1. SOCIAL ISSUES

1.1. **International Day of Persons with Disabilities**

**In News**

- Every year, December 3 is observed as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities.
- The theme for 2017 International Day of People with Disability is “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient society for all”.
- The overarching principle of this theme is to ‘leave no one behind’ and empowers people with disability to be active contributors of society. It is based on transformative changes envisaged in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

**Background**

- The annual observance of the International Day of Disabled Persons was proclaimed in 1992, by the United Nations General Assembly resolution.
- It aims to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all spheres of society and development, and to increase awareness of the situation of persons with disabilities in every aspect of political, social, economic and cultural life.
- **UN Effort to tackle disabilities include:**
  - The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which talks about leaving no one behind.
  - Other international development frameworks, such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Charter on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, the New Urban Agenda, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development etc. have integrated the concerns regarding persons with disabilities in the policy formulation.

### DISABILITY SCENARIO IN INDIA

**Disabled Population In India**

- The World Bank estimates that 15% of the world’s population is affected by one disability or another.
- Exclusion of disabled persons from the labour market leads to an annual loss of approximately 3-7% of the GDP.
- According to Census 2011, India is home to 26.8 million people with disabilities and that is a huge underestimation.

**Initiatives By Government**

- **National Policy for Person with Disabilities 2006.**
- India signed the **UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disability** in 2007.
- Term "divyang" is being considered in place of “viklang” to change mindset. The term would help in raising self-confidence and subsequent empowerment.
- India is a signatory to **Marrakesh Treaty** to facilitate Access to Published works by Visually Impaired Persons and Persons with Print Disabilities.
  - The treaty allows for copyright exceptions to help for the creation, export and import, sharing, translation of the books in any format for accessible versions of copyrighted books and other works for the people with impaired visibility.
  - Under this treaty, India launched **Accessible India Campaign (Sugam Bharat Abhiyan)** and has set up Sugamya Pustakalaya, an online library for Persons with print disabilities.
Centre recently announced universal ID for person with disabilities. The ID cards will have a unique number through which all their details such as personal, bank, education, employment, income status, disability certificate, which can be assessed and eliminate the hassle of carrying certificates for different purposes. It will be valid throughout the country and will allow the persons with disability to avail benefits of schemes and reservations.

Rights of Person With Disability Act 2016

Issues Around Disability In India

- **Social Segregation and Stigma** attached to disability is a big issue, considering their integration into society.
- **Non-availability of evidence-based facts.**
- **Inconsistency in Disability definition across censuses**: Different definitions in different censuses have led to inclusion of someone in one census and exclusion of the same person in another census.
- **Narrow perspective**: India looks at disability from medical or pathological angle only. Most developing countries look from social angle, highlighting institutional and social arrangements preventing those with impairments from leading normal lives.
- **Lack of standard reporting**: Census depends on self-reporting of disability; this may leave out mental disability and even physical disability.
- **Lack of Institutional and Infrastructural Support** for the disabled in India.
- **Lack of coordination-** inter-sectoral, inter-ministerial coordination as well as between government bodies and NGOs.
- **Limited competence and capacity** of decentralizing services.

Way Forward

- Kerala became first state to conduct a census of its own called Kerala Disability Census for 2014-15. Other states must follow example.
- Recently, Supreme Court proposed to provide 3% reservation to Persons with Disabilities in all posts and services under the Government of India. Currently, govt. has confined such reservation to Group C and Group D posts. This should be implemented to empower and enable them.
- **Accessibility and support services** for persons with disability must be increased manifolds.
- Multi-stakeholder approach should be adopted. It should include collaboration among key players such as government ministries, local champions like the DAISY Forum of India, and the private sector.
- **End Institutional Exclusion**: Today all Ministries like Ministry of Women and Child, Ministry of Education, and bodies like NCPCR etc. shed their responsibilities to Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment. This should be stopped and everyone has to take blame for poor disability environment in India.
- **Capacity building** of health care providers and program managers.
- **Increase public awareness and understanding of disability** through social marketing and campaigns.
- Strengthen and support research on disability.

Conclusion

It is not just the defect in their biological body that makes them disabled but the psychological trauma they go through by unfriendly attitude of the society towards them that renders them disable. By providing them aids to overcome their disability and enabling them to earn a dignified livelihood, we can actually transform them from being disabled to being differently-abled.

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act – 2016

- It fulfills the obligations to the United National Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), to which India is a signatory. The Act came into force during December 2016.

**Salient Features of the Act**

1. **Definition of disability:**
   - It has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept to include 21 conditions as disable.
   - Expands the list of disabilities from seven to 21.
   - It also defines Persons with benchmark disabilities as those with at least 40% of any of the above specified disabilities.
Speech and Language Disability and Specific Learning Disability have been added for the first time.

Acid Attack Victims have been included.

2. **Rights of persons with disabilities:**
   - Persons with disabilities (PwDs) shall have the right to equality.
   - Rights include protection from inhuman treatment and equal protection and safety in situations of risk, humanitarian emergencies, natural disasters and armed conflict.
   - All existing public buildings shall be made accessible for disabled persons.

3. **Education and skill development:**
   - It provides for the access to inclusive education, self-employment and vocational training to disabled persons.
   - At least 5% seats in all government institutions of higher education and those getting aid from the government are required to reserve seats for persons with benchmark disabilities. Earlier it was only 3%.

4. **Employment:**
   - The Union and State governments will ensure that at least 4% of the vacancies in identified establishments are filled by persons or class of persons with at least 40% of any of the disabilities.
   - The reservation must be computed on the basis of total number of vacancies in the strength of a cadre. Government can exempt any establishment from this provision of reservation.

5. **Legal Capacity:** Disabled persons have the equal right to own and inherit movable and immovable property, as well as control their financial affairs in par with others.

6. **Guardianship:** The district court may order guardianship to the disable person if found a mentally ill person and not capable of taking care of himself or of taking legally binding decisions.

7. **District level committees:** It will be constituted by the State Governments to address local concerns of PwDs. Special Courts will be designated in each district to handle cases concerning violation of rights of PwDs.

8. **Central and state advisory boards on Disability:** They will advise governments on policies and programmes on disability. The will also review the activities of organisations dealing with disabled persons.

9. **National and State Fund:** It will be created to provide financial support to the persons with disabilities. The existing National Fund for PwDs and the Trust Fund for Empowerment of PwDs will be subsumed with the National Fund.

10. **Punishment:** It provides for imprisonment ranging from six months to two years, along with a fine ranging from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 5 lakh, for discriminating against differently abled persons.

**Criticism**
- The Act strangely makes the clauses on non-discrimination in employment mandatory only in government establishments.
- Another point is a provision for a Chief Commissioner of Disabilities instead of National Commission proposed earlier in the 1995’s act.
- The chief commissioner has only recommending powers and there is no provision to ensure either the commissioners or any of the members of their advisory committees is required to be Persons with Disabilities.
- Despite a Supreme Court judgment in 2013 that reservations should be decided on the basis of the total number of vacancies in a particular cadre, rather than the posts identified by the government to be filled by persons with benchmark disabilities, the act has stuck to the latter.
- A cause of worry is section 3(3) allowing discrimination against a disabled person if it is “a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim”. This clause leaves “legitimate aim” open to the subjective interpretation of the bureaucracy.
- Decision to drop the proposal for the establishment of statutory disabilities commissions at the national and State levels is a cause of worry. As, to vest in an advisory body the responsibility to monitor enforcement and violations of the law, as well as financial supervision, is not the most effective approach to promote equal opportunities and combat discrimination.

**Comparison of New Act with PWD Act, 1995 and Draft Bill, 2011**
- The proposed Bill replaces the PWD Act. In 2010 the government appointed a committee chaired by Dr. Sudha Kaul, which submitted a Draft Bill in 2011.
Subsequently, the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2014 was introduced in Rajya Sabha in February 2014.

The table below provides a comparison of some of the key features of the PWD Act, Draft Bill and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act:

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of disabilities covered</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20 (includes dwarfism which is not covered in the 2014 Bill)</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent of disability to be covered under the law</td>
<td>At least 40% of a disability specified in the Act.</td>
<td>Rights and benefits to apply to all persons with disabilities irrespective of extent of disability. Benchmark disability: Person with 40% of a specified disability can avail of benefits such as reservation in education, employment, other schemes, etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reservations in education and employment in govt. institutions</td>
<td>Employment: 3% in government organizations (within that 1% for specific disabilities). Education: 3%</td>
<td>Employment: 7% in government organisations (bands created amongst all disabilities and each entitled to 1% within this). Education: 6% in each course in higher education.</td>
<td>Employment: 5% in government organisations (within that 1% for specific disabilities). Education: 5% in higher education institutions (and upper age relaxation of five years) and free elementary education for those between six to 18 years of age (six to 14 years under Right to Education Act, 2009).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>No provision in PWD Act. Guardianship covered under the National Trust Act, 1999 and the Mental Health Act, 1987.</td>
<td>All existing plenary guardians to be converted to limited guardians for all persons with disability.</td>
<td>Addresses guardianship of mentally ill persons in terms of limited and plenary guardianship. For other categories of disability, existing laws will apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal provisions</td>
<td>Chief Commissioner, and Commissioners for persons with disabilities, redress complaints by aggrieved parties and act as Civil Courts.</td>
<td>Disability Rights Tribunals to be set up at centre, and each state and district.</td>
<td>National Commission to have powers of a Civil Court. Session Courts to be notified as Special Courts by state governments.</td>
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**Conclusion:**
The previous law, the Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995, has failed to provide them a better quality of life. This new Act attempts to bring India in line with the 21st century understanding of the rights of persons with disabilities as captured in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) ratified by India.

1.2. **National Nutrition Mission (NNM)**
In News

• The Union Cabinet has approved setting up of NNM commencing from 2017-18. The main aim of this mission is to rein in malnourishment and stunted growth.

• NNM will address three aspects—the food that should be given to rein in stunting, undernourishment, low birthweight and anaemia; the delivery system required for it; and monitoring of the entire process.

• There are a number of schemes directly/indirectly affecting the nutritional status of children (0-6 years age) and pregnant women and lactating mothers. Inspite of these, level of malnutrition and related problems in the country is high.

• There is no dearth of schemes but lack of creating synergy and linking the schemes with each other is needed to achieve common goal. NNM through robust convergence mechanism and other components would strive to create the synergy.

Key Highlights

• The NNM, as an apex body, will monitor, supervise, fix targets and guide the nutrition related interventions across the Ministries.

• Major impact - The programme through the targets will strive to reduce the level of stunting, under-nutrition, anemia and low birth weight babies.

• The programme would be undertaken in a phased manner, covering 315 districts in 2017-18, 235 districts in 2018-19 and the remaining districts in 2019-20.

• Implementation strategy and targets:
  o Implementation strategy would be based on intense monitoring and Convergence Action Plan right upto the grass root level.
  o NNM targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
  o Although the target to reduce Stunting is atleast 2% per annum, Mission would strive to achieve reduction in Stunting from 38.4% (NFHS-4) to 25% by 2022 (Mission 25 by 2022).

• NNM would be implemented using information technology as the basic tool; workers at anganwadis (women and child development centres) would be given smartphones and their supervisors smart tablets to monitor daily activities and compile reports. The move will be a deviation from the old practice of maintaining registers and will also help to reduce pilferage.

• The mission would include several components like an ICT (information and communications technology)-based real-time monitoring system, incentivizing of states and Union territories to meet their targets, social audits, and setting up of nutrition resource centres.

1.3. World AIDS Day

In News

• World AIDS Day is held on 1 December each year. It provides an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV, show their support for people living with HIV, and to commemorate people who have died.
2017 Theme: **Right to Health**

Slogan: **Everybody Counts**

The right to health is enshrined in the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights as the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, including ending the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030, will depend heavily on ensuring the right to health for all.

Hence, UNAIDS has launched this year’s World AIDS Day campaign which focuses on this year's theme. The campaign, **My Health, My Right**, focuses on the right to health and explores the challenges people around the world face in exercising their rights.

World AIDS Day was the first ever global health day and the first one was held in 1988.

### Why is World AIDS Day Important

- Globally around 36.7 million people are living with HIV by 2016. More than 35 million people have died from the virus, making it one of the most destructive pandemics in history.
- People do not know the facts about how to protect themselves and others from HIV, and stigma and discrimination remain a reality for many people living with HIV.
- World AIDS Day is important as it reminds the public and Govt that HIV has not gone away – there is still a vital need to raise money, increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education.

### UNAIDS

- This is the joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS.
- It leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of **zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths**.
- UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

### HIV/AIDS SCENARIO IN INDIA

**Some Facts**

- India has the third-highest population of HIV-positive people with more than two million affected by the virus but a government-controlled health programme has been successful in cutting the number of new infections by half over the past decade.
- According to National AIDS Control Programme, the total number of people living with HIV is estimated at 21.17 lakhs, of which 6.54% are children below 15 years.
- The adult prevalence is in the range of 0.3%, of which around 40% are women.
- Among the States/UTs, in 2015, Manipur has shown the highest estimated adult HIV prevalence of 1.15%, followed by Mizoram (0.80%), Nagaland (0.78%), Andhra Pradesh & Telangana (0.66%), Karnataka (0.45%), Gujarat (0.42%) and Goa (0.40%).
- The prevalence of HIV has been decreasing over the past decade.

### The Human Immunodeficiency Virus And Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention And Control) Act, 2017


**Key Highlights:**

- **Prohibition of discrimination against HIV positive persons:** The Bill lists the various grounds - employment, education, health care services, provision of insurance (unless based on actuarial studies) etc. - on which discrimination against HIV positive persons and those living with them is prohibited.
- **Informed consent and disclosure of HIV status:** No HIV test, medical treatment, or research will be
conducted on a person without his informed consent. No person shall be compelled to disclose his HIV status except with his informed consent, and if required by a court order.

- **Guardianship:** A person between the age of 12 to 18 years who has sufficient maturity in understanding and managing the affairs of his HIV or AIDS affected family shall be competent to act as a guardian of another sibling below 18 years of age.

- **Ombudsman:** The bill creates a post of ombudsman appointed by each state to inquire into complaints related to the violation of the Act and the provision of health care services.

- **Role of central and state governments:** The bill obliges the governments to take necessary measures to
  (i) prevent the spread of HIV or AIDS,
  (ii) provide anti-retroviral therapy and infection management for persons with HIV or AIDS,
  (iii) facilitate their access to welfare schemes especially for women and children,
  (iv) formulate HIV or AIDS education communication programmes that are age appropriate, gender sensitive, and non stigmatizing, and
  (v) lay guidelines for the care and treatment of children with HIV or AIDS.

- **Courts proceedings:** It seeks to expedite the cases relating to HIV positive persons by asking courts to dispose such cases on priority basis.

**Benefits:**

- The Act has expanded protections for HIV-positive people and those living with them, which will be beneficial in containing the spread of the disease.
- It has prohibited discrimination in jobs and education and improved healthcare access and privacy statutes. Strict penalties would act as a deterrent.
- Most crucially, making it a legally punishable offence to deny such a person health insurance on the ground of the infection that causes lowering of immunity.
- It aims to bring a rights-based approach to AIDS treatment, making it imperative for both the central and state governments to provide treatment “as far as possible”.
- The HIV/AIDS Act helps avoid the social stigma associated with being diagnosed with/för HIV/AIDS by ensuring complete privacy for the patients Institutions are obliged to keep all such information confidential and reveal them only with the informed consent of the PLHIV (person living with HIV).
- The changes are also expected to provide essential support to the National AIDS Control Programme in arresting new infections and help **achieve the target of ending the epidemic by 2030.**

**Criticism:**

- It has taken a step forward by ensuring strict standards of compliance with respect to the informed consent clause. However, the true value of any legislation lies in its implementation and the Act has a long way to go when it comes to ensuring that it meets the very standards it wishes to set.
- In terms of financial feasibility and manpower whether the Government is equipped to meet the promises made in the Act remains to be seen.
- In light of the enormous implications of having a high HIV prevalence amongst core High Risk Groups (sub-population which show a disproportionately high prevalence of HIV are called High Risk Groups), it becomes necessary to review the extent of protection provided to such groups under the HIV/AIDS Act. The problem with provisions of the Act is that it is merely prescriptive in nature; more of a directive than a mandatory legal obligation on the State. This is evident from its language and content.
- Furthermore, the provisions are directed at the ‘appropriate government', which only has a limited capacity of causing legislative reform. This anomaly effectively reduces the scope of protection available under this act for protecting core HRGs.
- Testing of new-borns and in high risk institutions such as hospitals, prisons and risk groups such as sex workers should be made mandatory, an aspect which has been left unaddressed by the Act.
- Transmission of the AIDS virus or any action which increases the risk of transmission in any form should be made a criminal offence. The current Act has taken a limited view in this regard.
- The rights of the healthy spouse have not been given adequate protection by allowing non-disclosure in anticipation of violence.

**Conclusion:**
1.4. Courts Can Turn Down Child Repatriation

In News

- A Supreme Court judgment has accorded courts in India unlimited discretion to determine which parent should have the custody of minor children involved in international parental child abduction.
- International parental child abduction refers to the illegal removal of children from their home by an acquaintance or family member to a foreign country.
- Now, the Indian courts can decline the relief of repatriation of a child to the parent living abroad even if a foreign court, located in the country from where the child was removed, has already passed orders for the child’s repatriation.

Key Highlights

- The judgment observed that welfare of the child came first over the repatriation order of the foreign court as India was not a signatory to The Hague Convention of “The Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction”.
- It further observed that issue of welfare of the child has paramount significance over the legal principles like ‘comity of courts’ and the doctrines of “intimate contact” and “closest concern”.

Background

- The judgment came in a case where the father took the younger of the two sons from his wife’s custody in the United States and came to India.
- The mother’s version was that he had taken the boy on the pretext of visiting the neighbourhood mall. A U.S. Court upheld her lawful custody and ordered the man to return his son to his wife.

The Civil Aspects Of International Child Abduction Bill, 2016

- In June 2016, a draft Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction Bill, 2016, with provisions similar to The Hague Convention, was uploaded on the Ministry website for public comments.
- In Oct’ 2016, after examining the Bill and the issue, the Law Commission submitted a revised version of the Bill, called The International Child Removal and Retention Bill 2016, in line with The Hague Convention and legal precedents in the country.
- In February 2017, it was again decided to constitute a committee to draft suitable legislation, and to advise on whether India should become a signatory.
- The committee was asked to submit its report in four months. However, the report has been delayed.

Why We Need Such Bill?

- In recent years the issue of international parental child abduction has assumed relevance in India, which has fast been emerging as a major hub, not only for emigration out of the country but also for immigration to it.
- A large number of Indians live and work abroad. In addition to this, large numbers of foreign nationals have been arriving to work and live in India, and a number of Indian nationals who had previously settled abroad are also returning to resume their residence in India.
- The problem arises when one spouse decides to return to India with their child without permission of other parent. In such cases, it is seen that the welfare of child suffers as he is often forcibly uprooted from his habitual residence & made to take up residence in new and often alien country.
- The international community acted to solve such crisis by enacting The Hague Convention on The Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. India is not a signatory to The Hague Convention. A country has to have a domestic law in place before it can become a signatory.
- The Law Commission in its 218th report recommended that India should frame a domestic law and sign
The Hague Convention.

- Verdict of the Supreme Court in *Surya Vadan v. State of Tamil Nadu* (2015) laid down principles to be followed by courts and tried to evolve a consistent approach in multi-jurisdictional child custody disputes.
- However, in absence of legal codes no uniform policy has been followed by courts. In such cases ultimate sufferer is the child.

**Some Facts about Hague Convention**

- The objects of convention are-
  - To secure the prompt return of children wrongfully removed to or retained in any Contracting State;
  - To ensure that rights of custody and of access under the law of one Contracting State are effectively respected in other Contracting State.
- Hague Convention applies to cases in which –
  - The Child must be under 16 years of age;
  - The child must have been habitually resident in a convention country immediately before any breach of custody or access rights.

### 1.5. UNESCO Recognises Kumbh Mela As "Intangible Cultural Heritage"

**In News**

- Kumbh Mela has been recognised by UNESCO as an "intangible cultural heritage of humanity".
- Kumbh Mela, considered the world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims, joins new elements from Botswana, Colombia, Venezuela, Mongolia, Morocco, Turkey and the UAE on the list.

**Background:**

- In 2003, the UNESCO General Conference had adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage as an international treaty, acknowledging that cultural heritage was more than tangible places, monuments and objects.
- The intangible cultural heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history.
- It provides people with a sense of identity and continuity, and promotes respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.
- The UNESCO Convention for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, defines intangible cultural heritage as the *practices, representations, expressions* as well as *knowledge and skills* that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage.

**Key Highlights**

- The Kumbh Mela, held in Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik, represents a syncretic set of rituals related to worship and cleansing in holy rivers. As a religious festival, the tolerance and inclusiveness that Kumbh Mela demonstrates are especially valuable for the contemporary world.
- The Committee also took note of the fact that knowledge and skills related to Kumbh Mela are transmitted through the Guru-Shishya parampara (teacher-student relationship) by way of saints and sadhus teaching their disciples about traditional rituals and chants.
- This inscription is the third in two years following the inscriptions of ‘Yoga’ and ‘Norouz’ on 1st December 2016. Previous ones includes the **Chhau dance** (Inscribed in 2010), **the Buddhist chanting of Ladakh** (inscribed in 2012), **Sankirtana** –the ritual singing, drumming, and dancing of Manipur (inscribed in 2013), the traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making among the Thatheras of Jandiala Guru, Punjab (inscribed in 2014) and **Ramlila**- the traditional performance of the Ramayana (inscribed in 2008).
The inscription of elements on the list helps countries, which are a part of UNESCO’s convention, in safeguarding cultural heritage and mobilise international cooperation & assistance for ensuring that communities continue to practice and transmit such aspects of their heritage.

1.6. **National Trachoma Survey Report**

**In News**

- The Ministry, while releasing the report, has declared that India is now free from ‘infective trachoma’, a contagious bacterial infection of the eye.
- With this, India met the goal of trachoma elimination as specified by the WHO under its GET2020 program.

**Key Highlights**

- The Surveys were conducted by Dr. Rajendra Prasad Centre for Ophthalmic Sciences, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, New Delhi in collaboration with National Program for Control of Blindness & Visual Impairment, Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare from 2014 to 2017.
- Survey findings indicate that the active trachoma infection has been eliminated among children with overall prevalence of only 0.7%. This is much below the elimination criteria of infective trachoma as defined by the WHO (active trachoma is considered eliminated if the prevalence of active infection among children below 10 years is less than 5%).
- This has been possible due to decades of inter-sectoral interventions and efforts that included:
  - provision of antibiotic eye drops, personal hygiene, availability of safe water, improved environmental sanitation,
  - availability of surgical facilities for chronic trachoma, and
  - a general improvement in the socio economic status in the country.

**Trachoma:**

- It is a chronic infective disease of the eye and is the leading cause of infective blindness globally.
- Trachoma is a disease of poor environmental and personal hygiene and inadequate access to water and sanitation. It affects the conjunctiva under the eyelids.
- Repeated infections cause scarring leading to in-turning of the eyelashes and eyelids. This further causes damage to the cornea and blindness.
- It is found affecting the population in certain pockets of the States of North India like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Nicobar Islands.
- It was the most important cause of corneal blindness in India, affecting young children.

1.7. **LaQshya - Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative**

**In News**

- Government has launched “LaQshya –Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative, a Safe Delivery Mobile Application for health workers on the occasion of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) day.
- UHC Day is observed every year on 12 December to commemorate first unanimous United Nations resolution calling for countries to provide affordable, quality healthcare to everyone, everywhere.

**Key Highlights**
LaQshaya is a mobile app for health workers who manage normal and complicated deliveries in the peripheral areas. The goal of this initiative is to reduce preventable maternal and new-born mortality, morbidity and stillbirths associated with the care around delivery in Labour room and Maternity OT and ensure respectful maternity care. This initiative will be implemented in Government Medical Colleges (MCs) besides District Hospitals (DHs), and high delivery load Sub-District Hospitals (SDHs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs).

1.8. **Apex Court to Re-Examine Adultery Laws: Section 497 Under Scanner**

### In News

- The Supreme Court has said that the provision of adultery in the Indian Penal Code treats a married woman as her husband’s “subordinate.”
- The court has admitted the petition to drop adultery as a criminal offence from the statute book. For this, the apex court is examining **Section 497 of IPC**, which deals with adultery.

### Analysis

- Section 497 of the IPC mandates that “Whoever has sexual intercourse with a person who is and whom he knows or has reason to believe to be the wife of another man, without the consent or connivance of that man, such sexual intercourse not amounting the offence of rape, is guilty of the offence of adultery and shall be punished.”
- This penal provision raises many important issues such as:
  - **Only men, and not women**, are punished for committing adultery. Why does Section 497 treat the man as the adulterer and the married woman as a victim?
  - The offence of adultery ceases the moment it is established that the husband connived or consented to the adulterous act. So, **is a married woman the "property" of her husband or a passive object without a mind of her own?**
  - Only a husband or the person in whose care the husband has left his wife can file a complaint under Section 497.
  - Also, many activists are raising the question that whether the state should be entering into a private space between two consenting adults.
- In 2006, the **National Commission for Women recommended that adultery be decriminalised.** At a time when many jurisdictions around the globe have decriminalised adultery, we in India are still considering whether or not to decriminalise it.

### Arguments In Favour Of Criminalizing Adultery

- Indian criminal law explicitly criminalises acts that deceive a person. Act of adultery breaches the **sanctity of a pure social institution** such as marriage, by way of deceit and lies. Hence, it must be criminalized.
- Those who claim that the adultery law tries to dictate and intervene in the lives of two consenting adults, they forget how adultery **wrecks the life of another** including children of both the families. Hence, State interference is warranted.
- Criminal law everywhere in the world serves as a **guardian of the moral principles of society**, protecting a society's historical roots while leading it towards a progressive social order. If we start...
subjecting laws to our personal rationale, it would lead to chaos, as a counter-narrative would always exist.

- A welfare-oriented and inclusive country like India, while demanding that a marriage be registered in order to acknowledge and protect the rights of the parties involved, cannot do away with a crime which undermines the same legally recognised institution.

- The constitutionality of Section 497 of the IPC was previously challenged before the Supreme Court in *Yusuf Abdul Aziz v. The State of Bombay* (1954). A constitutional bench held then that Section 497 did not violate the right to equality as sex is a sound classification and although there can be no discrimination on such account, the Constitution itself provides for special provisions with regard to women and children.

**Conclusion**

There is no denying that there exist ambiguities within Section 497 of the IPC. The existing gender discriminatory penal law of adultery deserves a serious relook and revision. Declaring it unconstitutional would not serve the purpose.

1.9. **Government To Regulate Ads On Pre-Natal Sex Tests On Internet**

**In News**

- Supreme Court has left the issue of regulating ads and content relating to sex-determination tests to the Government and asked it to take care of such issues in consultation with the search engines.
- The court cited lack of expertise as a reason for this.

**Background**

- A public interest litigation (PIL) was filed in 2008 to get the search engines to abide by local law, which bans such tests to arrest the falling sex ratio in the country.
- The government had then set up a nodal body to act as the interface with the search engines on such complaints.
- In Feb' 2017, the SC had ordered 3 Internet giants — Google, Microsoft and Yahoo — to immediately set up their own in-house expert bodies to keep tabs on and delete online pre-natal sex determination advertisements.
- It said that the intent of the order was to make these search engines “responsive to Indian law.” *Section 22 of the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act of 2003* prohibits advertisements relating to pre-natal determination of sex and imposes punishment. However, ads continue to appear online, rendering the law toothless.
- This was a step in the right direction by the Indian judiciary. It will complement the steps taken by the Executive in correcting the sex ratio in India and bring India at par with other nations in terms of gender parity.
- The court has continuously expressed its concern with regard to reduction of sex ratio in this country since more than a decade now. It has gone to the extent of stating that when there is decrease in sex ratio, it is a disaster signal to the mankind.

**Menace Of Female Foeticide In India**

- This process began in the early 1990s when ultrasound techniques gained widespread use in India. There was a tendency for families to continuously produce children until a male child was born.
- Foetal sex determination and sex selective abortion by medical professionals has today grown into a **Rs. 1,000 crore industry.**
- Social discrimination against women and a preference for sons have promoted female foeticide in various forms skewing the sex ratio of the country towards men.
- According to the decennial Indian census, the sex ratio in the 0-6 age group in India went from 104.0 males per 100 females in 1981, to 105.8 in 1991, to 107.8 in 2001, to 109.4 in 2011. The ratio is significantly higher in certain states such as Punjab and Haryana (126.1 and 122.0, as of 2001).

### Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act
- The PC-PNDT Act was enacted in 1994 with the intent to prohibit prenatal diagnostic techniques for determination of the sex of the fetus.
- It was enacted to **stop female foeticides** and **arrest the declining sex ratio** in India.
- The act was amended in 2003 to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection.

### 1.10. One Nation, One School Board

#### In News
- The Supreme Court has dismissed a plea seeking ‘one nation and one syllabus’ for children aged 6-14 years throughout the country.
- According to petition, there is a need for establishment of ‘One nation, One Education Board’ regime to ameliorate the issue of ineffective curricula and disparity of knowledge on account of a multiple-board system.
- The apex court has observed that the education boards, of the Centre and the States, and the schools affiliated thereto are **entitled to the liberty** to determine the content of the subjects they wish to teach and the education they wish to impart to their students.

#### Need for One Education Board
- The current education under multiple boards did not provide **equal opportunity to all.** The fundamental right to free and compulsory education under Article 21A includes a common education system.
- 2011 judgment by the Panchal Bench in the *Tamil Nadu and Others versus K. Shyam Sunder* case had held that the “right of a child should not be restricted only to free and compulsory education, but should be extended to **have quality education without any discrimination** on the ground of their economic, social and cultural background.
- In 2017, Tamil Nadu government had decreed that as much as 85% of engineering and medical college seats in the State will be reserved for students who had completed the qualifying exam — the XII standard or equivalent certificate — under the State’s own board of secondary education. Similarly, the Delhi government passed a resolution in the State Assembly demanding that Delhi University reserve 80% of its seats for students from Delhi. This is leading to a **demand of quota system** based on education boards.
- Hence, there is a demand to ensure uniformity in the quality of education, at least at the school level to start with.

#### 1.11. Action Plan For The Backward Districts

#### In News
The government has drawn up tailor-made action plans for 115 identified “most-backward” districts in the country to improve their socio-economic profiles.

This will be done by making available basic services like healthcare, sanitation and education as well as basic physical infrastructure like roads and drinking water supply in a time-bound manner.

**Key Highlights**

- The 115 districts, including 35 affected by left-wing extremism, were selected on parameters like deprivation (extent of landless households), health & nutrition (institutional delivery, stunting of children and wasting in children), education (elementary dropout rate and adverse pupil-teacher ratio) and infrastructure (un-electrified homes, lack of toilets, villages not connected by road and lack of drinking water).
- The focus is to work with states to bring a transformative change in these backward areas through rapid government-anchored programmes and interventions by 2022.
- The District Collectors will be the chief executors of the action programmes in districts, which will be ranked annually based on their performance in improving the above parameters.
- While at least one district has been included from each state under the backward district programme, Jharkhand has the highest number of districts with 19, followed by Bihar (13) Chattisgarh (10) and 8 each in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha.

**Need for Such plan:**

- In 2016, India ranked 131 among 188 nations in the UN Development Programme’s Human Development Index (HDI) with major inter-state and inter-district variations.
- Nearly 40% of children born in India are stunted and/or underweight while almost 50% of women are anemic.
- On nutrition, India even lags behind its neighbours such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and China.

### 1.12. Hornbill Festival Of Nagaland

- To encourage inter-tribal interaction and to promote cultural heritage of Nagaland, the Government of Nagaland organizes the Hornbill Festival every year in the first week of December. The first festival was held in the year 2000.
- It is also called as the 'Festival of Festivals'. It coincides with the celebration of Nagaland Statehood Day on 1st December.
- Hornbill Festival of Nagaland is named after the Great Indian Hornbill. Hornbill exudes nobility – beauty and bravery and because of its roar-like call, its strength is believed to equal with that of a tiger, which personifies the quintessential warrior.
- It is also symbol of fertility – reproductive and agricultural – and is perceived to possess social values similar to those of humans.
- Christianity is the predominant religion in Nagaland, yet each tribe annually celebrates its respective traditional festival connected one-way or the other with sowing, post-sowing or harvesting.
- The 10 days long Hornbill Festival unites one and all in Nagaland and people enjoy the colourful performances, crafts, sports, food fairs, games and ceremonies. Traditional arts which include paintings, wood carvings, and sculptures are also on display.

### About Great Hornbill

- The great hornbill (Buceros bicornis) also known as the great Indian hornbill or great pied hornbill, is member of the hornbill family. It is predominantly frugivorous, but is an opportunist and will prey on small...
mammals, reptiles and birds.

- Distribution and habitat: Great hornbills are found in the forests of India, Bhutan, Nepal, Mainland Southeast Asia, Indonesian Island of Sumatra and North eastern region of India. In the subcontinent they are found in a few forest areas in the Western Ghats and in the forests along the Himalayas.
- Conservation status: Due to habitat loss and hunting in some areas, the great hornbill is evaluated as **near threatened** on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
- Symbols and logo: The great hornbill is the state bird of Chin State in Myanmar, and of Kerala and Arunachal in India. A great hornbill called William was the model for the logo of the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and the name of their building.

### 1.13. Kathakar: International Storytellers Festival

7th edition of three day ‘Kathakar: International Storytellers Festival was held at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi.

#### Key Highlights

- The partners for this edition of festival are IGNCA of Union Ministry of Culture in Delhi, Heritage Transport Museum, Gurugram and National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA), Mumbai.
- Kathakar is the only oral storytelling festival in India and is a part of **Ghummakkad Narain**- the Travelling Literature Festival, which was started under the aegis of UNESCO in 2010.
- Though performance storytelling has seen a revival in Europe, in India only few efforts have been made to contemporize the art form.
- Kathakar is an attempt to not just preserve the art form but also create new audiences for the same.

### 1.14. Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage

- The three days ‘Bodhi Parva: BIMSTEC Festival of Buddhist Heritage’ was inaugurated in New Delhi on December 08, 2017. India is hosting the “Bodhi Parva” as a part of celebrations of 20th anniversary of BIMSTEC.
- ‘Bodhi Parva’ has entwined various threads of the Buddhist heritage into a beautiful melange including an exhibition of international and Indian Buddhist art and architecture, discourses by eminent scholars and practitioners of Buddhism, guided meditation and chanting by Buddhist monks, screening of film on Buddhism, dance and music performances, quiz show and a food trail.
- These will help in building an awareness of BIMSTEC’s rich and common heritage.
2. **POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

2.1. **The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016**

### In News

- The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016 is set to be re-introduced in the winter session of Parliament.
- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has decided to go ahead with the bill in its original format (without any change in the draft provisions).

### Evolution Of Transgender Legislation

- In 2014, Supreme Court passed a landmark judgement in *National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India case*, which declared transgender people to be a ‘third gender’, affirmed that the fundamental rights granted under the Constitution of India will be equally applicable to transgender people, and gave them the right to self-identification of their gender as male, female or third-gender.
- The blueprint for transgender rights legislation draws from the court’s directives.
- The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2014, was introduced as a Private Member’s Bill in the Rajya Sabha by Mr. Siva.
- The Bill passed in the Rajya Sabha had many progressive clauses including the creation of institutions like the National and State commissions for transgenders, as well as transgender rights courts.
- Finally, the government drafted *The Rights of Transgender Persons Bill, 2015* which after consultation with legal experts and the Law Ministry was introduced in the Lok Sabha in August 2016 (after considerable revision to the 2015 draft).

### Key Highlights

- The bill defines the transgender person thereby leaving no scope for ambiguity. It states that the person’s gender must not match the gender assigned at birth, and includes trans-men, trans-women, persons with intersex variations and gender-queers.
- The Bill prohibits discrimination against a transgender person in areas such as education, employment, and healthcare. It directs the central and state governments to provide welfare schemes in these areas.
- Offences like compelling a transgender person to beg, denial of access to a public place, physical and sexual abuse etc. has been penalized. It would attract up to 2 years’ imprisonment and a fine.
- A transgender person must obtain a certificate of identity as proof of recognition of identity as a transgender person and to invoke rights under the Bill.
- The District Magistrate, on the recommendation of a Screening Committee, would grant such a certificate. The Committee would comprise a medical officer, a psychologist or psychiatrist, a district welfare officer, a government official, and a transgender person.

### Criticism Of The Bill

- The definition of ‘transgender persons’ in the Bill is at variance with the definitions recognised by international bodies and experts in India.
- The Bill includes terms like ‘trans-men’, ‘trans-women’, persons with ‘intersex variations’ and ‘gender-queers’ in its definition of transgender persons. However, these terms have not been defined.
- The final version of the legislation identifies transgenders as being “partly female or male; or a combination of female and male; or neither female nor male”. This definition which draws a clinical caricature is a departure from the intention of the original Bill to cleanse society of the stigma it placed on transgenders.
The Bill states that a person recognised as ‘transgender’ would have the right to ‘self-perceived’ gender identity. However, it does not provide for the enforcement of such a right.

To be recognised as transgenders, individuals have to submit themselves to a medical examination by a District Screening Committee. This is in stark contrast to the 2014 Bill which gives individuals the right to self-identify their sex. It overlooks the Supreme Court Judgment which has held that the right to self-identification of gender is part of the right to dignity and autonomy under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The earlier bill of 2014 had earmarked jobs for transgenders. The new draft bill, under the guise of promoting equal opportunity in all spheres, has ditched reservation for transgenders.

Conclusion

According to Census 2011, India has 6 lakh people belonging to the transgender community. The bill is aimed to empower this community. However, the terms, phrasing and wording of the bill are things to worry about, and may create an obstacle for empowerment of transgender community.

2.2. Darpan Project

In News

- Ministry of communications has launched DARPAN (Digital Advancement of Rural Post Office for A New India) project. It aims at realising financial inclusion of un-banked rural population.
- It is an IT modernization project, which also aims to improve the quality of service, and add value to services. The project is targeted to be completed by March 2018.

Key Highlights

- It will provide a low power technology solution to each Branch Postmaster (BPM) which will enable each of approximately 1.29 Lakhs Branch Post Offices (BOs) to improve the level of services being offered to rural customers across all the states.
- The Project shall increase the rural reach of the Department of Posts and enable BOs to
  - Increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance, and Cash Certificates;
  - Improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of accountable article;
  - Increase revenue using retail post business;
  - Provide third party applications; and make disbursements for social security schemes such as MGNREGS
- DARPAN offers core-banking services. The core banking application covers following services: cash deposit in savings bank (SB) and recurring deposit (RD), withdrawal from savings bank, new account opening for SB and RD, higher value withdrawal, mini statement, Aadhaar seeding and daily transaction report.

IT Modernisation Project Of The Department Of Posts (DoP)

- The Department of Posts is faced with twin challenges of increasing competition and continuing advances in communication technology, especially in mobile telephony and the Internet.
- In order to provide the best-in-class customer service, deliver new services and improve operational efficiencies, the Department of Posts has undertaken an end to end IT modernization project to equip itself with requisite modern tools and technologies.
As part of IT modernization project, the Department of Posts (DoP) has established 991 ATMs across the country.

The Department of Posts (DoP)

- DoP has been the backbone of the country's communication for more than 150 years and has played a crucial role in the country's socio-economic development.
- It touches the lives of Indian citizens in many ways: delivering mails, accepting deposits under Small Savings Schemes, providing life insurance cover under Postal Life Insurance (PLI) and Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) and providing retail services like bill collection, sale of forms, etc.
- The Department of Posts also acts as an agent for GoI in discharging other services for citizens such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) wage disbursement and old age pension payments.
- With 1.5 lakh Post Offices (approximately), the Department of Posts has the most widely distributed postal network in the world.

2.3. MEA Launches SAMEEP

In News

- As part of an "outreach" mission, the Ministry of External Affairs has launched a new programme, SAMEEP - 'Students and MEA Engagement Programme'.
- It aims to take Indian foreign policy and its global engagements to students across the country and thereby bringing foreign policy to the masses.
- The idea is not only to get students to take interests in India's global ambitions, but also consider diplomacy as a career option.

Key Highlights

- Under this project, the Ministry Of External Affairs will ask all its officers on leave to voluntarily travel to their hometowns and particularly their alma mater.
- Their job would be to engage students in the schools and colleges in the jobs that the ministry is engaged in, so as to give them a fair idea of how India engages with the world, what are its foreign policy priorities and how diplomacy is actually conducted.
- The Ministry would give them a standardized presentation and officials would be free to improvise and add their personal experiences.

2.4. Good Governance Day

- Good Governance Day is observed in India annually on 25th December, the birth anniversary of former-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.
- It was established in 2014 to honor the former PM by fostering awareness among the people of accountability in government.
- In keeping with this principle, the Government of India has decreed Good Governance Day to be a working day for the government.

Objectives of Good Governance Day

- To re-energise and re-engineer the process of governance to make it 'more accountable and transparent
- To enhance the welfare and betterment of the people
To standardize the government functioning and make more responsive
To make government officials aware of their duty and internal processes of administration.
To bring citizens closer to the government and to make them active participants in the governance process

2.5. India’s First Social Audit Law

In News

Meghalaya became the first state in India to operationalize a law that makes social audit of government programmes and schemes a part of government practice.

It has launched ‘The Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017’ that will allow citizens’ participation in the planning of development, selection of beneficiaries, concurrent monitoring of programmes, redress of grievances and audit of works, services and programmes on an annual basis.

Key Highlights

- The legislation is applicable to 11 departments and 21 schemes.
- A social audit facilitator will be appointed to conduct the audit directly with the people. He will present findings to the Gram Sabha, who will add inputs and the result will finally go to the auditors.
- The new council would mobilise public and civil societies to carry out concurrent audit of all development works in the State, thereby bringing greater transparency and accountability in government services.

Significance Of This Step

- It will give people a direct say in how money will be spent. It would also fill an information gap for officers as they will be directly in touch with the ground.
- So far, social audits of government programmes have been done at the initiative of civil society organisations. These social audits had no official sanction. With this act, social audit has received official sanction. This is the institutionalisation of participatory democratic governance.
- As the audit is rolling along and not being done after all the money has been spent, it would be easier to correct the course to achieve desired result. The real benefit of this process is “quick corrective action.
- The social audit facilitator will provide an outside perspective, but it will take into account what people directly benefitting or meant to benefit from the scheme have to say. Hence, it will help in maximizing the impact of the schemes.

Social Audit

- Social audits refer to a legally mandated process where potential and existing beneficiaries evaluate the implementation of a programme by comparing official records with ground realities.
- It is an extension of the larger accountability framework. It puts into practice the signature slogan of the Right to Information movement in India — “Hamara Paisa, Hamara Hisab”.
- The public hearings that social audits conclude with remain its soul. These audits were first made statutory in a 2005 Rural Employment Act.

Objectives of Social Audit:

- Accurate identification of requirements.
- Prioritization of developmental activities as per requirements.
- Proper utilization of funds.
Conformity of the developmental activity with the stated goals.

Quality of service.

**Benefits of Social Audit:**
- Involvement of people in developmental activities ensures that money is spent where it is actually needed.
- Reduction of wastages.
- Reduction in corruption.
- Awareness among people.
- Promotes integrity and a sense of community among people.
- Improves the standard of governance.

**Legislative Support Available to Social Audit in India:**
- Social Audit gained significance especially after the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution relating to PRIs that empowered Gram Sabhas to conduct Social Audits in addition to its other functions.
- So far, it was the only legislative reference to the concept of Social Audit.
- Right to information Act, 2005 is also a key pillar of support for Social Audit system in India.
- National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005 (NREGA): Section 17 of this Act provides for regular “Social Audits” so as to ensure transparency and accountability in the scheme.

**Social Audits Are Losing Their Relevance:**
- Lack of support from government machineries in institutionalizing social audit to deter corruption has meant that social audits in many parts of the country are not independent from the influence of implementing agencies.
- Lack of any legal proceedings for not following social audit principles
- Lack of education among the common masses

### 2.6. **The Prevention of Torture Bill, 2017**

**In News**
- The Prevention of Torture Bill, 2017 has been introduced in the Parliament. It has been introduced as a Private member’s bill.
- The proposed legislation fulfils India’s commitment, as confirmed to the United Nations, that “torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment” are prohibited and constitute serious violations of human rights.
- The 152nd report of the Law Commission on “Custodial Crimes” had also recommended changes to the law to make torture punishable.

**Key Highlights**
- The proposed law directly makes State responsible for any injury inflicted by its agents on citizens.
- It proposes at least three years of imprisonment, which can be extended to ten years, for a public servant who inflicts torture on anybody for a confession or even for information that may lead to the detection of an offence.
- It provides a wide definition to torture including inflicting physical, mental or psychological injury.
- Courts are entitled to award justiciable compensation to the victims of torture.

[Also refer the topic Life term for government officials indulging in torture discussed in October 2017 Issue of CA magazine]

### 2.7. **Rajasthan Ordinance On Immunity For Public Servants**

**In News**
A criminal law ordinance, promulgated in Sept’ 2017, of the Rajasthan government, which gave protection to public servants and imposed restrictions on the media, has lapsed.

A Bill seeking to replace the ordinance was tabled in the State Assembly on October 23.

Following an all-round criticism, the State Government was forced to refer the Bill to a select committee of the House for its review.

Key Highlights Of The Ordinance

The Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 provided immunity to serving and retired public servants, judges and magistrates from probe and prosecution on complaints about their alleged offences without prior sanction by the authorities.

It also barred the media from reporting on such accusations till the sanction was given. Contravening this provision will attract jail time of two years and fine.

Criticism Of The Ordinance

The ordinance restricts media’s ability to pursue the public interest. Though it does not directly prohibit reporting on a scam, it says that publishing any material that could give away the identity of the public official would attract criminal proceedings.

But cases like the 2G spectrum scandal have shown that media reporting on such allegations would be impossible without investigating the actions of individuals.

Apart from curtailing the media’s freedom of expression, the ordinance also seem to contravene Supreme Court rulings.

Significantly, the ordinance also hurts the Opposition and inhibits it in its duty of keeping the government in check.

2.8. Single-judge NGT Benches

The Centre has passed a notification allowing the NGT chairperson to “constitute a single-member bench” in “exceptional circumstances.”

Key Highlights


According to the earlier rules, the bench consisted of “two or more members” with at least one judicial member and another expert.

However, the amended rule has included an additional clause which allows the chairperson to constitute single judge bench.

Criticism

Many activists have termed this step as lazy governance. According to them, instead of the government taking the time to fill up vacancies, it is now attempting to reduce the bench to a single-member.

The essence of the NGT was to have a bench comprising both “technical and judicial” members. Often environment issues have a very strong scientific component, for which the expert members are important. This step will ensure that the tribunal will function no differently from a high court.

National Green Tribunal

The NGT is a statutory body established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010.
The stated objective of the Central Government was to provide a specialized forum for effective and speedy disposal of cases pertaining to environment protection, conservation of forests and for seeking compensation for damages caused to people or property due to violation of environmental laws or conditions specified while granting permissions.

The Principal Bench of the NGT has been established in the National Capital – New Delhi, with regional benches in Pune (Western Zone Bench), Bhopal (Central Zone Bench), Chennai (Southern Bench) and Kolkata (Eastern Bench).

The tribunal shall consist of a full time chairperson, judicial members and expert members. The minimum number of judicial and expert member prescribed is ten in each category and maximum number is twenty in each category.

The Chairperson of the NGT is a retired Judge of the Supreme Court or Chief Justice of a High Court, and other Judicial members are retired Judges of High Courts. The Chairperson shall be appointed by the Central Government in consultation with the Chief Justice of India.

The Chairperson, Judicial Member and Expert Member of the Tribunal shall hold office as such for a term of five years from the date on which they enter upon their office, but shall not be eligible for re-appointment.


It is guided by Principles of Natural Justice and is mandated to make an endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing.

2.9. Triple Talaq Bill

[For debates on Triple Talaq, refer the topic “Supreme Court Strikes Down Triple Talaq” from August 2017 issue of CA magazine]

In News

The triple talaq Bill has been passed in Lok Sabha and is slated to be tabled in Rajya Sabha.

The bill is titled ‘The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017’ and its objective is “to protect the rights of married Muslim women and to prohibit divorce by pronouncing talaq by their husbands”.

Background

In August 2017, the Supreme Court passed a judgment in the Shayara Bano v UoI on the practice of instant triple talaq, stating that it was “manifestly arbitrary” and “against the basic tenets of Islam”.

The apex court had asked the Government to legislate on the matter of talaq-e-biddat.

Key Highlights

Under the bill, the declaration of talaq “by a person upon his wife, by words, either spoken or written or in electronic form or in any other manner whatsoever, void and illegal.”

The practice of triple talaq is criminalised under this bill; a cognisable and non-bailable offence under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, wherein the punishment for pronouncing talaq upon one’s wife is imprisonment that may extend to three years and fine.

The bill provides for a ‘subsistence allowance’, determined by a magistrate, for her and any dependent children. A Muslim woman who has been subjected to triple talaq is also entitled to custody of her minor children.

Criticism Of The Bill
• The bill fails to take into account the nuances of women’s human rights. The concept of ‘subsistence allowance’ is abstract at best, and knowing how Muslim property and maintenance laws work, the calculation of such allowance should have been prioritised.

• Under the bill, the protection of the rights of Muslim women does not include protection, prevention or redressal of violence against Muslim wives by their husbands as it looks at talaq-e-biddat in an isolated manner.

• Section 7 of the draft Bill makes pronouncement of talaq-ul-biddat as a cognizable and non-bailable offence. However, it did not stipulate as to whose information regarding pronouncement of instant triple talaq will be construed as “information” required under Section 154 of the CrPC.

• This effectively means that any person can lodge an FIR against the husband and the husband will be under threat of arrest even without issuance of warrant.

• According to many critics, the bill suffers from several contradictions. These are:
  o After rendering talaq-e-biddat inoperative in Section 3, its nugatory pronouncement can be considered a cognisable and non-bailable offence in Sections 4 and 7. This raises an important question: Can a law criminalise an act after conceding that it does not result in a crime?
  o Sections 5 and 6 discusses post-divorce issues such as a “subsistence allowance” for the woman upon whom instant talaq “is pronounced” and the “custody of her minor children”. How could the Bill talk of post-divorce matters ignoring the fact that the pronouncement (instant talaq) has already been voided in Section 3 and cannot result in a divorce?

2.10. National Conference on e-Courts Project

In News

• The e-Committee of the Supreme Court of India, in association with the Department of Justice (DoJ) of the GoI, held a two day National Conference in New Delhi.

• The Conference focused on the progress, sharing of best practices, experiences, important issues and emerging challenges under the Project.

• e-Filing facility was launched during the conference. Through e-Filing software, registered advocates and registered parties or persons will be able to file their cases in the district courts.

e-Courts Project

• The e-Courts Mission Mode Project (Phase I 2010-15; Phase II 2015-19) is a national e-Governance project for ICT enablement of district and subordinate courts of the country.

• It aims to create a robust Court Management System through digitization, document management, judicial knowledge management and learning tools.

• The major objectives of the Project are:
  o to make whole judicial system ICT enabled by putting in place adequate and modern hardware and connectivity;
  o automation of workflow management in all courts;
  o electronic movement of records from taluka/trial to appeal courts;
• installation of video conferencing (VC) facility and recording of witness through Video Conferencing;
• connecting all courts in the country to the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG) through WAN and additional redundant connectivity;
• citizen centric facilities such as electronic filing, e-payment and use of mobile applications in all courts;
• touch screen based kiosks in each court complex, full computerisation of State and district level judicial and service academies and centres.

• An empowered committee has been constituted under the Chairpersonship of Secretary, Department of Justice, to give strategic direction & guidance to the project. The project is being implemented by National Informatics Centre (NIC).

• A project monitoring committee comprising of Department of Justice, representatives of eCommittee and NIC meets on a monthly basis to monitor the progress of the project.

2.11. PIL on Autonomy Of Election Commission of India

Supreme Court has sought assistance of Attorney General KK Venugopal in a PIL for complete autonomy to the Election Commission of India (ECI).

What Does PIL Seek

• The petition seeks direction to the Centre to “take appropriate steps to confer rule making authority on the Election Commission of India on the lines of the rule making authority vested in the Supreme Court of India to empower it to make election related rules and code of conduct.

• The PIL challenged Clause (5) of the Article 324 of the Constitution, according to which the CEC can be removed only by way of impeachment whereas the ECs can be removed on the recommendation of the CEC and are treated as regional commissioners.

• It also prayed for direction to the Centre to provide independent secretariat to the Election Commission of India and declare its expenditure as charged upon the consolidated fund of India on the lines of the Lok Sabha / Rajya Sabha secretariat.

• To strengthen the independence of the ECI, the Goswami Committee recommended that the ECI should have an independent secretariat, along the lines of the Lok Sabha/Rajya Sabha secretariats, provided in Article 98(2), which permits the Parliament to regulate the recruitment and service conditions of persons appointed to secretarial staff in either House of Parliament.

Rationale Behind The PIL

• ECI cannot function independently until its expenditure is charged on consolidated fund and has independent secretariat & rule making authority.

• The element of independence sought to be achieved under the Constitution is not exclusively for an individual alone but for the institution. Hence, autonomy to the ECI can only be strengthened if the ECs are also provided with the similar protection as that of the CEC.

• Various Committees & Commissions including the Goswami Committee, Election Commission and Law Commission (in 255th Report) have suggested in this regard but the Executive has not implemented those recommendations till date.
2.12. The Requisitioning and Acquisition of Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill, 2017

In News

- Lok Sabha passed The Immovable Property (Amendment) Bill to amend the regulations governing compensation payable for acquisition of immovable property by the Centre for defence and security purposes.
- The Bill seeks to amend the Requisitioning and Acquisition of Immovable Property Act, 1952.
- There has been instances of persons interested in a property challenging the acquisition move citing that they were not given the opportunity for personal hearing. The bill will prevent these persons from taking undue advantage by misusing the litigation process.

Key Features Of The Bill

- The amended bill is aimed at addressing cases where the property owner is able, after prolonged litigation, to get the acquisition notice quashed in the court so as to be given a hearing.
- This may cause astronomical hike in the quantum of compensation because of the inevitable appreciation of the market value of the property between the original date of publication of notice of acquisition and the present date of publication of the same, pursuant to the orders of the courts
- For such instances, the amended bill provides that the government need not pay compensation at the current market rate as is applicable on the date of issuing the fresh notice.
- The bill seeks to amend a provision to allow the Centre to re-issue the notice of acquisition in order to ensure that the property's owner gets an opportunity to be heard.
- However, the re-issue of notice will not apply to cases where the compensation has already been awarded and accepted by the claimants.
- In cases where a notice has been re-issued, the property owner (or a person interested in the property) will be entitled to an interest on the compensation payable to them.
- The interest will be calculated for the period from when the first notice was issued till the date of the final payment of compensation.
- The Bill provides that such enhanced compensation will be awarded only if: (i) the acquisition notice has been re-issued, and (ii) the land is being acquired for the purpose of national security and defence.
- The bill will have retrospective effect from March 14, 1952, the date of the enactment of the Act.

The 1952 Act:

- The Act provides for the central government to requisition immovable property (or land) for any public purpose.
- Such public purpose must be a purpose of the central government (such as defence, central government offices and residences).
- Once the purpose for which the property was requisitioned is over, it must be returned back to the owner in as good a condition as when the possession was taken.
The central government may acquire such requisitioned property in two cases which are:
- if the central government has constructed any work at such property, and the right to use such work must be with the government; or
- if the cost of restoring the property to the original condition would be excessive, and the owner refuses to accept the property without being compensated for restoring the property.

2.13. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017

The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017 has been introduced in Lok Sabha. The Bill seeks to amend the Representation of People Act, 1950 and the Representation of People Act, 1951 to allow for **proxy voting** and to make certain provisions of the Acts **gender-neutral**.

**Key Highlights**

- The 1950 Act permits the registration of persons in electoral rolls who are ordinarily resident in a constituency. These include: (i) persons holding a service qualification (such as member of armed forces, member of armed police force of a state, serving outside the state, or central government employees posted outside India); and (ii) persons holding certain offices in India declared by the President in consultation with Election Commission.

- Under the Act, the wives of such persons are also deemed to be ordinarily residing in India. The Bill replaces the term ‘wife' with ‘spouse’.

- The 1951 Act permits an overseas voter to vote only in person. An overseas voter is a citizen of India who is absent from his place of ordinary residence in India. The Bill seeks to amend the 1951 Act to permit an overseas voter to cast their **vote in person or by proxy** in the constituency where the poll is taken.

  [For detailed discussion on challenges associated with proxy voting, refer the topic “Proxy voting for NRIs” from August issue of CA magazine]

2.14. Plea To Bar Politicians From Contesting From Two Seats

**In News**

- The Supreme Court has agreed to adjudicate on whether politicians could be barred from contesting from more than one seat in an election.

- A petition was filed in Supreme Court challenging Section 33(7) of Representation of People Act, 1951. This section allows politicians to contest Parliamentary as well as Assembly elections from two constituencies.

**Why We Need To Stop This Practice?**

- The provision is just an insurance policy whose premium is paid by the citizens as it allows candidates to cover political risks by falling back upon a constituency if they are to lose the election to a seat.

- The provision exists not to create a more robust and diverse democracy but for the convenience of the politicians. It is their **back-up strategy at the expense of the people**. It hardly displays any commitment of the candidate towards the electorate he is claiming to so want to serve.

- It acts as a **drain on the exchequer** and the electorate since people are compelled to participate in an unwarranted and forced by-election.
• Election Commission is also in favour of not allowing politicians from contesting from multiple seats. In 2004, the CEC urged the Prime Minister for amendment of Section 33(7) to provide that a person cannot contest from more than one constituency for the same office simultaneously.

• One person, one vote & one candidate, one constituency is the dictum of democracy. Contesting from two seats is against this dictum.

Way Forward

• As suggested by ECI, if existing provisions are retained then the candidate contesting from two seats should bear the cost of by-election to the seat that the contestant decides to vacate in the event of his/her winning both seats.

• The amount in such an event could be Rs 5 lakh for assembly election and Rs 10 lakh for parliament election.

Section 33(7) of the Representation of People's Act

• It permits a candidate to contest any election (Parliamentary, State Assembly, Biennial Council, or by-elections) from up to two constituencies.

• The provision was introduced in 1996 prior to which there was no bar on the number of constituencies from which a candidate could contest.

• When a politician wins both seats, they must vacate one within 10 days, triggering a by-election, as stated under section 70 of the Representation of the People Act.

• Allowing candidates to contest from two constituencies sometimes helped political parties to “mobilize voters” and “shore up their party's prestige” during elections.

2.15. Special Courts To Try Politicians

[Also refer the topic “Speed up trial of politicians” from November 2017 issue of CA Magazine]

In News

• In an affidavit filed in the Supreme Court, the Centre said a scheme has been framed for setting up these courts to dispose off cases against political persons.

• The scheme envisages setting up for 12 special courts for a period of one year to dispose cases against political persons at an expenditure of Rs7.8 crore. These 12 special courts will try exclusively 1,581 criminal cases involving MPs and MLAs.

Background

• On 1 November 2017, SC had directed the centre to set up special fast-track courts to deal with pending cases against legislators.

• It gave them 6 weeks' time to submit the scheme for setting up such courts along with the costs.
3. **ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

3.1. **Economy Rebounds: GDP Growth Rate Rises To 6.3% In Sept' Quarter**

**In News**

- India’s economy regained momentum in Sept’ quarter as the manufacturing sector shrugged off impact of the implementation of the GST Tax to propel GDP growth to 6.3%.
- GDP growth recovered in 2nd fiscal quarter from a three-year low of 5.7% in the preceding three-month period, while Gross Value Added (GVA) growth accelerated to 6.1% from 5.6% in 1st quarter.

**Performance Of The Various Sectors**

- **Agricultural sector:** Agriculture however remained a cause for concern that grew only at 1.7%. The performance in the agriculture sector has been held up by the non-crop sector. This year’s crop production, while higher than the five-year average is lower than last year that saw a strong growth.

- **Mining sector:** Mining also posted a sharp uptick in growth to 5.5 per cent from a decline of 0.7 per cent in the previous quarter.

- **Manufacturing sector:** The most significant aspect is that this quarter’s positive result has been impacted significantly by growth in manufacturing. The manufacturing sector expanded by 7% in the quarter, a robust acceleration from 1.2% in the first quarter.

- **Construction sector:** Construction sector grew 2.6% just a little faster than the first quarter’s 2% indicating the war on black money continues to hurt the sector.

- **Services sector:** There has also been slowdown in the services sector especially finance, transport and hotels all of which saw growth slowing in the second quarter compared with the first quarter (decline to 7.1 per cent from 8.7 in the previous quarter).

- **Other sectors:** Other sectors that witnessed growth of above6% were utility services like electricity, gas, water supply and trade, hotels, transport and communication services related to broadcasting.

**Analysis Of The Latest Data (Positive)**

- **Robust recovery:** The revival of the GDP growth reinforces the perception that the economy is on a robust recovery phase and the short term disruptions caused by demonetisation and GST are behind us.

- **Lift market sentiments:** The market will get confidence from the latest GDP numbers and will lift investor sentiments.

- **Manufacturing growth:** Most encouraging part is that manufacturing has emerged as a key driver of growth indicating that firms have started restocking and recovery is taking shape. And gross fixed capital formation has also picked up from last year’s lackluster pace.

**Analysis Of The Latest Data (Negative)**

- **Slowdown as well:** While the rebound in GDP growth in the second quarter can act as a confidence booster for the economy but the slowdown in the services sector including finance, transport and hotels as well as in agriculture is cause for concern.
• **Agricultural growth slowdown:** Agriculture growth is also an area of concern because setbacks in the agricultural performance can have a cascading impact on consumer inflation. And will also limit the room for growth supportive monetary action by the Reserve Bank of India.

• **Services sector slowdown:** Possible causes for the slowdown in the services sector include the larger working capital requirements faced by the services sector (especially export-oriented ones) and teething process issues post GST implementation.

• **Effect of GST on services:** There is also possibly need to examine whether the 3 %-point increase in tax rate on services (from an effective 15% pre-GST to 18% under GST) is causing some demand side impact.

• **Slower growth than China:** Although there was a break with five quarters of declining trends in growth, but India remained behind China in economic expansion, which posted the growth of 6.8 per cent in July-September quarter.

• **Overall fall in investment:** While investment grew 4.6 % in Q2 compared to 1.6 % in the first quarter on a year on year basis, its share in GDP fell to 27.5 % from 29.9 % in Q1 indicating that GST related stress in the economy had not dissipated.

**Way Forward**

The recent growth uptake in Indian economy is a testimony to the economy's resilience. To further accelerating the growth the important measures that need to be taken include initiation of second generation reforms such as planned land and labour market reforms, removing social inequalities that rely to a great extent on cooperation with and between the states.

3.2. **Government To Enable Skilled Persons Bag Jobs Abroad**

**In News**

• India plans to make it easier for masons, carpenters and plumbers among other skilled persons to get jobs overseas by formulating a policy and laying a roadmap that will map the requirement of such professionals abroad as well as the certifications required in different countries. The skill development and entrepreneurship ministry is giving a final shape to this policy.

• Till now the lack of adequate information from across the globe on the kind of skills required and the basic minimum certification needed for placements has meant that not too many Indians are getting jobs overseas yet.

• In 2016, Government announced the launch of 50 India International Skill Centres in partnership between Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and Ministry of External Affairs to impart training to youth under the **Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana**.

**Expected Positive Impact**

• **Make India a skill capital of the world:** The move will help realise the vision of making India the skill capital of the world as envisioned under Skill India programme.

• **Help in achieving targets:** The said policy will also help in achieving the larger vision of imparting skills to 50 crore youth by 2022.
• **Address the information asymmetry**: The policy and the action plan will address the information asymmetry existing across the globe for different skills and the basic minimum certification required for each skill in different countries.

• **Facilitate targeted approach**: The new policy will also help in map the requirement based on which the Ministry can take a targeted approach towards facilitating the movements of our trained skilled personnel.

• **Increase the employability**: Moreover, the said policy will increase the employability and acceptability of Indian youth on global platforms while ensuring they get the respect and remuneration they deserve.

**Challenges**

• **Informalisation of workforce**: 93% of workforce of India is still in the informal sector so difficulty arises in implementing the said decision.

• **Poor functioning of ITI**: Industrial training institute (ITI) have failed to overhaul themselves and their syllabus is not in tune with global requirements.

• **Shortage of skilled trainers**: There is also huge shortage of the skilled trainers which also leads to poor training outcomes and may prevent the realization of making India a skill capital of the world.

• **Affordability of training programme**: Most of the youth still faces the inability to afford training programme for acquiring skills.

**Way Forward**

Considering that India will have a surplus manpower of four-five crore over the next decade the upcoming policy is in line with **Skill India Mission, 2015**. This will help in providing youthful manpower with skills and ability to tackle global challenges and help in utilizing the demographic dividend that would otherwise become a challenge in itself.

3.3. **Centre Prepares To Redefine ‘Employment’**

**In News**

• The recent economic data shows that job creation in the formal sector was slowest in almost a decade. But data also conveyed that the ground reality on jobs was not being properly captured as the existing system takes into account only the formal sector.

• But government has planned that all the economic activity in India including in the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) and informal sectors should also be properly captured.

**Formation Of The Task Force**

• **Task Force on Improving Employment Data**: Govt has established a Task Force on Improving Employment Data. The panel's terms of reference include assessing the existing data systems and sources that provide information on jobs and job creation and then identifying alternate sources that could provide such data. The terms also include recommending mechanisms for capturing information on jobs and job creation on a regular basis for both the informal and formal sectors.

• **The data to be covered**: The Task force also plans to include workers covered under the Employee’s State Insurance Act, 1948; Employee’s Provident Funds and Miscellaneous Provision Act, 1952, workers having coverage under private insurance or pension schemes or provident funds as well as workers subject to tax deduction at source on their income through submission of Form 16 or similar Income Tax form.
• **MUDRA data:** The panel had identified the Micro Units Development and Refinance Agency (MUDRA) scheme, which provides small, unsecured loans to enterprises as an important source of job creation.

### Analysis Of The Expected Effect Of Changed Definition

- **Pragmatic definition of formal sector:** Currently there is no fixed definition of formal workers in India. As all definitions are highly restrictive and exclude many workers who have decent and steady jobs but either do not work in large enough enterprises or do not have written contracts. Thus adopting a new and more pragmatic definition of formal workers is a step in right direction.

- **Help in policy formulation:** The availability of the holistic data will help the government in formulating the policy on the basis of proper empirical data that take into consideration the ground realities.

- **International best practice:** The inclusion of informal sector in job data compilation is in line with international best practices.

#### 3.4. Depositor’s Fears On Proposed FRDI Bill 2017

**In News**

- Bank depositor’s fears about the safety of their savings once the Centre enact the proposed new law for resolving financial entity’s bankruptcy.

- The **Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance (FRDI) Bill, 2017** proposes scrapping the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation (DICGC) that guarantees repayment of all bank deposits up to Rs. 1,00,000 in case a stressed bank is liquidated.

- Explicit **deposit insurance** is a measure implemented in many countries to protect bank depositors, in full or in part, from losses caused by a bank’s inability to pay its debts when due.

- The government has recently promised a Rs. 2.11 lakh crore recapitalization plan for public sector banks that are now taking haircuts on defaulted loans being put through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

**Provisions, Benefits, And Issues & Challenges Associated With The Bill**

Refer Section 3.3. of Oct’ 2017 CA Magazine.

**Concerns Of Depositors**

- **Ambiguity over savings:** There is ambiguity on how depositor’s savings will be protected in stressed banks and other financial entities under the new law, which also includes a ‘bail-in’ option to resolve financial entity’s stress.

- **Concern about safety of funds:** It has caused great anxiety about the safety of funds parked by millions of households in bank deposits. They fear that it will enable banks to be ‘bailed in’ by depositors’ funds rather than being ‘bailed out’ by taxpayers (or potential buyers).

- **Doubt about extent of deposit that will be guaranteed:** Presently the deposits are insured to the extent of Rs 1 lakh but the bill in its current form empowers the resolution corporation to decide the amount insured for each depositors. Thus creates doubt about extent of deposits that will be guaranteed.
- **Depositors facing haircut:** There is also doubt about the extent of deposits that will be guaranteed as also whether depositors may face varying degrees of haircuts or write-downs on their savings at different stressed entities.

- **Inequitable:** This will force small savers to pay for the inefficiencies of the banks and stakeholders. Hence the current provision is highly inequitable.

**Way Forward**

- The silence of the Bill on the extent of deposits to be guaranteed is a key source of concern, and may necessitate the need to revisit the existing Rs1 lakh deposit guarantee, which hasn’t been revised since 1993.

- The need for a specialized regime to cope with large financial firms on the verge of going bust is well understood especially since the global financial crisis of 2008.

- Even the committee framing FRDI law has noted that the ‘bail in’ clause should be used where continuing a firm’s services is considered vital but its sale is unviable but not as a lazy default option.

- With its thrust on initiatives such as the Jan Dhan Yojana and demonetization, the government has nudged more people towards the formal banking system. To ensure that these gains are not lost the government must communicate more clearly the rationale behind the ‘bail in’ provision and the circumstances in which it may ultimately be used, if at all.

- Most importantly, it must enhance the amount of bank deposits that will remain safe under the new dispensation.

**3.5. Hong Kong May Emerge As New FII Hotspot**

**In News**

- Global financial hub Hong Kong is likely to emerge as the new gateway for overseas investors looking to invest in India, pipping traditional destinations such as Singapore and Mauritius. As recently, India and Hong Kong have agreed on a new double-tax avoidance agreement (DTAA), which is likely to be notified soon.

- The terms of the agreement provide investments from Hong Kong privileges on a par with Singapore and Mauritius. But unlike the latter two, compliance with the tax avoidance laws is easy for funds coming from Hong Kong as a majority of them already have a proper business setup in the jurisdiction.

- The estimates suggest close to half of the inflows coming into India are domiciled in Hong Kong. But due to the absence of any tax arrangement they route their trades from a different jurisdiction.

**Possible Impact**

- **New source for foreign investment:** This new treaty will provide a boost for investments coming from Hong Kong. Thus provide a new source for foreign investment in India.

- **Win-win situation for investors:** The new treaty will be a win-win situation for investors as the investors will no longer be required to create special purpose vehicles (SPVs) via other jurisdictions such as Mauritius to invest in India.

- **Win-win situation for government:** Having a tax agreement with Hong Kong would be welcome for Indian tax authorities as it cultivates more information sharing between both the governments.
• **Easier compliance of GAAR and OECD regulations:** Further, the Asian operations of a majority of foreign institutional investors (FIIs) are headquartered in Hong Kong. Hence, they have a proper setup with employees and offices in Hong Kong. This could make compliance with anti-avoidance laws such as General Anti Avoidance Rules (GAAR) and OECD Multilateral Instruments easier.

**Final Words**

Going by the current government’s track record, FIIs have come to terms with the reality that there will be no tax havens. Even if there are any loopholes in any of the agreements, the Indian government will plug them. Further, India has become an important market for FIIs these days and hence tax arbitrage is not their priority any longer.

3.6. **Foreign Trade Policy: More Incentives For Exports, Focus On Ease Of Trading**

**In News**

• In the mid-term review of the foreign trade policy the government has unveiled several initiatives to improve the ease of doing business.

• Commerce Ministry also unveiled more incentives to boost labor-intensive and employment-oriented merchandise and services exports in the mid-term review of the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20. The annual incentive increased by 33.8 per cent or Rs 8,450 crore.

**New Announcement**

• **MEIS incentives:** The Commerce Department announced an increase in the Merchandise Exports from India scheme (MEIS) incentives for two sub sectors of textiles i.e. readymade garments and made ups from 2 per cent to 4 per cent.

• **SEIS incentives:** The Services Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) incentives have also been increased by 2 percentage points amounting to Rs 1140 crore.

• **Duty credit scrip:** MEIS and SEIS provide incentive in the form of duty credit scrip to the exporter to compensate for his loss on payment of duties. The Commerce Department now has abolished the GST for transfer and sale of these scrips to zero from 12 per cent and increased the validity period for these tradable papers to 24 months from 18 months.

• **Agriculture products:** The mid-term review also advocated focusing on increasing exports of value added agriculture products in the long term. And also called for creating cold chain and transport logistics infrastructure, promoting the export of organic products and setting up an organic export certification authority.

• **Trust-based self-ratification scheme:** Government has introduced 'trust-based self-ratification scheme' that allows duty free import of inputs for exports production after a self-declaration as against earlier exercise of getting ratification from the norms committee first. This will help reduce the turnaround time in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals, textiles, and engineering.

• **Round the clock customs clearance:** The round the clock customs clearance facility has been extended at 19 seaports and 17 air cargo complexes.
• **Creation of professional teams for ease of trading:** To improve the ease of trading, the mid-term policy has envisaged the creation of professional teams to handhold, assist, and support exporters with their problems, accessing export markets, and meeting regulatory requirements. It has also called for reducing the dwell time at inland container depots, ports, and airports through coordination among the customs and infrastructure ministries.

• **Institutions:** A National Trade Facilitation Committee will be set up which will cover issues such as simplification of procedures, infrastructure and risk-based assessment. The FTP also sought to establish an Export Promotion Mission to provide an institutional framework to work with state governments to boost India's exports.

• **Other institutions:** A state-of-the-art Trade Analytics Division has been set up in the Directorate General of Foreign Trade for data based policy actions. The initiative envisages processing trade information for specific policy interventions. Besides, a new Logistics Division has been created in Department of Commerce to develop and coordinate integrated development of the logistics sector.

**Positive Impact**

• **Boost labour intensive sectors:** The revised policy will boost labour intensive sectors such as leather, handicraft, carpets agriculture, marine, electronic components.

• **Increasing overall exports:** The 2% increase in the MEIS rates granted in the FTP mid-term review would provide the much-needed respite to these sectors as they were facing intense competition from other countries thus increasing overall exports.

• **Reduction in clearances time:** The trust-based self-ratification scheme will significantly reduce the time taken in getting the clearances from the norms committee for duty-free procurement. With this step the exporters can self-certify the requirement of duty-free inputs and take authorisation from the DGFT (Directorate General of Foreign Trade).

• **Two pronged strategy:** The two pronged strategy adopted by the government in its FTP mid-term review to promote new and sunrise sectors along with employment intensive segments will help in creation of more jobs as well as enter new areas of exports

**Challenges**

• **Export target:** The policy did not say much on achieving the target of $900-billion exports by 2020, which is currently facing the export slowdown.

• **Does not solve long term issues related to exports:** The increased incentive under MEIS and SEIS will only provide temporary relief to exporters and boost competitiveness in the short term but larger issues like infrastructure inadequacy, logistics, and skilling are still to be addressed.

• **Misdirected sops for export:** Moreover, more than sops exports need lower transaction costs, less red tape in clearances, efficient and functional infrastructure and rational labour laws.

• **Poor ease in trade facilitation:** The country's performance in cross border trade as per the World Bank Ease of Doing Business report is poor, calling for vast improvements in trade facilitation.

• **Delay in GST refunds:** Owing to delays in refunds that resulted in a working capital crunch for exporters following the adoption of the goods and services tax. Thus export fell in last 8 months.

• **Not taking holistic picture of agricultural sector:** Just focusing on the export of value added agriculture commodities may not directly benefit farmers rather promoting the export of farm products would do the same. Hence besides value added products a reasonable and stable policy for agriculture exports should be for raw farm products as well.

**Way Forward**
• With the goods and services tax network up and running exporters must be given refunds swiftly within a month at the most.
• The export promotion efforts in future should be towards more fundamental systemic measures such as improving overall export infrastructure rather than incentives and subsidies alone.

3.7. **RBI Leaves Key Rates Unchanged, Passes Economic Revival Buck To Centre**

**In News**

• The Reserve Bank of India kept interest rates unchanged citing pressure on prices and bumped up inflation forecast for the rest of the fiscal year marginally. Thus the repo rate at which RBI lends to banks remained at 6% for the second consecutive meeting.
• The RBI Monterey policy committee has been mandated to keep consumer price inflation at 4% with a two-percentage point band on either side.

**RBI’s Economic Forecast**

- **Inflationary pressure:** Inflationary pressures could build up from a variety of factors- a possible slide in the fiscal position, rising crude oil prices or disturbances in the global financial markets when the Federal Reserve unwinds easy liquidity and credit growth begins to gain momentum in the domestic market.
- **Inflation estimation:** RBI has estimated the Inflation at 4.3-4.7% in the third and fourth quarters for the current financial year.
- **Optimism on economic growth:** The central bank was optimistic about economic growth amid rising demand for credit and its surveys showing optimism that fresh orders are beginning to pile up.
- **Growth projection unchanged:** RBI kept its growth projection for the fiscal year- gross value added (GVA) at 6.7% unchanged from the October 2017 policy announcement.

**Final Analysis**

• The decision of RBI to keep key policy rates unchanged is in line with the expectations of analysts and financial markets. It is also a key pointer to the near-term prospects of the economy.
• The developmental and regulatory focus of the RBI must be on the debt market, as the future infrastructure projects must be financed by bonds rather than by bank loans.
• RBI must also cooperate in the ongoing efforts to banks and indebted companies to find solutions short of liquidation. Such measures too would matter more than minor cuts in the repo rate.

3.8. **Fight For Market Economy Status**

**In News**

• The U.S. has protested at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) against China’s bid for recognition as a market economy. Its opposition is a counter to China’s 2016 legal challenge against the U.S. and the European Union both of which refuse to accord China the coveted status it wants. EU and US says that the **use of state subsidies in China** distorts market prices.
• Under WTO norms, if a country gets MES (Market Economy Status), exports from it are to be accepted at the production costs and selling price as the benchmark as per its own domestic market not in reference to a third country.
The Dispute

- **Chinese government influence over prices:** To deny China the MES, other countries are also saying that unlike in market economies where prices are mainly determined by market forces there is significant government influence in China that in turn causes distortions in international trade.

- **Other countries stand:** As long as major trading powers treat China as a non-market economy, they would insist on ascertaining the value of goods with reference to prices in a third country to ensure that domestic firms did not gain an unfair trade advantage.

- **Chinese stand:** Central to China’s quest is the acknowledgement from trading partners that domestic prices are determined by open competition rather than by the government. This will help China counter attacks of unfair dumping.

- **Protocol of Accession:** The protocol to China’s 2001 WTO entry has been a subject of controversy. Beijing insists that under Section 15 of the Protocol of Accession, the country’s upgrade to a market economy was automatic on the completion of 15 years of its WTO membership in 2016.

- **Alternative interpretation of Protocol of Accession:** The alternative interpretation draws upon section 15(1)(i) which places the onus on Chinese firms to prove that they were operating under conditions of a competitive market economy in the manufacture and sale of relevant products. If they fail to do so the Section provides that importing states would be entitled to invoke rules applicable to a non-market economy while probing firms for dumping.

- **WTO appellate body ruling:** In support of that contention is a WTO appellate body’s 2011 ruling that the protocol to Beijing’s accession did not provide for the country to be treated differently by other member states for an indefinite period.

Possible Impact Of Grant Of Market Economy Status To China

- **Limits on Anti dumping:** MES status to China will severely limit other countries ability to resort to anti-dumping on cheap imports from China. If China to be granted the coveted position, it would be hard for other countries to defend its anti dumping rulings against Chinese firms at the world body.

- **Effect on Manufacturing sector:** There is also a concern over a glut of Chinese imports flooding domestic markets & causing job losses in manufacturing sector as imports will be unfairly low priced.

Way Forward

Considering the possible negative impact of the grant of MES, it will be prudent that the effective probe must be made by WTO into price determination methodology in Chinese domestic market. Such a decision will resolve the grievance of both the parties to the dispute. Moreover Chinese government must become transparent in respect of its economic policies.

3.9. **Imported Items May Be Released Without Upfront Payment Of Duty**

In News

- India may release imported items without any upfront duty payment as part of revamp of Customs framework to speed up movement of goods across borders, which currently take more than a week.

- Goods are currently released after assessment and payment of duty. If this system is reversed goods will be released first with assessment of duty liability taking place subsequently.
The upcoming budget is also likely to include several measures aimed at relaxing the Customs regime for businesses. Other measures could include allowing traders to know their tax liability in advance even for existing transactions (advance ruling).

**Positive Impact Of Proposed Decision**

- **Reduce logistic cost**: Release of goods without determination of duty would be hugely positive for the industry as of the 16% logistics cost in India, detention and demurrage contributes as much as 4%.

- **Prevent unnecessary litigation**: As for advance rulings, this will bring about predictability for businesses in tax matters and prevent unnecessary litigation.

- **Improve ease of doing business ranking**: India is ranked 146 out of 190 countries on the World Bank’s ease of doing business ranking on the ‘trading across borders’ measure and this measure can substantially lift the overall rank.

- **Reduce overall other costs**: In India, border compliance takes 267 hours (more than 11 days) for imports against 8.7 hours for OECD countries and instant clearance in as many as 21 countries. That translates into a cost of $536 per consignment in India compared with $111.6 in OECD countries. Adopting the proposed decision could prevent this.

**Way Forward**

The proposed decision is in consonance with the government overall strategy to improve ease of business. Moreover the government need to address key areas of concerns for a trader such as refunds and disputes addressable in a time bound transparent manner through IT-based tools, knowledge partnerships etc. Simpler and predictable rules will go a long way to improve the trade outlook and help India’s position of trade facilitator globally.

**3.10. GST Council Clears E-way Bill Mechanism**

**In News**

- The GST Council has decided to go for early implementation of e-way bill for interstate movement of goods from February 1 and uniform mandatory roll out from 1st June 2018.

- An e-way bill is required for movement of goods worth over Rs. 50000. When goods are transported for less than 10 km within a state, the supplier or the transporter need not furnish details on the GST portal.

- Over 150 items of common use including LPG cylinders, vegetables, food grain and jewellery will be exempt from such transport permits, which can be checked by designated tax officials by intercepting a transporting vehicle. Goods moved on non-motorized conveyance such as carts have been left out.

- Unlike earlier when only an invoice was generated on cargo transportation, the e-way bill marries the cargo and its vehicle. This means each vehicle number has to be registered with the GST network and a new bill is generated every time the vehicle is changed.

**Positives**
• **Removal of undue hardship:** Currently, the States are authorised to carry their own separate e-way bill systems. However, it was causing undue hardship in the inter-state movement of goods. Therefore, bringing in an early all-India system of e-way bill has become a necessity.

• **Plug tax evasion:** The e-way bill mechanism has been introduced in the GST regime to plug tax evasion loopholes, as it will enable the government to track tax evasion far better. Tax evasion was one of the reasons cited by the government for a fall in GST revenue collection in October that stood at Rs. 83346 crore lowest since the implementation of GST.

• **Check the correctness of input tax credit and refund claims:** Moreover in the absence of the GSTR1, GSTR2 and GSTR3 forms, which are now not required to be uploaded, the system is unable to match invoices to check whether the input credit and refunds being claimed by companies are correct or overstated.

### Negatives

• **Practical difficulty:** Given the India’s road conditions and the unorganised nature of the country’s transportation industry will make compliance complex. For instance generating a fresh bill online may be impossible if a vehicle breaks down in the middle of a highway far from Internet connectivity. Similarly, there is a time bound validity of the bill that is much shorter than the earlier bill and if a vehicle breaks down in the middle or has to be repaired a new bill cannot be generated and the current one may lose its validity.

• **Complicate the supply chain:** GST compliance process is still in the process of getting streamlined and implementing e-way bill at this juncture will further complicate the supply chain of most companies.

• **Setback to the development of compliance module:** Given that the GSTN portal is still not functional to add another process to it may further set back the development of the compliance modules.

• **More compliance burden:** The GST Council’s decision to use the E-way bill to fix the leakage is a bad idea. Already taxpayers are struggling with the new system and increasing compliance at this point will be counter-productive.

• **Harassment:** An E-way bill is bound to open up room for harassment by state government officials i.e. stopping trucks at border posts may have gone but trucks can now be stopped anywhere.

• **Very less time to adapt:** The bill will be introduced on a trial basis in the middle of January which means logistic companies will get less than two weeks to adapt to it before its implementation in the beginning of February.

### Way Forward

• Plugging revenue leakages is essential and encouragingly Karnataka’s e-way bill experience in the first month saw very few glitches. Given industry’s nervousness the government must simplify the onerous rules proposed for e-way bills (a one-day validity for distances up to 100 km, for instance), ensure that the IT backbone is robust and make inspections the exception not the norm.

• Moreover the other reason for lower than expected number of returns filed is that the IT system isn’t up to speed and that the GST procedures were too complicated and the tax slabs too many. This too also need to be resolved.

#### 3.11. Government To Expand BPO Subsidy Scheme

**In News**
The Ministry of electronics and IT (MeitY) is in favour of expanding its BPO promotion scheme, which aims to set up BPOs in small towns and rural areas. The strategy is to cover more non-metro towns and even villages.

Since the present subsidy amount is available till March 2019 with the response from companies being very optimistic, MeitY is planning to move a proposal to Finance Ministry for increasing the fund allocation.

**BPO Promotion Scheme**

- **Viability gap funding**: Under this initiative the government provides a subsidy of up to Rs 1 lakh per seat in the form of viability gap funding (VGF) to companies setting up BPOs in small towns (tier II or tier III town). Disbursement of the funding is linked to employment generation. A similar scheme is for the Northeast India in the form of North East BPO Promotion Scheme (NEBPS).

- **Other provisions**: The scheme also allows for subsidy on operational expenditure and lease and rent of space instead of just on outright purchases in capital expenditure. The scheme also provides for relaxation of norms for bank guarantee. The ministry has also waived off the limit of only one-third seats for one company in each location to provide more flexibility.

- **Fund allocation**: Currently, MeitY has earmarked Rs 493 crore for IBPS and an additional Rs 50 crore for NEBPS.

- **Seat allocation**: A total of 48300 seats for IBPS and 5000 for NEBPS have to be allocated based on population in the states. Of this, after rounds of open bidding, 18160 seats have been allocated.

**Expected Benefits**

- **Employment generation**: It expects this would provide direct employment to around 1.45 lakh persons considering three shifts operations.

- **Gender employment equity**: The scheme will also lead to greater participation of women particularly housewives. Thus improve gender employment equity.

- **Disperse the growth benefits**: BPOs have come up in towns such as Bhaderwah, Budgam, Sopore, Wardha, Kanpur, Varanasi, Bareilly and Raipur. Thus will disperse the benefits of growth.

- **Make India competitive on world forum**: These locations will compete with BPOs in countries like Ireland, Vietnam and Philippines as in the future there will be demand for BPOs catering to specific regions and languages. Moreover BPOs in small towns or even rural areas may help India retain its cost arbitrage as many BPOs have already migrated its voice processes to cheaper countries.

### 3.12. Draft Bill Proposes Heavy Penalty And Jail Term To Curb Illegal Deposit Schemes

**In News**

- The government has put out a revised draft of a bill to check unauthorized chit funds and Ponzi schemes proposing strict measures such as up to 10 years imprisonment and heavy penalty on operators of such schemes.

- The revised draft of ‘**Banning of Unregulated Deposit Schemes and Protection of Depositors Interests Bill, 2016**’ seeks to provide for a comprehensive code to ban unregulated deposit schemes and protect the interests of depositors.

**Provisions Of The Bill**
Comprehensive legislation: The Bill is a comprehensive central legislation to deal with unauthorized deposit taking schemes and will override a clutch of existing laws including those framed by the states.

Definition of deposits: The proposed law defines ‘Deposit’ as money taken by way of advance or loan or any other form and returned in a specified period or otherwise in cash or kind or in the form of a specified service with or without any benefit i.e. interest, bonus, profit or any other form. Thus, all unregulated deposit schemes will come under this law.

Penalty provisions: The bill stipulates that any deposit taker who promotes and accepts deposits in an unregulated deposit scheme may be punishable with imprisonment for minimum term of two years which may be extended to 10 years and with a fine which may extend to twice the amount of aggregate funds collected from subscribers, members or participants in such schemes or arrangements.

Repeat offenders: In case of repeat offenders, the draft bill proposes imprisonment for a minimum term of 5 years which may be extended to 10 years and fine extended to Rs. 50 crore.

Regulate deposit taking establishments: The bill also regulate the deposit taking establishments from directly or indirectly promoting, operating or issuing any advertisement soliciting participation in an unregulated scheme.

Empowered committee: The new law also proposes setting up an empowered committee for arbitration in case of any dispute over the jurisdiction of regulators over a particular scheme.

Role of the state: The states will nominate competent authorities (district magistrate) at the district level even as regulators oversee the different deposit schemes under their respective laws such as the Companies Act. It also gives over-riding powers to the district magistrates to seize money or other property acquired using the depositor’s money, and the assets could be sold off to repay the depositors.

Designated court: A Sessions Court or a District Court shall be the Designated Court for dealing with violation as well as effective implementation of various provisions of the Proposed Law.

Online database creation: The bill also provides for the central government to authorise creation of an online database of information on deposit taking activity in India.

Positive Impact

Curb fraudulent money raising practices: The proper enforcement of this bill will curb such practice. Moreover, looking at the penal provisions businessmen would prefer to suffer losses rather than to go to jail.

Cover formal as well as informal sector of fund raising: Current laws of SEBI and RBI only regulate fund raising by company, public sector undertaking or statutory corporation or LLPs; while the new bill also covers the informal methods of raising funds.

Fill the regulatory gap: Currently, the onus of action against Ponzi operators is largely on state government agencies, while markets regulator SEBI is authorized to take action against illicit Collective Investment Schemes involving over Rs. 100 crore or the cases where the number of investors is 50 or more - hence leading to regulatory arbitrage and gap. This problem will be resolved in the new bill.

Negatives
May affect genuine entrepreneur: Every Ponzi scheme is followed by a new law and such reactive law making adds to the woes of genuine entrepreneurs.

Affect unorganized businesses: The funds raised from third person for genuine business purpose cannot be regarded as a scheme for raising deposits in a country where a large part of business is run in an unorganized manner.

No reliable data: The problem also comes from that fact that there is no reliable data on the number of such unregulated schemes.

No provisions in regard to financial literacy: The bill does not contain any provisions for increasing financial literacy thus it does not prevent the occurrence of such fraudulent practice.

Judicial delay: Further, this being a penal law, criminal proceedings will have to be filed against the violators which generally take some time in the given judicial scenario and may lead to delay in obtaining appropriate and urgent reliefs that may be required to safeguard the hard earned money of the small depositors.

Lack of clarity: Moreover, there is no clarity whether funds collected and wound up even before the commencement of the Proposed Law but pending refund to depositors would be deemed as an ‘Unregulated Deposit in Operation’.

Final Analysis

The entire effectiveness of this law would depend on the ability and capability of the Competent Authority to be appointed by State Govt for investigating the violations under the Proposed Law and filing proceedings before the Designated Court seeking penalty and other reliefs.

Moreover, to protect genuine fund raiser bill must provide a litmus test and on meeting of such conditions business will be regarded as the loan taking not unregulated deposit.

3.13. First Employment Policy In Budget 2018 On Cards

In News

India will soon have its first National Employment Policy (NEP) that will outline a comprehensive road map for creation of quality jobs across sectors through economic, social and labour policy interventions. The move is aimed at addressing the crucial issue of job creation in the country.

The multi-pronged employment policy will include incentives for employers to create more jobs, reforms to attract enterprises and help for medium and small scale industries that are major job providers.

Positive Impact

Resolve twin issue: The idea is to address the twin issues of providing quality jobs to over 10 million youth being added to the country’s workforce every year and ensuring that more of these are created in the formal sector.

Social security: Creation of more jobs in the organized sector will provide workers with minimum wages and enough social security.

Poverty alleviation: The plan will also speed up job creation in sync with economic growth so that incomes rise and millions of people are lifted out of poverty.
Coordinated efforts: It will ensure coordinated efforts towards resolving unemployment issue as currently employment related initiatives are scattered across different ministries.

Way Forward

- India needs to have a flexible employment policy that protects the interest of both employer and employee. This means it has to be viable and attractive for investors and provide for a social security system for our workers.
- Moreover as pointed out by the OECD 2017 survey India need to have proper employment data for assessing labor market trends and taking prompt corrective steps.

3.14. Import Duty on Electronics Hiked to Lift Make in India

With an eye to boost revenues as well incentivizing domestic manufacturing by curbing imports of goods, the government hiked basic customs duty on mobile phones and a host of other electronic goods like television sets and microwave ovens.

Positive Impact

- **Promote Make in India**: The import duty increase is expected to prompt companies such as Apple to speed up local manufacturing programmes giving a boost to the government's Make in India programme.
- **Twin Objective**: The duty hike is aimed at twin objective of encouraging more manufacturing, value addition in India and increasing employment thereby.
- **Resource raising**: From the government’s revenue point of view, the move makes sense as it expects that due to pending refunds the GST revenue may fall further in subsequent months so alternative areas need to be tapped to raise resources.
- **Resolve issue of Inverted duty structure**: The duty hike will also make the local manufacturer more competitive in the Indian market who were currently facing the issue of inverted duty structure.
- **Resolve CAD**: The move will also make import of these goods costlier and thus will also resolve the issue current account deficit due to large imports.

Negative Impact

- **Bad idea**: Duty hike has been done in the name of promoting Make in India but experience of India's own past and of Asia's tiger economies shows that forcing import substitution behind high tariff walls is a bad way to promote manufacture.
- **Inferior quality**: Some additional production will take place but in sub-optimal volumes and with inferior quality that will not be accepted in export markets.
- **Impact on consumer**: The move will force Indian customer either to buy inferior products or pay for the inefficiencies of a domestic manufacturer.
- **Does not resolve the impediments to manufacturing**: It does not resolve the basic impediments to the manufacturing of advanced technology such as cluttered field of intellectual property, poor infrastructure even in the industrial parks meant to house production units.
• **No focus on R&D:** Higher duties will fetch the government additional revenue but will not induce local production unless the government supports firms with the critical mass in R&D and manufacturing capacity.

• **Violates WTO agreement:** The increase in custom duty has already run into rough weather with many competing countries calling it a violation of norms established by WTO. The USA, EU and Japan have claimed India's decision to raise duty on some telecom products violates the Information Technology agreement (ITA-1) of the WTO.

• **Other issues:** The protection provided by higher duties is more likely to reward continued inefficiency and lead to hectic lobbying by manufacturers in other industries to push for similar protection from imports.

**Way Forward**

• Make in India calls for extensive and intelligent investment by the government and the private sector in critical sectors of advanced manufacturing. Government should take the phased manufacture programme for mobile handsets, which aims to raise the local value addition in phones sold in India on average to 35% starting with the plastic components, the charger, the cable, etc.

• Higher import duties and tax exemptions are expedient tools of promotion while the effective ones call for intelligently planned expenditure to plug gaps in infrastructure, technology, standards and the ecosystem.

• The government also needs to sort out the problems faced by the companies in terms of land acquisition, stringent labour laws, lack of adequate infrastructure etc.

3.15. **India Likely To Be Fifth Largest Economy In 2018**

**In News**

• The Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) consultancy’s ‘2018 World Economic League Table’ (WELT) painted an upbeat view of the global economy and pointed out that India set to leapfrog Britain and France in 2018 to become the world’s fifth largest economy in dollar terms.

• India’s ascent is part of a trend that will see Asian economies increasingly dominate the top 10 largest economies over the next 15 years and the region will dominating in terms of size in just over a decade.

**Other Pointers Mentioned By WELT**

• **Global growth:** The global economic growth in 2018 looks likely to quicken slightly to 3.6 per cent from 3.5 per cent.

• **Trend:** The trend emerging is that by 2032 five of the ten largest economies will be in Asia while European economies are falling down the ranking and the US losing its top spot.

• **Chinese growth:** China is likely to overtake US as world’s No 1 economy in 2032. And the USA will retain its global crown a year longer than anticipated in the last report. This remains a remarkable achievement from an economy that was only 12% of the size of the US economy as recently as 2000.
• **Growth of Britain and France:** While Britain set to lag behind France over the next couple of years, WELT predicted that Brexit’s effects on Britain’s economy will be less than feared allowing it to overtake France again in 2020.

• **Russian growth:** Russia is vulnerable to low oil prices and too reliant on the energy sector and looked likely to fall to 17th place among the world’s largest economies by 2032 from 11th now.

### 3.16. Government May Bring Back Proposal To Allow Fixed-Term Employment

**In News**

- The labour ministry will soon extend full benefit of permanent jobs to fixed-term jobs (already a feature in the labour-intensive garment and leather industries) to most other sectors. The move, if given a go ahead, will allow industries to employ workers for short assignments and terminate their services once the projects are completed.

- A provision of fixed term employment is already there in the Industrial Disputes Act but to make it more foolproof the fixed term provision will be brought under the *Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946* through the notification.

- No specific period is currently defined for fixed-term either in the garment sector, where the facility was introduced in June 2016 or in the leather industry, where such short term jobs were allowed in December 2017.

- Of the country’s estimated 50 million workforces, hardly 10% is in the organized sector and entitled to social security benefits such as provident fund and benefits like defined working hours, minimum wages, allowances and other statutory dues. But unorganized sector workers are mostly deprived of these benefits.

**Expected Benefits**

- **Multiple benefits:** The move will have multiple benefits: It would boost creation of formal jobs, reduce instances of informal hiring which continues to be the norm in the unorganized sector and spare businesses the undue burden of keeping regularized contract employment, while their labour requirements are actually seasonal.

- **Protect interest of employer:** This move shall positively influence the economy as it shall create more formal jobs side by side allay fears of the employers of the risk of permanency even while employing workers for project-based or limited duration requirements.

- **Protect interest of employee:** Under fixed-term employment workers will be entitled to all statutory benefits available to a permanent worker in the same factory. Such as same working hours, wages, and allowances etc.

- **Benefits for industries:** For industries it will provide flexibility in hiring workers in seasonal jobs. The latest demand for this has come from the food processing industry.
• **Investment promotion:** The introduction of fixed-term employment in will attract large scale investments at global scale and promote manufacturing growth.

• **Preventing Litigation:** Legitimizing fixed term employment with all these benefits across industries is important to avoid unproductive disputes and litigation.

### Challenges

• **Favour employer over employee:** The proposal is heavily weighted in the favour of rich industrialist and ignores the interest of workers at large.

• **No employment security:** The Trade union have opposed the said proposal as it does not ensure the employment security for the workers and they have the risk being thrown out of the job after completion of the fixed period.

• **Does not resolve issue of Jobless growth:** The proposal in no way resolve the issue of jobless growth of the Indian economy. Hence is not a worthy proposition.

• **Fixed term period not mentioned:** Moreover currently no specific period is defined for fixed-term for the employment thereby further increasing the vulnerability of workers.

### Way Forward

The need is of balancing, protection of the interest of employer as well as employee. There is also a need to provide proper safeguards such as giving fixed term workers a minimum employment contract for six months and the right to be members of the trade union.

### 3.17. Amendments To Companies Act To Ease Compliance

#### In News

• A bill to amend the companies law (Companies Amendment Bill, 2017) to strengthen corporate governance standards, initiate strict action against defaulting companies and help improve the ease of doing business in the country has been passed by Parliament.

• The Bill provides for more than 40 amendments to the Companies Act 2013.

#### Important Amendments

• **Removal of limits for subsidiary company:** The Companies Act, 2013 limits the number of intermediary companies through which investments can be made in a company. Similarly the Act limits the number of layers of subsidiaries a company can have. The amendment act removes these limits.
Prospectus disclosures: The amendment also provides for aligning disclosure requirements in the prospectus with the regulations made by SEBI.

Remuneration: The amendment has replaced the requirement of approval of the central government for managerial remuneration above prescribed limits by approval through special resolution of shareholders.

Penalty provisions: It also provides for maintenance of register of significant beneficial owners and making offence for contravention of provisions relating to deposits as non-compoundable.

Focus on timely filing: The upper limit of 300 days for filing returns under the Act led to non-compliance and hence changes have been made in the law to improve timely filings.

Qualification for NCLT: The Act permits the appointment of members at the level of Joint Secretary to the quasi-judicial tribunal. Under the Bill, a technical member must be at least of the level of an Additional Secretary.

Other changes: The other major changes include simplification of the private placement process; rationalization of provisions related to loans to directors etc.

Positives

Serve dual purpose: While rationalizing and simplifying certain provisions the bill also provides for stringent penalties in case of non-filing of balance sheet and annual return every year, which will act as deterrent to shell companies.

Harmonization: The amendment will not only facilitate ease of doing business but also result in harmonization with SEBI and RBI rules and rectify certain omissions and inconsistencies in the existing Act.

Qualification for NCLT: The Bill amends provisions related to the qualifications of technical members; the composition of the Selection Committee of the National Companies Law Tribunal and the National Companies Law Appellate Tribunal. The amendments bring these provisions in line with a 2015 Supreme Court judgment.

Negatives

Promotes laundering of money: The amendment bill removes the limit on layers of subsidiaries and intermediaries. Although imposing such limits will affect the company’s structuring and ability to raise funds but it may become a tool to launder money by opening up of the shell companies.

May affect independence of directors: Certain provisions may affect independence of director such as company have been allowed to give loans to the director or to those of interest to a director; independent director has been allowed to have interest in the company upto 10% of their remuneration etc.

CSR non-compliance: The amendment bill does not provide any penalty for non-compliance of the CSR provisions and allows carrying forward the CSR funds.

Non-inclusion of certain provisions: The amendment bill has not included issues related to residence requirements for directors and compliance requirements for dormant companies.
Way Forward

Although the amendment may improve the ease of doing business in India but it should not be at the cost of ensuring independence of Independent directors. Moreover the amendment should also resolve the concerns about creation of shell companies otherwise it may affect the efforts towards curbing black money.
4. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

4.1. Pact on Rohingyas

In News

- Myanmar signs pact with Bangladesh over Rohingya repatriation.
- The Agreement - named as “Arrangement on Return of Displaced Persons from Rakhine State”- will begin the repatriation of more than 6,20,000 Rohingya refugees who have fled to Bangladesh in the past few months.
- According to the pact, a joint working group including officials from Bangladesh, Myanmar and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) will be set up in three weeks and Myanmar would begin to repatriate the refugees within two months by January 23, 2018.
- The deal is based on a 1992/93 repatriation pact between the two countries that followed a previous spasm of violence.
- Myanmar has said that they would accept people with identity documents issued by governments in the past.
- Refugees would have to fill in forms with names of family members, previous addresses in Myanmar, birth dates and a statement of voluntary return. And they will be taken back as soon as possible after Bangladesh sends the forms back to Myanmar.
- The requirement's for identification documents has been a contentious issue for the stateless Rohingya. Recently Amnesty International released a report accusing Myanmar of effectively denying citizenship to Rohingya on the basis of their ethnicity, including engaging in an active policy of depriving Rohingya of vital identity and residency documentation including denying the identity documents to the new borns.
- The countries most affected by the refugee exodus of the Rohingya's includes Thailand. Malaysia, India, Pakistan, Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Why Now

- The signing of the pact has come as a surprise to many because the Myanmar government led by the National League for Democracy as well as its military leadership have thus far been categorical about not accepting more repatriation and have denied any wrongdoing by the security forces.
- The turnaround may be ascribed in part to growing international pressure as well as United Nations resolutions particularly pushed by Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.
- In September, the Human Rights Council in Geneva voted to extend the mandate of an international fact-finding committee to investigate allegations of human rights violations in Myanmar and the UN General Assembly’s Third Committee voted overwhelmingly in condemning Myanmar’s actions.
- International human rights agencies have also called for targeted sanctions and an arms embargo against the Myanmar security forces.
- The signing of the deal also came at a time when Myanmar's leader Aung San Suu Kyi was facing international criticism for not stopping the violence and several awards/honours given to her for her work in restoring democracy have been revoked over the past few months.

China Angle

- The talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar were guided not only by international agencies but significantly by China. After back-to-back visits to Naypyidaw and Dhaka by Chinese Foreign Minister, China announced that it favoured a “three-step” solution comprising of (1) a ceasefire in
Rakhine, (2) a bilateral repatriation deal for the Rohingya to Myanmar and (3) long-term solutions including the economic development of the Rohingya areas.

- Beijing has deep interests in Rakhine especially in the Kyaukpyu Port, with oil and energy pipelines to Yunnan province forming part of a $10 billion economic zone in its Belt and Road Initiative.
- So far, China has protected the Myanmar regime from international sanctions at the UN. However, this time it has given strict signals to Myanmar and has tied itself to the success or failure of the repatriation agreement on which the fate of the Rohingya rests.

### Concerns/Problems With The Pact

- The pact makes no space for the involvement of a third party, which could have monitored or steered the process. This is an especially crucial gap since neither country’s stance inspires much confidence. Bangladesh has made no secret that it wants to get the refugee population off its soil. As far as Myanmar is concerned, it has maintained a complete denial of the atrocities in the face of mounting evidence.
- The agreement lets Myanmar decide on the legality of the documents produce. Since Myanmar stands accused of systematically trying to eject Rohingya from the country and of denying them citizenship it is debatable how many documents it will admit as valid.
- There are logistical problems with producing and verifying the documents. In a country that has denied Rohingya citizenship and basic rights for years it is not known how many people have identification papers. Besides this many had fled leaving everything behind so they might not have the papers even if they were issued.
- The pact states that neither country will provide citizenship or residency to “illegal immigrants” once registration is complete. Given the difficulties of identification, the process is likely to leave a large number of people as illegal migrants.
- There is the big question of what the Rohingya will return to. With entire villages razed to the ground, the government will need to help them rebuild their homes and lives once again. When the pact still refuses to call the Rohingya citizens of Myanmar, the government’s enthusiasm for such a project may be lacking.
- There is nothing to suggest that this deal has what the 1992 agreement did not -- safeguards to ensure that Myanmar’s military junta will alter its policies towards the Rohingya and not indulge any violence.

### Question

Briefly describe the pact signed between the Myanmar and Bangladesh on Rohingya? According to you, how much are the chances of success for this pact?

4.2. **Wassenaar Arrangement**

India joined the Wassenaar Arrangement as its 42nd member at a meeting of the group in Vienna.

### Background

- The Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls (CoCom) was established by Western bloc powers in the first five years after the end of World War II during the Cold War to put an arms embargo.
- In light of the end of the Cold War, members of the former COCOM export control regime recognised that COCOM’s East-West focus was no longer the appropriate basis for export controls. There was a need to establish a new arrangement to deal with risks to regional and international
security and stability related to the spread of conventional weapons and dual-use goods and technologies.

- It led the participating states to reach on an agreement known as “Wassenaar Agreement” on 19 December 1995. Participating states also agreed to continue the use of the COCOM control lists as a basis for global export controls on a national level until the new arrangement could be established.

**The Wassenaar Agreement**

- The Wassenaar Arrangement has been established in order to contribute to regional and international security and stability by promoting transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies thus preventing destabilising accumulations.

- Participating States seek through their national policies to ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine these goals and are not diverted to support such capabilities. The aim is also to prevent the acquisition of these items by terrorists.

- Participating States apply export controls to all items set forth in the List of Dual-Use Goods and Technologies and the Munitions List with the objective of preventing unauthorized transfers or re-transfers of those items.

- To assist in developing common understandings of transfer risks, Participating States regularly exchange information of both a general and a specific nature. Participating States are required to report their arms transfers and transfers/denials of certain dual-use goods and technologies to destinations outside the Arrangement.

- The decision to transfer or deny the transfer of any item is the sole responsibility of each Participating State. All measures with respect to the Arrangement are taken in accordance with national legislation and policies and are implemented on the basis of national discretion.

**How It Helps India**

- India will be able to more easily access dual use technologies and materials and military equipment that are proscribed for non-participating members. It would be easier for India to access high-tech items for its defence and space programmes.

- India will also be able to sell its nuclear reactors and other materials and equipment indigenously produced without attracting adverse reactions.

- It will also be in a better position to collaborate with other countries in developing such capabilities.

- The MTCR and the WA are two of the four major export control regimes that India has been trying to gain entry into for the past several years. The third is the Australia Group which defines itself as “an informal forum of countries which through the harmonisation of export controls seeks to ensure that exports do not contribute to the development of chemical or biological weapons”.

- The last is the Nuclear Suppliers group (NSG), which controls global nuclear commerce and technology and where India’s membership has been blocked by strategic rival China.

- Significantly, China is not a member of the MTCR or the WA. Thus, this will also help India to negotiate to enter other such agreements such as NSG.

- Membership in Wassenaar is crucial for India as it will give the nation a chance for a closer interaction with its 41 member states despite not being a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.
• An entry into the Wassenaar Arrangement can also help strengthen India’s non-proliferation credentials and advocate India’s plea to join the 48-member NSG stronger.
• Further, since India has low reserves of uranium required for its civil nuclear energy programmes, the country's entry to the Export Control regimes will help secure the supply of nuclear fuel more easily.

4.3. **Jerusalem As Capital Of Israel**

President Donald Trump has announced that US recognizes Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

**Importance Of Jerusalem**

• The city is sacred to all three of the great monotheistic religions. Christians, Jews, and Muslims all revere the city and see religious significance there.
• The city has been at the center of conquerors for centuries. The Romans, Crusaders, Ottomans, and the British Empire all once sought for control of the city.
• Since the creation of the modern state of Israel, both the Israeli leadership and their Arab neighbours have laid claim to the historic city.
• In the centre of the Old City is a hill with great significance to both Jews and Muslims. The hill is known to Jews as Har ha-Bayit or Temple Mount. To Muslims around the world, the hill is known as al-Haram al-Sharif or The Noble Sanctuary. Muslims revere two holy sites on the hill - the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Asqa Mosque.
• Christians revere the city for its connection to Jesus Christ who they believe preached, died and was later resurrected there.

**Israel-Palestine Conflict and Jerusalem**

• In the Six Day War of June 1967, Israel captured much of historic Palestine including the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It also occupied the eastern half of Jerusalem, whose old city houses holy sites like the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Aqsa Mosque. These places are sacred to Jews, Christians and Muslims alike.
• Shortly thereafter, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution calling on Israel to withdraw from “from territories occupied in the recent conflict.”
• The international consensus is that this decision applies to virtually all of these occupied Palestinian territories including East Jerusalem. Israel however contends the U.N. resolution requires only a partial withdrawal and only in the context of a comprehensive peace agreement with the Palestinians.
• In the 50 years since the Six Day War, Israel has been consolidating its hold on the West Bank and East Jerusalem by building Jewish settlements on the land it seized. In 1980, Israel unilaterally declared all of Jerusalem including East Jerusalem and several nearby Palestinian town as the capital of Israel.
• To try to make this declaration a reality, Israel has moved an estimated 208,000 Jewish settlers into East Jerusalem over the past 50 years, in violation of international law.
• Palestinians still living under Israeli occupation also suffer regular human rights violations as documented by Amnesty International and other international organizations. Palestinians are detained without trial, denied access to water, deprived of adequate schooling and displaced through home demolitions.
• Israel's stand is that united Jerusalem is Israel's eternal capital. But the status of East Jerusalem under international law hasn't changed. For the U.N. and its member countries, the city is still illegally occupied.
• That's why not a single country has recognized Israel's claim or moved its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem until Trump's recent announcement.

Effects Of The US Announcement
• The United States has for decades positioned itself as the primary mediator between Israelis and Palestinians. This move will further enhance the distrust that the Palestinians carry towards US. Also US interventions in Iraq has already detoriated the US influence in the region.
• This step has also not gone well with the international community. The EU has distanced itself from any such stance and has clearly indicated that the US step seems biased.
• Russia and China too have criticized the move saying it is against the UN's mandate and can further escalate tensions in the middle east.
• This can affect the US relations with the Arab world and thus can lead to major re-alignment in the global politics.
• Palestinian factions have called for protests in response to this announcement and Arab leaders have said that calling the city Israel's capital is likely to hurt Middle East peace negotiations.
• The Palestine Liberation Organization has suggested it would consider revoking its recognition of Israel and canceling all agreements between Israelis and Palestinians.
• In the aftermath of the announcement, experts have claimed that it would stoke extremism in the region.
• More immediately there are fears it could set off a wave of unrest perhaps even street protests and violence in the Palestinian territories and across the Arab world.

4.4. WTO Ministerial Conference 11 (MC 11)

In News
• The World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference took place in Buenos Aires in December 2017.
• This will be the 11th Ministerial (MC11) since the start of the WTO and the 7th since the start of the Doha Round of WTO negotiations.
• The Ministerial Conference is the highest decision-making body of the WTO.
• Under the Marrakesh Agreement, which established the WTO, the Ministerial Conference is to meet at least once every two years. The last Ministerial Conference took place in Nairobi, Kenya, in December 2015.

About MC 11
• The 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) of World Trade Organisation (WTO) ended in a deadlock.
• It was only able to agree on continuation of moratoriums on e-commerce and TRIPS non-violation complaints.
The MC11 was expected to negotiate over major trade related issues including e-commerce and investment facilitation, public stockholding and curb on farms and fisheries subsidies, many arising out of unresolved issues from Doha round talks.

India, South Africa, Venezuela and a large majority of developing countries pressed to insert language that the unfinished Doha round negotiations must continue until all issues are resolved satisfactorily by members till the next conference in 2019. China supported the developing countries demand.

The US along with 44 other countries by issuing a joint statement fiercely opposed any mention of the Doha work programme and Doha Development Agenda (DDA) in the ministerial declaration.

India was opposed to the issues of e-commerce and investment facilitation being taken up for discussion at the WTO MC11. According to experts, the definition and meaning of e-commerce varies from country to country and the ministerial conference stage is not mature enough at present to discuss this.

India had prioritised TRIPS non-violation moratorium. Along with Indonesia, it objected to renewing the e-commerce duties moratorium. Indonesia and India linked that moratorium to some of their priority issue such as an outcome on public stockholding for food security.

The permanent solution on the issue of public stockpiling for food security was a top priority for developing countries including India. The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) states that developing countries can provide agricultural subsidies or aggregate measurement support (AMS) up to 10% of the value of agricultural production.

At present their exists a ‘peace clause’ where even if a country breaches the 10% subsidy cap as stipulated by the multilateral trade body no action can be taken against the ‘violating’ country by the member states of WTO.

Permanent solution to this issue could help reduce hunger in the poorest countries. However US which questioned special and differential treatment to countries with a high GDP refused to finalise a permanent solution for public stockholding.

Another issue that had to come up for negotiations was the curbing of farm and fisheries subsidies being pushed by developed nations which the developing countries successfully managed to thwart.

The WTO's current “crisis of legitimacy” is the result of an increasing incapability to balance rich countries commercial interests and the demands of poorer countries to address development concerns.

**About Food Stock Pilling Issue**

According to global trade norms, a WTO member country's food subsidy bill is restricted to 10 per cent of the value of production based on the reference price of 1986-88.

However, during the Bali conference, members agreed to an interim ‘Peace Clause,’ under which any breach of the ceiling by a developing nation would not be challenged.

The clause was installed until a permanent solution was agreed upon. However it was decided that one would be negotiated at Buenos Aires.

India emphasised that permanent solution was a must have and should be an improvement over the Peace Clause agreed at Bali.
India made it clear that it cannot envisage any negotiated outcome at MC11, which does not include a permanent solution as it is a matter of survival for eight hundred million hungry and undernourished people in the world.

Q) What were the key issues at ministerial conference 11 of WTO? What was India’s stand at the conference on various issues.

5. INDIA AND WORLD

5.1. Agreement Signed Between India And Spain For Setting Up RRTS

An Indo-Spanish technical cooperation (Government to Government) agreement was signed between National Capital Region Transport Corporation (NCRTC) from Indian side and ADIF of Spain.

About The Agreement For Setting Up Of RRTS

- NCRTC, a Joint Venture of Government of India and State Governments of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi is mandated to design, construct, operate & maintain rail based Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) in the National Capital Region.
- Administrador de Infraestructuras Ferroviarias (ADIF) of Spain is State-Owned Railway infrastructure company that has experience of planning, developing, constructing, operating and maintaining high-speed railway and regional rail systems like Cercanias in Madrid.
- Three RRTS corridors: Delhi-Meerut Smart Line, Delhi - Panipat Smart Line and Delhi - Alwar Smart Line have been prioritised for implementation in first phase. Delhi-Ghaziabad-Meerut corridor will be the first corridor to be implemented for which pre-construction activities including geo-technical investigations, detailed design, utility shifting planning and traffic diversion planning are in progress.
- RRTS is first of its kind project in India with design speed of 180 kmph. It will use state of the art technologies for track structure, rolling stock and signaling system.
- Expertise and experience in India on these technologies for higher speeds being limited, International expertise will be tapped for efficient implementation of project, operation of system and developing capacity in the country.
- The agreement will enable availability of technical advice on specific issues, besides providing training and collaboration in the technical areas of Track, Signalling, Rolling Stock, Safety, Multi modal integration, Station Design etc.
- This agreement will provide institutional mechanism for mutual cooperation in the field of urban transport and specially in implementation of RRTS project.

Assessment

- After the Prime Minister Modi’s visit earlier this year Indo-Spain relations have witnessed a special harmony. Spain’s struggling economy needs to leverage its core competencies and expertise. India provides for the right platform being a rapidly developing country and a thriving democracy.
- On international platforms both the countries have supported each other and agreements such as RRTS brings the two nations closer. This also helps India in spreading and establishing its diplomatic influence which can be leveraged at crucial instances as seen at India’s lobbying for ICJ elections.

[INDO-SPAIN Relationship: Look into article 5.3 in India and World june 2017 issue for details on India-Spain Relations.]

Question.
1. What is RRTS (Regional Rapid Transit System)? How does such agreement with Spain help India in this regard?
2. Critically analyse the Indo-Spain relationship in the light of the recent agreement for setting up RRTS.

5.2. BIMSTEC Coastal Development Agreement

Member States of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) met in New Delhi to discuss the modalities for promoting coastal shipping in the region.

Background

- The meeting of the Working Group is the first such meeting to negotiate the agreement.
- It is a follow up of the BIMSTEC leaders call at the Retreat in Goa hosted by Indian Prime Minister in October 2016 to enhance connectivity in the region and to the agreements in the 15th Ministerial meeting of BIMSTEC where it was agreed to negotiate and finalise BIMSTEC Framework Agreement on Transit, Transshipment and Movement of Vehicular Traffic (BIMSTEC Motor Vehicle Agreement) as well as the BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement.
- India is the lead country in BIMSTEC for cooperation in transport and communication and thus the draft to the agreement was drafted and proposed by Ministry of Shipping on the behalf of GOI.

About BIMSTEC Coastal Development Agreement

- BIMSTEC Coastal Shipping Agreement aims to facilitate coastal shipping (instead of deep-sea shipping) in the region for boosting the trade between the member countries.
- Agreement applies to coastal shipping - shipping within 20 nautical miles of the coastline. Requirements for coastal shipping are different from requirements of deep-sea shipping. Coastal shipping requires smaller vessels and faces lesser draft and therefore involve lower costs.
- Agreement allows member countries to move cargo using coastal shipping. Once the agreement is ratified lot of cargo movement between the member countries can be facilitated through the cost effective, environment friendly and faster coastal shipping route.

Assessment

- The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) completed 20 years of its establishment. Comprising of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan. BIMSTEC is home to 1.5 billion people, accounting for approximately 21 per cent of the world population and a combined GDP of US$ 2.5 trillion.
- The growth rate sustained by the BIMSTEC countries is around six per cent per annum. However, despite its huge potential in terms of enhancing regional cooperation between parts of South and Southeast Asia, BIMSTEC has long suffered from lack of resources and proper coordination among its member states.
- In today’s context, the possibility of enhancing physical, digital and people-to-people connectivity in the sub-region is huge. Similarly, the potential to tap the vast energy resources and scope for intra-regional trade and investment too is enormous.
- On the front of connectivity, there are requirements for soft as well as hard infrastructure. The BIMSTEC coastal development agreement is one such important step for soft infrastructure. Other major connectivity improving steps taken are -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement (BBIN MVA); Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Transport Project and India-Myanmar-Thailand Highway.
BIMSTEC and ASEAN connectivity can not only provide India a leverage to tap its growth potential but can lead to greater sub regional and regional connectivity which can turn prove fruitful to the whole region.

BIMSTEC provides India what SAARC could not due to the tensions between the two member states of SAARC i.e. India and Pakistan.

[Note – BIMSTEC and India has been covered in detail in the article 6.1 in the August 2017 month current affairs booklet.]

Q) What is BIMSTEC coastal development agreement? How will this agreement improve the connectivity problem between the BIMSTEC nations?

5.3. India Receives Certificate Of Commendation From CITES

In News

- India has been awarded with the Certificate of Commendation for its exemplary enforcement action in its regional and global effort to combat illegal wildlife trade.
- The award was given to Wildlife Crime Control Bureau under Ministry of Environment and Forest.

About the Award

- The award was given to WCCB for its efforts in conducting and coordinating a species-specific wildlife enforcement operation, codenamed ‘Operation Save Kurma’.
- The operation was conducted to combat the proliferating illegal trade of live turtles and its parts from the country to destinations abroad. During the operation conducted from December 15, 2016 to January 30, 2017, approximately 16,000 live turtles and tortoises were seized and released back into the wild while 55 suspects involved in the illegal trade were also arrested.
- India is the only recipient of the Certificate of Commendation at the 69th Standing Committee meeting of CITES at Geneva. This has not only enhanced India’s reputation but has also highlighted the seriousness of the establishment when it comes for working towards safety of biodiversity.

About CITES

- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- CITES is an international agreement to which States and regional economic integration organizations adhere voluntarily. States that have agreed to be bound by the Convention (‘joined’ CITES) are known as Parties. There are 183 parties to the convention.

Background

- Annual international wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars and to include hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber, tourist curios and medicines.
- Levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species are high and the trade in them, together with other factors such as habitat loss is capable of heavily depleting their populations and even bringing some species close to extinction.
Many wildlife species in trade are not endangered but the existence of an agreement to ensure the sustainability of the trade is important in order to safeguard these resources for the future.

Because the trade in wild animals and plants crosses borders between countries, the effort to regulate it requires international cooperation to safeguard certain species from over-exploitation.

CITES was conceived in the spirit of such cooperation. It accords varying degrees of protection to more than 35,000 species of animals and plants whether they are traded as live specimens, fur coats or dried herbs.

CITES was drafted as a result of a resolution adopted in 1963 at a meeting of members of IUCN (The World Conservation Union). Finally, on 1 July 1975 CITES entered in force.

Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, in other words they have to implement the Convention but it does not take the place of national laws. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

CITES works by subjecting international trade in specimens of selected species to certain controls. All import, export, re-export and introduction from the sea of species covered by the Convention has to be authorized through a licensing system. Each Party to the Convention must designate one or more Management Authorities in charge of administering that licensing system and one or more Scientific Authorities to advise them on the effects of trade on the status of the species.

The species covered by CITES are listed in 3 appendices.

- Appendix I includes species threatened with extinction. Trade in specimens of these species is permitted only in exceptional circumstances.
- Appendix II includes species not necessarily threatened with extinction, but in which trade must be controlled in order to avoid utilization incompatible with their survival.
- Appendix III contains species that are protected in at least one country, which has asked other CITES Parties for assistance in controlling the trade.

WCCB
- Wildlife Crime Control Bureau is a statutory multi-disciplinary body established by the Government of India under the Ministry of Environment and Forests to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.
- It is established under Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972.
- It is mandated to:
  - Collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime activities and to disseminate the same to State and other enforcement agencies for immediate action so as to apprehend the criminals.
  - Establish a centralized wildlife crime data bank.
  - Co-ordinate actions by various agencies in connection with the enforcement of the provisions of the Act.
  - Assist foreign authorities and international organization concerned to facilitate co-ordination and universal action for wildlife crime control.
  - Facilitate capacity building of the wildlife crime enforcement agencies for scientific and professional investigation into wildlife crimes and assist State Governments to ensure success in prosecutions related to wildlife crimes.
  - Advise the Government of India on issues relating to wildlife crimes having national and international ramifications, relevant policy and laws. It also assists and advises the Customs authorities in inspection of the consignments of flora & fauna as per the provisions of Wild Life Protection Act, CITES and EXIM Policy governing such an item.
5.4. **India re-elected to International Maritime Organization Council**

India has been elected to the Council of the IMO ever since it started functioning, except for a two-year hiatus during 1983-1984.

**Why It Is Important For India To Be Represented In The IMO**

- India's ancient trade and cultural ties with Mesopotamia, Mediterranean rim countries; South East Asia, China, Middle East and Africa are testimonial to our rich maritime heritage.
- India has a large coastline of 7500 Kms. inland waterways of 20,000 Kms. over 200 major and minor ports and increasing ship building, ship repair and ship recycling facilities.
- India is also strategically located in the corridor through which substantial part of the east-west seaborne traffic flows.
- India has about one thousand four hundred vessels with Gross Tonnage of about 12.2 million. In addition, India has a large number of inland and near-coastal vessels. Nearly 90% of India's overseas trade by volume is carried through ships of which 92% is carried by foreign flag vessels.
- With the Indian economy poised to grow faster, a quantum jump in the maritime activities on the Indian Coasts is likely. India is upgrading its infrastructure and reforming the regulatory framework related to marine safety, marine pollution, coastal shipping and safety.
- SAGARMALA, the flagship programme launched in 2015 for port led development, has four limbs, namely, port modernization and new port development; port connectivity; port led industrialization; and port community development. Under this programme, 6 new major ports, 150 projects to modernize existing ports including construction of new berths, and 130 projects in rail & road sectors for last mile connectivity have been identified.
- 111 inland waterways fit for river navigation have been identified of which 32 will be developed in the first phase. These projects provide major investment opportunities for the International Community.
- India's has recently signed an agreement with the BIMSTEC for coastal shipping and is been pursuing sea and inland water based connectivity with the ASEAN nations as well.
- India has been one of the founder members of IMO and has been part of the IMO Council since then, except in 1983-84. In Category B of the Council, India represents the developing world and the nations with the largest share in international sea borne trade.
- Dr.C.P. Srivastava, IMO's longest serving Secretary General from 1974 to 1989 remains the most important face of India's commitment to the IMO's activities. His contribution in establishing World Maritime University, Sweden, International Maritime Academy, Italy, and International Maritime Law Institute, Malta is immense. Thus, India has greater stakes in the organization.
- The world's premier ship recycling facility is located at Alang Sosiya, in Gujarat, where nearly half of the world's scrapped ships are recycled. To make ship-recycling industry safe for its workers and the surrounding environment, a draft legislation to implement the Hong Kong Convention is now undergoing pre-legislative consultations.
- India has more than Four Hundred Thousand seafarers who are the preferred choice for specialized vessels.
- India is a key player in the space technology and the application of “Indian Regional Navigational Satellite System or IRNSS” in the maritime field is being pursued in IMO.
The Indian Naval ships and aircrafts continue to escort merchant ships of all nations in the Gulf of Aden. Even though there have been no successful hijackings of commercial vessels since May 2012, India continues to participate in all global forum to eradicate piracy in the Somalia region. India has been elected as a Co-chair for Working Group 1 of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS).

India has an efficient and vigilant Search and Rescue (SAR) set-up and has made commendable efforts to rescue seafarers in distress situations in the Indian SAR area, covering the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. The launch of IRNSS will further strengthen the SAR efforts.

Q) How does India’s re-election to IMO benefit India and why was it so important for India? Explain.

5.5. International Solar Alliance and India

International Solar Alliance becomes the first treaty-based international government organisation to be based in India, with 19 countries ratifying its framework agreement.

About ISA

Background

There was no specific body in place to address the specific solar technology deployment needs of the solar resource rich countries located between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Most of these countries are geographically located for optimal absorption of the sun's rays.

There is a great amount of sunlight year-round, which can lead to cost effective solar power and other end uses with high insolation of almost 300 sunny days in a year.

Most of these countries have large agrarian populations and many of these countries face gaps in the potential solar energy manufacturing eco-system. Absence of universal energy access, energy equity and affordability are issues common to most of the solar resource rich countries.

International Solar Alliance (ISA) was conceived as a coalition of solar resource rich countries to address their special energy needs and will provide a platform to collaborate on addressing the identified gaps through a common, agreed approach.

ISA an Indian initiative was jointly launched by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France on 30 November 2015 in Paris on the sidelines of COP-21, the UN Climate Conference.

It aims at addressing obstacles to deployment at scale of solar energy through better harmonization and aggregation of demand from solar rich countries lying fully or partially between the Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn.

It is aimed not to duplicate or replicate the efforts that others like International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership(REEEP), International Energy Agency (IEA), Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21), United Nations bodies, bilateral organizations etc.) in but to establish networks and develop synergies with them and supplement their efforts in a sustainable and focused manner.

In terms of its Framework Agreement, with ratification by Guinea, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) will become a treaty-based international intergovernmental organization on 6 December 2017. The ISA is headquartered in India and has its Secretariat located in the campus of National Institute of Solar Energy, Gurgaon, Haryana.

As of date, 46 countries have signed and 19 countries have ratified the Framework Agreement of ISA.
• Signatory Countries (46) of ISA -- Australia, Bangladesh. Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Chile, Costa Rica, Democratic Republic of Congo, Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guiana, Fiji, France, Gabonese Republic, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, India, Kiribati, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Nauru, Niger, Nigeria, Peru, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Tonga, Togolese Republic, Tuvalu, UAE, Vanuatu, and Venezuela.

• Ratifying Countries (19) of ISA -- India, France, Australia, Bangladesh, Comoros, Cuba, Fiji, Guinea, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Nauru, Niger, Peru, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tuvalu.

Programmes Under ISA

• ISA has so far launched three major programmes - Scaling Solar Applications for Agriculture Use, Affordable Finance at Scale and Scaling Solar Mini-grids - have been launched.

• These programmes will help in achieving the overall goal of increasing solar energy deployment in the ISA member countries for achieving universal energy access and speeding up economic development. In addition to the existing 3 programmes, ISA has initiated plans to launch two more programmes - Scaling Solar Rooftops and Scaling Solar E-mobility and Storage.

• Further, ISA has also been developing a Common Risk Mitigating Mechanism (CRMM) for de-risking and reducing the financial cost of solar projects in the ISA member countries. This instrument will help diversify and pool risks on mutual public resources and unlock significant investments. An international expert group has been working on the blueprint of the mechanism and it will be rolled out by December 2018.

• Another major initiative is establishment of Digital Infopedia, which will serve as a platform to enable policy makers, Ministers and corporate leaders from ISA countries to interact, connect, communicate and collaborate with one another. The interactive platform was operationalized in May 2017.

• Digital Infopedia will have three heads: (a) Member countries counter for investment opportunities; (b) at least 1000 best practices on solar energy (audio/visual), and (c) Member countries of ISA and the ISA Secretariat audio and visual interaction.

• The Paris Declaration establishing ISA states that the countries share the collective ambition to undertake innovative and concerted efforts for reducing the cost of finance and cost of technology for immediate deployment solar generation assets.

• This will help pave the way for future solar generation, storage and good technologies for each prospective member countries individual needs by effectively mobilizing more than US$1000 billion in investments that will be required by 2030.

Assessment

• ISA provides a platform to employ it as a foreign policy tool to cement its leadership among developing countries.

• The World Bank has signed an agreement with the ISA to mobilize $1 trillion in investments by 2030. In addition to this the ISA is also working on a plan to create a $300 billion risk mitigation fund as part of the strategy to create a sustainable financing architecture for solar projects globally.

• The fund will be used to insure solar power projects against risks such as default in payment from electricity procurers, foreign exchange fluctuation and regime change. This in turn, will help attract investors to the space.
India is also having ambitious targets for solar power generation and amid the climatic debate India needs to diversify its energy pie. ISA's launch will certainly help India achieve its targets.

China's Entry
- China's decision to join the sunshine alliance is significant since it the largest manufacturer of renewable energy equipment.
- China's decision to join ISA at this juncture should be seen in the context of its efforts to corner the solar energy market.
- For Indian industry, it is a wake-up call. It now needs to step up with credible affordable solutions. Or else, it may not be able to take advantage of the aggregation of opportunity that will take place through ISA.
- China has expressed its intention of joining the alliance even though India officially declined endorsing and participating in its One Belt, One Road Initiative. This is part of Beijing's strategy of being in diverse groups of initiatives.
- It allows China to make the most of emerging opportunities and shape efforts and activities of these groups in a manner that either supplements or furthers its interests.
- Yet, China's announcement that it proposes to join the ISA is a diplomatic gain for India as it means that China realizes the importance of the India led initiative and cannot neglect it. This also speaks well as a confidence building step for the India-China relations which have been going through ups and downs in the recent past.

Q) What is International Solar Alliance? How will this help India gain diplomatic prominence?
Q) How does China’s entry to International Solar Alliance affects India?

5.6. International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography

The Union Cabinet approved the agreement with UNESCO on establishment of International Training Centre for Operational Oceanography, as a Category-2 Centre (C2C) of UNESCO, in Hyderabad.

Purpose
- The purpose of this Agreement is to establish a training centre towards development of capacity for the countries on the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), African countries bordering the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, small island countries under the framework of UNESCO.
- The operational oceanography is an activity of conducting systematic oceanographic studies towards providing information services to various sectors viz. fisherman, disaster management, shipping, ports, coastal states, navy, coast guard, environment, offshore industries for conducting their day-to-day operations.
- This Centre will provide assistance in areas of capacity building and training, knowledge sharing and exchange of information and hence could represent a valuable resource for UNESCO and its Intergovernmental Oceanography Commission (IOC) by enhancing the impact and visibility of UNESCO's action.

Benefits To India
- The establishment of UNESCO Category-2 Centre will provide an opportunity for India to emerge as a leading country in the Indian Ocean.
This will also help India to forge cooperation and improve engagement among the counties of the Indian Ocean including South Asian and African states bordering the Indian Ocean.

The establishment of the centre would respond to the worldwide increasing need to build technical and management capacity to address marine and coastal sustainability issues and prepare the region for and react efficiently to marine natural hazards.

The Centre could contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goal-14 (SDG 14) related to building marine scientific research capacity in geographical area of the Centre responsibility which will also fulfill the commitments to support Small Island Developing States, Least Developed Countries.

This C2C is intended to improve skill of students and other participants, which will increase the employment opportunities within and outside India.

It is also envisaged to invite world class trainees from around the world and work out a curriculum for long duration courses.

5.7. India-Denmark

In News

- Danish Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen, visited India to attend the Global Entrepreneurship Summit (GES).
- This is the first visit by a Danish foreign minister to India since 2010 and thus is regarded as a big step towards the enhancement of Indo-Danish bilateral relations.

About Recent Visit

- Diplomatic bonds between the two countries suffered serious setbacks in recent years over Denmark's refusal to extradite suspected gunrunner Niels Holck, known in India as Kim Davy, who is wanted by New Delhi for allegedly delivering weapons to rebel forces in West Bengal in 1995.
- A new request for extradition - received in December last year is still being processed by Denmark's attorney general - was also discussed during the meeting.
- The two Ministers held discussions on various aspects of bilateral ties as well as important regional and multilateral issues of mutual interest. It was decided to enhance the relations between the two nations and resolve the conflicting issues amicably.
- Talking of exports the Danish minister highlighted that India is the world's seventh-largest economy but Danish exports to India are the same size as our exports to Lithuania. There were discussions around this unfulfilled potential of increasing the trade between the two countries.
- The discussions between the two Ministers focused on building of cooperation in the areas of trade & investment, science and technology, environment and renewable energy, shipping, food processing, healthcare, culture, tourism etc.

Bilateral Relations

- Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's visit to Denmark in 1957 laid the foundation for a friendly relationship between India and Denmark that has endured ever since. The bilateral relations between India and Denmark are cordial and friendly based on synergies in political, economic, academic and research fields.
There are three special focus Joint working Groups working to enhance the coordination between the two nations on the subjects of: (i) Biotechnology; (ii) New and Renewable Energy; and (iii) Labour Mobility.

The Indian demand of technology and research in the fields of water, sustainable energy, city planning and food and the Danish needs of expertise in Information and Technology and softwares has been one of the key areas of cooperation since long between the two nations.

Some of the important Bilateral Treaties and Agreements signed between the two nation are as follows:

- Technical Cooperation Agreement, Bilateral Agreement on an Integrated Fisheries Project at Tadri,
- Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPA), Protocol on Avoidance of Double Taxation (DTAA),
- MOU for cooperation between CII and Confederation of Danish Industries, Protocol on Foreign Office Consultation,
- Joint Business Council Agreement between FICCI and the Danish Industry,
- MOU on Biotechnology for Bilateral Cooperation, Agreement for establishment of a Bilateral Joint Commission for Cooperation,
- MOU for Cooperation in New and Renewable Energy, Arrangement on Gainful Employment for Family Members of the Diplomatic Mission or Consular Posts,
- MOU on Clean Development Mechanism, MOU on Cooperation in the area of Environment,
- MOU on Labour Mobility Partnership and Social Security Agreement.

Bilateral trade of commodities between India and Denmark has increased from US$1077.8 million in 2009 to US$ 1129 million in 2016. Still the bilateral trade has not achieved its fullest potential.

Major Danish investments in India have been made in sectors such as manufacturing, trade and transport, financial and business services. The Indian investment in Denmark were US$ 59 Million in 2016.

Major investing companies from Denmark include the Danish Shipping giant, the AP Moller – Maersk Group who has made significant investments in the port infrastructure in India, acquiring a major equity stake in the Gujarat Pipavav Port, development of a bulk terminal at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port to a container terminal, Cheminova Agro, F. L. Smidth & Co., Danfoss, CHR Hansen, Danisco, LM Glasfiber, Lundbeck, Egmont International Holding, Novozymes, Novo Nordisk, Carlsberg, Ramboll, ISS and others.

However, the presence of Indian companies in Denmark is rather small. Among IT companies, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and L&T Infotech and few pharma companies like Dr.Reddies and others are there. However, with increased focus in past few years few Indian companies like Reliance and Thermax have acquired Danish companies and established their presence in the Denmark.

In last two years, Denmark has taken part in various events organized by India such as World food Festival, Global Entrepreneurship summit etc.

There have been well-intended efforts from both sides to better the relationship between the two countries.
6. SUMMITS AND ORGANISATION


- The Global E-waste Monitor is a collaborative effort of the United Nations University (UNU), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Solid Waste Association (ISWA).
- Its objective is to help countries produce e-waste statistics and to build a global e-waste database over time as better data is an important step towards addressing e-waste challenge. Better e-waste data will eventually contribute to minimizing e-waste generation, prevent illegal dumping and improper treatment of e-waste, promote recycling and create jobs in the refurbishment and recycling sector.
- It also aims to map recycling opportunities from e-waste, pollutants and e-waste related health effects along with building national and regional capacities to help countries produce reliable and comparable e-waste statistics that can identify best practices of global e-waste management.
- Ultimately, its work will contribute to achievement of Sustainable Development Goals-11.6 and 12.5 by monitoring relevant waste streams and tracking ITU Connect 2020 target 3.2 on e-waste.

**United Nations University (UNU)** is an autonomous organ of the UN General Assembly dedicated to generating and transferring knowledge and strengthening capacities relevant to global issues of human security, development and welfare. The University operates through a worldwide network of research and training centres and programmes coordinated by UNU Centre in Tokyo.

**The International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** is the leading United Nations agency for information and communication technologies (ICTs), driving innovation in ICTs.
- Established over 150 years ago in 1865, ITU is the intergovernmental body responsible for coordinating the shared global use of the radio spectrum, promoting international cooperation in assigning satellite orbits, improving communication infrastructure in the developing world and establishing the worldwide standards that foster the seamless interconnection of a vast range of communications systems.
- From broadband networks to cutting-edge wireless technologies, aeronautical and maritime navigation, radio astronomy, oceanographic and satellite based earth monitoring as well as converging fixed-mobile phone, Internet and broadcasting technologies, ITU is committed to connecting the world.

**ISWA – the International Solid Waste Association** is a global, independent and non-profit making association, working in the public interest and is the only worldwide association promoting sustainable, comprehensive and professional waste management.

**Highlights Of The Report**

- Increasing levels of electronic waste and its improper and unsafe treatment and disposal through open burning or in dumpsites pose significant risks to the environment and human health.
- They also present several challenges to sustainable development, and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The growing amount of e-waste is the result of several trends. These are:
  - By 2017, close to half the world's population uses the internet and most people in the world have access to mobile networks and services.
  - Many people own more than one information and communication technology (ICT) device and replacement cycles for mobile phones and computers and also for other devices and equipment are becoming shorter.
At the same time, disposable incomes in many developing countries are increasing and a growing global middle-class is able to spend more on electrical and electronic equipment, consequently generating more e-waste.

- All the countries in the world combined generated a staggering 44.7 million metric tones (Mt), or an equivalent of 6.1 kilogram per inhabitant (kg/inh), of e-waste annually in 2016 compared to the 5.8 kg/inh generated in 2014.
- Globally only 8.9 Mt of e-waste are documented to be collected and recycled which corresponds to 20% of all the e-waste generated.
- In 2016, Asia was the region that generated by far the largest amount of e-waste (18.2 Mt), followed by Europe (12.3 Mt), the Americas (11.3 Mt), Africa (2.2 Mt), and Oceania (0.7 Mt).
- While the smallest in terms of total e-waste generated, Oceania was the highest generator of e-waste per inhabitant (17.3 kg/inh) followed by Europe (16.6 kg/inh).
- Asia generates less e-waste per inhabitant (4.2 kg/inh).
- The low collection rate compared to the total amount of e-waste generated is partly explained by the fact that only 41 countries have official e-waste statistics.
- In countries where there is no national e-waste legislation in place, e-waste is likely treated as other or general waste.
- There is the high risk that the pollutants are not taken care of properly or they are taken care of by an informal sector and recycled without properly protecting the workers while emitting the toxins contained in e-waste.
- Although e-waste challenge is on rise, a growing number of countries are adopting e-waste legislation.
- The most populous countries in Asia currently have e-waste rules, whereas only a handful of countries in Africa have enacted e-waste-specific policies and legislations.
- However, it must also be noted that countries with national e-waste management laws do not always enforce the law. Many countries lack measureable collection and recycling targets that are essential for effective policies.
- Since low-income countries generally have less e-waste management infrastructure than higher income economies these are alarming trends that need to be addressed.
- The type of e-waste covered by legislation differs considerably throughout countries, causing difficulties in coordinating collected and recycled e-waste amounts.
- The total value of all raw materials present in e-waste is estimated at approximately 55 Billion Euros in 2016 which is more than the 2016 Gross Domestic Product of most countries in the world.
- Therefore, the circular economy concept offers huge economic and employment opportunities for e-waste management.

**Circular Economy**

A circular economy is an alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) in which we keep resources in use for as long as possible, extract the maximum value from them whilst in use, then recover and regenerate products and materials at the end of each service life.

6.2. **AAROGYAM – 2017**

International AROGYA 2017 was the 1st International Exhibition & Conference on AYUSH & Wellness. It was organized by Ministry of AYUSH along with Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry & Pharmexcil.
**Pharmaceutical Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil)** is the authorized agency of the government of India for promotion of pharmaceutical exports from India.

- It was set up under the provisions of Foreign Trade Policy by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry in May 2004. Various pharmaceutical products, namely, bulk drugs, formulations, Biotech Products, Indian Systems of medicines, herbal products, diagnostics, clinical research etc. are covered under its purview.
- Pharmexcil takes up several external trade promotion activities by organizing trade delegations outside India, arranging buyer-seller meetings and international seminars etc.

**Objectives Of The Event**

- To showcase the strength and scientific validation of Indian System of Medicine in the Global Context.
- To promote and strengthen awareness and interest about AYUSH.
- To facilitate International promotion, development and recognition of Ayurveda, Yoga, Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, Sowa-Rigpa and Homoeopathy.
- To foster interaction of stakeholders and market development of AYUSH at international level.
- To give boost to AYUSH Products in International Market.
- To exhibit the research and latest developments in AYUSH sector.
- To harness the potential of this fast growing and globally emerging sector.

**Assessment**

- India’s health history dates back to many centuries and systems like Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) evolved in India as an integrative scheme of health services with a rationale logical foundation.
- At present we are witnessing a highly receptive environment where the value of AYUSH systems in healthcare is widely recognized worldwide translating into a growing global demand. Many reforms in administration, research strategies, nature of practice and education are already underway by the Ministry of AYUSH.
- This has caused resurgence in the interest levels towards the AYUSH system of medicine, both in India and abroad. There was a need of a quality International event to further deliberate and discuss the potential for AYUSH products to help improve the measures required to boost the industry.

**Question.**

What do you know about the AAROGYAM-2017? What is the requirement of such an event and how can it help bring a positive change in the AYUSH sector in India?

6.3. **SAICON 2017**

- In modern sports, the secret behind performance enhancement lies in the application of science & technology in the training of athletes.
- In the race towards the medals podium, the gap between the victor and the vanquished lies in millimeters, milligrams and microseconds. Sports Medicine(SM) & Sports Sciences (SS) can narrow this gap and help the athletes to reach the podium “Swifter, Higher & Stronger”.

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Creating awareness as well as knowledge sharing on SM & SS are of paramount importance while planning scientific support to sports.

To make this possible the scientists especially those of the younger generation should be given ample opportunities to come together on a common platform to share their knowledge, expertise and experience.

With this objective the Sports Authority of India organized the International Conference on Sports Medicine & Sports Sciences (SAICON 2017 Delhi) in December 2017 in New Delhi.

SAICON 2017 Delhi provided a platform for doctors and scientists from various parts of the country and from abroad to present their research work and field work on sports medicine & sports sciences, interact with their peers and also exchange information.

The conference also fostered the spirit of friendship and collaboration in the field of sports medicine and sport sciences amongst all those who aspire to contribute their mite for ushering in a refreshing scientific temperament in Indian sports.

6.4. World Inequality Report 2018

The World Inequality Lab aims to promote research on global inequality dynamics. Its core mission is to maintain and expand the World Wealth and Income Database.

It also produces inequality reports and working papers addressing substantive and methodological issues.

In addition to the year-round updates to the database and working papers, the World Inequality Lab publishes a biannual World Inequality Report.

The World Inequality Report aims to become the reference global report on inequality and to attract extensive coverage in the international media. The first report was published in December 2017.

Highlights Of The Report

Economic inequality is widespread and to some extent inevitable. However if rising inequality is not properly monitored and addressed it can lead to various sorts of political, economic and social catastrophes.

Income inequality varies greatly across world regions. It is lowest in Europe and highest in the Middle East.

Indian scenario:

- Income inequality in India has reached historically high levels with the share of national income accruing to India's top 1 per cent earners touching 22 per cent in 2014, while the share of the top 10 per cent was around 56 per cent.
- The structural changes to the economy along with changes in tax regulation, appear to have had significant impact on income inequality in India since the 1980s.
- The report noted that the temporary end to the publication of tax statistics between 2000–2010 by Indian government highlights the need for more transparency on income and wealth statistics that track the long-run evolution of inequality.
- In 2016, the share of total national income accounted for by just that nation's top 10% earners (top 10% income share) was 37% in Europe, 41% in China, 46% in Russia, 47% in US-Canada, and around 55% in sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and India. In the Middle East, the world's most unequal region the top 10% capture 61% of national income.
The diversity of trends observed across countries since 1980 shows that income inequality dynamics are shaped by a variety of national, institutional and political contexts.

The rise in inequality was particularly abrupt in Russia, moderate in China and relatively gradual in India reflecting different types of deregulation and opening-up policies pursued over the past decades in these countries.

The poorest half of the global population has seen its income grow significantly thanks to high growth in Asia (particularly in China and India).

However because of high and rising inequality within countries the top 1% richest individuals in the world captured twice as much growth as the bottom 50% individuals since 1980.

Increasing income inequality and the large transfers of public to private wealth occurring over the past forty years have yielded rising wealth inequality among individuals.

Within-country inequality dynamics have a tremendous impact on the eradication of global poverty.

Way Forward:

- Tackling global income and wealth inequality requires important shifts in national and global tax policies. Educational policies, corporate governance and wage-setting policies need to be reassessed in many countries.
- Tax progressivity is a proven tool to combat rising income and wealth inequality at the top. Progressive tax rates do not only reduce post-tax inequality they also diminish pre-tax inequality by giving top earners less incentive to capture higher shares of growth via aggressive bargaining for pay rises and wealth accumulation.
- It is also worth noting that inheritance taxes are nonexistent or near zero in high-inequality emerging countries leaving space for important tax reforms in these countries.
- A global financial register recording the ownership of financial assets would deal severe blows to tax evasion, money laundering, and rising inequality. Although the tax system is a crucial tool for tackling inequality, it also faces potential obstacles.
- The rise of tax havens makes it difficult to properly measure and tax wealth and capital income in a globalized world.
- Democratic access to education can achieve much but without mechanisms to ensure that people at the bottom of the distribution have access to well-paying jobs, education will not prove sufficient to tackle inequality.
- Better representation of workers in corporate governance bodies, and healthy minimum-wage rates are important tools to achieve this.
- Governments need to invest in the future to address current income and wealth inequality levels and to prevent further increases in them. Public investments are needed in education, health, and environmental protection both to tackle existing inequality and to prevent further increases.
- Reducing public debt is by no means an easy task but several options to accomplish it exist - including wealth taxation, debt relief, and inflation and have been used throughout history when governments were highly indebted to empower younger generations.
7. DEFENCE AND SECURITY

7.1. All About Crypto-Currencies

As per the Government, use of Bitcoins and other virtual currencies are not authorised by RBI.

**About Cryptocurrency**

- A cryptocurrency is a medium of exchange that uses cryptography to manage the creation of new units as well as secure the transactions.
- One of the most striking features of cryptocurrency is that it weeds out the need for a trusted third party such as a governmental agency, bank etc.
- The cryptocurrency system collectively creates the units.
- The rate at which such units are created is defined beforehand and is publicly known unlike the traditional currencies where the government or the authorized banks control the supply.
- At present there are around 969 cryptocurrencies in existence across the globe with a total market capitalisation close to 116 Billion USD.
- Founded as a peer-to-peer electronic payment system cryptocurrencies enable transfer of money between parties without going through a banking system.
- The digital payment systems are based on cryptographic proof of the chain of transactions deriving their name Cryptocurrency.
- These employ cryptographic algorithms and functions to ensure anonymity (privacy) of the users (who are identified by an alphanumeric public key), security of the transactions and integrity of the payment systems.
- Widely seen as a disruption for the traditional banking and financial institutions, cryptocurrencies have gained significant traction over the last half a decade at the same time creating a regulatory challenge.

**Bitcoin**

- Bitcoin is a snippet of codes based on algorithm first identified in a self authored paper by Satoshi Nakamoto (a fictions name for a group of geeks).
- The creation and transfer of bitcoins is based on open source cryptographic protocol managed in a decentralized manner.
- Bitcoin network shares a public ledger called the “block chain”. The ledger contains details of every transaction processed thereby, allowing user’s computer to verify the validity of each transaction.
- The authenticity of each transaction is protected by digital signatures corresponding to the sending addresses, permitting all users to have full control over sending bitcoins from their own bitcoin addresses.
- Anyone can process transactions using the computing power of specialized hardware. This process is called “mining”.

**How Legal Are Bitcoins**

- There are still no clear regulations on cryptocurrencies and bitcoin exchanges. The RBI advises caution on its use. Hence, bitcoin has not been clearly declared illegal in India.
- The RBI has so far issued three notifications pertaining to bitcoin and other virtual currencies (VC). In all these starting December 2013, the RBI has cautioned users, holders and traders on the risk of
these currencies and clarified that it has not given any licence or authorisation to any entity or company to operate such schemes or deals.

- After repeated cautionary circulars from the apex bank, in April 2017 the government set up an inter-disciplinary committee-chaired by special secretary (economic affairs) to examine the existing framework of virtual currencies.

- The committee was supposed to submit its report within 3 months. The committee was set up to take stock of the present status of virtual currencies both in India and globally, examine the existing global regulatory and legal structures governing virtual currencies, suggest measures for dealing with such virtual currencies including issues relating to consumer protection, money laundering and examine any other matter related to virtual currencies that may be relevant.

- In December 2017, finance minister told that the government doesn't consider bitcoin as a legal tender and it is working on recommendations for such currencies.

- Meanwhile, Securities Exchange Board of India (Sebi) on 20 December said that if bitcoin is considered as a commodity derivative then Sebi might regulate it.

- Though there are still no clear regulations or proper jurisdiction, the income-tax department is clear that tax has to be paid on all cryptocurrency transactions.

Risks Posed By Virtual Currencies(VC's) Such As Bitcoins

- VCs being in digital form are stored in digital/electronic media that are called electronic wallets. Therefore they are prone to losses arising out of hacking, loss of password, compromise of access credentials, malware attack etc.

- Since they are not created by or traded through any authorised central registry or agency the loss of the e-wallet could result in the permanent loss of the VCs held in them.

- There is no underlying or backing of any asset for VCs. As such their value seems to be a matter of speculation. Huge volatility in the value of VCs has been noticed in the recent past. Thus the users are exposed to potential losses on account of such volatility in value.

- It is reported that VCs, such as Bitcoins are being traded on exchange platforms set up in various jurisdictions whose legal status is unclear. Hence, the traders of VCs on such platforms are exposed to legal as well as financial risks.

- There have been several reports/incidents of the usage of VCs, including Bitcoins, for illicit and illegal activities in several jurisdictions. The absence of information of counterparties in such peer-to-peer anonymous/ pseudonymous systems could subject the users to unintentional breaches of anti-money laundering and combating the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) laws.

Assessment

- Bitcoins are digital cash and decentralized, peer-to-peer payment system. Being volatile in nature, care has to be taken that a mechanism is devised to tackle risks associated with fraud and money laundering. Regulators will have to take steps to provide individuals and businesses with rules to integrate this new technology with the formal regulated financial systems.

- In general, bitcoins have a number of benefits, it significantly reduces transaction costs, enables the growth, ease and security of e-commerce and physical transactions, etc. Keeping pace with the changing times, Indian government will have to come out with appropriate amendments in the foreign exchange and information technology laws to specifically include bitcoins.
Questions
1. What are bitcoins and are they legal tender in India?
2. What are the dangers posed by trading in Bitcoins? Weigh their potential benefits against the potential risks?

7.2. Military Exercises

A. Ajeya Warrior
- India is going through exercise with the army of United Kingdom. The joint military exercise was held at Mahajan range in state of Rajasthan. The exercise is named as Ajeya Warrior 2017.
- This is the 3rd joint military exercise between the two countries. The Exercise is held once in two years alternatively in India and the UK.
- The aim of the Exercise is “to build and promote positive military relations between Indian and UK Army and to enhance their ability and interoperability to undertake joint tactical level operations in Counter Insurgency/Counter Terrorism Environment under United Nations Charter”.
- The 14-day exercise is scheduled to be conducted in multiple modes in order to achieve complete integration between the two contingents at every stage.

B. Ekuverin
- Since 2009, the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force have been conducting Exercise Ekuverin - meaning ‘friends’ in the Dhivehi language. This exercise is held alternatively in India and Maldives.
- This is the 8th exercise of the joint annual training and focuses to enhance interoperability between the two forces for counter-terrorist operations in semi urban environment.
- Maldives shares very close ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and commercial ties with India. Exercise Ekuverin helps in further strengthening of the ties between the two nations.

C. Naseem-al-bahr
- Indian Naval Ships Trikand and Teg are deployed to Oman for bilateral exercise ‘Naseem Al Bahr’ or ‘Sea Breeze’. This exercise is the 11th edition and has been a biennial feature since 1993.
- The Indian Navy ships along with four Royal Navy ships of Oman - Al Rasikh, Khassab, Al Mubashir and Al Bushra - sailed for the sea phase of the exercise where for the first time an Indian Navy submarine as well as the versatile P8I- long range maritime aircraft were participating.
- India has an ancient maritime tradition and maritime interaction with Oman dates back to over 4000 years B.C.
- Bilateral relation between Indian and Oman were formally established with signing of a 1953 Indo-Oman Treaty of friendship, Navigation and Commerce, a first between India and an Arab country.
- Since then Naval exercises have contributed to strengthening of bilateral ties between India and Sultanate of Oman. The first exercise Indian Navy with Royal Navy of Oman was conducted in 1993 and this year marks 24 years of Indian Navy -Royal Navy of Oman bilateral exercises.
The signing of an MoU on Defence Cooperation in Dec 2005 and subsequent establishment of the Joint Military Cooperation in Mar 2006 has set the foundation for increased defence cooperation. The naval cooperation between the countries has gradually increased in scope and scale.

7.3. **BRO Builds Two Bridges In Arunachal Pradesh**

- There are close to 150 strategic bridges being constructed in the state to provide quick mobility to troops and supplies towards the LAC and act as alternative routes in case one gets destroyed during a conflict.
- Bridges are an important requirement of Arunachal, because the area is prevalent with rivers, including the Brahmaputra tributaries, besides nallahs.
- Due to monsoon and flash floods most of the state's border regions are cut off. These bridges will ensure all-year connectivity to the strategic roads located along the LAC in the state.
- A similar border infrastructure for better connectivity is also being created in the neighbouring state of Sikkim, following the Doklam standoff.

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The Border Roads Organisation (BRO), under the Defence Ministry, is constructing 410 bridges of strategic importance for stronger connectivity to the 3440-km long LAC from Ladakh to Arunachal.

- The first bridge inaugurated is a 300m-long Deopani Bridge. It is located over the Deopani River in Ro-ing-Hunli road and links Lower Dibang Valley with Upper Dibang Valley and Assam. The bridge is important because during monsoon the two districts are cut off from each other. It will also connect further north to Mipi and Dembuen at the LAC.
- The second bridge inaugurated is the Injupani Bridge between Roing and Paya in the Lower Dibang Valley. South of Roing is the 9.15 km long Dhola Sadiya Bridge constructed across Lohit River.
- Earlier this year, the bridge on the Tinsukia (Assam) - Roing road was inaugurated by Prime Minister.
- Merely having the Dhola Sadiya bridge for connectivity in the region was not enough therefore the Deopani Bridge among others had to be constructed. Located west of the Deopani Bridge is Pasighat in Arunachal's East Siang district.
- The BRO is connecting Pasighat with Roing by constructing a 5.7 km-long bridge, which is to be completed by March 2018. Pasighat will get connected to Dibrugarh, Assam, located south of it, by the Bogibeel Bridge across the Brahmaputra. And Dibrugarh is connected to Tinsukia.
- On the other hand in J&K there are about 100 bridges are under construction. Also 25 bridges in Himachal Pradesh and 55 Uttarakhand are under process.
- These are two-laned road bridges and of class 70 which is capable of bearing heavy loads as tanks. By the construction of these bridges, connectivity and movement will be increased.
- All this is a part of larger strategy to strengthen the connectivity across the LAC and to counter the Chinese infrastructurally as well as strategically across the LAC border.

**About Border Roads Organisation (BRO)**

- The BRO was formed on 7 May 1960 to secure India's borders and develop infrastructure in remote areas of the north and north-east states of the country.
- In order to ensure coordination and expeditious execution of projects, the Government of India set up the Border Roads Development Board (BRDB) with the Prime Minister as Chairman and Defence Minister as Deputy Chairman.
Today, the board exercises the financial and other powers of a Department of Government of India and is chaired by the Raksha Rajya Mantri (RRM).

In a bid to boost border connectivity, BRO has been entirely brought under the Ministry of Defence. Until year 2014-15, it received funds from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

The BRO consists of Border Roads Wing in the Ministry of Defence and the General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF). GREF-- the execution force under the Ministry of Defence, consists of officers from Indian Army Corps of Engineers who are posted to GREF.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) develops and maintains road networks in India's border areas and friendly neighbouring countries.

Currently, the organisation maintains operations in twenty-one states, one UT (Andaman and Nicobar Islands) and neighbouring countries such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka.

In 2017, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has constructed the world's highest motorable road in Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, passing through Umlingla Top at a height of over 19,300 feet.

The feat was achieved under ‘Project Himank’ of the organisation.

The BRO operates and maintains over 32,885 kilometres of roads and about 12,200 meters of permanent bridges in the country. The BRO is also in charge of maintenance of its road networks.
8. **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

8.1. **Launch of National Strategic Plan (2017-24), Mission “SAMPARK” on AIDS Day**

- On the occasion of World AIDS Day, Minister of State for Health and Family Welfare Anupriya Patel launched the National Strategic Plan 2017-24 and Mission “SAMPARK”, to trace those who are Left to Follow Up and needed to be brought under ART (Anti retroviral therapy).

- The National Strategic Plan 2017-24 will pave a roadmap not only for achieving the target of 90:90:90 but also strive along with partners towards fast track strategy of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

- **90:90:90 strategy**
  - It is a new HIV treatment narrative of UN AIDS programme.
  - The strategy calls for 90% of HIV-infected individuals to be diagnosed by 2020, 90% of whom will be on anti-retroviral therapy (ART) and 90% of whom will achieve sustained virologic suppression.

8.2. **Akash Missile Tested With Indigenous Radio Frequency Seeker**

- **Surface-to-air missile Akash** was successfully test fired with an indigenous radio frequency seeker. The missile was successfully launched from the Launch Complex-III at Integrated Test Range at Chandipur in Odisha.

- This is the **first surface-to-air missile with indigenous seeker** that has been test-fired. Radio frequency seekers, required for all missiles that have a range less than 300-km (called tactical/battlefield missiles), help missiles track and strike targets with accuracy. With this success, India has achieved the capability of making any type of surface-to-air missile.

- **AKASH MISSILE:** Akash is a surface-to-air missile with an intercept range of 30 km. Akash flies at supersonic speed, reaching around Mach 2.5. It can reach an altitude of 18 km and can be fired from both tracked and wheeled platforms.

8.3. **Discovery Of New Form Of Matter- Excitonium**

- Scientists have proven the existence of **new form of matter called excitonium** - which was first theorised almost 50 years ago.

- Excitonium is a **condensate** - it exhibits macroscopic quantum phenomena, like a superconductor or superfluid, or insulating electronic crystal. It is made up of excitons, particles that are formed in a very strange quantum mechanical pairing, namely that of an escaped electron and the hole it left behind.

- Scientists confirmed the existence of excitonium after analyzing crystals belonging to the **transition metal Dichalcogenide Titanium Diselenide, or 1T-TiSe2.**

- **Formation:**
  - The odd quantum mechanical pairing among the excitons lends excitonium unique macroscopic quantum properties, similar to the properties of a superconductor or insulating electronic crystal.
  - Semiconductors feature bands of energy called valence bands. The bands are full of electrons. When electrons on the edge of the valence bands get excited they can jump the energy gap to the neighboring conduction band, a band without electrons. The escaped electron leaves behind a hole.
8.4. **INS Kalvari Commissioned Into The Indian Navy**

- India's first modern conventional submarine, INS Kalvari, was inducted into the Navy. Kalvari is the first of the six Scorpene-class submarines that will be handed over by shipbuilder Mazagon Dock Limited (MDL) to the Navy. The submarines, designed by French naval defence and energy company DCNS.
- **Kalvari is a potent Man o’ War** capable of undertaking offensive operations spanning across the entire spectrum of Maritime Warfare. It also serves the need of disaster management to combating piracy, terrorism via sea, piracy, drug smuggling or illegal fishing. The Navy last inducted conventional **diesel-electric submarine INS Sindhushastra**.
- Kalvari, named after a deep sea tiger shark, carries the sea **skimming SM 39 Exocet missiles** and the heavyweight wire guided Surface and Underwater Target (SUT) torpedoes. For **self-defence, it has mobile anti-torpedo decoys**.

8.5. **Sentinel-5p Satellite**

- Sentinel-5P, a European satellite tracking the levels air pollutants around the world has beamed back new views of the Earth's atmosphere, including images of pollution drifting away from power plants in India. The worst of this pollution runs from north of Patna in Bihar to south of Raipur in Chhattisgarh. The Sentinel-5P satellite is designed to make daily global maps of the gases and particles that pollute the air.

**About The Satellite**

- Sentinel-5P is the latest spacecraft in a fleet of Earth observers being commissioned by the European Union and the European Space Agency.
- It was launched into an 824-kilometre high orbit by a Russian rocket in October 2017.
- **It carries an instrument called Tropomi** – a spectrometer that observes the reflected sunlight coming up from the Earth, analysing its many different colours.
- This helps detect the presence of trace gases such as nitrogen dioxide, ozone, sulphur dioxide, methane, and carbon monoxide in the atmosphere.
8.6. **New Graphene-Based Battery Charges Five Times Faster**

- Scientists have developed a new graphene-based battery material with charging speed five times faster than today's lithium-ion batteries.
- Standard lithium batteries require charging time of at least an hour to fully charge, even with quick charging technology. In theory, a battery based on the "graphene ball" material requires only 12 minutes to fully charge. This "graphene ball" was utilised for both the anode protective layer and cathode materials. This ensured an increase of charging capacity, decrease of charging time as well as stable temperatures.
- **About Graphene:** Graphene, a sheet of carbon atoms bound together in a honeycomb lattice pattern, is hugely recognized as a “wonder material” due to the myriad of astonishing attributes it holds. It is a potent conductor of electrical and thermal energy, extremely lightweight chemically inert, and flexible with a large surface area. It is also considered eco-friendly and sustainable, with unlimited possibilities for numerous applications.

8.7. **The World Health Organisation Has Declared Gabon A "Polio-Free Country"**

- The World Health Organisation has declared Gabon a "polio-free country. Now the disease is endemic only in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Poliomyelitis (polio) is a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and cause paralysis.
- Initial symptoms of polio include fever, fatigue, headache, vomiting, stiffness in the neck, and pain in the limbs. In a small proportion of cases, the disease causes paralysis, which is often permanent. There is no cure for Polio it can only be prevented by immunization.
- There are two types of vaccine that protect against polio: inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) and oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV). IPV is given as an injection in the leg or arm, depending on the patient's age. Polio vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines. Most people should get polio vaccine when they are children.
8.8. NASA Find First Alien Solar System With As Many Planets As Our Own

- Scientists on NASA Kepler mission has spotted an eighth planet around a distant star, making it the first alien solar system known to host as many planets as our own.

- The newfound world orbits a star named Kepler 90, which is larger and hotter than the sun and lies 2,500 light years from Earth in the constellation of Draco.

- Known as Kepler 90i, the freshly-discovered world is smallest of the eight now known to circle the star, and while it is probably rocky, it is a third larger than Earth and searingly hot at more than 420 degree Celsius.

- With the discovery of eighth planet ties Kepler 90 with our own solar system for having the most known planets.
8.9. **Drug Controller Allows Indian Firm To Conduct Phase 1 Trials For Zika Vaccine**

- The Drugs Controller General of India has granted permission to an Indian firm to conduct Phase-I clinical trials for a Zika vaccine.

- **About Zika:**
  - Zika virus is an emerging **mosquito-borne virus** that was **first** identified in **Uganda** in 1947 in rhesus monkeys. It was subsequently identified in humans in 1952 in Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania. Outbreaks of Zika virus disease have been recorded in **Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific**. It was first isolated from Rhesus monkeys in **Zika forest** near Lake Victoria in Uganda.
  - Zika virus is transmitted to people through the bite of an infected mosquito **Aedes aegypti** in tropical regions. This is the same mosquito that transmits **Dengue, Chikungunya and Yellow fever**.

- **About Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI):**
  - DCGI under gamut of Central Drugs Standard Control Organization (CDSCO) is responsible for approval of licenses of specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, vaccines, IV fluids and sera in India.
  - DCGI lays down standards and quality of manufacturing, selling, import and distribution of drugs in India.
  - It acts as appellate authority in case of any dispute regarding quality of drugs.
  - It brings about uniformity in enforcement of Drugs and Cosmetics Act.
  - It trains Drug Analysts deputed by State Drug Control Laboratories and other Institutions.

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8.10. **China Successfully Launches Remote Sensing Satellites**

- China has successfully launched remote sensing satellites to conduct electromagnetic environmental probes. The satellites were launched on a Long March-2C carrier rocket from Xichang Satellite launch centre in the southwest Sichuan province.

- As the third batch of the **Yaogan-30 project**, the satellites will conduct electromagnetic environmental probes and other experiments. The launch is the **260th mission** of the Long March rocket family.
Yaogan-30 project: Yaogan-30 is a Remote Sensing Satellite programme of China. The electro-optical digital imaging satellites developed under it by China Academy of Space Technology (CAST). China claims that these satellites are intended for scientific experiments, land survey, crop yield assessment, and disaster monitoring.

Remote sensing: It generally refers to use of sensor technologies to detect objects. The remote sensing satellites collect data by detecting energy reflected from Earth.

8.11. ISRO, NASA Jointly Working On Synthetic Aperture Radar Imaging Satellite

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) of NASA are jointly working on the development of NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR), a Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar Imaging Satellite.

About NISAR satellite:
- The NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar, or NISAR, satellite is designed to observe and take measurements of some of the planet's most complex processes, including ecosystem disturbances, ice-sheet collapse, and natural hazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides.
- Data collected from NISAR will reveal information about the evolution and state of Earth's crust, help scientists better understand our planet's processes and changing climate, and aid future resource and hazard management.

8.12. India Successfully Test-Fires Supersonic Interceptor Missile

India successfully test-fired its indigenously developed Advanced Air Defence supersonic interceptor missile, capable of destroying any incoming ballistic missile in low altitude, from a test range in Odisha.

- This was the third supersonic interceptor test in which an incoming ballistic missile target was successfully intercepted, within 30 km altitude of the earth's atmosphere by an interceptor.
- The interceptor is a 7.5-meter long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and an electro-mechanical activator.


China has successfully launched its second Land Surveying Satellite LKW-2 into a preset orbit from Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in the Gobi desert. The satellite will be used for remote sensing exploration of land resources. It was launched on board of Long March-2D rocket. It was 259th mission of the Long March rocket series.

- The LKW-2 has been developed by China Academy of Space Technology (CAST). It is probably an electro-optical observation satellite based on military jiangbing-6 series.
- Long March 2D: It is also known as Chang Zheng 2D, is a Chinese orbital carrier rocket. It is a two stage carrier mainly used for launching LEO and SSO satellite. It is mainly launched from area 2B and 4 at Jiuquan satellite launch centre. It is two stage version of LAUNCH MARCH 4 launch vehicle.
8.14. Monkey Fever

- Also referred to as monkey fever by the local people, **Kyasanur forest disease (KFD)** is a tick borne viral haemorrhagic fever endemic in Karnataka.
- The virus causing the disease: **KFD virus (KFDV)** is a member of the genus Flavivirus and family Flaviviridae.
- The similarity with Russian spring-summer encephalitis was noted and the possibility of migratory birds carrying the disease was raised. There are a variety of animals thought to be reservoir hosts for the disease, including porcupines, rats, squirrels, mice and shrews.
- The vector for disease transmission is **Haemaphysalis spinigera**, a forest tick. Humans contract infection from the bite of nymphs of the tick.

### Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) Virus Ecology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The hard tick <em>Haemaphysalis spinigera</em> is the reservoir and vector of Kyasanur Forest Disease Virus (KFDV). Once infected, ticks remain so for life and are able to pass KFDV to offspring via the egg.</th>
<th>Transmission of KFDV to humans may occur after a tick bite or contact with an infected animal, most commonly a sick or recently dead monkey. No person-to-person transmission has been described.</th>
<th>Human cases occur more frequently in drier months (Nov-Jun) and in Southwest and South India.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Monkeys and small mammals are common hosts for KFDV. Infection with KFDV can cause epizootics with high fatality in primates.

Local residents visit the forest to collect firewood and can be infected through tick bites. People with recreational or occupational exposure to rural and outdoor settings (e.g., hunters, farmers, people making charcoal) in Karnataka State and South India are potentially at risk for infection.

8.15. What Is CYBORG

- The term Cyborg was first coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan S. kline to describe man-machine system in which the control mechanism of the human portion are modified externally by drugs or regulatory devices so that the being can live in an environment different from the normal one .
- Cyborg is short for cybernetic organism is no longer an imaginary organism but an organism with organic and biomechatronic body parts that is partly human and partly machine .They include people with cochlear implants, cardiac pacemakers, contact lenses that makes life easier for humans ,in a way the two work together to improve human capability.
- The term cyborg is not the same thing as bionic, bio-robot or android. It applies to an organism that has restored function or enhanced abilities due to the integration of some artificial component or technology that relies on some sort of feedback. While cyborgs are commonly thought of as mammals, including humans, they might also conceivably be any kind of organism.
9. ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

9.1. India Awarded Certificate of Commendation by CITES

- India has been awarded with the Certificate of Commendation for its exemplary enforcement action in its regional and global effort to combat illegal wildlife trade. The award was given to Wildlife Crime Control Bureau by the Convention on Illegal Trade on Endangered Species (CITES) at Geneva.

- The award has been presented to WCCB for its efforts in conducting and coordinating a species specific wildlife enforcement Operation, codenamed “Operation Save Kurma” under “Operation Thunderbird”.

- **OPERATION SAVE KURMA**: It was species specific operation on turtles. The operation was conducted to combat the proliferating illegal trade of live turtles and its parts from the country to destinations abroad. The operation was also aimed to invite attention of the enforcement agencies towards such illegal trade. WCCB had worked in close collaboration with regional law enforcement agencies of different states.

- **OPERATION THUNDERBIRD**: Operation Thunderbird is the code name for INTERPOL’s multinational and multi-species enforcement operation. The operation brought about a unanimous approach by the state enforcement agencies in the fight against wildlife crime in the country.

### Wildlife Crime Control Bureau

- It is a statutory multi-disciplinary body established by the Government of India under the Ministry of Environment and Forests, to combat organized wildlife crime in the country.
- The Bureau has its headquarter in New Delhi and five regional offices at Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Jabalpur; three sub-regional offices at Guwahati, Amritsar and Cochin; and five border units at Ramanathapuram, Gorakhpur, Motihari, Nathula and Moreh.
- It is mandated to collect and collate intelligence related to organized wildlife crime and disseminate it to state and other enforcement agencies for immediate action.

### CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)

- It is an international agreement between governments. Its aim is to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- Annually, international wildlife trade is estimated to be worth billions of dollars and to include hundreds of millions of plant and animal specimens. The trade is diverse, ranging from live animals and plants to a vast array of wildlife products derived from them, including food products, exotic leather goods, wooden musical instruments, timber, tourist curios and medicines.
- Levels of exploitation of some animal and plant species are high and the trade in them, together with other factors, such as habitat loss, is capable of heavily depleting their populations and even bringing some species close to extinction.
- Many wildlife species in trade are not endangered, but the existence of an agreement to ensure the sustainability of the trade is important in order to safeguard these resources for the future.
- CITES is an international agreement to which States and regional economic integration organizations adhere voluntarily. States that have agreed to be bound by the Convention are known as Parties. Although CITES is legally binding on the Parties, it does not take the place of national laws. Rather it provides a framework to be respected by each Party, which has to adopt its own domestic legislation to
ensure that CITES is implemented at the national level.

9.2. **International Conference On Climate Change Held In Nepal**
- This conference was inaugurated to draw attention towards the adverse effects of global warming in the Hindu Kush mountain range. The Hindu Kush Himalaya Region is the lifeline to tens of millions of people and the impact of climate change and other human activities are adversely affecting the entire region.
- It was titled *Resilient Hindu Kush Himalaya: Developing Solutions towards a Sustainable Future for Asia.*
- Its purpose was to draw attention towards adverse effects of global warming in Hindu Kush mountain range.
- **Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH):** The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is the home of a series of the highest mountains on earth, including the world's highest and prominent peaks, Mt. Everest (Nepal) and K2 (Pakistan). The Hindu Kush-Himalayan region is separated for most of its length into two parallel and longitudinal mountain ranges due to the erosive power of the rivers Indus and Brahmaputra, each of which is characterized by mountain. The range north of the Indus and Brahmaputra is called the **High Himalayas.** The southern range is subdivided into three parallel zones: the **High Mountains, the Middle Mountains, and the Siwaliks.** Finally, the HKH region borders on lowlands in the south.

9.3. **FAME-India Scheme**
- The **FAME-India (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (hybrid &) Electric vehicles in India)** scheme is intended to support the hybrid/electric vehicles market development and its manufacturing eco-system to achieve self-sustenance.
- It was launched in 2015 under the National Electric Mobility Mission (NEMM).
- The FAME India Scheme is aimed at incentivising all vehicle segments i.e. 2 Wheeler, 3 Wheeler Auto, Passenger 4 Wheeler Vehicle, Light Commercial Vehicles and Buses. The scheme covers
Hybrid & Electric technologies like Mild Hybrid, Strong Hybrid, Plug in Hybrid & Battery Electric Vehicles.

- The scheme has four focus areas: **technology development, demand creation, pilot projects and charging infrastructure**.
- It is an important step needed in the longer run to clean up the air, reduce climate impacts and secure energy.

### National Electric Mobility Mission (NEMM)
- Government of India launched the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020 in 2013.
- It aims to achieve national fuel security by promoting hybrid and electric vehicles in the country. There is an ambitious target to achieve 6-7 million sales of hybrid and electric vehicles year on year from 2020 onwards.

### 9.4. Scientists At MIT Create Plants That Can Glow In The Dark
- MIT scientists have found a way to induce plants to give off dim light by embedding specialised nanoparticles into their leaves, a major step towards using plants to illuminate the workspace. This technology could also be used to provide low-intensity indoor lighting, or to transform trees into self-powered streetlights.
- The vision is to make a plant that will function as a desk lamp - a lamp that you don't have to plug in. The light is ultimately powered by the energy metabolism of the plant itself.
- **How They Did It?**
  - To create the glowing plants, the team turned to luciferase, the enzyme that gives fireflies their glow. Luciferase acts on a molecule called luciferin, causing it to emit light.
  - Another molecule called **Coenzyme A** helps the process along by removing a reaction by product that can inhibit luciferase activity.
  - They also prevent the components from reaching concentrations that could be toxic to the plants.
  - The researchers used silica nanoparticles about 10 nanometres in diameter to carry luciferase, and they used slightly larger particles of the polymers PLGA and chitosan to carry luciferin and coenzyme A, respectively.

### 9.5. Government Planning To Club Two Phases Of Ken-Betwa River Linking Project
- The Union Government is planning to club phase I and phase II of its ambitious Ken-Betwa interlinking river (ILR) project. The state government had allegedly warned that first phase of the project would not be allowed to take off if as it has not reworked to incorporate three other smaller projects – **Bina complex, Lower Orr dam and Kotha barrage projects** in the initial phase.
- **KEN-BETWA LINKING PROJECT**
The Ken-Betwa ILR project aims to transfer surplus water from the Ken River to the Betwa basin through a concrete canal to irrigate India’s worst drought-prone Bundelkhand region.

It is India’s first inter-State river interlinking project.

The main feature of the project is a 230-km long canal and a series of barrages and dams connecting the Ken and Betwa rivers. The key projects are Makodia and Dhaudhan dams.

On completion, the multipurpose project will benefit Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh in terms of meeting irrigation, drinking water and electricity needs of people across 6 districts in the two states.

9.6. Indian Government Favours Petroleum Coke Import Ban

- India is the world’s **biggest consumer** of petroleum coke, better known as petcoke, which is a dark solid carbon material that emits 11 percent more greenhouse gases than coal. Burning it also emits several times more sulphur dioxide, which causes lung diseases and acid rain.
- Petcoke, traditionally, was used in the U.S. to make aluminum and steel after its impurities were removed. But when those mills closed or moved to other countries, the need for petcoke waned, so they started exporting vast quantities of it to India.
- **Petcoke**: Petroleum coke, abbreviated coke or petcoke, is a final carbon-rich solid material that derives from oil refining, and is one type of the group of fuels referred to as cokes. Petcoke is the coke that, in particular, derives from a final cracking process—a thermo-based chemical engineering process that splits long chain hydrocarbons of petroleum into shorter chains—that takes place in units termed coker units.

9.7. International Conference On Ground Water

- An International conference was organized on the *Ground water issues in the country with a theme of “Ground water Vision 2030- Water Security, Challenges and Climate Change Adaptation”* from December 11 to 13, 2017.
- The conference has been organized by the National Institute of Hydrology (NIH), Roorkee and Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) under the aegis of Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation, Government of India.
- The Conference took stock of present status and challenges of Groundwater management in the country under the changing water use and climatic scenarios.
- The Conference took place at a time when water scenario in the country, especially the ground water scenario, is getting worse day by day. During the past decades, groundwater usage in the country has grown many folds and **today 80% of the rural domestic needs and 65% of the irrigation water requirement and 50% of industrial and urban water needs are sourced from our ground water resources**.
- **Over exploitation of ground water** has started threatening the sustenance of agricultural activities in many key regions in the country including Punjab, Bundelkhand and Rajasthan posing a grave threat to the food security in future. Moreover, climate change is expected to alter the
ground water recharge regimes across the country due to increase in extreme rainfall events. Over exploitation of ground water has also started affecting the ground water quality in many areas from the geogenic source of contaminants such as arsenic.

9.8. **NDMA conducts Training of Trainers for Sendai Framework**

- The three-day programme was organised by the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction-Global Education and Training Institute (UNISDR-GETI) to sensitise various Central Ministries and Departments on utilisation of Sendai Monitor for developing action plans for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), 2015-2030, is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda and identifies targets and priority actions towards reducing disaster risks and implementing development that is both resilient and sustainable. India, being a signatory to the SFDRR, is committed to work towards achieving the targets enshrined in the Framework.
- In June 2016, India became one of the first countries to align its National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) with the SFDRR, which clearly identifies regional, national and local targets along with short, medium and long-term timelines.
- This training programme aims to build the capacity of the participants to utilise defined indicators to monitor the progress of the Sendai targets. Training modules at the programme would also enable them to lead consultations and train others on the monitoring of the Sendai Framework Targets.

9.9. **Blanket Ban On Plastic Items In Towns Along Banks Of Ganga**

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has imposed a complete ban on plastic items like carry bags, plates and cutlery in towns located on the banks of the River Ganga like Haridwar and Rishikesh.
- The Green Tribunal also imposed Rs 5,000 fine on those violating the order and said action will be taken against erring officials too.
- It passed the direction after noting that despite its earlier order, plastic was being used in these areas causing pollution to the holy river.

9.10. **New Scorpion Species Discovered**

- Scientists have discovered new scorpion species named Schaller’s wood scorpion (Liocheles schalleri) from at Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary, Tripura.
- It has been named in honour of celebrated wildlife biologist George Schaller who has studied wildlife across the world, including the snow leopards of the Himalayas and central India’s tigers.
- Also called dwarf scorpions, wood scorpions are unlike the large scorpions we commonly see. Wood scorpions are only about three cm long and live in small burrows on the ground, making them very difficult to spot.
- There are records of wood scorpions from Kerala, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana but we do not know what species they are.
- India is home to more than 125 species of scorpions. Nine of India’s 11 wood scorpions are endemic to the country.
9.11. **Biodiversity Under Alien Attack**

- The Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) has for the first time compiled a list of **alien invasive animal species**, totalling 157.
- This number **excludes invasive microbe species**. Of the 157 species, 58 are found on land and in freshwater habitats, while 99 are in the marine ecosystem.
- Just as **alien plant species** such as *Parthenium hysterophorus* (cotton grass) and *Lantana camara* (Lantana) are known to harm agriculture and biodiversity, invasive animal species pose a threat to biodiversity and human well-being.
- According to experts, alien species become ‘invasive’ when they are introduced deliberately or accidentally outside their natural areas, where they out-compete the native species and upset the ecological balance.

- **Paracoccus marginatus** (Papaya Mealy Bug), which belongs to Mexico and Central America, is believed to have destroyed huge crops of papaya in Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu.
- **Phenacoccus solenopsis** (Cotton Mealybug) is a native of North America but has severely affected cotton crops in the Deccan. Among the invasive fish species, **Pterygoplichthys pardalis** (Amazon sailfin catfish) has been destroying fish populations in the wetlands of Kolkata.
- **Achatina fulica** (African apple snail) is said to be most invasive among all alien fauna. It is a mollusc and was first reported in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. But today it is found all across the country and is threatening the habitats of several native species.
- Among the alien invasive marine species, the genus **Ascidia** accounts for the
maximum number of species,

9.12. **Kaleshwaram Irrigation Project Gets Environmental Nod**

- The Expert Appraisal Committee of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has accorded environmental clearance for the Kaleshwaram irrigation project in Telangana.
- The project, jointly implemented by Maharashtra and Telangana, aims to divert water from the Godavari river basin to Telangana.
- While according clearance, the committee directed that there was a need to plan a greenbelt and reservoir rim treatment in consultation with the State Forest Department, focussing on local indigenous species. It wanted the government to take up construction work after following due procedure of Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in land Acquisition, Rehabilitation Act, 2013.
- The State was directed to ensure that at no point of time, the losers of land have any grievances on compensation and the displacement shall be taken up only after completing the process of land acquisition, including providing full compensation to all the project oustees.
- It also called upon the State to file six monthly compliance reports to MoEF, Chennai, until completion of the modernisation works.
- The project envisages construction of a barrage across River Godavari near Madigadda village in Karimnagar district of Telangana. This aims to divert 180 TMC of water for providing irrigation facility in 7.38 lakh hectares covering seven districts of Adilabad, Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Rangareddy districts.
- The project will have canal system of about 1,832 km. The 81 km long tunnel built between Yellampally barrage and Mallannasagar reservoir under this project will be the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia after completion.
- Apart from these, the project seeks to provide drinking water facility for Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

- The **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013** (also Land Acquisition Act, 2013) regulates land acquisition and lays down the procedure and rules for granting compensation, rehabilitation and resettlement to the affected persons in India.
- The Act has provisions to provide fair compensation to those whose land is taken away, brings transparency to the process of acquisition of land to set up factories or buildings, infrastructural projects and assures rehabilitation of those affected. The Act establishes regulations for land acquisition as a part of India's massive industrialisation drive driven by public-private partnership.
9.13. **Environment Ministry Launches Pilot Project For Beach Clean-Up**

- To enhance standards of cleanliness on beaches, the environment ministry has launched a pilot project for its clean-up and development.
- Under the project, each state or union territory has been asked to nominate a beach which will be funded through the ongoing Integrated Coastal Management Programme. They would also strive for the 'Blue Flag' certification for such identified beaches.
- The 'Blue Flag' is a certification by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) that a beach, marina or sustainable boating tourism operator, meets its stringent standards.


- The Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation (MDWS) launched ‘Ganga Gram’ – a project for sanitation based integrated development of all 4470 villages along the River Ganga.
- Ganga Gram vision is an integrated approach for holistic development of villages situated on the banks of River Ganga with active participation of the villagers. After achieving ODF target in Ganga Villages, implementation of solid and liquid waste management and other integrated activities are remaining tasks.
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation is the nodal agency for implementation of the Ganga Gram Project.
- For the Ganga Gram Project the Ministry works in close coordination with NMCG, various Ministries, State Government and Districts.

9.15. **CPCB Likely To Go For New Devices To Study Delhi Air Quality**

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has taken up the responsibility to strengthen the ground-level monitoring first on a priority basis. It may consider application of the LiDAR-like monitoring in later stages to have better strategic planning in air pollution control in Delhi-NCR.
- LiDAR is a monitoring system for mapping and modelling in micro-topography, forestry, agriculture, meteorology and environmental pollution. Elastic Backscatter LiDAR and Raman LiDAR are used in monitoring air pollutants vertically.
- The CPCB and IMD had used the Elastic Backscatter LiDAR in Delhi during the 2010 Commonwealth Games and the data was utilised in 3D modelling and forecasting during the games.
- LiDAR projects laser beams towards the sky. Subsequently, the interplay of light with the objects falling on its path through absorption, reflection, scattering help determine the composition of suspended particulates.

**LIDAR, which stands for Light Detection and Ranging, is a remote sensing method that uses light in the form of a pulsed laser to measure ranges (variable distances) to the Earth.** These light pulses—combined with other data recorded by the airborne system— generate precise, three-dimensional information about the shape of the Earth and its surface characteristics.

- Two types of LiDAR are topographic and bathymetric. Topographic LiDAR typically uses a near-infrared laser to map the land, while bathymetric LiDAR uses
water-penetrating green light to measure seafloor and riverbed elevations.

- LIDAR systems allow scientists and mapping professionals to examine both natural and manmade environments with accuracy, precision, and flexibility.

**Central Pollution Control Board:**
The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) of India is a statutory organisation under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC). It was established in 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

CPCB is also entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981. It serves as a field formation and also provides technical services to the Ministry of Environment and Forests under the provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.

It co-ordinates the activities of the State Pollution Control Boards by providing technical assistance and guidance and also resolves disputes among them. It is the apex organisation in the field of pollution control, as a technical wing of MoEF.

**Important Functions of CPCB:**
1. Air quality/pollution
2. Water quality/pollution
3. Municipal Solid Waste rules
4. Noise Pollution/Rules
5. Environmental Data Statistics

**9.16. Regional Project to Tackle Stubble Burning**

- In another significant step to combat climate change, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has approved a regional project on ‘Climate Resilience Building among Farmers through Crop Residue Management’ under the National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC).

- The first phase of the project has been approved for the States of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. The project will leverage approximately three times the approved amount with contribution from the States as well as farmers.

- The project not only aims to mitigate climate change impacts and enhance adaptive capacity, but will also counter the adverse environmental impacts that arise from burning stubble. The project will be implemented following a phased approach.

- Initially, awareness generation and capacity building activities will be undertaken to encourage farmers to adopt alternate practices which would also help diversify livelihood options and enhance farmer’s income.

- A slew of technological interventions will be undertaken for timely management of crop residue in addition to effective utilisation of existing machineries. Implementable and sustainable entrepreneurship models will be created in rural areas through upscaling successful initiatives and innovative ideas.

- The problem of crop residue burning has been intensifying over the years, with Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh being the major burning hotspots. Increased mechanization, declining number of livestock, long period required for composting and no economically viable alternate use of residues are some of the reasons for residues being burnt in field. This not only has
implications for global warming, but also has an adverse impact on air quality, soil health and human health.

### National Adaptation Fund on Climate Change
- The objective of the fund is to assist State and Union Territories that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change in meeting the cost of adaptation. The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has been appointed as National Implementing Entity (NIE) responsible for implementation of adaptation projects under the (NAFCC)
- The Adaptation Fund is to assist States that are particularly vulnerable, based on the needs and priorities identified under the State Action Plan on Climate Change (SAPCC) and the relevant Missions under National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).