Index

VAJIRAM & RAVI

1. SOCIAL ISSUES

1. eVIN PROJECT OF HEALTH MINISTRY

News:

- eVIN Project of Health Ministry becomes global best practise in immunization.

- Recently, members of a five country international delegation visited India to learn more about the global best practice of *eVIN (electronic vaccine intelligence network)* project of the Health Ministry and to understand how it is being implemented in the country and the ways in which it be replicated in their own countries.

- Representatives from Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal and Thailand are on a visit to India to study the project.

About eVIN Project:

- eVIN is an indigenously developed technology system in India that digitizes vaccine stocks and monitors the temperature of the cold chain through a smartphone application.

- The innovative eVIN is presently being implemented across twelve states in India. eVIN aims to support the Government of India's Universal Immunization Programme by providing real-time information on vaccine stocks and flows, and storage temperatures across all cold chain points in these states.

- The technological innovation is implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

- eVIN aims to strengthen the evidence base for improved policy-making in vaccine delivery, procurement and planning for new antigens in India.

- eVIN provides an integrated solution to address widespread inequities in vaccine coverage by supporting state governments in overcoming constraints of infrastructure, monitoring and management information systems and human resources, often resulting in overstocking and stock-outs of vaccines in storage centres.

- The integrated solution combines:
  - ➤ **Technology**: to facilitate evidence-based decision-making by making available online real-time information on vaccine stocks and storage temperature through the eVIN application software and temperature loggers;
  - ➤ **Governance**: to ensure efficient vaccine logistics management by systemizing record keeping through standardizing stock and distribution registers; identifying gaps and improving clarity on vaccine cold chain network; drawing attention to infrastructure upgrades; developing standard operating procedures; and encouraging good practices;
  - ➤ **Human Resources**: to empower the state cold chain network by building the capacities of government cold chain handlers; and deploying vaccine and cold chain managers in every district for constant support to estimate vaccine requirements, supervise cold chain handlers and coordinate with cold chain technicians across the district.

- eVIN empowers the cold chain handlers by building technical capacities and providing a robust decision-making tool for cold chain managers through a complete overview of vaccine replenishment times, supply and consumption patterns.

- By streamlining the vaccine flow network, eVIN is a powerful contribution to strengthening health systems and ensures equity through easy and timely availability of vaccines to all children.

2. NITI AAYOG EMPHASIZES MORE ON RESEARCH

News:

- In a three-year vision document, prepared by NITI Aayog, suggestions have been made to ensure that investments in research better translate to more products and bolster "innovation and development".

- The NITI Aayog suggestions stem from a three-year vision document that outlines targets and goals the Ministries — from railways to environment — ought to achieve by 2020.

Proposals:

- Faculty at "world class" institutions prioritise research and be allowed to "reduce their teaching responsibility," if required.

- Such universities also ought to be allowed to recruit research staff from abroad and be encouraged to compete for research projects from industry. The so-called 'world class universities' are part of a government-outlined plan to raise funding for 10 public and 10 private universities and mould them into institutions that rank among the world's best.

- Universities ought to be ranked according to metrics such as teaching, research output and funding won from the private sector. Gradually, this model may be extended to bring other universities in the fold. It also pitches for a new 'National Science, Technology and Innovation Foundation' headed by a distinguished scientist. This will coordinate with science and technology departments, ministries, governments and private sector bodies and deliberate on national issues and recommend interventions.

- The organisation also proposes a database of all existing schemes related to science and technology across ministries and departments. Given the government's "limited funds" the NITI Aayog recommends research priorities to water management, agriculture, energy, waste management, health, connectivity and security.

Analysis:

- Currently, teachers and professors are overloaded with teaching activities and they get very less time for research activities. These suggestions would lessen the burden for faculties who are interested in research activities.

- Ability to recruit the research faculty from abroad would promote greater interaction with foreign universities, which in turn will help in building the required ecosystem in India. It would also promote the necessary competition among faculties.

- S&T projects are "different than those" in infrastructure primarily because they are riskier and take longer to fructify. Hence, developing clear guidelines for implementing these projects and administering a clear funding mechanism for government financing is laudable.

Conclusion:

- Suggestions, if implemented, would bring the necessary change to promote the research activities in Indian universities. However, Government must also walk the talk by allocating more resources to these universities.

3. MEASUREMENT OF LIVEABILITY INDEX OF CITIES TO BEGIN

News:

- Ministry of Urban Development will launch measuring of Liveability Index of cities based on indigenously evolved Index. To start with, Liveability Standards of 140 cities including 53 cities with population of one million and above and Smart Cities will be assessed.

- Cities will be assessed on 15 core parameters relating to Governance, social infrastructure pertaining to education, health and safety and security, economic aspects and physical infrastructure like housing, open spaces, land use, energy and water availability, solid waste management, pollution etc.

- Cities will be ranked based on Liveability Index that would cover a total of 79 aspects.

Analysis:

- Such rankings would promote a sense of healthy competition among cities and towns.

- They will be forced to focus their attention on improving governance and infrastructure availability.

- More than providing funds to State and City Governments, there is urgent need to accord priority for incentivizing implementation of reforms that have a far-reaching impact on governance and service delivery.

- Also, cities can't be run and managed from state capitals and secretariats. They should be made to stand on their own for improving performance, responsibility and accountability".

- In this context, this exercise is a forward step in the right direction.

4. PAN-INDIA IMPLEMENTATION OF MATERNITY BENEFIT PROGRAM

News:

- The Union Cabinet has given ex-post facto approval to Pan-India implementation of Maternity Benefit Program.

- The Program will provide compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives so that the women can take adequate rest before and after delivery and not be deprived of proper nutrition.

About the scheme:

Background:

- The Government of India is committed to ensure that every woman gets adequate support and health care during pregnancy and at the time of delivery and every newborn is immunized on time which is the foundation for better health of the mother and the newborn.

- Normally, the first pregnancy of a woman exposes her to new kinds of challenges and stress factors. Hence, the scheme intends to provide support to the mother for safe delivery and immunization of her first living child.

Objective of the Scheme:

- To provide partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child. The cash incentives provided would lead to improved health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mother (PW&LM) to reduce the effects of under-nutrition namely stunting, wasting and other related problems.

Target Group:

- All eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM), excluding the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers who are in regular employment with the Central Government or State Government or Public Sector Undertakings or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being.

- It has been decided to give the benefit of Rs. 5000/- to PW&LM in three instalments for the birth of the first live child by MWCD and the remaining cash incentive as per approved norms towards Maternity Benefit under existing programmes after institutional delivery so that on an average, a woman will get ₹ 6000/-.

- The conditional cash transfer scheme would be in DBT mode.

5. READER TITLED "RAISING HAPPY CHILDREN AND PROVIDING SAFE CHILDHOODS" RELEASED BY WCD MINISTRY

- The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed a reader titled "Raising Happy Children and Providing Safe Childhoods".

- It provides advisory guidelines to parents, teachers and community to protect children from being involved in delinquent behaviour through early detection, counselling and positive engagement.

- It draws upon basic principles laid down in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015, which provides a strong formal framework for dealing with children in conflict with the law throughout the criminal justice process.

- Young children experience their world through their relationships with parents, teachers, peers and other caregivers. Therefore, there is a need to create a warm, loving and nurturing environment where their physical, emotional and spiritual needs are recognized and honoured by their family, school and community so as to allow them to reach their full potential.

- Keeping the above in mind, the reader draws upon good practices across the world which have proved to be successful in keeping children safe and away from delinquent behaviour.

- Every child is different and deserves support that is specifically tailored to their own needs and circumstances. The reader suggests a broad framework for imbibing positive skills such as conflict resolution and violence prevention to keep them protected and help them achieve their full potential.

- The reader is divided into three parts wherein part-I is for parents and what they can do to prevent violence and crimes by children, followed by part-II and III for teachers and community members respectively. Each part briefly discusses few major problems that can push children on the wrong side of law, the early signs of this, what can be done to strengthen protection or intervene to reduce risks.

6. ODISHA'S SUALGIRI, SWALGIRI COMMUNITIES NOTIFIED AS SCHEDULED CASTES

News:

- Odisha's Sualgiri and Swalgiri communities have been notified as Scheduled Castes following President Pranab Mukherjee's assent to a new law.

- The president gave the nod to the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Act, 2017.

- As per the modified list for Odisha, the "Sabakhia, Sualgiri, Swalgiri" are notified Scheduled Castes.

Benefits that these communities can avail:

- The Constitution provides certain privileges and concessions to the members of Scheduled Castes notified under the provisions of Article 341 of the Constitution. The SC category status will entitle these communities to reservation in government jobs and admission in educational institutions, besides some other financial benefits.

- Some of the major schemes for the scheduled castes include post-matric scholarship, national overseas scholarship, Rajiv Gandhi national fellowship, concessional loans from National Scheduled Castes Finance and Development Corporation, hostel facilities for the SC boys and girls etc.

Inclusion Into SC List:

- The criteria and procedure followed for inclusion of a community/ caste in the list of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are as under:-

Criteria:

- Scheduled Castes (SCs):- Extreme social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of traditional practice of untouchability.

- Scheduled Tribes (STs):- Indication of primitive traits, distinctive culture, geographical isolation, shyness of contact with community at large and backwardness.

- Other Backward Classes (OBCs):- Social, educational, economic backwardness and inadequate representation in the Central Government posts and services.

Procedure:

- The Constitution of India empowers the Parliament of India to modify the list of notified scheduled castes, which upon receiving the assent of the President of India can be notified as Scheduled Castes.

- Under the provision of Article 341, list of SCs in relation to a states/UT is to be issued by a notified Order of the President after consulting concerned state Government.

- However, the clause (2) of Article 341 envisages that, any subsequent inclusion in or exclusion from the list of Scheduled Castes can be effected only through an Act of Parliament.

- Further, Government has laid down Modalities in June, 1999, as amended in June, 2002 for processing of modifications in the lists of SCs and STs.

- The Modalities envisage that only such proposals of the concerned State Governments / Union Territory Administrations, which have been agreed to by the Registrar General of India (RGI) and National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), in the case of SCs, and RGI & National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) in the case of STs, are further processed in accordance with provisions of clause (2) of Articles 341 and 342 respectively.

- Inclusion of communities/ castes in the Central List of OBCs is done on the advice of National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) as envisaged in Section (9) of NCBC Act, 1993.

7. INDIAN EXCLUSION REPORT (IXR), 2016

News:

- The 2016 Indian Exclusion Report (IXR) has been released by the Centre for Equity Studies (CES).

- The 2016 Report reviews exclusion with respect to four public goods: pensions for the elderly, digital access, agricultural land, and legal justice for under trials. It also profiles four highly vulnerable groups in terms of their access to these goods.

Key Highlights:

Vulnerable communities

- The Report profiles a number of vulnerable communities who have faced historical discrimination such as manual scavengers, the rural poor, urban street children and the homeless community of Delhi.

- Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims continue to be the worst-hit communities in terms of exclusion from access to public goods.

- The report has found out that the same historically disadvantaged groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, and persons with disabilities and age-related vulnerabilities continue to remain as the most severely and consistently excluded groups of the society.

Legal rights:

- The IXR points out that there is strong evidence of a bias in the judicial system against SCs, STs, Muslims and the poor. The findings of the report suggest that minorities, Dalits and Adivasis have reduced likelihood to get justice.

Agricultural Land:

- With the respect to the criteria of agricultural land as a public good, the report has found that the landowners to be invariably belonging to the upper castes, cultivators to be belonging to the middle castes.

- Dalits and Adivasis remain largely as the agricultural workers and landlessness.

- In addition, Adivasis constituted around 40% of all those displaced by the developmental activities.

- The report has highlighted that the Land reform efforts have not benefited Dalits, women or Muslims significantly. The land holdings of Dalits, Muslims and women were found to be meagre in size.

Internet reach:

- The report has observed that even though India has been ranked among the top five nations in terms of the number of internet users, almost 1.063 billion Indians were found to be offline.

- It has cited Poverty and geographic location to be the two major barriers to digital access.

- The Report has cited problems like poor infrastructure, inadequate institutional frameworks, low literacy in the targeted areas, and poor cooperation from government officials as the major reasons behind poor implementation of government schemes aimed at enhancing digital access.

- The Report has also cited the reluctance on the part of government to be a signatory to a non-binding UN Human Rights Council resolution to protect human rights on the Internet.

About IXR:

- The IXR is an annual report is the outcome of a number of scholars and policy analysts putting their heads together to examine the record of the government of India in ensuring inclusion – with regard to a number of government services – to a large mass of deprived peoples.

- It discusses, in terms of public goods, four essential aspects to living with dignity – pensions, legal justice, access to agricultural land and access to the digital medium.

- It scrutinises the exclusion of various communities from these and documents the socio-economic reasons behind it, while viewing it as the government's duty to provide equitable and universal access to these public goods for all citizens.

- In its third edition, IXR, apart from documenting digital exclusion, also studies how marginalised communities face discrimination and exclusion in government schemes like National Old Age Pension System, the Atal Yojana Pension and so on.

8. UGC APP TO FIGHT RAGGING

News:

- Union Human Resource Development launched an Anti-Ragging Mobile App introduced by the University Grants Commission (UGC). It will help students register complaints against the menace of ragging in the country. Previously, students were required to visit the website to register a complaint against ragging.

- The new app will work on android platform and will facilitate students to register a complaint against ragging instantaneously. Students can log in and register their complaints immediately. The complaint will be sent to the concerned authorities for timely action and the action will be initiated immediately.

9. INAUGURATION OF INTEGRATION OF ESANAD WITH CBSE'S ACADEMIC REPOSITORY

- External Affairs Minister, Electronics and Information Technology Minister and Human Resource Development Minister jointly inaugurated the integration of eSanad with CBSE's academic repository "Parinam Manjusha".

- eSanad is aimed at online verification of the documents with an objective to extend contactless, cashless and paperless document attestation/ apostille service to applicants in India as well as abroad.

- The integration OF e-Sanad with Parinam Manjusha will help the applicants avoid long travels and precious resources of time and money for getting their documents attested by the concerned authorities in States. It also allows filing the application online.

- eSanad has been designed and developed by NIC and will be implemented in phases. As a pilot run, the first phase of eSanadhas been started in five passport offices and presently it is in the process of being implemented in the Apostille/ Attestation Cell of the Ministry.

10. HIGH LEVEL COMMITTEE ON SCOUTS AND GUIDES SUBMITS REPORT

News:

- A seven-member High-Level Committee on Scouts and Guides has submitted its Final Report to Minister for State (Independent Charge) for Youth Affairs & Sports with various recommendations.

- After receiving various complaints from various sectors against the Bharat Scouts and Guides and Hindustan Scouts and Guides, sports ministry had constituted a seven-member High Level Committee under the leadership of Harsh Malhotra in October 2016 to look into the infrastructure and assets of the two recognized Scouts and Guides Organizations.

- The high level committee submitted its first interim report on January 31, 2017 recommending to make Scouts movement as an integral part of Youth movement.

Key recommendations:

- It has suggested the constitution of an Enquiry Committee to look into the complaints and submit its report. The Committee has also suggested has suggested that it is mandatory to revamp the Bharat Scout & Guides and Hindustan Scouts and Guides.

- The Committee has found a number of irregularities and anomalies in the management and financial management, which has been audited by the Chartered Accountant. The Committee stressed the need for streamlining the organisational set up of Bharat Scouts and Guides and Hindustan Scouts and Guides.

- It has further recommended that there should be a permanent monitoring Committee, which will periodically assess the activities of both the organisations and submit report to the Ministry.

- The Committee has also recommended that there should be government nominees on the Boards of both the organizations. Complaints have also been reported, regarding leakage of question papers related to Rashtrapati Puruskar (2016–2017) in Bharat Scouts and Guides.

The Bharat Scouts and Guides:

- The Bharat Scouts and Guides is a Registered Society under Societies Registrations Act. It is totally voluntary, non-political and secular Organization. The national headquarters of BSG is recognised by the Government of India.

- The Association describes its aims in its mission:

  ➢ The mission of Scouting is to contribute to the education of young people, through a value system based on the Scout Promise and Law to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society.

- Scout and Guide units are separate although they have some coeducational activities such as Jamborees, rallies, and conferences. Handicapped boys and girls also participate in the Scouting program.

---

11. A REPORT ON "FINANCIAL SECURITY FOR INDIA'S ELDERLY – THE IMPERATIVES"

News:

- Recently, PFRDA – CRISIL has released a report entitled "Financial security for India's elderly -The imperatives". According to the report, every 5th Indian by 2050 will be 60+ as compared to every 12th at present.

- The report emphasised that with such demographic transition, development of the underpenetrated pension market in India be initiated now, when the situation is ripe.

Key Highlights of the Report:

- By 2050, persons above the age of 60 would increase from 8.9% of the population now to 19.4%. In addition to this, percentage of people above 80 years is likely to increase from 0.9% to 2.8% by 2050. The report suggests that it is crucial to have a well-developed, self- sustaining pension system in the country where the inter-generational support within families is continuously declining.

- A developed pension sector not only reduces the fiscal burden on the exchequer, it also has a stabilising effect on the economy by promoting long-term savings combined with long-term

investments. The report emphasises that the government must focus on voluntary pension targeting the huge unorganised sector.

- The report suggest that to address the issues of low coverage, low contributions and persistency the government can look at providing (a) flexible payment and withdrawal options, (b) monetary incentives for the lower income strata, (c) exclusive pension schemes for women, and (d) improved financial literacy and intermediation.

- The report suggests that the current pension structure under Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme (IGNOAPS) for elderly below poverty line is sparing and varied across states. Thus, the government can evaluate a targeted pension scheme for the indigent poor.

- Regarding the organised sector, as per the report, the pension system under this sector is skewed towards debt, compared with global peers, which are strongly invested in equity. So, the report suggests improvement in its asset allocation.

- The report emphasises that the government should focus on the financial awareness of pension products in the country. While emphasising on financial literary the report suggests inclusion of personal finance and retirement planning in the formal education curriculum.

- The report suggest that sufficient incentivisation of intermediaries and consistency across pension products in terms of accounting valuation, taxation and disclosures, can contribute in the growth of the industry.

12. 'DARWAZA BAND' CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

News:

- A nationwide campaign 'Darwaza Band' was launched by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, which is aimed at promoting use of toilets and discouraging open defecation.

Highlights:

- The campaign will run under the Swachh Bharat Mission. It has been supported by the World Bank and is being rolled out countrywide immediately.

- It is designed to encourage behaviour change in men who have toilets but are not using them. A part of the campaign also features actor, Ms. Anushka Sharma, who will be seen encouraging women to stand up for this issue in their villages and assume a leadership role.

- Behaviour change has been the focus of Swachh Bharat Mission, which is being pursued through a countrywide comprehensive IEC (Information-Education-Communication) programme.

- Communication campaigns have been taken up both, at the central and State levels, for promoting sustained use of toilets and for sustaining the Open Defecation Free status achieved.

13. SWACHH BHARAT APP LAUNCHED

News:

- With the focus to involve tourists actively to become part of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India mission), ministry of culture launched 'Swachh Bharat App'. The app will help spreading awareness about government's cleanliness mission among the tourists visiting museum and monuments.

Key Highlights:

- Swachch Bharat App would soon be rolled out for 116 ASI monuments across the country with the help of which visitors would be able to report garbage on the premises.

- The devices installed in the monuments will connect to this app using Bluetooth. The devices will have a range of around 30 metres.

- When a tourist is in any monument or Museum, the app delivers the message about Swachh Bharat Abhiyan and asks to report the garbage around the premises.

- Once the App is started, it will ask to take photograph of the garbage and write the comment and just submit. It will be reported to the authority on the backend.

- The Swachh Bharat App will be monitored by the Ministry of Culture. The App is expected to promote cleanliness in the premises of ASI monuments.

14. WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY

- Every year, May 31 marks the World No Tobacco Day. This day promotes and encourages abstinence from any sort of tobacco products. An uncommon yet sincere symbol of World No Tobacco day is an ashtray bearing fresh flowers.

- The flowers signify life as opposed to the rising number of deaths due to tobacco consumption, amounting to more than 10 lakh deaths per year, in India.

- In 1988, World Health Assembly of WHO had passed a resolution calling for the celebration of World No Tobacco Day, every year on May 31.

- World No Tobacco Day is one of eight official global public health campaigns marked by the WHO. This year WHO has released a report ahead of World No Tobacco Day.

Key highlights of the report:

- In this report, WHO warned that the annual death toll of seven million people had jumped from four million at the turn of the century, making tobacco the world's single biggest cause of preventable death. And the death toll is expected to keep rising, with WHO bracing for more than one billion deaths this century.

- Tobacco use also brings an economic cost: WHO estimates that it drains more than $1.4 trillion (1.3 trillion Euros) from households and governments each year in healthcare expenditures and lost productivity, or nearly two per cent of the global gross domestic product.

- In addition to the health and economic costs linked to smoking, the WHO report for the first time delved into the environmental impact of everything from tobacco production to the Rsarette butts and other waste produced by smokers.

- The report detailed how growing tobacco often requires large quantities of fertilisers and pesticides, and it warned that tobacco farming had become the main cause of deforestation in several countries. This is largely due to the amount of wood needed for curing tobacco, with WHO estimating that one tree is needed for every 300 Rsarettes produced.

- The report also highlighted the pollution generated during the production, transport and distribution of tobacco products. It is estimated that the industry emits nearly four million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent annually - the same as around three million transatlantic flights. And waste from

the process contains over 7,000 toxic chemicals that poison the environment, including human carcinogens.

- Two thirds of the 15 billion Rsarettes sold each day are thrown on to the street or elsewhere in the environment, it said, adding that butts account for up to 40 per cent of all items collected in coastal and urban clean-ups.

15. MISCELLANEOUS:

A) REANG OF TRIPURA:

News:

- A professor of History at Tripura University has documented the traditions of the tribe Reang.

- A unique and detailed publication by Lincoln Reang, titled 'Mapping with respect to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Tripura', is being published by the Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.

- It is an attempt to document and preserve the cultural and social diversity of the Reang.

About Reang Community:

- Reang is a tribal community residing in Tripura. Traditionally, jhum (shifting) cultivation has been one of the primary agricultural activities of the Reang tribe. However, with land rights being granted, many members of the community have taken to ploughing or settled cultivation.

- The Reang dialect is of Tibetan-Burmese origin and is locally referred to as KauBru. Though there is no script for the language, some publications follow the Bengali or Roman script to keep the language alive.

- One of the unique dances of the Reang is the Hodaigiri/Hojagiri, in which a group of women balance themselves on earthen pitchers and manage other props. The performance is associated with the harvest. Education has been pressing a concern for the tribe. As per the 2001 census, 66.93% of the Reang population is illiterate.

B) IIT-Kharagpur signs MoU with Madhya Pradesh for measuring happiness index:

- IIT Kharagpur's Rekhi Centre of Excellence for the Science of Happiness has signed an MoU with Madhya Pradesh government to collaborate on the development of a Happiness Index for measuring the well-being of the people of the state.

- The MoU was signed with MP government's 'Rajya Anandam Sansthan' (Department of Happiness).

- IIT-KGP will develop the index and analyse data collected by the state government to assess the level of happiness and chalk out recommendations that can be used to enhance happiness, the statement said.

- IIT-KGP will also develop an online screening and assessment system in order to screen and identify suitable volunteers from the database of more than 30,000 people who have offered to be part of the collaborative exercise.

2. POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. CANDIDATES CONTESTING POLLS HAVE TO DECLARE OWN AND KINS' INCOME SOURCES

News:

- Government has accepted the Election Commission's suggestions on financial disclosures.

- Candidates contesting elections will soon have to disclose their sources of income along with those of their spouses and dependents at the time of filing nomination papers.

- Government, however, refused to accede to the demand to make furnishing of false information a ground for disqualification, citing that it was for the legislature to take a call on this.

Key highlights:

- The Election Commission's suggestion of including a fresh column in the affidavit related to the "source of income of self and spouse" has been accepted by the law ministry. This will be a great step in improving the transparency regarding the candidate.

- According to The Election Commission, inclusion of source of income is necessary as it will enable the voters to make an informed decision as to whether the increase of the income of the candidate from the previous election is reasonable or not.

- The new rules also makes it necessary for the poll contestants to specify whether they are Indian citizens or not as only the Indian nationals can contest the elections.

- Other disclosures that need to be made by the poll contestants include the details of earlier disqualification under the Representation of the People Act for spreading enmity or declared bankrupt.

Background:

- The Ministry filed the affidavit in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) initiated by a Lucknow-based NGO Lok Prahari seeking a judicial direction on the income disclosure issue.

- The present law requires a candidate to disclose details of assets and liabilities of self, spouse and three dependents in Form 26 at the time of filing papers.

- Besides, a candidate is also required to furnish details of liabilities, educational qualifications and criminal antecedents, if any, at the time of filing nomination.

Representation of Peoples Act 1950 (RPA Act 1950):

The Act deals with the following :

- Qualification of voters.

- Preparation of electoral rolls.

- Delimitation of constituencies.

- Allocation of seats in the Parliament and state legislatures.

Representation of Peoples Act 1951 (RPA Act 1951):

It deals with –

- Actual conduct of elections.

- Administrative machinery for conducting elections.

- Election offences.
- Election disputes.
- By-elections.
- Registration of political parties

2. PANDIT DEENDAYAL UPADHYAYA SANCHAR KAUSHAL VIKAS PRATISTHAN SCHEME

- Telecom Minister has launched a skill development scheme that will train rural youth to maintain mobile towers, repair optical fibres and fix other communication technologies across India.

- Under this Scheme, the ministry will impart training to 10,000 people from 10 States/UTs in the first phase.

- States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Odisha, Punjab and Haryana will get benefitted in the first phase. Further, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) plans to established more than 1,000 Sanchar Kaushal Vikas Pratisthan in future.

- BSNL's satellite phone service and Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Telecom Skill Excellence Award Scheme were also launched.

- BSNL's satellite phone service will be offered in a phased manner. In the first phase, the service will be extended to the government agencies handling a disaster, state police, railways, Border security forces and other government agencies. In the subsequent phases, the phone service would be offered to those people who are travelling in flight and ships. Global satellite phone service is modern satellite phone service.

- Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Telecom Skill Excellence Award has been instituted to recognize achievers and talents in Telecom sector.

3. GOVERNMENT LAYS OFF NON-PERFORMING OFFICERS IN PUBLIC INTEREST

- As many as 129 government officers have been forced to retire in past few months in public interest for being non-performers. A total of 30 Group A officers and 99 Group B officers (total 129) have been sent on retirement in past few months.

- The action is part of review being done by the central government to check deadwood of its workforce.

- The punishment of compulsory retirement was given after reviewing service records of over 24,000 Group A officers and 42,251 Group B officers.

- This step is widely being hailed by many, as it would bring efficiency. It would further check the corruption and would promote citizen-centric governance.

- The Centre had in January terminated a senior IAS officer on grounds of non-performance. Earlier in 2014, graft-tainted IAS couple in Madhya Pradesh, Arvind and Tinoo Joshi, were dismissed from service.

- A service review on a government employee is conducted twice — first after 15 years and again after 25 years of completion of qualifying service.

4. NITI AAYOG HOLDS FIRST 'SAMAVESH' MEETING

News:

- In pursuance of the Prime Minister's call for a New India 2022, the first meeting of the National Steering Group and other knowledge partners was held in NITI Aayog.

- The meeting was aimed at bringing together 32 premier educational and policy research institutions to catalyse the development process enhance institutional capacity development and a field level interface with the community for New India 2022.

Key Highlights:

- The meeting witnessed signing of Memoranda of Understands (MoUs) between NITI Aayog and major think tanks across the country to create an ecosphere of evidence based policy research.

- This network will enable efficient knowledge sharing and information exchange among all partners to fulfil their role in transformative policy reform so as to achieve a sustainable and more inclusive development in line with the National Development Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals as well as the 15 year Vision, 7 year strategy and 3 year action plan.

- This is the first ever initiative taken in the country to bring the large number of institutions cutting across diverse domain themes to deliberate together on the way forward for inclusive development of the country.

- As part of Samavesh initiative, a new link on NITI's website was launched on the occasion which would eventually emerge as a major repository of knowledge based reports and case studies across different sectors of the economy.

NITI Aayog:

- The National Institution for Transforming India, also called NITI Aayog, was formed via a resolution of the Union Cabinet in January 2015.

- NITI Aayog is the premier policy 'Think Tank' of the Government of India, providing both directional and policy inputs.

- While designing strategic and long term policies and programmes for the Government of India, NITI Aayog also provides relevant technical advice to the Centre and States.

- At the core of NITI Aayog's creation are two hubs – **Team India Hub** and the **Knowledge and Innovation Hub**.

- The Team India Hub leads the engagement of states with the Central government, while the Knowledge and Innovation Hub builds NITI's think-tank capabilities.

- These hubs reflect the two key tasks of the Aayog.

- NITI Aayog is also developing itself as a State of the Art Resource Centre, with the necessary resources, knowledge and skills, that will enable it to act with speed, promote research and innovation, provide strategic policy vision for the government, and deal with contingent issues.

How different is the NITI Aayog from Planning Commission (PC)?

	Planning Commission (PC)	NITI Aayog
Structural Difference	- Members – More generalist - Ex-officio members – 2 members	- Members – Specialists - Ex-officio members – 4 nominated members are ex-officio members

---

	• No governing council • No ad-hoc regional council	• It has a governing council • It also has various ad-hoc regional council
Role of State	• In PC, role of state was limited to the meetings of National Development Council.	• Role of States is very wide and it is successfully promoting the cooperative federalism. • In governing council and ad-hoc regional council, the representation of states is more.
Functional Difference	• Preparation Of Five Year Plan • Devolution of money for Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Plan Expenditure	• More of a Think Tank • Acts as a data repository

Performance of NITI Aayog so far:

- It is the **repository of best practices** in states. It is also taking **stock of data** to get an idea of base line indicators. For example, it has a ready data for National Highways and Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

- So far, NITI Aayog has been successful in promoting **the spirit of cooperative federalism**. E.g. – The three sub groups of Chief Ministers (Rationalisation of Centrally Sponsored Schemes, Skill Development, Swachch Bharat sub group) provides the states a greater role in policy formulation.

- **As a Think Tank** –
  - ➢ Preparation of 15 year vision document
  - ➢ Preparation of India's Renewable Electricity Roadmap 2030
  - ➢ Plan to measure State Performance on the basis of certain parameters.
  - ➢ Picks up issues through working papers

- **Promoter of Innovation** – SETU, Atal Innovation Mission (AIM)

- **Bringing Structural Change** –
  - ➢ In Agriculture, it has initiated digitization. It has also formulated Land Leasing Policy in India.
  - ➢ It has proposed various measures to reform various institutions such as UGC, AICTE, MCI etc.

- **Role model for other institution** –
  - ➢ The institution has been awarded Five Star Rating by the Bureau of Energy Conservation
  - ➢ Every week, employees of NITI Aayog devote time by performing Shram Dan and Samay Dan towards the Swachch Bharat Mission.

Criticism of NITI Aayog:

- Among Union Territories, only Lieutenant Governors are invited. Chief Ministers of Delhi and Puducherry are not invited.

- Non Statutory, Non Constitutional and Non Accountable to Parliament

- Reports prepared by NITI Aayog consists of more information than solution.
- It has advisory role and it cannot implement its own recommendations.

Conclusion:

From its inception as a "Think Tank" of India, it has started to foster the spirit of federalism in India. Thus, it is playing a great role in transforming India.

5. PUBLIC AFFAIRS INDEX 2017

News:

- Public Affairs Centre (PAC) has released the Public Affairs Index 2017.
- Kerala and Tamil Nadu - secured first and second rankings for the second year in a row while Gujarat gained two positions rising from five in 2016 to three in 2017 in public affairs index (PAI) in governance in States.

Key Highlights:

- The survey was based on 10 themes, 26 focus subjects and 82 indicators.
- The report was based on a wide range of themes such as essential infrastructure, support to human development, social protection, women and children, crime, law and order, delivery of justice, environment, transparency and accountability, fiscal management and economic freedom.
- Karnataka and Maharashtra stood at 4th and 5th position respectively in governance indicators.
- In small state category, Himachal Pradesh ranked first followed by Goa and Mizoram at second and third positions respectively.
- The last four positions among the large states were occupied by Bihar (18th), Jharkhand (17th), Odisha and Assam.
- The last three positions among small states were occupied by Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir.
- In essential infrastructure, Goa stood as the best performer among all States followed by Delhi, Punjab and Tamil Nadu.
- In Human Development, Kerala, Mizoram and Manipur are the best performers while Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam are the worst performers.
- In Social Protection Policies, J&K, Tripura and Mizoram are the best performers.
- In Women and Children theme, Nagaland, Tripura and Kerala are adjudged as the best performers.
- In the category of Fiscal Management, Telangana is the best performer while Andhra Pradesh was labelled as the poor performer.
- In maintain Law and Order, Nagaland was adjudged as the best performer.

Public Affairs Committee:

- It is a Bengaluru based not for profit think tank, established in 1994 with a mandate to improve the quality of governance in India. The genesis of PAC is attributed to Dr. Samuel Paul in the early nineties.
- Public Affairs Centre (PAC), Bengaluru had formulated a Public Affairs Index (PAI) to rank

governance inter-state by using data available in the public domain in key areas of governance.

- The objective of Public Affairs Index (PAI) is an attempt to bring together the states of the country which are culturally, economically and socially diverse, into a common data-driven framework in order to facilitate an interstate comparison.

- A well-framed methodology backed by statistical data from government sources, has been included in the study to provide insights into the subject of good governance.

6. SUPREME COURT GOES DIGITAL WITH LAUNCH OF E-FILING SYSTEM

News:

- Filing a case online and tracking its progress at the Supreme Court is now possible, with the debut of **Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS).** The new system, aimed at serving as a digital repository for case-related information, can be accessed at www.sci.gov.in.

Key Highlights:

- Its functions include the option of e-filing cases, checking listing dates, case status, online service of notice/summons, office reports and overall tracking of progress of a case filed with the apex court registry.

- It is also proposed that it will operate as an online gateway for payment of court fee and process fee. Other features offered under the new system include an online court fee calculator. This is expected to streamline the filing process for both the advocates and the registry.

- All records of a particular case – at various stages – at the district court or high court will be integrated with the system to offer the complete record in digital form. In the future, linking of information on jail inmates and under-trials may be integrated into the system.

Significance:

- The apex court reportedly has more than 61,000 cases pending and all the high courts have 38.7 lakh pending cases. The newly inaugurated system would promote better management of cases and will be helpful in reducing the backlogs. It would help usher in transparency, reduce manipulation, and help the litigant track the progress of a case on a real-time basis.

- It will also help in reducing the time in filing pleadings as the Supreme Court would electronically pick up trial court and high court records, and there will be no need of case records being filed afresh in the Supreme Court. It is environment friendly, as the paperless initiative would help in saving millions of litres of water and plenty of trees.

7. STATES TO LINK PRISONS WITH COURTS VIA VIDEO

News:

- The Centre has asked all states to link prisons with courts through video conferencing for expeditious trial and to save costs of escorting under trials to courts. In an advisory to all states, the Ministry of Home Affairs also said prison e-system should be integrated with Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) as well as e-courts on priority basis.

- The advisory was issued following a national conference of heads of prisons in states and UTs on prison reforms. The state and UT governments have been advised to consider for implementation of some suggestions which are aimed at having an effective prison administration system.

Key suggestions:

- Combined training of prison, police, health department and judiciary on under-trial management should be conducted periodically. Separate training course on de-radicalisation of prisoners should also be conducted.

- The home ministry suggested to the states that the existing vacancies in all ranks of prison departments be filled up expeditiously for creating an effective prison administration system.

- In order to create an effective prison administration system the nomenclature of Prisons Department may be changed to "Prisons and Correctional Administration", which should have integrated prison, correctional and probation services.

- Every state should establish a welfare wing under prison department comprising welfare officers, law officers, counsellors and probation officers. To ensure uniformity in prison rules and regulations, all states/UTs should revise their existing prison manuals by adopting provisions of the model prison manual, 2016 prepared by the home ministry.

CCTNS:

- The Crime and Criminal Tracking Network System (CCTNS) project was started in 2009 as part of police modernisation programme under the national e-governance project. It was aimed to bring all 16,000 police stations in India under a single network to counter terror challenges.

- The core objective of CCTNS is to connect all the police stations so that any of the police stations can contact any other police station; thereby facilitate collection, storage, retrieval, analysis and transfer the information among police stations, state headquarters and central police organizations.

About E-Courts:

- The eCourts Project was conceptualized on the basis of the "*National Policy and Action Plan for Implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the Indian Judiciary – 2005*" submitted by e-Committee, Supreme Court of India with a vision to transform the Indian Judiciary by ICT enablement of Courts.

- E-committee is a body constituted by the Government of India in pursuance of a proposal received from the Chief Justice of India to constitute an e-Committee to assist him in formulating a National policy on computerization of Indian Judiciary and advise on technological communication and management related changes.

- The eCourts Mission Mode Project, is a Pan-India Project, monitored and funded by Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice, Government of India for the District Courts across the country.

The Project Envisages:

- To provide efficient & time-bound citizen centric services delivery as detailed in eCourt Project Litigant's Charter.

- To develop, install & implement decision support systems in courts.

- To automate the processes to provide transparency in accessibility of information to its stakeholders.

- To enhance judicial productivity, both qualitatively & quantitatively, to make the justice delivery system affordable, accessible, cost effective, predictable, reliable and transparent.

8. DRAFT RULES FOR NO-FLY LIST OF UNRULY PASSENGERS

News:

- Government has released the draft rules for a no-fly list that would bar unruly passengers from flying on domestic carriers.

- The new rules would be opened for public comments for a period of one month. After receiving comments, the civil aviation ministry would study the comments and then will release the final Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR).

Key features:

- As per the proposed rules, there will be three levels of barring—three months, six months and two years or more - depending the on level of misbehaviour.

- A passenger caught for verbal harassment and physical gestures will fall in the first slot. Anyone held for physical assault or sexual harassment will be in the second.

- Life threatening behaviour, including damage to aircraft and violence of any kind, such as a choking murderous assault, will attract a ban of two years or more.

- Aviation regulator Directorate General of Civil Aviation or DGCA will be the nodal agency for the no-fly list. As per the proposed rules, a person on a no-fly list will be informed by the airline in writing giving reasons and duration of the ban.

- The airline will form an internal committee with a retired district and session judge as chairman, a representative from a different schedule airline and a representative from a consumer association to review this decision within 10 days.

- Other airlines can also ban the same passenger but the decision will be left to the respective carriers. Passengers will be able to appeal against the ban to an appellate committee that will be set up by the aviation ministry. The appellate decision will be final and only be challenged in the high court.

- Passengers recommended by security agencies will not have a right to appeal and will be put permanently on the no fly list.

Background:

- The draft rules came at the backdrop of an assault of Air India employee by Shiv Sena MP Ravindra Gaikwad in March 2017. The existing Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) specify the steps that need to be taken to deal with unruly passengers.

- However, those rules are silent about the creation of a no-fly list. Hence, the existing Civil Aviation Requirements (CAR) are being amended by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA).

- In the year 2015 alone, around 10,854 incidents of unruly behaviour by passengers have been reported worldwide.

Few suggestions:

- Airlines in India fly 10 crore people yearly and the market is growing at 20%. This means 1 crore new people will fly every year and these are people coming from small towns who have never flown in a plane before and their social norms may be out of line with what is expected.

- Hence, the draft rule must have a provision of a learning curve of how to behave in a flight with co-passengers and people who are serving. In the name of civility in the plane, no one is allowed to transgress other's fundamental rights.

- The passenger who is being targeted for unruly behaviour should be given a warning and told why his behaviour is unacceptable.

- The threat to ban must not be used to gag consumers who are complaining about poor services, violation of consumer rights and rules or negligence on part of the airline. Also, the ministry should empower respective committees to handle consumer complaints against airlines.

9. WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX 2017

- The United Nations General Assembly recognises May 3 as the World Press Freedom Day. This is to remind the democratic governments all over the world that the freedom of expression and hence the freedom of Press is imperative for an elected body. On this day, World Press Freedom Index was launched.

Key Highlights:

- India is ranked 136, which is down from last year. India's previous rank was 133. The report blames the rise of Hindu nationalism for the drop in ranking.

- Norway is at the apex and North Korea at the bottom of the 180-strong list of nations. After six years at the top, Finland has surrendered its No. 1 position due to political pressure and conflicts of interests.

- The Index's bottom five also include Turkmenistan (178th), one of the world's most repressive and self-isolated dictatorships, which keeps increasing its persecution of journalists, and Syria (177th), driven by a never-ending war and still the deadliest country for journalists, who are targeted by both its ruthless dictator and Jihadi rebels.

- The report highlights the danger of a tipping point in the state of media freedom, especially in leading democratic countries. The obsession with surveillance and violations of the right to the confidentiality of sources have contributed to the continuing decline of many countries previously regarded as virtuous.

- Media freedom has never been so threatened as reflected by the "global indicator" which has never been so high (3872).

- The Asia-Pacific region is the third worst violator overall but holds many of the worst kinds of records. Two of its countries, China (176th) and Vietnam (175th), are the world's biggest prisons for journalists and bloggers.

- It has some of the most dangerous countries for journalists: Pakistan (139th), Philippines (127th) and Bangladesh (146th).

World Press Freedom Index:

- The Report is published annually by Reporters Without Borders (Reporters Sans Frontieres) since 2002.

- It measures the level of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries using the following criteria –

  ➤ Pluralism,

- ➢ Media independence,
- ➢ Media environment and self-censorship,
- ➢ Legislative environment,
- ➢ Transparency,
- ➢ Infrastructure
- ➢ Abuses.

10. NEW CENTRAL SECTOR SCHEME – SAMPADA

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for re-structuring the schemes of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) under new Central Sector Scheme – SAMPADA (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters) for the period 2016-20 coterminous with the 14th Finance Commission cycle.

- SAMPADA scheme is expected to leverage investment of Rs. 31,400 crore, handling of 334 lakh MT agro-produce valuing Rs. 1,04,125 crore, benefit 20 lakh farmers and generate 5,30,500 direct/indirect employment in the country by the year 2019-20.

Key features:

- The objective of SAMPADA is to supplement agriculture, modernize processing and decrease agri-waste.

- SAMPADA is an umbrella scheme incorporating ongoing schemes of the Ministry like Mega Food Parks, Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure, Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure, etc. and also new schemes like Infrastructure for Agro-processing Clusters, Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages, Creation / Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities.

- The implementation of SAMPADA will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet.

- It will not only provide a big boost to the growth of food processing sector in the country but also help in providing better prices to farmers and is a big step towards doubling of farmers' income. It will create huge employment opportunities especially in the rural areas.

- It will also help in reducing wastage of agricultural produce, increasing the processing level, availability of safe and convenient processed foods at affordable price to consumers and enhancing the export of the processed foods.

Background:

- Food Processing Sector has emerged as an important segment of the Indian economy in terms of its contribution to GDP, employment and investment. During 2015-16, the sector constituted as much as 9.1 and 8.6 per cent of GVA in Manufacturing and Agriculture sector respectively.

- Various measures have been taken by the government to give a boost to the food processing sector. With these measures food processing sector has grown at 7 per cent.

- In order to arrest post-harvest losses of horticulture & non-horticulture produce, the Ministry has accorded approval to 42 Mega Food Parks and 236 Integrated Cold Chains for creation of modern infrastructure for the food processing along the value chain from the farm to the market.

Government has taken various other measures to boost food processing sector as follows:

- To provide impetus to investment in food processing and retail sector, govt. has allowed 100% FDI in trading including through e-commerce, in respect of food products manufactured and / or produced in India. This will benefit farmers immensely and will create back – end infrastructure and significant employment opportunities.

- The govt. has also set up a Special Fund of Rs. 2000 crore in NABARD to make available affordable credit at concessional rate of interest to designated food parks and agro processing units in the designated food parks.

- Food and agro–based processing units and cold chain infrastructure have been brought under the ambit of Priority Sector Lending (PSL) to provide additional credit for food processing activities and infrastructure thereby, boosting food processing, reducing wastage, create employment and increasing farmers' income.

11. CENTRE BANS SALE OF COWS FOR SLAUGHTER AT ANIMAL MARKETS

News:

- The government has banned the sale of cows and buffaloes for slaughter through animal markets.

- The rules have been notified under Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960. Slaughter of cows is banned in most parts of the country except parts of the north-east India and Kerala. The new rules will be implemented in the next three months.

- The notification covers bulls, bullocks, cows, buffaloes, steers, heifers and calves, as well as the camel trade.

Key Highlights:

- The new rule has permitted the cattle trade only among farm land owners. Cattle can be only sold to a person possessing documents that he is an agriculturist. As per the new regulations, cattle bought cannot be resold within six months. Young and unfit animals cannot be traded.

- Animal markets cannot be set up within 50 km of an international border and 25 km of a state border. This is to curb the illegal trade across the border. Transporting cattle outside of the country will require special approval of the state government nominee.

- All animal markets have to run with the approval of district animal market committee to be headed by a magistrate. The committee will also have two representatives from government-approved animal welfare groups.

- The new regulations prescribe around 30 norms for animal welfare in markets like that of water, fans, bedding, ramps, non-slippery flooring, veterinary facility and separate enclosure for sick animals etc.

- The owner of the animal has to bear the cost of its upkeep in a shelter. In case, the owner is unable to pay, the cost would be recovered as land arrears. The state government will specify the costs every year on April 1.

Criticism:

- Many say the expanding protection for bovines is a proxy war against Dalits and Muslims – as exemplified by the lynching of dairy farmer Pehlu Khan in Rajasthan in April or the flogging of Dalit men in Gujarat's Una last year.

- The move introduces lots of paperwork for cow traders who are mostly poor and illiterate. For instance, before the trade, both seller and buyer will have to produce identity and farmland ownership documents.

- After buying a cow, a trader must make five copies of proof of sale and submit them at the local revenue office, the local veterinary doctor in the district of the purchaser, animal market committee, apart from one each for seller and buyer.

- Analysts do feel that the move will crimp supplies to the country's Rs 1-lakh crore meat and allied industries that source about 90% of their requirements from animal markets. It will hurt millions of poor farmers and squeeze supplies to the country's meat industry.

- It is also feared that the new rules will introduce inspector raj as it mandates veterinary inspector to certify proper loading and unloading of animals. He can also mark any animal unfit for sale.

- Experts say, the recently notified Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules of 2017 contravene the provisions of the very law — Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960 — under which it has been notified. The rules take away the rights of the owner to even sell the carcass of an animal dying of "natural causes" in the market. The rules prescribe that the carcass will be incinerated and not be sold or flayed for leather.

- The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, enacted in December 1960, however, does not impose any such restriction. It does not ban a cattle owner to sell the carcass of his animals for leather.

- Many states have questioned the centre's unilateral decision on cattle, which is a state subject.

3. ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

1. REAL ESTATE REGULATION ACT COMES INTO FORCE

News:

- As a result of a notification by the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA), The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 came into effect from 1st May 2017.

Why?

- Around more than 75,000 companies are involved in real estate sector and it is also the second largest employer after agriculture and contributes about 9% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

- Homebuyers, who are usually at the receiving end face so many problems like project delays, overcharges, and other fraudulent practices by some real estate developers.

Background

- It is a model law, which means it is up to the states to draft and pass their own laws according to the guidelines, as land is a state subject.

- The Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, was passed by Parliament in March 2016, and a part of it came into effect on May 1, 2016. However, 32 significant sections of the legislation were not notified. This was because these required an institutional framework to be in place first.

- So far, only 13 states and Union territories have notified the new rules, of which only three states—Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan—have appointed a housing regulator.

Salient Features of the Act

Regulatory Authorities

- It is now mandatory for all the States and Union Territories to establish state level regulatory authorities called **Real Estate regulatory authorities (RERAs) within a year** of the Act coming into force.

  Functions:

  ✓ It ensures registration of residential projects and the availability of relevant details on the RERA website & also ensuring that all the stakeholders such as buyers, sellers, and agents comply with obligations under the Act. It also advises government on matters pertaining to the development of real estate.

- Draft regulations are to be drafted by regulatory authorities within 3 months of establishment. A single window system of clearances, grading projects and promoters and ensuring digitization of land records will be promoted.

Appellate Tribunals

- To hear appeals against the decisions of RERAs, each State/UT has to establish one or more Real Estate Appellate Tribunals & it must adjudicate cases within 60 days and regulatory authorities must dispose of complaints within 60 days.

Central Advisory Council

- A Central Advisory Council is to be constituted to advise the central government on major questions of policy and protection of consumer interests. The Council will have representatives from union ministries, state governments, RERAs and representatives of the real estate industry, consumers and labourers.

Registration of Projects and Agents

- All the residential projects are to be registered under this Act. Registration is mandatory, for the promoters to book or sell the projects.

- However, registration is not required for such projects:

  ✓ where the area of land does not exceed five hundred square meters or the number of apartments does not exceed eight inclusive of all phases.

  ✓ which involves renovation/repair/re-development without re-allotment or marketing.

- Also, the state governments can prescribe the lower limits for exemption.

Duties of the Promoter

- Site and layout plans for the project to be uploaded with all the relevant details on the website of RERA.

- Update quarterly on status of the project.

- In case, a buyer wishes to withdraw from the project due to loss incurred by him because of false advertising, the promoter must return the amount collected with interest to the buyer.

- Promoters must deposit at least 70% of their funds, including land cost, in a separate escrow account to be used for construction purpose only. However, state governments can change the least percentage below 70.

- Promoters should not accept more than 10% of the total cost of the property as advance without a written agreement.

Duties of the Buyer

- The buyer has to make the required payments as per the agreement signed with the promoter. If there is a delay in payment, then the buyer will be liable to pay interest for the delayed period.

Penalties

- If the promoter fails to register the property, he has to pay upto 10% of the estimated cost of the project as a penalty.

- Failure to register the property despite orders issued by the RERA will attract imprisonment upto 3 years and or an additional fine of 10% of the estimated cost of the project.

- If a promoter violates any other provision he has to pay up to 5% of the estimated cost of the project.

- Real estate agents have to pay a fine of 10,000 for each day for the violation of provisions of the Act.

Significance of the Act

- Developers now have to register projects with the RERA prior to any advertisement and sale.

- Developers, prior to commencement of sale, are now expected to have all sanction plans approved and regulatory clearances in place. Subsequent changes have to be approved by a majority of buyers and the regulator.

- The Act also stipulates an electronic system, maintained on the website of RERA, so that developers are expected to update on a quarterly basis the status of their projects, and submit regular audits and architectural reports.

- Now non-registration of projects is a serious matter. RERA has the power to order up to three years imprisonment if there is non-compliance of the promoters to the project.

- Importantly, to ensure that funds collected are utilised only for the specific project, developers have to maintain separate escrow accounts in relation to each project and deposit 70% of the collections in that account .

- The Act also requires real estate brokers and agents to register themselves with the regulator.

Challenges

- The RERA lays out a dispute settlement mechanism. Given the experience of consumer courts, it's only a matter of time before the new mechanism face obstructions as some of the others in the past. Regulators and regulations can hardly be a substitute for a bright and lively market.

- Some other issues faced by real estate sector are lengthy process for project approvals, lack of clear land titles, and prevalence of black money, most of these fall under the State List.

- Recently there were many attempts to stall the Act from its inception, and state-level rules are yet to be issued in many cases. For instance,

  ✓ Maharashtra's Rules allow builders to sell open areas within a project as parking lots, a practice the Supreme Court had struck down.

  ✓ Both Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh allow builders of ongoing projects to submit details of only their last sanctioned plan, giving them scope to not reveal details of changes or delays with respect to the original plan and promise.

> **Builder Grievances**
>
> - The builders have been demanding "industry" status for the real estate sector as it would help in the availability of bank loans.
>
> - Real estate companies say that most delays are because of the failure of authorities to grant approvals/sanctions on time.
>
> - The onus is now on States to formulate rules and establish the regulatory authorities on time

Conclusion

- It is important to note that the Central legislation has to be implemented by the States. The responsibility of providing the enabling ecosystem rests with them. The proof of the pudding will lie in the manner the States implement the legislation.

> **Previous year Question**
>
> The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 has come into effect from 1st January, 2014. What are the key issues which would get addressed with the Act in place? What implications would it have on industrialization and agriculture in India?

2. PHASED MANUFACTURING PROGRAMME (PMP)

News:

- The Centre has introduced Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP) to make India a mobile manufacturing hub of the world in the next few years.

Features:

- The PMP scheme would promote

> **Steps taken by India in the past**
>
> In Budget 2015-16 Government introduced a differential Excise Duty for domestic mobile manufacturers. Under this, the Countervailing Duty (CVT) on imports at 12.5% and Excise Duty at 1% without input tax credit (or 12.5% with input tax credit) were given to domestic cell phone manufacturers.

domestic mobile phones production by providing tax relief and incentives on components and accessories used for the devices.

- This would be rolled out over a period of time in a phase-wise manner.

- In the current financial year (2017-18), PMP covers domestic production of components like Mechanics, Die Cut Parts, Microphone and Receiver, Key Pad and USB Cable.

- In 2018-19, it would cover printed circuit board assembly, camera module and connectors.

- While in 2019-20, the PMP would provide incentives for local production of display assembly, touch panel/cover glass assembly and vibrator motor or ringer.

Present Situation

- India imports basic chipset for mobile handsets but there has been a spurt in the production of other mobile components.

- Data from MeitY show that the country spent around Rs 40,000 crore on mobile phone and related imports during 2016-17, down 29 per cent from nearly Rs 56,000 crore in 2015-16.

- In March 2017, there were 35 crore smartphone users, compared with 12 crore in July 2014. The number is expected to grow to 81 crore by 2022.

- In the last two years, 42 new mobile manufacturing units and 30 component makers have set up shops in India, creating 1.65 lakh jobs.

Expected Impact:

Previous year Question
List the main objectives of the National Manufacturing Policy (NMP), 2011.

- With PMP, the share of locally-procured components in the manufacturing of feature phones will go up from about 15 to 37 per cent and for smart phones from about 10 to 26 per cent, leading to the setting up of a "robust indigenous mobile manufacturing ecosystem in India."

3. SWITCHING FINANCIAL YEAR TO JANUARY – DECEMBER

News:

The move breaks a 150-year old tradition of India's April-March financial year dated back to 1867. The April-March fiscal adopted in 1867 was in line with the practice in imperial Britain.

- The Madhya Pradesh cabinet approved proposal of switching over to a January-December financial year. This decision comes on the heels of Prime Minister Narendra Modi making a pitch for shifting the financial year to the January-December period during the NITI Aayog's governing council meet in the national capital on April 23.

Some Recommendations in the past:

- The First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in 1966 recommended the commencement of the Indian financial year to 1st January for better accuracy of revenue estimates and expenditure estimates.

- L. K. Jha Committee in 1984 recommended for changes in the financial year and advised to adopt 1st January as the preferred date for commencing the financial year.

- NITI Aayog in its discussion paper by Bibek Debroy and Kishore Desai recommended changing of the financial year.

- As a result the government set up a Committee in July, 2016 under former chief economic adviser Shankar Acharya for studying merits of NITI Aayog's suggestion.

- The panel supported the move and listed the pros and cons of a shift in the accounting period. It said the change will align the fiscal with the monsoon cycle and the country's agricultural harvests.

4. IMF REFORMS

News:

- The Union Finance Minister demanded reforms in the International Monetary Fund's Quota system which has become controversial in the present scenario.

Background:

- IMF's Quota determines the size of contingency funds to lend countries in need, it also determines the power of individual countries to influence lending decisions and tap funds for themselves.

- At present the developing countries hold less than half of overall quota, with their rapidly increasing economic weight globally they are demanding greater share.

Quota System of IMF:

- Each IMF member country was assigned a quota, based broadly on its relative position in the world economy and its financial commitment to the IMF.

- The current quota formula is a weighted average of GDP (50% weightage), openness (30%), economic variability (15%), and international reserves (5%).

- Quotas are denominated in Special Drawing Rights (SDRs), the IMF's unit of account.

- The largest member of the IMF is the United States, and the smallest member is Tuvalu.

- Currently, India with 2.6% voting rights stands below tenth rank in the quota system.

- **Role of quota in IMF:**
    - ✓ Subscriptions

> **WHAT ARE 'SPECIAL DRAWING RIGHTS (SDR)'?**
> ✓ SDR is an international type of monetary reserve currency created by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1969 that operates as a supplement to the existing reserves of member countries.
> ✓ An SDR is essentially an artificial currency used by the IMF and is basket of national currencies. The IMF uses SDRs for internal accounting purposes.
> ✓ SDRs are allocated by the IMF to its member countries and are backed by the full faith and credit of the member countries' governments.

> **ABOUT IMF**
> - International Monetary Fund (IMF) is an international organization which was conceived at UN conference in Bretton Woods in 1944.
> - IMF's primary aim is to ensure stability of international Monetary System (i.e. exchange rates etc.) for the purpose of smoother transactions among member countries or all over the world.
> - It does it in three ways: surveillance of economy of all 188 member countries, lending to countries with balance of payments difficulties, and giving practical/technical help to members by helping in framing economic or financial policies etc.

✓ Voting Power

✓ Access to Financing

Issues with present Quota System

- Higher IMF quota means more voting rights and borrowing permissions under IMF. But the formula is designed in such a way that USA has 17.7% quota higher than several countries cumulatively.

- The BRICS countries account for 1/5th of the world GDP and 2/5th of world population. Some countries are over represented in the IMF eg: G7 group has more than 40% quota whereas countries like India & Russia have only 2.5% quota in IMF, that's why emerging countries are against this quota scheme of IMF.

- It is almost impossible to make any reform in the current quota system as more than 85% of total votes are required to make it happen. The USA alone has a voting share of around 17% which makes it impossible to reform quota without the consent of developed countries.

- In 2010, the Board of Governors completed the 14th General Review of Quotas, which involved a package of far-reaching reforms of the Fund's quotas and governance. The reform package was finally implemented in 2016 as the US Congress was reluctant to ratify the proposal because the reform package aimed to reduce USA's share in the IMF.

Way Forward:

- The 15th General Quota Review provides an opportunity to assess the appropriate size and composition of the IMF's resources and to continue the process of governance reforms.

Conclusion:

- The quota system is controversial due to its asymmetric power structure. After the 2008 financial crises, developing countries became faster economic growth hubs of world but their say in IMF is still minimal. If reforms in the current quota system are not taken IMF may become another non-functional body with emergence of more regional banks like BRICS and so on.

> **Major Facts: Proposed 2010 Reforms**
>
> - The combined quotas will increase to a combined SDR 477 billion (about $659 billion) from about SDR 238.5 billion (about $329 billion)
>
> - 2010 reforms make **overall 6% increase for developing countries** and reduce quota share of developed or over represented countries in almost the same proportion.
>
> - India's share has been increased to 2.75% from current level of 2.44% and by jumping 3 spots, India has become the 8th largest shareholder in IMF.
>
> - China becomes the third largest member country in the IMF, and there will be four developing countries (Brazil, China, India, and Russia) among the 10 largest shareholders in the Fund.

Previous year Question

The World Bank and the IMF, collectively known as the Bretton Woods Institutions, are the two inter-governmental pillars supporting the structure of the world's economic and financial order. Superficially, the World Bank and the IMF exhibit many common characteristics, yet their role, functions and mandate are distinctly different. Elucidate.

---

5. ORDINANCE ROOT TO TACKLE NPA'S

News:

- The President approved an ordinance regarding NPAs which provides greater powers to the RBI to tackle mounting bad loans.

Details:

- The details of the ordinance are as follows:
  - ✓ Two new sections 35AA and 35AB have been introduced in the Banking Regulations Act, 1949.
  - ✓ 35AA gives powers to the Central government to authorize the RBI for issuing directions to a banking company to initiate insolvency resolution process in respect of stressed assets.
  - ✓ 35AB gives powers to the RBI to issue directions to banking companies for resolution of stressed assets. It also empowers the RBI to form Committees / Panels to advice banks – industry wide, specific cases.

Methodologies in Ordinance to tackle bad loan problem:

- Banks will have more control in taking decisions to resolve defaulting loan accounts and RBI now can direct and empower banks to initiate insolvency resolution process under the provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016.

> **What is a non-performing asset?**
>
> An asset, including a leased asset, becomes non-performing when it ceases to generate income for the bank.
>
> Generally when the account remained non-performing for a period of more of more than 90 days.

- The Ordinance is likely to give flexibility to banks to resolve bad accounts and give immunity to bankers from taking legal action in future.

- The RBI will target over 50 large defaulting borrowers and fresh loans to wilful defaulters may be barred.

- The new law will legally ring-fence bankers from scrutiny of investigating agencies such as Central Vigilance Commission, Central Bureau of Investigation, Comptroller and Auditor General, Enforcement Directorate and others, an issue which has till now restricted many bankers to take hard decisions.

- The Bankers may be empowered to take hair-cut or bear loss on the loans to get the maximum value out of the asset and allow asset reconstruction companies to revive the asset.

> In finance, a **haircut** is the difference between the market value of an asset used as **loan** collateral and the amount of the **loan**. The amount of the **haircut** reflects the lender's perceived risk of loss from the asset falling in value or being sold in a fire sale.

- The RBI may form committees or authorities and appoint members to advise banks on resolution of stressed assets.

FEW INITIATIVES TAKEN TILL NOW

1. Rescheduling amortizations (5/25 scheme)
2. Encouraging private Asset reconstruction companies (ARC)
3. Strategic Debt Restructuring scheme (SDR)
4. Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets

The economic survey suggests a centralized approach where Public Sector Asset Rehabilitation Agency (PARA) should be formed.

---

6. NPA'S RISING IN PRIVATE SECTOR BANKS

News:

- A Care Ratings study revealed that the rise in bad loans is not restricted to public sector banks alone.

Details:

- Gross NPAs or defaulter loans of top nine private sector banks in the country have gone up by almost three times in the last two years.

- The gross NPAs of 9 private banks as of March 2017 is Rs. 78,991 crore, 199% up from March 2015. ICICI, the private sector lender, has the gross NPAs to advances ratio of 7.89%.

- The jump can be attributed to the recognition norms being pursued by banks after RBI highlighted the same (known as Asset Quality Review).

7. FOREX RESERVES AT ALL TIME HIGH

News:

- According to Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s latest data India's foreign exchange reserves touched all time high of $372.7 billion.

Details:

- It is mainly due to rise in foreign currency assets which rose by $1.57 billion. This level of reserves can cover 11-12 months of imports.

- While gold reserves stayed steady, the special drawing rights with the International Monetary Fund increased by $8.5 million to $1.460 billion, and the reserve position with the Fund rose by $15.8 million to $2.35 billion. The last all time high was achieved when foreign exchange reserves was at 371.99 billion, in the week ending September 30, 2016.

WHAT IS A FOREX RESERVE?

Foreign Exchange Reserves means the foreign currency deposits held by a central bank (that is RBI) in India's case India's foreign exchange reserves comprise of

- ✓ Foreign currency assets,
- ✓ Gold and
- ✓ Special drawing rights (SDR's) allocated to it by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in addition to the reserves it has parked with the fund.

WHAT IS AN SDR?

- The Special Drawing Right (SDR) is an interest-bearing international reserve asset created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement other reserve assets of member countries.

- SDR is based on a basket of international currencies comprising the U.S. dollar, Japanese yen, euro and pound sterling. It is not a currency, nor a claim on the IMF, but is potentially a claim on freely usable currencies of IMF members.

- The value of the SDR is not directly determined by supply and demand in the market, but is set daily by the IMF on the basis of market exchange rates between the currencies included in the SDR basket.

---

8. NEW SERIES OF WPI AND IIP

News:

- The government released data based on new series of Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) data.

- The new IIP and WPI series will be released by Chief Statistician of India and Secretary, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation and Secretary, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion. It will bring greater accuracy and improved synchronisation among such data sets, in turn leading to better policies.

Change in Base Year

- Base year for IIP and WPI will be now 2011-12 which has currently 2004-05, as Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and gross value addition also has 2011-12 as the base year.

Removing Tax Component

- Excise duty from prices component has been removed in the latest series, which brings measure closer to the producer price index and, making it less responsive to changes in tax rates. The impact of tax changes (including the goods and services tax or GST implementation on prices) will be reflected in Consumer price index (CPI). The gap between CPI and WPI can be a better measure of the impact of GST on prices. This is in consonance with international practices.

Changing Items - Composition

WPI	IIP
As many as 199 new items (including natural gas, tissue paper, conveyor belt, rubber tread, steel cables, pointed gourd, cucumber, bitter gourd and jack fruit, etc.) are included in the new series.	New items like steroids and refined palm oil are included.
146 items (including coke (coal), papad, video CD player, khandsari and light diesel oil, etc.) are dropped under the new series.	Items like gutka, calculators and colour TV picture tubes have been removed.
The new WPI series include toys and games as a separate group.	New series treats electricity as a single product.
	Total items have increased to 809 from 620.

Previous year Question

- Why the Central Statistics Office has notified a new series of Consumer Price Index from this year? (2011)

---

9. GST TO BE ROLLED OUT FROM 1ST JULY,2017

News:

- Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council backed the date 1st July, 2017 to roll out unified indirect tax GST & help to achieve target of GST's "One Country One Tax One Market"

Highlights:

- GST Council decided Tax rates for 1,211 items of goods and services to be divided into four slabs of which 7% will be exempted, 14% will fall under 5% slab, 17% in 12% slab, 43% in 18% slab and 19% in 28% slab.

- The present tax incidence in excess of 28% on luxury items will be treated as cess after GST rollout, which will go to the corpus for compensating states for any revenue loss on account of GST's introduction.

- Bidis along with gold, footwear and branded items would be decided later.

Exempted Goods	Cereals, Milk, curd, Jaggery, Common salt, Fresh vegetables other than frozen or preserved.
@5%	Coffee, tea, Sugar, Coal, Life saving drugs, Sweets.
@12%	Meat, Butter and other fats, cheese, Dry fruits, Animal fats and oils, Fruit pulp and fruit juices based drink.
@18%	Electricity, Hair oil, Soap, Tooth paste, Manufactured Goods..
@28%	Capital Goods, Air conditioner, Refrigerator, Industrial Intermediaries, Aerated Drinks.

GST on Services

- Four-slab structure i.e. 5%, 12%, 18% and 28% for taxation of 0services has been proposed of which most fall under 18% bracket.

- Tax rate of 1% collected at source from E-commerce companies.

- Travelling on metro's, local train's, religious travel, Haj-yatra will be exempt from GST.

Positives:

- Food Inflation mainly on pulses and other items will be reduced because items such as cereals, which were taxed earlier at 5%, are now at zero rate.

- AC train travel, watching movies to become cheaper under GST.

- The GST on coal has been brought down to 5% from the current tax incidence of 11.69%, thereby making electricity generation cheaper.

Negatives:

- Exporters' costs could go up by upto 1.25 per cent (FOB value) once the GST is implemented, according to industry calculations.

- Cars to become dearer with tax rate of GST plus 1% cess and small diesel cars at 28% plus 3% cess. There would be an impact over Automobile Industry.

GST Council

As per the amended Constitution Article 279A, the GST Council will be a joint forum of the Centre and the States. The Council consists of the following members : -

- Union Finance Minister(Chairperson)

- Union Minister of State, in-charge of Revenue of finance.

- The Minister In-charge of finance or taxation or any other Minister nominated by each State Government.

Previous year Question

Q) Discussion the rationale for introducing Good and services tax in India. Bring out critically the reasons for delay in roll out for its regime. (2013)

10. IS INDIA GROWING JOBLESSLY?

News:

- The Report released by Labour Bureau highlights joblessness in eight key sectors of non-farm economy. Eight sectors mentioned are manufacturing, construction, trade, transport, accommodation and restaurants, IT/BPO, education and health.

Key Findings:

- The Government is unable to address the growing employment crisis even after various initiatives.

- In 2016-17 jobs increased by just 1.1% and our economy is growing at over 7% per year. Gross credit given to industry grew at just 6.7% in the past three years.

- The index of industrial production has inched up by just 6%. Gross fixed capital formation growth has slipped to 0.6% in January 2017, which is alarming compared to 6.1% 2016.

- Education and health added nearly half of the new jobs & both these sectors are known for low paying jobs. A dip of nearly 7% jobs in the construction sector & hospitality/food sectors showed a loss of jobs.

- Year-round jobs were found only in 61% of people in the workforce of which 34% were working only for 6-11 months even though they were willing to work for 12 months. The Report also revealed households earning only Rs 10,000 per month or less are about 68%.

Some of Recent comments by Debroy on Unemployment

- voluntary unemployment is on rise across India as people choosing not to work below certain level after investing in education

- There is both 'jobless growth' as well as 'growth-less jobs.

- There is a need for good data collection on employment as Current official data on labour and employment not able to capture the pre-dominantly informal and unorganised nature of the Indian economy.

- Recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced a task force led by the Aayog vice chairman Arvind Panagariya on employment data.

---

11. SHAKTI

News:

- A new scheme to increase transparency in coal allocation policy has been approved by CCEA called Scheme for Harnessing and Allocating Koyala Transparently in India (SHAKTI), with an aim is to reform the bureaucratic and non-transparent process of coal allocation for power projects.

Provisions:

- Policy is to have auction for existing Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) holders based on discount to already prevailing tariff, which had built up huge risk premiums due to uncertainty around coal supply in the past.

- Proposes to do away with the discretionary element and introduce market-based pricing for independent power producer (IPP). Linkages are awarded to projects which do not have captive coal mines.

Previous year Question
Q) To what factors can the recent dramatic fall in equipment costs and tariff of solar energy be attributed? What implications does the trend have for the thermal power producers and the related industry?

Benefits of Policy:

- Coal available to all Power Plants in transparent and objective manner. The Stress on account of non-availability of linkages to Power Sector Projects shall be overcome. Good for the Infrastructure and banking Sector.

- PPA holders to reduce tariff for linkage; Direct benefit of reduced tariff to Discom/consumers. There are some differences in the methodologies of existing system and the proposed SHAKTI scheme.

CURRENT SYSTEM	SHAKTI
✓ Under the present system, an independent power producer (IPP) proposing to set up a coal-fired power plant will have to request the power ministry for coal linkage. The ministry will forward the request with its own recommendations to a standing committee that will decide on approving the request along with the quantum and duration.	✓ SHAKTI proposes to do away with the discretionary element and introduce market-based pricing for IPPs. Those IPPs that have already stitched up power purchase agreements (PPAs) will have to bid for coal supply on the basis of discount over the tariff. Those without PPAs will have to bid over the notified price of coal by the supplier, Coal India or Singareni Collieries.

12. AN OVERSIGHT PANEL TO TACKLE BAD LOANS

News:

- The Reserve Bank of India is about to reconstitute and expand the oversight committee in order to deal with rising bad loans. It's a part of central bank's action plan to implement the ordinance that amended the Banking Regulation Act, 1949.

Oversight Committee (OC)

- It will be enlarged to include more members so that the OC can constitute requisite benches to deal with the volume of cases referred to it.

About OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (OC)
Oversight Committee (OC) comprises of two Members. It has been constituted by the IBA in consultation with the RBI.

Other Moves by the RBI:

- Plan to expand the scope of cases to be referred to the Committee beyond those under the Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A). A framework to facilitate an "objective and consistent decision-making process" with regard to cases that are referred for resolution under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy code (IBC).

- Feasibility of rating assignments being determined by the Reserve Bank itself and paid for from a fund to be created out of contribution from the banks and the central bank. Changed norms for decision-making in the Joint Lending Forum (JLF) whereby consent required for approval of a proposal was changed to 60 per cent by value from 75 per cent earlier.

13. GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT PREFERENCE TO MAKE IN INDIA

News:

- To promote its flagship "Make in India" programme, GOI has cleared its own version of the US's Buy American policy through a national government procurement policy, giving preference to locally made goods and services.

Highlights:

- It stimulates the flow of capital and technology into domestic manufacturing and services.

- The national procurement policy involves purchases of at least Rs 2 trillion a year and also covers autonomous bodies, government companies and entities under the government's control.

- Small purchases of less than Rs. 5 lakhs are exempted.

- In procurement of goods for Rs. 50 lakhs and less, and where the Nodal Ministry determines that there is sufficient local capacity and local competition, only local suppliers will be eligible.

- For procurement of orders worth more than Rs. 50 lakh, or where there is insufficient local capacity or competition, local suppliers will get a 20% margin of purchase preference.

> **Previous year Question**
>
> Q) "Success of 'Make in India' programme depends on the success of 'Skill India' programme and radical labour reforms." Discuss with logical arguments. 2015

- If the procurement is of a type that the order can be divided and given to more than one supplier, the non-local supplier who is the lowest bidder will get half of the order and the local supplier will get the other half if it agrees to match the price of the lowest bid. If the procurement cannot be divided, then the lowest cost local supplier will be given the order if it agrees to match the lowest bid.

- There will be penal consequences for false declarations. In some cases, verification by statutory / cost auditors etc. will be required

- A standing committee in the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion will oversee the implementation of this order and issues arising there from, and make recommendations to nodal ministries and procuring entities.

> **MAKE IN INDIA**
>
> ❖ The program was launched on September 25, 2014, with the primary goal of making India a global manufacturing hub, by encouraging both multinational as well as domestic companies to manufacture their products within the country.
>
> ❖ Led by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion, the initiative aims to raise the contribution of the manufacturing sector to 25% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by the year 2025 from its current 16%.
>
> ❖ Make in India has introduced multiple new initiatives, promoting foreign direct investment, implementing intellectual property rights and developing the manufacturing sector.

14. NEW PAYMENT BANKS

News:

- Airtel, Paytm and India Post are the three new payment bank services. They will have a differentiating factor. It is a sunrise sector.

> **PAYMENT BANKS**
>
> Payment bank is a new concept of banks that can
>
> ✓ Only take deposits but cannot issue loans or credit cards.
>
> ✓ The deposit is restricted to about Rs. 1 lakh per customer, in both current and savings accounts.
>
> ✓ Payments banks can issue ATM cards, debit cards and offer net-banking and mobile-banking.

15. GST's E-WAY BILL MAY BE DELAYED

News:

- Due to non – readiness of draft rules & required infrastructure, the enforcement of crucial e-way bill is likely to take at least six-months/ till December.

Details:

- E-way bill is an electronic way bill for movement of goods which can be generated on the GSTN (common portal).

- Movement of goods of more than Rs. 50,000 in value cannot be made by a registered person without an e-way bill. E-way bill also be allowed to be generated or cancelled through SMS.

- When an e-way bill is generated a unique e-way bill number (EBN) is allocated and is available to supplier, recipient, and the transporter.

16. FURTHER RULES TO RESTRICT PARTICIPATORY NOTES BY SEBI

News:

- Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) plans to further tighten norms on issuance of instruments like offshore derivative instruments (ODIs) and Participatory notes (P- note's)

- From April 1st, 2017 for a period of every three years Regulatory fee of $1000 be levied on each ODI issuing FPI for each and every ODI subscriber coming through such FPI.

- Currently ODI's are issued against derivatives along with equity and debt, now SEBI proposes to prohibit ODI's being issued against derivatives for speculative purposes.

P-notes
P-Notes or Participatory Notes are Overseas Derivative Instruments that have Indian stocks as their underlying assets
ODI or P-notes route is used by foreign entities who want to take an exposure to Indian equity but without getting registered with SEBI / so SEBI registered FPI's buy shares on behalf of such entities and then transfer the securities to actual beneficiaries

17. CBI TO PROBE AIR INDIA & INDIAN AIRLINES MERGER

News:

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has instituted a preliminary enquiry to probe into issues related to the merger of Air India and Indian Airlines.

- The agency alleged that the merger of the two state-owned airlines in 2011 has resulted in the loss of thousands of crores of rupees to the national exchequer.

- Air India which has accumulated losses of over Rs. 50,000 crore, is also sitting on about Rs. 55,000 crore of debt of which about Rs. 22,000 crore was loan taken to finance aircraft purchase and the rest for working capital.

NITI AAYOG RECOMMENDATIONS
- Strategic disinvestment of loss making Air India. *Eg:* Various international governments like British Airways, Japan Airlines and Austrian Air selling their entire stakes in airlines and not retaining any shareholdings to make them viable.
- The proposal is to transfer the aircraft-related loans and the working capital to the new owner, while taking care of half the liability.

18. WORLD BANK FORECAST ON INDIA

News:

- The World Bank reported signs of slowdown in 2016-17 but favourable monsoon heaved the economy before being temporarily hit due to demonetisation.

- The report comes ahead of the release of provisional estimates of national income for 2016-17 by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) on May 31. The CSO, in its advance estimates, had pegged GDP growth at 7.1 per cent in 2016-17.

Key Findings:

- On account of reforms, domestic consumption, and improvement in trade India's GDP growth is expected to be 7.2 per cent for 2017-18. World Bank highlighted issues like weak private investments, low credit growth and rising anti-trade rhetoric globally as challenges for growth.

- The cost of doing business for firms, logistics costs of moving goods across states, while ensuring no loss in equity will be taken care by GST.

- Reduction in external demand due to uncertain global environment, which includes rising protectionism, along with slowing Chinese economy that may hamper India's growth outlook.

- Private investment is lagging due to "corporate debt overhang" and financial sector is stressed with high levels of non-performing assets (NPAs) of the banks and the subdued private investment would put downside pressure on India's potential growth, besides a rapid increase in global oil and commodity prices.

- The agency also highlighted the need to address the lower participation of female labour force in India. As per its report, India has one of the lowest female participation rates in the world, ranking 120th among the 131 countries. India's potential GDP growth can go up by a full percentage point if half the gap in female labour force participation rate is closed near to Bangladesh or Indonesia.

19. ACCOUNT NUMBER PORTABILITY (ANP)

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) advocated banks to allow customers for Account Number Portability between banks without changing their account number

- ANP is now feasible due to stringent KYC norms aided by technological advancements in the field of payment system such as UPI and Aadhar linkage to individual bank accounts. Nowhere in the World Account Number Portability exist.

4. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

1. BELT AND ROAD FORUM

News:

- China organised a Belt and Road forum to give fresh impetus to the Belt and Road Initiative and unveiling specific measures to carry forward the inspiring initiative.

Key takeaways of the forum:

- The President of China Xi Jingping reiterated the significance of the Belt and Road initiative at the inauguration of the meeting which seeks to connect nations along the new Silk Road routes through economic cooperation and infrastructure development.

- During the meeting, the Chinese authorities unveiled that the China's Silk Road Fund will increase funding.

- The President of China raised concern regarding the increasing protectionism in the world and emphasized that the Belt and Road Initiative is based on the historic roots of the Silk Road, it focuses on Asia, Europe and African continents and is open to all nations.

- The project has its importance in gaining the historical prosperity that the Asian continent had. The Chinese president reminded that the countries along the ancient Silk Road were once places of great prosperity but now is full of turbulence, conflicts and crisis. Such conditions will be addressed only through development of the region that is what envisaged by the OBOR project and with the mutual cooperation and a sustainable security outlook.

- The objectives for the Belt and Road initiative has been reiterated during the meeting that China wants to create a new model of win-win and cooperation for the development of the region. It will not form a small group undermining stability but is set to build a big family with harmonious co-existence.

- The Belt and Road initiative will boost many of the Sustainable Development Goals through economic growth, employment, poverty reduction, and expansion of trade and investment among the countries along the Belt and Road.

- At the closing event of the forum the Chinese President said that nearly 70 countries and international organizations have signed up for the mega infrastructure project but others still have no idea what it is. For further deliberation on the OBOR project the next gathering in Beijing is decided for 2019.

- The two-day Belt and Road Forum identified and agreed on 270 deliverable goals of Belt and Road Initiative.

- The Forum resulted in signing of a joint communique by 30 heads of state that promised to implement plans for cooperation in trade and infrastructure programs across Asia, Europe and Africa.

- Though the forum ended with promises of joint action by participating countries but did not result in establishment of an institutional framework for implementing the planned construction program.

- The Signatories to the joint communique also pledged their support for promoting a rules-based, open and multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organisation at its core.

- China has assured the participating countries that it would not attempt to push its own political ideologies and systems onto another country during the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative.

- China has taken the first step to institutionalise the Belt and Road Forum (BRF) by announcing that the next edition of the BRF would be held in Beijing in 2019 indicating that China will continue to control the Belt and Road Initiative.

- Although India skipped the initiative six of its neighbours namely Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Afghanistan attended the summit and signed 20 infrastructure deals with China at the Belt and Road Forum (BRF). They also sought China's financial help for advancing infrastructure, power, banking and finance sectors.

Why India did not attend the OBOR summit?

- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a 3000 km project connecting Pakistan's deep-water port Gwadar and China's Xinjiang – is an important part under the OBOR initiative of China. India has its own reservations regarding CPEC.

- The CPEC passes through Gilgit-Baltistan region of the Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir.

- The Chinese presence in the disputed region has raised sovereignty concerns for India.

- It also raises strategic and security concerns for India because the Gwadar Port offers China to have its naval presence in the Arabian Sea and to the Indian Ocean. Already, China has plans to station its marines in Djibouti in Horn of Africa in Indian Ocean.

- India highlighted the Dual character of China by explaining that on one hand China is talking about respecting the sovereignty and integrity of other nations and on the other hand it is itself not abiding by its own words by implementing CPEC project in Disputed region between India and Pakistan.

- The other projects under the OBOR in South and South East Asia also have security implications for India. Unlike India, none of the other countries have sovereignty related issues with OBOR initiative.

- China is not only a neighbour to India but also a tough competitor. Indian establishment is yet to weigh upon the prospects of joining in or opting out of the OBOR in terms of key areas such as economic, strategic, geopolitical and security.

About OBOR:

- The Belt and Road initiative provides a visionary blueprint for global economic development in the new world order. Taking reference from the historic Silk Road, which transformed the nature of international trade links in ancient times, the Belt and Road Initiative offers a modern-day solution that fosters inclusive growth and development in the 21st century.

- The Belt and Road refers to the land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the seagoing "21st Century Maritime Silk Road". The routes cover more than 60 countries and regions from Asia to Europe via Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and the Middle East, currently accounting for some 30 per cent of global GDP and more than 35 per cent of the world's merchandise trade.

- The Belt and Road initiative is set to reinvigorate the seamless flow of capital, goods and services between Asia and the rest of the world, by promoting further market integration and forging new ties among communities.

- The Initiative offers global businesses from multinationals to small and medium-sized enterprises unparalleled opportunities to tap into new markets along the Belt and Road and gain deeper access to markets in the Chinese mainland, ASEAN, the Middle East, and Central and Eastern Europe. For developing and emerging economies in these areas, investment and trade to accelerate development for the benefit of all.

- The initiative envisages the building of six major economic cooperation corridors and several key maritime pivot points across Eurasia:

  - ➢ On land, the plan is to build a new Eurasian land bridge and develop the economic corridors of China-Mongolia-Russia; China-Central Asia-West Asia; the China-Indochina peninsula; China-Pakistan; and Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar.

  - ➢ On the seas, the initiative will focus on jointly building smooth, secure and efficient transport routes connecting major sea ports along the belt and road.

- Formally, OBOR emphasises five key areas of cooperation:

  - ➢ coordinating development policies

  - ➢ forging infrastructure and facilities networks

  - ➢ strengthening investment and trade relations

  - ➢ enhancing financial cooperation and

  - ➢ deepening social and cultural exchanges.

- But it is infrastructure such as railways, roads, ports, energy systems and telecommunications networks which is receiving most attention.

- Foremost among the key projects which have been promoted as focal parts of the OBOR initiative are the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which provides China's western provinces with access to the Indian Ocean through the Pakistani port of Gwadar, and the Bangladesh China India Myanmar Corridor, which will give Yunnan Province access to the Bay of Bengal.

- China's policy banks are providing massive funds for Chinese enterprises to operate along these axes, while further funding will be provided through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), funded by countries globally. The AIIB was created precisely to service projects under OBOR. The projects funded by the first loans issued by AIIB were in Indonesia, Bangladesh,

Pakistan and Tajikistan, all countries which China is trying to include within its OBOR initiative.

Q. What is One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR)? Why do you think India is not committed to OBOR? Give reasons in support of your answer.

2. FRANCE ELECTION

News:

- In the recent Presidential election in France, Emmanuel Macron was sworn in as France's youngest President after a landslide victory over far-right leader Marine Le Pen.

About the elections:

- In France, Presidential elections are conducted in two stages.

- The first round is open to any candidate who meets the requirements (which include the written support of five hundred elected representatives, including mayors and deputies) and has enough funding.

- Assuming that no single candidate acquires an absolute majority of votes on the first round, there is then a second round, which is a fortnight later that is a runoff between the two candidates with the most votes in the first round.

- The President of France is whoever gets a simple majority of the votes in the second round.

- To win a seat in the National Assembly, a candidate must receive at least 50 percent of the vote with a required minimum of 25 percent registered-voter turnout.

- A president can serve no more than two five-year terms in office .The former president, François Hollande was a socialist and was elected in 2012.

- The 2017 Presidential election in France was the most significant for many years. For the last two decades, candidates for the French presidency have been promising to make changes and get the French economy back and working properly again but for the last two decades, the promises made at elections have not led to much fundamental change.

- The 2017 election took place in a world that is very different from just a year ago. Right-wing populism has triumphed in the UK with Brexit and in the USA with Donald Trump, and in France the right-wing populists of the National Front, led by Marine Le Pen was also a strong opponent.

- The current President won the first round well ahead of the other candidates and attracted voters from many of those he had defeated.

About Emmanuel Macron:

- Emmanuel Macron was a former investment banker; Mr Macron worked as economic adviser to President François Hollande before taking up the post of economy minister in 2014.

- He is not an MP and has never stood for election before, but his political rise has been meteoric.

- His Macron Law was a controversial reform bill that allowed shops to open more often on Sundays and deregulated some sectors of industry.

- He also championed digital start-ups, but his policies drew opposition from the most left-wing Socialists.

- He launched En Marche as "neither left nor right" in April 2016 and resigned from the government before launching a presidential bid.

Elections affect on France's prospects of exit from European Union:

- Emmanuel Macron's win could prove fruitful to make France more attractive to business and will be proved fruitful for the European Union region too.

- The current president took many efforts to reform the French labour market and economy when he was Economy Minister.

- Hence it is assumed that the current results may not affect the European Union adversely.

> Q. How do you think France election and its result will impact Indo-France relations and France's prospects of exit from European Union?

3. NEW PRESIDENT IN SOUTH KOREA

News:

- In the current Presidential election South Korean liberal politician Moon Jae has won the country's presidential election ending a decade of conservative rule and potentially reshaping the country's policy toward North Korea.

About the election:

- Moon is the Democratic Party's candidate replaced the ousted President Park Geun-hye, and was declared the winner by the country's National Election Commission.

- Moon is a former human rights lawyer and is likely to mean an overhaul for Seoul's policy on North Korea.

- Unlike his hard-line conservative predecessor, he favours engagement with Pyongyang and has challenged the deployment of a controversial US missile defense system.

Issues in election:

Handling North Korea

- Under the previous conservative government's, South Korea has taken a confrontational approach toward the North by engaging in military exercises with the United States off the peninsula and participating in tightening sanctions over the North's missile and nuclear weapons programs.

U.S. Relations

- A defining issue has been the previous government's acceptance of an American antimissile system on South Korean soil to guard against missile attacks from the North.

Corporate Corruption

- The impeachment and recent removal from office of President Park Geun-hye in an influence-peddling case underline the strong influence of the chaebol (group of rich industrialists) in the upper reaches of government. Similar scandals have failed to curb the power of these family-controlled conglomerates.

- As in the past, most candidates have promised legislation to make the chaebol more transparent and to make it harder for chairmen to help their children amass fortunes through dubious but lucrative deals involving their companies.

Economic Inequality

- The youth unemployment rate reached 8.2 percent currently which is highest level since 1999, raising questions about the country's ability to create jobs for recent college graduates.

Q. South Korea is undergone a regime change. Critically analyse the key issues and the backdrop as to why sudden election had taken place in South Korea.

4. U.K. REFUSED TO APOLOGISE FOR BALFOUR DECLARATION

News:

- The British government refused to respond to apologise for the 1917 Balfour Declaration that played an important role in the subsequent creation of the state of Israel.

- The Balfour Apology Campaign headed by the Palestinian Return Centre (PRC) launched a petition urging the British government to openly apologise to the Palestinian people for issuing the Balfour Declaration.

About Balfour Declaration:

- Balfour Declaration signed in November 1917 was a statement of British support for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.

- Britain's public acknowledgement and support of the Zionist movement emerged from its growing concern surrounding the direction of the First World War.

- By mid-1917, Britain and France were mired in a virtual stalemate with Germany on the Western Front while efforts to defeat Turkey had failed spectacularly.

- On the Eastern Front, the fate of one Ally, Russia, was uncertain: revolution in March had toppled Czar Nicholas II and the provisional government was struggling against widespread opposition to maintain the country's disintegrating war effort against Germany and Austria-Hungary.

- Although the United States had just entered the war on the Allied side, a sizeable infusion of American troops was not scheduled to arrive on the continent until the following year.

- Against this backdrop, the government of Prime Minister David Lloyd George was elected in December 1916 who made the decision to publicly support Zionism, a movement led in Britain by Chaim Weizmann, a Russian Jewish chemist who had settled in Manchester.

- The motives behind this decision were various: aside from a genuine belief in the righteousness of the Zionist cause, Britain's leaders hoped that a formal declaration in favour of Zionism would help gain Jewish support for the Allies in neutral countries, in the United States and especially in Russia where the powerfully anti-Semitic czarist government had just been overthrown with the help of Russia's significant Jewish population.

- Finally, despite Britain's earlier agreement with France dividing influence in the region after the presumed defeat of the Ottoman Empire, it had come to see British dominance in Palestine.

- The establishment of a Zionist state in Palestine under British protection would accomplish this, while seemingly following the stated Allied aim of self-determination for smaller nations.

Impact

- The influence of the Balfour Declaration on the course of post-war events was immediate: According to the mandate system created by the Versailles Treaty of 1919 (treaty to end First World War), Britain was entrusted with the temporary administration of Palestine, with the understanding that it would work on behalf of both its Jewish and Arab inhabitants.

- Many Arabs, in Palestine and elsewhere were angered by their failure to receive the nationhood and self-government they had been led to expect in return for their participation in the war against Turkey.

- In the years after the war, the Jewish population in Palestine increased dramatically, along with the instances of Jewish-Arab violence.

- The area's instability led Britain to delay making a decision on Palestine's future.

- In the aftermath of World War II and the terrors of the Holocaust (genocide of jews) however, growing international support for Zionism led to the official declaration in 1948 of the State of Israel.

About the current issue:

- Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has called on Britain to apologize for issuing the declaration and cancel celebrations of its centenary.

- Britain plans to hold celebrations along with Israeli officials to mark the November 2 centenary of the Balfour Declaration**.**

- While the Foreign Office of Britain said that it does not intend to apologize for issuing the declaration, it added in its statement that the document should have called for the protection of political rights of the non-Jewish communities in Palestine, particularly their right to self-determination.

- The Balfour Declaration states that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine while making no mention of national rights of non-Jews.

- The Palestinian Authority ambassador to the UK said that unless Britain apologized, cancelled planned celebrations and recognized a Palestinian state, the Palestinians would go ahead with plans for a lawsuit against the British government for issuing the Balfour Declaration.

- Palestinian campaigners have long condemned the Balfour declaration as a pledge issued by a British government that gave away land it did not own.

> Q. What is Balfour Declaration? Why was it recently in news?

5. IRAN'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

News:

- Hassan Rouhani has been re-elected as the President of Iran in the recently held presidential elections in Iran.

- The campaign was hard-fought, particularly between moderate Rouhani and his closest contender, hardliner Ebrahim Raisi. During his first term in office, the president struck a deal with world powers to curb the country's nuclear programme in return for sanctions relief.

About structure of power in Iran – The Supreme leader:

- At the top of Iran's power structure is the supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who succeeded Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the father of the Iranian Revolution, upon Khomeini's death in 1989. Khomeini and Khamenei are the only two men to have held the office since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979.

- According to Iran's Constitution, the Supreme Leader is responsible for the delineation and

supervision of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

- The Supreme Leader is commander-in-chief of the armed forces and controls the Islamic Republic's intelligence and security operations; he alone can declare war or peace.

- He has the power to appoint and dismiss the leaders of the judiciary, the state radio and television networks and the supreme commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

- He also appoints six of the twelve members of the Council of Guardians, the powerful body that oversees the activities of Parliament and determines which candidates are qualified to run for public office.

President:

- The president is the second highest ranking official in Iran. While the president has a high public profile, however his power is in many ways limited back by the constitution which subordinates the entire executive branch to the Supreme Leader. In fact, Iran is the only state in which the executive branch does not control the armed forces.

Parliament

- The Iranian Parliament is a unicameral legislative body whose 290 members are publicly elected every four years. It drafts legislation, ratifies international treaties and approves the country's budget.

Assembly of experts

- The Assembly of Experts, which meets for one week every year, consists of 86 virtuous and learned clerics elected by the public to eight-year terms. Like presidential and parliamentary elections, the Council of Guardians determines who can run for a seat in the assembly.

- Members of the Assembly of Experts in turn elect the Supreme Leader from within their own ranks and periodically reconfirm him. The assembly has never been known to challenge any of the Supreme Leader's decisions.

Judiciary

- The judiciary branch of Iran's government is largely controlled by the Supreme Leader, who appoints the head of the judiciary, who in turn appoints the head of the Supreme Court and the chief public prosecutor.

Q. Iran has a unique structure of power in place. In the wake of recent presidential elections critically analyse the role of President and other seats of power in Iran.

6. NEPALESE PRIME MINISTER RESIGNED

News:

- The Prime Minister of Nepal Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" has resigned after a brief period of nine months, honouring a power sharing understanding reached between his party and the ruling partner Nepali Congress.

About the resignation of the Prime Minister:

- Prachanda, the Chairman of Communist Party Nepal (Maoist Centre), had reached an understanding with Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba that he would step down as Prime Minister and hand over the leadership to him after nine months.

- The pact was to run the government on a rotational basis until elections to the parliament are held in February 2018.

- Prachanda first became prime minister on 18 August, 2008, continuing in the position till 25 May, 2009, when he resigned after a political tussle with the then president Ram Baran Yadav over the appointment of army chief and the integration of former Maoist rebels into the army. His government was reduced to a minority after key ally CPN-UML withdrew its support.

- The arrangement was made in such a manner that while the local body elections would be held under the former rebel leader's leadership, the provincial and national elections will be held under Deuba's rule.

- Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist-Leninist leader K.P. Oli opposed that the Prime Minister could not resign in the middle of local elections and should continue until the second phase of the polls is completed.

Current political situation in Nepal:

- The local elections are about to happen but after the resignation of Prime Minister there are speculations over the successful completion of the local elections.

- The current crisis has exposed fundamental political fault lines in Nepal, not just within political party coalitions but also with regard to the growing issue of the influence of India and China.

- The Nepali Congress president Sher Bahadur Deuba would be the next Prime Minister.

- However, Nepal still has considerable hurdles to overcome. Political divisions and infighting threaten the prospects of a properly functioning government.

7. MANCHESTER ATTACK

News:

- In a suicide bombing attack at Manchester Arena twenty-two people were killed and 116 injured.

- The suspected attacker was 22-year-old Salman Abedi who detonated a home-made bomb in the arena's foyer as crowds were leaving a performance by US singer Ariana Grande.

- Though an Isis-related website claimed the attacker was a caliphate soldier who had killed crusaders but it remains unclear what links if any Abedi had to the terror group.

About the attack:

- The recent phenomenon of attacking soft targets continued after Batacalan concert attack and other such events .The blast, between the main arena and neighbouring Victoria station blew people off their feet and caused widespread panic. It was the worst terrorist attack in Britain since the 7/7 attacks on London in 2005.

Operation Temperer:

- After the Manchester attack, according to the investigations of intelligence agencies, there are threat for another terrorist attack hence the threat level in Britain increased from severe to critical.

- The Operation Temperer was to lower down the estimated risk of another attack in which military personnel were deployed to bolster security in the wake of the Manchester bombing, would be scaled back. Additional resources were deployed to help with the investigation into the attack and provide greater security at a host of weekend events.

8. FIRST DRAFT OF GLOBAL TREATY ON NUCLEAR BAN

News:

- The United Nations on 22 May 2017 released the first draft of the nuclear ban treaty that would legally prohibit the possession of Nuclear Weapons.

About the treaty:

- The draft treaty is the culmination of a sustained campaign, supported by more than 130 non-nuclear states frustrated with the slow pace of disarmament, to prohibit nuclear weapons and persuade nuclear-armed states to disarm.

- Nine countries are known or believed to possess nuclear weapons: the US, UK, Russia, China, France, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel. None has supported the draft plan.

- It would also require the states to make a pledge to never use the weapons and also to never develop, produce, stockpile, transfer or test them.

- The draft also rejects the concept of nuclear deterrence promoted by nuclear armed countries.

- The Draft was released in Geneva by Costa Rican UN Ambassador. It condemns the use of nuclear weapons a violation of International humanitarian law.

- States would also be obliged to destroy any nuclear weapons they possess and would be forbidden from transferring nuclear weapons to any other recipient.

- The US and other nuclear powers have argued states should strengthen and improve the 47-year-old nuclear non-proliferation treaty instead of adopting a total ban.

- US officials have cited the threat posed by North Korea, which has conducted a series of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile tests this year, as reason why nuclear deterrence and gradual nuclear disarmament is still needed.

The efficacy of a ban treaty:

- Nuclear weapons are ethically unacceptable in the 21st century. Intended to indiscriminately kill civilians, this 1940s technology is putting countless lives at risk every day. Their continued existence undermines the moral credibility of every country which relies on them. A treaty to ban them as a first step towards their elimination will have real and lasting impact.

- Support has been growing steadily over months of negotiations but it has no support from the nine known nuclear states which include the veto-wielding permanent five members of the UN Security Council.

- Critics argue that a treaty cannot succeed without the participation of the states that possess nuclear weapons or the alliance states that enjoy their protection. Australia, citing the deterrent effect of the US nuclear umbrella has been the most outspoken of the non-nuclear states.

- The proponents say a nuclear weapons ban will create moral suasion in the vein of the cluster and landmine conventions for nuclear weapons states to disarm, and establish an international norm prohibiting the development, possession and use of nuclear weapons.

- Non-nuclear states have expressed increasing frustration with the current nuclear regime and the piecemeal progress towards disarmament. With nuclear weapons states modernizing and in some cases increasing their arsenals, instead of discarding them, more states are becoming disenchanted with the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and lending their support for an outright ban.

About Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty

- The NPT is a landmark international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament.

- The Treaty represents the only binding commitment in a multilateral treaty to the goal of disarmament by the nuclear-weapon States. It was opened for signature in 1968 and entered into force in 1970. On 11 May 1995, the Treaty was extended indefinitely.

- A total of 191 States have joined the Treaty, including the five nuclear-weapon States. More countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement, a testament to the Treaty's significance.

- To further the goal of non-proliferation and as a confidence-building measure between States parties, the Treaty establishes a safeguards system under the responsibility of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

- Safeguards are used to verify compliance with the Treaty through inspections conducted by the IAEA. The Treaty promotes cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear technology and equal access to this technology for all States parties while safeguards prevent the diversion of fissile material for weapons use.

About IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency)

- IAEA was established in 1957 and currently has 168 member states. Widely known as the world's Atoms for Peace organization within the United Nations family, the IAEA is the international centre for cooperation in the nuclear field.

- The Agency works with its Member States and multiple partners worldwide to promote the safe, secure and peaceful use of nuclear technologies.

Functions

- The main functions of the IAEA are to:

  ➢ encourage and assist research, development and practical application of atomic energy for peaceful uses throughout the world;

  ➢ establish and administer safeguards designed to ensure that such activity assisted by the Agency is not used to further any military purpose;

  ➢ apply safeguards to relevant activities at the request of Member States;

  ➢ apply, under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and other international treaties, mandatory comprehensive safeguards in non-nuclear weapon States (NNWS) Parties to such treaties.

- In carrying out its functions, the Agency conducts its activities in accordance with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter to promote peace and international cooperation, and in conformity with policies of the United Nations for furthering the establishment of worldwide disarmament through safeguards.

Q. The United Nations on 22 May 2017 released the first draft of the nuclear ban treaty that would legally prohibit the possession of Nuclear Weapons. Critically analyse.

5. INDIA AND WORLD

1. TURKISH PRESIDENT VISITED INDIA

News:

- The President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid state visit to India from 30 April-01 May 2017. President Erdogan had earlier visited India in 2008 as the Prime Minister of Turkey.

Key Highlights of the visit:

- An India-Turkey Business Forum meeting for the visiting Turkish businessmen and their Indian business counterparts was organized during the visit. It was addressed by the President of Turkey and Prime Minister of India.

- President Erdoğan was conferred a Honorary degree (Honoris Causa) by Jamia Millia Islamia University. The two leaders agreed to encourage business efforts to achieve a level of at least USD 10 billion by 2020 in bilateral trade. Both leaders expressed their willingness for holding of the Turkey-India Joint Economic Committee Meetings regularly.

- Pointing to the importance of energy in bilateral relations, both the nations expressed their willingness to improve cooperation in the fields of hydrocarbons and renewable energy (solar and wind). To boost bilateral cooperation in the field of civil aviation for encouraging the people-to-people contacts the leaders agreed on the necessity of holding frequent civil aviation meetings.

- The two Leaders underlined their shared interest in strengthening global nuclear non-proliferation objectives. In this regard, President Erdogan welcomed India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in June 2016. Prime Minister of India thanked President Erdogan for Turkey's support for India's membership of the MTCR and applications to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group and Wassenaar Arrangement.

- For the solution of the Kashmir problem between India and Pakistan the Turkish president offered to mediate between both India and Pakistan. In response Indian Prime Minister explained that the Kashmir conflict will be solved bilaterally between India and Pakistan and thanked the Turkish president for his supportive gesture.

- Both the nations strongly condemned the use of double standards in addressing the menace of terrorism and agreed to strengthen cooperation in combating terrorism both at the bilateral level and within the multilateral system. In this regard, they called for early conclusion of negotiations on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

- Recognizing the need for comprehensive UN reforms including the Security Council expansion to make the body more representative, accountable and effective both sides agreed to work towards the reform of the UN Security Council in order to enhance its democratic nature and to reflect the reality of the twenty-first century.

Agreements signed during the visit:

- Agreement about Cultural Exchange Program for 2017-2020.

- MoU for Cooperation between Foreign Service Institute of India and Diplomacy Academy of Turkey.

- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Turkey and the Government of the Republic of India on Gainful Occupation for Family Members of the Members of Diplomatic Mission or Consular Post.

- MoU between Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), India and Information and Communication Technologies Authority (ICTA), Turkey.

- Cooperation Agreement between Press Trust of India (PTI) and Anadolu Agency (AA) of Turkey.

India-Turkey relations:

- There are historical connections between India and Turkey. The first exchange of diplomatic missions between the Ottoman Sultans and the Muslim rulers of the subcontinent dates back to the years 1481-82.

- India and Turkey also have a cultural overlap. The Sufi philosophy of Mevlana Jelaluddin Rumi found resonance in the Indian sub-continent with its own traditions of Sufism and the Bhakti movement.

- More recent historical contacts between India and Turkey were reflected in the medical mission led by renowned Indian freedom fighter, Dr. M.A. Ansari, to Turkey in 1912 during the Balkan Wars and the Khilafat movement (1919-1924).

- India also extended support in the 1920s to Turkey's War of Independence and in the formation of the Turkish republic.

- Mahatma Gandhi had taken a stand against the injustices inflicted on Turkey at the end of World War-I which the whole nation had overwhelmingly supported.

Economic & Commercial Relations:

- India-Turkey economic and commercial cooperation constitutes an important dimension of the bilateral relationship. Several bilateral agreements and institutional mechanisms at the governmental level as well as Business to Business level provide the framework for strengthening economic and commercial ties.

- The Bilateral Trade Agreement between India and Turkey was signed in 1973. This was followed by an Agreement on setting up an India–Turkey Joint Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation (JCETC) in 1983.

- The India-Turkey Joint Business Council (JBC) between Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Foreign Economic Relations Board of Turkey (DEIK) was set up in 1996.

- Bilateral investment and economic cooperation progressed in the last decade and Bilateral India-Turkey trade has increased significantly in the preceding decade and a half.

Cultural Relations and Indian Community in Turkey:

- India and Turkey share traditional cultural overlap and bilateral cooperation has enhanced over the years.

- The Turkish edition of book on Gandhi's Outstanding Leadership was released at the prestigious Koç University in 2015.

- The Taj Express Bollywood musical group from India was invited by the local authorities of Antalya to the International Theatre Festival in Antalya in 2015 and again in May, 2016.

- Turkish students study Hindi in Central Institute of Hindi and Turkish diplomats have participated in Professional Course for Foreign Diplomats (PCFD) in India.

- World Hindi Day was celebrated at the Embassy in collaboration with the Indology Department, Ankara University on 09 January, 2016. Hindi books have been presented to the Indology Department of Erciyes University and Ankara University.

- The Indian Community in Turkey is small, mostly working in business establishments and universities in Istanbul and Ankara.

Conclusion:

- India and Turkey being among the top 20 economies in the world with sound economic fundamentals and increasing convergence of positions could contribute to addressing international issues of mutual interest such as new economic order, stability and security of the respective regions thus the leaders resolved to bolster relations at all fronts**.**

- Both Prime Minister of India and President Erdogan during the discussions affirmed that the relationship between India and Turkey was anchored in historical exchanges between the Leaders and the peoples of the two nations.

- In the recent geopolitical scenario in the Middle East and Europe, Turkey stands as India's stable and reliable partner.

2. PRESIDENT OF PALESTINE VISITED INDIA

News:

- The President of State of Palestine, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas visited India from 14 to 17 May 2017. This is the third State Visit to India by President Abbas.

Key highlights of the visit:

- The visit was significant in the light of Prime Minister of India's Israel visit next month. The Palestinian President wanted India to support the peace process between Israel and Palestine and to endorse the two-state solution for the resolution of Israel- Palestine conflict.

- During the visit Palestinian President Abbas visited C-DAC (Centre for Development of Advanced Computing) in Noida to forge cooperation between Palestine - India Techno Park being built by India in Palestine and Indian IT industry. He also visited India Islamic Cultural Centre in Delhi.

- The leaders of both the nations reaffirmed the historically close and friendly ties. India re-emphasized its political support to the Palestinian cause and also ensured its support for the developmental projects in Palestine by extending technical and financial assistance.

- The visit provided an opportunity for reviewing the entire gamut of bilateral relations among both the nations along with Middle East Peace Process, regional and international issues. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' State visit to India was under scrutiny to see how he would respond to India's increasing closeness to Israel. But the official meetings ended with a consensus on both sides that India's commitment to Palestine remains the same.

MoUs signed:

- MoU on Visa Exemption on Diplomatic and Official Passports.

- MoU on Cooperation in Youth Affairs and Sports.

- MoU on Agricultural Cooperation.

- MoU on Cooperation in Health Sector.

- MoU on Information-Technology and Electronics.

India – Palestine Relations

- India's solidarity with the Palestinian people and its attitude to the Palestinian question was given voice during our freedom struggle by Mahatma Gandhi. Since then empathy with the Palestinian cause and friendship with the people of Palestine has become an integral part of India's foreign policy.

- India was the first Non-Arab State to recognize PLO (Palestine liberation organisation) as sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974.

- India was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the Palestine Authority in Gaza which later was shifted to Ramallah in 2003. India has always played a proactive role in garnering support for the Palestinian cause in multilateral fora.

- India co-sponsored the draft resolution on the right of Palestinians to self determination during the 53rd session of the UN General Assembly and voted in favour of it.

- India also voted in favour of UN General Assembly Resolution in October 2003 against construction of the separation wall by Israel and supported subsequent resolutions of the UNGA in this regard.

- India voted in favour of accepting Palestine as a full member of UNESCO. At the United Nations General Assembly on November 29, 2012 the status of Palestine was upgraded to a 'non-member state'. India co-sponsored this resolution and voted in favour of it.

- India supported the Bandung Declaration on Palestine at Asian African Commemorative Conference in April 2015. India supported installation of Palestinian flag at UN premises along with other observer states like the flags of member states in September 2015.

Developmental cooperation:

- Apart from the strong political support to the Palestinian cause at international and bilateral levels, India has been contributing material and technical assistance to the Palestinian people.

- With the Government of India's aid, two projects were completed in the field of higher education i.e. Jawaharlal Nehru Library at the Al Azhar University in Gaza city and the Mahatma Gandhi Library-cum-Student Activity Centre at the Palestine Technical College in the Gaza Strip.

- India provided plot and constructed a chancery building for the Embassy of Palestine in New Delhi. Government of India has set up an India-Palestine Centre of Excellence in ICT and Innovation in Al Quds University in 2015.

Trade

- Since, trade between India and Palestine is channelized through Israel, complete trade statistics are not available. Limited data suggests that India-Palestine bilateral trade stands at around US$ 30 million. Apart from trade in goods, there is vast scope for trade in services. India's prowess in IT and IT enabled services; consultancy etc. is widely acknowledged in Palestine

Culture

- Existence of cultural similarities and having a small Indian community in Palestine has made Indian arts and culture very popular in Palestine.

- Several cultural activities, including film shows and photo exhibitions have been organized by the Representative Office of India in various Palestinian cities in addition to screening of documentaries prepared by Public Diplomacy division in local TV channels, local schools and youth clubs. A performance by the Indian martial arts dance troupe Kalaripayattu was organized in October 2004.

- In 2014, a bust of Mahatma Gandhi was unveiled at the Garden of Nations and a Kathak performance was organized at Ramallah.

India's view on Palestine issue:

- India traditionally believes in the two-state solution and supports the establishment of a sovereign independent and a viable state of Palestine.

- India's support for Palestine has not deterred its growing relationship with Israel. India has ensured that increasing its closeness to Israel doesn't compromise its support for Palestine.

- However, over the years the Indian government has diluted its reaction to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.

- In 2014 India favoured a UN resolution which established a Commission of Inquiry to investigate a violation of international humanitarian and human rights law in the 'Occupied Territories' during ' Operation Protective Edge'. But Indian Government was reluctant to pass a resolution in Parliament condemning the Israeli action deviating from its earlier practice.

- In 2015 India abstained at the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) on a resolution welcoming the report of the same Commission of Inquiry. It was the first time India refused to vote against Israel.

- Later on, Indian Government clarified that there was no change in India's traditional support to the Palestinian cause and it was only due to the reference made in UNHRC resolution for taking Israel to the ICC (International criminal court) which made India abstain from voting. (India has neither signed nor ratified the Rome statute on ICC). Earlier also whenever the UNHRC had made a direct reference to the ICC such as in case of Syria and North resolution the general approach of India had been to abstain.

- However with an increased focus on closer ties with Israel there is little doubt that India has to create a balance between traditional support to Palestine and new emerging geopolitical situations.

> Q. India and Palestine share unique bonhomie. Critically analyse the changing dynamics on India-Palestine relationships.

3. INDIAN PRIME MINISTER VISITED SRI LANKA

News:

- In an attempt to further cement India's ties with Sri Lanka Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi visited Sri Lanka as the chief guest to inaugurate the Vesak ceremony which is the main Buddhist festival in Sri Lanka.

Key Highlights of the visit:

- The visit was more a ceremonial visit to deepen the bilateral ties than an economic one hence during the visit no agreement was signed between the two countries and no joint statement was issued.

- The visit was significant, in the context that India and the US have expressed concerns about the Colombo government's economic ties with Beijing which is not in favour of India-Sri Lanka bilateral relations.

- The visit was mainly aimed at reinforcing the traditional connect between India and Sri Lanka at a time when China is seeking to make inroads in the island nation.

- During the visit the Indian Prime Minister gave speech in Colombo about thousands of years of India-Sri Lanka relations through Buddhism, he said India is at a moment of great opportunity in our ties with Sri Lanka, an opportunity to achieve a quantum jump in our partnership across different fields.

- The Indian Prime Minister reiterated the significance of India- Sri Lanka relation for maritime as well as strategic security in the Indian Ocean region.

- During the visit India highlighted its concerns such as Sri Lanka's repeated postponement of economic pacts between the two countries, including an Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement (ETCA) which India regard as beneficial for its strategic interests.

- The visit was the latest expression of the sharp contest between India and China to influence Sri Lanka, strategically located in the Indian Ocean.

- During his visit, the Indian Prime Minister addressed Tamil community and addressed a meeting of plantation workers organised by the estate trade unions. He attended the opening of a new hospital funded by Indian government and promised 10,000 houses for plantation workers.

Visit of Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to India

- The Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe paid state visit to India from 25-29 April 2017.

- The two leaders discussed a range of bilateral issues and matters of mutual interest. The Ministers of External Affairs, Home Affairs and Road, Transport, Highways and Shipping discussed several issues with the visiting dignitaries.

- The discussions of the Indian leadership with the visiting dignitary provided both sides an opportunity to review the progress in implementation of the decisions taken during various high level exchanges in the past two years or so, including the visit of the Prime Minister to Sri Lanka in March 2015 and the visits of the President and the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka to India since February 2015.

- The Indian side reiterated India's commitment to promoting prosperity in the neighbourhood and affirmed the continued support of India for realizing the vision of the Sri Lankan leadership for a stable, peaceful and prosperous Sri Lanka.

- The leaders welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding for 'Cooperation in Economic Projects' which outlines the agenda for bilateral economic cooperation in the foreseeable future. Both sides expressed their commitment to ensuring that this mutually beneficial agenda is expeditiously implemented.

- They also expressed the hope for early conclusion of the ongoing negotiations on the Economic

---

and Technology Cooperation Agreement.

- Pointing out that India had welcomed Sri Lanka co-sponsoring the Resolution Promoting Reconciliation, Accountability and Human Rights in Sri Lanka at the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), the Indian leadership expressed the earnest hope that recommendations on the reconciliation would be completed within the stipulated timeframe of two years.

- The Indian interlocutors requested continued cooperation of the Government of Sri Lanka for humanitarian treatment of Indian fishermen without resorting to force under any circumstances.

- Both sides welcomed the meeting of the Joint Working Group on Fisheries held in Colombo. The Indian side also informed the Sri Lankan side of the measures taken by India to encourage the Indian fishermen concerned for adopting deep sea fishing.

India- Sri Lanka relations:

- The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is more than 2,500 years old and both sides have built upon a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction.

- In recent years, the relationship has been marked by close contacts at the highest political level, growing trade and investment, cooperation in the fields of development, education, culture and defence as well as a broad understanding on major issues of international interest.

- Bilateral exchanges at various levels over the past year and significant progress in implementation of developmental assistance projects for the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and disadvantaged sections of the population in Sri Lanka has helped further cement the bonds of friendship between the two countries.

- The nearly three-decade long armed conflict between Sri Lankan forces and the LTTE came to an end in May 2009. During the course of the conflict, India supported the right of the Government of Sri Lanka to act against terrorist forces.

- At the same time, it conveyed at the highest levels its deep concern at the plight of the mostly Tamil civilian population, emphasizing that their rights and welfare should not get enmeshed in hostilities against the LTTE.

- The need for national reconciliation through a political settlement of the ethnic issue has been reiterated by India at the highest levels.

- India's consistent position is in favour of a negotiated political settlement which is acceptable to all communities within the framework of a united Sri Lanka and which is consistent with democracy, pluralism and respect for human rights.

Commercial Relations

- India's largest trade partner in South Asia is Sri Lanka. India in turn is Sri Lanka's largest trade partner globally.

- Trade between the two countries grew particularly rapidly after the entry into force of the India-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreement in March 2000.

- Sri Lanka has long been a priority destination for direct investment from India. India is among the four largest overall investors in Sri Lanka with cumulative investments over US$ 800 million.

- The last few years have also witnessed an increasing trend of Sri Lankan investments into India.

Developmental Cooperation

- The conclusion of the armed conflict saw the emergence of a major humanitarian challenge, with nearly 300,000 Tamil civilians housed in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

- The Government of India had put in place a robust programme of assistance to help the IDPs return to normal life as quickly as possible.

- India's immediate humanitarian assistance to IDPs included supply of 250,000 family relief packs, establishment of an emergency medical unit which treated over 50,000 IDPs and assistance for their rehabilitation.

- India also assisted in revival of agricultural and economic activities in areas affected by the conflict. With the shift from relief and rehabilitation to reconstruction and development, the Government of India turned its attention to the housing requirements of the IDPs.

- Sri Lanka is one of the major recipients of development credit given by the Government of India. Under a line of credit the tsunami-damaged Colombo-Matara rail link has been repaired and upgraded.

- On March 4, 2014 the reconstructed railway track between Kilinochchi and Pallai was inaugurated. India is also involved in projects for renovation of Palaly Airport, Kankesanthurai Harbour, construction of Cultural Centre in Jaffna, interconnection of electricity grids between the two countries, construction of a 150-bed hospital in Dickoya and setting up a coal power plant in Sampur as a joint venture between National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) and Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB).

- India also continues to assist a large number of smaller development projects in areas like education, health, transport connectivity, small and medium enterprise development and training in many parts of the country through its grant funding.

Cultural Relations and Cooperation in Education sector:

- The Cultural Cooperation Agreement signed by the Government of India and the Government of Sri Lanka on 29 November, 1977 at New Delhi forms the basis on which the periodic Cultural Exchange Programmes between the two countries are signed and implemented.

- The Indian Cultural Centre in Colombo actively promotes awareness of Indian culture by offering classes in Indian music, dance, Hindi and Yoga. Every year cultural troupes from both countries exchange visits.

- India and Sri Lanka also commemorated the 2600th year of the attainment of enlightenment by Lord Buddha (Sambuddhatva Jayanthi) through joint activities. These included the exposition of Sacred Kapilavastu Relics in Sri Lanka took place from 19 August 2012 to 11 September 2012.

- Education is another important area of cooperation between India and Sri Lanka. India now offers about 290 scholarship slots annually to deserving Sri Lankan students which benefits not only regular undergraduate studies but also provides opportunities for higher research.

- In addition, under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Scheme and the Colombo Plan, India offers nearly 200 slots annually to Sri Lankan nationals for short and medium term training courses in a wide variety of technical and professional disciplines.

- Tourism also forms an important link between India and Sri Lanka. In 2013, out of the total 1274,593 tourists, 208,795 were from India constituting 16.38% of the total. Sri Lankan tourists too are among the top ten sources for the Indian tourism market.

- The India-Sri Lanka Foundation, set up in December 1998 as an intergovernmental initiative, also aims towards enhancement of scientific, technical, educational and cultural cooperation through civil society exchanges and enhancing contact between the younger generations of the two countries.

Indian Community

- The People of Indian Origin (PIOs) comprise Sindhis, Borahs, Gujaratis, Memons, Parsis, Malayalis and Telugu speaking persons who have settled down in Sri Lanka (most of them after partition) and are engaged in various business ventures.

- Though their numbers (10,000 approximately) are much lesser as compared to Indian Origin Tamils (IOTs), they are economically prosperous and are well placed. Each of these communities has their organization which organizes festivals and cultural events.

- According to unofficial statistics, it is estimated that around 2000 Indian expatriates are living in Sri Lanka. The IOTs are mostly employed in either tea or rubber plantations in Uva and Sabragamuwa provinces though during the last decade, the younger generation has been migrating to Colombo in search of employment.

- A fair number of IOTs living in Colombo are engaged in business. According to Government census figures (2011), the population of IOTs is about 842,000.

> Q. There has been a sharp contest between India and China to influence Sri Lanka which is strategically located in the Indian Ocean. Discuss.

4. SOUTH ASIA SATELLITE:

News:

- The satellite dedicated to SAARC nations except Pakistan was launched by Indian Space and Research Organisation from Sri Harikota for cooperation in the socio-economic development of the South Asian region.

About the satellite:

- The South Asia Satellite is a geosynchronous communications and meteorology satellite developed by Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) for the South Asian nations including Afghanistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives.

- Though the satellite was initially called the SAARC satellite, it was renamed as South Asia Satellite (SAS) after Pakistan withdrew from the proposal. Initially India could not reach an agreement with Afghanistan to be a part of the project but later on it became a part of the project.

- The satellite is having 12 transponders in Ku-band and a coverage area over the South Asian region. One transponder is allocated to each of the participating countries. The successful launch is also an indication of success of the indigenous Cryogenic engines being developed by ISRO. The project has been totally funded by India.

- This is very economical as compared to the benefits which will accrue to the participating countries, which is estimated to be around Rs. 10,000 crores during the satellite's 12 year mission life.

- The space cooperation is for the development of the South Asian region. The benefits of this satellite will go a long way in meeting the developmental needs of the countries participating in this project.

- The project is a significant step towards promoting cooperation with the entire South Asia. The benefits will be in the areas of mapping of natural resources, tele-medicine, education, IT connectivity and people-to-people links.

- The project was proposed in 2014 and the Indian Prime Minister had made a unilateral proposal of India launching the satellite whose data would be shared with the eight SAARC countries for their development. The satellite is meant for providing communication and disaster support, connectivity among the countries of the South Asian region.

- It will provide a significant capability to each of the participating countries in terms of DTH (direct-to-home), certain VSAT (very small aperture terminal) capacity plus linking among the countries for both disaster information transfer and also in the field of education and research.

Space diplomacy and SAARC Satellite:

- After gaining expertise in the art and science of making satellites and putting them into orbit the project was to show the world that India can take a lead in regional cooperation.

- The initiative to have an exclusive communications satellite for the countries of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was envisioned in 2014 when the present government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarked on a policy of engagement with neighbours, also referred to as the 'neighbourhood first policy'.

- In June 2014, Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was tasked to develop a SAARC satellite with full range of applications and services which could be gifted to India's neighbours. This was seen as an effort towards development of SAARC countries with India playing a lead role.

- The vision took shape on May 05, 2017 with the launch of GSLV-F09 rocket from ISRO's launch facility at Sriharikota. The rocket carried the satellite GSAT-9 which was successfully put into a Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) for use by seven South Asian Countries. Presently, the countries that would benefit from the satellite are Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

- Though the data from the satellite is freely accessible, the member countries will have to build their own ground infrastructure to tap this data and provide internal networks.

- The strategic significance of the South Asia Satellite is enormous, as it has signalled a deeper integration of India with its neighbours. The push towards regional cooperation of SAARC countries will be seen as an effort towards development of the South Asia region, with India being seen as a big brother.

- India is the only country amongst the SAARC nations with fully developed satellite fabrication, launch and monitoring capability. Sharing the benefits accrued from the satellite will go a long way in bridging the gap between the countries of the region.

- What India has offered is not just its technological prowess but also a shared future as a developed South Asia is essential for India to emerge as a leading economy of the world.

- While putting a South Asia Satellite in orbit is just the beginning, sharing the services of Navigation Indian Constellation (NAVIC) could be the next step. Proactive diplomacy through space will also help in countering the growing influence of China in the neighbourhood.

Q. What is South Asia satellite and Space diplomacy? How do you think South Asia Satellite might affect and impact India's relation with South Asian nation?

5. INDIA- CYPRUS

News:

- The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Nicos Anastasiades paid a state visit to India from 25-29 April 2017.

Key Highlights of the visit:

- President Anastasiades was accompanied by a high-level business delegation. In New Delhi, he addressed a meeting of representatives of the Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry – CII, FICCI and ASSOCHAM and delivered a lecture at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF).

- During the meeting the two Leaders reaffirmed the traditionally close and time-tested friendship between India and Cyprus. They also underlined their mutual commitment to further strengthen and diversify this relationship.

- They noted that the ties between the two countries went back to even before the independence of Cyprus in 1960. They recalled the ideological commonalities and mutual respect between the founding fathers of the two nations, Mahatma Gandhi and Archbishop Makarios.

- Both sides reviewed with satisfaction the state of play of bilateral relations, covering a wide spectrum of political, economic, trade and cultural issues.

- The leaders agreed that the long tradition of political collaboration at bilateral and multilateral level provide a valuable base to take relations forward, which is underpinned on shared values of democracy, rule of law, international peace, security and shared prosperity and development for all nations.

- Prime Minister Modi reiterated India's unwavering and consistent support for the independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and unity of the Republic of Cyprus. President Anastasiades briefed Prime Minister Modi on the current state of play in the ongoing efforts to reunify the Republic of Cyprus through a functional, viable comprehensive settlement, in line with UNSC Resolutions and EU law.

- Realising the current levels of bilateral trade between the two nations and immense potential for growth both leaders emphasized the need for a comprehensive expansion of mutually beneficial contacts between the business communities of the two countries.

- The two leaders expressed satisfaction on the signing of revised India-Cyprus Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement in November 2016. Prime Minister Modi suggested that the revision of the Agreement could be utilized to increase investments between the two countries, especially in Indian flagship programmes like Make in India and various Cyprus investment projects.

- The two leaders took stock of progress in the implementation of existing bilateral agreements and underlined the importance of optimizing existing inter-governmental and other bilateral mechanisms.

- Recognizing new opportunities in light of their growing economies, the two sides decided to make further use of the Joint Economic Committee as a mechanism that proposes recommendations to the two governments on ways and means to expand mutually beneficial cooperation in all areas of common interest.

- President Anastasiades briefed Prime Minister Modi about the plan for developing the hi-tech sector in Cyprus as the third pillar of its economy. In light of India's well-established capabilities in the fields of Information Technology, ITES, Biotechnology and R&D, both sides identified these as potential areas for future cooperation.

- The two sides also noted other potential areas for bilateral economic cooperation arising from Cyprus's expertise in financial services and cooperation in knowledge-based industry relating to accountancy, legal and investment banking and merchant shipping research.

- In the context of India-EU relations the Republic of Cyprus, as a Member State of the European Union, reiterated its support for the strengthening of the India-EU Strategic Partnership based on shared values and principles and in line with the priorities set out in the India-EU Agenda for Action 2020. Both Leaders felt that India and the EU can work closely on major global issues, such as combating international terrorism, dealing with climate change and promotion of sustainable development.

- The two sides welcomed the recent adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2347(2017), aiming to combat the unlawful destruction of cultural heritage, religious sites and artifacts and the smuggling of cultural property by terrorist groups during armed conflict.

- Both countries share the view that the successful conclusion of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism remains a priority and will be a decisive step to further strengthen the global normative framework that will support vigorous international action against terrorism.

- President Anastasiades briefed Prime Minister Modi about the trilateral cooperation mechanisms that Cyprus and Greece have established with Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine respectively for the purpose of advancing dialogue and cooperation in various spheres in the Eastern Mediterranean and with the ultimate goal of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region.

Agreements signed:

- The following bilateral agreements and memorandum of understanding were exchanged:
  ➤ Merchant Shipping Agreement
  ➤ Revised Civil Aviation Agreement.
  ➤ Work Plan on cooperation in the field of agriculture.
  ➤ Executive Programme for Cultural, Education and Scientific Cooperation
  ➤ These will further enhance the longstanding relations between the two countries. In the framework of the newly-signed Protocol Amending the Air Services Agreement, it was agreed that both countries would focus on enhancing two-way tourism.

6. BANGLADESH BHUTAN INDIA NEPAL (BBIN) AGREEMENT ISSUE

News:

- The Bhutan government's intents to move a motion to withdraw the Motor Vehicle Agreement involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) during the joint sitting of the parliament .

About the issue:

- The Bhutanese government wants to withdraw the BBIN agreement. There have been internal differences over the BBIN pact as the council was skeptical.

- The council believes that ratifying the agreement, which aims to facilitate seamless cross-border movement of both cargo and passenger vehicles, will overwhelm Bhutan, the smallest country in the grouping. The opposition also argues that it will affect the livelihoods of Bhutanese transport operators. However, the main reason behind Bhutan's hesitance to sign the pact now is because of environmental concerns raised by a section of the country's citizens.

- On the contrary, the government argues that Bhutan's interests will be protected while enacting protocols, which will be the by-law of the agreement. While the opposition stance is that it could support the agreement if such assurances were incorporated in the protocols and presented along with the agreement in the Parliament.

- The government believes that implementation of the motor vehicle agreement, which is the first of any between the four countries, will open gates for cooperation in other areas. The government identified the agreement as the precursor to cooperation in other fields including connectivity, energy, trade and ICT.

- However, the Council remains unconvinced because of the principle of reciprocity which the agreement upholds. The 12-member joint parliamentary committee was formed to resolve the differences and propose recommendations to the Parliament.

- The chairman of the joint committee said the best option for the committee would be to propose a withdrawal as it will be tough to get support from the opposition and most council members regarding the agreement. Unable to ratify the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) motor vehicles agreement, Bhutan has asked the three other members to go ahead without it. The positive news is that Bhutan has not quit the plan altogether. But when they join, they have to negotiate the terms afresh.

Background:

- South Asia is one of the least integrated and connected regions of the world. Intra-regional trade is around five per cent of the total trade of South Asian countries. This lack of connectivity and integration has long been accepted as one of the biggest contributors to the sub-optimal utilisation of the region's economic potential.

- Cargo movement between countries in the region is mostly through transshipment arrangements at the border points. Issues like procedural delays, infrastructure bottlenecks (particularly parking and warehousing facilities and the security of the cargo in such facilities), corruption, governance issues, etc. further compound and complicate the issues.

- Replacing the large-scale transshipment operations with easy movement of vehicles across the borders via a motor vehicles agreement between the countries was the need of the hour that has the potential in effectively bypassing much of these hurdles.

- Therefore, in June 2015, the BBIN MVA Framework Agreement was signed and draft protocols (separately for cargo and passenger vehicles) are being finalised for its implementation. While

political will in the region is mostly enabling at this point in time, the countries are likely to face several implementation challenges in making this intent at the highest level a reality.

Objectives:

- To facilitate trade, transit and transport among four countries, viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal.

- Effective implementation of the BBIN MVA and such other enabling framework agreements and policy initiatives through evidence-based research, facilitate dialogue, advocacy and capacity building.

- Estimate the potential net gains from the effective implementation of the MVA and its impact on socio-economic development.

- To contribute towards effective implementation of transit protocols with an inclusive and participatory approach.

- Organize multi-level, multi-stakeholder advocacy dialogues and capacity building exercises for higher political buy-in for smooth implementation of BBIN MVA and other such transit arrangements among these countries.

About BBIN:

- The Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) Initiative is a sub regional architecture of countries in South Asia.

- It meets through official representation of member states to formulate, implement and review quadrilateral agreements across areas such as water resources management, connectivity of power, transport, and infrastructure.

- The transport ministers of the four countries signed the agreement in June 2015 in Thimphu

---

7. INDIA-PACIFIC ISLANDS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE

News:

- The India-Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference was hosted by Ministry of External Affairs, India and inaugurated by the Acting Prime Minister of Fiji, Mr Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum.

Key Highlights of the conference:

- Prime Minister of India explained that the conference is significant for a better understanding of solutions to the challenges faced by the region.

- Minister of State for External Affairs welcomed the representatives of 14 pacific nations and reaffirmed India's commitment to strengthen and taking forward its partnership with the Pacific Island Nations to take concrete action to create a sustainable world.

- The Minister stressed on the need to join hands through knowledge sharing, technology sharing and capacity building to minimise the serious impact of natural hazards, limiting human and economic loss in the region.

- Minister of State for External Affairs of India announced that India will contribute US$ 1 million to Fiji's Trust Fund for their Presidency of COP-23 to be held in November 2017.

- The Sustainable Development Conference (SDC), marks crucial step in India's pioneering initiative in engaging with the Pacific Island Countries (PICs).

- The dignitaries from Fiji reaffirmed that the creation of FIPIC (Forum for India Pacific Islands Co-operation) in 2014 has resulted in closer ties between India and the Pacific Island nations, giving people a chance to better their lives.

- The conference was held under the framework of the Forum for India Pacific Islands Co-operation (FIPIC), with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) as its key knowledge partner.

- During the two days of the programme, the conference focused on issues such as the blue economy, adaptation-mitigation practices for climate change, disaster preparedness, health, the International Solar Alliance as well as finding practical solutions to Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) implementation.

- The conference facilitated the exchange of knowledge and experience and initiate public-private partnerships and collaborations for the benefit of all participating countries.
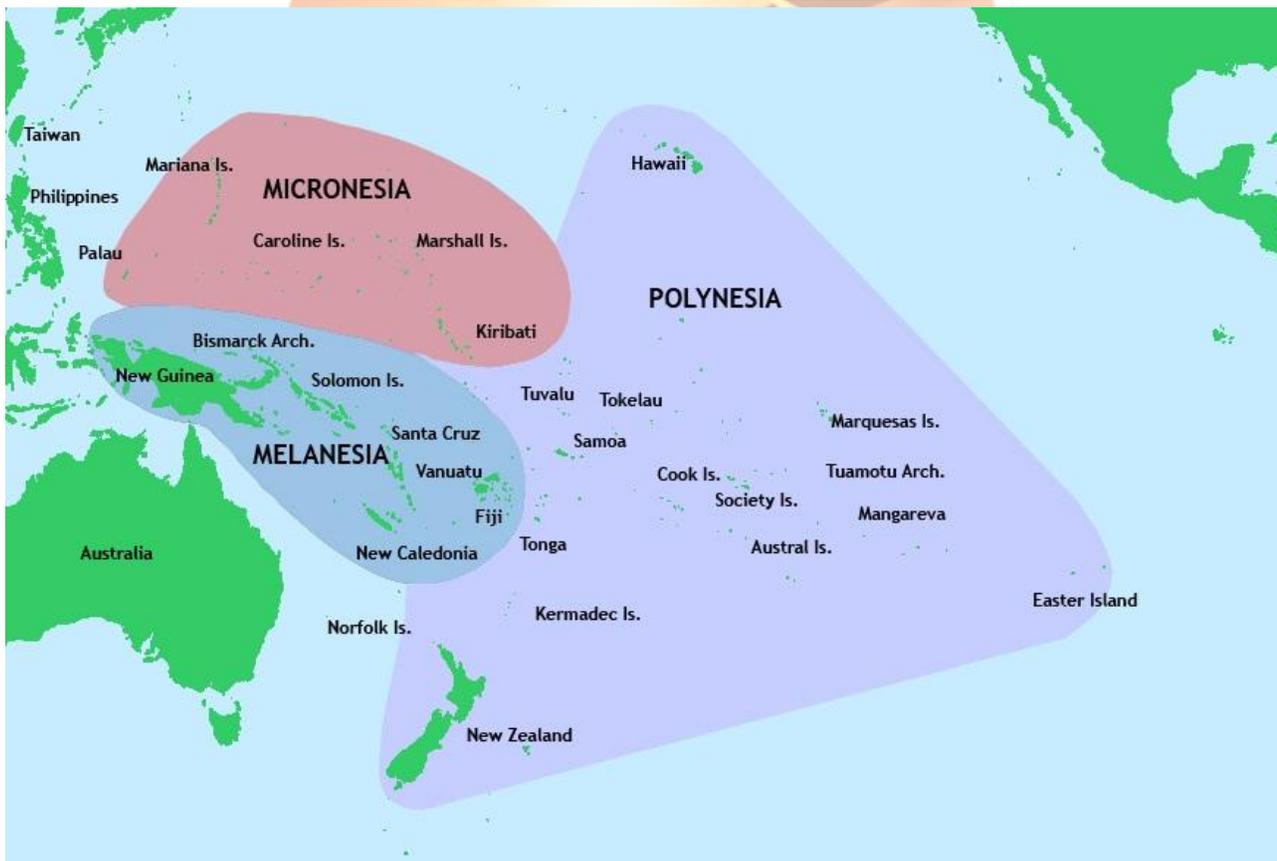
MOUs Signed:

- MOU for cooperation on broadcasting between Prasar Bharti, New Delhi, India and Fiji Broadcasting Corporation for Exchange of Audio Visual Programmes. MoU between Ministry of New and Renewable Energy of the Government of the Republic of India and Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport of the Government of the Republic of Fiji on Co-operation in the field of Renewable Energy.

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Republic of India and the Government of Republic of Fiji for establishing India — Fiji Centre of excellence in IT.

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Fiji and the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports of the Republic of India on Cooperation in the field of Youth Development.

- Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Republic of India and the Government of Cook Islands for Establishing India — Cook Islands Centre of Excellence in IT.

About FIPIC (Forum for India Pacific Islands Co-operation):

- Forum for India-Pacific Islands cooperation (FIPIC) is a multinational grouping developed for cooperation between India and 14 Pacific Islands nations. FIPIC was formed in November 2014 to strengthen India's relationship with the Pacific Island Countries.

- The first FIPIC summit was held at the level of Heads of Government in November 2014 in Suva, Fiji, followed by the FIPIC-II summit held in August 2015, in Jaipur, India.

- FIPIC includes 14 of the island countries – Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.

Significance of FIPIC for India:

- The FIPIC initiative marks a serious effort to expand India's engagement in the Pacific region.

- India's focus has largely been on the Indian Ocean where it has sought to play a major role and protect its strategic and commercial interests but the security at the front of Pacific Ocean is necessary for a safe and secure India Ocean.

- The Pacific Ocean region is rich in minerals and hydrocarbons hence the relation with Pacific nations is significant for fulfilling energy needs of India. The exploitation of hydrocarbon resources in the Pacific area off the coast of countries such as Vietnam has attracted Indian participation.

> **ABOUT TERI**
>
> - The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) is a leading think tank dedicated to conducting research for sustainable development of India and the Global South.
>
> - TERI was established in 1974 as an information centre on energy issues. However, over the following decades, it made a mark as a research institute, whose policy and technology solutions transformed people's lives and the environment.
>
> TERI's key focus areas:
> - ⇨ Clean energy
> - ⇨ Water management
> - ⇨ Pollution management
> - ⇨ Sustainable agriculture
> - ⇨ Climate resilience
>
> Q. What is India Pacific Islands Sustainable Development Conference and What is its significance for India?

- India has had a long history of cooperation and close engagement with Fiji, which has a large population of Indian origin.

- A new element of India's Act East policy has been the extension of India's Look East policy beyond the ASEAN, with emphasis on strengthening ties with 14 Pacific island countries.

- The 14 prominent Pacific island countries are: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Kiribati, Cook Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, Tonga, Solomon Islands, Samoa, Niue, Vanuatu, Palau, Marshall Islands and Micronesia.

- Although these islands are geographically remote, they are strategically significant from New Delhi's point of view as they are located at the important sea lines of communication through which important maritime trade is conducted.

- India has extended its support to the Pacific island countries in the field of space and ocean development dealing with natural disasters, etc. India offers gratis visa (It is granted to the diplomats and officials) to the nationals of the Pacific island countries.

- In turn, India seeks their support for its own position on climate change and reform of the United Nations.

6. SUMMITS AND ORGANISATIONS

1. AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK ANNUAL MEET

News:

- The 52nd annual meeting of the African Development Bank was organized in Gandhinagar, Gujarat from 22nd to 26th May.

Key highlights of the meeting:

- This is the first time that the Annual Meetings of AfDB was held in India. These Meetings are the Bank's largest annual event and serve to raise the profile of the institution on the global stage.

- The Annual Meetings provide a unique forum for representatives of government, business, civil society, think-tanks, academia and the media from Africa and beyond to debate key issues on Africa's development and to discuss the Bank's performance in delivering on its mandate.

- Reflecting the significance of agriculture in Africa and in the Bank's development work, the 2017 Annual Meetings was on the theme: **Transforming Agriculture for Wealth Creation in Africa.**

- There is a great scope for a greater synergy between India and Africa in order to achieve shared goal of rural and agricultural transformation, which would go a long way in reducing rural poverty and improving the quality of lives of rural people.

- AfDB meeting in India was an occasion to further deepen the economic cooperation with the African countries through various other events that have been planned. On the occasion of the Annual Meetings, Government Of India organised an India-Africa Dialogue in partnership with Confederation of Indian Industries (CII).

- These sessions broadly sensitized Indian industry and fraternity about the Bank's Agenda especially to help in building a roadmap of how can Indian industry contribute to 'Industrialise Africa' and move the continent up in the Global Value Chains (GVCs).

- The Government of India also organized an exhibition in partnership with FICCI during the Annual Meetings of the Bank with an objective to showcase the capabilities of Indian companies in terms of technology, innovation, and start-ups, which could be relevant for African countries.

- The theme of the exhibition was centred around priority areas of the Bank, i.e., the "High 5s" (Energy, Healthcare and Pharma, Agriculture, Industrialization, e-Governance).

- At the event, the Framework Agreement of International Solar Alliance would be kept open for signature and we would also accepted ratification documents from those countries that have completed the ratification process. So far 25 countries have signed the Framework Agreement of ISA. Guatemala, Djibouti, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Chad, Comoros, Mauritius, Yemen and Somalia have agreed to sign the Framework Agreement.

- A Special Session on India-Japan co-operation for development of Africa was also being organized. At this side event, Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japan Bank for International Co-operation (JBIC), in cooperation with their partner organizations in India and Africa including the African Development Bank, discussed the promotion of African business through private-public partnerships between Japan and India in order to contribute to the development of the African economy.

- The African Development Bank (AfDB), the OECD Development Centre and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released their joint African Economic Outlook (AEO) 2017 Report.

AfDB and India:

- India joined the African Development Fund in 1982 and became a member of the Bank in 1983. India is a **non-regional member** of the Bank. India and Africa share a great relationship and have great degree of commonalities in terms of a shared history and current challenges.

- India Africa Forum Summit 2015 was a successful event to strengthen the relation between India and Africa. The announcement of a US$ 10 billion line of credit by the India marked a new beginning in the approach to engage with African countries in a more constructive manner.

- The AfDB meeting was a significant reckoner in this regard. The five-day event had 2,800 delegates arriving from Africa and elsewhere. Like the Make in India Forum that was held in Mumbai in 2016, this is another example of the government's determination to take marquee business and economy events outside the national capital and encourage individual states to up their game. Yet, that is a collateral story.

- The major theme of the AfDB week has given teeth to India's engagement with a continent where despite goodwill; it has hitherto lagged behind China in project execution.

- India-Africa trade doubled in the five-year period ending 2014-15, to reach US$ 72 billion. In the following year, it fell sharply to US$ 56 billion, a direct consequence of the end of the commodities boom that had led to a surge in Indian resources imports. India realizes the capacity and strength of Africa and ready to avail the opportunity provided by the increasing relationship between both the nations.

About African Development Bank:

- The African Development Bank (AfDB) Group is a regional multilateral development finance institution established to contribute to the economic development and social progress of African countries that are the institution's Regional Member Countries (RMCs).

- The AfDB was founded following an agreement signed by member states in August 1963 in Khartoum, Sudan. The AfDB comprises three entities: the African Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Fund (ADF) and the Nigeria Trust Fund (NTF).

- As the premier development finance institution on the continent the AfDB's mission is to help reduce poverty, improve living conditions for Africans and mobilize resources for the continent's economic and social development. It is established to promote economic and social development efforts on the African continent.

Membership:

- It comprised 54 African countries and 26 non-African countries. To become an AfDB member, non-regional countries must first be ADF (African Development fund) members.

- Its Non-regional member countries are Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Korea, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States of America, United Arab Emirates (ADF member only).

Objectives:

- The overarching objective of the African Development Bank (AfDB) Group is to spur sustainable economic development and social progress in its regional member countries (RMCs), thus contributing to poverty reduction.

- The Bank Group achieves this objective by:

  ➢ mobilizing and allocating resources for investment in RMCs; and

  ➢ providing policy advice and technical assistance to support development efforts.

- In 2015, all multilateral development institutions have agreed on a same set of objectives called the Sustainable Development Goals.

> Q. The 52nd annual meeting of the African Development Bank was organized in Gandhinagar, Gujarat from 22nd to 26th May. What is African Development Bank and how it is significant for India?

2. INTERNATIONAL COURT OF JUSTICE

News:

- India appealed against Pakistan in International Court of Justice to render justice for Kulbhushan Jadhav, who is accused of espionage by Pakistan.

- Indian lawyer Harish Salve argued India's case at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague.

About ICJ:

- The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the **principal judicial organ** of the United Nations (UN). It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.

- The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands). All members of the UN are parties to the statute of the ICJ, and nonmembers may also become parties.

- The Court's role is to settle in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.

- The Court is composed of 15 judges who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council.

- It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are **English and French.**

- The creation of the Court represented the culmination of a long development of methods for the settlement of international disputes, the origins of which can be traced back to classical times.

Jurisdiction:

- The International Court of Justice acts as a world court. The Court has a dual jurisdiction : it decides, in accordance with international law, disputes of a legal nature that are submitted to it by States (jurisdiction in contentious cases); and it gives advisory opinions on legal questions at the request of the organs of the United Nations or specialized agencies authorized to make such a request (advisory jurisdiction).

- The jurisdiction of the Court in contentious proceedings is based on the *consent of the States* to which it is open. The form in which this consent is expressed determines the manner in which a case may be brought before the Court.

- The jurisdiction of the Court comprises all cases which the parties refer to it. Such cases normally come before the Court by notification to the Registry of an agreement known as a special agreement and concluded by the parties especially for this purpose.

- The jurisdiction of the Court comprises all matters specially provided for in treaties and conventions in force. In such cases a matter is normally brought before the Court by means of a written application instituting proceedings this is a unilateral document which must indicate the subject of the dispute and the parties and, as far as possible, specify the provision on which the applicant founds the jurisdiction of the Court.

- A list of treaties and conventions governing the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice in contentious cases is given in the Treaties and Other Documents section.

- The Statute provides that a State may recognize as compulsory, in relation to any other State accepting the same obligation, the jurisdiction of the Court in legal disputes. These cases are brought before the Court by means of written applications.

- The States parties to the present Statute may at any time declare that they recognize as compulsory ipso facto (by that very fact or act) and without special agreement, in relation to any other State accepting the same obligation, the jurisdiction of the Court in all legal disputes concerning:
  - o the interpretation of a treaty;
  - o any question of international law;
  - o the existence of any fact which, if established, would constitute a breach of an international obligation;
  - o the nature or extent of the reparation to be made for the breach of an international obligation.

3. INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANISATION

News:

- The International Oil Spill Conference (IOSC) was organized by International Maritime Organisation in United States. International experts have been sharing experiences, new technologies and scientific advancements relating to oil spill response at the conference.

- The theme of the conference was "**prevent, prepare, respond and restore**", which fully aligns with IMO's regulatory work to prevent oil spills from occurring and also its work to support countries to be prepared to respond to such incidents.

About IMO:

- The International Maritime Organization is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships.

- Because of the international nature of the shipping industry it has long been recognized that action to improve safety in maritime operations is more effective if carried out at the international level rather than by individual countries acting unilaterally and without co-ordination.

- It was against this background that a conference held by the United Nations in 1948 adopted a convention establishing the International Maritime Organization (IMO) as the first ever international body devoted exclusively to maritime matters.

- In the 10-year period between the adoption of the convention and its entry into force in 1958, other problems related to safety but requiring slightly different emphasis had attracted international attention.

- One of the most important of these was the threat of marine pollution from ships, particularly pollution by oil carried in tankers. An international convention on this subject was adopted in 1954, and responsibility for administering and promoting it was assumed by IMO in January 1959.

- From the very beginning, the improvement of maritime safety and the prevention of marine pollution have been IMO's most important objectives. In the early 2000s, maritime security became another major focus for the Organization.

- The overall objectives of the IMO is safe, secure and efficient shipping on clean oceans. The Organization is the only United Nations specialized agency to have its Headquarters in the United Kingdom.

Member States:

- IMO currently has 172 Member States and three Associate Members.

- Non-governmental international organizations that have the capability to make a substantial contribution to the work of IMO may be granted consultative status by the Council with the approval of the Assembly.

Structure:

- The Organization consists of an Assembly, a Council and five main Committees: the Maritime Safety Committee; the Marine Environment Protection Committee; the Legal Committee; the Technical Cooperation Committee and the Facilitation Committee and a number of Sub-Committees support the work of the main technical committees.

Functions:

- The important function of IMO is Maritime security, which first came to prominence on the IMO agenda following the hijacking of the Italian cruise ship Achille Lauro, in October 1985.

- IMO adopted a resolution on Measures to prevent unlawful acts which threaten the safety of ships and the security of their passengers and crews and in further issued the Guidance on measures to prevent unlawful acts against passengers and crew on board ships.

- Through Technical Cooperation Committee, IMO provides technical assistance to states, many of them developing countries, to ratify IMO conventions and to reach the standards contained in the conventions and other instruments.

- The 1954 Oil Pollution Convention, for which the IMO became depositary in 1959, was the first major attempt by the maritime nations to curb the impact of oil pollution.

- In 1969, two new conventions were adopted: the Convention on Intervention on the High Seas in Cases of Oil Pollution Casualties, which gives states the right to intervene in incidents on the high seas that are likely to result in oil pollution; and the Convention on Civil Liability for Oil Pollution Damage, which is intended to ensure that adequate compensation is available to victims and which places the liability for the damage on the ship owner.

- A conference convened by the IMO in 1960 adopted the **International Convention on Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS)**. The convention covered a wide range of measures designed to improve the safety of shipping, including subdivision and stability; machinery and electrical installations; fire

protection, detection and extinction; lifesaving appliances; radiotelegraphy and radiotelephony; safety of navigation; carriage of grain; carriage of dangerous goods and nuclear ships.

Q. What is International Maritime Organisation? Discussing its organizational structure critically analyse its role in making global shipping safe and secure.

4. 43RD G-7 MEETING

News:

- The leaders of the Group of Seven (G7) convened in the meeting for a two-day summit in the resort town of Taormina, Italy.

- This was the sixth time that Italy has taken over the rotating G7 Presidency.

Key Highlights of the Meeting:

- The mission of the 2017 Summit was "**Building the Foundations of Renewed Trust**". The agenda was based on three fundamental pillars: 1) citizen safety; 2) economic, environmental and social sustainability and the reduction of inequalities; 3) innovation, skills and labour in the age of the Next Production Revolution.

- This year's gathering was being focused upon how serious the new US administration is about implementing its policy agenda, particularly on climate change and trade issues the G7 members broadly agreed on until last year. In the summit several security issues were discussed among the G-7 nations including the conflicts in Syria and Libya.

- Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe highlighted the concerns over neighbouring North Korea following its recent series of missile tests in the summit. British Prime Minister Theresa May was concerned over the rising terrorism and held discussion on "terrorism" in working sessions.

- Italy, a country at the sharp end of Europe-bound flows, with more than 180,000 arrivals urged the G7 countries to give attention on migration issue. Italy wanted G7 partners to commit to the stabilisation of Libya where most refugees set off from and steer discussions on the wider issue of fostering Africa's economic development.

- The leaders of Tunisia, Ethiopia, Niger, Nigeria and Kenya joined the discussions to encourage G-7 countries for enhancing investment and innovation in the African continent.

About G-7:

- The Group of Seven (G7) is an informal bloc of industrialized democracies—Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States that meets annually to discuss issues such as global economic governance, international security and energy policy.

- Its current members make up nearly *50 percent of the world economy* and represent more than *60 percent of net global wealth*.

- The G7 takes no mandatory decisions and the meeting is billed as an opportunity to allow leaders to exchange ideas in key issues. A leaders' declaration at the end of summit is not binding in nature.

- The presidency which rotates among member states who is responsible for setting the agenda and arranging logistics. The current Presidency is with Italy which organized the 43rd summit 2017.

Origin:

- Known at the time of establishment as the G6, it started as a forum for non-Communist powers to address pressing economic concerns, including inflation and recession following an OPEC oil embargo.

- The first summit in 1975 was attended by France, Germany, the US, Britain, Japan and Italy.

- Canada was invited to join a year later, creating the G7, which became formalised with annual meetings between the heads of the seven governments. Representatives of the European Union have been additional participants to summits since 1981.

- Russia joined the discussions in 1994 and the group became known as the Group of 8 (G8) or the Political Eight; Russia officially became the eighth member in 1997.

- In March 2014 Russia precipitated an international crisis when it occupied and annexed Crimea, an autonomous republic of Ukraine. The original Group of 7 (G7) responded by indefinitely suspending Russia's membership in the group, effectively dissolving the larger G8.

7. DEFENCE AND SECURITY

1. BRAHMOS BLOCK III MISSILE

News:

- The Indo-Russian BrahMos Block III supersonic cruise missile with an advanced guidance algorithm was flight tested from a test range of India's east coast.

About Brahmos Block III:

- The BrahMos is a long-range, supersonic, anti-ship missile developed by BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited, a joint venture company established in 1998 between Russian NPO Mashinostroyenia and the Indian Ministry of Defense Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO).

- BrahMos acronym comes from the rivers Brahmaputra of India and the Moscow of Russia. Designed with operational flexibility in mind, the BrahMos missile can be launched from surface ships, submarines, airborne platforms, underground silos and Tractor-Erector-Launcher trucks.

- Moreover, the missile accepts both vertical and inclined launch. In addition to its anti-ship primary role the missile is being developed to engage land targets as well. The Indian Armed Forces plans for the deployment of BrahMos missiles within the Navy, Army and Air Force.

- The BrahMos Block III is an advanced ground-launched, land attack supersonic cruise missile fitted with a new guidance system and intended to destroy fortified/hardened targets and bunkers with high precision. The new missile also features deep penetration capability as well as extended range.

Significance:

- Brahmos Block III is one of the world's most lethal weapon systems in India's arsenal. The missile travels at supersonic speed and is hard to detect and impossible to intercept. Hundreds of BrahMos missiles have already been inducted into the Indian Army and almost all Indian front-line warships now boast of this supersonic cruise missile.

- This variant of BrahMos is designed to take on floating airfields like aircraft carriers. It was first tested in March-2012 and the missile gained the capability to attack Aircraft Carriers using the supersonic vertical dive with extremely high precision and can travel upto a distance of 290 kms. The missile will fly at speeds of Mach 3.

- Its penetration capabilities had been impressively demonstrated in the past at sea when a single BrahMos cruise missile was able to effectively pierce the hull of a free-floating ship, destroying it entirely. The deep penetration Block-III variant expands this capability greatly, allowing the BrahMos to destroy reinforced targets like Aircraft Carriers.

- Upon impact with a warship or an aircraft carrier, the BrahMos Block-III with its sheer velocity / kinetic energy clubbed with an extremely high explosive warhead**.**

2. MILITARY EXERCISES

News:

- The 24th bilateral exercise involving Indian Navy and Republic of Singapore Navy has commenced in South China Sea.

About SIMBEX:

- The Indian & Republic of Singapore Navy began participating in the bilateral exercises in 1994. Since then the two navies share a long standing relationship. The earlier edition of the bilateral exercise, SIMBEX-16 was held at Visakhapatnam in Bay of Bengal.

- SIMBEX stands for "Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercises". The bilateral maritime exercise was aimed at increasing interoperability amongst the RSN and IN as well as developing common understanding and procedures for maritime security operations.

- The major thrust of the exercise lied on Anti-Submarine Operations (ASN), integrated operations with Surface, Air and Sub-surface Forces, Air Defence and Surface Encounter Exercises.

India and South China Sea:
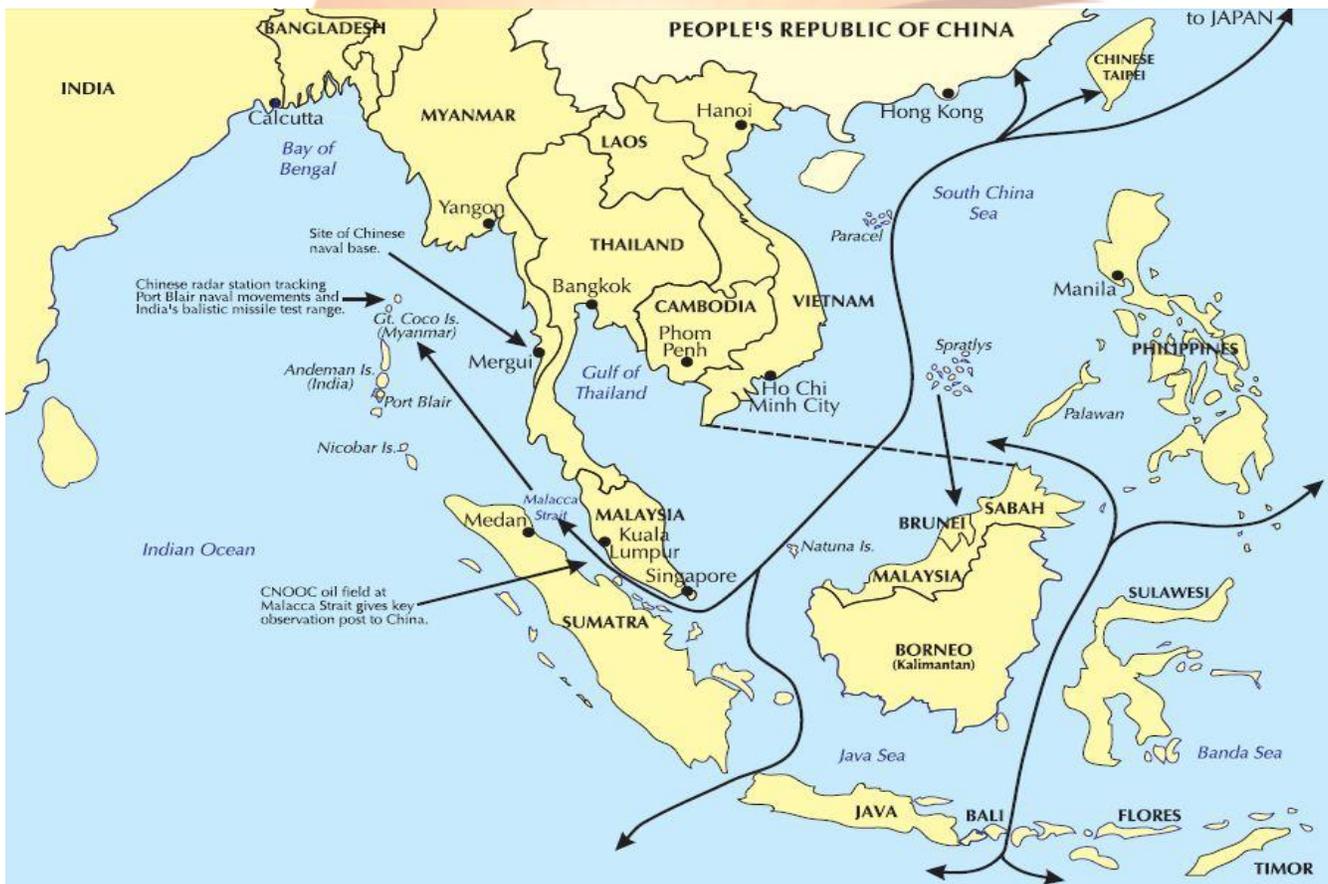
- Geographically, the South China Sea plays a significant role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific.

- Indian trade and economic linkages in the Pacific Ocean are becoming stronger and deeper. Not only with ASEAN and the far-eastern Pacific key target areas of the "Act East" policy, Asia's Eastern commons are increasingly a vital facilitator of India's economic development.

- With growing dependence on the Malacca Strait for the flow of goods and services, economics is increasingly a factor in India's Pacific policy. There lies the economic significance of South China Sea for India. China's dominance / interventionist policies in the SCS threaten the future trajectory of India's economic development, creating an unacceptable hindrance for regional trade and commerce.

- The South China Sea is bordered by Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam. Competing claims of territorial sovereignty over islands and smaller features in the South China Sea have been a longstanding source of tension and distrust in the region between China and surrounding nations.

- India believes that the disputes in the Southeast Asian littorals are a litmus test for international maritime law. In the aftermath of the Hague Tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea, New Delhi feels obligated to take a principled stand on the issue of freedom of navigation and commercial access as enshrined in the UNCLOS.

- India recognizes the threat that Chinese aggression poses for the wider Asian commons in particular the exacerbation of existing power asymmetries. In order to contribute to a fair and equitable regional maritime order, India is taking a stand that will restore strategic balance in maritime-Asia.

- India remained acutely conscious of its official position of neither being party to the disputes nor taking sides for many years. But with increasing ties with East Asian countries (Act East Policy), India indirectly started raising concerns about Chinese illegitimate claims in the South China Sea.

- In the aftermath of the Hague Tribunal's verdict on the South China Sea, India can now take a principled stand on the issue of freedom of navigation and commercial access enshrined in the UNCLOS.

- Despite China's protests, India continues its oil exploration in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) in the South China Sea from where ONGC Videsh Limited supplies oil to Vietnam.

- India also supports a negotiated settlement of Brunei's maritime dispute with China and has inked defense cooperation agreement that would provide an institutional foundation for more collaborative work on maritime security and secure India's energy lanes to Brunei.

Q. What is South China sea dispute and How it affects India?

3. POLICY TO ENGAGE PRIVATE PLAYERS FOR DEFENCE MANUFACTURING

News:

- The Ministry of Defence (MoD) has finally granted its nod to the draft Strategic Partnership policy which was forwarded to the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) for its final approval.

Strategic Partnership Policy:

- To promote the participation of private players in defence sector the Strategic Partnership Policy was finalized. Once approved by the CCS (Cabinet Committee on Security), it will become part of the DPP (Defence Procurement Procedure).

- The objective of the SP policy is to boost manufacturing of armaments by the private sector companies which will be enlisted into separate categories to manufacture a particular defence platform in partnership with foreign partners to make high-end defence equipment.

- In the initial phase, the policy will be implemented in selected segments -fighter aircraft (including helicopters), submarine and armoured vehicle. More segments will be added as the policy matures.

- The policy envisages the establishment of long-term strategic partnerships with qualified Indian industry majors through a transparent and competitive process wherein the Indian industry partners would tie up with global players to seek technology transfers and manufacturing know-how to set up domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains.

4. ICJ VERDICT KULBHUSHAN JADHAV ISSUE

News:

- International Court of Justice refused all claims represented by Pakistani official against the retired Naval officer of India Kulbhushan Jadhav and asked Pakistan to give him justice and revoke all the allegations against Jadhav.

- The ICJ backed India's contention that there has been a violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations as New Delhi's requests for consular access to its national had been denied 16 times.

About the ICJ case of Kulbhushan Jadhav:

- After refusing for consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav under Vienna Convention on Consular relations, India appealed in International Court of Justice seeking justice for Kulbhushan Jadhav.

- The jurisdiction of the ICJ is based on the consent of sovereign States. In legal doctrine, it is axiomatic that a consensual reference to international judicial bodies implies that a judicial decision is binding upon the parties to the litigation and consequently must be carried out in good faith.

- Pakistan claimed that ICJ has no jurisdiction in present case citing the 2008 agreement between India and Pakistan regarding counsellor access. This argument was rejected by the ICJ.

- In the core of ICJ jurisprudence, the bilateral agreements cannot be interpreted to supersede the obligations under international treaties. As such the strength of Vienna Convention blunted the Pakistan's claim based on 2008 bilateral agreement. India and Pakistan have been signatories to the Vienna Convention since 1977.

- The ICJ thus ordered Pakistan shall take all measures to ensure that Jadhav is not hanged until a final decision by the court. The circumstances of his arrest are in dispute. India should have been given consular access as per Vienna Convention.

- The ICJ also decided that, until it has given its final decision, it shall remain seized of the matters which form the subject matter of this order. Asserting its jurisdiction over the case, the ICJ backed India's contention that there has been a violation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations as New Delhi's requests for consular access to its national had been denied 16 times.

- It stated that the rights claimed by India were plausible, that there was a link between the rights asked for and the provisional measures and that there was a risk of irreparable prejudice being caused if the Court did not interfere, given Jadhav's situation.

Enforceability of ICJ provisional measures

- There have been some reservations in past on the enforceability of the orders of provisional measures of the Court.

- This matter was rendered an convincing interpretation by the Court in the year 2001 when it held in the LaGrand case (LaGrand case was a legal action heard before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which concerned the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations) that orders of provisional measures indicated by the ICJ under Article 41 of the Statute are binding and consequently subject to enforcement.

- The Court also may under Article 78 of the Rules request information from the parties on any matter connected with the implementation of any provisional measures it has indicated. These provisions not only represent moral and political pressures but also are supplementary means indicating the inherent authority of the Court's orders.

- The principal enforcement machinery of judicial decisions of the ICJ is conferred on the Security Council under Article 94 (2) of the U.N Charter. It provides that if any party to a case fails to perform the obligations incumbent upon it under a judgment rendered by the Court. The other party may have recourse to the Security Council.

- Nevertheless, Article 94 of the UN Charter itself provides no exclusive authority for the Security Council to be the ultimate and sole enforcer of the ICJ decisions. There is no straightforward and independent enforcement means of international obligations especially those derived from international judicial decisions.

Options for India:

- If India moves to Security Council for enforcement of the ICJ decision, China is sure to veto that. Even if there has been unanimity, there cannot be any joint action by Security Council unless there is a grave danger to peace and security.

- Here is the stage when India has an unbeatable edge over Pakistan. India can coerce and set up a quid pro quo with Pakistan to ensure the enforcement of the ICJ judgment.

- India under the present circumstances must wield its international standing to force Pakistan to comply with the ICJ orders lest its image of a rogue nation will be even more firmly established among the comity of civilized countries.

- The denial to counsellor access to Kulbhushan Jadahav was the Pakistani Army insistence which failed them at the ICJ. But if the Pakistani Army agrees to counsellor access, the cob-web of the uncorroborated confession of Kulbhushan Jadhav under military captivity will tear apart and entire sham of the so called trial will demolish.

Current Situation:

- This is a catch 22 situation for Pakistani establishment. Their plea in ICJ included a deplorable declaration that an army field officer with legal background was given to help Kulbhushan Jadhav to fight his case. It was such a disgraceful admission of the violation of fundamental human rights whereby every accused is entitled to be defended by an attorney of his choice.

- It is true that no appeal can be preferred against the verdict of a Pakistani Court- civil or military, in the ICJ. The ICJ can only see whether the trial was conducted as per the internationally acceptable Rules of Law and fair play.

- The real battle will have to be fought in Pakistan's Supreme Court and the provisional measures in the mean time by ICJ has given a breather and is only the first step towards that.

5. LASER WALL KAVACH

News:

- For the development of impenetrable border security the Border Security Force will make use of the Invisible Laser Wall Kavach to safeguard the 198 km India-Pakistan international border in Jammu and Kashmir.

About Laser Wall:

- The Laser wall is capable of detecting intrusions and relaying information to the nearest post for action. The technology developed by the Delhi-based defenceIoT (Internet of Things) firm, CRON Systems and is expected to bolster BSF's defences amid strained ties and increase in the number of infiltration bids and ceasefire violations.

- The new technology called Kavach (KVx) series laser walls has been built indigenously. BSF is presently pilot testing the Kavach walls along the Samba sector border in Jammu and Kashmir.

- Kavach walls have intrusion detection system based on infrared array and hence are invisible. They will also be effective in transparent water and glass.

- Kavach walls are all-terrain weather-proof system that uses complex, encrypted technologies to monitor and immediately alert the nearest outpost about intrusion attempts. It is capable of monitoring large swathes of any territory from a single interface.

- The devices will use CRONet, an encrypted network, to communicate with each other. Five such KVx-series walls will be capable of securing a kilometre-long stretch.

Effective Border Management at Indo-Pak Border:

- India and Pakistan share 3000km border of which 198 km international border and 740 km Line of Control (LoC) falls in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

- Infiltration of Pakistani terrorists along the border area which has 13 rivers and rivulets is a major issue for the BSF. BSF has been making use of various technologies like electric fencing and other technologies such as laser to detect and prevent intrusions.

- Adoption of Kavach walls are the latest in the series of up-gradations made by the force.

- The system uses complex, encrypted technology to monitor and communicate with the soldiers. The installation of the technology too is easy. It would take a few hours for a 1 kilometre stretch to install the technology.

- In case of a power snap, the technology would run at least 12 hours on UPS.

6. MOUNTAIN STRIKE CORPS

News:

- The Indian Army to build requisite deterrence along the 4,057-km Line of Actual Control with China has now expedited the process to raise the second division of the new Mountain Strike Corps XVIII for the northern borders with China.

Background:

- In July 2013, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved the Army's proposal for raising a Strike Corps for the mountains to secure the borders with Chinese territory in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.

- India's Cabinet Committee on Security agreed to proceed with the creation of a new Mountain Strike Corps of nearly 40,000 troops to be deployed along the disputed China border region.

- From October 2013 onwards, the army HQ started posting key officers for the new corps, to be based at Ranchi until it moved to its permanent location at Panagarh in West Bengal some time in 2015.

- The new corps have two high-altitude infantry divisions with their integral units, two independent infantry brigades, two armoured brigades and the like.

The XVII Mountain Strike Corps:

- The XVII Corps would strengthen the deterrence level at the Chinese borders. It will get some rapid reaction force capability to launch a counter-offensive into Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in the event of any Chinese attack.

- The XVII Corps is not only for war-waging, it is for war-prevention as well and to raise and convert our combat power into certain amount of QRF (Quick Reaction Force) capabilities.

- The XVII Corps to better secure the north-eastern border in future be equipped with two force-multipliers: the TAC-4G broadband fourth-generation cellular network, and the Real Time Intelligence Centre (RICent) multi-sensor modular Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) system.

- The Mountain Strike Corps will be an invaluable instrument for escalatory control and also for enlarging our politico- military options.

- It will be composed of all arms teams to include infantry, armoury, artillery, combat engineers, aviation and also other enablers like long-range vectors, communication assets, space and surveillance instruments etc. The capacities that India seeks to create are composite and not predicated on manpower alone.

Need:

- India has an almost 4057 kms long border called Line of Actual Control with China that runs into three sectors.

- In the western sector in Ladakh, China's People Liberation Army (PLA) controls most of the area that Beijing claims as its own.

- The central sector, at the UP-Tibet border already China controls Tibet. The eastern sector is the most contentious one as here China claims Arunachal Pradesh as its own and India is in control of the area. Sikkim also falls in this sector.

- China claims 90,000 sq. kms of territory here in this sector, which belongs to India. It is here for this area, India is planning a mountainous strike corps.

- The China-Pakistan nexus is the strongest that any country can possibly have with China. Probably, Pakistan's strategic location has a lot to do with this.

- Chinese design to use Pakistan as a front for waging asymmetric war on India dates back to the 1960s when Zhou-en-Lai suggested to Ayub Khan that Pakistan should prepare for a prolonged conflict with India instead of short-term wars.

- This emphasized the need of securing the Chinese border with the establishment of the dedicated strike force.

- It helps India to upgrade its military strategy against China from dissuasion to meaningful deterrence as the Strike Corps, in conjunction with the Indian Air Force (IAF) and provides the capability to launch offensive operations across the Himalayas so as to take the next war into Chinese territory while simultaneously defending Indian Territory against Chinese aggression.

Poor border infrastructure along Chinese border: A Challenge

- The biggest challenge in front of effective border management comes from the poor state of border infrastructure. For instance, it reportedly takes 20 hours to drive a distance of 500 km from Guwahati to Tawang – a reflection of the severe condition of the road network in the region.

- The Chinese roads nearly reach the line of actual control (LAC) or in some cases go beyond while on the other hand most Indian roads stop well before the Indian side of the LAC.

- The Cabinet committee on security though approved the new corps but the Army also wanted the long-pending infrastructure and capability development plan along the northern borders with China to be speeded up.

- The immediate requirements for ably guarding Indian territorial integrity with assurance are many.

- The first and foremost among these is the necessity of building a road and rail infrastructure linking the border areas on LAC with the hinterland for logistics to move forward.

- Inter-state connectivity for force deployment and redeployment is required to reduce the sectoral isolation.

- The lay of Tibetan plateau is such that Chinese can build road or rail link almost parallel to the LAC. Whereas, the Indian side, is interspersed with valleys running north-south - laying of a road parallel to LAC may not be possible

- Hence to secure borders not only dedicated forces but their capacity building with robust border infrastructure and ammunitions is also urgently required.

> Q. What is Mountain Strike Force and what is the significance of such force?

7. RANSOMWARE ATTACK

News:

- Globally hospitals, industries and government institutions have been affected severely with the ransomware attack called Wannacry.

About ransomware

- Ransomware is a type of malware that blocks access to a computer or its data and demands money to release it.

- When a computer is infected the ransomware typically contacts a central server for the information it needs to activate and then begins encrypting files on the infected computer with that information.

- Once all the files are encrypted it posts a message asking for payment to decrypt the files and threatens to destroy the information if it doesn't get paid often with a timer attached to ramp up the pressure.

- Most ransomware is spread hidden within Word documents, PDFs and other files normally sent via email or through a secondary infection on computers already affected by viruses that offer a back door for further attacks.

What is WannaCry?

- WannaCry is a form of ransomware that locks up files on the computer and encrypts them in a way that cannot access them anymore.

- It targets Microsoft's widely used Windows operating system.

- When a system is infected, a pop-up window appears with instructions on how to pay a ransom amount of $300.

- The pop-up also features two countdown clocks, one showing a three-day deadline before the ransom amount doubles to $600 and another showing a deadline of when the target will lose its data forever.

- Payment is only accepted in bitcoin. It is also being called WannaCryptor 2.0, WannaDecryptor 2.0, WCry 2, WannaCry 2 and WannaDecryptor 2.

- The creators of this piece of ransomware are still unknown but WannaCry is their second attempt at cyber-extortion.

- An earlier version, named WeCry, was discovered back in February this year: it asked users for 0.1 bitcoin to unlock files and programs

Global Effect:

- Many international companies such as Nissan, FedEx etc were affected and their working was impacted severely. Russian bank discovered malware bulk emails to banks but detected no compromise of resources took place.

- The virus attacked the IT system of Russian Railways but it did not affect operations due to a prompt response. According to NHS Digital at least sixteen NHS (National Health Service) organizations have been affected. They were not able to access their patient's data.

Impact in India:

- Odisha state in India was hit by the file encrypting ransomware. The attack affected e-medicine services and payment to ASHA workers. The essential data of the hospital's email id was also believed to be hacked. The attackers had similar special Modus operandi as seen in other countries i.e. the attackers allegedly demanded $300 to restore the access to the hospital's system.

- Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), Andhra Pradesh one of the richest Hindu shrines in the world was affected by the ransomware attack. However, there was no impact on the software related to the pilgrim services of the TTD including online booking for darshan and prasadam.

- 18 computers of Andhra Pradesh Police Dept were also infected. Computers in Panchayat offices in Wayanad and Pathanamthitta districts in Kerala too were infected.

- In Gujarat over 120-odd computers connected with Gujarat State Wide Area Network were affected by the WannaCry ransomware attack. Fortunately, there was no crucial data lost in the cyber attack.

- West Bengal too was affected. Reports suggest at least 10 computers at customer care centres of West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited (WBSEDCL) were attacked in West Midnapore and 2 other districts.

Cyber security preparedness of India:

- With recent government push towards a digital "cashless" economy, India is heading towards being a Digital Society rapidly. This increasing dependency on digital highlights the need for a secure cyber space in the country, especially when a number of users are beginners (novice) as far as secure practices go.

- For securing the cyber space from such attacks the government has identified following objectives:
  - ➢ preventing cyber-attacks,
  - ➢ reducing national vulnerability to cyber attacks
  - ➢ Minimizing damage and recovery time from cyber attacks.

- The initiatives taken by the government of India have focused on threats to critical information infrastructure and national security, adoption of relevant security technologies, information security awareness, training and research.

- Due to dynamic nature of cyber threat scenario the actions to establish a robust cyber space is needed and continued, refined and strengthened from time to time.

- The current cyber security apparatus in India is:

> The Information Technology Act 2000 and IT Amendment Act 2008 have been enacted to cater to the needs of National Cyber Security.

> Formulation of National Cyber Security Policy 2013 to create a safe, secure and reliable IT networks in India.

> Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT- In) has been operational as a national agency for cyber security incident response.

> Growth and application of digital signature certificates in a number of areas has taken place.

> The government has prepared a National Crisis Management Plan for countering cyber attacks and cyber terrorism has been prepared and is annually updated.

> Security Auditors have been empanelled for conducting security audits.

> Dedicated cyber cells in police stations in states and separate special cyber police has been established to secure the cyber space.

Q. What is a ransomware? Critically analyse is India ready to handle such cyber threats.

.

8. SCIENCE AND TECH ISSUES

1. TARANG SANCHAR

- It is a portal launched by telecom department for Information sharing on Mobile Towers and EMF Emission Compliances, and will allow users to get a tower or base station checked for radiation emission, for a fee of Rs 4,000.

What is it for?

- It allows people to track radiation emitted from mobile towers within a locality and check their compliance with the stipulated norms. It is aimed at clearing "myths and misconceptions" about mobile towers and emissions from them.

2. SYNTHETIC SOFT TISSUE RETINA

News:

- Scientists from the University of Oxford have developed a synthetic, soft tissue retina that closely mimics the natural retinal process.

Significance of this:

> **How retina builds picture:**
>
> The retina sits at the back of the human eye, and contains protein cells that convert light into electrical signals that travel through the nervous system, triggering a response from the brain, ultimately building a picture of the scene being viewed.

- Study could lead to development of new, less invasive technologies that more closely resemble human body tissues, helping to treat degenerative eye conditions such as retinitis pigmentosa. Until now, artificial retinal research has used mostly rigid, hard materials.

- The human eye is incredibly sensitive, which is why foreign bodies like metal retinal implants can be so damaging, leading to inflammation and/or scaring. But a biological synthetic implant is soft and water based, so much more friendly to the eye environment

How will it work:

- The new synthetic, double layered retina replica consists of soft water droplets (hydrogels) and biological cell membrane proteins. Designed like a camera, the cells act as pixels, detecting and reacting to light to create a grey scale image.

3. DISARIB

- A noble small molecule, designed and synthesised by Indian researchers, has shown promise in targeted killing of cancer cells.

How this molecule works:

- Disarib works by binding itself to a protein called BCL2, which suppresses death of cancerous cells. While BCL2 protein is produced in excess in cancer cells, its expression is almost undetectable in normal cells. Hence, Disarib targets and kills only cancer cells while sparing normal cells.

Why Cancer cells live longer

- Inside a cell, there is always a balance between proteins that promote cell death (apoptosis) and those that suppress cell death. When the proteins BAX and BAK that promote cell death get bound to BCL2, cell death is suppressed and cancer cells are able to live longer.

4. THE KODAIKANAL SOLAR OBSERVATORY DATA OPENED FOR PUBLIC

- The Kodaikanal Solar Observatory data, spanning a hundred years and more has now been digitised by astrophysicists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, and opened up to the public.

- The 100-year data is unique also for its three sets of images taken using different filters – White light, H-alpha and Calcium-K. It is known that the sun has a layered structure, and each of the data sets exposes a different layer.

- Under white light filtering, the sun's photosphere and the sunspots are visible, while the Calcium-K light can show layers some 2,000 km above this, in the chromosphere. The H-alpha images show up layers a little above the Calcium-K images.

- Features called "filaments" which are related to large expulsions of material from the sun's surface can be viewed in the Calcium-K sets.

Where these data can be used:

- They can be used in academic studies of long-term behaviour of the Sun. The data can also be used to better understand sunspot activity, which impacts climate and affects telecommunication systems. These data can also throw light on major events that had an impact on the earth's magnetic field.

5. EUROPEAN XFEL

News:

- European XFEL, the world's biggest x-ray laser has generated its first light, marking a milestone.

About XFEL:

- It is buried within a 3.4 km facility, most of which is located in underground tunnels, at the Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron research centre in Hamburg.

- Working: To generate the X-ray flashes, bunches of electrons will first be accelerated to high energies and then directed through special arrangements of magnets (undulators). In the process, the particles will emit radiation that is increasingly amplified until an extremely short and intense X-ray flash is finally created.

- X ray obtained from XFEL can be used to make pictures and films of the Nano cosmos at atomic resolution – such as of biomolecules, from which better understandings of the basis of illnesses or the development of new therapies could be developed.

- Other opportunities include research into chemical processes and catalytic techniques, with the goal of improving their efficiency or making them more environmentally friendly; materials research; or the investigation of conditions similar to the interior of planets.

6. NORTH INDIA TO GET DNA BANK FOR WILDLIFE

News:

- Bareilly's Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) is creating North India's first DNA bank for wildlife.

- The aim is to take the pressure off the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (lacones) in Hyderabad, which is the only facility for testing wild DNA in India.

- The bank will also help in clamping down on wildlife poaching and smuggling. Body parts obtained from poachers can be compared with the bank's DNA samples to know the name and schedule of species.

Details:

- The schedule of the species will help in knowing whether the animal falls in endangered category.

- The bank will also preserve serum of wild species. Serum is a protein-rich liquid, which separates out when blood coagulates. It gives an idea of whether the animal was suffering from a disease. The bank will start by year's end. Once functional, the bank will accept samples from forest departments.

8. ELECTRICK

- It is a way to add touch controls to any object, no matter what shape or material it is. Like many touchscreens, Electrick relies on the shunting effect — when a finger touches the touchpad, it shunts a bit of electric current to ground.

- By attaching multiple electrodes to the periphery of an object or conductive coating, researchers showed they could localise where and when such shunting occurs.

Applications:

- The technology was used to make an interactive smartphone case – opening applications such as a camera based on how the user holds the phone. It can also be used in a game controller that can change the position and combinations of buttons and sliders based on the game being played or the player's preferences.

9. INS KARWAR AND KAKINADA

News:

- Recently these naval ships were decommissioned.

INS Karwar (M67)

- It was the first of the 'Natya' class minesweepers . It was acquired from the erstwhile USSR. The ship operated from Vishakhapatnam till 2013 after which, the ship was based at Mumbai. Manned by a crew of six officers and 90 sailors, INS Karwar had her motto 'Hamesha Tayyar'.

INS Kakinada (M70)

- Commissioned at Riga in December 1986, like her sister ship, Kakinada also operated from Vishakhapatnam till 2013 before shifting base port to Mumbai.

10. MULTIDRUG DRUG TB RISE IN INDIA

News:

- Lancet Infectious Disease journal has forecasted an increase in drug-resistant tuberculosis cases in the four high-burden countries, including India, and suggested that person-to-person transmission will become the engine that drives drug-resistant tuberculosis in these countries.

Some highlights from Study:

- By 2040, 12.4 per cent, or an eighth, of TB cases in India will be multi-drug-resistant, up from 7.9 per cent in 2000. Globally, an estimated 10.4 million new cases of tuberculosis and 1.8 million deaths related to tuberculosis disease occurred that year. Multi-drug-resistant TB accounted for 480,000 cases, and 9.5% of these cases were estimated to be extremely drug resistant.

- Of the multi-drug-resistant cases, one in 10 are expected to be extensively drug-resistant by 2040 — 9% in Russia and the Philippines, 8.9% in India, and 8.5% in South Africa

What is MDR TB?

- MDR TB is a specific type of drug resistant TB infection. It means that the TB bacteria that a person is infected with, are resistant to at least two of the most important TB drugs, isoniazid (INH) and rifampicin (RMP).

Causes for this Resistance:

- Reasons why multidrug resistance continues to emerge and spread are mismanagement of TB treatment and person-to-person transmission. Most people with TB are cured by a strictly followed, 6-month drug regimen that is provided to patients with support and supervision.

- Inappropriate or incorrect use of antimicrobial drugs, or use of ineffective formulations of drugs (such as use of single drugs, poor quality medicines or bad storage conditions), and premature treatment interruption can cause drug resistance, which can then be transmitted, especially in crowded settings such as prisons and hospitals.

Solutions to control drug-resistant TB are to:

- Cure the TB patient the first time around

- Provide access to diagnosis

- Ensure adequate infection control in facilities where patients are treated

- Ensure the appropriate use of recommended second-line drugs.

10. *e*-KRISHISAMVAD

- It is internet-based interface and is a unique platform that will provide direct and effective solutions to the problems faced by farmers and stakeholders in the agriculture sector. e-KrishiSamvad is useful to get information pertaining to welfare and development of agricultural stakeholders

11. SPYDER: SURFACE TO AIR MISSILE

- Spyder', an acquired missile system from Israel. It is a short-range, quick reaction surface-to-air missile designed to strike an enemy air target within a very short time. The state-of-the-art missile has a strike range of about 15 km in low altitude.

- It is shorter than India's indigenously developed surface-to-air 'Akash' missile, which has a 25 km strike range. It is an all-weather missile, which has an automatic process of engaging an aggressive aircraft or missile. Besides aircraft and UAVs, it can also neutralise low-level cruise missiles.

12. YUEGONG-1

- Also, called as Lunar Palace, it is a Chinese research facility for developing a moon base.

- It is an environmentally closed facility where occupants can simulate a long-duration self-contained mission with no outside inputs other than power/energy.

- As part of this experiment, four Chinese students have entered the 160-square-metre (1,720-square-foot) cabin. They will live there for 200 days.

- The volunteers will live in the sealed lab to simulate a long-term, self-contained space mission with no input from the outside world.

- It is the world's third bioregenerative life-support base, and the first developed in China.

- It is the only such facility to involve animals and microorganisms as well as plants and humans.

13. DERBY: AIR-TO-AIR BEYOND VISUAL RANGE MISSILE:

- The Light Combat Aircraft (TEJAS) successfully demonstrated an Air-to-Air Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missile firing capability by releasing Derby missile in RADAR guided mode.

- Derby is developed by Israeli defence company Rafael Advanced Defense Systems to meet the combat needs of the armed forces.

- The Derby AAM can be integrated onto a variety of fighter aircraft and Mirage and is capable of engaging aerial threats from short ranges and near-beyond visual range. Derby can also be configured as a surface-to-air missile (SAM).

14. WEARABLES TO BE PRINTED ON THE SKIN

- Researchers have developed a 3D printing technique, which they believe could soon make it possible to print electronics directly on human skin.

- They haven't printed on human skin yet, but are able to print on the curved surface of a model hand using the new technique.

- This ultimate wearable technology could eventually be used for health monitoring or by soldiers in the field to detect dangerous chemicals or explosives.

Sensitive device:

- The researchers used 3D printing to make stretchable electronic sensory devices.

- The device is so sensitive that it could detect one's pulse in real time.

- They created a unique sensing fabric that can stretch up to three times their original size.

- This technology could give robots the ability to feel their environment.

- These sensors could make it easier for other robots to walk and interact with their environment.

- It could also have applications in robotic surgeries.

15. FIRST UTERUS TRANSPLANT SOON

- One in every 4,000 women in India is born without a uterus.

- A uterus transplant is an extremely complex procedure that will enable women with absent or diseased uteruses to carry a pregnancy to term after a donor uterus is transplanted into them.

- The other organ transplants are life-saving procedures but a uterus transplant is simply a "surgical feat". Two medical centres in Pune and Bengaluru are gearing up to perform the country's first uterus transplants.

- The very first uterine transplant in the world was carried out in 2002 in Saudi Arabia, and the second one in Turkey in 2011. Both the transplants failed due to rejection of the organ.

16. IMMUNISATION DRIVE TO INCLUDE PNEUMONIA VACCINE

- The government's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) provides routine immunisation to all children free of charge.

- Covering over 27 million infants, 100 million children between the age of 1-5 years, and 30 million pregnant women annually, it is the largest of its kind in the world.

- The vaccine programme aims to protect newborns against 12 preventable diseases every year.

- The goal is to ensure that no child dies in the country from vaccine preventable diseases.

Pneumococcal Diseases

- Pneumococcal disease is the leading cause of vaccine-preventable deaths in children under five years of age globally and in India.

- India accounts for nearly 20% of global pneumonia deaths in this age group.

- There are over 90 different types of pneumococcal bacteria, which cause a range of problems.

- India rolled out the long-awaited anti-pneumonia vaccine as part of the government's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

- The vaccine will protect children against severe forms of pneumococcal disease, such as pneumonia and meningitis

Why this step:

- The vaccines in the private sector were accessible to only those who could afford them.

- Now by making them available under the UIP, the government is ensuring equitable access to those who need them the most, the underprivileged and underserved.

17. CLEAR FLOAT GLASS

News:

- The Finance Ministry has imposed definitive anti-dumping duty on 'clear float glass' imports from Iran.

What is it?

- It is superior in quality when compared to other flat glass

- It has the unique characteristics of excellent surface finishing, flatness, uniform thickness, high optical quality and bright appearance.

- The float process was developed in the late 1950's.

- Float technology has been rapidly replacing plate and sheet facilities worldwide in recent decades.

- Float glass derives it name from the Float process used where the molten glass floats on the top of molten tin.

Characteristics of Clear Float Glass:

- High light transmission

- Optical clarity

- Can be further fabricated into reflective, low-E, laminated, security, insulating, heat-treated and ceramic decorated glass

Application of Clear Float Glass:

- Automotive Glass

- Reflective Glass

- Coated Glass

- Windows

- Mirrors

- Table Tops

- Insulated Glass

- Architectural Purposes

18. BIOPHARMACEUTICALS

News:

- CECA has given its approval for Industry-Academia Collaborative Mission for accelerating discovery research to early development for biopharmaceuticals – "**Innovate in India (13) empowering biotech entrepreneurs & accelerating inclusive innovation**" to be funded by the Government of India.

- The Mission will focus on Development of specific products - vaccines, bio therapeutics, medical devices and diagnostics; establishment of shared infrastructure and facilities; building and strengthening domain specific knowledge and management skills; creating and enhancing technology transfer capabilities in public and private sector.

What are they:

- They are medical drugs produced using biotechnology. They are proteins (including antibodies); nucleic acids (DNA, RNA or antisense oligonucleotides) used for therapeutic or in vivo diagnostic purposes, and are produced by means other than direct extraction from a native (non-engineered) biological source.

- The large majority of biopharmaceutical products are pharmaceuticals that are derived from life forms. Small molecule drugs are not typically regarded as biopharmaceutical in nature by the industry

Background:

- The National Biotechnology Development Strategy 2015-2020 announced by the DBT lays emphasis on making India ready to meet the challenge of achieving US $100 billion biotech industry by 2025.

- The focus is on generation of biotech products, processes and technologies for affordable and accessible health care, promoting innovation R&D, establishing India as world class biomanufacturing hub, and building the required skilled workforce.

- To achieve this, it is important to promote industry -academia interface and enable the start-ups and small and medium enterprises to build translational innovation research capacities for affordable healthcare product development.

19. BLOOD-FORMING STEM CELLS: 'LIMITLESS' BLOOD SUPPLY CLOSER TO REALITY

News:

- For the first time, scientists have generated blood-forming stem cells in the lab, an advance that brings them close to create a limitless supply of human blood. Since human embryonic stem (ES) cells were isolated in 1998, scientists have been trying, with little success, to use them to make blood-forming stem cells.

The Research

- Researchers combined two previous approaches to successfully generate hemogenicendothelium, which is an early embryonic tissue that eventually gives rise to blood stem cells.

- They then added genetic regulatory factors to push the tissue toward a blood-forming state.

- Researchers used pluripotent (immature) stem cells that can make virtually every cell type in the body.

Benefit:

- The study may help create immune-matched blood cells, derived from patients' cells for treatment purposes.

- This step opens up an opportunity to take cells from patients with genetic blood disorders, use gene editing to correct their genetic defect and make functional blood cells.

- This also gives the potential to have a limitless supply of blood stem cells and blood by taking cells from universal donors. This could potentially augment the blood supply for patients who need transfusions.

20. AKASH MISSILE

News:

- Ministry of defence has decided to cancel the Army's global contest for Short Range Surface to Air Missile (SR-SAM) systems and instead procure two additional regiments of the indigenously developed Akash missile systems.

About the missile:

- India's first indigenously designed, developed and produced air defence surface-to-air missile system. It is a supersonic short-range surface-to-air missile capable of neutralising aerial threats.

- It can neutralise multiple aerial targets coming from different directions at the same time.

- The maximum range of this missile is 25 kilometres and can neutralise targets at a maximum altitude of 20 kilometres.

- An Akash missile regiment has six launchers with three missiles each.

- This defence system consists of surveillance and tracking radars, control centres and ground support systems.

- It is all weather missile system which can work from both static and mobile platforms.

21. INDIA PERFORMS WORSE THAN SOMALIA IN GLOBAL BURDEN DISEASE RANKING:

- In the GBD rankings for healthcare access and quality (HAQ), India has fallen 11 places, and now ranks 154 out of 195 countries. India's healthcare index of 44.8 is the lowest among the sub-continental countries, as Sri Lanka (72.8), Bangladesh (51.7), Bhutan (52.7), and Nepal (50.8) all fared better.

- The top-ranked nation was Andorra with an overall score of 95 and the lowest-ranked nation was Central African Republic at 29. India's downward slide in the rankings indicates that it has failed to achieve health care targets, especially those concerning neonatal disorders, maternal health, tuberculosis, and rheumatic heart disease.

- In the case of neonatal mortality, on a scale of 1 to 100, India scored 14 in the HAQ index, while Afghanistan scored 19/100 and Somalia, 21/100. Access to tuberculosis treatment in India was scored 26 out of 100, lower than Pakistan (29), Congo (30) and Djibouti (29).

What is Global Burden of disease:

- The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors study is put together by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), an independent population health research centre associated with the University of Washington, along with a consortium of 2,300 researchers in more than 130 countries. The HAQ Index is based on death rates from 32 ailments that could be avoided by timely medical intervention.

22. BERGENIN: COMPOUND TO KILL TB BACTERIA

News:

- A team of Indian researchers has been able to achieve 100-fold reduction in TB bacterial load in lungs of mice after 60 days of treatment using bergenin.

About the compound:

- It is a phytochemical isolated from tender leaves of sakhua or shala tree *(Shorearobusta).*

How it kills TB Bacteria:

- Unlike the regularly used antibiotic drugs that target the TB bacteria, the bergenin compound modulates the immune system to kill the bacteria found inside the macrophages. In study, it was found that the compound was unable to directly kill TB bacteria when treated with the compound. However, in the case of *in vitro* studies, the compound was able to kill the bacteria found inside infected cells.

23. NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES

- These are a **cluster of 17 diseases** affecting the poorest people living in the least developed pockets of the world. While some of these diseases may be unfamiliar, leprosy, kala-azar and filariasis are better known in India and being targeted for elimination in the near future.

A cause of concern:

- Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) affect over 1.5 billion of the world's most impoverished people, including 875 million children. They cause severe pain, long-term disability, and are the cause of death for over 170,000 people per year. Amongst children, infection leads to malnutrition, cognitive impairment, stunted growth, and the inability to attend school. Adults suffer from social isolation and are unable to work, and anaemia caused by NTDs increases the risk of maternal mortality.

Indian government target to eliminate these diseases:

- The Indian government has set itself the target of eliminating kala-azar and filariasis by 2017, and leprosy by 2018.

- In the case of lymphatic filariasis, better known as elephantiasis, the government is targeting a population of 600 million in 256 endemic districts with mass drug administration (MDA).

- The other key intervention is for visceral leishmaniasis (VL) or kala-azar, which is transmitted through the bite of the female sand-fly. In India, a majority of cases are reported in Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Where India should focus:

- To eliminate leprosy, India needs to tackle the stigma associated with the disease. It leads to delays in diagnosis and treatment, which in turn result in continued transmission of infection within families and communities. In 2015-16, 118 districts in India were endemic for leprosy with a prevalence rate of more than 1 per 10,000.

- At the same time, it is important to maintain constant vigilance through robust **surveillance and reporting mechanisms**.

- Partnerships with diverse stakeholders including the private sector, community-based organisations, and community leaders are specifically useful in creating awareness, improving case detection, treatment completion and, most importantly, managing stigma associated with these diseases.

- While tackling NTDs, it will be important to remember that along with timely diagnosis and treatment access in unreached areas, focussing on the fundamentals of preventive interventions, nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene are essential in fast-tracking the ultimate goal of elimination.

24. QUASARS

- Astronomers have created the first map of the large-scale structure of the universe based entirely on the positions of quasars.

What are Quasars?

- Quasars are the **incredibly bright and distant points** of light powered by super-massive black holes. Quasars are so bright and can be seen all the way across the universe. This makes them the ideal objects to use to make the biggest map yet.

- The amazing brightness of quasars is due to the supermassive black holes found at their centres.

- As matter and energy fall into a quasar's black hole, they heat up to incredible temperatures and begin to glow. **Visible light, ultraviolet rays, infrared waves, X-rays, and gamma-rays** are emitted by these objects.

25. GM MUSTARD: SHOULD IT BE INTRODUCED IN INDIA?

News:

- Recently GEA has given approval for introduction of GM mustard in India. GENETICALLY modified (GM) mustard, or DMH11, has been developed by a team of scientists in Delhi University.

About GM Mustard DMH-11

- Mustard is an important rabbi crop sown between mid-October and late November. It a self-pollinating crop difficult to hybridise naturally due to its cross-pollinating properties. It is the largest edible oil yielding crop of India. DMH (Dhara Mustard Hybrid)-11 is genetically modified variety of mustard developed by Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants at Delhi University under the government-sponsored project. The researchers at Delhi University have created hybridised mustard DMH-11 using 'barnase / barstar' technology for genetic modification. It is Herbicide Tolerant (HT) crop.

Arguments in favour:

- GM food is safe for human consumption is quite visible from the fact that nearly all the corn and soyabean grown in the US and Canada are GM crops and people have been consuming these for decades.

- According to scientists, the human race has been selectively breeding crops and altering plant genomes for millennia. And for around 60 years, scientists have been using mutagenic techniques to alter the DNA of plants through radiation and chemicals, creating new strains of wheat, rice, peanuts and pears that have become common. Nobody has objected to this practice so far.

- Inter-species hybridisation and inter-generic hybridisation are also happening in nature. The origin and improvement of maize crop is a telling example. Triticale, formerly a grass and now widely grown as a grain, is an example of inter-species hybridization between wheat and rye. The big point in favour of the proposed commercialisation of mustard seed is that it has been developed by our own scientists and the question of royalty to a multinational firm like Monsanto will not arise.

- One of the criticism for introduction of DMH-11 is that it is herbicide resistant. However, Herbicide resistance is developed all over the world in soyabean, cotton, maize and many other crops. In America and the European Union they cultivate GM crops in over 100 million hectares. Herbicide resistance will enable farmers to raise the crop with minimum tillage, which in turn will save fossil fuel by doing away with the use of tractors or tillers. What's more, this will also reduce carbon emissions, making farming environment-friendly and sustainable.

- Another fear was that when a new variety is conjured up it could lead to the genetic erosion of mustard. There need be no fear on this account. National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources, with seven centres across the country, has a sizeable collection of crop germplasm stored in liquid nitrogen. At any time it can be revived, and given to the farmers and breeders. This way at least 75-80 percent of our diversity is already preserved and the process is still continuing

- If the commercialisation of mustard seed does take place, it will open a new era of GM food crops in India which could be drought and pest resistant and also have higher yields. GM mustard is supposed to increase productivity by 30 per cent. India does need an agricultural revolution as the sector is facing low productivity, susceptibility to drought and pest attacks. These problems have led to low incomes of farmers who get into a debt trap as crops fail, causing hardships and suicides.

Points in opposition:

- The GM technique enables scientists to insert into a plant's genome a single gene or a few of them from another species of plant or even from bacterium, virus or an animal. This process can have long term effects which may not be visible at the present moment, but may unfold later.

- GM crops create super weeds which are herbicide resistant and a threat to other crops. Another environmental issue is regarding the negative impact on non-target organisms, loss of conventional plants and ability of GM organisms to introduce engineered genes to native fauna as well as increased use of chemicals in agriculture.

- The harmful effects on human body are allergies and cancers in children as well as transferal of antibiotic resistant genes from GM foods to human. Most of the countries that have higher cotton yields than India do not grow GM cotton. The package of promises sold did not reveal all of this.

- The highest yields in mustard are from the five countries which do not grow GM mustard — U.K., France, Poland, Germany and Czech Republic — and not from the GM-growing U.S. or Canada. If India is desirous to increase its mustard yield rapidly and safely, this can be done by adopting the practice of System of Mustard Intensification, for which successful trials have been done in Bihar through a World Bank project.

- There have been numerous severe deficiencies in the evaluation process of GM mustard. The risks to health, environment and agriculture have not been evaluated even through those inadequate tests which were conducted at the time of Bt brinjal examination, though mustard is far more extensively grown and consumed than brinjal.

- HT (herbicide tolerant) GM crops have been condemned by a number of medical professionals and other scientists for increasing chemical herbicide use, leading to serious health conditions — at all stages, but most worryingly at the foetal stage. A scientific report from Argentina found a fourfold increase in birth defects and a threefold increase in childhood cancers in HT soya areas. Shockingly, the GEAC has conveniently omitted to have any herbicide-related studies.

- A recent report by the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, sums up the end game when it says: "Recent mergers have resulted in just three powerful corporations: Monsanto and Bayer, Dow and Dupont, and Syngenta and ChemChina. They control more than 65 per cent of global pesticide sales. Serious conflicts of interest issues arise, as they also control almost 61 per cent of commercial seed sales. The pesticide industry's efforts to influence policymakers and regulators have obstructed reforms and paralysed global pesticide restrictions globally." Their business model ensures that no matter who produces a GM seed, they profit.

- GM food is not an emotive or political issue and should be looked at from a purely scientific point of you. As there is considerable amount of uncertainty regarding the impact of GM food on the environment, insects and animals, the decision of allowing GM mustard has to be weighed carefully.

26. AIRLANDER 10: WORLD'S LARGEST AIRCRAFT

- Airlander 10 is a hybrid airship designed and manufactured by British manufacturer Hybrid Air Vehicles (HAV). Comprising an airship with auxiliary wing and tail surfaces, it flies using both aerostatic and aerodynamic lift and is powered by four diesel engine-driven ducted propellers**.**

- World's largest and longest aircraft. Outfitted with two giant manually deployable airbags, which are placed on either side of the cockpit, preventing it (and any human occupants) from being crushed during heavy landings.

27. GIANT CYCLONES SWIRLING AT JUPITER'S NORTH AND SOUTH POLES

News:

- NASA's Juno spacecraft has spotted giant cyclones swirling at Jupiter's north and south poles. Recent observations and data showed Jupiter's previously unseen poles.

- Juno was also able to probe the cloud cover and discover wells of ammonia that form giant and violent weather systems in the deep atmosphere.

- Mission also revealed that Jupiter's magnetic field is 10 times stronger than the strongest magnetic field on Earth and twice as strong as anticipated, exceeding researchers' expectations.

About Juno:

- Juno was launched in 2011 on a mission to study Jupiter's composition and evolution. Primary goal was to find out whether Jupiter has a solid core, and whether there is water in the planet's atmosphere — something that may not only provide vital clues to how the planet formed and evolved, but also to how the solar system we live in came into existence.

- Juno became the first spacecraft to cruise this far out into the solar system powered solely by the sun, beating Europe's Rosetta spacecraft.

28. 3D BIO PRINT

News:

- Researchers at IIT Delhi have been successful in 3D bioprinting of cartilage using a bio ink.

Artificially made cartilage was in demand:

- Millions of people around the world suffer from degenerative joint diseases such as arthritis. Despite attempting for the last 30 years, scientists across the world have not been able to produce cartilage-like tissues in the lab that are functionally and structurally similar to cartilages seen in human knees and have load-bearing capacity.

- For the first time, Indian researchers at IIT Delhi have been able to achieve a measure of success in developing cartilages that are molecularly similar to the ones seen in human knees. The team was able to achieve this by combining the tissue engineering and 3D bioprinting expertise at IIT Delhi with developmental biology expertise at IIT Kanpur.

3D Bioprinted cartilage:

- The bio ink has high concentration of bone-marrow derived cartilage stem cells, silk proteins and a few factors. The chemical composition of the bio ink supports cell growth and long-term survival of the cells.

- The cartilage developed in the lab has remained physically stable for up to six weeks.

3D bioprinting:

- Bioprinting uses a technique similar to that of inkjet printers, in which a precisely positioned nozzle deposits one tiny dot of ink at a time to form shapes.

- In the case of bioprinting, the material used is human cells rather than ink. The object is built by spraying a combination of scaffolding material (such as sugar-based hydrogel) and living cells grown from a patient's own tissues.

- After printing, the tissue is placed in a chamber with the right temperature and oxygen conditions to facilitate cell growth. When the cells have combined, the scaffolding material is removed and the tissue is ready to be transplanted.

29. AERONAUTICAL TEST RANGE (ATR)

- It is newly built Aeronautical Test Range (ATR) of the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) at Chitradurga in Karnataka.

- Facility is aimed at creating conditions for research, which will in turn develop the type of human resource in the country required in the field of aeronautical testing. The range will cater to the needs of DRDO for testing of indigenously developed aeronautical systems.

- The ATR is the first of its kind range in the country exclusively meant to conduct flight-tests of indigenous unmanned and manned aircrafts, developed by the DRDO.
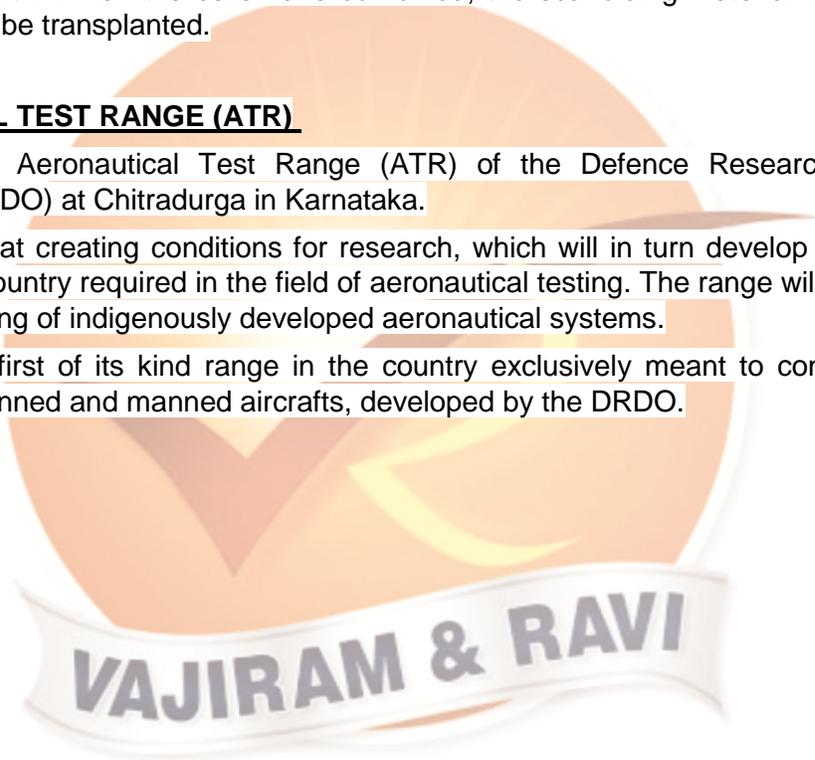
9. ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. SEBI FINALISES NORMS FOR LISTING OF GREEN BONDS

News:

- SEBI i.e. Securities and Exchange Board of India- after taking into account inputs from the Ministry of Finance, MoEF and the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy- has finalised norms for issuance and listing of green bonds. It will help in raising funds from capital markets for investment in the renewable energy space.

Why is it important?

- The full potential of India's green bond market remains untapped, with only a limited number of issuers so far. Currently, there are no standard norms for green bonds. Further to the interpretation indicated in SEBI's green bond guidelines on what classifies as 'green', there is a need for developing a formal definition of 'green' to ensure understanding across sectors.

- In addition, the cost of renewable energy in India is higher by 24-32% to that in the U.S. and Europe. Green bonds help raise funds for the projects in this sector at competitive rates leading to fall in cost.

About Green Bonds

- A green bond is like any other debt instrument issued by an entity for raising funds from investors. However, its proceeds are ear-marked for use towards financing green projects.

Benefits of Green Bonds

- Green bonds can help to meet India's ambitious target of building 175-gig watt of renewable energy capacity by 2022, which will require a massive estimated funding of $200 billion.

- Financing needs of renewable energy space in the country require exploration of new alternatives. That can also help in reducing the cost of the capital.

- Green bonds reflect the commitment of the issuer towards promotion of sustainable development and renewable energy thus enhancing the issuer's reputation.

- On economic front also it attracts a wider investor base and benefits the issuers in terms of better pricing of their bonds compared to a regular bond.

2. HIGH COURT SPELLS OUT STEPS TO STOP POLLUTION IN DAL LAKE

News:

- The Jammu & Kashmir High Court has come down heavily on Lakes and Waterways Department Authority (LAWDA) for its failure to preserve the famous Dal Lake.

- Ever-growing pollution and encroachments in and around the water body has prompted the court to pass such a directive apart from lake being central to the Valley's tourism.

Problems faced by Dal Lake

- Environmental degradation, pollution caused due to letting out of discharge by residential buildings, growth of weeds and discharge of toxic effluents have caused serious damage to the world-famous water body.

Measures Suggested by Court

- Need to re-structure and refurnish existing STPs considering the impact its failure may have on pollution in Dal Lake.

- Engage the NGOs and other organisations for "technical experience" and install CCTV cameras "to strengthen" the LAWDA's Enforcement Wing.

- A rehabilitation project for lake-dwellers who are being displaced as part of the conservation programme.

- Need to seek guidance of the World Wildlife Fund, to ensure sustainable water management. WWF has created a network called the India Water Stewardship Network and Alliance for Water Stewardship.

- It has asked the Monitoring Committee [set up by the High Court in 2002] to consider the proposal of establishing a non-profit trust like a 'Dal Lake Fund'. It can be given the task of restoration of the lake.

- Need to encourage good Samaritans help to save the lake. It can be done by promoting school and college students to take part in community service programmes, focusing specifically on clean environment in and around the lake.

About Dal Lake

- The lake is located within a catchment area in the Zabarwan mountain valley, in the foothills of the Shankracharya hills, which surrounds it on three sides.

- Dal Lake is an urban lake. It is the second largest lake in J&K. Also it is made of not one but three lakes.

- It is integral to tourism and recreation in Kashmir and is named the "Jewel in the crown of Kashmir" or "Srinagar's Jewel".

- The lake is an important source for commercial operations in fishing and water plant harvesting.

- The floating gardens, known as 'Rad' in Kashmiri blossom with lotus flowers during July and August.

- It acts as a **flood lung of river Jhelum.** It is **a major wetland facing the problem of Eutrophication but is not yet a part of Ramsar convention.**

3. THE THIRSTY RIVER

Background

- India has built many dams for the last many decades. Dams have changed the rivers cape of the country in a profound way.
- A river's geography, ecology and geo-morphology that have been shaped by millennia-long processes have been short-changed within decades.

About changes

- With changing land use, increased industrialisation, and pollution, landscapes and river scapes have been altered so dramatically that virtually no river today flows freely to the sea.
- The sea is rushing in the Gulf of Khambat, where the Narmada is supposed to meet the sea.

Less river, more sea

- The Narmada has been blocked by many big and small dams. Her waters are used for 'productive' at other places, and since the Narmada no longer reaches the sea, the sea has started a march inwards.

Impact

- In the very last stretch of the river there is virtually no water.

- Bore wells in the river bed are spouting saline water with high levels of chloride.

- Industries are shutting down because of water shortage.

- Salinity in the soil has also increased, destroying agriculture—according to one estimate, over 10,000 hectares.

- Saltpans that occupied less than 1% of land in the estuary in 1990 were spread over 3.18% in 2011—an increase of more than 300% in two decades.

- Narmada's famous **Hilsa fisheries** are on the verge of collapse.

- Alia Bet, an island at the mouth of the Narmada has merged with the left bank of the estuary thanks to accretion from reduced freshwater inflow.

- According to the remote sensing analysis of the Indian Space Research Organisation in 2014, the **area occupied by** the **river and tidal creeks in the estuary** have decreased significantly.

Importance of Narmada

- River waters play critical roles along the coastline by bringing nutrient-rich sediments to the sea. It maintains the salinity gradients apart from nourishing rich marine and coastal ecologies. It supports the livelihood of coastal communities. Saltpans could act as a source of major economic activity.

- It needs a bare minimum of 600 cusecs (cubic metres per second) of water to maintain its critical minimum flow, as per the Environmental Impact Assessment Study by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute's (NEERI's) Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) in 2013.

- However the river is so drained now that it is dying of thirst due to lack of enough water.

4. REDUCING EMISSIONS FROM DEFORESTATION AND FOREST DEGRADATION (REDD+)

Context of the issue

- The Paris Climate Agreement has emphasized on the central role of forests in achieving the goal of keeping temperatures well below 2°C. It focuses on mitigation options that aim to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation.

Current Status

- To date, 118 countries have included forestry and land use measures as part of their pledges in their Intended Nationally Determined Contributions. This represents 162 million hectares of restored, reforested and afforested land, which is in line with the **Bonn Challenge** and the **New York Declaration on Forests.**

About UN-REDD Programme

- **The United Nations Collaborative Programme** on **Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (UN-REDD Programme)** was launched in 2008.

- It builds on the convening role and technical expertise of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment).

Its role

- The UN-REDD Programme is supporting 64 countries to become "REDD+ ready", or prepared to welcome relevant investment opportunities.

- The UN-REDD Programme supports nationally led REDD+ processes and promotes the informed and meaningful involvement of all stakeholders, including indigenous people and other forest-dependent communities, in national and international REDD+ implementation.

About Bonn Challenge

- **The Bonn Challenge** is a global effort to bring 150 million hectares of the world's deforested and degraded land into restoration by 2020, and 350 million hectares by 2030.

- The forest landscape restoration (FLR) approach is the key feature of Bonn challenge. It aims to **restore ecological integrity** at the same time as improving human well-being through multifunctional landscapes.

- It is a vehicle for **achieving the water and food security and rural development while contributing to the achievement of international climate change, biodiversity and land degradation commitments.**

5. THE GLOBAL GENDER AND ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK (GGEO)

News:

- The GGEO Project will be celebrating its first anniversary this month.

About GGEO Project

- The Global Gender and Environment Outlook (GGEO) Critical issues project was launched in May 2016. It provides a comprehensive overview of the linkages between gender and environment in the contexts of SDGs and 2030 Development agenda. It is a new global benchmark for environmental analysis and decision-making.

Background

- Recognizing the importance of gender from an environmental perspective, and in response to a call from the Network of Women Ministers and Leaders for the Environment (NWMLE), UNEP made a commitment at Rio+20 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to undertake a ground-breaking global gender and environmental assessment.

Significance

- It is expected to enable better understanding of the environment through a gender perspective, support better integration of gender perspectives in development and implementation of environmental policies at international and national levels, through partnerships.

UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO)

- UNEP's Global Environment Outlook (GEO) is an integrated environmental assessment with a future-looking approach. It provides a comprehensive synthesis and up-to-date analysis about the state and trends of the environment.

- It is an important way in which UNEP makes available credible, scientific data on the environment, and presents policy-relevant analyses at global and regional scales.

6. WILDLIFE TRAFFICKING THREATENS 30% WORLD NATURAL HERITAGE SITES: WWF

About Issue

- According to the report 'Not for Sale' by the World Wide Fund, endangered species are nearing extinction due to poaching, illegal logging and fishing in nearly 30 per cent of World Heritage sites. It has also put the livelihoods dependant on them at risk.

About The report

- The report has also sought additional and immediate measures to halt the worrying trend in illegal trafficking for international trade of CITES-listed species in the world's most ecologically important places -- including World Heritage Sites (under natural category) in India.

- CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), is an international agreement between governments.

- It acts as a deterrent so that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

- There are over 35,000 species (over 5,000 animals and 30,000 plants) listed under CITES.

- According to the report, species at risk in the World Heritage sites includes snow leopard, rhino, eastern swamp deer, white-lipped peccary - a hog like animal, jaguar and elephants.

- Seven natural sites in India are facing the risk and among them some rarest of the rare species like pangolins and snow leopards are on the target of poachers.

The Indian sites

- **Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Park,**

- **Kaziranga National Park,**

- **Manas Wildlife Sanctuary,**

- **Keoladeo National Park, Western Ghats,**

- **Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area** and

- **Khangchendzonga National Park**, the latest site to be named a World heritage site.

Concern

- Natural World Heritage sites are among the most recognized natural sites for their universal value.

- However many are threatened by destructive industrial activities. Also the unique animals and plants are affected by over-exploitation and trafficking.

Measures

- Governments must address the entire wildlife trafficking value chain as a long term protection.

- There is need for more collaboration and integration between CITES, the World Heritage Convention and national authorities.

- It will lead to a more coordinated, comprehensive response to halt wildlife trafficking - from harvesting of species in source countries, transportation through processing destinations, to sales in consumer markets.

7. INDIA'S GREEN CAR PLAN PRIORITISES ELECTRIC VEHICLES OVER HYBRIDS

News:

- Niti Aayog in its report titled Transformative Mobility Solutions for India, has recommended lower taxes and interest rates for loans on electric vehicles. It has also asked to limit the sales of conventional cars. It signals a dramatic shift in country's policy, which is one of the world's fastest growing auto markets.

Objective

- The move is aimed at **electrifying all vehicles in the country by 2032 and beyond.**

Highlights of the report

- Its recommends the government to open a battery plant by the end of 2018.

- It also asks to use tax revenues from the sale of petrol and diesel vehicles to set up charging stations for electric vehicles.

- It suggests bulk procurement of electric vehicles, building standardised, swappable batteries for two- and three-wheelers.

- It will bring down their cost. It also supports favourable tariff structures for charging cars.

- It also sets a goal of 2018 for setting up a 250 megawatt-per-hour battery plant that aims to reach one gigawatt of production by 2020.

Background

- India, in 2015, launched a scheme called Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles under which it offered incentives for clean fuel technology cars to boost their sales to up to 7 million vehicles by 2020.

- However lack of clarity on policy risks delayed the much needed investment in the auto sector.

Changed Approach

- The present report focuses solely on electric vehicles. It moves away from the current policy that incentivise both hybrid vehicles (combination of fossil fuel and electric power) and electric cars.

Why Hybrids

- China has announced aggressive measures last year to push sales of plug-in vehicles including subsidies, research funding and rules designed to discourage fossil-fuel cars in big cities.

- It would be a radical step by India to **cut its oil import bill** to half by 2030 and **reduce emissions as part of its commitment to the Paris climate treaty.**

Challenges Ahead

- High battery costs would push up car prices. Lack of charging stations and other infrastructure due to lack of investment in the technology is a major hurdle.

- Without requisite investment India might become importer of batteries. There has been resistance from carmakers.

Silver Lining

- Maruti Suzuki has invested in mild-hybrid technology, which makes less use of electric power than full hybrids. Currently Mahindra & Mahindra is the only manufacturer of **electric vehicles in India**.

8. CHINNAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY HITCHES WAGON TO STAR TORTOISES

News:

- An ambitious project of the **Kerala Forest Department to rehabilitate Indian star tortoises** seized from smugglers has witnessed a major success. The project is being run at the **Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS).**

Significance

- This makes the CWS the **only rehabilitation centre for star tortoises** in the country. The CWS is **the only place in Kerala where star tortoises are known to occur in the wild.**

- The sanctuary is now a haven for at least 450 such tortoises seized from poachers in less than two years.

- The success of the programme is so overwhelming that the star tortoise has turned into an icon of the sanctuary.

Background

- In August 2015 Customs department seized an out-of-the-ordinary consignment that contained 200 star tortoises at the Nedumbassery International Airport. It was heading to an East Asian destination.

Demand

- In East Asian regions, live Indian star tortoises are considered auspicious for gaining wealth. Hence Indian star tortoises, despite being protected under the Wildlife Act, are poached and smuggled.

Rationale for Project

- Fearing they would perish in a zoo or a forest area where they cannot adapt naturally, the CWS authorities created a special project to protect the Indian star tortoises.

Species identification

- Species identification is done through a molecular genetics process to scientifically identify them as a southern Indian species.

- It is to avoid mixing of genetically different populations since a western Indian species inhabiting Gujarat and Rajasthan also reside there.

- Project follows the 'soft releasing' process in which randomly selected tortoises are taken to the wild in an enclosure from which they enter the forest at will.

- The enclosures are monitored to prevent attacks by wild animals.

About Star Tortoises

- The Indian star tortoise is a **threatened species** of tortoise found in dry areas and scrub forest in India and Srilanka and Pakistan.

- Due to its quite popular in the exotic pet trade, it is categorised as **vulnerable in IUCN** Red List. Earlier its status as threatened. Later it was considered as endangered.

About Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary

- It is located in the rain shadow area of the Western Ghats. It boasts of a unique thorny scrub forest with xerophyte species. It is the habitat for the endangered Giant Grizzled Squirrel of India. Unlike other sanctuaries in Kerala, Chinnar gets only less than two months of rain every year.

- Rich in wildlife, the mixed deciduous forests here are ideal for trekking.An extensive Sandalwood forest nearby is an added attraction at Chinnar.

- Herds of gaur and elephants are found along with **Hanuman Langur**. Dry deciduous forests, high sholas and some grassland provide the diversity to the sanctuary.

9. WORLD TURTLE DAY

News:

- The World Turtle Day is observed every year on May 23. It focuses on protecting turtles and tortoises and their rapidly disappearing habitats across the world.

Background

- World Turtle Day was started in 2000 by the American Tortoise Rescue (ATR). Since then it is celebrated every year to create awareness about the world's oldest living reptiles in the world.

Major Threat in Indian Context

- The most prominent threat faced by the **turtles and tortoises** in India is smuggling. They are smuggled live every year to **East Asian and Southeast Asian markets.**

- Apart from the live specimens, the eggs of sea turtle have a huge demand. They are sold as delicacies in the South Asian countries.

- West Bengal has become a major hub of turtle smuggling. Despite efforts of the government, turtle smuggling has become a lucrative business in India despite the government interventions.

Secondary Threats

- Human intervention is affecting the survival of turtles. Habitat destruction is a key threat faced by the turtles.

- It is a major threat for turtles found in Ganga and other major rivers in the country as these rivers are being affected by pollution.

- The pollution of seas and sea beaches has also affected the survival of sea turtles. Many turtles are dying every year by eating plastics.

- The hatchlings are born deformed and the food sources are disappearing.

Conservation

- Efforts for the conservation of turtles in India include **"turtle walks".** It has focussed on the protection of Olive Ridley sea turtles on the coasts of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

- The **"turtle walks"** involve many local people who carefully dig up the nests along the beaches and take the eggs to a protected spot to make sure the eggs are not stolen or eaten.

- Other conservation efforts include the creation of protected areas on the Ganges in order to protect turtles from smugglers and monitor their breeding.

10. WORLD BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY DAY

About the event

- International Day for Biodiversity also known as World Biodiversity Day is **observed on May 22**. It is observed since the year 2000 as per the decision of UN General Assembly.

Background

- It is so observed to commemorate the date of Adoption of the Convention on Biological Diversity at Nairobi (UNEP Headquarters) on 22 May 1992.

Theme

- The theme for 2017 World Biodiversity Day is "Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism". The year 2017 is also being observed as "International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development".

UN Decision

- It is being observed as per the decision of the UN General Assembly. UN has already declared **2011-20** as **United Nations Decade on Biodiversity to support and promote reducing the loss of biodiversity.**

What is Biodiversity?

- Raymond F. Dasmann, the wildlife scientist and conservationist invented the term Biological Diversity in 1968.

- Biodiversity refers to the "totality of genes, species and ecosystems of a region". There are three levels of biodiversity viz. species diversity, ecosystem diversity and genetic diversity.

Use of the term

- The term biodiversity sums up several problems in environmental conservation including loss of species, destruction of habitats, invasive species, genetic pollution, over exploitation and effects of climate change on biodiversity.

Distribution

- Biodiversity is unequally distributed on Earth and it varies across regions on the basis of climatic and geographical factors.

- Equatorial and tropical regions are richest in terms of biodiversity. In comparison to Oceans, terrestrial biodiversity is much greater. It is greater at equator in comparison to poles.

- Around 90% of world's biodiversity is found in tropical rainforests which occupy less than 10 percent of Earth's surface. The marine biodiversity is highest along the coasts in the Western Pacific which is known for highest sea temperature.

- Around 70% of World species are found in 12 countries viz. Australia, Brazil, China, Columbia, Costa Rica, Congo, Ecuador, India, Indonesia, Madagascar, Mexico and Peru.

11. WHY DOES THE INDIAN OCEAN RISE AND FALL?

About Sea Level Rise

- A sea level rise is an increase in the volume of water in the world's oceans, resulting in an increase in global mean sea level.

Major cause of a sea level rise

- Thermal expansion due to warming of the ocean (since water expands as it warms) and increased melting of land-based ice, such as glaciers and ice sheets are the two major causes for sea level rise.

- NASA's satellite data on the average rise and fall in sea levels shows that the seas on average have risen 85 mm since 1993, adding about 3.5 mm annually.

Indian Ocean and the sea level rise

- Since 2004, Indian Ocean has been rising particularly rapidly. However, the sea level rise is specific to a smaller stretch called the North Indian Ocean.

- North Indian Ocean consists of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and a large part of the Indian Ocean until the 5 degree S latitude.

- According to research the North Indian Ocean sea levels actually dipped between 1993 and 2004, at about 0.3 mm per year.

- However after 2004, it has been rising 6 mm per year. Such a fluctuating trend hasn't been observed for the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean.

Why Indian Ocean Alone?

- Peculiar geography of the North Indian Ocean is a major reason. It is surrounded on all sides by continents, except on the southern side. This influences the rate at which heat is absorbed and flushed out from within the system.

- According to researchers, heat was moving out slower after 2004 than during the 1990s. Also, the wind flows, which led to warm water welling up on the Indian Ocean surface, changed directions every decade and probably influenced sea level patterns.

What does it indicates?

- This means a rise in average global temperature doesn't mean a concurrent rise in sea levels everywhere. In fact the researchers are predicting that North Indian Ocean levels may see a fall over the next decade (like seen between 1993 and 2004).

How the current study will benefit?

- It could help sharpen monsoon forecasts and predicting coastal erosion patterns.

- Better understanding of sea level undulations could also inform future reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

12. TECHNOLOGY ROAD SHOW POST-KIGALI AMENDMENT

What is the News?

- Recently Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, organized an "Ozone2Climate" Technology Road show along with the UN Environment Ozone Action's Compliance Assistance Programme.

- The road show was organised post Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, on the sidelines of the South Asia National Ozone Officers Annual Network Meeting – 2017 in Agra.

- This was the first time the Ozone2Climate Technology Road show was organised as a part of the annual network meeting globally.

Objective

- The Road Show promoted ozone and climate-friendly alternative technologies to HCFCs and HFCs in the refrigeration and air-conditioning (RAC) sector.

- It focused on making the current refrigeration and air conditioning equipment designs more energy efficient.

Benefit

- The move will not only save the money for consumers, it will be more environments friendly.

Annual Meet

- The meet will focus on current policy and technology updates on ozone and climate friendly alternatives to HCFCs and HFCs post-Kigali amendment.

- Meet will also focus on UNEP's Compliance Assistance Programme (CAP) which provides significant support to Article 5 countries with meeting and sustaining their obligations under the Protocol.

About Kigali Summit

- The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol is **legally binding** and will **come into force from 1 January 2019**.

- As a part of **Kigali Amendment,** 197 countries, including India have agreed to a timeline to reduce the use of HFCs by roughly 85% of their baselines by 2045.

- At Kigali Hydro fluorocarbons (HFCs) were included in the list of chemicals under the Montreal Protocol.

Objective

- It was done to regulate their production and consumption and phase them down over a period of time with financial assistance from the Multilateral Fund created under the Montreal Protocol.

- Kigali amendments to the Montreal Protocol will provide **incentive to improve energy efficiency in case of use of new refrigerant and technology for the first time.**

- **Also** it includes funding for R&D and service sector in developing countries in the agreed solutions on finance.

13. COBRA LILY BLOOMS AGAIN AFTER 84 YEARS

News:

- Cobra lily, extremely rare species of flora featuring a distinctive translucent spathe has been recently rediscovered in the western Nilgiris after 84 years.

- It was last collected by E. Barnes in 1932 and described by C.E.C Fischer in 1933.

Importance of discovery:

- Barely a few hundred cobra lily plants are left in the wild and they can be found only in a small area measuring less than 10 square kilometres in the Nilgiris.

- The Toda tribals of the Nilgiris, familiar with the plant, have an embroidery motif known as the 'podwarshk', which resembles Cobra Lily.

- The indigenous Toda tribal community predict the early arrival of monsoon from the blooming of the cobra lily's 'translucens'.

Risk of extinction

- Prized and valued for its beauty around the world, cobra lily is at even greater risk of extinction from the commercial trade in exotic plants.

- Cobra lilies have vanished in the past decades along with the disappearance of the Shola tree patches in which they were found.

- Based on its tiny population and distribution, the Cobra Lily could be considered **'critically endangered'.**

Need for Conservation

- Of the handful cobra lily species found in the Nilgiris, only two are endemic. There is an urgent need of the protection of the patch of land where the **Cobra Lily** is found.

- The rediscovery of the plant highlights the importance of preserving of Shola tree patches, even inside plantations and tea fields.

14. ACTION PLAN FOR PAMPA CONSERVATION

About the News

- A seven-point action plan for conservation of the river Pampa has been chalked out recently. It has been termed Pampa Declaration.

- It delineates a comprehensive plan to be implemented with the active involvement and support of the government and the public.

The salient features of the declaration

- It aims at bestowing living entity status to river Pampa.

- It calls for the constitution of a River Management Board for the governance of the river.

- It also aims at Documentation of livelihood along the river basin.

- Periodic status report will be prepared of flood plains and wetlands and formation of tributaries, micro watersheds, and ponds linked to the river every five years.

- It also calls for digitising biodiversity reports and implementation of green protocol for containing the pollution of the river and for the conservation of the Pampa ecosystem.

- The government has to create an additional standing committee on environment at the level of local bodies.

- It will to ensure participation of local government institutions in the governance of the river.

River basin management

- There is a need for implementing an Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) process for the river Pampa.

- It would ensure equitable, sustainable, and coordinated methods to address the issues of deforestation, sand-mining, river bank agriculture, degraded water quality, bacteriological contamination, and threats to its ecology.

About the river Pampa

- Pampa is the third longest river in Kerala after Periyar and Bharathappuzha and the longest river in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore.

- The river is also known as 'Dakshin Bhagirathi or Dakshin Ganga. It is also called river 'Baris'.

- Sabarimala temple of Lord Ayyappa is located on the banks of the river.

- River basin is famous for rice cultivation and water for irrigation purposes is provided by the Pamba River. It ends up in a Vembanad lake.

15. 'GLOBAL ENERGY REVOLUTION' ON ANVIL

News:

- Recently Japan and China have successfully extracted the **combustible ice** from the sea floor off their coastlines.

- It has made the commercial development of the globe's huge reserves of a frozen fossil fuel a reality.

Combustible ice

- Combustible ice is **a frozen mixture of water and concentrated natural gas.** Technically it is known as **methane hydrate.**

- It can be lit on fire in its frozen state and is believed to comprise one of the world's most abundant fossil fuels.

Significance of the discovery

- For Japan, methane hydrate offers the chance to reduce its heavy reliance of imported fuels.

- In China, it could serve as a cleaner substitute for coal-burning power plants and steel factories leading to pollution in the form of lung-damaging smog.

Whereabouts

- Methane hydrate is found **beneath seafloors**. It also lies buried inside **Arctic permafrost and beneath Antarctic ice.**

Constraints

- Successful extraction of the fuel at a profit is a major hurdle faced by both the private and state-owned energy companies for decades.

- Hence, large-scale production may take many years. There are also environmental concerns too.

- Methane hydrate can increase greenhouse gas emissions if leaked during the extraction process.

Prospects

- Estimates of worldwide reserves range from 280 trillion cubic metres up to 2,800 trillion cubic metres, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

- Hence methane hydrate reserves could meet global gas demands for 80 to 800 years at current consumption rates.

- The fuel also could displace renewables such as solar and wind power if extracted at a profitable cost.

16. PANEL TO STUDY HARMFUL EFFECTS OF PET COKE

News:

- The National Green Tribunal has directed the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) to set up an experts' panel to examine the harmful effects of petroleum coke also known as pet coke on human health and environment.

Context of the issue

- Petition was filed in NGT seeking a ban on the use of all forms of pet coke, as it emits fine particulate matter (PM) which is harmful to human health.

About Pet Coke

- Pet coke is a **high calorific value solid fuel** which is extensively used for power generation especially in developing countries.

- It is a solid carbon material. It is also one of the key inputs for the cement industry.

Indian Preference for Pet Coke

- 18.3 million Tonne pet coke was used in the country in 2015-16 reflecting high dependence on pet coke being consumed as a fuel.

- It is a cheaper alternative to coal since it does not have a clean environment cess of Rs 400/tonne currently levied on coal.

Why Detrimental To Environment?

- Petcoke contains 7-8 per cent sulphur. At current rates it adds 1.5 million tonne sulphur in the environment

- Many foreign countries have already banned the use of petcoke as fuel as it emits sulphur in high quantity.

- The Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority is considering imposing a ban on polluting industrial fuels such as fuel oil and pet coke.

- Also petcoke is not "an approved fuel" as per the environmental laws in India.

17. CHITALE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS SEVERAL MEASURES FOR DESILTATION OF GANGA

News:

- Committee on De-siltation of river Ganga has recommended a variety of measures for de-siltation of the river.

Background

- **Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation** had constituted a committee in July 2016.

- It was headed by Shri Madhav Chitale (Expert Member, National Ganga River Basin Authority).

Mandate

- To prepare guidelines for de-siltation of river Ganga from Bhimgauda (Uttarakhand) to Farakka (West Bengal).

- To establish a difference between desilting and sand mining.

- To establish the need for desilting to maintain the ecological balance and e-flow of river Ganga.

Recommendations

- According to committee de-siltation can enhance the hydraulic performance of the river. However it doesn't have any direct role in improving environment flow of the river.

- On the other hand, indiscriminate de-silting or sand mining can have an adverse impact on ecological flow of the river.

- Committee has suggested the approach of Catchment Area treatment and Watershed Development Works to curb the inflow of silt into the river Ganga.

- It has also suggested the **morphological and flood routing studies** along with study of **reach wise sediment transport process.**

- Reservoirs in Ganga and its tributaries, particularly in upper reaches, should enable the passage of first floods, having high silt load, without storage while river flows in later phases of the monsoon are only stored for use during non-monsoon season.

- It has emphasised on the sustainable agricultural practices along the river flood plains should so that it does not disturb the passage of flood by increasing the resistance to flow causing aggradations.

- The committee has asked for **the de-siltation/dredging** of **shoals** formed close to Farakka Barrage by taking care of the river training works around it.

- It has also asked for the preparation of annual reports (Sand registry) describing the previous de-silting/ dredging activity.

- According to it a technical institute may be entrusted to conduct the sediment budget.

- **The Ganga Flood Control Commission,** headed by Union Minister of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation with the Chief Ministers of Ganga river basin States and Member, NITI Aayog should carry out necessary studies with regard to sediment management in river Ganga and incorporate sediment management strategies in their comprehensive plans prepared for all sub-basins of river Ganga.

18. STUDY ON COMMON RISK MITIGATION MECHANISM (CRMM) FOR SOLAR POWER GENERATION PROJECTS

News:

- India has commissioned a study to define and structure a Common Risk Mitigation Mechanism (**CRMM**) for solar power generation projects in solar-rich countries.

- The study is being conducted in collaboration with countries like Argentina, Burkina-Faso, Chad, France, Ivory Coast, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and Yemen.

Context of the news

- The exercise is part of the international efforts to implement the Paris Declaration of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) adopted on 30 November 2015.

Objective

- The study is aimed at a reduction in the cost of finance for renewable energy and the overall price of **electricity.**

Highlights

- A task force chaired by Terrawatt Initiative (TWI), the World Bank Group, the Currency Exchange Fund (TCX), the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) and the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) will conduct the study.

- A qualified representative will be appointed by the participating countries to cooperate with the task force.

- It will also the provide information regarding the country specific expectations, experience and needs of the task force.

- All the countries lying fully or partially between the Tropics have been invited to join the task force and support this initiative in order to attract investments into solar sector.

Significance

- The Council on Energy, Environment and Water has calculated the cost of capital which forms a substantial amount in the total costs of renewable energy.

- In Indian context it accounts for 70% of the total cost of solar Power.

- In this context, the CRMM is expected to offer a simple and affordable tool that will develop a secure environment for private institutional investment in solar assets.

- The instrument will help diversify and pool risks on mutualised public resources and unlock significant investments.

About International Solar Alliance

- The International Solar Alliance was launched by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Francois Hollande as a union of countries with abundant sunlight. It was launched in the COP-21 summit at Paris climate conference.

- Under this alliance, 121 countries that fall within the tropics {i.e. between Tropic of Cancer and Tropic of Capricorn} have been invited to make collaborative efforts to harness solar energy to generate the electricity.

- Most of the countries are in the Asia, Africa and South America.

- There are three objectives behind the International Solar Alliance. First is to force down prices by driving demand.

- Second is to bring standardization in solar technologies and third is to foster research and development.