagpur High Court building is called a **Poem in Stone because of its beautiful structure**.

➢ It was designed by **Architect H.A.N. Medd**.

➢ **Greek influence can be seen prominently in the columns.** The predominant Roman features can be seen in the ornamentation of both square and arched alcoves.

➢ The Renaissance drum is cylindrical and elongated. Over it are Rajasthani Chhatris. The dome has the resonance of the soprano.

Neemrana Baori – Rajasthan

➢ The **Neemrana Stepwell was built in 18th century by Thakur Janak Singh**.

➢ It is also known as **Rani Ki Baoli in the local language**.

➢ The primary cause of the creation of this step well was to create employment during the famine that hit the area during that period.

Ranipur – Jharial – Odisha

➢ Ranipur Jharial is known as **"Soma Tirth" in scriptures**.

➢ It is a combination of religious faiths of **Shaivism, Buddhism, Vaishnavism, and Tantrism**.

➢ The site is famous for **Chausath (64) Yogini temples** or the temples without roofs—known as the hypaethral temples.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

➢ ASI is the premier organization for archaeological **research, scientific analysis, excavation of archaeological sites, conservation and preservation of protected monuments**.

➢ It is an attached office under the **Department of Culture (Ministry of Culture)**.

➢ **ASI was founded in 1861** by Alexander Cunningham who became its first Director-General.

Jallikattu Event Held in Tamil Nadu

Recently, events of Jallikattu were organized in many parts of Tamil Nadu.

➢ **Jallikattu is referred to as bull taming event** typically practiced in Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations.

Note:

- The person participating in the event has to **pluck bundles of money or gold tied to the animal's horns**.
- The term 'jallikattu' is derived from the **Tamil words 'jalli' and 'kattu'. Jalli refers to gold or silver coins. Kattu means 'tied'**.
- It is an **ancient 'sport',** believed to have been practiced some 2500 years ago. It also **found mentioned in the Sangam literature**.
- It is controversial because the sport often results in **major injuries and even deaths of both bulls and humans**.
- Supreme Court in 2014 banned Jallikattu and bullock-cart races and such events like the Rekla (race-bulls lugging makeshift carts, TN), Kambala (buffalo race in Karnataka), Dhirio (bullfight in Goa), buffalo fight (Assam) in response to Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) and People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) petitions citing cruelty to animals.

Arguments in Favor

- **Culture:** Tamils consider it symbolic of Tamilian pride as it is an ancient tradition. Organizers of bullock cart races have argued that extreme care and precaution is exercised.
  - However, the court had noted that even the ancient culture and tradition do not support Jallikattu in the form they are conducted today; Tamil culture and tradition is about worshipping the bull considered the vehicle of Lord Shiva.
- **Saving Native Bulls:** Proponents of Jallikattu argue that only native bulls are allowed to participate in Jallikattu and these bulls will become extinct if Jallikattu is not allowed to happen.

Arguments Against

- **Violation of constitution and law:** The practice of jallikattu violates the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals act, 1960.
  - Also, the article 51A of the constitution which includes our fundamental duties and states that citizens should safeguard the wildlife and forests and have compassion for living creatures.
- **Animal rights issues:** The animal welfare body through its studies and reports had highlighted that bulls were physically and mentally tortured for human pleasure.

Andhra Pradesh's Second Largest Petroglyph Site

Andhra Pradesh's **second largest petroglyph site,** containing about 80 petroglyphs, has been discovered at Mekala Benchi in **Kurnool district**.

- **Kandanathi,** with 200 petroglyphs, the **biggest petroglyph site in Andhra Pradesh** is also in **Kurnool district**.

- Petroglyphs are **rock carvings (rock paintings are called pictographs) made by pricking directly** on the rock surface using a stone chisel and a hammerstone.
  - These Petroglyphs mostly have images of **bulls or bull-riding, in addition to human figures, an elephant, tiger-like animals and cupules**.
  - While Mekala Benchi has petroglyphs dating back from the **Neolithic to the Megalithic period,** Kandanathi carvings range from the **prehistoric to the historic period**.
  - The petroglyphs at Kandanathi reveal the presence of the Boya community divided into many exogamous groups such as Mandla (herdsmen) and Yenubothula (buffalomen).

Stone Ages
- **Palaeolithic (Old Stone) Age**
  - Basically a **hunting and food gathering** culture.
  - Palaeolithic tools include sharpened stone, chopper, hand axe, scraper, spear, bow and arrow, etc. and were generally made up of hard rock quartzite.
  - Rock paintings and carvings found at **Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh** reflect upon hunting as the main subsistence activity.
  - Palaeolithic age in India is divided into **three phases**: Early or Lower Palaeolithic (50,0000 – 100,000 BC), Middle Palaeolithic(100,000 – 40,000 BC) and Upper Palaeolithic (40,000 – 10,000 BC).
  - Homo sapiens mark their **presence in upper palaeolithic age**.

- **Mesolithic (Middle Stone) Age**
  - ○ The age is marked by transition from Pleistocene period to Holocene period and favorable changes in the climate.
  - ○ The early period of Mesolithic age marks the **hunting, fishing and food gathering**.
  - ○ **Domestication of the animal**s began in this age.
  - ○ The tools called **Microliths** were smaller and had improved geometry than the Palaeolithic age.
- **Neolithic (New Stone) Age**
  - ○ Referred to as the concluding phase of the Stone Age, the age heralded the beginning of food production.
  - ○ **Sedentism (living in one place for a long time)** use of pottery, and invention of crafts are characteristics feature of neolithic age.
  - ○ The neolithic tools composed of heavy ground tools like pestles, grinders, pounders and also axes and sickles.
- **Megalithic Culture**
  - ○ Megaliths refer to **large stone structures** that were constructed either as burial sites or as commemorative sites.
  - ○ In India, archaeologists trace the majority of the megaliths to the Iron Age (1500 BC to 500 BC), though some sites precede the Iron Age, extending up to 2000 BC.
  - ○ Megaliths are **spread across the Indian subcontinent**. Majority of them are found in peninsular India, concentrated in the states of Maharashtra (mainly in Vidarbha), Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Savitribai Phule

Recently **187th birth anniversary of Savitribai Phule** was celebrated in the country.

- Savitribai Phule was a 19th century social reformer who worked in the field of women education.

Personal Life

- Savitribai Phule was born on **3rd January 1831** at Naigaon in Maharashtra's Satara district.
- She was the eldest daughter of Lakshmi and Khandoji Neveshe Patil, both of whom belonged to the Mali community, now an Other Backward Caste (OBC).
- **At the age of 9, she was married to 13-year-old Jyotirao Phule.**
- Jyotirao Phule, better known as Jyotiba, was also a social reformer who worked in the field of women education. **Jyotirao educated Savitribai at home after their marriage**.
- Savitribai Phule died on **10 March 1897,** while caring for a patient in the clinic she had opened for the treatment of those affected by the bubonic plague.

Social Endeavors and Its Impact

- In the 19th century, public education was limited and there were only a few missionary schools which were "open to all". In this period, Jyotiba, at the age of 21, and Savitri, 17, **opened a school for women in 1848**.
  - ○ It was the country's **first school for women started by Indians**.
- She also took teacher's training course at an institute run by an American missionary in Ahmednagar and in Pune's Normal School.
- She then started teaching girls in Pune's Maharwada.
- **By the end of 1851, the Phules were running three schools in Pune with around 150 girl students.** The teaching methods at their schools were believed to be better than government schools and soon the number of girls enrolled in Phule's schools outnumbered that of the boys in government schools.
- In 1849, Jyotiba and Savitri Bai left their family home as their acts were considered against the society by their family.
  - ○ They stayed with the family of a friend, Usman Sheikh, where Savitribai met Fatima Begum Sheikh.
  - ○ Fatima Sheikh along with Savitribai went to the Normal School and they both graduated together. She was the first Muslim woman teacher of India.
- **In the 1850s,** the Phule couple initiated two educational trusts—**the Native Female School, Pune and the Society for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs and Etceteras**—which came to have many schools under them.

Note:

- She published **Kavya Phule in 1854 and Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar in 1892**. In her poem, *Go, Get Education,* she urges the oppressed communities to get an education and break free from the chains of oppression.

- In **1852,** Savitribai started the **Mahila Seva Mandal** to raise awareness about women's rights. She simultaneously **campaigned against child marriage, while supporting widow remarriage**.

- In **1863,** they started a **home for the prevention of infanticide in their own house, for the safety of pregnant, exploited Brahman widows and to nurture their children**.

- In **1890, Jyotirao passed away**. Defying all social norms, she lit his funeral pyre.

- After Jyotiba's death in 1890, Savitribai carried forward the work of the organization Satya Shodhak Samaj and also chaired the annual session held at Saswad in 1893.

- She initiated the first **Satyashodhak marriage—a marriage without a dowry, Brahmin priests or Brahminical rituals in 1873**.

Satya Shodhak Samaj (Truth Seekers Society)

- It was founded by **Jyotirao Phule in 1873 in Pune**.

- Satya Shodhak Samaj was founded with a purpose to **give education to the lower castes,** scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and make them aware of the exploiting tradition of society.

■■■

Social Issues

Highlights

Umbrella Scheme for Family Welfare and Other Health Interventions

Cabinet has approved the continuation of umbrella scheme for "Family Welfare and Other Health Interventions" during 2017-18 to 2019-20.

➢ The scheme is **funded 100% by Central Government**. The government has allocated an overall outlay of around Rs. 2300 crore for the scheme.

Its sub schemes are as follows

➢ **Swastha Nagrik Abhiyan (SNA):** It aims to create a social movement for health, create awareness among citizens of India and to encourage healthy lifestyles and empower the citizens.

  ○ SNA was **proposed in National Health Policy, 2017**.

  ○ According to NHP, 2017 'Swastha Nagrik Abhiyan' is based on coordinated action in seven core areas:

   • The **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**

   • A balanced, **healthy diet and regular exercise**

   • Addressing **tobacco, alcohol and substance abuse**

   • **Yatri Suraksha -** preventing deaths due to rail and road traffic accidents

   • **Nirbhaya Nari -** action against gender violence

   • Reduced stress and improved **safety at the workplace**

   • **Reducing** indoor and outdoor **air pollution**

➢ **Population Research Centres (PRC):** Third-party evaluation will be done only for those centers which are considered for continuation.

➢ The **Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW)** has established a network of **Population Research Centres (PRC)** with the mandate **to provide research-based inputs related to the Health and Family Welfare Programs and Policies** at the national and state levels.

➢ **Health Surveys and Health Research (HSHR): For sourcing of data on population, health and nutrition for India and its States** including through periodically conducted National Family Health Survey (NFHS). The NFHS provides valuable data for policy and programmes right up to the district level.

➢ **Social Marketing of Contraceptives:** For branding, attractive packaging, marketing and selling of products and services related to Family Planning for low-income groups at affordable prices.

➢ **Free Supply of Contraceptives:** For providing a free supply of contraceptives including condoms, Oral Contraceptive Pills, Pregnancy Test Kits, other contraceptives, etc. to States.

Benefits

➢ The five schemes listed in the proposal are crucial to **attaining the goals and objectives of National Health Policy (NHP) 2017, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

➢ The SNA scheme has a very **ambitious target of improving health-seeking behavior** of the population through increased awareness and enhanced uptake of health services.

➢ The **HSHR would assist in keeping a tab on the progress of the entire set of health programmes/ schemes** run by the government of India and assisting in timely course corrections.

➢ The free and social marketing of contraceptives will **enable better child and mother health, besides population stabilization**.

Note:

Government Removes Price Cap on Innovative Drugs

The government has removed price restrictions on new and innovative drugs developed by foreign pharmaceutical companies under the **Indian Patent Act, 1970**.

➢ These restrictions have been removed for the **first five years** from the date of first commercial marketing undertaken by the manufacturer in the country.

➢ This will give Indian patients access to drugs that are currently only available abroad. These also include **orphan drugs** that are used for treating rare medical conditions.

Orphan drugs

➢ Orphan drugs are medicinal products intended for diagnosis, prevention or treatment of life-threatening or very serious diseases or disorders **that are rare**.

➢ These drugs are called "orphan" because under normal market conditions the pharmaceutical **industry has little interest in developing and marketing products** intended for only a small number of patients.

Patent

➢ Patents provide the **patent owner with the legal means** to prevent others from making, using, or selling the new invention for a limited period of time, subject to a number of exceptions.

➢ A patent only gives an inventor the right to prevent others from using the patented invention. It says nothing about whether the product is safe for consumers and whether it can be supplied.

➢ Patented pharmaceuticals still have to go through rigorous testing and approval before they can be put on the market.

Section 3(d) of Indian Patent Act, 1970

➢ Section 3(d) of Indian Patent Act **prevents the "evergreening" of patents**.

➢ It means that the following inventions are **not patentable**:
  ❍ mere discovery of a new form of a known substance and which **does not result in increased efficacy** of that substance.
  ❍ mere **discovery of any new property**.

  ❍ **new use** for a known substance.
  ❍ mere use of a **known process,** machine or apparatus unless such process results in a new product.

➢ This, in other words meant that India did not support inventions which were **minor modifications** and thus prevented undue monopoly during the extended period of patent protection by the inventor/company.

Compulsory Licensing (CL)

➢ **CL** allows governments to **license third parties** (that is, parties other than the patent holders) to produce and market a patented product or process without the consent of patent owners.

➢ Any time after three years from date of sealing of a patent, application for compulsory license can be made, provided:
  ❍ reasonable requirements of public have not been satisfied;
  ❍ patented invention is not available to public at a reasonably affordable price;
  ❍ Patented invention is not worked in India.

➢ The Union government issued this Order under **section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955,** to provide essential and life-saving medicines at a reasonable price to the general public.

➢ **Drug Price Control Orders (DPCO) (Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers)** lays down the rules for regulating the prices of medicines through a National List of Essential Medicines, known as **Schedule-I of DPCO** which is amended by the government from time to time.

National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM)

➢ The first National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) of India was **prepared and released in 1996**. This list was subsequently **revised in 2003 and 2011**.

➢ The list is prepared by the **Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**.

➢ Essential medicines are those that satisfy the priority health care needs of the population. These are selected with due regard to disease prevalence, evidence on efficacy and safety, and comparative cost-effectiveness.

Background

➢ Earlier the US raised concerns about the Indian price controls on **coronary stents and knee replacement implants,** prices of which had been slashed by as much as 85% and 70%, respectively.

Note:

➢ The US announced that it was reviewing the **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)** eligibility of India after the US dairy industry and the US medical device industry requested a review of India's GSP benefits, complaining that Indian trade barriers affected US exports in these sectors.

Rajya Sabha Passes the Bill to Abolish theNo Detention Policy

The Parliament has passed the **Right of Children to Free & Compulsory Education (Amendment) Bill, 2018**.

➢ The Bill seeks to amend the Right to Education Act, 2009 to abolish the no-detention policy in schools.

Provisions of the Bill

➢ There shall be a **regular examination in the fifth class and in the eighth class** at the end of every academic year.

➢ If a child fails in the examination he shall be **given an opportunity for re-examination within a period of two months** from the date of declaration of the result.

➢ The **State Government may allow schools to hold back a child** in the fifth class or in the eighth class or in both classes if he fails in the re-examination.

➢ The **State Government may also decide not to hold back a child** in any class until the completion of elementary education.

➢ **No child shall be expelled from a school** till the completion of elementary Education.

What is No Detention Policy?

➢ No Detention Policy states that no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled till s/he completes elementary education, which is upto Class VIII.

➢ It is provided under Section 16 of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 or Right to Education Act (RTE).

Why was No Detention Policy introduced?

➢ The provision was made in the original Act because examinations were often used to hold back children who obtained poor marks.

➢ To reduce the higher dropout rate especially among economically marginalized communities - it was felt that compelling children to repeat a class was demotivating, often forcing them to abandon school.

➢ The No Detention Policy was supposed to be part of the larger continuous and comprehensive evaluation (CCE) effort which replaced the annual examination system.

➢ CCE mandates the assessment and evaluation of students' academic, social and personality development on a continuous basis.

Challenges with No Detention Policy

➢ In 2016, Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) had advised Human Resource Development Ministry for the scrapping of 'No Detention policy' on the ground that it was leading to lower learning outcomes.

➢ **Teachers were ill-equipped** to facilitate the implementation of the new methods of evaluation and in most cases the policy was interpreted as one that required no assessment at all. Less than 10% of the schools in the country are fully compliant with the RTE's requirements on infrastructure and teacher availability.

➢ The policy focused more on increasing the enrollment in elementary education and **compromised on the quality of basic education**.

➢ It led to **lackadaisical attitude among students towards their studies,** as they did not fear detention.

➢ **TSR Subramanian Committee on Education and the Vasudev Devnani Committee** formed under CABE had recommended the revocation of No Detention Policy.

Way Forward

➢ Bringing back year-end examinations for Classes V and VIII and detaining students who fail will not improve learning outcomes on their own unless supported by other necessary changes in the educational ecosystem.

➢ The real solution to poor learning outcomes is improving quality of and access to education.

➢ Making teachers do their job better as well as fixing shortcomings in educational infrastructure and administration is the need of the hour.

➢ Raising the quality of classroom teaching, continuous monitoring of teacher attendance and introduction of free vocational and industrial skills training for all those with such an aptitude after elementary schooling should be the priority.

Note:

Survey of Child Care Institutions

Recently, Ministry of Women and Child Development released a report, **Mapping of Child Care Institutions under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015**.

➢ The report consists of findings of the survey conducted by **Childline India Foundation** and the **National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR)** of 9,589 shelters homes/child care institutions.

➢ The study of the Mapping Exercise of the Child Care Institutions (CCIs)/Homes throws light on a critical component of the Juvenile Justice System i.e. functioning of CCIs/Homes across the country, in the context of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 (JJ Act).

Findings of the survey

➢ **Profile of CCIs/Homes**
  ○ Among the total Homes surveyed , there are mostly Children Homes and rest are Shelter Homes, Specialised Adoption Agency, Observation Homes, Special Homes, Swadhar Homes, Ujjawala, Place of Safety and Combination Homes nationwide.
  ○ Out of a total number of CCIs/Homes studied, 91% of the total CCIs/Homes, are run and managed by Non-Government Organisations, whereas, only 9% are Government supported Homes.

➢ **Profile of Children in CCIs/Homes**
  ○ The different categories of children residing in the CCIs/Homes included Children who are Orphan, Abandoned, Surrendered, Sexually Abused, Victim of Child Pornography, Trafficked for domestic work, Trafficked for labour/Rescued from Labour, Trafficked for Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Victims of Child Marriage, Children affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, Children affected by natural disasters as well as manmade disasters and conflict, and Homeless, Runaway/ Missing, Mentally and Physically Challenged Children.

➢ **Standard of Child Care Facilities**
  ○ Facilities for children like individual bedding, proper nutrition and diet, toys, hygiene and maintenance of the CCI/Homes, sufficient water, health check-ups, educational facilities based on the age and special needs of the child were not being adequately and satisfactorily addressed in many CCIs/Homes resulting in a failure to provide even the basic services to the children residing there.

➢ **Lack of Grievance Redressal Mechanism**
  ○ The absence of various mechanisms for grievance redressal including management and children committees, thereby limiting and/or eliminating options available for children to express their views and concerns to the appropriate authorities.

➢ **Human Resource**
  ○ With respect to the adequacy of staff, as per the norm, the highest percentage of CCIs/ Homes following the norms was found in Delhi and lowest in Sikkim.
  ○ There is also a shortage of adequate staff both as per the norm and as per sanction across all the CCIs/Homes in India.

➢ **Physical Infrastructure**
  ○ There is lack of security measures, such as a boundary wall, fencing, and a strong structure to ensure the safety of children and staff within the premises of many CCIs/Homes, including privacy in toilets and bathing areas.

➢ **Lack of adherence to Juvenile Justice (Act and Rules) Procedure**

➢ **Financial Transparency**
  ○ Serious limitations were found with respect to financial transparency.
  ○ Many CCIs/Homes do not have the necessary system for maintaining and documenting financial records.

Recommendations

➢ There must be an **adequate representation** of the different categories of CCIs/ Homes under the ambit of the JJ Act.

➢ **Registration** must be made compulsory for all CCIs/ Homes to register under the JJ Act.
  ○ Record Keeping and Documentation must be carried out as a matter of practice in all Homes/ CCIs/Agencies.

➢ **Child Protection Policy** must be adopted in every CCI/Home, must be explained to and signed by each and every staff, management or adult dealing in any capacity with the CCI.

➢ **Human Resources:** The staff in the CCIs/Homes need to be properly trained to sensitively and efficiently deal with children and their issues, needs, problems, concerns, and safety.

Note:

➢ **Regular Monitoring and Action Taken Reports:** Regular inspections by the relevant authorities and appropriate action must be taken against CCIs/Homes not following norms.

➢ Intervention by the respective governments with the help of external agencies must be carried out to **regularize finances to bring about transparency** in the system.

National Health Authority

The Union Cabinet has approved the restructuring of existing National Health Agency as "National Health Authority" with an aim to efficiently implement Pradhan Mantri – Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY).

➢ The National Health Authority will be an attached office to the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare and shall have full autonomy, accountability and the mandate to implement PM-JAY through an efficient, effective and transparent decision-making process.

➢ The NHA will be responsible for its operational guidelines, fixing the ceiling of premium amounts, and developing mechanisms for strategic purchase of healthcare from the private sector. It is also tasked with building a health information technology platform, and working with the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority.

➢ The post of the National Health Agency, CEO will be upgraded to that of a Secretary to the Government of India with full financial powers.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)

➢ PMJAY offers a sum insured of Rs. 5 lakh per family for secondary care (which doesn't involve a super specialist) as well as tertiary care (which does). For the beneficiaries, this is a free scheme.

➢ It is an entitlement-based scheme that targets the beneficiaries as identified by latest Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) data.

➢ Individuals can walk into any empanelled hospital that can process cashless payments.

➢ Once identified by the database, the beneficiary is considered insured.

➢ The insurance cost is shared by the centre and the state mostly in the ratio of 60:40.

➢ Empanelled hospitals agree to the packaged rates under PMJAY—there are about 1,400 packaged rates for various medical procedures under the scheme.

○ These packaged rates also mention the number of average days of hospitalization for a medical procedure and supporting documents that are needed.

○ These rates are flexible, but once fixed hospitals can't change it and under no circumstances can they charge the beneficiary. The scheme also has prescribed a daily limit for medical management.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme

Recently, the Department of Empowerment of persons with Disabilities, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment organised a regional conference on **"Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS)"** in Mumbai.

➢ It was the second of a series of Regional Conferences to be held across the country wherein Programme Implementing Agencies (PIAs) from the western region namely, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Goa participated.

➢ Since this scheme was **revised in 2018,** the Regional Conference was organized in order to **disseminate the provisions of the revised scheme and bring the Department closer to implementing agencies**.

Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme

➢ DDRS is a **Central Sector Scheme** of Government of India which is being implemented **since 1999** for providing financial assistance to **NGOs working** for education and rehabilitation of persons with disabilities.

➢ The objectives of the scheme are:

○ To create an enabling environment to ensure equal opportunities, equity, social justice and empowerment of persons with disabilities.

○ To encourage voluntary action for ensuring effective implementation of the **Right of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016**.

➢ NGOs are being **given assistance under DDRS** for providing a wide range of services to children/persons with disability, e.g.

Note:

○ programmes for pre-school and early intervention

○ special education,

○ vocational training and placement

○ community based rehabilitation

○ manpower development

○ psychosocial rehabilitation of persons with mental illness

○ rehabilitation of leprosy-cured persons, etc.

➢ The "Scheme to Promote Voluntary Action for Persons with Disabilities" was **revised and was renamed** as the "Deendayal Disabled Rehabilitation Scheme (DDRS) from **April 2003**.

Astana Declaration

In October 2018, the **World Health Organization (WHO)** organized **Global Conference on Primary Health Care: From Alma-Ata towards universal health coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals,** meeting at Astana, Kazakhstan.

➢ The Astana Declaration which was signed at the conference aims to meet all people's health needs across the life course through comprehensive preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative services and palliative care.

➢ The declaration has been **signed by all 194 WHO member states including India**.

➢ At the conference, countries declared their commitment to 'Primary Care' and reaffirmed their commitment to Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health care signed in 1978.

➢ The Astana Declaration marks the **40th anniversary of the historical Alma Alta Declaration** that declared **health a human right for all** and not just a privileged few and urged the world to make **primary health care the mainstay of universal health coverage** in 1978.

➢ **India was a signatory to the Alma Ata Declaration in 1978 that assured 'health for all' by the year 2000.**

Note:

Miscellaneous

Highlights

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PARIVESH Portal

➢ **Gujarat government** and **other states** have operationalised **'PARIVESH' (Pro-Active and Responsive Facilitation by Interactive, Virtuous and Environmental Single-window Hub)** portal from January 15.

➢ PARIVESH is a **web-based, application** which has been developed for online submission and monitoring of the proposals submitted by the proponents for seeking Environment, Forest, Wildlife and Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ) Clearances from Central, State and district level authorities.

➢ It automates the entire tracking of proposals which includes online submission of a new proposal, editing/updating the details of proposals and displays status of the proposals at each stage of the workflow.

➢ This portal is developed under **'Digital India' initiative by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)**.

Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram

The Cabinet has approved the continuation of **Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram** Scheme for the Period 2017-18 to 2019-2020.

➢ The umbrella scheme of Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram has subsumed the following **eight sub-schemes**:

- ❍ Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS);
- ❍ National Youth Corps (NYC);

- ❍ National Programme for Youth & Adolescent Development (NPYAD);
- ❍ International Cooperation;
- ❍ Youth Hostels (YH);
- ❍ Assistance to Scouting & Guiding Organizations;
- ❍ National Discipline Scheme (NDS); and
- ❍ National Young Leaders Programme (NYLP).

➢ The Rashtriya Yuva Sashaktikaran Karyakram Scheme is a **Central Sector Scheme of the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports** and has been continuing since the **12th Five Year Plan (2012-17)**.

➢ It aims to **develop the personality and leadership qualities of the youth and to engage them in nation building activities**.

➢ The Scheme beneficiaries are the youth in the age group of 15-29 years, in line with the definition of 'youth' in the National Youth Policy, 2014. In the case of programme components specifically meant for the adolescents, the age group is 10-19 years.

National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC)

India's first National Museum of Indian Cinema (NMIC) was inaugurated in **Mumbai**.

➢ The National Museum of Indian Cinema is a storehouse of information to laymen and it **also helps filmmakers, film students, enthusiasts and critics** to know and **evaluate the development of cinema** as a medium of artistic expression, not only in the country but also in all parts of the world.

Note:

- ➢ The museum is **housed in a 19th-century heritage bungalow, Gulshan Mahal,** along with another newly built state-of-the-art NMIC building.
- ➢ The new museum building has **four exhibition halls,** whose themes are:
  - ○ Gandhi and Cinema;
  - ○ Technology, Creativity and Indian cinema;
  - ○ Cinema across India;
  - ○ Children's Film Studio.
- ➢ **Raja Harishchandra made by Dadasaheb Phalke in 1913** was the **first silent feature film in India** and **Ardeshir Irani's Alam Ara in 1931** was the first feature film with sound.

Kadaknath Chicken

Recently the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Jhabua, Madhya Pradesh has urged the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to include Kadaknath chicken in players' regular diet.

- ➢ Kadaknath or **"Kali Masi"** is one of the rarest poultry breeds of India which is **native to Jhabua district of Madhya Pradesh, India**.
- ➢ Kadaknath chicken from Madhya Pradesh was granted a **Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the government registry in 2017**.
- ➢ It is **popular for its black meat** which is famous for its meat quality, texture, taste, and excellent medicinal values.
- ➢ Kadaknath chicken **contains 25-27% of the protein** in comparison with other breeds of chickens that contain 18% protein. It is also known for its **high iron content**.
- ➢ It has **lower levels of fat and cholesterol content compared with other chicken breeds**.
- ➢ Kadaknath chickens are mainly **reared by tribal communities in the districts Jhabua and Dhar** in the state of Madhya Pradesh.

> **What is GI tag?**
> - ➢ The GI tag is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory.
> - ➢ It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods.
> - ➢ For a product to get a GI tag, the goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. It is also essential that the product has a special quality or reputation.
> - ➢ The Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999 provides registration and also protection of GI goods in India.

Renewables 2018 Global Status Report

- ➢ **Renewable Energy Network for the 21st Century (REN21)** has released the **Renewables 2018 Global Status Report**.
- ➢ As of 2016, renewable energy accounted for an **estimated 18.2% of global total final energy consumption,** with modern renewables representing 10.4%.
- ➢ India **ranked fifth in renewable power (including hydropower) and fourth (not including hydropower) as of end 2017**.
- ➢ According to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, a total of around 73.35 GW of renewable energy capacity has been installed in the country up till October 2018.
- ➢ This includes around 35 GW from Wind, 24 GW from solar, 4.5 GW from Small Hydro Power and 9.5 GW from Bio-power.

106th Indian Science Congress

- ➢ The **106th edition of the Indian Science Congress (ISC)** was inaugurated at **Lovely Professional University (LPU) in Phagwara, Jalandhar Punjab**.
- ➢ The theme for ISC-2019 was **'Future India - Science and Technology'**.
- ➢ In his inaugural speech, the Prime Minister added **'Jai Anusandhan'** to former prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri's famous slogan of Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan and Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Jai Vigyan to give a **new slogan – Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan, Jai Vigyan and Jai Anusandhan**.
- ➢ A **time capsule containing 100** items representing India's scientific prowess and the range of technology available in the modern world was lowered down to the ground to preserve a glimpse of present day India for future generations.
- ➢ The previous (2018), i.e. **105th edition was held in Imphal (Manipur University)**.

Indian Science Congress (ISC)

➢ The Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) owes its origin to the foresight and initiative of **two British Chemists, namely, Professor J.L. Simonsen and Professor P.S. MacMahon**.

➢ The first meeting of the Congress was held from **January 15-17, 1914 at the premises of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta**.

#WebWonderWomen

Twitter India and Ministry of Women and Child Development, in partnership with human rights organization Breakthrough, has launched the campaign **#WebWonderWomen** to **celebrate Indian women achievers**.

➢ Under the campaign, **people can nominate their favourite Indian woman achiever** with her Twitter handle, anywhere in the world.

➢ The women can be nominated under the following categories: **health, media, literature, art, sports, tech, travel, business, legal/policy, governmental, entertainment, fashion/beauty, finance, food and environment**.

Know India Programmes (KIP)

The 51st edition of **Know India Programmes (KIP)** was conducted from January 5th to 29th 2019 in partnership with Gujarat.

➢ The KIP is a **25-day orientation programme** organized by the **Ministry of External Affairs** in partnership with the states of India.

➢ It's objectives are:

○ **Engage the students and young professionals of the Indian diaspora** in the age group of 18 to 30 to connect with India.

○ To **motivate and inspire young minds and to give them an exposure to various aspects of India's art, heritage and culture** and to promote awareness about different facets of life in the country and the progress made by India in various fields.

➢ The **scheme was launched in 2004,** and since then the Ministry of External Affairs has conducted 49 editions of KIP in which more than 1600 Indian youth have participated from overseas.

Raisina Dialogue 2019

Recently, **Raisina Dialogue conference was concluded in New Delhi**.

➢ The theme of the Dialogue was **"A World Reorder: New Geometries; Fluid Partnerships; Uncertain Outcomes"**.

➢ The Raisina Dialogue is a multilateral conference committed to addressing the most challenging issues facing the global community.

➢ The Dialogue is structured as a multi-stakeholder, cross-sectoral discussion, involving heads of state, cabinet ministers and local government officials, as well as major private sector executives, members of the media and academics.

➢ The conference is hosted by the **Observer Research Foundation** in collaboration with the **Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs**.

Farm to Port Project

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia had decided to use India as a base to address their food security concerns. To implement this, India has announced a **Farm-To-Port Project**.

➢ The farm-to-port project is similar to a special economic zone but in the style of a corporatized farm, where crops would be grown keeping in mind the requirements of UAE and Saudi Arabia's market.

➢ For the first time, India's export policy identifies the potential of agriculture along with horticulture, dairy, plantation and fisheries.

➢ Exporting the produce will give a boost to farm income. If successful, it would create a whole new sector for agro-industries.

India's Largest Startup Ecosystem

One of country's largest startup ecosystems with 1.8 lakh sq ft. facility housing incubation infrastructure across a series of sectors in technology was **launched in Kerala**.

Note:

➢ The Integrated Startup Complex under the **Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM)** includes ultra modern facilities in fields such as biotechnology, computer-aided design, augmented/virtual reality and advanced communication.

National Youth Day

➢ The National Youth Day is observed every year on **January 12,** to mark the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

➢ The **first edition** of National Youth Day was celebrated in the year **1985**.

➢ **International Youth Day** is celebrated on **12th August**.

Swami Vivekananda

➢ Swami Vivekananda was born Narendra Nath Datta, on January 12, 1863.

➢ He was a monk and chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

➢ He introduced Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world and is credited with raising interfaith awareness, bringing Hinduism to the world stage during the late 19th century.

➢ He established Ramakrishna Mission in 1987, named after his Guru Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa. The institution did extensive educational and philanthropic work in India.

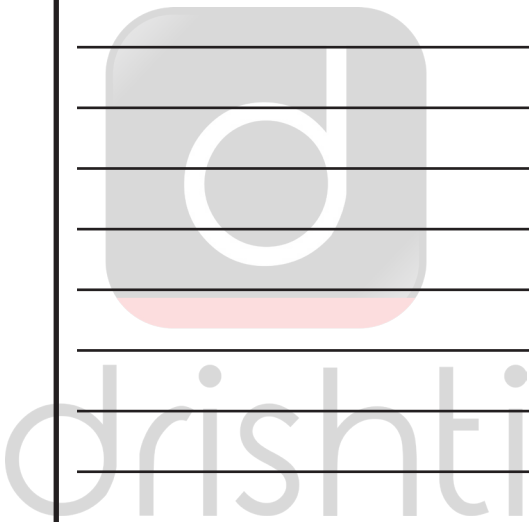➢ He also represented India in the first Parliament of Religion held in Chicago (U.S.) in 1893.

Note:
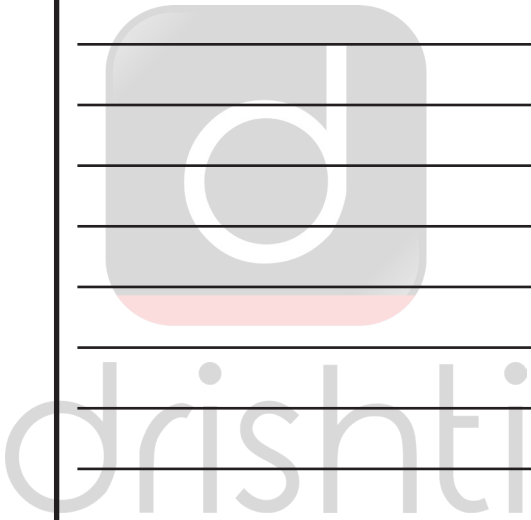
Key Points

Details

Summary

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