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I. POLITY & GOVERNANCE

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

1. Issues Related to sedition Law

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Recently, the leader of forum against the Citizenship Amendment Bill, noted Assamese scholar Hiren Gohain, and former journalist Manjit Mahanta have been slapped with sedition charges speeches at a recent rally that alluded to the possibility of a demand for independence and sovereignty if the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill was pushed through Parliament.

What is sedition law?

- According to section 124- A of Indian Penal Code, whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by signs, or by visible representation, or otherwise, brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, or excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards, the government established by law shall be punished with imprisonment for life or any shorter term, to which fine may be added, or with imprisonment which may extend to three years, to which fine may be added.
- The expression “disaffection” includes disloyalty and all feelings of enmity.
- Exceptions:
 1. Comments expressing disapproval of the measures of the government with a view to obtain their alteration by lawful means, without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.
 2. Comments expressing disapproval of the administrative or other action of the government without exciting or attempting to excite hatred, contempt or disaffection, do not constitute an offence under this section.

Analysis of this imposition of sedition law:

- The sedition law in independent India has colonial origins being enunciated by the English Government in the year 1870.
- Experts opine that the slapping of sedition charges against these leaders for remarks made against the proposed citizenship law is misuse of the law relating to sedition as the act is disapproval of the governments action without any hatred or contempt thus it comes under exception no 2.
- Action of the police in charging them with “offences against the state” under the Indian Penal Code is quite reprehensible.

- When the initial draft of the Indian Constitution was being debated on, sedition was included as one of the restriction on freedom of speech and expression as Indians had suffered greatly due the misuse of the sedition laws.
- Clash of freedom of speech and sedition:
 - (a) The right to freedom of speech & expression constitutes one of the essential foundations of a democratic society and laws like sedition takes away the right of the person to have an opinion.
 - (b) It is noteworthy that sedition is a colonial law which was imposed in India only to undermine the aspirations of Indians.
 - (c) Constitution of India has placed some restriction on freedom of speech which shows that its use cannot be absolute.
 - (d) A trend is emerging in India where any criticism is termed as sedition which becomes worse in the era of social media which is largely unregulated. Criticism is a well-known and celebrated facet of democracy cannot survive.

Various recommendations:

- Law commission, in August 2018 recommended to re-think or even repeal the provision of sedition (Section 124A) from the Indian Penal Code. It questioned relevancy of the law which was made to oppress Indians in independent India and said that an “expression of frustration over the state of affairs cannot be treated as sedition.” It however said that the stringent sedition law should be invoked only in cases “where intention” behind the act is to “disrupt public order or to overthrow the Government with violence and illegal means”.
- For merely expressing a thought that is not in consonance with the policy of the government of the day, a person should not be charged under the section 124-A.
- Supreme Court, in Kedarnath v State of Bihar, held that the Sedition law was constitutional but at the same time observed that the sedition law must be narrowly interpreted and if given wider interpretation, it would not survive the test of constitutionality.

Way forward:

- While it is essential to protect national integrity, it should not be misused as a tool to curb free speech. This was the recommendation of the Law commission which needs to be implemented.
- We need to understand that there lies a difference between populist opinion and constitutional morality. The Indian Judicial System should be

allowed to interpret the law, trial by media must be discouraged.

- The freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental right and also a basic human right. It gives an opportunity to an individual to express himself, dissent, self-improvement and free flow of information both imparting and receiving. The restriction on it have to be constitutionally valid and reasonable not arbitrary.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

2. Deadline for Lokpal search Committee

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

The Supreme Court has recently given deadline to the Lokpal search committee to short-list a panel of names for chairperson and members of the Lokpal to be placed before the high-power selection committee led by Prime Minister.

About Lokpal and Lokayukta:

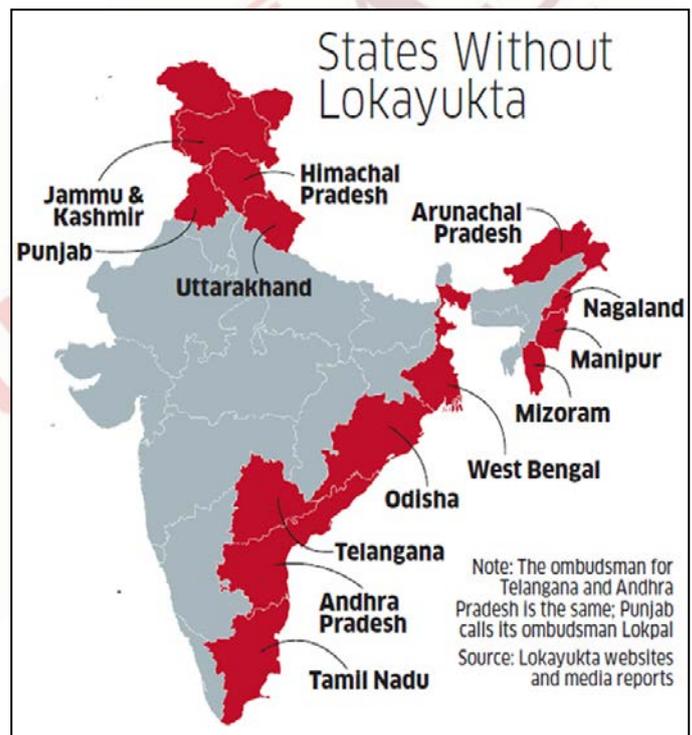
- The 'Lokpal' is the central governing body that has jurisdiction over all members of parliament and central government employees in case of corruption whereas, 'Lokayukta' is similar to the Lokpal, but functions at the state level.
- Their main function is to address complaints of corruption, to make inquiries, investigations, and to conduct trials for the case on respective state and central government with having responsibility to help in curbing the corruption in the central and state government.

About Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013:

- It seeks to provide for the establishment of Lokpal for the Union and Lokayukta for States to inquire into allegations of corruption against certain public functionaries and for related matters.
- The act extends to whole of India, including Jammu & Kashmir and is applicable to "public servants" within and outside India.
- It mandates creation of Lokpal at the central level and Lokayukta at the state level.
- The institution of Lokpal is a statutory multimember body made up of one chairperson and maximum of 8 members.
- chairperson of the Lokpal should be Either the former Chief Justice of India, or the former Judge of Supreme Court, or an eminent person with impeccable integrity and outstanding ability, having special knowledge and expertise of minimum 25 years in the matters relating to anti-corruption policy, public administration, vigilance,

finance including insurance and banking, law and management.

- Out of the maximum eight members, half will be judicial members. Minimum fifty per cent of the Members will be from SC / ST / OBC / Minorities and women.
- The members are to be appointed by President on the recommendations of a selection committee consisting of Prime Minister, Speaker of Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, Chief Justice of India or a Judge nominated by him / her, One eminent jurist.
- The term of office for Lokpal Chairman and Members is 5 years or till attaining age of 70 years.



What are the current issues?

- Though passed in 2014, the Lokpal and Lokayukta Act of 2013 was not implemented all these years because there was no Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the 16th Lok Sabha. The 2013 statute includes the LoP as a member of the selection committee.
- Supreme Court, in its earlier hearing stated that the government's stand on completing the appointment of Lokpal, as wholly unsatisfactory.
- The NGO, common cause had filed a contempt petition against the government for not appointing Lokpal despite an April 2017 judgment by the Supreme Court.
- The court has for the past several months been constantly urging the government to complete the Lokpal appointment.

- Several states have also not appointed the Lokayuktas.

TOPIC: GS II, ASPECTS OF GOVERNANCE

3. Social Media in Politics

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Facebook has recently announced to tighten rules for political ads in countries such as India where elections are scheduled in the first half of the year.

Related Concept – Section 126 of the RP Act, 1951:

- Section 126 of the RP Act prohibits displaying any election matter by means of television or similar apparatus, during the period of 48 hours before the hour fixed for conclusion of poll in a constituency.
- Election matter has been defined in this section as any matter intended or calculated to influence or affect the result of an election.
- The provision prohibits conduct of exit poll and dissemination of their results during the period mentioned therein, in the hour fixed for commencement of polls in the first phase and half hour after the time fixed for close of poll for the last phase in all the States.
- Violation of the provisions of Section 126 is punishable with imprisonment upto a period of two years, or with fine or both.

Recommendations of Umesh Sinha Committee:

Umesh Sinha Committee, constituted to review and suggest modifications and changes in the provisions of the Section 126 and other sections of the RP Act 1951 and provisions of Model Code of Conduct has recently submitted its report. Its main recommendations are as follows:

- Internet service providers and social media companies should take down content violating the 48-hour ban on campaigning prior to polling, instantly and latest within 3 hours of EC issuing such a direction.
- Amend section 126(1) of R P Act to impose the “campaign silence period” on print, electronic media and intermediaries. The definition of intermediaries, as per Section 2(w) of the Information Technology Act, includes telecom service providers, internet service providers, web-hosting service providers, search engines, etc.
- Bring in changes in the model code of conduct to ensure that parties release their manifesto at least 72 hours prior to polling (or 72 hours prior to polling for first phase in a multi-phase election).

- Star campaigners should desist from addressing press conferences or giving interviews on election matters during silence period. Also, in a multi-phased election, there should be no direct or indirect reference seeking support for parties/candidates in constituencies observing silence period.
- Intermediaries should ensure that their platforms are not misused to vitiate free and fair polls. This would include a notification mechanism by which EC may notify the platform of potential violations of Section 126 of R P Act.
- The intermediaries would also need to maintain a repository of political advertisements with information on their sponsors, expenditure and targeted reach.

Why is it difficult to regulate social media from violating model code of conduct?

- Under the current norms, the authorities can book a politician and the owner of the television channel for violating norms, but there is no provision to book lakhs of social media users who share the videos or images or written messages which play significant role in influencing the voter.
- In last few years, the number of smartphone users have increased manifold and most of the Smartphone users are active on social media like facebook twitter, whatsapp etc. Moreover cost of data uses have also gone down manifold.
- All these increase the penetration of fake news or news related to allurements of voters to the grassroots level of the society.
- Under the current norms, we can book a politician and the owner of the television channel for violating norms, but there is no provision to book the four lakh social media users who shared the video of the interview and may have had a role in influencing the voter.
- Due to the anonymity of the source of these messages the real culprit often goes scot free.
- Large numbers of Indian politicians are active on social media and they are being followed by thousands of young people. These leaders often advertise their electoral motives malign the character of their opponents under the garb of their official works as ministers.

Steps taken:

- Election commission has intensified its efforts to rope in competent agencies for keeping a tab on the content on social media for possible violations of model code of conduct by political parties and their candidates. The selected company would be entrusted with monitoring all the social media

platforms of all the contesting candidates and parties, including the content that is being generated in favour of/against the candidates/parties.

- The Election Commission is drafting a social media policy that will allow it to monitor content that transgresses the code of conduct and also checks the misuse of the medium for surrogate publicity.
- Guidelines of Election commission:
 1. Election commission has directed political parties and candidates not to make calls or send SMSes and WhatsApp messages between 10 pm and 6 am till the model code of conduct in is force. It is on the lines of prohibition of door to door campaign and use of loudspeakers between the same time during the model code of conduct.
 2. It has also directed the broadcasters not to broadcast any form of “hate speech” or other obnoxious content that may lead to incitement of violence or promote public unrest or disorder. “News broadcasters should strictly avoid reports which tend to promote feelings of enmity or hatred among people, on the grounds of religion, race, caste, community, region or language.

II. SOCIAL JUSTICE

TOPIC: GS I, SOCIAL JUSTICE

4. Devdasi System

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- Recently, a study conducted by National Law School of India University and Tata Institute of Social Sciences found that the practice of Devdasi still prevalent.
- The study also highlighted that the grim picture of the indifferent approach of the legislature and enforcement agencies to crack down on the practice. More than thirty-six years after the Karnataka Devadasis (Prohibition of Dedication) Act of 1982 was passed, the State government is yet to issue the rules for administering the law.

About Devadasi System:

- Devadasi (means servant of God) system is a religious practice mostly in parts of southern India, whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple.
- The tradition can be traced back to as early as the 7th century, particularly in southern parts of India during the reigns of the Cholas, Cheras, and

Pandyas. They were well treated and respected, and held a high social status in the society. It was common for them to be invited to be present at or initiate sacred religious rituals. As long as the temples and empires flourished, so did they.

- The marriage usually occurred before the girl reached puberty and required the girl to become a prostitute for upper-caste community members. Such girls are known as jogini.
- They were forbidden to enter into a real marriage.

Details of the study:

- The study revealed that special children, with physical or mental disabilities or Girls from socio-economically marginalised communities continued to be victims of the custom, are more vulnerable to be dedicated as devadasis.
- May be subjected to commercial sex hence are prone to AIDS and other health issues at a young age.
- Despite sufficient evidence of the prevalence of the practice and its link to sexual exploitation, recent legislations such as the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012, and Juvenile Justice Act of 2015 have not made any reference to it as a form of sexual exploitation of children.
- Dedicated children are also not explicitly recognised as children in need of care and protection under juvenile justice act, 2015 despite the involvement of family and relatives in their sexual exploitation.
- India’s existing immoral trafficking prevention law or the proposed Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill 2018, also do not recognise these dedicated girls as victims of trafficking for sexual purposes.

Way forward:

- The states have to ensure a more inclusive socio-economic development.
- A legislative overhaul and a more pro-active role from State agencies to curb the Devadasi system must be undertaken.
- Providing these communities with basic education and making them economically empowered, along with sensitisation, would be the ideal way forward.

TOPIC: GS II, EDUCATION

5. Assessment of Indian education system

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- NGO Pratham, has recently revealed its Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018.

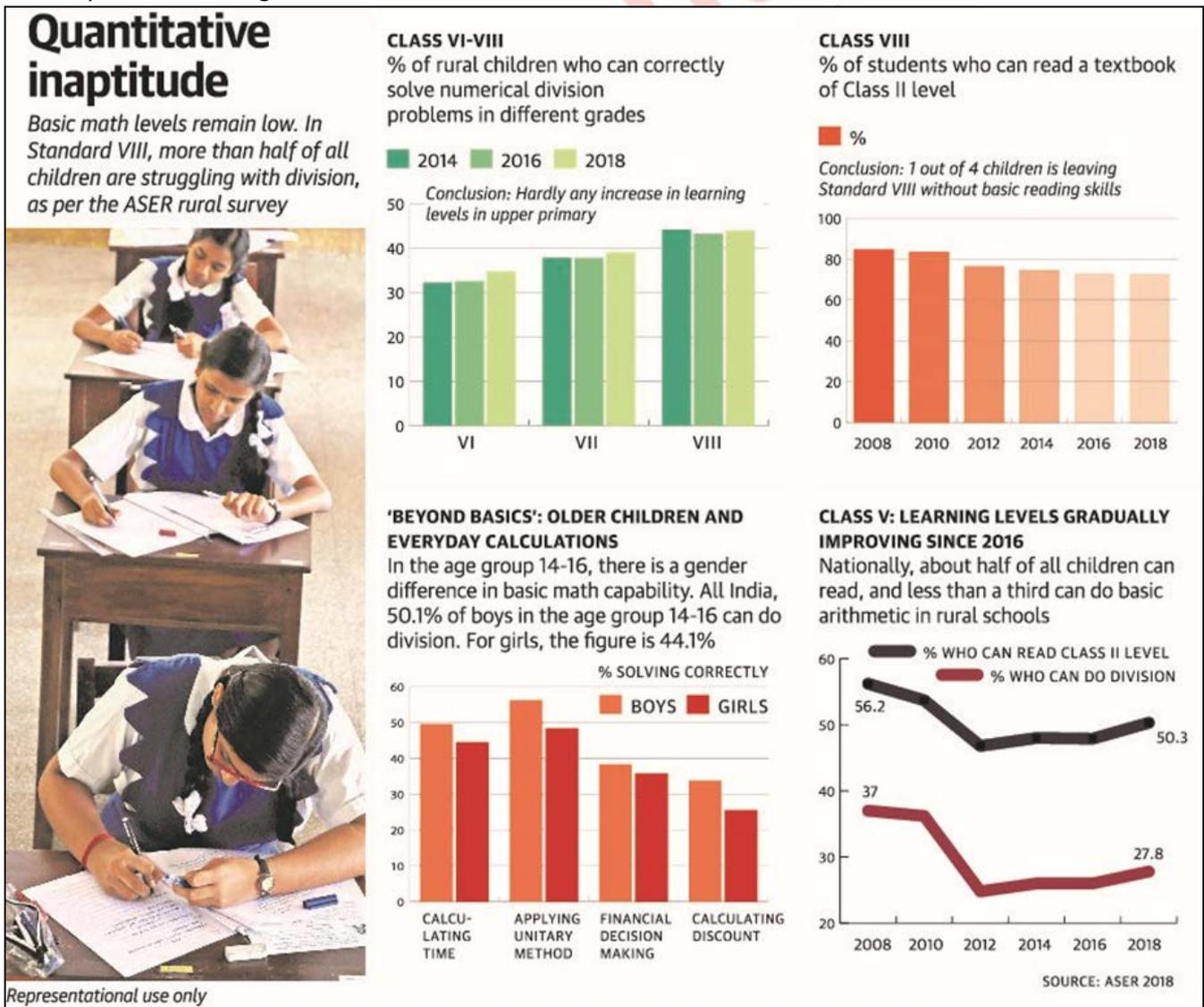
- It shows that there has been some improvement in the reading and arithmetic skills of lower primary students in rural India over the last decade, the skills of higher standard students have actually seen a continuous decline as more than half of standard 8 students cannot correctly solve a numerical division problem and more than a quarter of them cannot read a primary level text.

Highlights of the ASER 2018:

- Survey has been conducted in 596 rural districts across the country
- In 2008, 84.8% of Std. 8th students could read a text meant for class II, by 2014, only 74.6% could do so, and by 2018, that percentage had fallen further to 72.8%.
- According to the reports of 2014, only 44.1% of students in Std. 8th could correctly divide a three digit number by a single digit number which in 2018, fell to 43.9%.
- This deficit is present across government and private schools.
- Additional value added in terms of math skills for each year of schooling is low. All these will have a

direct bearing on future of the Indian workforce, its competitiveness and economy.

- The enrolment is increasing and the percentage of children under 14 who are out of school is less than 4%.
- For primary students, there has been gradual improvement since 2018 despite that, in 2018, less than 30% of students in std 3rd are actually at their grade level, that is, able to read a std 2nd text book and do double digit subtractions.
- The gender gap is also shrinking, even within the older cohort of 15-and-16-year-olds. Only 13.6% of girls of that age are out of school, the first time that the figure has dropped below the 15% mark.
- In 2006, the all India proportion of girls in the age group 11 to 14 who were out of school stood at 10.3% which fell down to 4.1% in 2018.
- According to Pratham, this report calls for immediate help in acquiring foundational skills in literacy and numeracy because without strong foundational skills, it is difficult for children to cope with what is expected of them in the upper primary grades.



Causes:

- There isn't much being done to cultivate the habit of reading among students in rural areas. Furthermore, a section of teachers aren't very good at reading either. We don't have a good system to promote reading habits. Classrooms have books for students to read, but seldom are they used to actively improve the reading skills. Even at homes, lack of encouragement often deters students from taking up reading. There is still much to be done on this front.
- The students between the age of 14- 18 don't have any proper mechanism for their counselling.
- Quality of the education system is still poor. Many governmental teachers have been found to be engaged in other governmental tasks like election.
- Infrastructural status of Indian education system is still questionable.

Way forward:

- Use of mobile phone is increasing among the children which have also increased their access to information. This could also be a great channel for counselling them.
- Merely increasing the enrollment rate will not increase the skill of elementary knowledge. Hence, in place of enrollment, there is need of improving the cognitive skills of the students.
- Intervention at the early childhood learning, retention of students especially girls, and enhancing employability of the higher standards students is the need of the hour.
- Government teachers should not be made to engage in other governmental tasks. They should be made to focus on their teaching jobs only. Moreover, regular assessment of teachers will enable the government to reach the actual areas where effort needs to be made.
- Special attention needs to be made on the students who fall behind.

TOPIC: GS I, SOCIAL JUSTICE

6. Eradicating the menace of Child Labour

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- The governments of Rajasthan and Bihar have recently joined hands to eradicate child labour. This initiative is also being supported by the civil societies.
- Both the governments will take joint action to stop trafficking of children from various towns of Bihar to the workshops and home-based production

units in Jaipur. About 80% of children employed in the workshops in localities of Jaipur are trafficked from Bihar.

What is child labour?

- Child labour refers to a situation when a child is employed in activities to feed self and family. It prevents them from attending school and is a hazard to a Child's mental, physical, social, educational, emotional and spiritual development.

Child labour in India:

- According to the 2011 census of the total number of children who are victim of child labour are more than 10.2 million.
- Although in rural settings the number of child workers reduced from 11 million to 8 million between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, over the same period, the number of children working in urban settings rose from 1.3 million to 2 million.
- Major causes:
 1. Poverty and illiteracy of a child's parents
 2. Lack of awareness about the harmful effects of child labour
 3. Lack of access to basic and meaningful quality education and skills training
 4. High rates of adult unemployment and under-employment
 5. Cultural values of the family and surrounding society
 6. Conflicts, droughts and other natural disasters
 7. Family indebtedness
 8. Trafficking.
- Changing trends of child labour in India:
 - (a) The types of child labour have changed in recent years due to enforcement of legislation, awareness amongst buyers about child exploitation, and international pressure.
 - (b) Child labour is now more invisible because the location of the work has changed from the more formal setting of factories, to business owners' homes.
 - (c) There has also been an increasing involvement of children in the home-based and informal sectors.
 - (d) Children are engaged in manual work, in domestic work in family homes, in rural labour in the agricultural sector including cotton growing, at glass, match box and brass and lock-making factories, in embroidery, rag-picking, beedi-rolling, in the carpet-making industry, in mining and stone quarrying, brick kilns and tea gardens amongst others.

Steps taken to eradicate child labour in India:

- Global steps are UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment of 1973 (ILO Convention 138) and on the Worst Forms of Child Labour of 1999 (ILO Convention 182).
- At national level they are:
 1. In 1979, the Central Government formed the first statutory committee to analyse and research on the issue of child labour in India – the Gurupadswamy Committee. It resulted in enactment of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), “to prohibit the engagement of children in certain employments and to regulate the conditions of work of children in certain other employments” (preamble of the CLPR Act). It excludes a section of toiling children in the unorganized sectors including agriculture, as well as household work. In 2015, a major amendment was made to this act which stipulated that children between 5-14 years are not to be employed in any occupation (except in the entertainment industry).
 2. National Policy on Child Labour (1987), with a focus more on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations and processes, rather than on prevention.
 3. Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 (the JJ Act) and amendment of the JJ Act in 2006: includes the working child in the category of children in need of care and protection, without any limitation of age or type of occupation. Section 23 (cruelty to Juvenile) and Section 26 (exploitation of juvenile employee) specifically deal with child labour under children in need of care and protection.
 4. The Right to Education Act 2009 has made it mandatory for the state to ensure that all children aged six to 14 years are in school and receive free education. Along with Article 21A of the Constitution of India recognizing education as a fundamental right, this constitutes a timely opportunity to use education to combat child labour in India.

III. ECONOMY

TOPIC: GS III, INDIAN ECONOMY

7. EXIM Bank

Source: Livemint

Why in news:

Union Cabinet has approved ₹6,000 crore capital

infusion in Exim Bank and an increase in the Exim Bank's authorised capital from ₹10,000 crore to ₹20,000 crore.

Significance:

- The infusion of capital into Exim Bank would enable it to augment capital adequacy and support Indian exports with enhanced ability.
- It will give an impetus to new initiatives such as supporting Indian textile industries, likely changes in the Concessional Finance Scheme, likelihood of new letters of credit in future in view of the country's active foreign policy and strategic intent.

About EXIM Bank:

- Export-Import Bank of India was established in 1982 under the Export-Import Bank of India Act 1981.

Functions:

- It provides direct financial assistance to exporters of plant, machinery and related service in the form of medium-term credit.
- Underwriting the issue of shares, stocks, bonds, debentures of any company engaged in exports.
- It provides rediscount of export bills for a period not exceeding 90 days against short-term usance export bills discounted by commercial banks.
- The bank gives overseas buyers credit to foreign importers for import of Indian capital goods and related services.
- Developing and financing export oriented industries.

IV. ENVIRONMENT

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION

8. Sustainable Catchment Forest Management launched in Tripura

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

Tripura has launched the Sustainable Catchment Forest Management (SCATFORM) project which is undertaken with the assistance of JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency).

About SCATFORM project:

- The SCATFORM project aims to address issues such as forest cover loss and forest degradation have been mainly caused by shifting cultivation, which increases soil erosion risks on hill slopes especially in upper catchment areas.

- It would be implemented mainly in upper catchments where forest degradation and soil erosion are severe and livelihood improvement needs are high. The project aims to improve quality of forest in the catchment area by sustainable forest management, soil and moisture conservation and livelihood development.
- The activities undertaken under the project involves promotion of bamboo plantation, agroforestry based livelihood, eco-tourism development, development of value addition for bamboo and other Non-Timber Forest Product (NTFP) in order to create alternate livelihood opportunities for local communities.
- The 80 per cent of the cost is contributed by JICA and the rest would be funded by the state and central governments.

TOPIC: GS III, CONSERVATION, ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AND DEGRADATION, ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9. Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW)

Source: Economic Times

Why in news:

An alliance of global companies has launched a new organisation-Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW) to help eliminate plastic waste, especially in the ocean.

About the Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW):

- The Alliance to End Plastic Waste (AEPW), comprising about 30 companies, pledged over \$1 billion to eliminate plastic waste across the world. They aim to invest \$1.5 billion over the next five years for the same.
- The alliance is a not-for-profit organisation that includes companies that make, use, sell, process, collect and recycle plastics. This includes chemical and plastic manufacturers, consumer goods companies, retailers, converters, and waste management companies, also known as the plastics value chain.
- It includes companies from across North and South America, Europe, Asia, Southeast Asia, Africa as well as the Middle East are part of the Alliance.
- The Global Companies Alliance will develop and bring to scale solutions that will minimise and manage plastic waste and promote solutions for used plastics by helping to enable a circular economy.

- From India, Reliance Industries will advance efforts towards a sustainable future.

The Issue:

- Plastics have helped improve living standards, hygiene and nutrition around the world, especially in developing countries. Rapid increases in incomes and prosperity have brought many of the conveniences of modern life. But used plastics have become a global environmental challenge.

Way ahead:

- Addressing plastic waste in the environment requires the participation and long term commitment of all aspects of society, including consumers, manufacturers, technology developers, the finance community, government and civil society. No one country, company or community can solve this on their own.

V. INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TOPIC: GS II, IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

10. Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

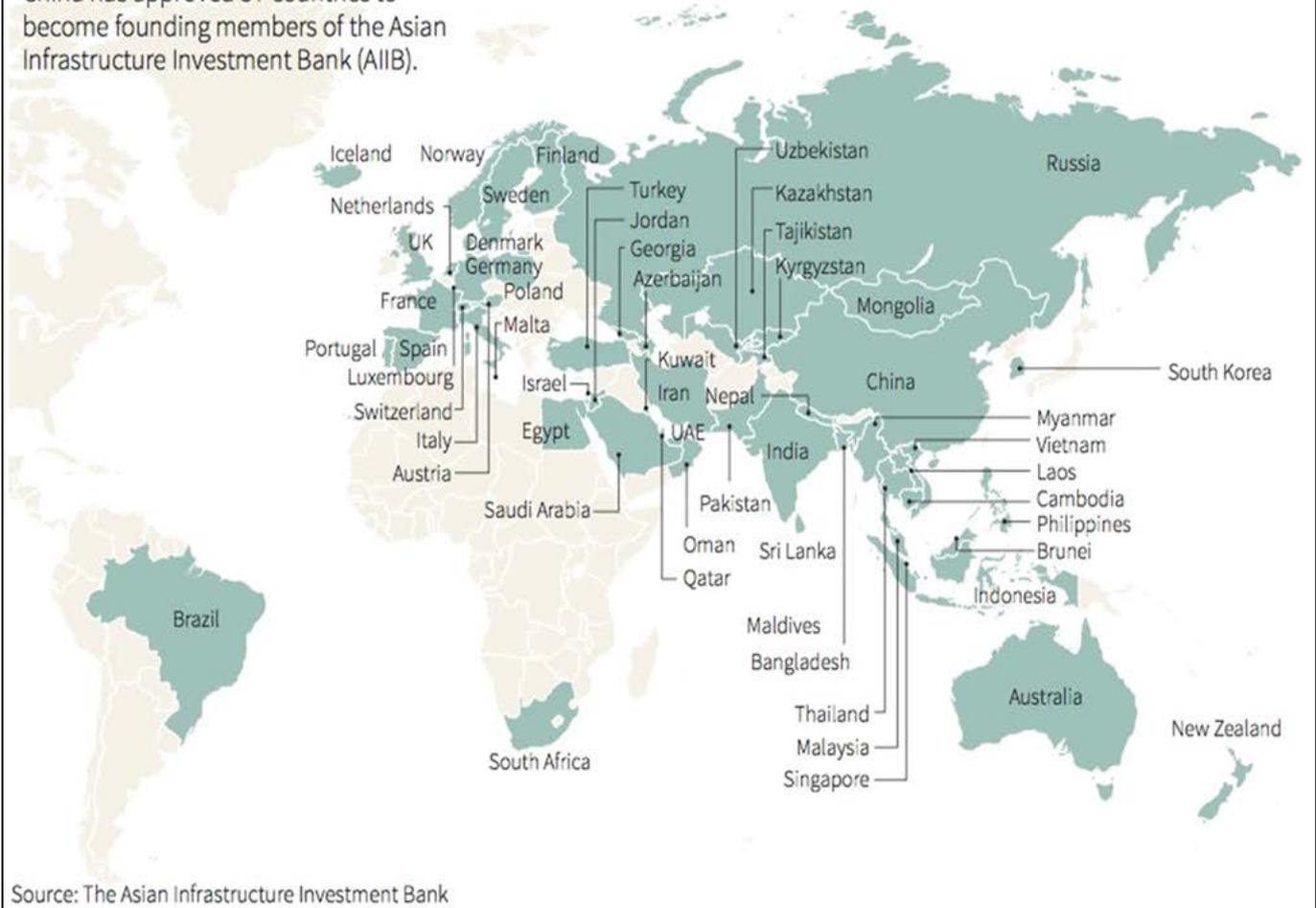
Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) was recently in news for completing its 3rd year of establishment.

About AIIB:

- It is a multilateral development bank which was established in 2016 with its headquarters located in Beijing.
- It is a new multilateral financial institution founded to bring countries together to address the daunting infrastructure needs across Asia.
- The bank has 52 member states.
- It aims to stimulate growth and improve access to basic services by furthering interconnectivity and economic development in the region through advancements in infrastructure.
- It offers sovereign and non-sovereign finance for projects in energy and power, transportation and telecommunications, rural infrastructure and agriculture development, water supply and sanitation, environmental protection, urban development and logistics.

AIIB founding members

China has approved 57 countries to become founding members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).



Source: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Myths and reality of AIIB in its aims and intentions:

A. Myth:

- The initial scepticism towards AIIB was that it was primarily a vehicle to fund BRI-related projects as well as to further China's strategic goals as the AIIB project was first announced in 2013 simultaneously with China's mooted the Belt and Road Initiative.
- The initial projects approved by the AIIB in 2016 were granted to China's close allies—mainly in Central Asia and Pakistan, as well as Oman, which was a strategic centre for the BRI.
- China is the AIIB's single largest contributor and holds around 28% voting share, giving it veto power over major decisions at the AIIB.
- Currently, a distracted U.S. appears neither willing nor capable of fundamentally reshaping and resourcing the much-vaunted Bretton Woods-era institutions for the challenges of the 21st century.
- India, China and other multilaterally minded major countries will need to pick up this gauntlet in the areas of trade, development and finance.
- The successful mainstreaming of the AIIB in three short years must become just the beginning of system-wide reform and overhaul.

B. Reality:

- India has been the bank's biggest beneficiary, with a quarter of the AIIB's approved projects geared towards its development. India is also the only country apart from China to enjoy a permanent seat on the Bank's board of directors. It is noteworthy that India is not the part of China's sponsored Belt and Road initiative. Hence AIIB as an institute to fund only BRI can be easily negated.
- Attack of critics that AIIB is barely a concealed attempt by China, India and the global south to supplant the existing international financial order can also be refuted as Most of its projects are co-financed with the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank, suggesting a healthy mix of complementarity and competition with its peers.
- Critics have also attacked AIIB for its non-transparent internal procedures, notably the lack of a resident board, and potentially lax loan appraisal standards, which they claimed would spark a rash of irrecoverable loans. They have also raised concerns related to governance and environmental and social safeguards.
- The reality is that the AIIB's lending practices have been socially conscious and prudent, attested by

its triple-A credit rating secured from the three major international rating agencies.

- Disregarding the U.S.A's effort to dissuade the western countries from joining the bank as its founding members, 90-odd countries have signed up as founding or prospective members.

Way Forward:

- Finally, as the AIIB marches from strength-to-strength, experts point out that it should develop a wider portfolio of projects in areas such as smart cities, renewable energy, urban transport, clean coal technology, solid waste management and urban water supply.
- Along with the New Development Bank, its uniqueness must lie in faster loan appraisal, a lean organisational structure resulting in lower cost of loans, a variety of financing instruments, including local currency financing, and flexibility in responding to its clients' needs.
- AIIB should leverage its unique 'special funds mechanism' to crowd-in infrastructure financing from external sources, including extra-regional, public and private, as well as nurture infrastructure as a profitable asset class for capital market investors.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

11. China's debt trap and opportunities for India

Source: ORF

Why in news:

- According to a recent Wall Street Journal, Chinese officials offered to help bail out Malaysia in exchange for stakes in the Belt and Road railway and pipeline projects in Malaysia in 2016. This confirms that the monetary help offered by China in terms of loan of investments is a debt trap.
- Many experts are of the opinion that BRI is a scheme to entrap various strategic countries in debt traps, and transform them into client states for China.

Analysis of China's advancement under BRI projects:

1. Sri Lanka and Hambantota:

- It is a maritime port in Hambantota, Sri Lanka which is situated along the key shipping route between the Malacca Straits and the Suez Canal, which links Asia and Europe. An estimated 36,000 ships, including 4,500 oil tankers, use the route annually. Thus it is very important from strategic point of view.

- Despite the poor performance of the port, China continued to invest, and the port kept losing money. By this time, more than 90 percent of Sri Lankan government revenue was going towards servicing debt.

- To ease the debt, in return for USD 1.1 billion, Sri Lanka handed over 70 percent of the ownership of the port to China on a 99-year lease.

2. **Myanmar:** There are oil and gas pipelines linking Myanmar to China's Yunnan province, mooted as an example of China's strategic foresight are in the pipeline but afraid of the Hambantota effect, the Myanmar government is reportedly refusing to give any sovereign guarantees.

3. **Kenya:** Mega projects like the Mombasa-Nairobi standard gauge railway (SGR) built by the China has made it as a country with third highest Chinese debt in Africa and if it fails to repay it, it could, like Sri Lanka, lose its assets.

4. **Maldives** owe a major portion of their GDP for repaying loan of China.

5. **Pakistan:** In CPEC, out of the \$55 billion, \$35 billion will be spent on the power sector. China will be charging 17 per cent to 20 per cent guaranteed return to recover its loan early. According to the current estimates, Pakistan will have to repay \$90 billion by 2030, which is a task easier said than done. China will also charge Rs 8.50 per kilowatt an hour, while the reasonable rate is rupees five only.

What India should do?

- India should deepen its diplomatic relations with the neighbouring countries especially which are at greater risk of being engulfed in the Chinese debt trap. This will keep the options open for those countries and India will be able to overcome China in terms of influence.
- As India's investment run on the local partner concept in which the local contractors of the countries are involved while China works on minimum sharing of information basis. India should keep pursuing such policies as despite the being an anti Indian former regime in Maldives, the common people of the country remained friendly towards India due to such policies.
- India must not abandon its soft power attitude and work for restoring democracy in its neighbouring countries because China's BRI is more penetrative in those countries where democracy is not very strong and governments accountability is negligible which results in corruption and a large part of China's money go in

private pocket. Hence restoration of democracy will ultimately negate China's strategy of entrapping India's neighbours and undermining their sovereignty.

TOPIC: GS II, INDIA AND ITS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

12. Gilgit-Baltistan and India

Source: The Hindu

Why in news:

- India has recently protested against a recent order of the Supreme Court of Pakistan that brought the region of Gilgit-Baltistan within its ambit by stating that the region was, and would remain, an integral part of India.
- Pakistan in recent months had taken a series of steps to ensure full constitutional and legal guarantees to the region which was strategically important for the country especially in view of the passage of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.



About Gilgit Baltistan:

- Gilgit-Baltistan is a chunk of high-altitude territory at the north-western corner of Jammu and Kashmir. The region was a part of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir, but has been under Pakistan's control since November 4, 1947, following the invasion of Kashmir by tribal militias and the Pakistan army.
- At present it has an elected Assembly and a Council headed by the Prime Minister of Pakistan. This Council wields all powers, and controls the resources and revenues from the region.
- In any case, the so-called regional government is under the overall control of the federal Ministry of Kashmir Affairs and Gilgit-Baltistan in Islamabad.
- Gilgit-Baltistan or Northern Areas do not find any mention in the Pakistani constitution. It is neither

independent, nor does it have provincial status. This helps Pakistan maintain ambiguity about the region, in the way it does with Pakistan occupied Kashmir.

- India sees Gilgit-Baltistan as part of Indian territory illegally occupied by Pakistan. The unanimous parliamentary resolution of 1994 had reaffirmed that the region is a "part of the State of Jammu and Kashmir, which is an integral part of India by virtue of its accession to it in 1947.

Geo strategic Importance of Gilgit Baltistan:

- Without control of Gilgit, Gwadar has no meaning to China. For China, the \$46 billion China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which passes through Gilgit baltistan, is a means to enhance influence through rail, road and pipeline connectivity to Central and West Asia while linking Gwadar to Xinjiang through Gilgit. Besides, Xinjiang is only 2500 km from the Arabian coast but is 4500 km from the Pacific coast.
- For Pakistan, this region has highly significant as it hopes to get out of the economic distress by making CPEC a success. Gwadar, overlooking the Gulf of Oman and as an alternative to the Iranian port of Chahbahar will give strategic advantage to Pakistan. Importance of Gilgit baltistan also increases in the wake of non TAPI project being not implemented due to its disturbed Balochistan as the route for this pipeline passes from this region of the country.

VI. SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- DEVELOPMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIANS IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

13. UNNATI Programme

Source: ISRO

Why in news:

India announced a capacity building programme UNNATI (UNISpace Nanosatellite Assembly & Training by ISRO) on Nanosatellites development through a combination of theoretical coursework and hands-on training on Assembly, Integration and Testing (AIT) in June 2018 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the first United Nation conference UNISPACE+50.

More about the UNNATI Programme:

- U R Rao Satellite Centre (URSC) being the lead centre of ISRO for satellite building has designed the basic structure of this programme with equal emphasis on theoretical and practical exposure.

- The primary objective of the programme is to provide theoretical course on Satellite technology, comprehensive course on Nanosatellite realization and hands-on training to assemble, integrate and test a low cost, modular Nanosatellite.
- The programme is scheduled to be conducted in three batches. The first batch of the above programme is scheduled during 15th January – 15th March 2019. 30 participants from 17 different countries are participating in this programme. Two more batches are planned subsequently during October 2019 & October 2020.

TOPIC: GS III, ACHIEVEMENTS OF INDIANS IN SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY; INDIGENIZATION OF TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPING NEW TECHNOLOGY

14. ISRO's Young Scientist Programme

Source: Indian Express

Why in news:

Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has announced Young Scientist Programme.

- Young Scientist programme is part of ISRO's efforts to reach out to the student community. On the New Year day, ISRO had organised Samwad with Students and an announcement was made about the student outreach programme.

About Young Scientist Programme:

- It aims to inculcate and nurture space research fervour in young minds.
- It would be a one month programme. The students will be exposed to the practical experience of building small satellites.
- Mostly 8th standard passed out students will be given lectures and access to research laboratories. 3 students from each of the 29 States and 7 Union Territories will be selected for the Young Scientist program.

TOPIC: GS III, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY- DEVELOPMENTS AND THEIR APPLICATIONS AND EFFECTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

15. DD Science and India Science launched

Source: PIB

Why in news:

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) along with Doordarshan (DD), Prasar Bharati recently launched two science communication initiatives, DD Science and India Science.

- The channels have been conceived and supported by the DST and are being implemented and managed by Vigyan Prasar, an autonomous organisation of DST. An agreement has been signed between Vigyan Prasar and Doordarshan in this regard.

DD Science:

- DD Science is a one-hour slot on Doordarshan National channel which will be telecast Monday to Saturday from 5 pm to 6 pm. DD Science may be scaled up to a full-fledged channel in the future.

India Science:

- India Science is an Internet-based channel which will be available on any internet-enabled device and will offer live, scheduled play and video-on-demand services. India Science will have a 24x7 presence through www.indiascience.in.

Significance:

- The two science communication platforms are National level initiatives to elevate science into a celebration and bring it close to everyday life. DST and DD aim to make them jewels in the crown of the country for serving humanity for the furtherance of science.
- The two science channels which are milestones in the history of science communication in India, are the first step in creating a national science channel for the country. While India Science (www.indiascience.in) is already a 24x7 presence, DD Science may also be scaled up to a full-fledged channel in the future.

The two channels will have science-based documentaries, studio-based discussions, and virtual walkthroughs of scientific institutions, interviews and short films and will be completely free to access.

Vigyan Prasar:

- Vigyan Prasar (VP) is an autonomous organisation under the Department of Science and Technology. Vigyan Prasar aims to popularise science in India through several strategically important approaches.

VII. PRELIMS/MISCELLANEOUS

16. B. Tech course in AI by IIT Hyderabad

- IIT Hyderabad has announced the launch of a full-fledged bachelor's programme in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology.
- IIT Hyderabad has become the first institute in the country to launch full-fledged Bachelor's programme in AI technology.
- IIT Hyderabad will be the third institute to globally offer the B.Tech course in AI.

- Other institutes providing similar courses in AI are US-based Carnegie Mellon University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

17. Mount Shindake

A volcano- Mt Shindake has erupted on Kuchinoerabu Island of Japan. Kuchinoerabu Island belongs to Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan.

- The entire island lies within the borders of the Kirishima-Yaku National Park.
- The island is of volcanic origin and has an area of approximately 38 square kilometres. The Island has an active volcano.
- Increased seismic activity in 2015 and an eruption resulted in an ash cloud. Eruptions in December 2018 and January 2019 led to pyroclastic flows.

Kagoshima Prefecture:

- Kagoshima Prefecture (Prefecture is the first level of jurisdiction and administrative division in Japan) located on the island of Kyushu in Japan. This prefecture includes a chain of islands stretching further to the southwest of Kyushu for a few hundred kilometres.

18. Chakma and Hajong communities

About Chakmas and Hojongs:

- Chakmas and Hajongs came to India from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), having lost their homes and land to the Kaptai dam project (Karnaphuli river) mid-1960s. They also faced religious persecution
- Chakmas are Buddhists, while Hajongs are Hindus.
- Chakmas are close to Bengali-Assamese while Hajongs speak a Tibeto-Burman tongue written in Assamese.

What are the issues associated with them?

- The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, changes the definition of illegal migrants. The Bill seeks to amend the Citizenship Act, 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants, from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, who are of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian. However, the Act doesn't have a provision for Muslim sects like Shias and Ahmediyas who also face persecution in countries like Pakistan.
- The citizenship bill is facing opposition by the states like Arunachal Pradesh (where a sizeable population of these communities are currently living), on claims that the move will change the demographics of the mostly tribal state. The bill, if passed would serve as a legal basis for legitimising the claims of Chakma and Hajong refugees as the indigenous people of the state.

- Southern Mizoram has had a sizeable Chakma population for ages. But there is a perception among the majority Mizos that many Chakmas have crossed over from the adjoining Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh following displacement by the Kaptai dam. Some came later along with some 2,000 Hajongs, who are Hindus, because of alleged religious persecution.

19. Saksham 2019

Why in news:

- 'Saksham' (Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahaotsava), an annual high intensity campaign of Petroleum Conservation Research Association (PCRA) under the aegis of Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas has been recently launched by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.

About Saksham:

- Saksham is annual flagship event of PCRA with active involvement of Oil & Gas PSUs along with other stakeholders like State Governments.
- It aims at creating focused attention on fuel conservation through people centric activities and sensitize masses about conservation and efficient use of petroleum products leading to better health and environment.
- It also aims to intensify efforts for making citizens aware about conservation and effective utilization of petroleum products.
- It seeks to enthuse masses with new energy coupled with all-out effort for saving precious fuel, which will also contribute in keeping our environment green.

20. Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan

Yojana

Why in news:

- Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY) has recently crossed the milestone of one crore beneficiaries.

About PMRPY:

- PMRPY was announced on August 07, 2016 and is being implemented by Ministry of Labour and Employment through the Employees' Provident Fund Organization (EPFO).
- Under the scheme, Government is paying full employers' contribution of 12% (towards Employees' Provident Fund and Employees' Pension Scheme both), for a period of 3 years in respect of new employees who have been registered with the EPFO on or after 1st April 2016, with salary up to Rs. 15,000 per month.

- The entire system is online and AADHAR based with no human interface in the implementation of the scheme.
- PMRPY has a dual benefit i.e. on the one hand, the employer is incentivised for increasing the employee base in the establishment through payment of EPF contribution of 12% of wage, which otherwise would have been borne by the employer and on the other hand, a large number of workers find jobs in such establishments. A direct benefit is that these workers have access to social security benefit through Provident Fund, Pension and Death Linked Insurance. The terminal date for registration of beneficiaries through an establishment under the PMRPY is March 31, 2019.

21. Diffo Bridge

Why in news:

- Diffo Bridge has been recently dedicated to the nation by the Defense Minister.

About Diffo bridge:

- It is a 426.60 metre long Pre Stressed Concrete Box Girder type bridge over Diffo river on Roing-Koron-Paya road in Arunachal Pradesh.
- It has been complete by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO).
- It would provide uninterrupted access between Dibang valley and Lohit valley region of Eastern Arunachal Pradesh and an all-weather Road to the troops deployed on the China Border.

22. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana

Why in news:

- It has been recently found that the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Grameen) scheme is able to provide only 66% housing for the rural poor of its target to complete one crore houses in the current financial year. However, the scheme has been successful in reducing the average time of construction from 314 days to 114 days.

Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana:

- In pursuance to the goal – Housing for all by 2022, the rural housing scheme Indira Awas Yojana has been revamped to Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin) from 1st April 2016. Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided for construction of pucca house to all houseless and households living in dilapidated houses in rural areas.

Key features of the scheme:

- Under the scheme, it is proposed to build four crore pucca houses in total, by the year 2022

- The selection of beneficiaries will be on the basis of the Socio-Economic Census 2011 data and validating it through the Gram Sabha.
- The finished houses will be equipped with the facilities like toilets, liquefied petroleum gas connection, electricity connection, and drinking water availability
- The faster completion of quality houses has been assisted by payment of assistance directly into the beneficiary account through IT-DBT platform.
- In PMAY-G, programme implementation and monitoring is to be carried out through an end to end e-Governance model- Using AwaasSoft and Awaas App.
- Space technology and IT platforms are being used to monitor the cycle of house construction, right from identification of beneficiary to construction stages of houses to completion and each stage is being geo-tagged.
- The programme implementation is to be monitored not only electronically, but also through community participation (Social Audit), Member of Parliament (DISHA Committee), Central and State Government officials, National Level Monitors etc.
- Provision of assistance (Rs. 12,000/-) for toilets through convergence with Swaccha Bharat Mission.
- The beneficiary is entitled to 90 days of unskilled labour from MGNREGA.
- To ensure good quality of house construction, Rural Mason Trainings have been organized to facilitate availability of trained masons in the rural areas. The programme provides for skilling 5 lakh Rural Masons by 2019.

23. Elephantiasis

- Maharashtra is all set to roll out the World Health Organization (WHO)-recommended triple-drug therapy for lymphatic filariasis to speed up the elimination of the disease.

About Lymphatic filariasis:

- Lymphatic filariasis, commonly known as elephantiasis, is a neglected tropical disease.
- According to the WHO, infection occurs when filarial parasites are transmitted to humans through mosquitoes.
- The infection is usually acquired in childhood, causing hidden damage to the lymphatic system.
- It impairs the lymphatic system and can lead to the abnormal enlargement of body parts, causing pain, severe disability and social stigma.

- Millions of people in 52 countries worldwide remain threatened by lymphatic filariasis and require preventive chemotherapy to stop the spread of this parasitic infection.
- It can be eliminated by stopping the spread of infection through preventive chemotherapy with safe medicine combinations repeated annually for at least 5 years.

About Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs):

- They are a group of communicable diseases found in the tropical and subtropical regions of the world especially in 149 countries falling in this region

and affect more than one billion people, costing developing economies billions of dollars every year. They mainly affect populations living in poverty, without adequate sanitation and in close contact with infectious vectors and domestic animals and livestock.

- Some of the major NTDs are Dengue, Elephantiasis, Trachoma, Yaws, Leprosy, Soil-transmitted helminthiases etc.

Question:

1. Do you think that sedition law is relevant in the contemporary India? Critically analyse recommendations of different committees in this regard. Suggest measures to prevent its misuse.
2. Critically examine the different provisions of the Lokpal and Lokukta acts. What are the issues associated with its implementation?
3. Discuss the role of social media in the Indian electoral system. Critically analyse the recommendations of Umesh Sinha committee in this regard. Why do you think it is difficult to regulate social media for preventing the violation of model code of conduct?
4. What is child labour? Highlight the changing trends in child labour in India. Critically analyse the steps taken by the government for eradicating the menace of Child labour in India.
5. Do you think that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank is an instrument of China for advancing its policy of debt trap? Suggest measures for making it more significant for improving the infrastructural status of the countries in Asia.
6. Highlight recent cases which prove that the China's sponsored Belt and Road initiative is a debt trap. How this is an opportunity for India?