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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

1. Courts to go Digital

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Supreme Court took the step towards digitization of courts across the country by launching three applications to facilitate e-filing of cases, making digital payments and service of judicial notices through smartphones to the litigants.
- The applications – e-courts services, E-pay and NSTEP (National Service and Tracking of Electronic Processes) would pave the way of quality and speedy justice to litigants.

Details of the digital applications:

- E-courts services: the litigants and the lawyers would be able to file petitions in almost 17,000 district and 'taluka' courts in the country by using their computers and mobile phones.
- E-pay: It will enable the litigants to pay court fees, costs imposed by courts, maintenance in matrimonial cases through digital means
- NSTEP: The court staffs would be provided Smartphones and will be entrusted with the task of serving court summons and notices on litigants
- The NSTEP would be connected to GPRS and the judges would be able to ascertain the fact whether the court staff has visited the place to serve the summons or not.

Significance:

- It paves the path of quality, quantity, affordability and cost-effectiveness.
- It helps in achieving the goal of digital inclusion by computerizing courts.

TOPIC: GS II, JUDICIARY

2. Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts (Amendment) Bill

Source: The Hindu

Why in news

- The Bill intends to make India as a sought-out business destination in the world. Its objective is to set India at the top of the 'Ease of Doing Business' index of the World Bank. It aims to create a conducive regulatory environment for investors to set up and operate businesses.

- Commercial disputes include regular commercial and business contracts, construction contracts, shareholder agreements, licensing agreements, etc.
- It seeks to bring down the specified value of commercial disputes from the existing Rs 1 crore each to Rs 3 lakh and for their speedy disposal. The Commercial Courts Act, 2015, provides for commercial courts and commercial divisions of high courts to settle commercial disputes with a value of at least Rs 1 crore.
- The bill provides for the establishment of commercial courts at the district judge level for the territories over which respective high courts have ordinary original civil jurisdiction.
- The law will be given prospective effect so that the authority of the judicial forum at present adjudicating the commercial disputes is not affected.
- Pre-Institution Mediation (PIM) process is introduced in cases where no urgent relief is contemplated as it will provide an opportunity to the parties to resolve commercial disputes outside the ambit of the courts through the authorities constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- The Bill proposes a new Section, 21A, which enables the Centre to make rules and procedures for PIM.

Why amendment is needed?

- With rapid economic development, there has been a considerable increase in commercial activities which led to rise in the number of commercial disputes at the domestic and international levels.
- Growing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and overseas commercial transactions have contributed to a significant increase in commercial disputes.

Significance:

- Bringing down the specified value of commercial disputes would reduce the time taken for resolution of such disputes and improve India's ranking in the ease of doing business.
- The introduction of the pre-institution mediation process will provide an opportunity to the parties to resolve the commercial disputes outside the ambit of courts through authorities constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act. However, in all other cases, the mediation is mandatory and will be conducted within a period of three months (extendable by another two months with the consent of the parties).

- Any settlement via mediation will have the status of an arbitral award on agreed terms and will be enforceable like a decree of the court.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

3. Amendments in Anti-corruption Law

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Parliament has recently made certain amendments to laws on corruption. These are:

- Requiring prior approval for initiating investigation into allegations of corruption against public servants.
- Requiring prior sanction for prosecution of public servants.
- Section 6A of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act has been amended, reinterring the requirement of prior approval for initiating investigation of corruption cases not only against Joint Secretaries and above as existed earlier, but all categories of public servants. Exceptions in this are cases of traps in which such public servants are caught red-handed while taking bribe.
- Under Section 19 of the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988, prior sanction of the competent authority is required to prosecute public servants. This safeguard has been extended to retired public servants. Hence a prior approval of the government is required to even initiate an investigation by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) into allegations of corruption against public servants.

The anti corruption law:

- It was enacted to combat corruption in government agencies and public sector businesses in India.
- It defines who a public servant is and punishes public servants involved in corruption or bribery. It also punishes anyone who helps him or her commit the crime corruption or bribery.

Concerns:

- Earlier, the police had unfettered jurisdiction to initiate investigation into a crime or acts of corruption, once it gets credible information. Even the judiciary could not interfere in it. Hence the amendments have led to curbing the power of the investigation agencies.
- Time and again the government tried to curb the power of investigating agencies. The provision of prior permission from the government before taking action against any public servant was brought in the Central Vigilance Commission Act

of 2003. However, later the Supreme Court set aside this provision of the Act.

- The power of CBI to enquire and investigate into the allegations of bribery and corruption against a certain class of public servants and officials is subverted and impinged by Section 6A.

Way Forward:

- In the Indian criminal justice system, the police and the CBI are bound by law to investigate a crime reported to them. They have jurisdiction as per law and that the power to register and proceed with the investigation must remain unhindered.
- Other authorities should interfere only after the investigation is complete and the police or the CBI is ready with the report on the investigation.

TOPIC: GS II, INTER STATE RELATION

4. SC favours lower storage at Mullaperiyar

Source: The Hindu

About the Mullaperiyar Dam:

- It is a masonry gravity dam on the Periyar River in Idukki District of Kerala and situated at the confluence of the Mullayar and Periyar rivers
- The Periyar National Park in is located around the dam's reservoir.
- The dam was built in the late 1800s in the princely state of Travancore (present-day Kerala) and given to British-ruled Madras Presidency on a 999-year lease in 1886. The dam is located in Kerala on the river Periyar, but is operated and maintained by Tamil Nadu.
- The agreement was renewed in 1970 under which, Tamil Nadu was given rights to the land and the water from the dam as well as the authority to develop hydro-power projects at the site, and Kerala would receive rent in return.

Purpose of the dam:

- The Periyar river which flows westward of Kerala and falls in Arabian sea was diverted eastwards to flow towards the Bay of Bengal to provide water to the arid rain shadow region of Madurai in Madras Presidency which was in dire need of a greater supply of water as small river like Vaigai could not fulfill the need of the people.
- The Mullaperiyar dam and the diverted Periyar waters act as a lifeline for many districts by providing water for irrigation and drinking, and also for generation of power in Lower Periyar Power Station.

Views of Kerala Government:

- It states that it does not object to giving water to Tamil Nadu, their main cause of objection being the dam's safety as it is 116 years old. Mullaperiyar dam has leaks and cracks in the structure. Increasing the level would add more pressure to be handled by the already leaking dam. Idukki district, where the dam is located, is earthquake-prone and has experienced multiple low-intensity quakes. So, the dam is situated in a seismically active zone. A 2009 report by IIT Roorkee stated that the dam "was likely to face damage if an earthquake of the magnitude of 6.5 on the Richter scale struck its vicinity when the water level is at 136 feet"
- It poses danger to life and property to people living downstream. Three million people living in the vicinity of the reservoir.

Views of Tamil Nadu:

- On the orders of the Supreme court, the Tamil Nadu government lowered the storage level from 152 feet to 142.2 feet then to 136 feet, conducted safety repairs and strengthened the dam.
- It becomes difficult to sustain agriculture if water level is not increased.
- The dam has been strengthened and there will be no threat to people and the tremors that felt in neighborhood was minor.

Reason for the controversy:

- In 2006, SC allowed Tamilnadu to raise water height to 142 feet after strengthening the dam but Kerala passed a law called Kerala Irrigation and Water Conservation (Amendment) Act, 2006, to prevent the neighboring State (TN) from raising the water level beyond 136 feet which was challenged by Tamil Nadu in the Supreme Court.
- In May 2014, Supreme Court termed the Kerala dam Law of 2006 is unconstitutional as Mullaperiyar is a dispute between two states and in such disputes one state legislature cannot unilaterally enact law in its own favor and this act of Kerala is also interference with the judicial function.
- SC also appointed a Supervisory Committee which shall inspect the dam periodically particularly immediately before the monsoon and after the monsoon and keep close watch on its safety and recommend measures which are necessary.
- It will also issue necessary directions to both the States or any one of them for the safety of the Mullaperiyar dam. Such direction shall be obeyed by all the concerned parties.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

5. NABARD All India Rural Financial Inclusion Survey 2016-17

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Recent survey by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) has found that more than half the agricultural households in the country have outstanding debt, and their average outstanding debt is almost as high as the average annual income of all agricultural households.

Survey Details:

- The southern States showed the highest levels of indebtedness among agricultural households.

Mapping farm debt

Among other things, the NABARD survey measured incidence of indebtedness (IOI), the proportion of households reporting outstanding debt



- Average amount of outstanding debt (AOD) for indebted agricultural households is ₹1,04,602
- Outstanding debt for indebted non-agricultural households is ₹76,731. Overall extent of indebtedness taking all households combined is ₹91,407
- 43.5% agricultural households reported to have borrowed any money from some source or the other
- 60.4% of agricultural households borrowed from institutional sources alone
- 30.3% borrowed from only informal sources and 9.2% of agricultural households borrowed from both sources
- 56.7% of non-agricultural households and 58.6% of all households borrowed from institutional sources

SOURCE: NABARD, SURVEY REFERENCE YEAR: 2015-16

Source of Loans:

- Only 46% of the loans were taken from commercial banks and farm households took less than half their loans from commercial banks
- 40% were taken from non-institutional sources such as moneylenders and landlords. Around 11.5% households exhibited dependence on local moneylenders and landlords, which exposes them to exploitation by having to pay exorbitant interest.
- The persons resorting to local moneylenders for loan often include either the illiterate or extremely poor ones who are not eligible for loans from formal institutions.
- 10% take loans from self-help groups.

Main reasons for taking loans:

- The biggest reason for taking loans among agricultural households was for agricultural purposes and a quarter of all loans taken for this purpose.
- 19% of loans were taken for meeting running expenses for agricultural purposes.
- 19% were taken for sundry domestic needs.
- Loans for housing and medical expenses stood at 11% and 12%, respectively.

Status of indebtedness:

- The highest incidence of indebtedness came from those owning more than two hectares of land.
- Among small and marginal farmers owning less than 0.4 hectares, slightly less than 50% of the households were in debt.
- Those with more land were more likely to have multiple loans. This may be attributed to the fact that these economically better-off households are more eligible for taking loans as they have enough assets to serve as security against the loans taken.

TOPIC: GS I, IMPACT OF URBANISATION

6. Urbanisation and policies related to slums in India

Source: The Hindu

Status of slums in India:

- India must get its numbers right as there are no concrete figures on these temporary and semi-permanent settlements.
- India’s rapid urbanization for decades has given rise to thousands of slums in the urban areas.
- Slums have a fluid definition and legal action leads to exclusion of people.
- Over 70% of families in slums live in debt.
- The difference between their monthly earnings and expenses is less than ₹1,000 leaving them vulnerable in case of educational, vocational, social or health emergencies.
- With no access to formal financial systems, any borrowing comes from private money lenders at high interest rates.
- For many, even water and electricity are disproportionately more expensive as they are forced to rely on the grey market rather than on formal, subsidized channels.
- The slum dwellers end up staying in the same slums for many years. When they move out of their slums, they end up in accommodations which is worse than slums.

Way Forward:

- A nuanced slum policy, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach is needed.
- In many established slums, political patronage has produced concrete houses, title deeds, piped water and regularized electricity. Here, economic opportunities and employment are key.
- Slums resembling refugee camps need housing and basic amenities.
- Until these nuances are considered, ambitious but slow-to-implement housing schemes will do little for the welfare of slum dwellers.

TOPIC: GS II, INTERSTATE RELATIONS

7. Goa-Karnataka Tussle on Mahadayi

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Goa government has filed application under the Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 in the Mahadayi Water Dispute Tribunal seeking action against Karnataka for breach and disobedience of the earlier order passed by the tribunal.

Background:

- Karnataka and Goa, the riparian states of the Mahadayi (known as Mandovi in Goa) are fighting over the sharing of water of the river, which originates at Belagavi in Karnataka.
- Karnataka has built bunds to block the flow of the Mahadayi water into Goa following which Goa had filed a contempt application before the tribunal. However, Karnataka filed an affidavit, stating that it would not divert the waters and hence Goa withdrew the contempt application with liberty to file such application as and when such necessity arose.



- In July 2018, it was noticed that on account of the gradient slope that Karnataka built, Mahadayi waters was flowing into the Malaprabha basin.

TOPIC: GS III, VARIOUS ARMED FORCES

8. CBI investigation of extrajudicial killings under SC's Scanner

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

A Special Bench monitoring the CBI investigation into the alleged extrajudicial killings in Manipur will hear a petition filed by 355 Army officers in the Supreme Court, alleging "persecution" by agencies such as the CBI for doing their duty in the insurgency-hit areas of Jammu and Kashmir and the north-eastern States.

Background:

- In its earlier judgment, the SC ended the immunity provided by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 (AFSPA). It declared that "there is no concept of absolute immunity from trial by a criminal court".
- However after this judgment there is surge in the petitions in the court over armed forces personnel fighting in the insurgency-hit areas and the nation's borders. They are plagued by doubts whether performing their duty to fight enemies would expose them to prosecution and land them in jail.
- The petition said the Supreme Court's orders and the resultant CBI action against Army personnel have made soldiers jittery.

Arguments against Impunity:

- The on-going situation is demoralising the officers and troops deployed in field areas and fighting in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir and north-eastern States.
- The Indian Army has to, in given circumstances, take quick decisions which cannot be judged later on like an ordinary murder appeal. The scope of judicial review against active military operations cannot be on the same parameters as in other situations.

Arguments against Immunity:

- Reports of blatant abuse of the law by the armed forces have flowed through the years, especially in the Northeast and Kashmir.
- Impunity is to address any allegation of use of excessive or retaliatory force beyond the call of duty.
- It is the requirement of a democracy and the requirement of preservation of the rule of law and the preservation of individual liberties that it does

not matter whether the victim was a common person or a militant or a terrorist, nor does it matter whether the aggressor was a common person or the state. The law is the same for both and is equally applicable to both.

- Given this history of violence and bloodshed trailing AFSPA, the judiciary's attempt to make it less draconian and more accountable is a step in the right direction.
- Judicial review tears down the cloak of secrecy about unaccounted deaths involving security forces in disturbed areas and serves as a judicial precedent to uphold civilian and human rights in sensitive areas under military control.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

9. MPLADS funds to be used for Relief and Rehabilitation

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

In the wake of devastations caused by floods in Kerala, the Government has declared this a calamity of a 'severe nature' and both the Rajya Sabha Chairman and Lok Sabha Speaker urged Members of Parliament to generously contribute from their MPLADS funds for relief and rehabilitation works.

Guidelines for aid:

- The Guidelines of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme has provision that in the event of 'Calamity of severe nature' in any part of the country, an MP can recommend works up to a maximum of Rs. 1 cr. for the affected district.
- The guidelines say that from the day an MP makes such contribution, concerned authorities have to identify relief works in one month time and the same should be implemented within eight months.

MPLADS:

- Every Member of Parliament (MP) gets Rs. 5 crore annually to undertake development works of his choice in his constituency, known as the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS).
- The MPLAD Scheme is Central Sector Scheme launched in 1993-94. It enables Members of Parliament (both elected and nominated) to recommend works for creation of durable community assets based on locally felt needs to be taken up in their constituencies in the area of national priority like drinking water, education, sanitation etc.

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MSPI) is nodal ministry to coordinate work under scheme.
- Funds released under the scheme are non-lapsable.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

10. Loopholes in Swachh Bharat Abhiyan

Source: The Hindu

About the mission:

- The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, also known as the Clean India Mission is a national-level campaign dedicated to clean the country started on 2 October 2014 at Rajghat, New Delhi in honour of Mahatma Gandhi's memory. It involves the cleaning of roads, streets and infrastructure. The mission is the biggest cleanliness drive India has ever seen.
- Government has resolved to accomplish the vision of a clean India by 2019, on the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhi.

Adoption of Western approach:

- This approach is an uncritical adoption of the 19th century Western model of removing waste from the public gaze.
- Although stopping the spread of disease was the primary intention in the West, sanitation is now largely an extension of visual aesthetics, sanitation means the absence of "filthiness all around us".
- The West introduced technologies to systematically remove waste. For example, during the 'Great Stink' in 1858, a holistic sewerage plan became the part of British Government and soon the construction of toilets in households and shops became mandatory.

Loopholes in Swachh Bharat Mission:

- The Swachh Bharat campaign hardly addresses a reworking of the underground sewerage system. This is a cause for grave concern, since many labourers have died recently while cleaning jammed manholes that open into the sewerage system. Moreover, these deaths have a caste pattern. According to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in December 2017, there are over 300 cases of deaths due to manual scavenging, mostly from particular caste groups.
- Punitive measures should urge the public to learn where and how one should urinate, defecate and dispose the garbage. The campaign, however, burdens the contractual labourer with an 'exclusive' right to cleaning public spaces, while

making it a voluntary act for the 'public' to not defecate, urinate or litter in random spaces.

- In India, waste carries the stigma that is attached to caste. The waste remover in India is not a professional like the West. The stigma resides in the profession, the labour, the body, and in the space.
- Workers are now expected to visit door to door for collecting the waste. Thereafter, the unsegregated garbage, is taken to the composting yard where they have to manually segregate it. Manually segregating the waste at the landfill compromises their hygiene and health. Until they were banned in 1993, dry latrines were emptied through a similar door-to-door service.
- Toilets' are not viewed as essential parts of buildings and public architecture in India. For instance, the Delhi Metro did not include toilets in all the stations in its original plan. It was only after a PIL that the Delhi High Court directed the Metro authorities to construct toilets and provide other facilities in all stations. Temples usually did not construct toilets. And when they are constructed, they are built away from the boundary.

Association with caste:

- Similarities between the secular SBA and the casteist form of manual scavenging are evident, but they have gone unnoticed. The secular sounding Swachh Bharat has led to concealment of caste.
- Association of caste with the door to door visit for collection of waste announces the presence of a lower caste body from whom all contact has to be avoided.
- In traditional Indian houses toilets are often located at the boundary of the compound with an exclusive path for the 'scavengers'. Clearly, religious notions of pollution on the one hand, and secular notions of stigma on the other, influenced the building of toilets.
- This particular trait reflected in colonial architecture as well. Significantly, in colonial Indian architecture, the scavengers'/sweepers' staircase did not intersect with the servants' staircase. The original planning document of the Viceroy's Lodge had clear references to this secluded pathway.

Addressing the stigma:

- Any tangible achievement of a clean India is possible only if the stigma attached to sanitary labour, place and waste are critically addressed by caste-neutralising these professions and through adoption of technologies. Until then we are unlikely to succeed in any mission to keep our

cities clean. Even if we succeed in achieving cleanliness, we need to remember that a clean village exists because an 'unclean' caste has absorbed all the 'filth' of the village.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

11. Issues related to Srikrishna Committee Report

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

August 24 will mark the first anniversary of the Supreme Court's affirmation of the status of the right to privacy as a fundamental right under the Constitution which was decided in a unanimous nine-judge bench that came in the context of the cases challenging the constitutionality of the Aadhaar project.

Issues related to BN Srikrishna report:

- For making a law for data protection the B N Srikrishna committee which recently submitted its report for draft bill on personal data protection proposes extensive amendments to the Aadhaar Act. The draft bill has been criticised by many as containing exceptions and exemptions for the government and law enforcement agency as opposed to treating the state as a model data controller.
- The draft bill unequivocally disapproves of the UIDAI's practices that many of the safeguards sound as if the committee intends to say sorry to the Indian public on behalf of the government.
- The Aadhaar project was set up by an executive notification in January 2009, which did not mention that the UIDAI would have the authority to collect, store or process biometric information including fingerprints or iris scans. The draft bill defines sensitive personal data to ordinarily include biometric data and that such sensitive personal data usage by the state without consent can only be authorised by a law or explicitly mandated by law, under clauses 19 and 20. Even for processing sensitive personal data with consent, the draft bill lays down that such consent must be free, clear, explicit, informed, specific and capable of being withdrawn. It is not valid consent when people are made to enroll for Aadhaar on a threat of denial of any service or benefit, for example.
- Aadhaar's regime of "mission creep" also receives the committee's rebuke. From allowing registrars to collect several additional fields and create their own profiles in the State Resident Data Hubs (SRDH), to opening the Aadhaar platform to be used by anyone for any purpose. The obligation of ensuring data

quality on the fiduciary is also at odds with the UIDAI philosophy of exclusively placing the burden of accuracy on the data principal.

- The obligation of a detailed notice under clause 8 and the rights under chapter VI of the draft bill such as the right to opt-out, right to be forgotten and the right of data portability, have never been provided for nor respected in the case of Aadhaar.
- Clause 37 lays an emphasis on the data fiduciary engaging with other entities to process data on its behalf only through a valid contract. It is worth recalling that the UIDAI engaged and continues to engage registrars and enrolment agencies to collect and process data on its behalf based on MoUs it signed with registrars, which clearly are not valid contracts.
- Moreover, in placing the burden of accountability on the data fiduciary, the committee has also effectively come down heavily on the long-standing UIDAI practice of pointing fingers at someone else in case of a security or privacy incident.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

12. National Health Protection Mission

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- It has been announced that National Health Protection Mission, will be launched formally on September 25.
- It is a Centrally Sponsored program called Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission sponsored by Ministry of Health and family welfare. It is an ambitious initiative providing a coverage of Rs. 5 lakh per family a year to 10 crore families chosen through the Socio-Economic Caste Census, mainly rural poor and identified urban workers.
- The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population.
- AB-NHPM will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes –Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

Challenges:

- National schemes on health provide an overarching framework, but the responsibility of executing them falls on the State governments.

NHPM has a problem with the distribution of hospitals, the capacity of human resources, and the finances available for cost-sharing. Addressing these through the planned increase in public health spending to touch 2.5% of GDP, and 8% of State budgets, is the immediate challenge.

- With steady economic growth, meeting that policy commitment through higher investments will be a test of political will.
- Private insurance can only be a short-term option, and it clearly has limitations. Less ethical institutions have been found ordering unnecessary treatments to claim insurance compensation.
- Since a majority of the families will be rural, and the secondary and tertiary public hospital infrastructure suffers from severe efficiency and accountability problems.

Way Forward:

- State governments, which will administer it through their own agency, will have to purchase care from a variety of players, including in the private sector, at pre-determined rates.
- Reaching a consensus on treatment costs through a transparent consultative process is vital for a smooth and steady rollout. A large-scale Information Technology network for cashless treatment should be set up.
- State governments should upgrade the administrative systems.
- Apart from challenges it is also an opportunity to tap into a large labour pool for the new jobs that will be created.
- Reducing the cost of universal health coverage is imperative, and it requires parallel investments in the neglected public sector.
- An ombudsman to deal with complaints from NHPM users should be set up on priority basis.
- The Centre should extend the scheme to all children and senior citizens, and cover out-patient consultation and essential drugs to reduce out-of-pocket spending.

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

13. The need for a strong UN declaration on TB

Source: Live mint

There is a concerted effort to eliminate tuberculosis (TB) from the world.

Moscow Declaration:

- In the first ever Global Ministerial Conference on ending TB in Moscow last year where 120 nations

adopted the Moscow Declaration, which included commitments on universalizing access to TB care, ensuring adequate financing of TB programmes, investing in research and development (R&D) and building mechanisms to review progress.

- It also attempted to define the narrative for a forthcoming high-level meeting (HLM) on TB at the UN general assembly.

Challenges in realizing the Moscow Declaration:

- US is employing arm-twisting tactics to get the provision of “access to affordable treatment” out of the declaration.
- Under US pressure, the latest draft of the political declaration no longer included references to the flexibilities contained in the 1994 World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) in the operative paragraphs. This part of the declaration would have affirmed the rights of developing countries to access affordable medicines via TRIPS flexibilities. However, civil society groups in India and the US have taken up the fight urging the Indian and American administrations to take concrete steps to make the declaration conducive to the needs of developing countries. It is important for the developing countries to come to the fore and continue to retain the references of flexibilities of 1994 WTO TRIPS.
- The removal of the operative clause from the political declaration that refers to the commitments made in Doha to protect public health and to promote access to medicines for all is worrying. It endangers the rights of people in developing countries to access new lifesaving medicines.

TRIPS and its provision of flexibilities:

- TRIPS, created in 1995, introduced standards for protecting intellectual property rights and also incorporated important flexibilities which included granting countries freedom to determine the grounds for issuing compulsory licences through which the countries can ensure that patents do not impede the protection of public health and that lifesaving drugs under a patent are made available to large populations at a cheaper and affordable price. Hence, many countries like India, South Africa Rwanda etc significantly lowered the cost of those patented drugs which were not accessible to a large section of the population in developing countries.
- The TRIPS flexibilities were built in for the greater public good. Essential drugs are a matter of human rights and they must be made universally accessible to everyone. This is true for TB drugs.

TB is a curable disease yet, over 400,000 Indians die of it every year and those who survive the disease have to bear the double burden of wage loss and poverty.

- It is vital for India to show its leadership and stand against efforts to deny its TB patients access to essential medicines. It will be crucial to our efforts to eliminate TB by 2025.
- India must ensure that the declaration is meaningful and delivers the promise to rid the world of TB.

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

14. Malnutrition in India

Source: The Hindu

Status of Malnutrition in India:

- According to the Global Nutrition Report 2016 and the Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2017, India stood at 114 out of 132 countries and 100 out of 119 countries.
- Among children less than 5 years, wasting is 21% in the 2017 index.
- There has been a reduction in stunting from 61.9% in 1992 to 38.4% in 2017.
- Mortality among children less than 5 years old has declined to around 5% from 11% during the same period, according to both the GHI and the NFHS (National Family Health Survey).
- 25% of India's children less than 5 years old are still malnourished.
- About 190.7 million people in India sleep hungry every night, and over half of adolescent girls and women are anaemic.
- Despite a 7% compound annual growth rate over the last decade and the various programmes to improve nutrition, levels of under-nutrition are unacceptably high.

National Nutrition Strategy and Poshan Abhiyan:

- The National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) has set targets for 2022 and the Poshan Abhiyan has also specified three-year targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition and low birth weight by 2% each year, and to reduce anemia by 3% each year.
- For purposeful action, it is imperative to have common goals and metrics for improving nutrition, which can then be disaggregated by year, State, district, etc., into a nutrition dashboard, with metrics that are clear and measurable and a real-time tracking mechanism, much like we track economic data.

- The aim of these programmes should be on priority basis designed to reach populations most at risk.
- Both the NNS and the NNM have recognised the criticality of working collaboratively across Ministries; yet both are silent on the constructive role that the private sector, development agencies and civil society should play in realizing these ambitious goals.
- The approach, commitment and resources therefore have to be inter-generational, multi-sector, multi-dimensional and multi-year. To simplify a complex issue, the challenge for India is to simultaneously address insufficient and poor diets, inadequate hygiene and sanitation and better management of disease and infections. Success in this domain will be driven by coordinated action on multiple fronts.

Three pronged approach:

- To adequately re-engineer the ICDS, MDM and PDS for greater effectiveness by disaggregating the works as per the expertise and involving private sectors also. The key advantages of this disaggregated model are that it engages local communities, generates employment and ensures minimal leakage as it works with and inside the community.
- To mandate food fortification comprising edible oil, wheat, rice and dairy products, in addition to salt. There are evidences from several countries of the efficacy and cost-effectiveness of large-scale staple food fortification to address "hidden hunger" or micro-nutrient deficiencies. The effectiveness of iodised salt in significantly reducing iodine deficiency is well-established in India empirically.
- Multiple campaigns designed to inform, communicate and educate on nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive behaviours like breast feeding, diet diversity, hand-washing, de-worming, safe drinking water, hygiene and sanitation should be taken into consideration.

III. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY

15. Falling of Rupee and its impact on the Economy

Source: The Hindu

With the rupee recently weakening past ₹70 to a dollar and hovering about that level since, concerns over the impact of the devaluation on economic indicators are

intensifying. Here is what happens when the rupee falls.

What happens to inflation?

- When currency falls, the country's imports become more expensive and exports cheaper. It takes more rupees to pay for the same quantum of imports and fewer dollars for a buyer to pay for the same quantity of exports.
- More expensive imports are likely to drive inflation upward, especially in India where input products constitute a large part of our imports. In addition, a depreciating rupee also impacts the oil import bill since it costs more rupees per barrel of oil, which plays its own part in pushing inflation up.

What happens to GDP growth?

- This is a more complex question given the number of factors that affect GDP growth. On the one hand, costlier inputs and the subsequent increase in the prices of finished goods should have a positive impact on GDP. But the consequent decrease in demand due to higher prices could nullify this.
- A depreciating rupee certainly affects the exports and imports, since exports are likely to receive a boost while imports could flag somewhat. It remains to be seen what impact a reduction in household consumption would have on demand, especially when the festive season is nearing.

What does this mean for you?

- A depreciating rupee means higher prices of goods and services, costlier petrol and trips abroad turning more expensive. On the flip side, the domestic tourism could grow as more tourists visit India since their currency now buys more here. In the medium term, export-oriented industries may also create more jobs.

Why Indian Rupee is Falling?

- Turkish currency turmoil: The Indian currency had plunged by Rs 1.08, or 1.57 per cent, to a record low of 69.91 against the US currency amid fears that Turkish currency turmoil could turn out into global financial crisis.
- The Spike in oil prices has pulled down the rupee, by pushing up dollar demand.
- The Chinese yuan has fallen sharply in the last few sessions. This also has triggered a dollar flight from many emerging economies. The Spurt in dollar outflow has pulled down most Asian currencies, including the rupee.

- Global Trade war fears triggered by the US and China's retaliatory import tariffs have also weakened the Rupee.

TOPIC: GS III, INFRASTRUCTURE- AIRPORTS

16. UDAN scheme for International Routes

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Centre today unveiled a draft scheme for extending the affordable air travel programme UDAN to international circuits, with state governments identifying the routes for operation.

Key highlights:

- Target: The draft International Air Connectivity (IAC) scheme envisages to increase the international ticketing to 20 crore by 2027.
- The scheme is to be made operational only for states, which demonstrate their commitment to implement and provide the requisite support for promoting operations under the scheme.
- Identification of routes: According to the draft, state governments will identify the routes to be connected, and airline operators will assess demand on the identified routes and submit proposals for providing connectivity.
- Permitted aircrafts: Operations under the scheme will be permitted through fixed-wing aircraft only with more than 70 seats.
- The scheme has proposed to set up an International Air Connectivity Fund (IACF) — a dedicated fund for providing subsidy support under the scheme. It will be created through the contributions of state governments.
- The subsidy support shall be provided to selected airlines only for the passenger seats, which remain unsold at the time of IAC flight operation, from the total number of passenger seats for which subsidy has been requested by the selected airline as part of its proposal. The subsidy support will be extended only up to three years.
- The Airport Authority of India (AAI) will be the implementing agency of the scheme.
- The key difference between this scheme and the regional connectivity scheme (RCS) for domestic routes is that there is no capping of fares. Under RCS, fares are capped at ₹2,500 for one hour of flight on a fixed wing aircraft in order to make air travel affordable, which was why the scheme was called Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN).

About Regional Connectivity Scheme -UDAN:

- UDAN was launched in 2016 to make air travel affordable for people through subsidised ticket rates and to provide air connectivity to smaller towns. It envisages providing connectivity to un-served and under-served airports of the country through revival of existing air-strips and airports.

Salient features:

- The regional connectivity scheme will be applicable on route length between 200 to 800 km with no lower limit set for hilly, remote, island and security sensitive regions.
- The Central government will provide concessions to the tune of 2 per cent excise on Value Added Tax (VAT) and service tax at 1/10th the rate and liberal code sharing for regional connectivity scheme airports.
- A Regional Connectivity Fund (RCF) will be created to fund the scheme via a levy on certain flights. States are expected to contribute 20 per cent to the fund.
- For balanced regional growth, allocations will be spread equitably across 5 regions - North, West, South, East and North East with a cap of 25 percent.
- Market-based reverse bidding mechanism to determine least VGF to select the airline operator with the right to match to the initial proposer. The government said VGF will be reduced if passenger load factor remains high and will be discontinued after 3 years when route becomes self sustainable.

Significance of UDAN Scheme:

- Other than providing affordable travel, UDAN is likely to give a major fillip to tourism and employment generation in the hinterland. Through introduction of helicopters and small aircraft, it is also likely to significantly reduce travel timings in remote and hilly regions, as well as islands and other areas of the country.

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATING TO PLANNING, MOBILIZATION OF RESOURCES,

17. TReDS Platform

Source: Times of India

Why in news:

State-owned aerospace and defence PSU Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) has executed its first digitised invoice discounting transaction on RXIL TReDS platform when it accepted the digital invoice uploaded by Narendra Udyog, a Nasik-based MSME vendor.

- This makes HAL the first PSU (public sector unit) to transact on TReDS across platforms.
- RXIL, India's first TReDS platform, enables MSMEs to gain control of their receivables with enhanced visibility and timeliness.

About TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System):

- TReDS is an online electronic institutional mechanism for facilitating the financing of trade receivables of MSMEs through multiple financiers. The TReDS Platform will enable discounting of invoices/bills of exchange of MSME Sellers against large Corporates including Govt. Departments and PSUs, through an auction mechanism, to ensure prompt realization of trade receivables at competitive market rates.

Salient Features of TReDS:

- Unified platform for Sellers, Buyers and Financiers.
- Eliminates Paper.
- Easy Access to Funds.
- Transact Online.
- Competitive Discount Rates.
- Seamless Data Flow.
- Standardised Practices.

How does the system work?

- A seller has to upload the invoice on the platform. It then goes to the buyer for acceptance. Once the buyer accepts, the invoice becomes a factoring unit. The factoring unit then goes to auction. The financiers then enter their discounting (finance) rate. The seller or buyer, whoever is bearing the interest (financing) cost, gets to accept the final bid. TReDS then settle the trade by debiting the financier and paying the seller. The amount gets credited the next working day into the seller's designated bank account through an electronic payment mode. The second leg of the settlement is when the financier makes the repayment and the amount is repaid to the financier.

TOPIC: GS III, EFFECTS OF LIBERALIZATION ON THE ECONOMY, CHANGES IN INDUSTRIAL POLICY

18. Participatory Notes

Source: India Today

Why in news:

Investments through participatory notes into Indian capital markets have plunged to over nine-year low of Rs 80,341 crore till July-end amid stringent norms put in place by the watchdog SEBI to check misuse of these instruments.

Possible reasons for decline:

The decline could be attributed to several measures taken by the market watchdog to stop the misuse of the controversy-ridden participatory notes.

- In July 2017, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) had notified stricter norms stipulating a fee of USD 1,000 on each instrument to check any misuse for channelising black money. It had also prohibited FPIs from issuing such notes where the underlying asset is a derivative, except those which are used for hedging purposes.
- These measures were an outcome of a slew of other steps taken by the regulator in the recent past. In April last year, the SEBI had barred resident Indians, NRIs and entities owned by them from making investment through P-notes.

About P-NOTES:

- P-notes are issued by registered foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) to overseas investors who wish to be part of the Indian stock market without registering themselves directly. They, however, need to go through due diligence process.
- P-notes are not issued in India, rather these are issued by an India registered FII to other overseas investors. The FII will be the entity to initiate a transaction in our stock markets, which could be on behalf of foreign clients. P-notes are then issued by the FII to the client, underlining that the securities are held on behalf of the client albeit in the name of the FII. The P-note holder is entitled to all the dividends, capital gains and other payouts on the underlying securities. FIIs have to periodically report to SEBI on P-note issuance without the need to name the final beneficiary.

What are governments & regulator’s concerns?

- The primary reason why P-Notes are worrying is because of the anonymous nature of the instrument as these investors could be beyond the reach of Indian regulators. Further, there is a view that it is being used in money laundering with wealthy Indians, like the promoters of companies, using it to bring back unaccounted funds and to manipulate their stock prices.

Why are P-notes popular?

- These are a popular way to invest in Indian markets as not only do these save the investor from regulatory hassles of registration, but also allow the final beneficiary to remain anonymous.
- Large hedge funds and high net worth individuals find this a hassle-free and simple way to get exposure to Indian markets.

- Reports also suggest that P-notes may aid in movement of black money or unaccounted funds. Such funds leave the country through various routes and can easily re-enter via investments aided by P-notes, which won’t reveal the identity of the beneficiary. Given that P-notes are issued outside India to overseas investors, they are not regulated and are open to misuse.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

19. World’s largest 3D-printed reef installed in Maldives to help save corals

Source: DNA India

Why the news:

The world’s largest 3-D printed reef has been submerged at Summer Island Maldives, in what is hoped could be a new technology-driven method to help coral reefs survive a warming climate.

- The artificial reef, assembled with hundreds of ceramic and concrete modules, was submerged at Summer Island’s ‘Blue Lagoon’ — a sandy part of the lagoon, where the resort hopes to create a new coral reef ecosystem.
- The ceramic structures built closely resemble the original structures found in the Maldives. Ceramic itself is made of calcium carbonate, the same inert substance that occurs in abundance in corals.

Significance of the Experiment:

- Bleaching poses the most potent danger to corals, which used to abound in the Pacific Ocean and colour its waters in different hues. With imminent threats like increasing temperatures of water bodies and disposal of chemical wastes in oceans, 3D printing technology is hoped to offer a safety net for corals, for posterity.
- The technology allows to mimic the complexity of natural reef structures, so as to design artificial reefs that closely resemble those found in nature. This will be a more effective way of growing and restoring corals.

Background:

- The Maldives is one of the world’s most climate-vulnerable nations. Rising sea temperatures pose a grave threat to the world’s coral reefs, and mass bleaching events are becoming more common and more severe.
- Summer Island Maldives has implemented a number of recent environmental initiatives,

including the adoption of solar energy, a ban on the use of plastic straws, phasing out imported drinking water, and coral conservation projects.

**TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION,
ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION
AND DEGRADATION**

20. India bans pet coke import for use as fuel

Source: The Hindu, Livemint

Why in news:

India has banned the import of pet coke for use as fuel, but has allowed shipments for use as feedstock in some industries.

- Usage of pet coke, a dirtier alternative to coal, in the energy-hungry country has come under scrutiny due to rising pollution levels in major cities.
- Import of pet coke is allowed for only cement, lime kiln, calcium carbide and gasification industries, when used as the feedstock or in the manufacturing process on actual user condition.

Background:

- As the world's largest consumer of pet coke, India imports over half its annual pet coke consumption of about 27 million tonnes, mainly from the United States. Local producers include Indian Oil Corp, Reliance Industries and Bharat Petroleum Corp.
- India is the world's biggest consumer of petroleum coke, which is a dark solid carbon material that emits 11% more greenhouse gases than coal. Usage of pet coke, a dirtier alternative to coal, in the energy-hungry country has come under scrutiny due to rising pollution levels in major cities.

What is petcoke?

- Petroleum coke, the bottom-of-the-barrel leftover from refining Canadian tar sands crude and other heavy oils, is cheaper and burns hotter than coal. But it also contains more planet-warming carbon and far more heart- and lung-damaging sulphur.

Concerns:

- The petcoke burned in factories and plants is contributing to dangerously filthy air in India, which already has many of the world's most polluted cities. It contains 17 times more sulfur than the limit set for coal, and a staggering 1,380 times more than for diesel.

Need for Regulation:

- The country has seen a dramatic increase in sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide emissions in recent

years, concentrated in areas where power plants and steel factories are clustered. Those pollutants are converted into microscopic particles that lodge deep in the lungs and enter the bloodstream, causing breathing and heart problems.

- Petcoke, critics say, is making a bad situation worse across India. About 1.1 million Indians die prematurely as a result of outdoor air pollution every year, according to the Health Effects Institute, a nonprofit funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and industry.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF POLICIES
OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING
COUNTRIES ON INDIA**

21. US to create Space Force'

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- US President has ordered to create a new Space Force by 2020 which would become the sixth branch of the American military after the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Air Force but it requires Congressional approval to take effect.
- The concept of a Space Force was first proposed in 2000.

What is a Space Force?

- The Space Force will be a new department of the US military which will comprise three units:
 - Space Command to oversee warfighting operations.
 - Space Development Agency to identify and develop new technologies.
 - Space Operations Force, made up of leaders and fighters for their expertise.
- At present, the US Air Force Space Command looks after space power and air force cyberwarfare.
- According to the US Constitution, it is Congress' responsibility to "raise and support armies". The Army and the Navy, the first two branches of the US military, are enshrined in the Constitution.
- Using satellites, the Space Force will aid other arms of the military by strengthening communications, navigation and providing intelligence to counter adversaries which could use missiles or cyber warfare to target its satellites.

**TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS
NEIGHBOURHOOD RELATIONS**

22. Bilateral trade between India and Pakistan

Source: The Hindu

Details of trade between India and Pakistan:

- Over the last five years, the bilateral trade trajectory has been volatile. From \$2.70 billion in 2013-14, it fell to \$2.40 billion in 2017-18. During this time, while Pakistan's exports to India were consistent, India's exports decreased. Despite that, India has a significant trade surplus with Pakistan.
- Informal trade between India and Pakistan is almost twice the value of formal trade between the two countries. Informal trade refers to all trade between two countries that should be included in the national income statistics but is not.

What drives informal trade?

- Factors such as high tariffs, political tension, infrastructure impediments, and ease of trading goods via third countries have generated a thriving industry for informal trade between these two countries.
- Pakistan's negative list of 1,209 items as the most important factor pushing informal exports from India. Items on the negative list are those that are not allowed to be imported from a particular country. More than one in every two items exported informally to Pakistan are on Pakistan's negative list.

Which commodities are traded?

- Jewellery items like gold, diamond and precious stones constitutes the largest share of 23% of informal exports from India to Pakistan. Informal trade also includes chemicals, tyres, alcohol and tobacco products, among several others.
- While India's imports from Pakistan included items such as dry fruits and spices.
- Most of informal trade between the two countries are conducted via a third country particularly Dubai (about 68%).

Route of the trade:

- Delhi-Lahore route.
- Delhi-Mumbai-Dubai-Karachi-Lahore route. It is 2.75 times more efficient in terms of transport per transaction cost incurred per container-kilometre.
- Higher transaction cost on the direct route is because of factors such as limited number of

items that can be exported via road route, cumbersome customs checks at Attari/Wagah customs station, transaction costs in the form of bribes incurred in getting customs clearances, physical examination of goods and poor infrastructure, among others.

- While the total cost of shipping would still be lower in the formal channel, given the fact that the distance is one-tenth of the route via Dubai, predictability and comfort encourages traders to incur these high costs via the long route.

Area of Cooperation:

- In textiles industry, huge amount of raw materials from Indian hubs such as Surat (Gujarat) and Tiruppur (Tamil Nadu) are exported to Pakistan. Given Pakistan's expertise in Salwar Kameez and cost benefits attached with trading between India and Pakistan has raised its demand in India. Hence, there is significant scope for collaboration.
- Pakistan's sports goods manufacturing sector is emerging as an original equipment manufacturer for major global brands. However, manufacturers require quality raw materials or semi-finished products like latex, rubber, and football bladders to produce these goods and India can become main exporter for these materials.
- Pakistan's surgical instruments manufacturing industry is noted for its expertise and these are exported to developed countries like U.S., Germany, France and Belgium. India, on the other hand, has a large medical market which imports those instruments from these developed countries at high rates. Direct imports from Pakistan to India in this area would ensure considerable cost benefits in terms of economics and logistics.
- To strengthen value chain linkages, India can potentially increase the supply of stainless steel to Pakistan, a major raw material used in instrument manufacturing, or even import semi-finished products

Way Forward:

- It is important to alleviate the trust deficit in the trading community from both the countries.
- Tariff and non-tariff barriers should be addressed and steps should be taken towards increasing awareness and building confidence among the trading communities.
- Business-to-business linkages need to be formed and strengthened between traders.
- SAARC business traveller visas should be implemented in practice.

- Connectivity by sea and air needs to be improved and at the same time issues arising in sectors like textile needs to be resolved.
- Sporting events could play a pivotal role in boosting people-to-people relation. Contacts between the people and educational exchanges between the two nations could pave the way for long-term peace and stability in the region.
- There is need to divert a significant share of informal trade to formal channels.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF POLICIES OF DEVELOPED AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ON INDIA

23. U.S. companies to Fight Data Localisation in India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Various U.S. companies have decided to fight against stringent Indian data localization laws as they fear that it will inhibit their growth aspirations in India with raising cost requirements.
- Amazon, American Express and Microsoft, have opposed India's push to store data locally.

What are the issues?

- Data localisation is not just a business concern, it potentially makes government surveillance easier, which is a matter of concern.
- It could lead to increased government demands for data access.
- Business firms are apprehensive that the mandate would hurt their planned investments by raising costs related to setting up new local data centres.
- This could further undermine already strained economic relations between India and the United States.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD RELATIONS

24. India Bhutan Relations

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

National Assembly of Bhutan has been dissolved and an interim government has been appointed this month ahead of the election which will mark 10 years of democracy in Bhutan.

Major issues for election campaign in Bhutan:

- Current government which is perceived to be "pro India" is banking on growth in Construction and tourist boom in Bhutan.

- It is credited for stabilising the rupee-angultrum crisis as well as for economic reforms.
- It is also working out strategy to capitalize on the backdrop of Doklam crisis.
- However, the opposition is emphasizing on "sovereignty, security and self-sufficiency" as its top priorities and want to make Bhutanese foreign policy less dependent on India.

Project Dantak:

- Project DANTAK of the Border Roads Organization was raised in May 1961. It is headquartered at Simtokha, near Thimphu.
- It has constructed, under GOI funding, over 1500 km of roads through very difficult mountainous terrain in Bhutan and all the major highways such as the East-West highway, Bhutan Broadcasting Station, Chhukha Hydroelectric Housing Complex etc.
- It is also constructing infrastructure works for the Tala Hydro-electric project.

Issues related to Bhutan's sensitivity:

- Roads built under Project Dantak had road signs and markers with Indian Tricolors. This has become a cause of concern for many Bhutanese as they are feeling that India is imposing its flag on their country's road signs.
- Indian government's early decision to cut cooking gas subsidy just before the 2013 elections in Bhutan has often been shown as proof of Indian interference, especially by the opposition party.
- Some of India's action like indicating a preference for one party and antipathy for another in its neighbourhood have been noted closely in Bhutan.
- The hydropower projects where delays in constructing and commissioning in Bhutan by Indian companies have led to the country's burgeoning national debt.
- India's power-surplus status and the advent of other renewable energies like wind and solar power will make it more difficult for Bhutan to ensure that its hydropower sector becomes profitable.

The China factor:

- The biggest issue between India and Bhutan will remain how to deal with China.
- Bhutan-China border dispute, could become a point of India-China conflagration with Bhutan becoming a hapless spectator in the middle.
- China's actions to build a permanent military presence above the stand-off point, mean that Bhutan has a much-reduced advantage in any forthcoming negotiations on the issue.

- After Wuhan summit and several meetings of India and China, Bhutan too has decided that there is little point in avoiding engagement with China. So it is important to clarify here that the popular narrative of India coming to the rescue Bhutan during Doklam stand off is inaccurate, rather it was India's security that was at stake as its "chicken neck" was on the line.

Way Forward:

- India should revise India's Bhutan policy and address several issues that have come up in the past few years.
- India should find ways to help, it will be accused of the same sort of "debt-trapping" that China is accused of today.
- India also needs to focus on policing cross-border trade better. The goods and services tax still hurts Bhutanese exporters, and demonetisation has left lasting scars on the banking system.
- India should also reach out more to the people of Bhutan to address issues concerned.

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL AND REGIONAL GROUPINGS

25. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), among 16 Asian and Pacific Ocean countries, have entered a decisive phase.

Details:

- Most potential member-countries of the grouping, that comprises the 10 ASEAN members and their Free Trade Agreement partners, Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand and Republic of Korea, would like to see a "substantive agreement" on the trade deal by the end of this year.
- Singapore, having the ASEAN chair currently, is expected to resolve the issues of different countries.

India's Concerns in RCEP:

- Although many of India's concerns have been resolved however some still persist.
- Once it is implemented, the Chinese goods will have to the Indian market, a problem given India's massive trade deficit. To circumvent this, given that India is the one country that doesn't have an FTA with China, the government has proposed a "differential market access" strategy for China, which others are inclined to accept. After the

Wuhan summit, India and China have made progress on addressing the trade deficit, with China increasing access for Indian goods such as pharma and agricultural products.

- The second concern is about demands by other RCEP countries for lower customs duties on a number of products and greater access to the market than India has been willing to provide. On the other hand, the more developed RCEP countries such as Australia and Singapore have been unwilling to accommodate India's demands to liberalise their services regime and allow freer mobility of Indian workers.
- None of this is going to be easier as India is headed for elections next year, a point where governments traditionally turn protectionist.

Way Forward:

- Despite these concerns, the Indian government must take into account the deeper strategic pitfalls of either slowing down India's RCEP engagement or walking out of the talks at this stage.
- India must not take the easiest way out on the trade deal and walk out of talks. Walking out would cut India out of the rules-making process for the RCEP and give China further space in the regional trade and security architecture.
- At a time when the U.S. has broken from the global concord on multilateral trade agreements, an Indian walkout would endanger the united message that RCEP countries, which represent 40% of the global GDP, would wish to send out.
- The push for trade blocs has acquired a new urgency, with the Trump administration unleashing a trade war of sorts against China and even the EU.
- It would also be a sharp departure from India's "Act East" slogan and its extended outreach to ASEAN.
- If the RCEP countries are keen on a slice of India's market, they must sweeten the deal.
- India should carefully weigh the pros and cons of exiting the trade bloc. It should seriously consider the impact of any exit from RCEP on its links to global supply chains. The East Asian Tigers were, like India, remarkably protectionist economies, but they opened up at the right time, and at the right pace. India could still learn a few lessons, given its botched experience in industrial development. Multilateralism, fairness and WTO principles must be believed in but these must not hit the Indian Industries.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, AWARENESS IN SPACE

26. Chandrayaan-1 data confirms presence of ice on Moon

Source: The Indian Express

Why the news:

- Scientists have found frozen water deposits in the darkest and coldest parts of the Moon's polar regions using data from the Chandrayaan-1 spacecraft, that was launched by India 10 years ago.
- Scientists used data from NASA's Moon Mineralogy Mapper (M3) instrument to identify three specific signatures that definitively prove there is water ice at the surface of the Moon.

Key findings:

- At the southern pole, most of the ice is concentrated at lunar craters, while the northern pole's ice is more widely, but sparsely spread.
- With enough ice sitting at the surface — within the top few millimetres — water would possibly be accessible as a resource for future expeditions to explore and even stay on the Moon, and potentially easier to access than the water detected beneath the Moon's surface.
- The ice deposits are patchily distributed and could possibly be ancient.
- Most of the newfound water ice lies in the shadows of craters near the poles, where the warmest temperatures never reach above minus 156 degrees Celsius. Due to the very small tilt of the Moon's rotation axis, sunlight never reaches these regions.
- Previous observations indirectly found possible signs of surface ice at the lunar south pole, but these could have been explained by other phenomena, such as unusually reflective lunar soil.

About Moon Mineralogy Mapper (M3):

- M3, aboard the Chandrayaan-1 spacecraft, launched in 2008 by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), was uniquely equipped to confirm the presence of solid ice on the Moon.
- It collected data that not only picked up the reflective properties we would expect from ice, but was able to directly measure the distinctive way its molecules absorb infrared light, so it can differentiate between liquid water or vapour and solid ice.
- NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory designed and built the moon mineralogy mapper instrument.

About Chandrayaan-1:

- The Chandrayaan-1 spacecraft is India's first lunar probe.
- The mission performed high-resolution remote sensing of the moon in visible, near infrared (NIR), low energy X-rays and high-energy X-ray regions.
- One of the objectives was to prepare a three-dimensional atlas (with high spatial and altitude resolution) of both near and far side of the moon.
- It aimed at conducting chemical and mineralogical mapping of the entire lunar surface for distribution of mineral and chemical elements such as Magnesium, Aluminium, Silicon, Calcium, Iron and Titanium as well as high atomic number elements such as Radon, Uranium & Thorium with high spatial resolution.
- It started suffering from several technical issues and stopped sending radio signals on August 28, 2009. Shortly after this, ISRO officially declared the mission over.

The probe, which was intended to operate for two years, achieved 95 per cent of its planned objectives in under a year of its space journey. In 2016, NASA used ground-based radar systems to relocate Chandrayaan-1 in its lunar orbit. Repeated observations over the next three months allowed a precise determination of its current orbit.

Way Forward:

- Learning more about this ice, how it got there, and how it interacts with the larger lunar environment will be a key mission focus for NASA and commercial partners, as humans endeavour to return to and explore the Moon.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

27. Successful Flight Test of ATGM 'HELINA'

Source: PIB

Indigenously developed Helicopter launched Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) 'HELINA' was successfully flight tested from Indian Army Helicopter at Pokhran range. The weapon system was tested for its full range.

About HELINA:

- HELINA is helicopter launched version known of NAG ATGM, designed and developed indigenously for Indian Army under integrated guided missile development programme (IGMDP).
- It is manufactured by India's sole missile producer, state-owned Bharat Dynamics Limited.
- HELINA is one of the most advanced Anti-Tank Weapons in the world. It works on "fire and

forget” principle and operates in Lock on Before Launch mode.

- It has operational range of 7-10km (after air-launched). It is equipped with highly advanced Imaging Infrared Radar (IIR) seeker along with integrated avionics. This technology is possessed by very few nations. It also possesses advanced passive homing guidance system. It has been designed mainly to destroy modern main battle tanks and other heavily armoured targets.

**TOPIC: GS III, DISASTER
AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

28. National Calamity

Source: The Hindu, The Indian Express

Why in news?

The Union government has declared the Kerala floods a “calamity of severe nature”.

How does the law define a disaster?

- As per the Disaster Management Act, 2005, “disaster” means a catastrophe, mishap, calamity or grave occurrence in any area, arising from natural or man-made causes, or by accident or negligence which results in substantial loss of life or human suffering or damage to, and destruction of, property, or damage to, or degradation of, environment, and is of such a nature or magnitude as to be beyond the coping capacity of the community of the affected area.

How can any of these be classified as a national disaster?

- There is no provision, executive or legal, to declare a natural calamity as a national calamity.
- The existing guidelines of State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)/ National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), do not contemplate declaring a disaster as a ‘National Calamity’.
- The government had treated the 2001 Gujarat earthquake and the 1999 super cyclone in Odisha as “a calamity of unprecedented severity”.

Has there ever been an attempt to define a national calamity?

- In 2001, the National Committee on Disaster Management under the chairmanship of the then Prime Minister was mandated to look into the parameters that should define a national calamity. However, the committee did not suggest any fixed criterion. In the recent past, there have been demands from states to declare certain events as natural disasters, such as the Uttarakhand flood in 2013, Cyclone Hudhud in Andhra Pradesh in 2014, and the Assam floods of 2015.

How, then, does the government classify disasters/calamities?

- The 10th Finance Commission (1995-2000) examined a proposal that a disaster be termed “a national calamity of rarest severity” if it affects one-third of the population of a state. The panel did not define a “calamity of rare severity” but stated that a calamity of rare severity would necessarily have to be adjudged on a case-to-case basis taking into account, inter-alia, the intensity and magnitude of the calamity, level of assistance needed, the capacity of the state to tackle the problem, the alternatives and flexibility available within the plans to provide succour and relief, etc. The flash floods in Uttarakhand and Cyclone Hudhud were later classified as calamities of “severe nature”.

What happens if a calamity is so declared?

- When a calamity is declared to be of “rare severity”/“severe nature”, support to the state government is provided at the national level. The Centre also considers additional assistance from the NDRF. A Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) is set up, with the corpus shared 3:1 between Centre and state. When resources in the CRF are inadequate, additional assistance is considered from the National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF), funded 100% by the Centre. Relief in repayment of loans or for grant of fresh loans to the persons affected on concessional terms, too, are considered once a calamity is declared “severe”.

How is the funding decided?

- As per the National Policy on Disaster Management, 2009, the National Crisis Management Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary deals with major crises that have serious or national ramifications. For calamities of severe nature, inter-ministerial central teams are deputed to the affected states for assessment of damage and relief assistance required. An inter-ministerial group, headed by the Union Home Secretary, studies the assessment and recommends the quantum of assistance from the NDRF/National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF). Based on this, a high-level committee comprising the Finance Minister as chairman and the Home Minister, Agriculture Minister, and Planning Commission Deputy Chairman as members approves the central assistance.

How are the NDRF and the SDRFs funded?

- The NDRF is funded through a National Calamity Contingent Duty levied on pan masala, chewing tobacco and cigarettes, and with budgetary provisions as and when needed. A provision exists

to encourage any person or institution to make a contribution to the NDRF. However, this source of funding has not been tapped so far, according to the government.

- The 14th Finance Commission recommended changes to this structure once the cess was discontinued or subsumed within the Goods and Services Tax. However, the government, instead, decided to continue with the National Calamity Contingent Duty even in the GST regime. The SDRF corpus is contributed by the Union government and the respective State governments in a 75:25 ratio for general category States and 90:10 for Special Category States.
- The allocation of the SDRF for each State is done by the Finance Commission, and the Centre contributes its specified share each financial year. The Central share of SDRF is released in two equal instalments, in June and then in December.

What has been the trend in budgetary allocations to the NDRF and SDRFs?

- The Union government has maintained a steady flow of funds to the NDRF each year, ranging from Rs. 5,690 crore in 2015-16 to a budgeted amount of Rs. 2,500 crore for the current financial year. In addition, the Centre has also been contributing to the SDRFs every year, amounting to Rs. 8,374.95 crore in 2016-17 and Rs. 7,281.76 crore in 2017-18.

TOPIC: GS III, DISASTER AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

29. Telangana Government launches Disaster Response Force vehicles

Source: Business standard

Government of Telangana has launched for the first time Disaster Response Force (DRF) vehicles in the Hyderabad city.

Key facts:

- The vehicles will be parked at 24 locations with Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) DRF staff and they will reach the emergency spots in no time.
- The main aim to start this DRF is that a state should have its own Disaster force.
- DRF personnel have been trained in tackling of flooding, tree falls, structural collapses and any other site of normal emergencies.
- DRF has been first brought on to the ground with 120 personal with 8 specialised vehicles and other equipment's which are required.

TOPIC: GS III, DISASTER AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

30. Cyclone Warning Centre in Kerala

Source: The Hindu

Why the news

With several incidents of tropical cyclones and severe weather events striking Kerala and Karnataka coasts in the recent times, the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences would set up a Cyclone Warning Centre in Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram. It also proposed to set up C-band Doppler weather radar at Mangalore, Karnataka.

About Cyclone Warning Centre:

The centre will be equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure including forecasting tools to provide daily weather alerts, issue weather warnings and coastal warnings or bulletins (for fishermen etc). It is expected to be functional within a month and will cater to the needs of Kerala and Karnataka states. It will further strengthen the present forecasting activity in India Meteorological Department's existing office in Thiruvananthapuram.

- At present, IMD has six cyclone warning centres, four along east coast at Chennai (Tamil Nadu), Visakhapatnam (Andhra Pradesh), Bhubaneswar (Odisha) and Kolkata (West Bengal), and two along west coast at Ahmedabad (Gujarat) and Mumbai (Maharashtra).

About C-band Doppler weather radar:

It is proposed to be set up at Mangalore, Karnataka to provide nowcast alerts for severe weather, including thunderstorms triggered by heavy rain for the next 2-3 hours. This radar will cover northern Kerala and Karnataka. It is expected to be installed by the end of next year.

- Currently, there are two Doppler radars in Kerala at Kochi and Thiruvananthapuram, which cover central and southern districts, respectively. With addition of this new radar, entire state will be covered for monitoring rainfall and severe weather events.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

31. What is lemons problem in economics?

- The idea was first proposed by American economist George Akerlof in his popular 1970 paper, "The market for lemons: Quality uncertainty and the market mechanism".
- It refers to a form of adverse selection wherein there is a degradation in the quality of products sold in the

marketplace due to asymmetry in the amount of information available to buyers and sellers.

- Since sellers typically know more about any defects in the products that they sell to buyers, there is an opportunity for the sellers in the marketplace to sell low-quality products to unaware buyers.

32. Maitree 2018

- Exercise Maitree 2018 was held in Thailand.
- The Exercise Maitree is an annual event designed to strengthen the partnership between Royal Thai Army and Indian Army.

33. Exercise Pitch Black

- Exercise Pitch Black 2018 was held at RAAF Base Darwin, Australia. The Indian Air Force for the first time participated with fighter aircraft in Exercise.
- It is a biennial multi-national large force employment warfare exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
- The aim of the exercise is to practice Offensive Counter Air (OCA) and Defensive Counter Air (DCA) combat, in a simulated war environment.

34. iCRAFPT

- International Conference on Recent Advances in Food Processing Technology (iCRAFPT) 2018 was held at Indian Institute of Food Processing Technology, Thanjavur in Tamilnadu during 17th to 19th August 2018.
- **Theme:** Doubling farmers' income through food processing.

35. Coloured Stickers to indicate Nature of Fuel

- The Supreme Court has accepted the Centre's proposal to use hologram-based coloured stickers on vehicles, plying in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR), to indicate the nature of the fuel used.
- The Hologram-based sticker of light-blue colour will be used for petrol and CNG-run vehicles.
- Sticker of orange colour will be used for diesel-driven vehicles.

Questions:

1. Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Abhiyan Ayushman Bharat is going to be the world's largest government-funded healthcare insurance programme and cover a large section of Indian population. Do you think that this scheme has the potential to change the entire scenario of India's health sector? Does this scheme guarantee universal health coverage for India?
2. Political will is indispensable for weeding out corruption from the country. Do you think that such political will is present in India. Discuss with reference to the recent amendments in anti corruption laws.
3. There are many points of dispute between India and Pakistan on political front. However on economic front there are areas which can open a new era of cooperation between the two countries. Critically analyse. India needs to reform its foreign policy to re engage with neighbouring countries. Discuss with respect to changing Indo- Bhutan relations.
4. At the time of rising protectionism in the world, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has emerged as a new hope for countries who still want to protect globalization. However there are various issues which needs to be solved for making this a successful group. Discuss with special reference to India's interest in RCEP.