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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

1. Universal Labour Guarantee

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has recently released its report on the 'Future of Work' to mark its centenary.
- It has warned that "without decisive action we will be sleepwalking into a world that widens inequality, increases uncertainty and reinforces exclusion, with destructive political, social and economic repercussions."

Details of the Report:

- Around the world, 190 million people are unemployed, while 300 million workers live in extreme poverty.
- Wage gaps are growing at a time of declining wage growth.
- Two-thirds of jobs in the developing world are susceptible to automation, and only 15% of households in emerging countries have internet access.
- Implementing the Paris Climate Agenda could create 24 million new jobs, but it could still be brutal to the 6 million workers expected to lose their jobs in the transition to a greener economy.

Automation and its impact:

- As per the International Studies Association (ISA), automation is defined as the creation and application of technology to monitor and control the production and delivery of products and services. Automation is spread across different segments of the economy, such as, manufacturing, transportation, utilities, defense, services, etc.
- Introduction of driverless metros in Delhi, application of artificial intelligence and robotics in content, banking, pharmaceuticals, food and beverages, logistics and security sectors are prominent examples.
- Positive impacts of automation on jobs:
 1. Reduced prices of goods and services than traditional providers. The reduced costs keep the inflation under check and results in more savings by individuals and companies. The increased savings will be utilized as capital by the industry, which will lead to the creation of more jobs.
 2. Increase in profits ensures more funds for innovation and research by companies, which

in turn lead to the development of new technologies and consequently, more jobs.

3. Automation raises the efficiency and productivity. According to a report released by the World Bank Group in 2016, Digital Dividends, concluded that e-procurement initiatives by the Indian government helped in injecting more competition into the process by increasing the probability that the winning bidder comes from outside the project's region resulting in more qualitative infrastructure and they are vociferous users of automation techniques.
 4. Automation reduces bureaucratic discretion and reduces opportunities for petty corruption in patronage-based systems. Reduction in corruption leads to improved ease of doing business conditions, which will further lead to more investments and more job opportunities.
- Negative impacts of automation:
 1. The major criticism against automation of processes is layoffs. This is more so in the lower and middle-level due to the low skill set required and less human-to-human interaction of employees. Besides losing an existing job, automation also creates challenges for individuals in the transition to new jobs, especially when the skill needs of new jobs are different from those of the old jobs.
 2. As per the World Bank's report, automation leads to an emergence of new forms of jobs such as microwork, which are the jobs in the on-demand economy. These new forms of jobs are freelancing in nature and leads to erosion of workers' bargaining power and a lack of benefits such as health, insurance, etc.

Way Forward:

The following steps need to be taken to minimize the adverse impacts of automation on employment opportunities:

- Skill upgradation: The union government has launched various programmes to skill the youth under the Skill India campaign. The programmes should include not only the illiterate youth, but also those who lost jobs due to automation.
- Flexible-labour laws: Apart from the skill upgradation, the labour laws should be made flexible to facilitate an employee's transition from one job to another job is smooth. Adequate social support systems should be put in place to support workers while they are between jobs or not working regularly.
- Focus on SMEs: As per an estimate, an investment of around 1.5 lakh rupees is needed to create one

job in small and cottage industries, whereas an investment of around 6 lakh rupees are required to create one job in capital intensive heavy industries. Hence, the immediate focus should be on the development of small and medium enterprises as heavy industries based on automation cannot be driver of employment. Thus, labour-intensive infrastructure sectors such as roads and railways and cottage industries should be developed.

- Need for employee protection: The World Bank Group suggested that it would be better to strengthen workers' protection independently from work contracts by de-linking social insurance from employment, offering independent social assistance, and helping workers retrain and find new employment quickly.

International Labour Organization

- The International Labour Organization (ILO) was founded in 1919, its Constitution forming part of the Treaty of Versailles. The ILO became the first specialised agency of the UN in 1946.
- The ILO is the only 'tripartite' (shared by or involving three parties) UN agency. It brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to jointly shape policies and programmes. This unique arrangement gives the ILO an edge in incorporating 'real world' knowledge about employment and work.
- The ILO is devoted to advancing opportunities for women and men to obtain decent and productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity.
- The ILO helps to advance the creation of decent jobs and the kinds of economic and working conditions that give working people and business people a stake in lasting peace, prosperity and progress.

Principle Strategic Objectives:

- To promote and realize standards and fundamental principles and rights at work
- To create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment;
- To enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all
- To strengthen tripartism and social dialogue.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

2. Northeast Autonomous Councils

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Union Cabinet recently approved a constitutional amendment to increase the financial and executive powers of the 10 autonomous councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of the northeast.

What is Autonomous District Council?

- As per the Sixth Schedule, the four states viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram contain the Tribal Areas which are technically different from the Scheduled Areas.
- Though these areas fall within the executive authority of the state, provision has been made for the creation of the District Councils and regional councils for the exercise of the certain legislative and judicial powers.
- Each district is an autonomous district and Governor can modify / divide the boundaries of the said Tribal areas by notification. Currently, there are ten such Councils in the region as listed below.

Details of the proposed amendment:

- The amendment would impact a population of about 1 crore tribals living in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram
- The Finance Commission would be mandated to recommend devolution of financial resources to the councils, the government said in an official statement. Till now, the autonomous councils have depended on grants from Central Ministries and the State governments for specific projects.
- As per the proposed amendment, at least one third of the seats would be reserved for women in the village and municipal councils in the Sixth Schedule areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.
- The amendment also provides for transfer of additional 30 subjects, including the departments of Public Works, Forests, Public Health Engineering, Health and Family Welfare, Urban Development and Food and Civil Supply to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Territorial Council and Dima Hasao Autonomous Territorial Council in Assam.
- The proposed amendments provide for elected village municipal councils, ensuring democracy at the grass-roots level. The State Election Commissions would hold elections to the autonomous councils, village and municipal councils in the areas of Assam, Mizoram and Tripura.

3. Election system in India and Electronic Voting Machines

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Several commentators and political party representative have raised the issues related to the futility of using the EVM (Electronic Voting Machine) because of the possibility of electoral fraud by manipulating and tampering with the technology that drives the machine.
- Tampering is the alteration in the software program either on existing microchips of control unit (CU) or introducing malicious software program by inserting new microchips in CU and also making keys – pressed in Ballot Unit (BU) not record faithfully in the Control Unit.

Possibility of manipulation of the EVMs:

- According to the Election Commission of India, there is very stringent security protocol at manufacturer level regarding security of software. The manufacturers are in no position to know which candidate will be contesting from a particular constituency and what will be the sequence of the candidates on the ballot unit.
- Each EVM has a serial number and the Election Commission by use of EVM tracking software can find out from its database which machine is located where. So, any manipulation at manufacturing stage is ruled out.
- The stringent security measures by ECI make it impossible to introduce Trojan Horse in the machine. It is noteworthy that many leaders have alleged that the introduction of Trojan horse can manipulate the votes in the favour of a particular party.
- Once a ballot key is pressed in CU, the CU enables BU for registering the vote and waits for the key pressing in the BU. During this period, all keys in the CU become inactive till the entire sequence of casting of that vote is complete. Once any of the keys (candidates vote button) is pressed by a voter in BU, the BU transmits the key information to CU. The CU gets the data and acknowledges it by glowing the corresponding LED lamps in BU. After the enabling of ballot in CU, only the 'first key press' is sensed and accepted by CU. After this, even if a voter keeps on pressing the other buttons that is of no use as there will not be any communication between CU and BU as the result of those subsequent key presses, nor will BU register any key press. Hence, there can be only

one valid key press (the first key press) for every ballot enabled using CU.

- In 2014, EVM machines which completed 15 years of economic life and not compatible with VVPAT (voter-verified paper audit trail) has been discontinued and there is a standard operating procedure laid down by ECI to discard these EVMs. The process of destruction of EVM & its chip is carried out in the presence of Chief Electoral Officer of the state or his representatives inside the factory of manufacturers.
- The EVMs use some of the most sophisticated technological features like one time programmable (OTP) microcontrollers, dynamic coding of key codes, date and time stamping of each and every key press, advanced encryption technology and EVM-tracking software to handle EVM logistics, among others to make the machine 100% tamper proof. In addition to these, new model M3 EVMs also have tamper detection and self-diagnostics as added features. Since, software is based on OTP the program cannot be altered, re-written or Re-read. Thus, making EVM tamper proof. If anyone make, attempt, the machine will become inoperative.
- In the wake of several misinformation, it is important to know that. India does not use any EVMs produced abroad. EVMs are produced indigenously by 2 PSUs viz. Bharat Electronics Ltd., Bengaluru and Electronics Corporation of India Ltd., Hyderabad. The Software Programme Code is written in-house, by these two companies, not outsourced, and subjected to security procedures at factory level to maintain the highest levels of integrity.
- Every microchip has an identification number embedded into memory and the producers have their digital signatures on them. So, the question of their replacement does not arise at all because microchips are subjected to functional tests with regard to the software. Any attempt to replace microchip is detectable and can make EVM in-operative. Thus, both changing existing programme and introducing new one are detectable making EVM in-operative.

What are the possibilities of manipulation at the place of storage?

- At the district headquarters, EVMs are kept in a double-lock system under appropriate security. Their safety is periodically checked. It is fully protected. No Unauthorized person can get access to the EVMs at any point of time. During non election period, Annual Physical Verification of all EVMs is done and report is sent to ECI. Inspection & checking have recently been completed.

Why many developed nations have either not adopted or discontinued EVMs?

- EVMs in developed countries were computer controlled and connected to the network, which in turn, made them prone to hacking and hence totally defeating the purpose. Whereas, Indian EVM is stand-alone and paper audit trail has also been introduced paper audit trail which eliminates even distant possibilities of misuse of the system.
- There were not adequate security measures and safeguards in their corresponding laws regulations for security, safety and protection. In some countries, courts struck down the use of EVMs on these legal grounds.
- In developed countries, rules regarding storage and security of data were lacking.

Why EVMs are suited for India?

- EVMs, in India, are stand-alone devices not connected to any network, thus making it impossible for anyone to tamper. EVMs are most suited for India, looking at the country's past poll violence and other electoral malpractices like rigging, booth capturing etc. during the polls.
- It is worth mentioning that in contrast with many developed countries, Indian Laws & ECI regulations have in-built adequate safeguards for security & safety of EVMs. Besides, Indian EVMs are far superior on account of secured technological features.
- Indian EVMs are also superior because of the use of VVPATs.

Why are the questions related to the authenticity of the EVMs are arising?

- Questions are primarily raised by the political parties that have chosen to blame EVM manipulation as an easy excuse for their losses in various elections.
- There is barely any shred of evidence to show that any election held recently was subject to electoral fraud through a manipulation of EVMs, and repeated assurances by the Election Commission of India (ECI) have been given for the robustness of the administrative and technical safeguards in place to prevent EVM tampering.
- Glitches and machine failures are often shown as "EVM hacking" and administrative errors in transporting the machines have been presented as evidence of tampering.

Way forward:

- The idea of abandoning EVMs in electoral system should be abandoned as its use has led to a significant decline in election fraud such as rigging,

booth capturing, ballot stuffing, etc. in many States and even resulted in increased voter turnout especially of the vulnerable and poorer sections of the Indian electorate.

- The EVMs have served the purpose which was the reason for its deployment by the ECI in the first place to assure free and fair elections, and to ease the process of voting. Improvements to the EVM are certainly possible, but a return to paper ballots is an.
- The best possible way of improving upon our electoral process and bringing in greater trust in it is in a continuing and constructive critique of India's EVM through a scrutiny of the election process including technical assessments of the devices used. Having said this, there should be no place for an uninformed dismissal of the EVM as a part of the discourse as this will only increase distrust in our democratic process.
- Technical glitches and administrative errors must be avoided as they are being portrayed as electoral malfunctioning by the party leaders with vested interests.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

4. Electoral Bonds

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The former Chief Election Commissioner has recently referred to the electoral bond scheme a huge disappointment" because of its failure to address the issue of black money paid to political parties. Rather it has emerged as a greater method of camouflage.
- Around 95% of the fund under the electoral bond has gone to the ruling party of the country.

What are the possible causes?

- The electoral bonds have eliminated the 7.5% cap on company donations (which was earlier present) which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations.
- It has also eliminated the requirement for a company to have been in existence for three years paving the way for fly-by-night shell companies to contribute huge amount of black money to the political parties.
- Under the bond of electoral bonds, the companies no longer need to declare the names of the parties to which they have donated so shareholders won't know where their money has gone.
- The political parties no longer need to reveal the donor's name for contributions above ₹20,000, provided these are in the form of electoral bonds.

Hence, a foreign company can anonymously donate unlimited sums to an Indian political party without the Election Commission or the IT department ever getting to know.

- The most pernicious feature of electoral bonds is their potential to load the dice heavily in favour of the ruling party. The banks which send and receives the money in the form of electoral bond have to report to the RBI which is under the control of the government. So there is the possibility of government knowing the name of the companies who have donated in favour of it or the opposition.

Electoral Bonds Scheme:

- The electoral bonds scheme was announced in Union Budget 2017-18 with an aim for increasing transparency in political funding.
- It makes India first country in the world to have such unique bonds for electoral funding.
- These bonds are bearer instrument in nature of promissory note and interest-free banking instrument.
- It aims at rooting out current system of largely anonymous cash donations made to political parties which lead to generation of black money in the economy.
- These electoral bonds can be bought for any value in multiples of Rs. 1,000, Rs. 10,000, Rs. 1 lakh, Rs. 10 lakh or Rs. 1 crore after fulfilling all existing Know Your Customer (KYC) norms and making payments from bank account.
- It will not carry name of payee. The bond deposited by any eligible political party to its account shall be credited on the same day.
- Electoral Bonds are valid for fifteen calendar days from the date of issue. No payment shall be made to any payee political party if bond is deposited after expiry of validity period.
- Eligible political parties can encash electoral bonds only through their bank accounts. Electoral Bonds may be purchased by only citizen of India. An individual can buy Electoral Bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- Only registered political parties, that have secured not less than 1% of votes polled in last election of Lok Sabha or legislative assembly of state, will be eligible to receive electoral bonds.
- The cash donation has been capped at Rs. 2000 and beyond that donations are via electoral bonds.

TOPIC: GS II, VARIOUS STATUTORY BODIES

5. Central Information Commission (CIC)

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Recently, out that out of 280 applications received for the post of information commissioners at the CIC recently, 14 were shortlisted and 13 of them are bureaucrats.
- As a result a PIL against this has been filed in the Supreme Court which, highlighting the provision of the Right to Information Act of 2005 mandating that people with a range of experience and from various fields should serve as information commissioners has asked the government for the reason behind this move.

In depth analysis of the issue:

- As mandated by Section 12(5) of the Right to Information Act, there should be at least one eminent person from the fields of law, social service, media, journalism, science and technology.
- Since the notification does not mention the term and the status, many eminent persons might not have opted to even apply. This naturally shrinks the scope of right persons from getting into the transparency body.
- The notification does not clearly mention the tenure and the status of the CIC which is equivalent to the Chief election commissioner of the country.
- There is the tendency in the government to view only bureaucrats as the agents of good governance. Even the Search Committee which short-lists the persons consist of bureaucrats only. For these reasons, official bias in favour of its own class is writ large in the selection process.

Way forward:

- To bring transparency in selection of ICs, states should adopt the process adopted by the Centre in which it uploads on the website the names of the Search Committee, the names of the candidates who have been shortlisted as well as the criteria which is followed for selection.
- Information Commissioners should be appointed from other streams, as mentioned in the act and the selection is not limited only to the Government employee/ ex-government employee.
- Appointment of information commissioners and CIC should be done on the same terms and conditions as applicable to the Chief Election

Commissioner and Election Commissioner but It would also be appropriate if the said terms and conditions on which such appointments are to be made are specifically stipulated in the advertisement and put on website as well.

- The Search Committee should also include members from other streams.

Central Information Commission (CIC)

- CIC was established in 2005 by Central Government under provisions of Right to Information (RTI) Act (2005).
- The Chief Information Commissioner heads the Central Information Commission.
- The general superintendence, direction and management of affairs of Commission are vested in Chief Information Commissioner who is assisted by Information Commissioners.
- CIC hears appeals from information-seekers who have not been satisfied by the public authority, and also addresses major issues concerning the RTI Act.
- CIC submits annual report to Union government on the implementation of the provisions of RTI Act.
- The central government in turn places this report before each house of Parliament.
- The Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee consisting of – The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee; the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha; a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

Functions and Powers of CIC:

- It can order inquiry into any matter if there are reasonable grounds.
- It can secure compliance of its decisions from the public authority.
- It can recommend steps to be taken for promoting such conformity, if public authority does not conform to provisions of RTI Act.
- It receives and inquires into a complaint from.
- It examines any record which is under control of the public authority and which may be withheld from it on any grounds during the enquiry. While inquiring, it has powers of civil court.

TOPIC: GS II, GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND INTERVENTION

6. Land acquisition Act

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Supreme Court has recently agreed to look into the request from the Centre to set up a constitution bench for expeditious disposal of issues relating to amendments in the Land Acquisition Act.
- Last year, the court issued notice to Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Jharkhand on the amendments to their States' land acquisition laws to the extent that consent of farmers or land owners was not required before their land was acquired for projects like industrial corridors, expressways, highways, etc.
- As a result, petition has been filed in the court against the amendments terming it violative of the core spirit of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013.

Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act of 2013:

- The Act shall apply when land is acquired for 'public purpose'. This includes land acquisition for defence purposes, infrastructure development, housing for the poor, etc.
- Consent is not required for government projects. Private projects require the consent of at least 80% land owners. Public-private partnership projects require the consent of at least 70% land owners.
- Conducting a Social Impact Assessment is mandatory for all acquisition cases except irrigation projects where an Environmental Impact Assessment has already been done or those cases exempted under the urgency provision.
- Compensation for land shall be two to four times the market value of land in rural areas and two times the market value of land in urban areas.
- Rehabilitation and Resettlement will be given to all affected families, including land owners, and families whose livelihood is primarily dependent on the acquired land. R&R must be provided in case land is purchased (not acquired) by a private company, when the area to be purchased is more than that specified by the state.
- State Governments have to set up dispute settlement Chairman and he should be a district judge or practising as a lawyer for 7 years. The Act also has provision for the establishment of Land

Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Authority for speedy disposal of disputes.

Amendment in the Act:

- The 2015 bill was amended twice and second amendment bill was passed by the Lok Sabha but got stuck in the Rajya Sabha.
- The changes brought by the 2015 second amendment bill as passed by the Lok Sabha are:
 1. First, mandatory consent clause of 80% people in case of private projects and 70% in case of PPP projects is not applicable to the newly defined five to the newly defined five categories of land use in the 2015 bill. They are: (i) defense, (ii) rural infrastructure, (iii) affordable housing (iv) industrial corridors (v) infrastructure projects including Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects where the government owns the land. Second, the government may also permit to exempt above categories of land use from Social Impact Assessment clause and from the restrictions of acquisition of multi cropped land clause of LARR act 2013.
 2. Under the LARR Act, 2013, if the acquired land remains unutilized for five years then it has to be returned to the original owners. New provision says that the period after which unutilized land will need to be returned will be: (i) five years, or (ii) any period specified at the time of setting up the project, whichever is later.
 3. The Act provides for the establishment of a Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (LARR) Authority which may be approached in case a person is not satisfied with an award under the Act. The amendments state that the LARR Authority must hold its hearing in the district where the land acquisition is taking place, after receiving a reference from the Collector and giving notice of this reference to all concerned parties.

Argument against the amendments:

- Adversely affected the rights of livelihood of landowners and farmers", and go against the basic structure of the law.
- State amendments were invading the constitutional rights of citizens as key aspects like consent provisions, social impact assessment, objections by affected citizens, the participation of representative local bodies in acquisition of land have been exempted.
- Whole essence" of the Act was to ensure consultation with public in the process of acquisition of land but the amendments made by these states have exempted these important

aspects. virtually all projects like industrial corridors, expressways, and highways were exempted.

- Power of the states to introduce such amendments that are conflicting with the central law.
- Amendments made by the states were in violation of Article 21, which guarantees the right to live with dignity and personal liberty.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS II, HEALTH

7. Fighting Malaria

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The World Health Organisation's World Malaria Report of 2018 has recently highlighted India's progress against malaria.
- India is the only country among the 11 highest-burden countries that saw substantial progress in reducing disease burden with a 24% decrease in 2017 compared to 2016. This shows that India has assumed a leadership role in advancing global efforts to end malaria. The country's success provides hope to the other highest-burden countries to tackle malaria head-on.

Causes of India's progress:

- India's progress in fighting malaria is an outcome of concerted efforts to ensure that its malaria programme is country-owned and country-led, even as it is in alignment with globally accepted strategies.
- At the East Asia Summit in 2015, India pledged to eliminate the disease by 2030.
- India launched the five-year National Strategic Plan for Malaria Elimination in 2017 to eliminate the disease by 2022 which is three years ahead of the global deadline. This marked a shift in focus from malaria "control" to "elimination". This plan provided a roadmap to achieve the target of ending malaria in 571 districts out of India's 678 districts by 2022.
- Among the States, Odisha has emerged as an inspiration in the fight against malaria.
 1. In recent years it has dramatically scaled-up efforts to prevent, diagnose and treat malaria through its Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran (DAMaN) initiative, which has produced impressive results in a short span of time.
 2. DAMaN aims to deliver services to the most inaccessible and hardest hit people of the State.

3. The initiative has in-built innovative strategies to combat asymptomatic malaria.
4. DAMaN has been accorded priority in the State's health agenda. There is financial commitment for a five-year period to sustain and build on the impact created by the initiative.
5. In 2017, accredited social health activists (ASHAs) helped distribute approximately 11 million bed nets, which was enough to protect all the residents in areas that were at highest risk. This included residential hostels in schools.
6. As a result of its sustained efforts, Odisha recorded a 80% decline in malaria cases and deaths in 2017.

Way forward:

- The new country-driven 'high burden to high impact' plan to reduce disease burden in the 11 countries reflects the global sentiment that business as usual is no longer an option when it comes to fighting the disease.
- Adequate investment combined with coordinated action between governments, civil society and philanthropic donors is imperative to achieve this goal.
- Since health is a State subject, State governments across the country shoulder a special responsibility in tackling the disease.
- India needs to tighten malaria surveillance, invest more in campaign.

III. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY AND ISSUES RELATED TO INCLUSIVE GROWTH

8. Debt-to-GDP ratio of Centre and states

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Status Paper on Government Debt for 2017-18 has been released by the Government.

Key findings:

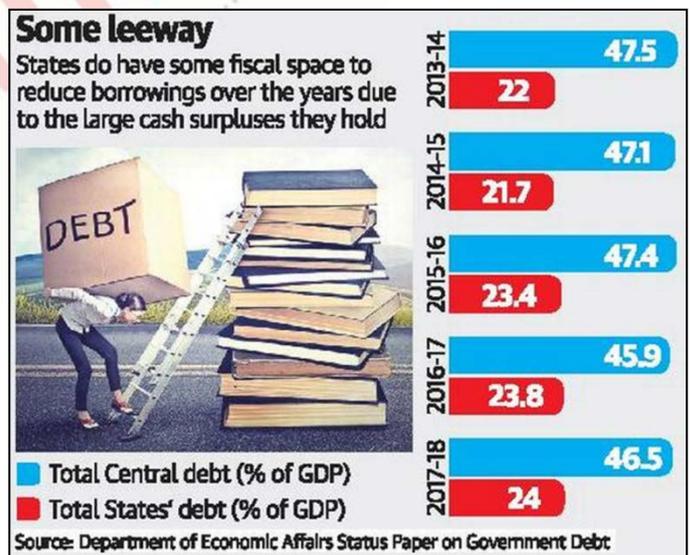
- The Centre's total debt as a percentage of GDP reduced to 46.5% in 2017-18 from 47.5% as of March 31, 2014.
- The total debt of the States has risen to 24% in 2017-18, and is estimated to be 24.3% in 2018-19.
- In absolute terms, the Centre's total debt increased from ₹56,69,429 crore at the end of March 2014 to ₹82,35,178 crore in 2017-18, representing a 45% increase. The total debt of the States increased from ₹24,71,270 crore to

₹40,22,090 crore over the same period, an increase of almost 63%.

- While the Centre is moving in the right direction in terms of meeting the N.K. Singh Committee recommendations on public debt, the States are moving in the opposite direction.
- Outstanding liabilities of States have increased sharply during 2015-16 and 2016-17, following the issuance of UDAY bonds in these two years.
- The increase in the debt stock at the State level is worrying because they don't have the wherewithal to service the debt if it goes beyond a certain point. They could then start getting into a debt trap situation.

Recommendations by N.K. Singh Committee:

- The N.K. Singh-headed FRBM (Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management) Review Committee report had recommended the ratio to be 40% for the Centre and 20% for the States, respectively, by 2023.
- It said that the 60% consolidated Central and State debt limit was consistent with international best practices, and was an essential parameter to attract a better rating from the credit ratings agencies.



Conclusion:

- The States do have some fiscal space to reduce their borrowing in the coming years due to the large cash surpluses they hold. This indicates scope for reducing the quantum of market borrowings by State governments in case they bring down their cash surpluses (parked as investment in treasury bills of the Central government).
- State governments as a group have exhibited a tendency to hold large cash surpluses/investments in Cash Balance Investment Account on a consistent basis while at the same time resorting to market borrowings to finance their GFD (Gross Fiscal Deficit).

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

9. FMCG Sector

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry is expected to clock double digit growth in the current year, though the growth is likely to be lower than that of the previous year, which saw the sector benefit from the overall health of the economy and lower inflation.

Key points:

- According to the latest study by market research firm Nielsen, the FMCG industry is expected to grow between 11% and 12% in 2019, which is a tad lower than the 13.8% growth in 2018. Incidentally, the FMCG industry growth in the fourth quarter of 2018 was quite buoyant at 15.9%. Nielsen takes into account the calendar year while making projections.
- The growth in the current year will be primarily on the back of conducive macroeconomic environment, rural consumption, sustained benefits of GST regime and election impact, according to the study.
- Consumption growth in 2018 was led by favourable macros like growth in GDP, lower inflation and manufacturers passing on the benefits of margin expansion from the GST regime.

What is FMCG Sector?

- FMCG industry, alternatively called as CPG (Consumer packaged goods) industry primarily deals with the production, distribution and marketing of consumer packaged goods.
- Moreover, the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) are those consumables which are normally consumed by the consumers at a regular interval.
- While some of the prime activities of FMCG industry are selling, marketing, financing, purchasing, etc. Besides, the industry also engaged in operations, supply chain, production and general management

Indian FMCG Sector:

Fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is the 4th largest sector in the Indian economy with Household and Personal Care accounting for 50% of FMCG sales in India. Growing awareness, easier access and changing lifestyles have been the key growth drivers for the sector.

- The government has allowed 100% Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in food processing and single-brand retail and 51% in multi-brand retail. This would bolster employment and supply chains, and also provide high visibility for FMCG brands in organised retail markets, bolstering consumer spending and encouraging more product launches.

Some of the major initiatives taken by the government to promote the FMCG sector in India are as follows:

1. Consumer Protection Bill with special emphasis on setting up an extensive mechanism to ensure simple, speedy, accessible, affordable and timely delivery of justice to consumers.
2. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) is beneficial for the FMCG industry as many of the FMCG products such as Soap, Toothpaste and Hair oil now come under 18 per cent tax bracket against the previous 23-24 per cent rate.
3. The GST is expected to transform logistics in the FMCG sector into a modern and efficient model as all major corporations are remodeling their operations into larger logistics and warehousing.

TOPIC: GS III, ECONOMY

10. Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Fund

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Three former Tata Group executives in partnership with Quantum Advisors will launch a \$1 billion Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) Fund.

About the Fund:

- The Fund will invest in Indian companies that value the environment, society and corporate governance to the core.
- The proposed equal joint venture (JV) would mobilise funds from long-term foreign investors such as pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and family offices of high net worth individuals (HNIs) who value ESG.
- The fund will aim to drive higher ESG performance in Indian corporates and it will adopt an engaged, private equity approach to public markets investing, with a focus on working with companies willing to recognize the long-term advantages of actively adopting ESG standards of excellence.

Significance:

- This pool of capital in the fund will act as a catalyst to force businesses to think hard about their choices and offers a viable path to promoters who

wish to add value to the communities they work in and long-term benefits to their shareholders

- There is pressing need for such a fund in India as there are concerns on standards of corporate governance in the country and Indian companies will need to play a central role to help achieve global climate change targets.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

11. National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

There are 139 Indian cities that breach air pollution standards but are not included in the Centre's National Clean Air Programme (NCAP), says a report by Greenpeace.

- Airpocalypse III, as the Greenpeace report is titled, analyses air pollution data of 313 cities and towns for the year 2017.

Highlights of the Report:

- Of these 313 cities, 241 (77%) had PM10 levels beyond the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS).
- While 102 of these cities were included in the NCAP, the remaining 139 cities were left out. That's because the government's list of 102 cities relied on average pollution data until 2015, whereas Airpocalypse III used data updated up to 2017.
- Even if the NCAP were able to reduce pollution by 30% by 2024, 153 cities would still be left with pollution levels exceeding the NAAQS.
- Of the 139 cities that have not been included in the non-attainment list under the NCAP, there are several cities that have a population of more than 1 million, and PM levels (recorded in 2017) above NAAQS.
- These include: Ranchi, Dhanbad (Jharkhand); Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh); Chennai, Madurai (Tamil Nadu); Meerut (Uttar Pradesh); Pimpri-Chindwar, Thane, (Maharashtra); Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara (Gujarat); and Howrah (West Bengal).

Level of air pollution in India:

- The World Health Organisation's database on air pollution over the years has listed Tier I and Tier II Indian cities as some of the most polluted places in the world.

- In 2018, 14 of the world's 15 most polluted cities were in India.
- A study in the journal Lancet ranked India as No.1 on premature mortality and deaths from air pollution.

About National Clean Air Programme (NCAP):

The NCAP was launched by the government earlier this month and is a ₹300 crore initiative to reduce particulate matter (PM) pollution by 20-30% in at least 102 cities by 2024.

- This is the first ever effort in the country to frame a national framework for air quality management with a time-bound reduction target.
- The programme will not be notified under the Environment Protection Act or any other Act to create a firm mandate with a strong legal back up for cities and regions to implement NCAP in a time bound manner for effective reduction.

Key features of NCAP:

- It aims to achieve a national-level target of 20-30% reduction of PM2.5 and PM10 concentration by between 2017 and 2024.
- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will execute this nation-wide programme in consonance with the section 162 (b) of the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1986.
- The plan includes 102 non-attainment cities, across 23 states and Union territories, which were identified by Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the basis of their ambient air quality data between 2011 and 2015.
- Non-attainment cities are those which have been consistently showing poorer air quality than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. These include Delhi, Varanasi, Bhopal, Kolkata, Noida, Muzaffarpur, and Mumbai.
- The Centre also plans to scale up the air quality monitoring network across India. At least 4,000 monitors are needed across the country, instead of the existing 101 real-time air quality (AQ) monitors, according to an analysis.
- The plan proposes a three-tier system, including real-time physical data collection, data archiving, and an action trigger system in all 102 cities, besides extensive plantation plans, research on clean-technologies, landscaping of major arterial roads, and stringent industrial standards.
- It also proposes state-level plans of e-mobility in the two-wheeler sector, rapid augmentation of charging infrastructure, stringent implementation of BS-VI norms, boosting public transportation

system, and adoption of third-party audits for polluting industries.

- Various committees: The national plan has proposed setting up an apex committee under environment minister, a steering committee under-secretary (environment) and a monitoring committee under a joint secretary. There would be project monitoring committees at the state-level with scientists and trained personnel.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

12. Effects of global warming on El Niño in the 21st Century

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The most recent projection of global warming impact on El Niño appeared in the scientific journal Nature in December 2018.

Highlights of the study:

- El Niño is the largest climate phenomenon that occurs frequently, producing droughts, floods, wildfires, dust and snow storms, fish kill, and even elevated risks of civil conflicts. The theatre of action for El Niño is the tropical Pacific Ocean but its global reach costs the global community tens of billions of dollars each time.
- El Niño may impact weather phenomenon across the world. For Eg: The eagerly-awaited winter rain and snow storms over California did not occur over California during the latest extreme El Niño.
- The study notes that strong El Niño's and thus extreme weather events associated with such strong El Niño's will increase in the coming decades. This should serve as a warning to the countries on all continents that suffer from these extreme weather events.
- However, available data is not sufficient to say with confidence how the tropical Pacific has responded to global warming till now. It is unclear if the impact of global warming on El Niño can easily be extracted considering its intrinsic tendencies and the fact that it depends on so many factors that are not easily predictable.

Way forward:

- In this context, it is imperative that models be held to very stringent standards on their performance of El Niño behaviour during historic periods, especially the 20th century, as a test of their reliability for future projections. This would also be necessary for projecting other events such as droughts and floods. For example, droughts over India are closely tied with El Niño and any

projections of how droughts will respond to global warming will depend on how models perform in their historic depiction of El Niños as well as monsoons and how reliably they can project El Niño response to global warming in addition to how the models perform in reproducing floods and droughts of 20th century.

What is El Nino?

- El Nino is a climatic cycle characterised by high air pressure in the Western Pacific and low air pressure in the eastern. In normal conditions, strong trade winds travel from east to west across the tropical Pacific, pushing the warm surface waters towards the western Pacific. The surface temperature could witness an increase of 8 degrees Celsius in Asian waters. At the same time, cooler waters rise up towards the surface in the eastern Pacific on the coasts of Ecuador, Peru, and Chile. This process called upwelling aids in the development of a rich ecosystem.

What causes El Nino?

- El Nino sets in when there is anomaly in the pattern. The westward-blowing trade winds weaken along the Equator and due to changes in air pressure, the surface water moves eastwards to the coast of northern South America. The central and eastern Pacific regions warm up for over six months and result in an El Nino condition. The temperature of the water could rise up to 10 degrees Fahrenheit above normal. Warmer surface waters increase precipitation and bring above-normal rainfall in South America, and droughts to Indonesia and Australia.

What are El Nino's effects?

1. El Nino affects global weather. It favours eastern Pacific hurricanes and tropical storms. Record and unusual rainfall in Peru, Chile and Ecuador are linked to the climate pattern.
2. El Nino reduces upwelling of cold water, decreasing the uplift of nutrients from the bottom of the ocean. This affects marine life and sea birds. The fishing industry is also affected.
3. Drought caused by El Nino can be widespread, affecting southern Africa, India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands. Countries dependent on agriculture are affected.
4. Australia and Southeast Asia get hotter.
5. A recent WHO report on the health consequences of El Nino forecasts a rise in vector-borne diseases, including those spread by mosquitoes, in Central and South America. Cycles of malaria in India are also linked to El Nino.

What is ENSO (El Nino Southern Oscillation)?

- As the name suggests, it is an irregular periodic variation of wind and sea surface temperature that occurs over the tropical eastern Pacific Ocean. ENSO affects the tropics (the regions surrounding the equator) and the subtropics (the regions adjacent to or bordering the tropics). The warming phase of ENSO is called El Nino, while the cooling phase is known as La Nina.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

13. Cow urine may be adding to Global Warming

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

According to a latest study Cow urine — a minor fount of research in India for its medicinal benefits — may also contribute to global warming.

Key findings of the study:

- The urine from the ruminant is a source of nitrous oxide emissions (N2O), a gas that is 300 times more powerful than carbon dioxide.
- Most times, when cow urine is used in degraded pastures, N2O emissions are tripled.
- The cattle and livestock are a significant source of methane, a greenhouse gas, and therefore a contributor to global warming. However, the role of cow urine is less understood.

How vulnerable is India?

- Dung and urine are commonly mixed together for manure in Indian fields. Since, India also hosts the world’s largest livestock population, as well as significant tracts of degraded land, the findings may have a bearing on nitrogen emissions from Indian fields.

- A 2012 satellite study by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said that about 30% of India’s geographical area (or about 96.4 million hectares) is degraded.
- Degraded pastures not only affect food security and the livelihood of farmers today, but affect the livelihood of future farmers because they emit more gases that cause global warming.
- Degraded grasslands emitted more N2O than healthy pastures because the vegetation in the latter took up some of the reactive nitrogen compounds and only the leftovers were emitted.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

14. India can’t handle more Tigers

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

While conservation efforts are aimed at increasing the tiger count in India, global experts and officials in the government suggest that India must also prepare for a new challenge — of reaching the limits of its management capacity.

Key points:

- Officially, India had 2,226 tigers as of 2014. An ongoing census is expected to reveal an update to these numbers.
- India’s current capacity to host tigers ranges from 2,500 to 3,000 tigers.
- Since 2006, the WII has been tasked with coordinating the tiger estimation exercise. The once-in-four-years exercise calculated, in 2006, that India had only 1,411 tigers. This rose to 1,706 in 2010 and 2,226 in 2014 on the back of improved conservation measures and new estimation methods.
- 25-35% of India’s tigers now lived outside protected reserves.

Tiger, tiger, burning bright
India has the maximum number of wild tigers in the world. It needs a fool-proof plan to manage the growing number of big cats

There are 50 tiger reserves in India, governed by Project Tiger administered by the National Tiger Conservation Authority

India is home to 70 percent of tigers in the world

In 2006, there were 1,411 tigers which increased to 1,706 in 2011 and 2,226 in 2014

The ongoing tiger census will reveal updated numbers this May

Total number of wild tigers, globally, was 3,891 in 2016, according to World Wildlife Fund and Global Tiger Forum

- Recent attempts at translocating tigers to unpopulated reserves, such as Satkosia in Orissa, have ended badly, with one of the tigers dying.
- Needlessly huge amount of money is being dumped repeatedly on the same 25,000-30,000 sq. km area where tigers are already at saturation densities, while other areas with potential for future recovery are starved of key investments.

During the St. Petersburg declaration in 2010, tiger range countries had resolved to double tiger numbers across their range by 2022.

Main Challenges:

- Dwindling core forest as well as the shrinking of tiger corridors (strips of land that allow tigers to move unfettered across diverse habitat).
- Poaching
- Man-animal conflict.

Way ahead:

- India has the maximum number of wild tigers in the world (70% of tigers in the world are in India). Therefore, it needs a fool-proof plan to manage the growing number of big cats.
- Given the low availability of prey in some reserves, the country should now concentrate on developing vast tracts of potential tiger habitat that can be used to improve prey density, develop tiger corridors and therefore support a much larger population.

International Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation:

- The 3rd Stock Taking Conference on Tiger Conservation was recently inaugurated in New Delhi.
- Third in a series of Stock Taking Conferences, this is the second to be held in India after 2012 and is expected to have wide-ranging discussions on the status of the Global Tiger Recovery Program (GTRP) by the 13 tiger range countries besides deliberations on combating wildlife trafficking.
- 13 Tiger range States—Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- The conference is being hosted by the National Tiger Conservation Authority, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in close collaboration with the Global Tiger Forum which is an International, Intergovernmental Organization for conserving tigers in the world.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

15. Golden langur breeding project in Assam

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Assam state zoo-cum-botanical garden is all set to achieve another milestone with the authorities planning to build a conservation breeding centre for the highly endangered golden langurs inside its premises.

- Assam has announced the success of the Golden Langur Conservation Breeding Programme in the State. The golden langur conservation project was undertaken at the Assam State Zoo in Guwahati during the 2011-12 fiscal.

About Golden Langur:

- Scientific name: *Trachypithecus geei*
- IUCN Status: Endangered.
- Apart from a 60 square mile area in north-western Assam, small populations are found in Bhutan and Tripura.
- Only a handful of the highly endangered golden langurs are found in the Manas Tiger reserve in lower Assam and in the Umananda temple on river Brahmaputra.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

16. Sarus Crane

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Sarus crane, whose numbers were pushed to the edge by habitat degradation and human callousness, now seems to be getting a new lease of life in Uttar Pradesh, where it enjoys the status of official State bird.

Key points:

- The population of the Sarus crane has climbed to 15,938 as per the 2018 census (summer). This is a jump of 5.2% from 2017, when there were 15,138 Sarus cranes across U.P.
- Its population in Uttar Pradesh has steadily grown since 2013, as wetlands thrive and farmers, fisherfolk nurture their nests.

Role of Sarus:

- The Sarus habitat is outside protected areas, in natural wetlands with low water depth, marshy and fallow areas and agricultural fields. They play a vital role in ecological balance by controlling the population of harmful insects and have significant cultural importance, while also being sociable.

About Saras Crane:

- Scientific name: Grus antigone.
- IUCN status- Vulnerable.
- It is the world's tallest flying bird.
- It is also India's only resident breeding crane.
- Its height can be 152-156 cm, over 5 feet on average.
- It has three disjunct populations in the Indian sub-continent, south-east Asia and northern Australia.
- It is distinguishable by its red upper neck and white collar.
- Sarus is omnivorous, feeding on fish and insects, as well as roots and plants.
- As per the IUCN 2016 status, the Sarus crane population is suspected to have decreased globally, owing to the loss and degradation of wetlands, as a result of drainage and conversion to agriculture, ingestion of pesticides, and the hunting of adults and collection of eggs and chicks for trade, food, medicinal purposes and to help limit damage to crops.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION

17. Crocodylus Palustris

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

The mugger crocodile, also called marsh crocodile or broad-snouted crocodile, is a species (*Crocodylus palustris*) native to freshwater habitats from southern Iran and Pakistan to the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka.

- It has come to the centre of renewed attention in Gujarat, where the Forest Department has started evacuating muggers from two ponds on the Sardar Sarovar Dam premises on the Narmada, to facilitate a seaplane service at the Statue of Unity.

About Muggers crocodile:

- Already extinct in Bhutan and Myanmar
- The mugger has been listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List since 1982.
- In India, it is protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. (Among the six schedules in the Act, Schedule I and part II of Schedule II provide the highest degrees of protection to listed species, with the most stringent penalties for offenders.)
- Vadodara, 90 km from the Narmada dam, is the only city in the country where crocodiles live in their natural habitat amidst human population. Crocodiles from the Vishwamitri river, where they number around 300, often enter people's homes,

giving rise to conflict and capture. Most of these crocodiles are thereafter released in the Narmada dam waters, away from human habitats.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL GROUPINGS

18. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Negotiations have been going on for settling down the conflicting matters and forge an agreement by the end of this year for establishing Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). However, the suspense with India's participation in the proposed, the first trade bloc that groups large economies of the developing world in Asia-Pacific, still continues despite many rounds of negotiations.

India's objection with RCEP:

- India's trade deficits have always widened with nations after signing free-trade-agreements (FTAs) with them. The same is true for India's FTAs with the ASEAN, Japan, Korea, and Singapore, most of which are RCEP nations.
- Exposing vulnerable sectors to market forces and the vagaries of competition emerging from global trade. There are concerns that it will worsen the condition of India's agriculture and dairy sectors, which are not in positions to compete with Australia and New Zealand which are part of RCEP and quite advanced in agriculture.
- Indian manufacturing sector is yet to mature to be competitive enough to face the competition brought about by international trade.
- Although many argue in favour of signing the RCEP as it will realise the Make in India project by bringing more and more investments. However, it is also true that this project was never conceived of at the cost of domestic industry.
- It is a major concern for entire value chain system from production to marketing.
- RCEP can make Indian market as a dumping ground for Chinese products.

Where does India lag behind in terms of reforms?

- While the introduction of GST was thought of to be a major step in this regard by rationalising supply-chains, and removing the fragmented nature of the markets, multiple rates of GST often cause problems of compliance across the value-chain of a commodity.



- A host of unimplemented reforms in the manufacturing sector has kept this sector still in budding stage.
- Despite low relative labour cost, labour productivity in India in manufacturing is still one of the lowest in the world, and spatially fragmented labour laws escalate costs of transaction.
- RCEP takes away an economy's ability to customise trade policies according to the needs of specific time periods. This will be another long-term cost that the Indian economy has to bear.

About RCEP:

- RCEP is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) or comprehensive regional economic integration agreement between the 10-ASEAN countries (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and its six FTA partners (Australia, New Zealand, India, China, Japan and Korea).
- The negotiations for this mega trade deal were formally launched at 2012 ASEAN Summit in

Cambodia. It aims to cover goods, services, investments, economic and technical cooperation, competition and intellectual property rights under its ambit.

- Till 2017, 16 RCEP member states accounted for population of 3.4 billion people with total GDP (in terms of PPP) of \$49.5 trillion, approximately 38% of the world's GDP (combined GDPs of China and India makes up more than half that amount) and 29% of world trade.

TOPIC: GS II, INTERNATIONAL RELATION

19. US-China Trade War

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Economists are warning that the world is on the verge of an all-out trade war. With US President Donald Trump imposing a lot of taxes on imports, and China hitting back with similar measures, there is every possibility that world will witness a new war – a trade war – in the coming months.

Trade War:

- A trade war is an economic conflict in which countries impose import restrictions on each other in order to harm each other's trade.
- In a trade war, two or more countries create trade barriers on each other in retaliation for other trade barriers.

Trade Barriers:

- Trade barriers are what governments use to hinder or control free trade (mainly imports from another country).
- There are two types of trade barriers.
- Tariff barriers – Eg: Import tariff, Export tariff, Specific duty, Ad valorem duty, Countervailing duty, Anti-dumping duty, Protective tariff etc.
- Non-Tariff barriers – Eg: quotas, embargoes, sanctions, levies and other restrictions.

About Tariff:

- In simplest terms, a tariff is a tax.
- A tariff is a tax on imports or exports.
- Money collected under a tariff is called a duty or customs duty. Tariffs are used by governments to protect domestic industries from competition.
- It adds to the cost of imported goods.

Current Tariff policies of USA:

- The Trump tariffs are a series of tariffs imposed during the presidency of Donald Trump. In January 2018, Trump imposed tariffs on solar panels and washing machines, and in March 2018, he imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium.
- The case the White House is making is that the tariffs necessary to protect vulnerable American industries.
- President Donald Trump had said that the US which has nearly USD 800 billion deficit with other countries is ready for a trade war with them if they retaliated against his decision to impose 25 percent import tariff on steel and 10 percent on aluminium.
- On March 7, US President Donald Trump announced 25% tariffs on imports of steel and aluminium from China.
- China responded by saying it would impose duties on \$3bn worth of US products, announcing tariffs of up to 25% on imports of food including frozen pork, wine and some fruits on April 1.

What can the World Trade Organisation (WTO) do?

- The arbiter of international trade disputes – WTO – was born in 1995 out of a set of agreements struck by countries trying to reduce trade barriers.

- If a government's complaint about another nation's trade barriers is seen as grounded, the WTO recommends acceptable retaliation.
- In the case of steel, Trump is invoking a seldom-used clause of a 1962 U.S. law that gives him the authority to curb imports if they undermine national security.
- Under WTO rules, countries can take trade actions to protect "essential security interests."
- Other nations could challenge the validity of the U.S. use of that clause. They also could copy the U.S. move by citing national security to block imports themselves.

Trade War – Who will be the winner?

- Stockmarkets across the world have fallen anticipating a full-blown trade war between the United States and China.
- The tariffs measures were poorly received by the vast majority of economists; almost 80% of 104 economists surveyed by Reuters believed that imports on tariffs on steel and aluminum imports would be a net harm to the U.S. economy, with the rest believing that the tariffs would have little or no effect; none of the economists surveyed believed that the tariffs would benefit the U.S. economy.
- On the other hand, the trade war can badly affect China too. If China's exports suffer from President Trump's upcoming trade actions, and any copycat barriers elsewhere, domestic consumption hardly looks robust enough to carry growth.
- Should a trade war escalate between the US and China, consultancy Wood Mackenzie estimates that global economic growth could slow from 2.9% to 2.2% over the next four years.
- The small, open economies in the eastern part of the European Union will suffer disproportionately if the global trade war currently brewing extends to Europe, analysts have warned.
- "Jonathan Butcher, Wood Mackenzie principal economist, in a March 28 note, says, "That risk of retaliation and escalation is itself a threat to the global economy. We are currently enjoying a period of robust global growth, but sentiment plays a big part in maintaining economic momentum. The threat of a trade war could dampen sentiment, slowing consumer spending and business investment. If a trade war does develop there are no winners in such a situation."

What happened in previous trade wars?

- One of the most notorious examples is the Smoot-Hawley Act passed by Congress in 1930 and often blamed for deepening the Great Depression. The

act raised import tariffs on some 20,000 goods provoking retaliatory tariffs by major US trading partners, leading to a severe trade war, the contraction of world trade, and exacerbation of the Great Depression.

Who wins in trade wars?

- No one, if history is any guide. When President George W. Bush raised steel tariffs in 2002, U.S. gross domestic product declined by \$30.4 million, according to the U.S. International Trade Commission. The U.S. lost about 200,000 jobs, about 13,000 of which were in raw steel-making, by one estimate.

Conclusion:

- Trump's trade war will hurt everyone — the only question is how much. Everybody, all economies, will be adversely affected. A trade war between the world's major economies would lead to a significant contraction of world trade. In turn, this could result in a deep recession in the world economy, which would, no doubt, exacerbate the –already tense geopolitical strains.

TOPIC: GS II, IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL POLICIES ON INDIA
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20. India in an Uncertain World

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

As India prepares for election in few months, all signs point to 2019 being a difficult year. Whether this would directly impact the poll outcome is uncertain, but the country needs to remain alert to unexpected developments in the wake of global disorder and vacuum of global leadership.

Steps taken by major powers for enhancing their influence:

- Russia is vigorously pursuing its pivot to Asia and for greater influence in Eurasia. It has deepened its partnership with China, and enhanced relations with Japan and South Korea.
- However, growing tensions in the Sea of Azov following Russia's seizure of Ukraine's ships could well lead to a major conflagration between Russia and the West.
- China is consolidating its position in Asia. In addition to its strategic partnership with Russia, China has mended fences with Japan. China's Belt and Road Initiative has become the most potent weapon in its armoury, with Vietnam and Japan endorsing this concept. India finds itself increasingly isolated in Asia as a result.

- Economic activities during 2018 for most of the world proved highly daunting i.e U.S.-China trade war. This had triggered highly unsettled conditions, and the situation was further aggravated by signs of a weakening Chinese economy. Experts have observed that at the beginning of 2019, it is amply evident that politics is conflicting with business across the world. Hence, normal economic calculations are getting disrupted.
- As a consequence, India cannot hope to remain insulated from these trends.

China's outreach in the Region:

- Recently, China has initiated certain moves to create a China-Myanmar Economic Corridor on the lines of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- China has poised to challenge India's position in the Indian Ocean where the Chinese submarines already outnumber India's here.
- China is also preparing to outflank India by seeking control of the Kyaukpyu Port on the Arakan Coast in Myanmar, and planning a canal (the Kra canal), connecting the Andaman Sea with the Gulf of Thailand. Together with China's existing control over the Gwadar (Pakistan) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka) Ports, if China were to succeed in its attempts, it could give it a stranglehold across the Indian Ocean Region. India's capacity to counter such moves in near future appears extremely limited.
- All weather friendship of China-Pakistan is going to be further deep. As Pakistan has facilitated China's involvement in Afghanistan and also succeeded in co-opting Russia to be a party to talks with the Afghan Taliban. The CPEC having weathered quite a few storms in 2018, seems well set to progress this further in 2019.
- The prospects of India-Pakistan relations improving on the other hand are extremely limited. India may face even rougher weather, in Afghanistan given US withdrawal and dependence of China and Russia more on Taliban who are backed by Pakistan.
- India has been kept out of talks with the Afghan Taliban by all countries concerned, including the U.S., China, and Russia, apart from Pakistan. This is making India's position here highly invidious.

India's ties with Russia, Japan:

- The strengthening of the Russia-China strategic relationship and the recent warmth in China-Japan relations could impact India's relations with both countries. It is going to restrict India's space of manoeuvrability. Hence, India will need to use its

diplomatic capital to ensure that relations do not decline to any considerable extent.

- Managing relations with China will be India's top priority. India-China relations are marked by a surface calm, but this masks an intrinsic struggle for influence in Asia and even beyond. The Wuhan Spirit, notwithstanding, little has changed as far as India-China relations are concerned, except that there has not been any major Chinese incursion across the disputed India-China border.

Expected challenges faced by India in near future:

- The return of Sheikh Hasina as Prime Minister after the general elections in Bangladesh has been a welcome relief. Yet, India will need to work harder in 2019 to check China from weaning away its neighbours, including Nepal as also Bangladesh, with offers of economic and military aid.
- India will also need to use all its resources to assist Bangladesh to limit the influence of radical Islamist groups there.
- Experts point out that the more challenging internal security problems will be Kashmir and the Northeast. The deadlock between the Jammu and Kashmir administration and militants is unlikely to be resolved. President's rule has made little headway in sorting out the conflict-prone situation. Militant outfits are expected to become still more active. More educated locals are joining militant ranks. Disclaimers notwithstanding, the presence of the Islamic State is also in evidence. The consequences of this as far as 2019 is concerned could be considerable.
- The other major internal security threat that India faces is the resurgence of ethnic sub-nationalism in the Northeast. This has been simmering for some time, but now threatens to boil over, following the enactment of the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill. The Bill has given rise to fears that it would drastically alter the status quo in the region. The Amendment has helped unite vast segments of people across the entire Northeast. The divisive potential of the recently enacted Act, will have special resonance in an election year. It will demand sensitive and careful handling in 2019.
- Farmer's and Dalit unrest, still remain unattended as 2019 begins. Both can ignite fires, specially in an election year. There is little evidence, however, that the causes for the unrest are receiving careful consideration.
- Considering the difficult external and internal situation, peace may prove elusive. On the diplomatic front, India will need to be more dexterous. The internal situation will require to be dealt with far greater understanding.

TOPIC: GS II, BILATERAL RELATIONS

21. India-South Africa Relations

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The South African President Cyril Ramaphosa visited India and also became the chief guest for India's Republic Day in 2019. This is the second time a South African leader is Chief Guest at Republic Day Nelson Mandela was the chief guest in 1995.

Details of the visit:

- Both the countries signed a large number of agreements including finalization of a strategic programme of cooperation aimed at implementation in a time-bound manner.
- The specific emphasis has been laid on promoting defence which extends to maritime security, joint training exercises on sea and land, and provision of training facilities.
- Cooperation in the sectors like research and IT.
- Both expressed concern at the slow pace of UN reforms and committed themselves to securing representation in an expanded UN Security Council to achieve a more representative UN Security Council Membership.
- Both pledged to expand their bilateral trade from \$ 10 bn and of cooperation in sectors including agro-processing, mining and the financial sector.
- Gandhi-Mandela Skills Institute will soon be opened in Pretoria.
- Strengthening cooperation to address fugitive economic offenders.

Concerns:

- Despite the promotion, bilateral trade and investment are yet to show robust and speedy expansion mainly due to the small size of the South African economy and its slow rate of growth.
- Lack of direct air connectivity and South Africa's rigid business visa regime are seen as discouragements.
- Xenophobia and its concerns:- have been at the receiving end of xenophobic attacks and violence. Much of this is driven by hatred stemming from the perception that migrants are taking away the jobs of local South Africans.

Way forward:

- Contemporary India and South Africa need to recognise and harness the potential of new migratory flows. Only then can we realise our true strength as allies in BRICS or IBSA (India, Brazil & South Africa). The emphasis on skill development,

South-South cooperation, and people-to-people contact is significant as it is, cannot be delinked from cross-border flows of people, who are rapidly transforming the employment and migration landscape in both countries.

- At the same time, free labour mobility on its own is not enough; we need measures to safeguard and uphold labour standards globally.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

22. Shift in India's Foreign Policy

Source: Live mint

Why in news:

With general elections approaching, there is a lot of debate on how things have or haven't changed under the last five years of the current government.

Shift in India's foreign policies in last few years:

- India has moved on from its non-aligned past and become an aligned state but based on issues.
- It is the time for India to become the part of the rule-making process as in the rules-based order, India would have a stronger position in multilateral institutions.
- India's future would be largely shaped by the kind of role it manages to play in the G-20 and the Indo-Pacific which clearly shows the changing priorities of the Indian foreign policy establishment.
- Today's India aspires to be a leading power, rather than just a balancing power and as a consequence, it is willing to shoulder greater global responsibilities. For instant, the active leadership role played by India at Quad.
- India has transformed itself from being merely an important player in the global order into one that is able and willing to define the priorities of the international system.
- For becoming a major power in ensuring a rule based order, the country has reasserted its civilizational soft power. This has resulted in a hyper-energetic diplomacy that not only seeks an ever-greater global footprint but also places an emphasis on the nation's soft power attributes from yoga and spiritualism to the diaspora. This shows India's ambition to be a rule-maker, not merely a rule-taker.
- India, from perpetually being a cautious power, is seemingly ready to take on a larger global role by being more agile than ever in playing the great power game.

- Today's India is redefining strategic autonomy as an objective that is attainable through strengthened partnerships rather than the avoidance of partnerships yet not weakening its capacity of balance of power. For instant, India has boosted its relation with both USA as well as China which are actually engaged in trade war. When India engages in the "Quad", it enhances its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis China. When it sits together with Russia and China for a trilateral, it enhances its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis a current US administration's intent on challenging the fundamentals of the global economic order.
- India is currently charting new areas in its foreign policy, predicated on the belief that rather than proclaiming non-alignment as an end in itself, India needs deeper engagement with its friends and partners if it is to develop leverage in its dealings with its adversaries and competitors.
- India is today well positioned to define its bilateral relationships on its own terms and would do well to continue engaging more closely with those countries that can facilitate its rise to regional and global prominence.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENTS

23. ISRO's first Mission of 2019

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

India has successfully launched Microsat-R, a military satellite and Kalamsat onboard its Polar rocket PSLV C44, in the first mission for the ISRO in 2019.

- With this, the PSLV, basically a four-stage vehicle with alternating solid and liquid stages, has launched 54 Indian and 269 satellites of international customers.

Key points:

- Microsat-R is an imaging satellite. It is meant for military purposes.
- Built at a cost of around Rs 12 lakh, the Kalamsat is an experimental satellite for studying the communication system of nano satellites, which can be useful in many fields, predominantly disaster management.
- Contributed by college students and the members of a Chennai-based organisation — Space Kidz India — Kalamsat is the first to use PS4 (the fourth stage of the vehicle) as a platform to orbit around the earth.

TOPIC: GS III, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AGENCIES AND FORA, THEIR STRUCTURE, MANDATE

24. International Year of The Periodic Table

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The International Year of the Periodic Table of Chemical Elements will be launched on 29 January at UNESCO's Headquarters.

- Events and activities will be held throughout the year to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the organization of the periodic table by Russian scientist Dmitri Mendeleev, one of the fathers of modern chemistry.

Key facts:

- Russian scientist Dmitry Mendeleev published the first such periodic table in 1869.
- The table organizes all chemical elements by the number of protons in a given atom and other properties.
- There are seven rows, called periods, and 18 columns, called groups, in the table.
- Elements in the same group share similar properties. Those in the same period have the same number of atomic orbitals.
- Most elements on the table are metals divided into six broad categories – alkali metals, alkaline earths, basic metals, transition metals, lanthanides and actinides. They are located on the left, separated from the non-metals on the right by a zig-zag line.
- Lanthanides and actinides, often called “inner transition metals”, are commonly hived off as a separate section under the main table as including all 30 – including Uranium – would make the table too wide.
- The table is a useful tool for people to derive relationships between the different properties of the elements. It can also help predict the properties of new elements that have yet to be discovered or created.

1001 Inventions:

- UNESCO has also launched its educational initiative, 1001 Inventions: Journeys from Alchemy to Chemistry. Consisting of educational material and science experiments to help young people improve their understanding of chemistry and its numerous uses, the initiative will be brought to schools around the world during 2019.

About IUPAC:

The International Union of Pure Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) is responsible for maintaining the periodic table.

- IUPAC is an international federation of National Adhering Organizations that represents chemists in individual countries. It is a member of the International Council for Science (ICSU).
- It was established in 1919 as the successor of the International Congress of Applied Chemistry for the advancement of chemistry.
- Headquarters: Zürich, Switzerland.
- Its members, the National Adhering Organizations, can be national chemistry societies, national academies of sciences, or other bodies representing chemists.
- The IUPAC's Inter-divisional Committee on Nomenclature and Symbols (IUPAC nomenclature) is the recognized world authority in developing standards for the naming of the chemical elements and compounds.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

25. Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC)

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The Human Space Flight Centre (HSFC) which would be the core of ISRO's future manned missions was inaugurated at the ISRO headquarters in Bengaluru.
- A full scale model of Gaganyaan's crew module was also unveiled.

More about HSFC:

- HSFC shall be responsible for the implementation of Gaganyaan project – which involves mission planning, development of engineering systems for crew survival in space, crew selection and training and also pursue activities for sustained human space flight missions.

Background:

- Announced on August 15 2018, the country's first crewed mission is set to happen by 2022, the 75th year of Independence.
- Earlier, S. Unnikrishnan Nair was named as the founder Director of HSFC and R. Hutton as the project director of Gaganyaan.

Note: Gaganyaan is covered in detail in the earlier editions.

**TOPIC: GS III, E-TECHNOLOGY
IN THE AID OF FARMERS**

26. National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP)

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The ICAR has recently launched Rs 1100 crore ambitious National Agricultural Higher Education Project (NAHEP).

More about NAHEP:

- Its aim is to attract talent and strengthen higher agricultural education in the country.
- It will be funded by the World Bank and the Indian Government on a 50:50 basis.
- The objective of the NAHEP for India is to support participating agricultural universities and ICAR in providing more relevant and higher quality education to Agricultural University students. In addition, a four year degree in Agriculture, Horticulture, Fisheries and Forestry has been declared a professional degree.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

27. Aber: A new digital currency

- The central banks of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia have launched a common digital currency called 'Aber', which will be used in financial settlements between the two countries through Blockchains and Distributed Ledgers technologies.
- The use of the currency will be restricted to a limited number of banks in each state.
- In case that no technical obstacles are encountered, economic and legal requirements for future uses will be considered.

28. India replaces Japan to be world's second largest steel producer

- India has replaced Japan as the world's second-largest steel producing country, only behind China, which is the largest producer of crude steel accounting for more than 51 per cent of production, as per the latest report by World Steel Association.

29. Bio-Jet fuel for Military Aircraft

- Indigenous produced bio-fuel has been finally cleared for use by Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification (CEMILAC).

- The bio-jet fuel has been produced from seeds of Jatropha plant sourced from Chhattisgarh and processed at CSIR-IIP's lab at Dehradun.
- Any hardware or software which is to be used on Indian military aircraft, including those operated by Indian Navy or Army has to be cleared for use by CEMILAC before being inducted for regular use.
- Significance: Increased demand of bio-jet fuel would give impetus to increase in collection of tree-borne non-edible oil seeds, which, in turn, will help generate ancillary income, increase remuneration for tribal and marginal farmers, and enthruse cultivation/ collection of oilseeds.

30. BSNL to Offer Data Connectivity Services through SMS

State-run telecom firm BSNL has partnered with French company Be-Bound to offer data connectivity through SMS in areas where there is no Internet connectivity or signal breaks.

- The SMS based data connectivity will work with the help of a technology embedded in a mobile App.
- The app will detect if the user's area has poor network connectivity. If yes, then the app will send commands to the Be-Bound server.
- This commands would be sent send SMS from the user's account.
- Be-Bound server will facilitate SMS based data connectivity after getting a command from the app.
- The connectivity is based on SMS sent to and fro between the app and the Be-Bound server.

This technology was first introduced in France and it is also being tested in some of the African countries. In India, BSNL is in talks with some apps to implement the technology.

31. 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas

- The Prime Minister has recently inaugurated the 15th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas Convention at Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.
- The three day long convention has been organized for the first time in Varanasi from 21-23 January, 2019.
- The theme of PBD Convention 2019 is "Role of Indian Diaspora in building New India".
- Prime Minister of Mauritius Mr. Pravind Jugnauth was the chief guest of the PBD convention.

About Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas:

- The decision to celebrate Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas (PBD) was taken by the former Indian Prime Minister, late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

- The 1st PBD was celebrated on 9th January, 2003 in New Delhi.
- January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate PBD as it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, had returned to India from South Africa.
- PBD now celebrated once in every two years and it provides a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and reconnect with their roots. During the Convention, Pravasi Bharatiya Samman is conferred on the selected overseas Indians for their significant contributions to various fields both in India and abroad.

32. The Subhash Chandra Bose Museum

- Subhash Chandra Bose museum at Red Fort, New Delhi has been recently inaugurated.
- It provides a detailed account of Subhash Chandra Bose and the history of Indian national army. It also showcases various artefacts related to Subhash Chandra Bose and INA.

33. Bharat Parv 2019

- The Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with other central Ministries has recently organized the 4th edition of 'Bharat Parv' event showcasing the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat at Red Fort as a part of Republic Day 2019 Celebrations.
- The objective of the event is to generate a patriotic mood promote the rich cultural diversity of the country and to ensure wider participation of the general public.

34. Sea Vigil

- The first coastal defence Exercise Sea Vigil has been recently conducted by the Indian Navy and Coast Guard.
- The exercise covered the entire 7,516 km-long Indian coastline and exclusive economic zone involving 13 coastal states and Union Territories to check the efficacy of maritime security and surveillance.
- It is the largest coastal defence exercise off the Indian coast after 26/11.
- The exercise is a build up towards the major theatre level tri-service exercise TROPEX which Indian Navy conducts every two years.

35. National Voters Day (NVD)

- The country has recently celebrated the 9th National Voters' Day (NVD) on 25th January 2019 at more than six lakh locations covering around ten lakh Polling Stations across the country.

- New Voters have been felicitated and handed over their EPIC (Elector Photo Identity Card).
- My Vote Matters, a Quarterly Magazine, has also been launched on the occasion.
- Theme of the day was "No Voter to be Left Behind".

About National Voters Day:

- The National Voters' Day (NVD) is celebrated all over the country on January 25 every year since 2011 to mark the Foundation day of Election Commission of India, which was established on 25th January 1950.
- The main purpose of the NVD celebration is to encourage, facilitate and maximize the enrollment, especially for the new voters.
- Dedicated to the voters of the country, the Day is utilized to spread awareness among voters for promoting informed participation in the electoral process.

36. National Girl Child Day

- National Girl Child Day (NGCD) has been recently celebrated on 24th January by the Women & Child Development Ministry.
- The programme also observed anniversary of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme.
- The theme of this NGCD was "Empowering Girls for a Brighter Tomorrow" and celebrating with objectives of generating awareness on the issue of declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and create a positive environment around valuing the girl child.

About Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):

- It is a Central Sector Scheme with 100% financial assistance for District level component and the fund are directly released to the DC/DM's account for smooth operation of the Scheme.
- It is a comprehensive programme to address the declining Child Sex Ratio (CSR) and related issues of empowerment of women over a life-cycle continuum.
- The Child Sex Ratio (CSR), defined as number of girls per 1000 boys in the age group of 0-6 years.
- The specific objectives of the scheme includes preventing gender biased sex selective elimination; ensuring survival and protection of the girl child and ensuring education and participation of the girl child.

Note: International Day of the Girl is celebrated on 11th October by the United Nations.

37. Vande Bharat Express

- Minister of Railways has recently announced the name “Vande Bharat Express” for Train 18, acknowledging its made-in-India status.
- It is India’s fastest and engine less train. It can achieve high speeds (max speed of 160 kmph) due to faster acceleration & deceleration and will reduce journey time by 25% to 45%.
- It will cover the distance between Delhi and Varanasi in 8 hours, stopping at only two stations – Kanpur and Prayagraj.
- It incorporates many modern features which debut for the very first time on Indian Railways. It has been provided with ‘State of the Art’ passenger amenities like On-board wifi entertainment, GPS based passenger information system, CCTVs, bio-vacuum toilets, rotating chairs in executive class, etc. at par with global standards.
- It also has provision for Divyang-friendly facilities.

38. Swadesh Darshan Scheme

- First project in Sikkim as a part of the “Development of North East Circuit under Swadesh Darshan Scheme has recently inaugurated.

About Swadesh Darshan scheme:

- Swadesh Darshan scheme is the flagship scheme of Ministry of tourism for development of thematic circuits in the country in a planned and prioritised manner in 2014-15.
- Under this scheme the Government is focussing on development of quality infrastructure in the country with objective of providing better experience and facilities to the visitors on one hand and on other hand fostering the economic growth.

39. The future of Rail

- Minister of Railways has recently launched the report titled “The Future of Rail” of International Energy Agency (IEA)

Details of the report:

- The Future of Rail the first-of-a-kind report analyses the current and future importance of rail around the world through the perspective of its energy and environmental implications.
- The report reviews the impact of existing plans and regulations on the future of rail, and explores the key policies that could help to realise an enhanced future rail.

About IEA:

- IEA is an inter-governmental organization established in 1974 as per framework of

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

- It was established in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis after the OPEC cartel had shocked the world with a steep increase in oil prices. Presently it has 30 member countries including India and 8 association countries.
- It is headquartered in Paris, France. Its prime focus is on the “3Es” of effectual energy policy: energy security, economic development and environmental protection.

40. National Salt Satyagraha Memorial

- Prime Minister has recently dedicated the National Salt Satyagraha Memorial at Dandi in Navsari district, Gujarat to the nation on Mahatma Gandhi’s death anniversary.
- The statues of Mahatma Gandhi and 80 Satyagrahis who had marched with him during the historic Dandi Salt March in 1930 to make salt from sea water against the British law has also been inaugurated.
- The memorial also has 24-narrative murals depicting various events and stories from the historic 1930 Salt March.
- Solar trees are installed to meet the energy requirements of the memorial complex.

About Dandi March:

- The Salt March began on March 12, 1930 and continued till April 6, 1930. It was a 24-day non-violent march led by Mahatma Gandhi.
- During that time, the British had prohibited Indians from collecting or selling salt. Indians were also forced to buy the staple diet ingredient from the British, who, not only exercised monopoly over its manufacture and sale but also levied a heavy salt tax. The Salt March was a collective beginning of a mass resistance movement against the British tyranny.
- Upon reaching the seashore in Dandi, Mahatma Gandhi broke the law by producing illegal salt. This later turned into a mass civil disobedience movement throughout India as millions broke salt laws by either making salt or buying illegal salt.

41. Carnot Prize

- The Kleinman Center for Energy Policy at the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Design has recently presented the fourth annual Carnot Prize to Union Minister Shri Piyush Goyal, Minister of Railways & Coal and former Minister of Power, Coal, New & Renewable Energy and Mines, Government of India.

About the Carnot Prize:

- It recognises the path breaking transformations in India's energy sector especially India's solid footing to reach a 40% renewable mix by 2030.
- It is the Kleinman Center's annual recognition of distinguished contributions to energy policy through scholarship or practice.
- It is the most prestigious award in the energy sector. Carnot Prize is named after French physicist Nicolas Sadi Carnot who recognised that the power of the steam engine would produce a great revolution in human development.
- It intended's to honour those leading revolutions in energy policy to further progress and prosperity.

42. Petrotech-2019

- Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas has recently organized PETROTECH-2019, the 13th International Oil & Gas Conference & Exhibition.

Details of the conference:

- The conference is a biennial International Oil & Gas Conference. The conference provides a platform for national and international experts in the oil & gas industry to exchange views and share knowledge, expertise, and experiences.

- The exhibition will focus on development in technologies for exploration & production, process control, refining and pipeline and services, systems, products, oil field hardware, software, analytical instruments, Renewable, R&D, HSE, training and publications of technical literature.

43. Rag Rag Mein Ganga

- Union Minister for Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has recently launched travelogue program "Rag Rag Mein Ganga on Doordarshan.

Details of the program:

- The travelogue series "Rag Rag Mein Ganga" has been created by Doordarshan in collaboration with National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG).
- The 21 episode series, covering River Ganga's journey from Gomukh to Gangasagar, has been shot using state-of-the-art techniques including Drone Cameras and Go-Pro Cameras in HD Format.
- The show relays the message of the need of rejuvenating River Ganga while also informing about the efforts of the Government to clean Ganga-presented in a unique and interesting format.

Question:

1. Critically analyse the arguments in favour and against the scrapping of article 35 A. Do you think that scrapping this will ensure equality among the states in the country?
2. Do you think that Indian economy is ready for automation as prevailing in the western countries? Discuss the positive and negative impacts of automation on the Indian economy.
3. Discuss the various issues surrounding the authenticity of the Electronic Voting Machine (EVM). Highlight the features of the EVEMs in India which makes it tamper proof. Why do you think the EVMs are absent in the western electoral system? Should India continue to use EVMs or it should go back to the ballot system?
4. The aim behind electoral bonds was to eliminate the presence of black money in the Indian electoral system. However, it seems that it has rather opened doors which were previously closed for the black money to be channelled to the political parties. Do you agree? Highlighting the issues around the electoral bond system discuss the same.
5. Highlighting the proposed amendments in the land acquisition act 2013 discuss its advantages as well as disadvantages. Do you think the amendments go against the spirit of the constitution?
6. Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or RCEP is the biggest economic agreement aiming at enhancing investments manifold in the country. Yet, for India it may not be highly beneficial rather it will be disastrous in current form. Do you agree?

7. The recent trade war between the US and China signals that there are looming threats over free trade. Comment. Also, discuss the implications of such trade war on developing countries like India.
8. Critically analyse various challenges offered by the major world powers in near future for India. Do you think that Indian diplomacy is matured enough to handle such a situation. Discuss the present leadership vacuum created by the withdrawal of USA and emergence of China in the world
9. The Indian foreign policy has undergone various transformations in last few years given the changes in the current global politics. Yet it has not abandoned the spirit which inspired its formation at the time of independence. Discuss.