



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

APRIL 2019

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INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

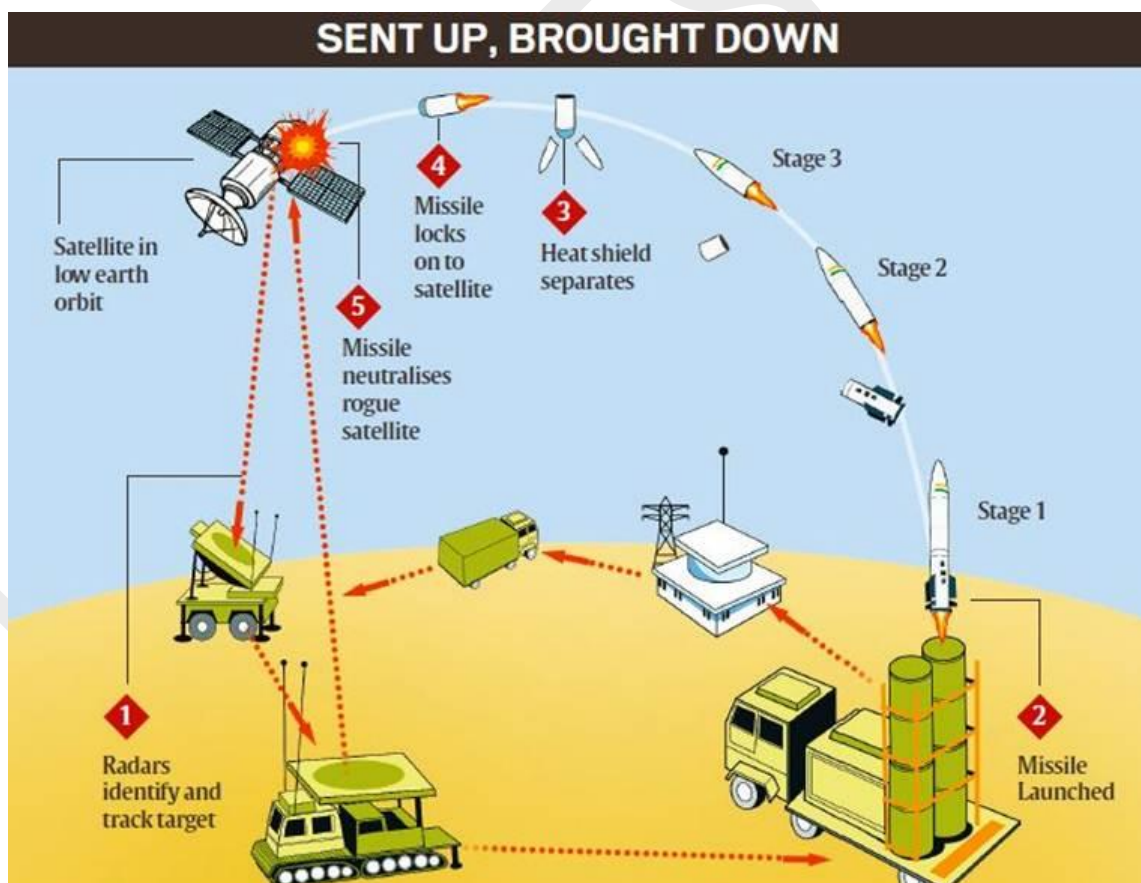
1. THE ABC OF INDIA'S ANTI-SATELLITE MISSILE TEST

Context:

- India announced to the world that it had carried out a **successful anti-satellite missile test**, becoming **only the fourth country** to do so.
- With Prime Minister Narendra Modi coming on television himself to make the announcement, the test is being described as a **giant technological and strategic development for the country**.
- Today, we are **using space and satellites** for all sorts of purposes, including agriculture, defence, disaster management, communication, entertainment, weather, navigation, education, medical uses, and other things.
- In such a situation, the **security of these satellites is extremely important**.

What is an anti-satellite missile test (ASAT)?

- It is the technological capability to **hit and destroy satellites in space** through missiles launched from the ground.
- Scientists and engineers at Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) launched a missile from the **Dr A P J Abdul Kalam Island** launch complex near Balasore in Odisha that struck a predetermined target: a redundant Indian satellite that was **orbiting at a distance of 300 km from the Earth's surface**.



Why is space debris such a big problem?

- Anything launched into the space **remains in space**, almost forever, unless it is specifically **brought down or slowly disintegrate** over decades or centuries.
- According to the September 2018 issue of **Orbital Debris Quarterly News**, published by NASA, there were **19,137 man-made objects in space** that were large enough to be tracked.

- These included active and inactive satellites, rockets and their parts, and other small fragments. Over a thousand of them are **operational satellites**.
- Besides these, there are estimated to be millions of other smaller objects that have **disintegrated** from these and keep floating around in space.

Anti-Satellite Missile launch adds to the Space Debris:

- When China carried out its **first anti-satellite missile test in 2007**, destroying its **Fengyun-1C weather satellite**, it created more than **2,300 large pieces of space debris**, and an estimated **1.5 lakh pieces of objects** that were larger than 1 cm in size. Each of them could render a satellite useless on collision.
- With countries launching **more and more satellites**, each one of them being a **strategic or commercial asset**, avoiding collisions could become a challenge in the future.
- According to the European Space Agency, there were an estimated **7,50,000 objects of size one cm or above in space**.
- A satellite that is destroyed by a missile **disintegrates into small pieces**, and adds to the space debris.
- The **threat from the space debris** is that it could collide with the operational satellites and render them dysfunctional. According to the ESA, space debris is one of the **principal threats to satellites**.
- Countries do not want to complicate matters by **creating more debris in space**.
- The Ministry of External Affairs, in its statement, said the Indian test was done in the **lower atmosphere to ensure that there was no space debris**.
- Whatever debris that is generated **will decay and fall back on to the earth** within weeks.

Did India Violated and International or Treaty?

- A-SAT missile will give **new strength to India's space programme**. India assure the international community that our capability **won't be used against anyone** but is purely **India's defence initiative for its security**.
- We are against arms raised in space. This test won't breach any international law or treaties.
- The test was timed according to **the degree of confidence** that the country could build, to **ensure success in the mission** and with no intention of entering into an arms race in the outer space.
- India has always maintained that **space must be used for peaceful purposes** and that **outer space is the common heritage of humankind**.
- The test does **not violate any International law or treaty** and also supported **UNGA resolution 69/32** on No First Placement of Weapons on Outer Space

Conclusion:

- ❖ A strong India is necessary for **the security of this region**. Our strategic goal is to **ensure peace** and not create an environment for war.
- ❖ While the government has conceded that India has long had **ASAT capabilities**, this is the **country's first demonstration** to the world.
- ❖ It has shown that it is **capable of bringing down a satellite, and disrupting communication**.
- ❖ Targeting satellites in the higher orbits, however, is only a matter of scale of powering the rockets enough to go deeper in the space.
- ❖ India stressed that it always been against the **weaponisation of outer space** and support international efforts to reinforce the **safety and security of space-based assets**.

Significance of Mission Shakti:

- Satellites are used by countries for **navigation, communications** and also for guiding their **missile weaponry**.
- The ability to **bring down an enemy's missile**, therefore, gives a country the capability to **cripple critical infrastructure of the other country**, rendering their weapons useless.
- Though the **United States** and the then Soviet Union both tested anti-satellite missiles **way back in the 1970s** at the height of the cold war, never has any country brought down the satellite of any other country, either during a conflict or by mistake.
- During the tests, countries **target their own satellites**, those which are **no longer in use** but continue to be in the space.
- A detailed statement by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) confirmed that an **Indian satellite had been used for the test, but did not specify which satellite it was**.
- PM Modi was careful to state that India's test was a "defensive" move, aimed at securing its space infrastructure, and does not change India's strong opposition to weaponisation of space.

- ❖ Many of the **most strategic satellites** are placed in **orbits that 30,000 km** from earth's surface or even higher. DRDO scientists claim **India has the technology to target these as well.**

2. A BLOW AGAINST ARTICLE 370

Context:

- On March 1, 2019, the **77th and 103rd constitutional amendments** were extended to **Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) by a presidential order**, with the concurrence of the **J&K Governor**.
- **77th constitutional amendment:** relates to **reservations in promotions** for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the State services
- **103rd constitutional amendment:** relates to special provisions for the advancement of **economically weaker sections** (10% reservation in education and government jobs to EWS).
- However, recently, this was challenged before the **J&K High Court**. Previously also, a petition has been **filed in the Supreme Court** challenging the **continued existence of Article 370**, which gives a **temporary autonomous status** to the State of Jammu and Kashmir and restricts the power of Parliament to make laws for the State.

What is article 370 Guaranteed By Constitution of India?

- The **Article 370** is defined under **Part XXI** of the Indian Constitution which deals with **Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions**.
- Though in this part (Part XXI) special provision are given to the states of Maharashtra, Gujrat, Nagaland, Assam, Manipur, Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh and Goa, the special power and provision of J & K are nowhere when compared.
- **Article 370 restricts Indian parliament** to make any laws for the state and it can only preside over the subjects like **Défence, External Affairs, and communication**.
- Laws related to union and concurrent list in J & K can be passed only after **consultation with the state government**.

Present order in President's rule: Against federalism

- The manner in which the **2019 order** was made also goes **against the spirit of federalism**, which is a salient constitutional principle.
- **President's rule** is an exception to the general constitutional scheme that envisages representative government at the State level to accommodate regional aspirations.

This Dilution in Governance and Administration: A slow death

- The sheer number of such orders, as well as the circumstances under which they were made, have considerably **eroded J&K's special status under Article 370**.
- From the 1950s there has been a **gradual dilution of the procedural norms** followed by these presidential orders.
- While passing the 1954 order, procedural propriety was followed in the fullest possible sense with concurrence from an elected State government and also State Constituent Assembly.

ARTICLE 370 OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION

- ❖ A temporary provision
- ❖ Grants special status to Jammu and Kashmir.
- ❖ Under Part 21 of the Constitution of India, which deals with "Temporary, Transitional and Special provisions", the State of Jammu and Kashmir has been accorded special status under Article 370.

Brief Background of Article 370:

- **Article 370 of the Indian constitution** is an article that gives **autonomous status** to the state of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The article is drafted in **Part XXI of the Constitution: Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions**.
- The Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir, after its establishment, was empowered to **recommend the articles of the Indian constitution** that should be applied to the state or to abrogate the Article 370 altogether.
- After the J&K Constituent Assembly later created the state's constitution and dissolved itself without recommending the **abrogation of Article 370**, the article was deemed to have become a permanent feature of the Indian Constitution.
- While the article was created to give **temporary, transitional, special provisions**, it has become a **Permanent feature**.
- In the years since Independence, this article was to be removed. But due to unwell administration and wars between India and Pakistan, this article has not been touched.

- However, the **presidential orders** made after the dissolution of the State Constituent Assembly except a **1986 order extending Article 249** (Article 249 deals with Power of Parliament to legislate with respect to a matter in the State List in the national interest), and the present 2019 order can be seen as the **first level of dilution**.
- Because, though concurrence of an elected State government was obtained, the **State Constituent Assembly did not exist** and, therefore, could **not give its ratification**.
- The **1986 order** represents a **second level of dilution**. This is because it was made when J&K was under Governor's rule as per **Section 92 of the J&K Constitution**. Governor acting without a popularly elected government can be considered as a "state government" for the **purposes of concurrence**.
- In the absence of an **elected council of ministers**, the Governor could not have validly given the requisite concurrence to the presidential order. **1986 order** was challenged in the J&K High Court and is **still pending**.

According to Author: The recent 2019 order can be considered third level of dilution.

- In December 2018, the President assumed **all the functions** of the State government and the Governor through a **proclamation under Article 356**.
- In an order passed on the same day, the President directed that all powers assumed by him would be exercisable by the Governor as well, "subject to the **superintendence, direction, and control of the President**".
- During Governor's rule, as was the case in 1986, the Governor is at least on paper expected to act independently.
- However, in the present case **involving President's rule**, the **Governor is reduced to a mere delegate of the Centre** and is expected to act as per the aid and advice of the Central Government.
- A presidential order made through obtaining such a **Governor's concurrence** is tantamount to the Centre talking into a mirror and makes a **mockery of Article 370**.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Extending **constitutional provisions to the State** during this exceptional state of affairs is suspicious.
- ❖ If the Centre had legitimate intentions, it should have waited until the **formation of an elected government in J&K**. In the absence of popular will backing it, the 2019 order clearly falls foul of the principles of constitutional and political morality.
- ❖ Commenting on the **1986 order**, the **Sarkaria Commission** had observed that "every action which is **legally permissible** may not be necessarily prudent or proper from the **political stand-point**".
- ❖ Not only is the recent presidential order against federalism generally and the **spirit of Article 370** in particular but it also violates the letter of the Constitution.

3. THE SHAPE OF AN URBAN EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE

Context:

- India is in the midst of a **massive job's crisis**. The unemployment rate has reached a 45-year high (**6.1% in 2017-18**) as per leaked data from the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) report** of the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- According to the **PLFS report**, the unemployment problem is especially aggravated in India's cities and towns.
- **Understaffed and underfunded statistical services** cannot possibly have sufficient domain expertise to undertake substantively informed analyses in all the areas for which statistical data are required.
- Aside from unemployment, **low wages and precarity** continue to be widespread. In urban India the majority of the population continues to work in the informal sector.
- Hence, India cannot ignore the **crisis of urban employment**.
- **Centre for Sustainable Employment**, Azim Premji University, recently published policy brief "Strengthening Towns through Sustainable Employment", which propose the **creation of a National Urban Employment Guarantee Programme**.

Idea of an urban employment programme

- The **idea of an urban employment programme** is gaining traction in political and policy debates.
- Both State and Central governments tend to treat **towns as “engines of growth”** for the economy rather than spaces where thousands toil to make a living.
- Programmes such as the **Swarna Jayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (1997)** that included an urban wage employment component have made way for those **focused on skilling and entrepreneurship**.
- In Madhya Pradesh, the new State government has launched the **“Yuva Swabhiman Yojana”** which provides employment for **both skilled and unskilled workers among urban youth**.
- **Green New Deal:** In the United States of America, **‘Green New Deal’ proposals** provide for a **‘Green Job Guarantee’** which enshrines ‘a legal right that obligates the federal government to provide a job for anyone who asks for one and to pay them a liveable wage’.
- Such a programme would give urban residents a **statutory right to work** and thereby ensure the **right to life guaranteed under Article 21** of the Constitution.
- Since it is an urban programme, it should have a wider scope than the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA); this would provide **employment for a variety of works** for people with a range of skills and education levels.
- There is a need to emphasise that it would **not come at the expense** of MGNREGA but rather the **two would go hand-in-hand**.



Reviving India’s small Towns and Cities:

- India’s small and medium towns are particularly ignored in the **State’s urban imagination**.
- As per **Census 2011**, India has **4,041 cities and towns** with an urban local body (ULB) in the form of a Municipal Corporation, Municipal Council or Nagar Panchayat.
- However, national-level urban programmes such as the **Smart Cities Mission** and the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (**AMRUT**) only benefit a fraction of them.
- Most ULBs are struggling to **carry out basic functions** because of a **lack of financial and human capacity**.
- Further, with untrammelled urbanisation, they are facing more challenges due to the **degradation of urban ecological commons**.

Present Employment Crises areas:

- Given the State’s **relative neglect of small and medium towns** and to avoid migration to big cities, such a programme can cover all ULBs with a population less than 1 million.
- In the context of the present employment crises, it is worthwhile considering to introduce an employment guarantee programme in urban areas.
- Urban informal workers with **limited formal education** would benefit from this programme.
- Along with addressing the concerns of underemployment and unemployment, such a programme can bring in **much-needed public investment** in towns to improve the **quality of urban infrastructure and services**, restoring urban commons, skilling urban youth and increasing the capacity of ULBs.
- To make it **truly demand-driven**, we have proposed that the **ULB receives funds from the Centre and the State at the beginning** of each financial year so that funds are available locally. Wages would be disbursed in a decentralised manner at the local ULB.
- They can undertake **standard public works** such as building and maintenance of roads, footpaths and bridges for a guaranteed 100 days in a year, at ₹500 a day.

- We have also proposed a **new set of “green jobs”** which include the creation, restoration/rejuvenation.
- **Maintenance of urban commons** such as green spaces and parks, forested or woody areas, degraded or waste land, and water bodies.
- Further, a set of jobs that will cater to the **“care deficit” in towns** by providing child-care as well as care for the elderly and the disabled to the urban working class have been included.

Skilling and Apprenticeship is the need of the hour:

- Another novel aspect is the creation of a skilling and apprenticeship programme for **unemployed youth** with higher education who can sign up for a contiguous period of **150 days (five months)**, at Rs.13,000 a month for five months.
- These employed workers can assist with **administrative functions** in municipal offices, government schools, or public health centres, and for the monitoring, measurement, or evaluation of environmental parameters.
- While the first category of work is aimed at providing **additional employment opportunities** and raising incomes for those in low-wage informal work.
- The second category is to provide **educated youth experience and skills** that they can build-on further.
- There is an estimate that such a programme will **cost between 1.7-2.7% of GDP per year** depending on design, and can provide work opportunities to around 30-50 million workers.
- In light of the **74th Amendment**, this programme should be **administered by the ULB in a participatory manner** by involving ward committees.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Our proposal provides **strong transparency and accountability structures** proactive disclosure of information based on **Section 4 of the RTI Act**, proactive measures through mandatory periodic social audits, public hearing and reactive measures through a **“Right to Timely Grievance Redressal” for workers**.
- ❖ An urban employment guarantee programme not only improves incomes of workers but also has **multiplier effects on the economy**.
- ❖ It will **boost local demand** in small towns, improve public infrastructure and services, spur entrepreneurship, build skills of workers and **create a shared sense of public goods**.
- ❖ A better way of building a **robust data infrastructure** may be to ensure that each major data collection activity is augmented by an analytical component led by domain experts, recruited from diverse sources, including academia.
- ❖ Hence, the time is ripe for an **employment guarantee programme** in urban India. Hence, we need new ways to **promote the sustainable development** of India’s small and medium towns.

4. A STOP SIGN: ON INDIA’S GROWING CARBON EMISSIONS

Context:

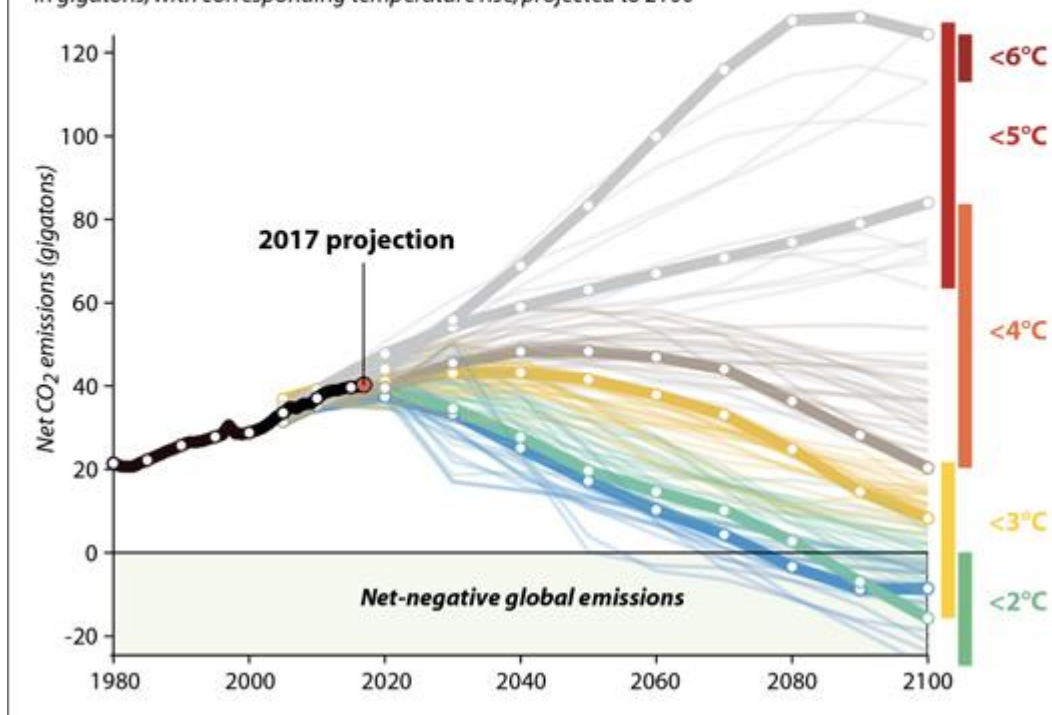
- **International Energy Agency (IEA)** recently released **Global Energy and CO2 Status Report** that highlights worldwide trends and developments of fuels, renewable sources, energy efficiency and carbon emissions.
- Report highlights **global energy consumption in 2018** increased at **nearly twice** the average rate of growth since 2010, driven by a **robust global economy** and **higher heating and cooling needs** in some parts of the world.
- Demand for all fuels increased, led by natural gas, even as solar and wind posted double digit growth. **Energy efficiency** saw lacklustre improvement.
- As a result of higher energy consumption, **CO2 emissions rose 1.7% last year** and hit a new record.

CO₂ Emissions Are Still Rising

Human-caused greenhouse gas emissions had appeared to be leveling off, but new research shows 2017 is headed for a new high. The future projections show how emissions levels translate to temperature rise.

FOSSIL FUEL AND LAND-USE CO₂ EMISSIONS

In gigatons, with corresponding temperature rise, projected to 2100



SOURCE: Global Carbon Project 2017

InsideClimate News

Global Findings by IEA:

- While emissions from **all fossil fuels increased**, the power sector accounted for nearly **two-thirds of emissions growth**.
- Coal use in power alone surpassed 10 Gt CO₂, mostly in Asia. **China, India, and US** accounted for **85 per cent of the net increase in emissions**, while it declined for Germany, Japan, Mexico, France and the United Kingdom.
- **Coal-fired power generation** continues to be the single largest emitter, accounting for **30% of all energy-related carbon dioxide emissions**.
- **Global gas demand** expanded at its fastest rate since 2010, with year-on-year growth of 4.6%. Oil demand grew 1.3% and coal consumption rose 0.7%.
- China saw the **most substantial increase in energy demand**, which grew 3.5% to 3,155 Mtoe, the highest since 2012.
- After three years of decline, energy demand in the United States rebounded in 2018, growing by 3.7%, or 80 Mtoe, nearly one-quarter of global growth.
- Energy demand in Europe in 2018 followed a different path. Despite an **economic expansion** of 1.8%, demand increased by only 0.2%.

India's energy demand outpaces global growth: IEA:

1. **India, the third-highest contributor**, is projected to see emissions rise by 6.3% from 2017.
2. The 2.7% projected global rise in 2018 has been driven by appreciable growth in coal use for the second year in a row, and sustained growth in oil and gas use.
3. **India's energy demand** outpaced global demand growth in 2018 according to the International Energy Agency. The growth in India was led by **coal for power generation and oil for transport**.
4. According to the IEA's Global Energy & CO₂ status report, India saw **primary energy demand increase 4 per cent** or over 35 million tonne of oil equivalent. This accounts for 11 per cent of global demand growth.
5. **Coal-fired power generation** continues to be the single largest emitter, accounting for 30 per cent of all energy-related carbon dioxide emissions
6. The higher energy demand was driven by a global economy **that expanded by 3.7 per cent in 2018**, a higher pace than the average annual growth of 3.5 per cent seen since 2010.

- An **increase in energy efficiency in Germany** resulted in a 2.2% drop in energy demand, with oil demand decreasing by more than 6%. Demand in France and the United Kingdom increased moderately.

Urgent action is needed on all fronts:

- Despite **major growth in renewables**, global emissions are still rising, demonstrating once again that **more urgent action is needed on all fronts** — developing all clean energy solutions, curbing emissions, improving efficiency, and spurring investments and innovation, including in carbon capture, utilisation and storage.
- Demand for natural gas accounted for almost **half the growth in global energy demand**, driven by the US and China, with global gas demand increasing by 4.6 per cent in 2018, the fastest pace since 2010.

Priority Areas for India to achieve India's INDC's:

- At the global level, **renewable sources of energy** grew by **7% during 2018**, but that **pace is grossly insufficient**, considering the rise in demand.
- Moreover, it was **China and Europe** that contributed the bulk of those savings, in **large measure from solar and wind power**, indicating that India needs to ramp up its capacity in this area.
- In fact, as the founder of the **International Solar Alliance**, India should lead the renewables effort. Yet, in spite of **falling prices and rising efficiency**, the potential of **rooftop solar photovoltaics** remains poorly utilised.
- It is time **State power utilities** are made responsible for defined rates of growth in the **installation of rooftop systems**.
- A second priority area is the **cleaning up of coal power plants**, some of which are young and have decades of use ahead.
- This process should be **aided by the UNFCCC**, which can help transfer the best technologies for carbon capture, use and storage, and provide financial linkage from the **\$100 billion annual climate fund proposed for 2020**.
- India's record in **promoting green transport** has been uninspiring, and emissions from fossil fuels and the resulting pollution are rising rapidly.
- The Centre's **plan to expand electric mobility** through financial incentives for buses, taxis and two-wheelers **needs to be pursued vigorously**, especially in the large cities.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **Oil demand** grew by 1.3 percent in 2018, while coal consumption was up 0.7 percent as higher demand in Asia outpaced declines everywhere else.
- ❖ More work was needed to **increase power generation** from renewable energy sources, with demand rising by 4 per cent last year.
- ❖ **Global gas demand** increased at its fastest rate since 2010, **up 4.6 percent** from a year earlier, driven by higher demand as **switching from gas to coal increased**.
- ❖ **Demand for energy from renewable sources** rose by 4 percent but the use of renewables needs to expand much more quickly to meet long-term climate goals.
- ❖ **Coal-to-gas switching** avoided almost 60 million tonnes of coal demand, with the transition to **less carbon-intensive natural gas** helping to avert **95 million tonnes of CO2 emissions**.
- ❖ Without this coal-to-gas switch, the increase in emissions would have been more than 15 percent greater.
- ❖ Inevitably, India will have to **raise its ambition on emissions reduction**, and participate in the **global stocktaking of country-level action in 2023**.
- ❖ It has the rare opportunity to choose green growth, shunning fossil fuels for **future energy pathways and infrastructure**.

5. ENSURING ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Introduction:

- The **justice system** in any democracy is set up, under the Constitution to serve the public **without "fear or favour, affection or ill-will"** as far as judges are concerned.
- The Indian Judiciary plays an increasingly important role **in the life and the governance** of this country.

- It is argued that the Indian judiciary has **become all powerful**, mostly by taking on enormous authority in policy areas that are technically beyond its ambit.
- But, As the author highlighted the India case: As far as India is concerned, in **operating the system** have stopped that very access judges through **lack of prescience**, and many lawyers through **their dishonesty** in many forms.

Revisiting judges advice on different benches of Supreme Court:

- Under **Article 130**, the Supreme Court can sit in other places to deliver justice.
- In fact, around a decade ago, the Central Government advised the Supreme Court to sit in other places, but, the Supreme Court decided against the idea.
- It was felt that the **authority of the Supreme Court** would get diluted.
- The Supreme Court shall sit in Delhi or in such other place or places, as the Chief Justice of India may, with the **approval of the President, from time to time, appoint.**
- At an informal meeting, all of the then sitting judges of the Supreme Court **advised the then Chief Justice of India** to decide against the request of the then Central government to sit in other places in the country under **Article 130 of the Constitution.**
- The reason judges decided against it was because we felt that the **authority of the Supreme Court would get diluted.**
- However, Many High Courts in this country have different Benches for **meting out justice without 'justice' being 'diluted'.**
- The **number of Benches** depends on the size of the State, the idea being to facilitate easier access to justice.
- For example, the **Bombay High Court has four Benches** — in Mumbai, Aurangabad, Nagpur and Panaji (Goa) and the quality of its decisions or status have **certainly not been diluted**

Direct consequence of the wrong decision has been three-fold:

- First, the Supreme Court **sitting only in Delhi** has resulted in excellent lawyers from other High Courts **not appearing before the Supreme Court**, possibly because it casts **too large a monetary burden on their clients**, many of whom are being middle class and lower-middle class.
- Second, all lawyers, whatever their **calibre or competence**, who happen to be in Delhi now appear in the Supreme Court.



- Some of the good lawyers who were able to leave lucrative practices in the High Courts have settled down in Delhi, but **they have established a monopoly**.
- As a result, **charge unconscionable fees** even from charitable concerns sometimes even when they do not appear at the hearing. This is also true of **litigating lawyers at all levels of the judicial system**.
- The third fallout of the **failure to act under Article 130** is that the **Supreme Court** in Delhi has been flooded with work and been **reduced to a District Court** instead of a Court of Final Appeal and Constitutional Court as envisaged under the Constitution.

Unethical lawyers: Resulted in Delaying and Denying Justice:

- But the fault in actually denying access to justice to citizens is the **fault of unethical lawyers alone**.
- Lawyers are (frequently) humorously **called liars**, and because they are the **middle-men** between judges and the litigating public, they act **like dishonest brokers**.
- Some of the lawyers specialising in **victim compensation cases** do not charge any fees for their services and render services free of cost.
- They generally **obtain a blank cheque from the victim** which is filled in after credit of the compensation to the bank account of the victim.
- Some of the lawyers specialising in victim compensation cases thus take huge money as a **percentage of compensation** amount awarded towards victim compensation. Such a **practice is frustrating** the whole purpose of victim compensation.
- The procedure is similar to that adopted by some advocates dealing with **Motor Accident Claim Cases** under Section 166 (application for compensation) of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.
- Incidentally, according to a study carried out by a **research organisation, Vidhi**, in the Delhi High Court, **more than 70% of the delays in the disposal of cases are attributable to lawyers**, a major reason being sometimes unjust pleas for adjournments.

Disciplinary action against Lawyers:

- Unfortunately, the **disciplinary powers available to Bar Councils** both in Delhi and in States are more often than **not ineffective**.
- Some are **politically motivated** and some States do not have disciplinary committees at all.
- The disciplinary jurisdiction over lawyers was **originally with the courts**.
- This continued till the power was taken away **by the Advocates Act, 1961**.
- The solution to the present situation is to **give the disciplinary jurisdiction back to the courts** and to repeal the Advocates Act, 1961.

The way forward:

- ✓ Therefore, to **hound out the corrupt lawyers** from the system **at all levels** so that justice may be truly rendered to the public, mentioned few suggestions:
- ✓ First, the Supreme Court should **reconsider setting up Benches in different States** in keeping with the recommendations of the **Law Commissions (125th Report and 229th Report)**.
- ✓ Second, the **Bar Council of India** should exercise its powers under the **Advocates Act, 1961** more effectively.
- ✓ If not, the **disciplinary jurisdiction must be returned to the judiciary** as was the position prior to the Advocates Act, 1961 by repealing the 1961 Act.
- ✓ Third, lawyers should be made irrelevant by **referring more cases to trained mediators**, as the Supreme Court has done in the Ayodhya dispute.

Conclusion:

- ❖ There are many underlying issues that **need to be addressed** if justice is to be **made accessible in a better way**.
- ❖ These issues are **hefty fees** charged by the lawyers to present a matter and the **huge court fee**.
- ❖ Unfortunately, lawyers are no exception when it **comes to monetary issues**. This is manifested in the manner in which some lawyers entrusted with state briefs handle matters.
- ❖ **Self-realisation** is the first step towards change. The Supreme Court has an **ideal opportunity to brainstorm** on this. In this connection, former judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts, sitting judges and academic luminaries can be a part of the process.

6. SERIOUS SETBACK: ON SC SETTING ASIDE RBI'S 'FEB. 12 CIRCULAR'

Context:

- The Supreme Court order quashing a **circular issued by the RBI on resolution of bad loans** is a setback to the evolving process for **debt resolution**.
- According to data from the ratings agency **ICRA**, the voiding of the **February 12, 2018 circular** could slow down and complicate the **resolution process for loans** aggregating to as much as **Rs.3.80 lakh crore** across 70 large borrowers.
- According to ICRA estimates, the total debt impacted by the circular at Rs 3.8 lakh crore, including Rs 2 lakh crore across 34 borrowers was **in the power sector**.
- As of March 31, 2018, 92% of this debt had been classified as non-performing, and **banks have made provisions** (percentage of bad asset that has to be 'provided for') of **over 25-40%** on these accounts.
- By taking a hard line and refusing to heed representations, the RBI may only have harmed its own well-intentioned move.

Setback for RBI

What did the Feb. 12, 2018 circular from RBI say?

- Banks to classify large loans as stressed within a day of default
- Banks to frame a

resolution plan within **180 days**, failing which, insolvency proceedings would begin

Why was the circular brought in?

- Existing schemes such as Corporate Debt Restructuring (CDR), Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A), Strategic Debt Restructuring (SDR) and the Joint Lenders' Forum (JLF) were proving ineffective

- Bad loans were pushing **10%** of total advances

- With the enactment of the IBC, the RBI wanted a harmonised and simplified framework for debt resolution

Who did the circular affect?

- Mainly power sector firms, and those in telecom, steel, infrastructure, sugar etc



SHAKTIKANTA DAS

About Reserve Bank of India's "February 12 circular":

- Through a notification issued on February 12, 2018, the RBI laid down a **revised framework for the resolution of stressed assets**, which replaced all its earlier instructions on the subject.
- The circular introduced a **new one-day default norm**, as soon as there is a default in the borrower entity's account with any lender, all lenders singly or jointly shall initiate steps to cure the default.
- Banks were required to immediately start working on a resolution plan for accounts **over Rs 2,000 crore**, which was to be **finalised within 180 days**.
- In the case of non-implementation, lenders were required to **file an insolvency application**.
- This is basically to harmonise the **framework for resolution of stressed assets**.

RBI's Intention to Introduce the Circular:

- **Mounting bad loans**, which crossed **10% of all advances** at that point, and the **failure of existing schemes** such as corporate debt restructuring, stressed asset resolution and the Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A) to make a dent in resolving them formed the backdrop to this directive.
- The circular was aimed at **breaking the nexus** between banks and defaulters, both of whom were content to evergreen loans under available schemes.
- It introduced a **certain credit discipline** — banks had to recognise defaults immediately and attempt resolution **within a six-month timeframe**.
- While borrowers risked being dragged **into the insolvency process** and losing control of their enterprises if they did not regularise their accounts.
- RBI data prove the circular had begun to impact resolution positively.

Resolution of Stressed Assets Revised Framework:

- **Indian banks' NPA** as a percentage of advances is expected to be at **10.3 per cent** as of March 2019, from 11.5 per cent in March 2018, according to **RBI's financial stability report**.
- The circular went into effect on the same day that it was issued, and all existing schemes for stressed asset resolution were withdrawn with immediate effect.
- Banks were required to immediately start working on a resolution plan for accounts over Rs 2,000 crore, which was to be **finalised within 180 days**.
- In case of non-implementation, lenders were required to file an insolvency application.
- The circular had forced banks to recognise defaults by large borrowers with dues of over Rs.2,000 crore **within a day after an instalment fell due**; and if not resolved within six months after that, they had no choice but to refer these accounts for resolution under **the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code**.

However, Supreme Court quashed February 12 Circular:

- Supreme Court said that February 12 circular is **"Ultra vires as a whole"**, it means the RBI has gone beyond its powers and thus "of no effect in law".
- Supreme Court struck down the RBI circular giving lender Banks six months to resolve their stressed assets or move them under the Insolvency Code against the private entities, who have **defaulted on loans worth over Rs. 2,000 Cr.**
- It gave relief to different sectors like power, telecom, sugar, fertilizer etc.

Impact of Supreme Court order of quashing Feb 12 circular:

- The order provides **immediate relief to companies** that have defaulted in repayments, especially those in the **power, shipping and sugar sectors**.
- However, many financial sector experts argued that the **verdict could delay** the process of **stressed assets resolution**, which had of late picked up pace.
- Since banks will have the **choice of devising resolution plans** or going to the **National Company Law Tribunal** under the IBC, the urgency that the RBI's rules had introduced in the system could be impacted.
- Voiding of the February 12 circular is **credit negative for Indian banks**. The circular had significantly **tightened stressed loan recognition** and resolution for large borrowers.
- The resolution of stressed loans impacted by the circular will be further delayed as the process may have to be started afresh.
- The Indian Banks Association had sought a relaxation in the **RBI's norms for infrastructure and power companies**.
- Banks will continue to have the option of **referring a defaulting borrower** under the IBC, in case the resolution plan fails. However, the resolution process, which was expected to be expedited, **may get delayed**.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The RBI's good work done in **debt resolution** in the last one year should not be go in vain.
- ❖ It is this credit discipline that risks being **compromised now**. The international ratings agency **Moody's** has termed the development as **"credit negative" for banks**.
- ❖ It is true that the **circular failed to take into account** the peculiarities of **specific industries or borrowers** and came up with a **one-size-fits-all approach**.
- ❖ It is also true that **not all borrowers were deliberate defaulters**, and sectors such as **power** were laid **low by externalities** beyond the control of borrowers.
- ❖ The RBI could have **addressed these concerns** when banks and borrowers from these sectors brought these issues to its notice.
- ❖ It is now important for the central bank **to ensure that the discipline in the system** does not slacken.
- ❖ The RBI should **study the judgment closely, and quickly reframe its guidelines** so that they are within the framework of the powers available to it under the law.

7. OUTER CLARITY: ON 'WEAPONISATION' OF OUTER SPACE

Context: India gets surveillance satellite:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched the country's **first electronic surveillance satellite, EMISAT**, from Sriharikota in coastal Andhra Pradesh.
- As many as **28 small satellites** of international customers were also put in space as secondary riders.
- Space-based electronic intelligence or ELINT from the 436-kg spacecraft will add teeth to **situational awareness of the Armed Forces** as it will provide location and **information of hostile radars** placed at the borders.
- **AMSAT or the Radio Amateur Satellite Corporation**, India, has sent a payload called the **Automatic Packet Repeating System**.
- This is expected to help amateur radio operators to get **improved locational accuracy** in their tracking and monitoring.
- This will be another dimension to current land or aircraft-based ELINT, according to defence experts.

NASA reports about Indian ASAT test:

- Despite a much-reported complaint from NASA about the Indian test leaving debris that could "pose a **risk to the International Space Station**" and adding that it was a "terrible, terrible thing".
- According to the US Strategic Command's Joint Force Space Component Command (JFSCC), there are **about 250-270 debris pieces** that have been generated from the **Indian ASAT test** which is more along the lines of the debris created during the **US ASAT test in 2008**, which was also at a similar altitude.
- However, it must be recognised that India conducted the test in a **responsible and transparent manner**.
- The fact that India decided to do it at an **altitude of 300 km in low earth orbit (LEO)** ensured that its action did **not lead to the creation of long-lasting space debris**.

But, There is Growing militarization of Outer Space:

- There is **no global regulatory regime** to address the growing militarisation in space which compels India to **develop deterrence for the security** of its space-based assets.
- **Anti-satellite technology** has so far been in the hands of very few countries: United States, Russia and China.
- The acquisition and demonstration of this technology make **India a member** of an elite group of countries.
- Outer space is becoming an arena for **technological shows of force** whether by deployment of spy satellites or testing of weapons.
- Missiles are one aspect of **space warfare**, there are several equally effective methods like lasers, to incapacitate satellites that are being developed and are of equally serious concern.

No global regulatory treaty: Therefore, No control weaponization of space:





- There is **no global regulatory regime** to address the growing militarisation in space.
- The **Outer Space Treaty** does **not ban military activities** within space or the weaponization of space, with the exception of the placement of weapons of mass destruction in space.
- Last year, at the **UN Disarmament Commission**, India expressed concern about the **weaponization of outer space** and sought collective action to secure space-based assets.
- As the regulation has **vacuum**, India has legitimate reasons to **develop deterrence** for the security of its space-based assets.

Outer Space Treaty, 1967:






- The **Outer Space Treaty**, formally the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, is a treaty that forms the **basis of international space law**.
- The Outer Space Treaty **prohibits only weapons of mass destruction** in outer space, not ordinary weapons.
- As of February 2019, **108 countries** are parties to the treaty, while another 23 have signed the treaty but have not completed ratification.
- The exploration and use of outer space shall be carried out for the benefit and in the **interests of all countries** and shall be the province of all mankind.
- Given the prohibitively **expensive nature of space projects**, India and other countries must utilise the increased presence in space to legitimately advance the **well-being of their people**.

- Along with international law, there is need of separation **between civilian and military use of outer space**, international co-operation, free exchange of ideas across borders and import of technologies and products **to bring transparency** and **to build confidence** among nations.

HOW MILITARY SATELLITES ARE COMMONLY USED

COMMUNICATION	EARLY WARNING	INTELLIGENCE	NAVIGATION
			
Satellite communication is perhaps the most important space capability for a military, allowing for real-time command and control of forces deployed anywhere in the world.	Early warning satellite systems were created by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. to watch for missile attacks by the other during the Cold War. Both the U.S. and Russia continue to update their systems today.	Intelligence satellites are used for imagery or signal interception. The most advanced remote sensing satellites are believed to have resolutions of up to six inches.	Navigation satellites are used to guide soldiers, identify targets, and for weapon guidance. Currently, the U.S., Russia, and China maintain navigation satellite constellations, while the EU is still in development.

HOW SATELLITES COULD BE ATTACKED

JAMMING	CONVENTIONAL WEAPONS	NUCLEAR WEAPONS	DIRECT ENERGY WEAPONS	SPACE-BASED WEAPONS
				
The easiest way to negate a satellite is to disrupt its communications signals, and the technology required to do so is easily attainable. For example, Iraq used GPS jamming equipment during Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.	Rockets or missiles could either be used to release a payload of metal pellets or gravel into the path of a satellite. Or they could be used to target the satellite directly with more sophisticated sensor technology.	Detonating a nuclear weapon in space would create an electromagnetic pulse that would be highly destructive for all unprotected satellites in the area.	Ground-based low-power lasers could be used to temporarily disrupt, or "dazzle", satellites. High-powered lasers could potentially be used to "heat to kill" electronics on satellites in low orbit.	Space-based negation technology would likely take the form of microsattellites that could be maneuvered near a satellite and exploded. This capability is entirely theoretical.

Conclusion:

- ❖ India needs to emphasise **outlining rules** for what is permissible. India has interests in ensuring that outer space is **kept clean, safe and secure for future generations to use as well**.
- ❖ It also has interests in strengthening its **credentials in global space governance**.
- ❖ Until now, India could not play an active role in this because it did not have that capability that gives it a voice in this arena.
- ❖ But now, India has successfully demonstrated **its ASAT capability**, it should play an important role in **mitigating problems** such as space debris, space traffic management, orbital frequency issues and other issues that are important for ensuring **safe and secure access** to outer space.
- ❖ India should partner with like-minded countries in **initiating** these conversations and take them to **meaningful international platforms** such as Conference on Disarmament, UN First Committee and UN Disarmament Commission.

8. HOW TO ACHIEVE 24×7 POWER FOR ALL

Context:

- Electricity consumption is one of the most important indices that decide the development level of a nation. **Electricity is the driver for India's development**.
- Almost every willing household in India now has a **legitimate electricity connection**.
- The household electrification scheme, **Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya**, has been implemented at an unprecedented pace.
- More than **45,000 households** were **electrified every day** over the last 18 months.
- The Government of India is committed to improving the quality of life of its citizens through **higher electricity consumption**. The aim is to provide each household access to electricity, round the clock. The **'Power for All' programme** is a major step in this direction.

Beyond connections: Uninterrupted Power Flow must be Way Forward:

- Despite such massive efforts, the battle against **electricity poverty** is far from won.
- The erection of electricity poles and an extension of wires do not necessarily mean uninterrupted power flow to households.
- While the median hours of supply increased from 12 hours in 2015 to **16 hours a day in 2018**, it is still far from the goal of 24x7.
- Despite the subsidies, **constant loss of revenue** would make it unviable for DISCOMS to continue servicing these households in the long run.
- Low consumer density along with **difficult accessibility** mean that conventional approaches involving meter readers and payment collection centres will be unviable for many rural areas.
- By tracking **more than 9,000 rural households**, since 2015, across six major States (Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal), the Access to Clean Cooking Energy and Electricity Survey of States (**ACCESS**) report by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), has **highlighted the gap between a connection and reliable power supply**.
- Similarly, while instances of low voltage and voltage surges have reduced in the last three years, about a quarter of rural households still report **low voltage issues** for **at least five days** in a month.

About Saubhagya:

- Government of India launched '**Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana**' (Saubhagya) in Sept. 2017 to achieve the goal of universal household electrification in the country **by 31st March 2019**.
- The scheme envisages to **provide last mile connectivity** and electricity connections to all remaining households in rural as well as urban areas.
- The Government with the support of State Power Departments and DISCOMS have already connected about 3 Crore households since launch of scheme.

PMO

- Named: 'Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana aka **'Saubhagya'**
- Aims:
 - To provide electricity to un-electrified households by March 2019.
 - To provide subsidy on equipment like transformers, meters and wires.
- Budget: Rs 16000 crore
- **No price will be charged for the poor to get an electricity connection.**
- Thomas Alva Edison invented the bulb and said: '*We will make electricity so cheap that only the rich will burn candles.*'
- 4 crore people of the country are yet to get electricity.
- India which used to face power shortage, is now a power surplus country.
- Mr Modi said, the installed power capacity has increased by 12 per cent during last three years and 60 thousand Mega Watt power has been added.



Therefore, How can we ensure 24x7 power for all?

In order to achieve 24x7 power for all, we need to **focus on three frontiers**:

- First, **India needs real-time monitoring of supply at the end-user level**:
 - We achieve what we measure. While the government is bringing **all feeders in the country online**, we currently have **no provision to monitor supply** as experienced by households.
 - Only such **granular monitoring** can help track the evolving reality of electricity supply on the ground and guide DISCOMS to act in areas with sub-optimal performance.
 - Eventually, **smart meters** (that the government plans to roll out) should help enable such monitoring.

- Second, DISCOMS need to focus **on improving the quality of supply as well as maintenance services**:
 - Adequate demand estimation and respective power procurement will go a long way in **reducing load shedding**.
 - Moreover, about **half the rural population** across the six States reported at least two days of 24-hour-long **unpredictable blackouts** in a month.
 - Such incidents are indicative of **poor maintenance**, as opposed to intentional load-shedding.
 - DISCOMS need to identify **novel cost-effective approaches** to maintain infrastructure in these far-flung areas.
 - Some States have already taken a lead in this. Odisha has **outsourced infrastructure maintenance** in some of its rural areas to franchisees, while Maharashtra has introduced **village-level coordinators** to address local-level challenges. Such context-based solutions should emerge in other States as well.
- Finally, the improvement in supply should be complemented with a **significant improvement in customer service**, which includes billing, metering and collection.
 - Success depends on curbing **DISCOM losses** and **consumer honesty**.
 - Distributed generation could complement **centralised grid electricity** to resolve both, and ensure sustained use of electricity not just for rural households, but also for the entire rural economy including farms, schools, hospitals, and small businesses.
 - It would lead to **improved consumer satisfaction**, as electricity truly becomes an enabler of prosperity in rural India.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Around **27% of the electrified rural households** in the six States were **not paying anything for their electricity**.
- ❖ We need **radically innovative approaches** such as the proposed prepaid smart meters and last-mile rural franchisees to improve customer service and revenue collection.
- ❖ **Rural renewable energy enterprises** could especially be interesting contenders for such franchisees, considering the **social capital** they already possess in parts of rural India.
- ❖ As we focus on granular monitoring, high-quality supply, better customer service and greater revenue realisation at the household level, we also need to **prioritise electricity access** for livelihoods and community services such as education and health care.
- ❖ Only such a **comprehensive effort** will ensure that rural India reaps the **socio-economic benefits of electricity**.

9. PRIVACY IN THE AGE OF SUNSHINE LAWS

Context:

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has finally concluded **hearing a crucial appeal** (after being nine years in cold storage) under the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005.
- One of the three crucial questions raised in this case pertains to **whether judges are required to publicly disclose their assets** under the RTI Act in light of **Section 8(1)(j)**.
- Participation, transparency, legitimacy and responsiveness form the pillars of good governance.
- The concept of good governance was applied in India through the passing of Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005, 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment.
- Right to Information Act, 2005 forms a **basic requisite of good governance** and the Act has played and is still playing a major role in bringing good governance by making our system **transparent and accountable**.

Section 8(1)(j) of RTI, Act:

- This provision **prohibits the sharing of personal information** that has no nexus to public activity or which amounts to an unwarranted invasion of privacy unless the **larger public interest justifies** such a disclosure.
- RTI is not absolute, it is balanced out with **right to privacy of public servant** and with necessarily check on disclosure of such information which can cause **damage to national security** or would cause embarrassment to the Government in its functioning or would be **prejudicial to national interest**.

- However, the RTI Act left this power of sharing of personal information to **Public Information Officer (PIO)** to cancel request on this ground **on its discretion** with very limited accountability.

Origin of the Present case:

- The case has its origins in an **RTI application filed in 2007**, in which the Public Information Officer of the Supreme Court was asked **by RTI activist**, Subhash Agrawal whether the **judges of the Supreme Court had complied with the terms of a resolution adopted in 1997**.
- Through that resolution all judges had committed to disclose information about **their assets and liabilities to the Chief Justice of India**.
- The resolution had specifically mandated that the information would **remain confidential**.
- In 2005, Parliament passed the RTI Act, **creating legal right to demand information** held by public authorities, which arguably also includes the CJI.
- The PIO sought to invoke, among other Sections, Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act to deny the information.

Exemption from Disclosure RTI Act 2005 Section 8(1)

1. Information that would prejudicially affect the sovereignty, integrity, security, scientific or economic interest and relation with a foreign state
3. Information received in confidence from a foreign government
5. Information which would lead to commission of an offence
7. If information disclosure endangers life and physical safety of any person
9. If it is likely to impede investigation and prosecution processes
11. If it is about a source of information or assistance given in confidence of law enforcement or security purposes

Exemption from Disclosure RTI Act 2005 Section 8(1)

Contd...

1. Cabinet Papers including deliberations of Council of Ministers, Secretaries and other officers
3. Information whose release is forbidden by a court or tribunal or disclosure which might constitute contempt of court
5. Personal or private information . subject to larger public interest . to be decided by the Public Information Officer.
7. Commercial and trade secrets, intellectual property etc. that would harm competitive position of third party . subject to public interest . to be decided by Competent Authority.
9. Information available to a person in his fiduciary relationship . subject to public interest . to be decided by the Competent Authority.

20

Case of Political Representatives in disclosing their assets and sources of income:

Supreme Court rubbished the privacy claims of the political class to disclose their assets:

- The five judges hearing the matter now and by them to assert the **fundamental right to privacy** as the basis for **not disclosing assets to the public** would necessarily require an implied overruling of landmark judgments.
- In **PUCL (2003) and Lok Prahari v. Union of India (2018)**, in which smaller benches of the court rubbished the **privacy claims of the political class** while forcing them to **publicly disclose** not just their assets but also the sources of their income.
- The final ruling of the Constitution Bench will also impact the **contentious Section 44 of the Lokpal Act, 2013**, which requires **all public servants** (this includes judges) to **disclose their assets** but is silent on whether the disclosure should be to the competent authority or the general public.
- This provision has already been the subject of an amendment in 2016.

However, there are some arguments against for disclosure of asset by Judges:

- Public disclosure of political class is done with the view of the **right to freedom of expression of voters under Article 19** to express their choice of vote.
- On the other hand, judiciary and public servant are **not directly accountable** to public but **accountable to Constitution and Laws by Parliament**.
- **Already Resolution adopted in 1997**: Judges of the Supreme Court had complied with the terms of a resolution adopted in 1997, in which all judges had committed to **disclosing information** about their assets and liabilities **to the Chief Justice of India (CJI)** well before the enactment of RTI.
- SC held that there is no question on the **integrity and neutrality of the CJI**. Hence transparency must not be seen as panache, it must be **balanced with trust, privacy and national interest**.
- In *Girish Ramchandra Deshpande v. Central Information Commissioner, 2012*, the Supreme Court ruled that the **assets of the bureaucrat** could not be revealed to an applicant under the RTI Act unless there was a **showing of a larger public interest**.

- Hence there is **no blanket ban**, if the person seeking such information could **demonstrate a “larger public interest”** such as wrongdoing or impropriety on the part of the public official, the information could be disclosed.

Conclusion:

- ❖ What the RTI Act has managed to **achieve in the last decade** is to unleash a silent **citizen’s movement** for **government accountability** across the country.
- ❖ **The RAAG report** found that on an average, **4-5 million applications** are filed under the Act every year. But this has not been without its negative consequences.
- ❖ The **foundation of RTI is being true to power**. If the purpose is to seek truth in exercise of all power then the question is not about all kind’s information has to be put in public domain.
- ❖ It would then be only a matter of time before politicians and their spouses seek the overturning of the PUCL and Lok Prahari judgments, thereby **turning back the clock on electoral transparency**.
- ❖ Complete information in public domain does not mean **good governance**. It is also about the **mindset and approach towards transparency**.

10. MALDIVIAN WAVE

Context:

- A massive victory for Maldives President Ibu Solih’s **Maldives Democratic Party** in Parliament and the return of ex-president Nasheed to active politics as a MP will **boost India’s strategic outreach** in its Southern neighbourhood where China has been attempting to make inroads.
- President Ibu Solih’s Party (MDP) won 67 out of 87 seats in parliament, a historic margin that will strengthen President Ibu Solih’s mandate to **investigate the former government’s ties to China**.
- The people of the **small archipelago** in the Indian Ocean **voted for change** and brought to power the Opposition candidate, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.
- Maldives has been caught in a **battle for influence** between India and China, which invested millions of dollars during Abdulla Yameen’s rule as **part of its Belt and Road plan**.



Maldives new govt. will investigate its debts to China:

- There are accusations that the Yameen government of allowing a **Chinese ‘land grab’ of Maldivian islands**, key infrastructure, and even essential utilities.
- This **‘land grab’** has raised the concerns of Maldives being increasingly falling into an **economic neo-colonial influence of China**.
- In the run-up to the elections, Solih’s party promised voters to **investigate debts to China**, which it fears could run as **high as \$3 billion**.
- Increased Chinese investments and BRI designs in the Maldives had made India wary as Delhi has been a **traditional net security provider in the region**.
- Ahead of last year’s election, former president Mohamed Nasheed, then in exile in Sri Lanka, claimed as much as **80% of the Maldives’ foreign debt was owed to China**.
- President Solih promised to reverse this and investigate **the former administration’s ties to China** amid accusations of corruption.

- Solih said a new commission would be tasked with “investigating corruption and **recovering state assets** function with the support of the new Parliament.”
- Addressing the supporters at the victory rally, President Solih reiterated his **zero-tolerance policy for corruption**.

Now Maldives want to unravel the web of Chinese Loans:

- So far as India’s interests in the **Indian Ocean Region** are concerned, warm bilateral ties between New Delhi and Male are a high priority after five years of **strategic drift** that benefited Beijing considerably.
- According to some analyses, the surging **influx of Chinese infrastructure** investment under the Yameen administration may have caused the Maldives national debt to balloon to **nearly a quarter of its GDP**.
- As it seeks to unravel this **web of Chinese loans**, the new leadership has promised that **what is owed would be paid**.
- However, the honouring of such debt, especially where it was linked to the **grant of land, lease rights and mega-construction projects**, will be complicated.
- MoUs on Indian grant aid for “**high-impact community development projects**” have been signed, as also agreements on **clean energy** and **regional maritime security**.
- So long as the new government presses on with the urgent task of rebuilding and deepening the Maldives’ democratic credentials, there is hope for **political stability and economic development** across the 1,192-island archipelago and the **wider IOR**.

India and Maldives friendship reaching new heights:

- Maldives foreign minister Abdulla Shahid has said that the friendship between India and Maldives has reached new heights since Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended the swearing in of President Solih.
- The Indian government had announced a **1.4 billion US dollars assistance to Maldives** and details of projects are being formulated. Maldives requested for assistance in **construction of a cricket stadium** during the recent visit to Male of External affairs minister.
- In an interview, Maldives foreign minister said that **development cooperation agenda** is being implemented at quick pace.
- Mr. Shahid said that his government’s promise for **people-oriented projects** like water and sewage facilities, are being implemented with generous assistance from the Government of India.
- Mr. Shahid also said that there is a **very fruitful defence cooperation** between the two countries.

Conclusion:

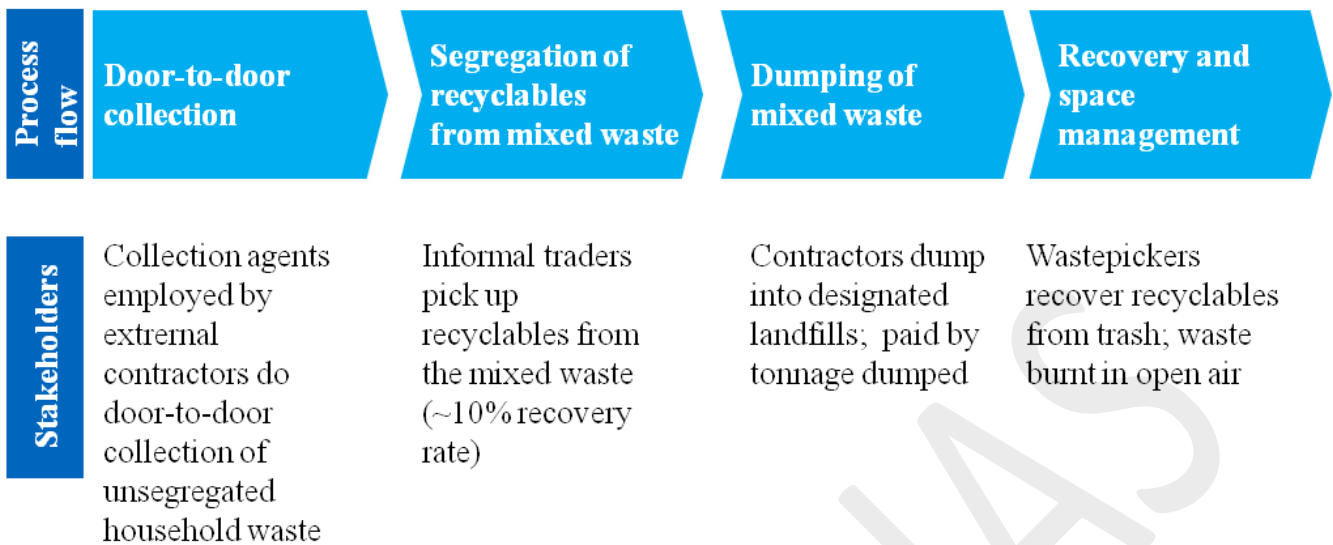
- ❖ Maldives is an island nation located in the Indian Ocean. Relation with Maldives is important for India given **its strategic location and geographical proximity**.
- ❖ As Mr. Solih grapples with above mentioned challenges, the assurance that the **Maldives has India’s backing would be vital**.
- ❖ Already, the elements of a **strategic reset with India** seem to be falling into place.
- ❖ When Mr. Solih visited India in December, a **\$1.4 billion financial assistance package** for the Maldives was announced, and the two governments agreed to exempt holders of diplomatic and official passports **from visa requirements**.
- ❖ By changing to **more democratic form of government** in Maldives, India can engage with Maldives to establish **much more friendly relations** than previous government era to protect the **safety and security of entire Indian Ocean region**.

11. CLEANING UP THE MESS: THE NEED FOR A WASTE MANAGEMENT POLICY

Introduction:

- In India, less than 60% of waste is collected from households and **only 15% of urban waste is processed**.
- **Hyperconsumption** is a curse of our modern times. Humans generate monumental amounts of waste, a sizeable portion of which is **disposed in landfills** and through **waste-to-energy incinerators**.
- However, billions of tonnes of garbage, including microplastics, never make it to landfills or incinerators and **end up in the oceans**.
- This garbage **chokes marine life** and disturbs zooplankton, which are **vital to the elimination of carbon dioxide** from the atmosphere.

- To understand the existing scenario of waste management, impact of poor waste management solutions, policies that have been framed to address it and the **major systemic changes** that need to happen to ensure this important public issue does **not turn into a national calamity**.



Unsegregated Waste end up in Landfills:

- In India, **nearly 60%** of the household waste is **wet organic waste**, with low calorific value.
- Landfills are seedbeds of methane and other greenhouse gases, which **contribute to global warming**.
- These toxic chemicals **poison the soil** and their leached run-off makes its way into the oceans. And while they do generate energy, **waste incinerators cause health issues such as cancer**.
- This makes options such as **waste-to-energy incinerators inefficient**. We need to design incinerators that are suited to Indian conditions.

Problems of unscientific MSW disposal:

- Only about **75- 80% of the municipal waste** gets collected and out of this only **22-28 % is processed and treated** and remaining is disposed of indiscriminately at dump yards.
- It is projected that by the year 2031 the MSW generation shall increase to 165 million tonnes and to **436 million tons by 2050**.
- If cities continue to dump the waste at present rate **without treatment**, it will need 1240 hectares of land per year and with projected generation of 165 million tons of waste by 2031, the requirement of setting up of land fill for 20 years of 10 meters height will require 66,000 hectares of land.
- Scientific disposal of solid waste** through segregation, collection and treatment and disposal in an environmentally sound manner **minimises the adverse impact** on the environment.
- The **local authorities** are responsible for the development of infrastructure for collection, storage, segregation, transportation, processing and disposal of MSW.

There are several problems in India in how waste is treated:

- First, segregation of waste into **organic, recyclable and hazardous categories** is not enforced **at source**.
- As a result, **mixed waste lands** up in the landfills, where waste-pickers, in hazardous conditions, try to salvage the recyclables, which are of poor quality and quantity by then.
- Second, ideally, waste management should **not be offered free of cost to residents**.
- Only if residents pay will they realise the **importance of segregation and recycling**.
- Third, there is the **issue of logistical contractors** who are motivated to dump more garbage in landfills as their compensation is proportional to the tonnage of waste.
- They are also prone to **illegally dump waste** at unauthorised sites to reduce transportation costs.
- Fourth, and importantly, **organic farming and composting** are not economically attractive to the Indian farmer, as chemical pesticides are heavily subsidised, and the **compost is not efficiently marketed**.
- There are solutions to the garbage pandemic through the **crucial processes of material recycling and composting**.
- Efficient composting is possible through an optimal combination of microbes and temperature to produce a **nutrient-dense soil conditioner**.

- If municipal solid waste management is done through **proper planning and management**, it would lead to a business case of **income generation** and provide **financial support to ULBs** by generating revenue.

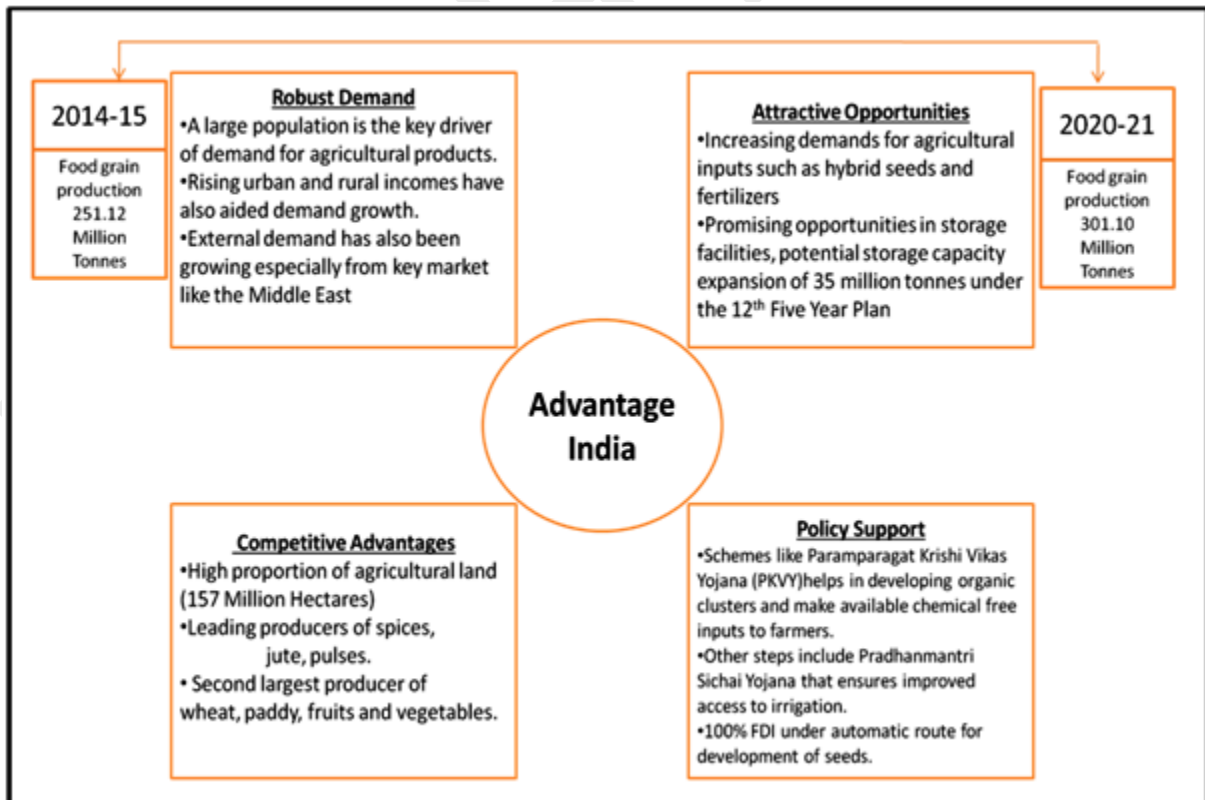
Conclusion:

- ❖ The manufacturers or brand owners of **sanitary napkins** are responsible for awareness for **proper disposal of such waste** by the generator.
- ❖ They should also need to provide a pouch or wrapper for disposal of each napkin or diapers along with the packet of their sanitary products.
- ❖ There is a need to give sufficient **power to the local bodies** across India to decide the user fees.
- ❖ Municipal authorities will **levy user fees for collection, disposal and processing** from bulk generators.
- ❖ As per the rules, the generator will have to **pay “User Fee”** to the waste collector and a **“Spot Fine”** for littering and non-segregation, the quantum of which will be decided by the local bodies.
- ❖ The need of the hour is we need a **comprehensive waste management policy** that stresses the **need for decentralised garbage disposal practices**. This will incentivise private players to participate.
- ❖ **Behavioural change and citizen/community participation** in SWM is the key to sustain a project related to management of municipal solid waste.

12. AGRICULTURAL POLICY NEEDS TO SHIFT TO A PRO-FARMER FOCUS

Context:

- Agriculture is the **backbone of Indian economy**. Agriculture plays a vital role in India’s economy. **Over 58 per cent of the rural households** depend on agriculture as their principal means of livelihood.
- Agricultural development in post-independence India started as a response to **food shortages** and the green revolution was designed to meet this challenge.
- Even after India became a net exporter of food grains, the mindset continued and food security **remained central to agricultural planning**.



Agriculture and its Allied Activities in GDP:

- Agriculture, along with fisheries and forestry, is one of the largest contributors to the **Gross Domestic Product**.
- Gross Value Added by agriculture, forestry and fishing is estimated at Rs 17.67 trillion (US\$ 274.23 billion) in FY18.
- As per estimates *by the Central Statistics Office (CSO)*, the share of agriculture and allied sectors (including agriculture, livestock, forestry and fishery) was 15.35 per cent of the Gross Value Added (GVA) during 2015-16.
- India is the largest producer, consumer and exporter of **spices and spice products**.
- **Agricultural export** constitutes **10 per cent of the country's exports** and is the fourth-largest exported principal commodity.
- India, the **second-largest producer of sugar**, accounts for 14 per cent of the global output. It is the sixth-largest exporter of sugar, accounting for 2.76 per cent of the global exports. India is the leading producer of wheat, rice, cotton, sugarcane & vegetables.
- The expansion of the public distribution system, price controls, export bans and the pernicious use of the Essential Commodities Act dominated the scene.
- Most of these interventions had an unapologetic consumer bias driven mostly by political considerations.

Some Major problems we are facing in Water Usage:

(i) Managing the Water–Energy Nexus in Agriculture:

- **Energy and water** are key inputs in agricultural production. It is essential to manage their **use efficiently**, and policymakers, researchers, academia, farmers, and social activists continually discuss how to formulate policies that will help.
- **Highly subsidised electricity pricing** has led to several negative externalities, such as over-pumping, higher energy use by crops, and the cultivation of more water-intensive crops, which have reduced water supplies in agriculture
- **Drip subsidy** is hindering the adoption and expansion of micro-irrigation in several states. **Subsidy norms need to be simplified** and made available to all farmers eligible for micro-irrigation.
- Most studies highlighted that issues and policy interventions that indirectly, through **electricity pricing policies** help reduce the over-exploitation of groundwater.
- Groundwater acts and rules, and spacing norms, are **ineffective**. Power pricing policies—such as metering of agricultural pump set connections and pricing of electricity (flat tariff, pro rata system)—are **socially and politically sensitive**.

(ii) Measures need to be taken for paradigm shift in Agriculture:

- The **subsidy regime** needs to undergo major structural changes. Investments for sustainable agriculture have to take precedence **over natural resource depleting subsidies**.
- **Restructuring of ICAR:** Changing the main objective of ICAR to focus on **best returns for farmers**. ICAR has done well to increase productivity and get India out of food insecurity.
- R&D for a new India needs to be focussed on the future. This might involve a major restructuring of ICAR and **creating space for private R&D**.
- However, Agri-education and Krishi Vigyan Kendras eat up most of ICAR's budget, leaving little for futuristic research.
- **Unemployed graduates in villages** can be trained to provide such services at a nominal rate.
- **Designing the agricultural policy** to focus on the best returns a farmer can get from his land.
- **Reforming the market and removing almost all restrictions:** EC Act, APMC Act, movement across states, most of the export restrictions, etc.
- There is need to make e-NAM and the village markets deliver for the farmers. If there is an occasional shortage, we can **resort to 'calibrated' imports**.
- Shift from a strategy of production-chasing demand and **work on a decentralised model** where farmers can produce to the market, not only in terms of aggregate demand, but also in terms of the various segments, time and geographies.
- **Creating reliable information systems** on market demands.

- In order to tackle challenges posed by **weather and climate variability**, efforts should **focus on micro-climate-based strategies and crop diversification**.

Conclusion:

- ❖ India is expected to achieve the ambitious goal of **doubling farm income by 2022**.
- ❖ The agriculture sector in India is expected to **generate better momentum** in the next few years due to increased **investments in agricultural infrastructure** such as irrigation facilities, warehousing and cold storage.
- ❖ Furthermore, the growing use of genetically modified crops will likely **improve the yield** for Indian farmers.
- ❖ India is expected to be **self-sufficient in pulses** in the coming few years due to concerted efforts of scientists to get early-maturing varieties of pulses and the increase in minimum support price.
- ❖ To boost adoption, the government should promote **cost-effective micro-irrigation system** designs, simplify subsidy norms, and **strengthen capacity-building programmes for farmers**.

13. JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE: 'DEEP REGRET' IS SIMPLY NOT GOOD ENOUGH

Context:

- Government of India has decided to mark the **remembrance of 100 years** of the historical Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre
- When we **observe 100 years** of the horrific **Jallianwala Bagh massacre**, India pays tributes to all those martyred on that fateful day.
- The massacre took place at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar during the **Baisakhi festival on April 13, 1919**, when troops of the **British Indian Army** under the command of Colonel Reginald Dyer **opened fire at a crowd of people** holding a pro-independence demonstration, leaving several dead and scores injured.
- It took Nobel laureate **Rabindranath Tagore** to capture the full import of the outrage at Jallianwala Bagh. In his letter of protest **renouncing the knighthood conferred on him**.
- **Their valour and sacrifice** will never be forgotten. Their memory inspires us to work even harder to build an India they would be proud of.

India will never forget the massacre happened:

- MPs had suggested that an apology was **owed to the victims and their families** as part of efforts to **strengthen relations with India**.
- "India will never forget," Conservative MP Bob Blackman, who introduced the debate told to the MPs.
- Over 80 MPs from across political parties signed a letter, initiated by Labour MP Pat McFadden, calling for an **"official apology."**
- Others argued that there was a **need for the U.K. to raise awareness** of the atrocity and the darker aspects of **Britain's colonial legacy in schools**, which would **help children understand** where they came from and where the country was today.

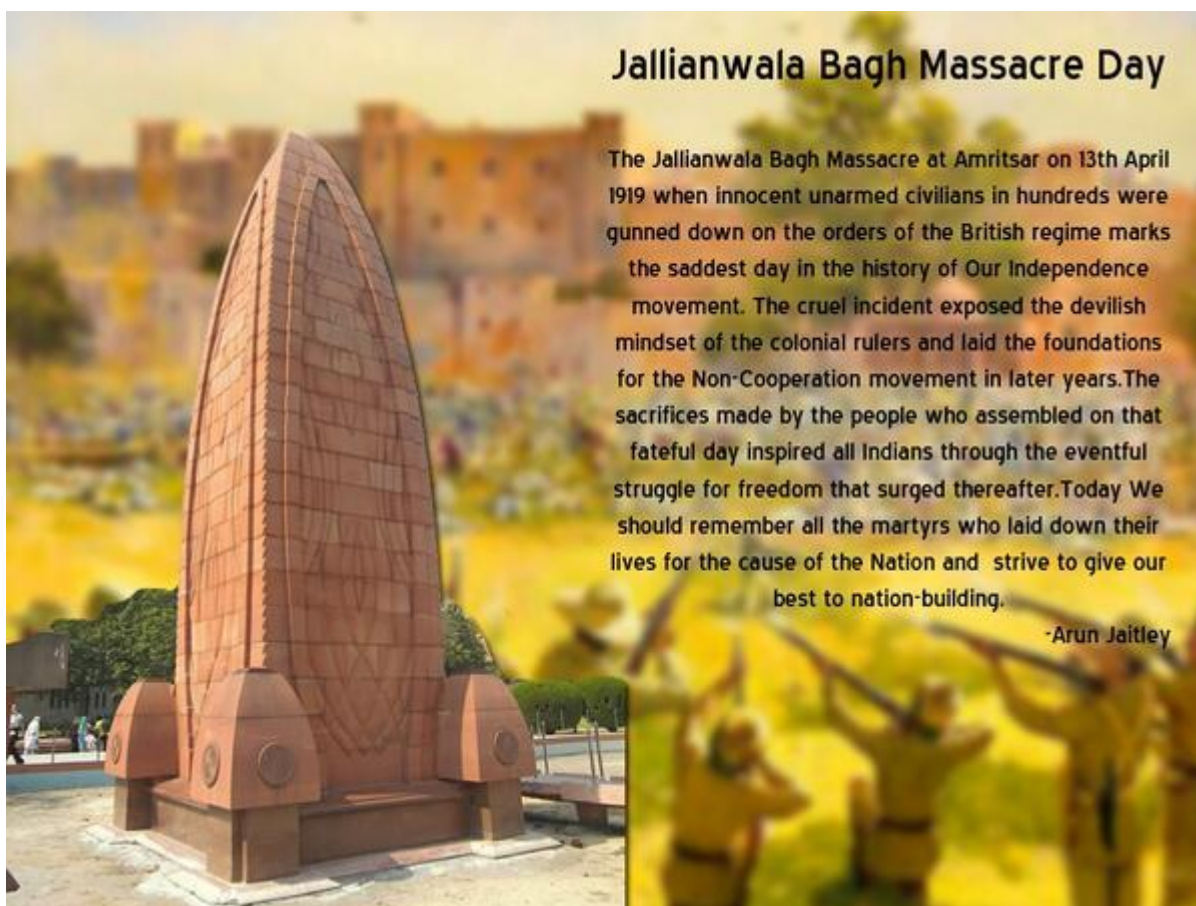
Britain expressed deeply regret for the incident:

- British Prime Minister Theresa May expressed **"regret" in Parliament** for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, ahead of the **100th anniversary** of the killings on April 13.
- Opening the Prime Minister's Questions with a reference to the massacre, Ms. May quoted Queen Elizabeth's remarks, calling the incident a **"distressing example" of Britain's past history with India**.
- "We deeply regret what happened and the suffering caused," Ms. May said.

In Recent Past, Canada Apologised for 1914 Komagata Maru Incident:

- While it is still uncertain whether the Britishers would act contrite for the excesses committed by them, **Canada apologised** for the **1914 Komagata Maru incident**.
- In Komagata Maru incident, hundreds of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim immigrants were **denied entry into that country** and turned away from the **port of Vancouver** to return to an uncertain and ultimately violent fate in India.

- In May 2016, **almost 102 years** after Canada turned away over 376 migrants, mostly Sikhs from India, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau formally apologised in Parliament for the **“great injustice”** that had happened **due to discriminatory laws of the time**.
- Trudeau apologised in the **House of Commons** for the **1914 decision** by the then Canadian government to turn away the migrants onboard the ship Komagata Maru after their arrival in Vancouver.
- Komagata Maru sailed into Vancouver harbour **on May 23, 1914** from Hong Kong, but most of the passengers were eventually turned away on the grounds of the **“continuous journey clause”** that allowed only travellers on a trip **without interruption to land in Canada**.



Jallianwala Bagh Massacre Day

The Jallianwala Bagh Massacre at Amritsar on 13th April 1919 when innocent unarmed civilians in hundreds were gunned down on the orders of the British regime marks the saddest day in the history of Our Independence movement. The cruel incident exposed the devilish mindset of the colonial rulers and laid the foundations for the Non-Cooperation movement in later years. The sacrifices made by the people who assembled on that fateful day inspired all Indians through the eventful struggle for freedom that surged thereafter. Today We should remember all the martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of the Nation and strive to give our best to nation-building.

-Arun Jaitley

Way Forward:

- ✓ Relations between the U.K. and India today are **friendly and constructive**. Yet, that does not mean that an apology would not do good.
- ✓ We cannot turn back or erase the past, but we can take steps to recognise what happened and to respond in a way that befits a modern relationship between two countries which today **enjoy normal and positive diplomatic relations**.
- ✓ The need for the world community to come together to **promote everlasting peace** in all the corners of the globe and ensure that **sustainable development of the planet** becomes the watchword at all times and at all levels from schools to summits of global leaders.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Jallianwala Bagh was a reminder to each one of us as to **how hard won & precious our freedom is**.
- ❖ It was an occasion to shed a silent tear for each of the innocent Indians who lost their lives that **Baisakhi day in 1919** and a poignant moment of reflection on colonial cruelty & irrational anger.
- ❖ The Vice President of India expressed hope that this day would inspire us to strive to create a **world without oppression & persecution**, a world of friendship, peace & progress, a world where all nations stand united to defeat **inhuman forces of terror & violence**.
- ❖ It is a day to reaffirm India's centuries long commitment to the ideal of **Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam**.

14. FORCING CHINA'S HAND ?

Context:

- Recently, U.S. opened another front in its ongoing **multi-pronged tussle with China** when it circulated a **draft resolution** to the powerful **15-nation UN Security Council (UNSC)** to blacklist Pakistan-based **Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar** and subject him to a **travel ban, an assets freeze and an arms embargo**.
- USA circulated resolution because it knows that the Chinese position on the issue as China had put a **hold on a French proposal** to list Azhar under the **1267 al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee** of the Council.
- Washington has underlined that it would **utilise “all available avenues”** to ensure that Azhar is held **accountable by the UNSC**.
- By suggesting that “while we strongly prefer that UNSC designations take place through the committee process, the United States and its allies and partners.

Terrorist activities by the Azhar and JeM:

- The presented draft resolution is **backed by France and Britain**, which joined the U.S. earlier this month in pushing for sanctions **against Azhar in the Al-Qaeda and Islamic State committee**.
- Azhar is **linked to terrorism** for “participating in the financing, planning, facilitating, preparing, or perpetrating of acts or activities” carried out by the JeM, according to an annex to the draft.
- China has been **accused by western diplomats** of protecting Pakistan’s interests in the latest stand-off with India.
- The Chinese mission to the U.N did not immediately respond to a request for comment.
- Security Council, will utilise all available avenues to ensure that the founder and leader of the UN-designated terrorist organisation JeM is **held accountable by the international community**.
- The **Pulwama terror attack** prompted tit-for-tat air raids, fueling fears of an all-out conflict between the two nuclear-armed countries.

China’s Reaction to the US Resolution:

- China, of course, has **reacted strongly to this move** by arguing that the U.S. decision to **go directly to the UNSC** to designate Azhar could scuttle China’s efforts to resolve the issue amicably.
- As per the **Chinese spokesperson**, “China has been working hard with relevant sides and is making positive results.

According to Chinese Foreign Ministry:

- The U.S. knows that very well. Under such circumstances, the U.S. still insists on pushing the draft resolution doesn’t make any sense.”
- But Beijing has defended its decision by arguing that it had **adopted a “responsible attitude”** in dealing “with this issue with relevant parties via **thorough consultation**.
- There appears to be little to be gained at present by forcing China further into Pakistan’s corner, especially as New Delhi has said it would pursue the Azhar listing with China with **“patience and persistence”**, in keeping with its desire not to **sacrifice the bilateral relationship** over the issue.

However, Chinese seems to be Isolated:

- Due to out of patience, the **US, the UK and France** are determined to force China’s hand this time by going **around the sanctions committee**, whose opaque operational rules of **confidentiality and anonymity** allowed China to **block the designation** without explaining its reasons or taking responsibility for it.
- The three powers want China to allow the **UNSC designation of Azhar** “tentatively” by April 23, or they will move to the next step by moving a formal resolution for discussion, vote and passage at the UNSC.
- With the latest proposal, the U.S. plans to **“shame” China** by bringing the Azhar listing to a **public debate at the UNSC**.
- And if that fails, it is reportedly considering a UN General Assembly statement **condemning Azhar**.
- To begin with, there is no indication that China is ready to change its stand, particularly in the **face of coercion or threat from the U.S.**, and it could veto this proposal as well.

CHINA BAILS OUT MASOOD AZHAR AGAIN

Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) chief Masood Azhar escapes being designated a 'global terrorist' for the fourth time, as China yet again put a 'technical hold' on the proposal at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In the aftermath of the Pulwama terrorist attack France moved a new proposal to blacklist JeM and was backed by the US and UK, but like previous three such attempts China blocks again. EXPLAINED:



THE NEW PROPOSAL

- **February 27** – The proposal to designate Masood Azhar under the 1267 Sanctions Committee – the ISIL and al-Qaeda Sanctions Committee of the UNSC – was moved
- **3 UNSC members** – France, United Kingdom and the United States of America moved the proposal, Germany and the rest of the UNSC members became the co-sponsors later
- **March 13** – Was the deadline for the committee members to raise their objections
- **Envoys of 25 countries**, including those from five permanent UNSC members, were briefed by India
- **15 member** countries of the UNSC were given specific details of JeM involvement in terror activities in India
- **Out of 15 members countries** at the UNSC, 13 countries supported the bid to designate JeM chief a global terrorist
- **12:30 am on March 13**, is when the deadline for raising objections expired, China blocked the move to ban around 11: 30 pm

THE PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS

- 2019:** France moved a new proposal to blacklist JeM and was backed by the US and UK, but China blocked again on the pretext that it needs more time to examine the sanction request
- 2017:** The US, UK and France again move the proposal under the 1267 Sanctions Committee, China blocked the proposal
- 2016:** After the Pathankot airbase attack India along with the US, UK and France – the P3 countries – move the proposal in 1267 Sanctions Committee to ban Masood Azhar, China sided with the JeM
- 2009:** India moves the proposal to designate the JeM chief Masood Azhar a global terrorist, China blocked India's proposal

WHAT DESIGNATION BY 1267 SANCTIONS COMMITTEE MEANS

- Assets freeze:** All states are required to freeze funds, other financial assets or economic resources of the designated individuals and entities
- Travel ban:** Entail preventing designated individuals entry into or transit by all states through their territories
- Arms embargo:** All states freeze arms sales to the designated individuals and entities

Way Forward: Need of the hour is Regional peace:

- ✓ The **listing of Azhar** is an unfinished task India is justified in pursuing. However, the latest U.S. move comes with some concerns.
- ✓ The latest American move is an unprecedented one, and is not only aimed at forcing the Chinese hand on Masood Azhar but is also a recognition of the **new regional context in South Asia** where a stronger global attempt to rein in Pakistan is the only viable option of **maintaining regional peace**.
- ✓ As the U.S. and China prepare the South Asian chessboard, Indian moves have suddenly become the decisive ones and both the powers are calibrating their own moves accordingly.
- ✓ New Delhi must applaud the **strong support the U.S.** and the other **UNSC members** have provided on the issue of **cross-border terror threats**, and on the vexed issue of Azhar's listing.
- ✓ But it must be careful not to stake too much on an immediate win at the UNSC vis-a-vis China, and keep **its expectations realistic**.

15. SEEING DARKNESS: THE FIRST IMAGE OF A BLACK HOLE

Context:

- When the first-ever **direct picture of a black hole** was unveiled, scientists around the world were almost giddy over finally getting a chance to see one of the **most mysterious objects in the universe**.
- **“A once-in-a-lifetime result,”** exulted, director of the Event Horizon Telescope, the international team of scientists who created the image using **a network of radio telescopes linked together to form a single, Earth-size observatory**.

About event horizon telescope:

- Event horizon telescope consists of **eight radio observatories** around the world, including telescopes in Spain, the US and Antarctica
- In 2006, an international team of more than 200 researchers, led by Harvard University astronomers, launched the **Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) project with a sole aim: to capture a direct shot of a black hole**.
- Thirteen partner institutions worked together to create the EHT, using both pre-existing infrastructure and support from a variety of agencies.
- Key funding was provided by the US National Science Foundation (NSF), the EU’s European Research Council (ERC), and funding agencies in East Asia.
- The EHT observations use a **technique called very-long-baseline interferometry (VLBI)** which synchronises telescope facilities around the world and exploits the rotation of our planet to form **one huge, Earth-size telescope** observing at a wavelength of 1.3 mm.
- Observations at the different sites were **coordinated using atomic clocks**, called **hydrogen masers**, accurate to within one second every 100 million years. Researchers **combined radio-wave data** from each telescope, creating the image.

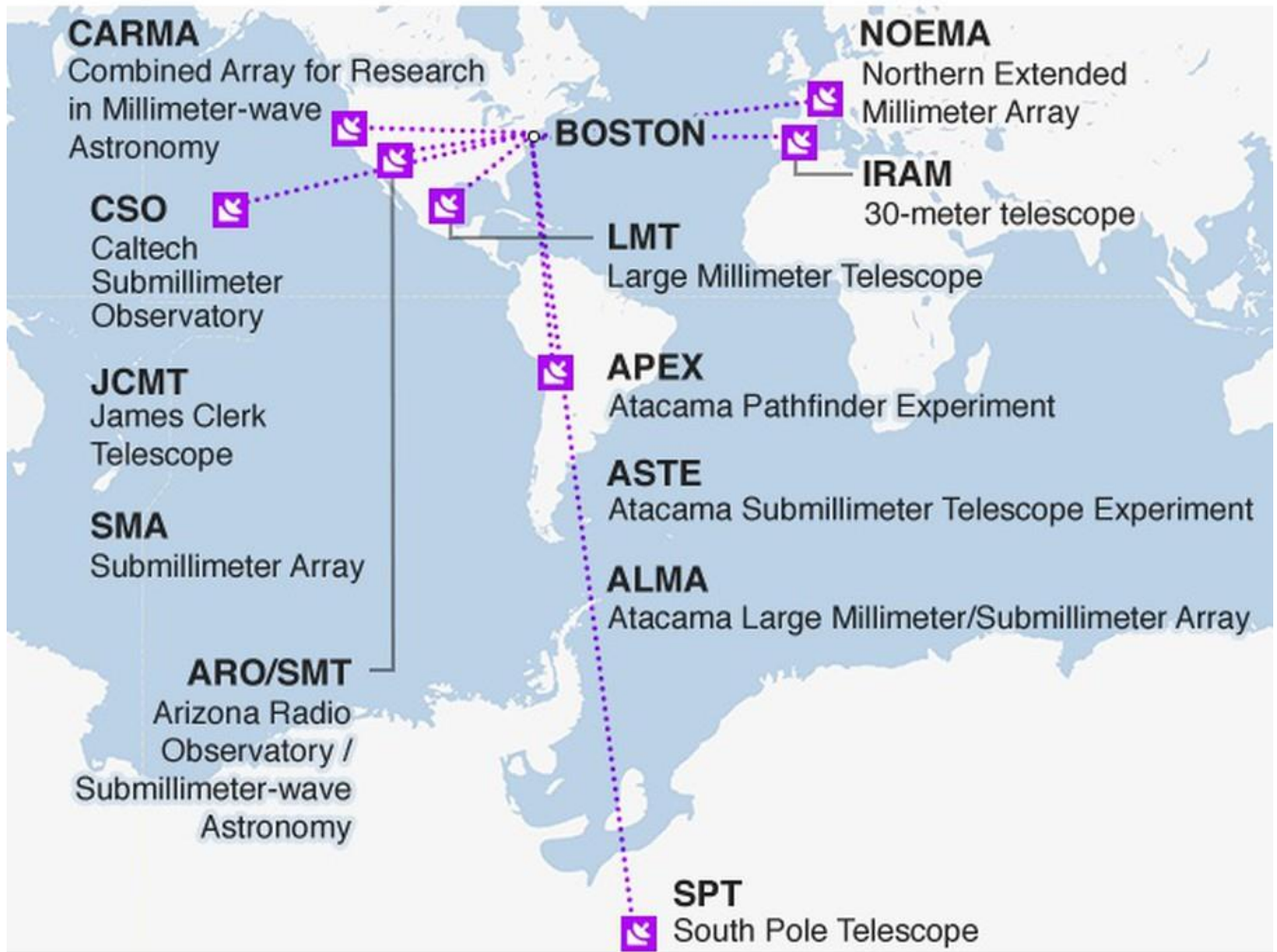
First supermassive black hole photographed to be named Powehi:

- The team of astronomers who created the **image of the black hole** called it **M87(asterisk)**. A language professor has given it a name from a Hawaiian chant — **Powehi meaning “the adorned fathomless dark creation.”**
- The black hole in question is **about 53 million light years away** in the center of a galaxy called **Messier 87**, or M87 for short.
- Scientists revealed a picture they took of it **using eight radio telescopes**, the first-time humans had actually seen one of **the dense celestial objects** that suck up everything around them, even light.
- This is a **great scientific achievement**, but its success owes to good management rather than pathbreaking science.
- The **Event Horizon Telescope** is actually a virtual machine, a network of eight radio telescope arrays scattered all over the earth, which were synchronised in 2017 to look at the same spot in the heavens, **55 million light years away**.

What exactly is a black hole? How big is the black hole in M87?

- According to **Albert Einstein’s theory of general relativity**, black holes are uninhabitable chasms of spacetime that **end in a ‘singularity,’** or a mass of infinite density.
- Black holes, with **gravitational fields so powerful** that not even light could escape them, were inferred by quantum physics about a century ago.
- It’s a place so bleak that even the laws of physics break down there, Mother Nature Network reported.
- According to scientist estimates there are **approximately 100 million black holes** in our galaxy, however, none of them are close enough to Earth, Fortune reported.
- The gravitational forces of them are so strong that nothing, **neither matter nor light, can escape once it gets too close**.
- As per the estimates made using different techniques, the **size of the black hole in M87** has ranged between 3.5 billion and 7.22 billion times the mass of the sun.
- However, new EHT measurements show that its mass is **about 6.5 billion solar masses**.
- The EHT team has also determined the black hole’s size, the diameter of this black hole stretches a whopping 38 billion kilometers and it spins clockwise, according to Science News report.

The Event Horizon Telescope Array



Way Ahead to the Scientists:

- ✓ **The Event Horizon Telescope's** first run prove that event horizons really exist. Astronomers now hope to carry out **further observations of M87** to deduce the shape and depth of the shadow region more accurately.
- ✓ They are also hopeful to **add more telescopes** to the array that will allow for higher-resolution images. As well as M87, the EHT team is attempting to take the first image of Sagittarius A.
- ✓ The experiment of EHT owes to international collaboration and use of **interdisciplinary expertise**. Future runs could help us to understand the basics of our universe **more precisely and accurately**.
- ✓ Science fiction celebrates **black holes as gateways into "wormholes"**, shortcuts across the **universe that bend space-time**.
- ✓ Step into one black hole, step out of **another 55 million light years away**. Of course, the first step is the hardest.
- ✓ An object crossing the event horizon of a black hole would suffer acceleration and tidal forces that should **end its career as matter**.
- ✓ A black hole is only a shortcut to the sobering realisation that the **laws of physics**, which we regard to be **susceptible to change**.

16. NECESSARY STEPS TO ENDING POVERTY

Introduction:

- It is by **now close to 50 years** since Indira Gandhi brought the **idea of eradicating poverty** into the electoral arena in India. **'Garibi Hatao'** had been her slogan.
- The role that **income generation** actually played in lowering poverty in India may be gauged from the facts that economic growth had surged in the 1980s, and the late 1960s was when agricultural production quickened as the **Green Revolution progressed**.
- While the last attribute motivated her to improve the condition of her people, the first left her aware of the **centrality of income generation in poverty eradication**.

Would a Universal Basic Income (UBI) have been better?

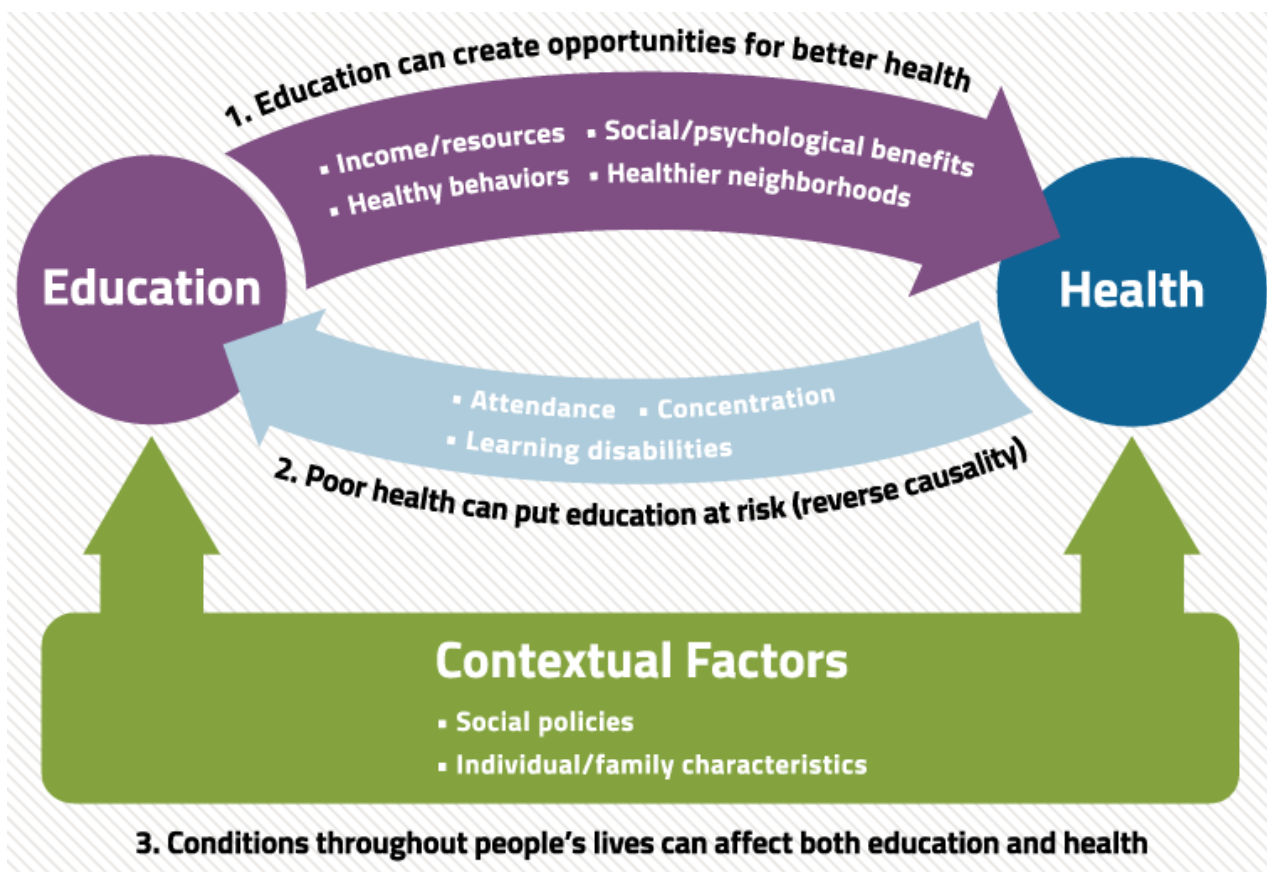
- It would probably have been easier to implement, but would have come with a **bigger financial tab** even if the top two income deciles are excluded.
- Remember, however, that developed economies have experimented with UBI, but have **not been persuaded of its efficacy**.
- Even Arvind Subramanian, who commended the UBI when he was Chief Economic Adviser and wrote a whole chapter on it in Economy Survey 2016-17, appears to have retraced his steps, and is now pitching for a **'Quasi-Universal Basic Rural Income' (QUBRI)**.
- It is difficult to begrudge a welfare measure targeted at the poorest people in a country that even to this day.
- Government offers **subsidies to the middle-class and the rich** on everything from cooking gas to power to gold to aviation turbine fuel to the tax breaks on small savings instruments (which are a form of implicit subsidy) — **to the tune of ₹1 lakh crore a year**.
- For Instance, in Agricultural sector, As per a report published by the State Bank of India, the central government's most recent **budgetary allocation to subsidy and farmer support schemes** totalled **around ₹981 billion** – which is roughly **2.9% of India's GDP**.

Capability deprivation is the main reason for Indian Poverty:

- **Health, education and physical infrastructure** are central to the capabilities of individuals, and the extent of their presence in a society determine whether the poor will remain so or exit poverty permanently.
- The scale at which these inputs would be required to **endow all Indians** with the **requisite capabilities** makes it more than likely that we would have to rely on public provision.
- As the services of Health, Education, Public services cannot always be purchased in the market, income support alone cannot be sufficient to eliminate poverty.
- It is in recognition of the role of services in enabling people to lead a productive and dignified life that the **idea of multi-dimensionality** has taken hold in the thinking on poverty globally.

What is needed: Universal Basic Services:

- ✓ **Universal Basic Services** from public sources is the need of the hour. The idea of universal basic income emanated from Europe. But Europe has saturated with publicly provided UBS.
- ✓ In light of a pitch that has been made for the implementation in India of a **publicly-funded universal basic income (UBI) scheme**, we can say that from the perspective of **eliminating poverty, universal basic services (UBS)** from public sources are needed.
- ✓ So, if a part of the public revenues is **paid out as basic income**, the project of providing **public services** there will **not be affected**.
- ✓ This is not the case in India, where the task of creating the wherewithal for providing public services has not even been seriously initiated.
- ✓ There are no short cuts to ending poverty. There is **indirect evidence** that the provision of **health, education and public services matters more for poverty** than the Central government's poverty alleviation schemes in place for almost half a century.
- ✓ **Per capita income levels and poverty** vary across India's States. A discernible pattern is that the southern and western regions of India have lower poverty than the northern, central and eastern ones.



Conclusion:

- ❖ The indicator is based on the **health and education status** of a population apart from per capita income, bringing us back to the **relevance of income generation** to poverty.
- ❖ As the Central government is common across regions, differences in the **human development index** must arise from policies implemented **at the State level**.
- ❖ This further implies that a **nationwide income support scheme** that channels funds from a common pool to households in the poorer States would be tantamount to rewarding lower effort by their governments.
- ❖ There is a **crucial role for services**, of both producer and consumer variety, in eliminating the capability deprivation that is poverty.
- ❖ At a minimum these services would involve the **supply of water, sanitation and housing** apart from health and education.
- ❖ It has been estimated that if the absence of such services is accounted for, poverty in India would be found to be far higher than recorded at present.
- ❖ The budgetary implication of the scale at which public services would have to be provided if we are to **eliminate multi-dimensional poverty** may now be imagined.
- ❖ This allows us to appraise the challenge of **ending effective poverty** and to assess the **potential of the income-support schemes** proposed by the main political parties.

17. AT A CROSSROADS: PROTESTS IN SUDAN

Context:

- Sudan's long-time president **Omar al-Bashir** has been **removed from office** and arrested following months of **protests against Bashir's regime**.
- With this act **three-decade rule** of Sudanese president Omar Hassan al-Bashir has ended.
- For the past four months, Sudan has been rocked **by countrywide protests**, leading to a **military intervention** last week which **ejected Bashir from power**, thereby ending his **brutal 30-year rule**. The protests have earned praise for **employing peaceful methods**.

- Sudan has been **engulfed by violence** for more than a century, even while it was under the British-Egyptian colonial rule.
- Since **independence in 1956**, the North African nation has seen **sectarian violence, famines and political instability**, the latest coup toppling Bashir being the fifth such forcible takeover.

Omar al-Bashir's rule:

- Omar al-Bashir became the **country's ruler in 1989** after he toppled a democratically-elected government.
- After Bashir came to power, the country went on to adopt and enforce Saudi-sponsored **orthodox Islam in Sudan**.
- Radical version, departing from the moderate Sufi tradition that it earlier followed. This caused great **detriment to women's rights** and to the **status of minorities**.
- Sudan became the nesting ground for the **world's jihadists** and even sheltered **Osama bin Laden** in the 1990s.
- The Bashir regime initially tried to deprive the movement of popular support by claiming that the rallies were **backed by the rebel movement** from the **Darfur region**.
- This tactic boomeranged as the crowds grew in size, and the **slogan "We are all Darfur" was raised**. What began as a protest against price rise morphed into a mass movement, calling for Bashir's resignation.
- Sudan's **male-dominated Sharia**-inspired setup also came under attack following which a **tremendous women turnout** was registered.
- Women went on to constitute **70 per cent of the protesters**. Religious leaders who supported Bashir were also denounced.



What are the effects of hunger in Sudan?

- Hunger anywhere can have **long-term, debilitating consequences**, but it can be particularly threatening during a **complex crisis** like the one in Sudan.
- When people go hungry, they have trouble staying healthy and become more **vulnerable to dangerous diseases**, which is a weakness people sheltering in makeshift camps and communities can't afford.
- Their bodies are also **not as strong or productive** as they could be, which makes it difficult for them to work, find food and keep their families safe at a time when they urgently need the strength to do so.
- Children's development is also **seriously impacted by hunger**.
- **Without proper nutrition**, they don't hit critical developmental milestones, which can permanently inhibit their ability to learn and function for the rest of their lives.
- Hungry children don't learn as well, and they are also at a higher risk of disease.
- **According to UNICEF**, more than 1 million children in Sudan are acutely malnourished, and 1 in 4 are stunted.

The Sudan protests due to rise in Inflation:

- In December 2018, enacting **austerity measures** recommended by the **International Monetary Fund (IMF)**, Sudan **devalued its currency**, the Sudanese Pound, and cut back on subsidies.
- This led to a **steep rise in inflation and food prices**. The price rise in essential commodities sparked anger among the Sudanese people, who were already wary of **Bashir's autocratic rule**.
- Protests erupted in the eastern part of the country and soon reached the capital **Khartoum**.

Who is most affected by the crisis?

- **Women and girls** make up the majority of the **displaced population** and are disproportionately impacted by the conflict in Sudan.
- Over half the population of the United Nations' displacement sites is made up of women and girls, and **86 percent of Sudanese refugees** in Uganda are women and children.
- **Sexual violence is also pervasive**. Almost half of women and girls have reported experiencing abuse — even while most incidences of violence go unreported.
- In addition, women and girls continue to bear the **burden of family caretaking** even during crisis.
- In the face of heightened violence, recurring displacement and loss of livelihoods, daily tasks like **collecting water and firewood** can make them targets for attack.

Failure of governments leads to Army retaining Power:

- This conflict was visible in **neighbouring countries** where dictators fell amid public protests.
- **In Egypt**, Hosni Mubarak resigned as President in 2011, but the **military never gave up its privileges**. In two years, it was back in power through a coup.
- **In Algeria**, Abdelaziz Bouteflika stepped down as President this month, but the **army has retained power**; protests still continue in the country.
- The Sudanese protesters say they want an **orderly transition** under a civilian government.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **Over three decades**, Mr. Bashir and his **military clique** had used several tactics, from aligning with Islamists and **banning political parties** to suppressing dissent and unleashing paramilitaries against defiant regions, to stay in power.
- ❖ Protests are still going on in Sudan despite 30-year rule of Omar al-Bashir **replaced by military-led transitional council**.
- ❖ Protesters are looking **for democratic government** in the country as they believe military rule completely phased out. Protesters said that just five or six people have been replaced by another five or six people and regime remained the same.
- ❖ But the recent **economic crisis**, especially after South Sudan split away with three-fourths of the **oilfields**, broke the regime's back. Now, Mr. Bashir has quit.
- ❖ The army should respect **their demand and resolve the impasse**. It's time to replace the oppressive regime he built, with a much **more inclusive, responsive and democratic civilian government**.

18. IMD'S FIRST LONG-RANGE MONSOON FORECAST TO MARK EL NINO IMPACT

Context:

- The **India Meteorological Department (IMD)** issued its **first long-range forecast** for the **south-west monsoon**.
- while releasing its monsoon forecast, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) expressed the projected rainfall in terms of **Long Period Average (LPA)**, saying that it was **expected to be 96% of LPA**.
- The LPA of the monsoon season over the country is **89 cm**, calculated for the **period 1951-2000**.
- This is the average rainfall recorded during the months from **June to September**, calculated during the 50-year period, and is kept as a benchmark while forecasting the **quantitative rainfall** for the monsoon season every year.

Skymet Predictions on Weather:

- Skymet was the **first private sector entity** to provide **weather forecasts** and weather graphics to the Indian media in 2003.
- The **key culprit is El Nino**, the warming of the Central Pacific Ocean, that is frequently associated with drying monsoon rains.
- The private weather forecaster Skymet said, it expects the coming monsoon rains to be below normal and about **7% short of the 89cm**, the

Monsoon Impact on Agriculture:

- A **normal monsoon** has a positive impact on the overall economy through inter-sectoral relations between **agriculture and other sectors**, both from the **demand and supply side**.
- The rains are critical because **nearly half of all Indians** depend on a **farm-based income** and **60%** of the country's **net-sown area does not have any form of irrigation**.
- Millions of farmers wait for the rains to begin summer (or monsoon) sowing of major crops, such as rice, sugar, cotton, coarse cereals and oilseeds.
- **Half of India's farm output** comes from summer crops dependent on these rains. Food prices have a **30% weightage** in **India's consumer price index**.
- Robust summer rains, which account for **70% of India's total annual rainfall**, spur rural spending on most items and increase demand in other sectors of the economy.
- Rural sales, for instance, account for about 48% of all motorcycles and 44% of television sets sold annually **if the monsoon is normal**, according to **consumer sales data from the Citibank Research**.
- Patchy rains tend to **stoke food inflation**. "If the rains are well distributed, this bodes well for the general economy as well as food prices". **High food prices** do not just cloud growth but also **pose a political risk**.
- For good farm output, the rains have to be not just normal but also evenly spread across states. The monsoon also replenishes 81 nationally-monitored water reservoirs **critical for drinking, power and irrigation**.

country usually gets from June to September as LPA.

- July, the key month for agriculture is expected to be nearly 9% short. There is a higher probability that it would be below normal in June and July, it added.

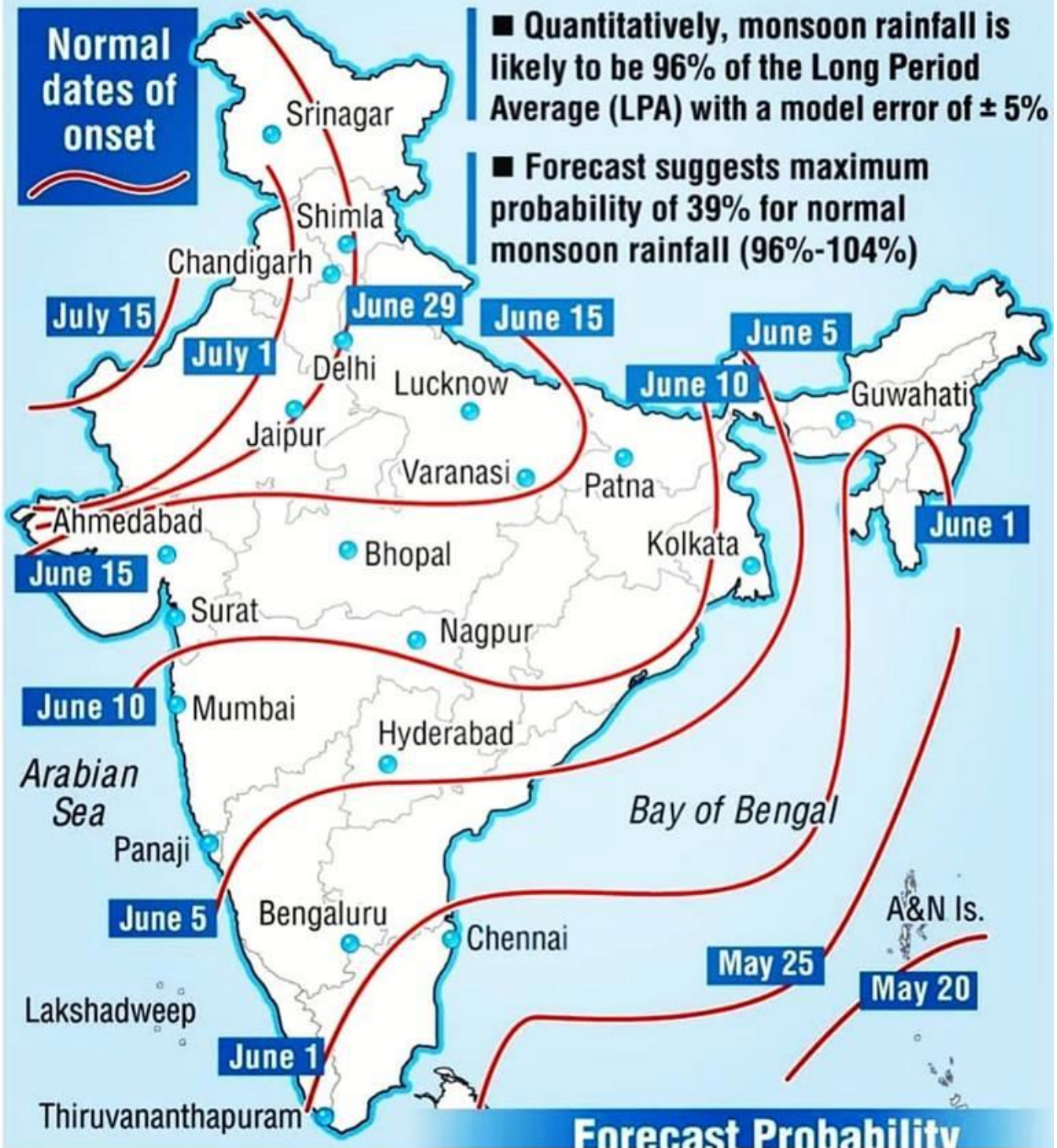
Near Normal Monsoon Predicted for 2019

As per India Meteorological Department's forecast, southwest monsoon season (June-Sept) rainfall is likely to be near normal in 2019

Normal dates of onset

■ Quantitatively, monsoon rainfall is likely to be 96% of the Long Period Average (LPA) with a model error of $\pm 5\%$

■ Forecast suggests maximum probability of 39% for normal monsoon rainfall (96%-104%)



IMD maintains five rainfall distribution categories on an all-India scale. These are:

- IMD forecasts the **category of rainfall**, be it for country, region or month, the forecast is based on these standardised figures **calculated for a period of 50 years**.
- As per the outputs obtained from the weather models, the rainfall is categorised as normal, below normal, or above normal.
 - **Normal or Near Normal:** When per cent departure of actual rainfall is +/-10% of LPA, that is, between 96-104% of LPA.
 - **Below normal:** When departure of actual rainfall is less than 10% of LPA, that is 90-96% of LPA
 - **Above normal:** When actual rainfall is 104-110% of LPA
 - **Deficient:** When departure of actual rainfall is less than 90% of LPA
 - **Excess:** When departure of actual rainfall is more
- IMD maintains an independent LPA for **every homogenous region** of the country. They **range from 71.6 cm to 143.83 cm**.

The region-wise LPA figures are:

- 83 cm for East and Northeast India
- 55 cm for Central India
- 61 cm for South Peninsular India
- 50 for Northwest India

It puts the **average of all-India figure to 88.75 cm**.

The monthly LPA figures for the season are:

- 36 cm for June
- 92 cm for July
- 13 cm for August
- 34 cm for September.

How accurate are weather forecasters?

- IMD's forecast for 2019 directly challenges the prediction of **India's only private sector weather forecaster, Skymet**, which is slightly more pessimistic with a **forecast of 93%**.
- Both the IMD and Skymet have hit the bull's eye an equal number of times in the last six years. IMD was off the mark in 2014, 2015 (which turned out to be drought years) and 2018, which **narrowly escaped a drought**.
- 2018 was the **second below-normal monsoon year** in a row. However, rains were better distributed than in 2017, with north India, for once, getting satisfactory rainfall.
- Twelve regions saw deficits. Kerala, however, saw excess rainfall which led to devastating floods.
- IMD said **El Nino conditions** are prevailing over the equator, but expects the same to weaken throughout the monsoon season, which lasts between June and September.
- This will lead to the possibility of a **normal monsoon**. These rains are a crucial source of **water supply for agriculture**. Nearly 75 percent of India's annual rainfall occurs during these four months.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The **south-west monsoon**, which makes its onset over India around May-end, is critical for its **over 100-million farmer families**.
- ❖ The **four-month rainy season** contributes more than **70% of India's annual showers**.
- ❖ The forecast will be closely watched as the IMD will also highlight the global impact of El Nino, and its effect on this year's monsoons in India. The phenomenon is associated with below normal monsoon rains and droughts.
- ❖ After facing **droughts in 2014 and 2015**, primarily because of **the effects of El Nino**, the monsoon rains improved in **2016** with India **receiving normal rainfall** in the four months between June and September.
- ❖ In 2017, rainfall was near-normal, but the following year **it dropped to 91%** of the long period average (LPA).
- ❖ The stakes are high this year as large parts of India, including Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, are **witnessing farm distress**.
- ❖ Ultimately, **India's economic output** will achieve stability only if it is able to **escape the vagaries of the monsoon**. That cannot happen without improvements in **prediction and mitigation**.

19. A CRISIS OF CREDIBILITY ?

Context:

- In a recent letter to **the President of India**, a group of retired bureaucrats and diplomats, in the context of recent incidents, expressed **concern over the Election Commission of India (EC's)** "weak kneed conduct" and the institution "suffering from a **crisis of credibility today**".

- The group also requested the EC to “**issue directions** to withhold the release of all biopics and documentaries on **any political personages** through any media mechanism until the **conclusion** of the electoral process”.
- They asserted that the release of such propaganda amounted to **free publicity**, and hence should be **debited as election expenditure** in the name of the candidate in question.

Issues with regard to Election Commission of India:

- Though the ECI has since become an **institution** of some authority, there have been **controversies** over appointments of ECs, allegations of partisanship, and new problems such as of voter bribery and paid news, which the ECI has not been able to address so far.
- But in the 2019 general election, it has come under the scanner like never before in the **wake of incidents** involving a **breach of the Model Code of Conduct**, particularly those by the ruling party.
- Other important issues highlighted in the letter included *transfers of top officials, voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT) audits, violations of the MCC by Rajasthan Governor and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister* and also corrosion of the political discourse in general.
- Needless to say, the questions being raised about the **credibility of the EC are a cause for worry**.
- It is, however, not the first time that the conduct of the commission has been questioned.

At the core of the issues that need Immediate Attention:

The **genesis of the problem** lies in the **flawed system** of appointment of **election commissioners**, who are **appointed unilaterally by the government of the day**:

- This debate can be settled once and for all by **depoliticising appointments** through a **broad-based consultation**, as in other countries.
- In its **255th report**, the **Law Commission** recommended a **collegium**, consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Justice of India.
- Political stalwarts **supported the idea** in the past even when in office. But successive ruling dispensations have ducked the issue, not wanting to let go of their power.
- It is obvious that **political and electoral interests take precedence over the national interest**.
- A **public interest litigation** was also filed in the Supreme Court calling for a “**fair, just and transparent process** of selection by constituting a **neutral and independent Collegium/selection committee**”.
- Even the **Supreme Court** which have always described as **the guardian angel of democracy** has to act with utmost urgency. If democracy is derailed, its future too would be in jeopardy.

Besides the manner of appointment, the **system of removal of Election Commissioners** also needs correction:

- Only the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC)** is protected from being removed except through
- The other two commissioners having **equal voting power** in the functioning of the EC can outvote the CEC 10 times a day.
- The government can control a defiant CEC through the **majority voting power of the two commissioners**.

Election Commission of India:

- Election Commission of India (ECI) is a **constitutional body under Article-324** vested with the responsibilities of **superintendence, direction and control of conduct of elections**. It consists of a Chief Election Commissioner and two Election Commissioners.
- **Article 324** states that the Election Commission shall consist of Chief Election Commissioner and such numbers of other Election Commissioners, if any, as the **President may from time to time** fix and appointment of CEC and other ECs shall, subject to provisions of any law made in that behalf by the Parliament, be made by the President.
- The **Election Commission of India (EC)** is a formidable institution which has led the world in **electoral efficiency** since its inception.

Challenges of free and fair election in India

1. Candidates and parties with lot of money may not be sure of their victory but they do enjoy a big and unfair advantages over smaller parties and independence.
2. In some parts of the country, candidates with criminal connection have been able to push others out of the electoral race and to secure the ticket from major parties.
3. Some families tend to dominate political parties; tickets are distributed to relatives from these families.
4. Very often elections offer little choice to ordinary citizens, for both the major parties are quite similar to each other both in policies and practice.
5. Smaller parties and independent candidates suffer a huge disadvantages compared to bigger parties.

- One has to remember that the **Constitution enabled protection to the CEC** as it was a one-man commission initially.
- This must now be **extending to other commissioners**, who were added in 1993, as they collectively represent the EC.

The EC's reputation also suffers when it is **unable to tame recalcitrant political parties**, especially the ruling party:

- The reform was **first suggested by the CEC in 1998** and reiterated several times.
- This is because despite being the registering authority under **Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951**, it has **no power to de-register them** even for the gravest of violations.
- The EC has been seeking the power to **de-register political parties**, among many other reforms, which the EC has been wanting.
- The EC also submitted an **affidavit to the Supreme Court** saying it wanted to be empowered **"to de-register a political party, particularly in view of its constitutional mandate"**.

The challenges will be tougher and tougher, because of the emerging technological developments, social media, money power and other factors.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Elections are the **bedrock of democracy** and the **EC's credibility** is central to **democratic legitimacy**.
- ❖ The **independence of the Commission** can be strengthened further if the Secretariat of the Election Commission consisting of officers and staff at various levels are also **insulated from the interference of the Executive** in the matters pertaining to their appointments, promotions, etc.
- ❖ It is time that action is taken to **depoliticise constitutional appointments** and the EC empowered to **de-register parties for electoral misconduct**.
- ❖ It is a step needed towards **restoring all-important public faith** in the institution.

Way Ahead:

- ✓ Under Chief Election Commissioners like T.N. Seshan and J.M. Lyngdoh, the commission has in the past shown the capacity **to come up with creative solutions** that adhere to both the **spirit and the letter of the law**.
- ✓ Their examples should encourage the EC to find strength in its **constitutional mandate** and **not plead helplessness** in the face of challenges to its authority. The Supreme Court too made the EC conscious of its own powers once more.
- ✓ While these reforms may continue to be debated, nothing stops the EC from asserting the ample authority it has under the Constitution and being tough.
- ✓ It's not their discretion but the **constitutional mandate**. It did not need a reminder or a nudge from the Supreme Court.

Hence, the guardian of elections itself **needs urgent institutional safeguards** to protect its autonomy.

20. HARD LANDING: JET AIRWAYS' TEMPORARY HALT

Context:

- Jet Airways announced **temporary suspension** of all its international and domestic flights, with the last flight operating between Amritsar and Mumbai.
- In a filing before the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and a statement to the media, Jet Airways said it was informed by the **State Bank of India (SBI)**, on behalf of the consortium of Indian lenders, that they were **unable to consider its request for critical interim funding**.
- Despite intense lobbying by the bankrupt airline, **banks stood firm** on their decision to **not release emergency funds** to sustain operations until a white knight is found.

Jet suspends all flights after banks refuse to release funds:

- Since no **emergency funding** from the lenders or any other source is forthcoming, the airline will **not be able to pay for fuel or other critical services** to keep the operations going.
- Over the last several weeks and months, the company has tried every means possible to seek **both interim and long-term funding**.

- Consequently, with **immediate effect**, Jet Airways is compelled to cancel all its international and domestic flights.
- At least **one month's salary** was needed to be paid to the employees for retaining them.
- Jet would require **around Rs 170 crore** to clear at least one month's salary of its employees.



Survival of The Fittest:

- The humbling of one of India's most successful international brands illustrates the **challenge of making money** in the country's aviation sector, **dominated by low-cost carriers** such as IndiGo and SpiceJet Ltd.
- The Indian market is also **highly price-sensitive**, and airlines compete **to keep fares low**, even at a loss, **to continue expanding**.
- The domestic market has seen **around 20 percent growth** in the number of passengers over the past few years.
- Carriers including IndiGo, SpiceJet and Vistara, a joint venture between Singapore Airlines and Tata Sons, **have over 1,000 planes** on order from Boeing Co and Airbus SA.

Historically burn cash to sustain aggressive pricing:

- **Fuel accounts for 35-40% of airlines' operational costs.**
- According to CAPA, an aviation sector consulting firm, Indian airlines could end the 2018 fiscal year with a **combined loss of \$1.9 billion**. Because of this, they have to raise fresh working capital to finance their operations.
- The industry wants **longer credit periods for jet fuel** purchased from state-owned oil marketing companies (OMCs) for **user charges** paid to the Airports Authority of India (AAI) and private airports as relief.
- States are charging **exorbitant value added tax (VAT) rates on ATF** as the fuel remains outside the Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- The civil aviation ministry has been pitching for **inclusion of jet fuel in the GST**. However, a consensus on the issue remains elusive till now.
- According to sector experts, air traffic should **grow at 1.5 time of the GDP**. Considering 7-8% GDP growth, domestic air traffic should grow by a maximum of 10.5-12%.
- But Indian airlines saw an ebullient growth of 17.31% in domestic air traffic in 2017-18 as they aggressively wooed passengers with aggressive ticket pricing. **Frantic capacity addition** has added to the aviation's woes, says credit rating agency ICRA.

ATF should be brought under GST:

- **Aviation turbine fuel (ATF)** should be brought under the **Goods and Services Tax (GST)** regime as it will **ensure a level playing field** for the domestic airline industry, Civil Aviation Minister Suresh Prabhu said.
- He said **input costs** should be **competitive for any sector** and the ministry has been of the strong view that the fuel should be brought **under the GST regime**.
- Different rates of taxes in states pushes the price of ATF. Each state has a different tax. Due to this, the refuelling (for airlines) cost completely changes.
- The GST Council takes a call on that and we are pursuing this with the council continuously. We will work on it that aviation fuel should also be brought under GST for **predictability** and for **ensuring level playing field**," the minister informed.

- Airlines have been demanding **inclusion of ATF in the new indirect tax regime**.
- Airlines could expect an **annual relief of up to Rs 5,000 crore** by way of input tax credit if ATF is brought under GST. The move could cushion them from the burden of increased jet fuel prices, besides providing relief to customers.

Whether National Civil Aviation Policy, 2016 implemented in Letter and Spirit?

- The policy is also silent on the **future roadmap for the state run Air India** and the way forward for that airline.
- There is no word about **removing the sales tax on ATF** and other taxation measures levied on Indian carriers.
- The regional aviation policy is well-intentioned, but **expecting private capital** to flow to loss-making projects remains elusive.
- The regional aviation policy unveiled by the previous government with incentives like **4% sales tax on ATF** and **no landing/ parking charges** could not achieve the expected progress. Experts feel that the policy is too difficult to implement.
- Adding to the woes, the **expected rise** in helicopter operations, private flying and regional airlines is likely to add to the pressure.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **India's aviation market** is cut-throat and it is **survival of the fittest**. One needs not only deep pockets but a **deep threshold for pain**.
- ❖ When India's Kingfisher Airlines went bankrupt in 2012, lessors were forced to write off millions of dollars in losses and thousands of people lost their jobs.
- ❖ Even with **40% upwardly mobile middle class**, India's aviation industry remains largely untapped with promising potential. Air transport is still expensive for the majority of country's population.
- ❖ **Safety, convenience and overall growth** of all stakeholders is important and the government will have to work on this. The lenders and shareholders have to **work and co-operate** with each other to find a better solution.
- ❖ Framing right policies with special focus on **quality, cost and passenger interest** can make India to achieve its vision of becoming the **third largest civil aviation market by 2020 and largest by 2030**.

21. HUMANISE THE LAW: DRAFT INDIAN FOREST ACT

Context:

- The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has finalised the **first draft** of the **comprehensive amendments** to the **Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA)** and sent to states for consultation.
- The Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA) is the **backbone of forest governance in India**.
- The original law, the Indian Forest Act, 1927, is an **incongruous relic**, its provisions having been drafted to suit the **objectives of a colonial power** that had extractive uses for forests in mind.

Concerns with regard to the present Draft Bill:

- The draft Bill reinforces the **idea of bureaucratic control of forests**, providing immunity for actions such as **use of firearms by personnel** to prevent an offence.
- The **hard-line policing approach** is reflected in the emphasis on **creating infrastructure** to detain and transport the accused.

Indian Forest Act, 1927:

- The Indian Forest Act, 1927 was largely based on previous Indian Forest Acts **implemented under the British**. The most famous one was the Indian Forest Act of 1878.
- Both the 1878 act and the 1927 one sought to **consolidate and reserve** the areas having forest cover, or significant wildlife, to regulate movement and transit of forest produce, and duty leviable on timber and other forest produce.
- Britishers impose **Indian Forest Act, 1927** to take over Indian forests, use them to produce timber, while **curtailing and extinguishing rights** of millions.
- The Act gave the Government and Forest Department the **power to create Reserved Forests**, and the **right to use Reserved Forests** for Government use alone.
- It also defines the **procedure to be followed** for declaring an area to be a **Reserved Forest, a Protected Forest or a Village Forest**.
- It defines **what a forest offence is**, what are the acts prohibited inside a Reserved Forest, and penalties leviable on violation of the provisions of the Act.

- To **penalise entire communities** through denial of access to forests for offences by individuals.
- Such provisions invariably **affect poor inhabitants**, and run counter to the **empowering and egalitarian goals** that produced the Forest Rights Act.
- For decades now, the Forest Department has **resisted independent scientific evaluation** of forest health and biodiversity conservation outcomes.
- In parallel, **environmental policy** has weakened public scrutiny of decisions on diversion of forests for destructive activities such as mining and large dam construction.
- **Impact assessment reports** have mostly been **reduced to a farce**, and the public hearings process has been
- The **exclusion of 'village forestry'** from the preview of Forest Right Act (forest official supersedes **Gram Sabha**) is **legally contradictory** and would add confusion on the ground.
- The draft mentions that the **state governments** could **take away the rights of the forest dwellers** if the government feels it is not in line with "conservation of the proposed reserved forest" by payment to the people impacted or by the grant of land.

India's forests play a key role in moderating the lives of **not just the adivasis and other traditional dwellers**, but everyone in the subcontinent, through their **impact on the climate and monsoons**. Their health can be improved only through collaboration.

Way Forward:

- ✓ The government needs to launch a **process of consultation**, beginning with the State governments to ensure that a **progressive law is adopted by all States**, including those that have their **own versions of the existing Act**.
- ✓ The Centre must hear the **voice of all stakeholders and communities**, including independent scientific experts.
- ✓ The finalising law should aim to **reduce conflicts, incentivise tribals** and stop diversion for non-forest uses.
- ✓ This can be achieved by **recognising all suitable landscapes as forests** and insulating them from commercial exploitation.

Conclusion:

- ❖ As per the **latest FAO report**, India is placed **8th in the list** of Top Ten nations reporting the greatest annual net gain in forest area.
- ❖ Forests play a vital role in **water conservation** and improve the water regime in the area.
- ❖ A new law enacted should make a departure and be aimed **to expand India's forests**, and ensure the well-being of **traditional forest-dwellers** and **biodiversity** in these landscapes.
- ❖ The Government has recently enacted a Bill in the Parliament for **taking out bamboo from the tree category**, where it is grown **outside forest areas**.
- ❖ This will encourage people to **grow bamboo on private lands**, which will be helpful in increasing the **livelihood opportunities** for farmers and also enhance the green cover and **carbon stock** of the country.
- ❖ The need is for a paradigm that encourages **community-led, scientifically validated conservation**.

India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017 released by MoEFCC:

- India is ranked **10th** in the world, with **24.4% of land area under forest** and tree cover, even though it accounts for 2.4 % of the world surface area and sustains the needs of 17 % of human and 18 % livestock population.
- The total forest and tree cover are **24.39 per cent** of the geographical area of the country.
- However, the critical side is, **only 2.99% of India's geographic area** is classified as very dense forest.
- The rest of the green cover of a total of 21.54% is nearly equally divided into open and moderately dense forest, according to the **State of Forest Report 2017**.

MORE POWER TO FOREST OFFICERS



22. LINE OF CAUTION: ON SUSPENSION OF CROSS-LOC TRADE

Context:

- the **Ministry of Home Affairs** announced the **suspension** from midnight of **trade** at the **two designated points** at **Salamabad and Chakan-da-Bagh**, citing concerns about **“illegal weapons, narcotics and fake currency”** being transported into India.
- The Central government’s decision to **suspend trade** across the Line of Control between **Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir** is bad in conception, and comes at a particularly fraught time.

Why do India and Pakistan resort to informal trade?

- Informal trade** between countries happens through a third country. The third country will officially (formal trade) buy the goods from one country and sell it to the other country at a higher price.
- This **price is still lower** than the price at which formal trading would happen.
- For example, in the case of India and Pakistan, **India-Dubai-Pakistan is the main channel for informal trading**.
- Trade is recorded between **India and UAE** and between **Pakistan and UAE**, but is not recorded between India and Pakistan.
- The trade is allowed through **two trade facilitation centres** located at (1) Salamabad, Uri, District Baramulla and (2) Chakkan-da-Bagh, District Poonch.
- As per a **study by ICRIER**, informal trade between the two countries in 2012-13 was almost **double the value of formal trade**, and most of this was routed through a third country.



LoC Trade: Kashmir specific confidence building measures:

- Compared to the **cross LoC bus service** that was flagged off with much fanfare in 2005, **cross-LoC trade** between Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir got off to a **low-profile start**, receiving little attention at the time in India or Pakistan.
- In diplomatic parlance, these **two measures** are categorised as **“Kashmir specific confidence building measures”**.
- It then flowed out of backchannel negotiations between India and Pakistan **on a resolution to Kashmir**, in the belief that this would then give both sides legroom to **“remake” India-Pakistan relations**.

Cross-LoC trade is one of the Four-point proposal:

- Specifically, these measures seems to have originated in a **four-point proposal for Kashmir** that began to get regular airing from about 2005 from then military ruler General Pervez Musharraf. The four points were:
 - The **LoC will stay** but Kashmiris on both sides will be **allowed to move freely back and forth**;
 - self-governance** or autonomy to the region, but not independence;
 - gradual demilitarisation** on both sides;
 - a **joint supervision mechanism** with India, Pakistan and Kashmir represented on it.

Reasons stated by Ministry of Home Affairs:

- The ministry, while highlighting **the terror outfits fuelling separatism** in the valley.
- “During **ongoing probe** of certain cases by NIA, it has been brought out that a significant number of **trading concerns engaged in LoC trade** are operated by persons **closely associated with banned terror organisations** involved in fuelling **terrorism/separatism**.”

- It is also being argued that the **zero-tariff barter arrangement** is being **violated** through **under-invoicing** and the **exchange of third party items** such as U.S.-origin California almonds.
- The first is presumably **a way to transfer funds**; and
- the second would be to **exploit the zero-tariff trade**, something brought up by traders who operate via the Wagah border.
- The government's concerns may be well-founded, but the solution to violations of a trade agreement is to **enforce the rules** stringently, **not stop exchange of goods**.
- It will put at risk the **livelihood of countless people** on both sides of the LoC.
- At a protest in Srinagar against the trade suspension, for instance, a leader of the cross-LoC traders association argued that they had, in fact, themselves been **seeking a "fool proof mechanism"** to enforce the terms of the agreement.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **LoC trade** is meant to **facilitate exchange of goods** of common use between local populations across the LoC in Jammu & Kashmir.
- ❖ The government has **sent unsettling signals** by closing the National Highway between **Udhampur and Baramulla** to civilian traffic for two days a week to secure the movement of troop convoys.
- ❖ To now summarily **suspend LoC trade** is to **invite suspicion** that the step has been taken **without careful consideration of the consequences** and also for political reasons. The suspension must be **urgently revoked**.
- ❖ A **stricter regulatory and enforcement mechanism** is being worked out and will be put in place in consultation with various agencies. The issue of reopening of LoC trade will be revisited thereafter.
- ❖ More than its **value in currency terms**, the cross-LoC trade holds **much symbolic value in Jammu and Kashmir**, especially in the **Poonch-Rawalakot sector**, where there are more divided families and villages than at the Uri crossing point.

23. EASTER SUNDAY BOMBINGS: WHY SRI LANKA ?

Context:

- A series of coordinated attacks on **Easter Sunday in Sri Lanka** shattered the peace in a country that has suffered a **long history of sectarian tensions**.
- During a decades-long civil war, which **ended in 2009**, the **primary fault line** in the country was between the **Sinhalese Buddhist majority and minority Tamil groups**.
- But the bombings, claimed **by the Islamic State** and targeting Christian minorities, have little to do with these historical tensions.
- The Sri Lankan government has said the **Easter Sunday bombings** that killed over **350 people** were a retaliation for a white terrorist gunning down 50 people in **two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand**, on March 15 last.

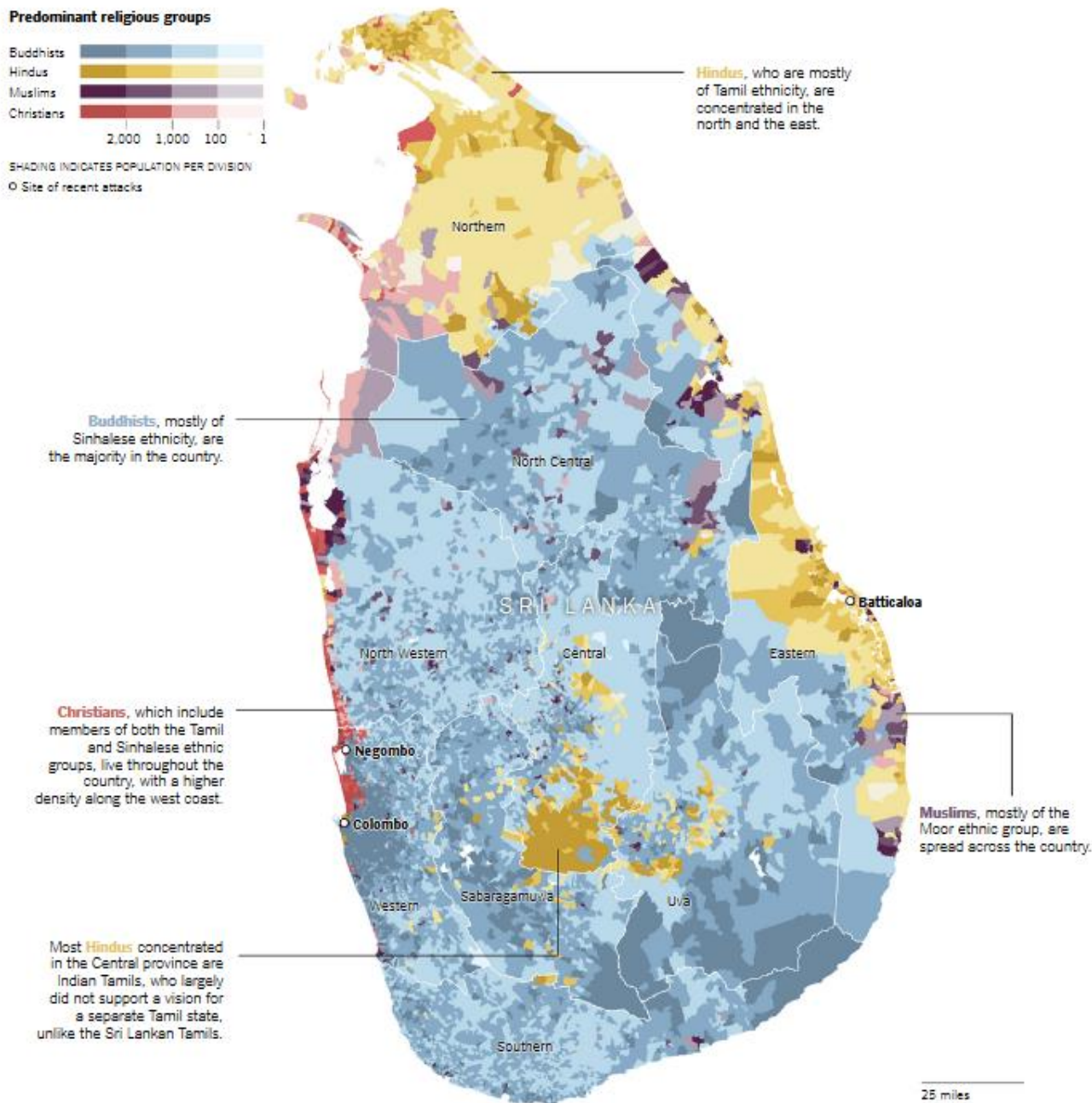
Radical Islamist ideology: National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ):

- Investigators have said local Islamist organisation **National Thowheed Jamath (NTJ)** was behind the attacks, possibly with help from **international networks**.
- The **Islamic State (IS)** has claimed responsibility for the attacks through its Amaq news agency and released a photograph of what it claimed to be the bombers.
- The Sri Lankan government also announced the **suspension of several social media platforms**, including Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram.
- The inability of such prominent services to catch up to and **counter the spread of misinformation**, especially during times of crisis, continues to be a major challenge for government and civil society.

Between the lines:

- Sri Lanka's **decades-long civil war** was driven largely **by ethnolinguistic cleavage**, with Tamil separatists in the north and east fighting against the Sinhalese-majority government.
- The pattern of Easter Sunday attacks in churches point to **yet another growing divide**.

- In its religious demographics, Sri Lanka is **overwhelmingly Buddhist**, more than 70% of the country's population of more than 22 million, with around 12% Hindu, just under 10% Muslim, and a **little more than 7% Christian**.
- The country's earlier history of violence pitted **ethnic Sinhalese** (mainly Buddhist) against Tamil (mainly Hindu), with the small Muslim and Christian minorities not a target.
- Tensions have been **growing between Buddhists and Muslims**, however, last year Buddhist extremists attacked Sri Lankan Muslims.



India condemns blasts, stands in solidarity with Sri Lanka:

- President Ram Nath Kovind, hours after the blasts which shook Sri Lanka, **condemned the attacks** and said that such senseless violence has no place in a civilised society.
- PM Modi tweeted, **Strongly condemn** the horrific blasts in Sri Lanka. There is no place for such barbarism in our region. India stands in solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka.
- World leaders call for perpetrators of such **ghastly and heinous act** and those who provide them support to be brought to **justice expeditiously**.
- We stand together with the people and Government of Sri Lanka in this hour of grief.

From recent evidences, South Asia, a fertile ground for ISIS:

- It's evident from its actions that the ISIS leadership has seen **South Asia as a fertile ground for the organisation**.
- The history of **jihadi insurgency**, high Muslim population and **growing tensions** between communities may all have prompted the group to focus on the region in its quest for expansion.
- Despite large-scale military setbacks at the core, ISIS still remains **a global terrorist force**.
- In **Nigeria, Boko Haram**, the jihadist group that controls parts of the country, has declared allegiance to ISIS.
- In **Afghanistan**, ISIS members and sympathisers have already **set up a wilayat** called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant Khorasan Province in the eastern Nangarhar province.
- The group has carried out **several suicide attacks**, mainly **targeting Shias** in the already troubled country.
- It's from Khorasan that ISIS is **handling its South Asia operations**, including in **India, Pakistan and Bangladesh**.
- ISIS hasn't carried out any major terror attack in India, nor does the group have any organisational presence in the country. But it has **lured dozens of Indians into its fold**.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The **IS world view of permanent conflict** between its version of puritanical Islam and other cultures continues to inspire young jihadists.
- ❖ **Thousands of IS militants** have survived the **fall of the 'Caliphate'** and there's an apparent communication system between the ramparts of the centre and the potential fighters in the **periphery**.
- ❖ Their target is to **spread terror anywhere** in the world and **trigger a cultural war** between Islam and other faiths. This time it's Sri Lanka, next time it could be any other country.
- ❖ All these developments, from establishing **wilayats in Afghanistan and Libya** to attracting youth **from India and Pakistan**, suggest that ISIS may have been weakened at its core but **it's far from defeated**.

24. UNCERTAIN TIMES: ON INDIA'S OIL IMPORTS

Context:

- United States announced that it would **not extend beyond May 1** the 180-day waiver it had granted to eight countries, **including India**, to purchase oil from Iran.
- India will **stop importing crude oil from Iran** following the US move to end sanction waivers, and will **use alternate supply sources** such as Saudi Arabia to make up for the lost volumes.
- The Trump administration decided **not to renew waiver** that let countries like India buy Iranian oil without facing US sanctions.

Iran and India's oil basket:

- India, the **world's third-biggest oil consumer**, meets **more than 80%** of its crude oil requirements and around **40% of its natural gas needs** through imports.
- Domestic oil and natural gas production have been declining for the last few years, even as the **energy needs of the economy have grown**.
- **India is Iran's top oil buyer after China**. In 2018-19, it imported 23.5 million tonnes from Iran; in the previous year, almost 10% of its total 220.4 million tonnes of crude imports was from Iran.
- **Iran was the fourth largest supplier of oil to India** in 2018-19, and other suppliers may not provide the same benefits in the form of price and credit facilities.

India acceding to the US sanctions on Iran:

- India has said the country is **"sufficiently prepared"** to deal with the impact of the US decision **to curtail the temporary exemption** from sanctions on the purchase of Iranian oil.
- Government mentioned that **"a robust plan"** has been put in place for **adequate supply** of crude to refineries.
- Petroleum Minister said the country plans to **increase imports from major oil producing nations** other than Iran, indicating that it will be acceding to the U.S. plan to reduce Iran's oil exports to zero.

- However, **Ratings agency ICRA** has estimated that stopping oil imports from Iran could cost Indian refineries as much as **₹2,500 crore**.

Potential impact on India:

Analysts point to key metrics that could be impacted by the current situation:

(i) Current account deficit:

- Higher crude oil prices will **widen the trade deficit and current account deficit**, given that the **value of imports goes up** with crude oil, and that the quantity imported tends to be sticky in general.
- **According to CARE**, a permanent increase in crude oil prices by 10% under ceteris paribus conditions could translate into the **current account deficit increasing by 0.4-0.5% of GDP**.

(ii) Rupee:

- The **currency could be impacted** if the trade and current account deficits were to widen. An **increase in the import bill** will tend to put pressure on the rupee.

(iii) Inflation:

- There could be **significant impact on inflation**, given how crude oil prices move and the extent to which the government allows the pass-through to the consumer.
- The crude oil price could be an important consideration when the **Monetary Policy Committee meets** for its bi-monthly meeting in June.

(iv) Fiscal impact:

- There could be a **two pronged impact on government finances** both on the **revenue side** and on the **expenditure side**.
- On the revenue side, higher oil prices mean more revenue for the states as tax is ad valorem; for the Centre, though, it may not materially impact the fiscal math as the duty rates are fixed.

US wants to Isolate Iran by imposing Sanctions:

- US secretary of state Mike Pompeo said that the latest decision **“intended to bring Iran’s oil exports to zero.”**
- **Oil is the lifeline of the nation**, which continues to **export one million barrels per day (bpd)**. It exported 2.7 million bpd before the sanctions kicked in last year.
- US said so far, the sanctions had deprived the regime of more than \$10 billion in oil sales.

Iran responded: Strait of Hormuz: world’s most critical oil choke point:

- Iran threatened to **close the Strait of Hormuz**, a neck of water between its southern coast and the northern tip of the sultanate of Oman.
- Strait of Hormuz lane through which a **third of the world’s seaborne oil passes** every day.

INDIA'S OIL IMPORTS FROM IRAN

India's the world's **4th** largest oil importer after US, China and Japan

Imports **6.9%** of the world's oil, amounting to **\$60.2 billion**



Iran is India's **3rd** largest supplier of oil

India imports oil worth **\$6.2 billion** from Iran

Following US sanctions on Iran, India will have to look elsewhere to import oil

THE OPTIONS



- It is a threat that Iran has made earlier, too and this strategic area has seen several flashpoints erupt in **Tehran's fraught relationship with the West** over the years.
- Iranian exports will not actually reach zero. "China will continue buying Iranian crude, perhaps as high as several hundred thousand bpd, to save face.
- China may barter for the oil or wall off banks to handle transactions in renminbi. India will likely take a similar position."
- Iran has repeatedly threatened to **disrupt the flow of oil** through the **Strait of Hormuz** if it's prevented from **using the Persian Gulf** through which about a **third of all oil traded at sea passes**.
- Such a move could threaten **Saudi exports** as the route is used for most oil shipments from the kingdom.
- US statement says that if **Chinese imports from Iran do not drop quickly**, the US sanctions could be **applied to Beijing's central bank**, the People's Bank of China.

Conclusion:

- ❖ **International energy markets** are critically dependent on **reliable transport**.
- ❖ **Over 60% of the world's petroleum** and other liquids production moves on **maritime routes**.
- ❖ Blocking the maritime choke points can lead to **huge increases in energy costs and world energy prices**.
- ❖ Choke points are also the places where tankers are **most vulnerable to pirates, terrorist attacks, political unrest, war, and shipping accidents**.
- ❖ For India, If India is to **protect its interests** in the **ever-volatile global oil market**, the government will **need to take steps to diversify its supplier base** and also work towards increasing **domestic sources of energy supplies**.
- ❖ Opening up the **renewable energy sector** for more investments will also **help avoid over-dependence on oil** from the global market to meet the country's ever-increasing energy needs.

25. BREAKING NEW GROUND

Context:

- The Madras High Court announced that **the term 'bride'** as per the Hindu Marriage Act, would also **include a transsexual** and not just someone born as a 'woman'.
- In the judgment delivered in **Arunkumar and Sreeja v. Inspector General of Registration and Others (2019)**, the Madras High Court has held that a properly **solemnised marriage** between a **male and transwoman is valid** under the **Hindu Marriage Act, 1955**, and the Registrar of Marriages is bound to register the same.
- A judgment of the Madras High Court, Madurai Bench, has **extended enjoyment of civil rights**, especially those pertaining to **marriage, to transpersons**.

Solemnised Marriage: Path-breaking decision:

- While this is path-breaking for much of the country, the judgment also opens doors to the **larger LGBTQ community** for **availing civil rights** including marriage, succession and inheritance.
- The judgment quotes **NALSA v. Union of India (2014)**, which held that transgender persons have the **right to decide their "self-identified gender"**.
- Now, when this is read along with the Supreme Court's explicit reference to the American court's guarantee of **right to marry to homosexual couples**.
- This shows that there **cannot be a legal bar any more** to extending **civil rights** such as marriage, succession or inheritance to LGBTQ couples who have decided to get **married consensually**, have married in accordance with the existing laws and are **not in violation of any other laws**.
- The court drew inference from **mythology (Mahabharata and Ramayana)**, traditional lore to **modern neuroscience**.

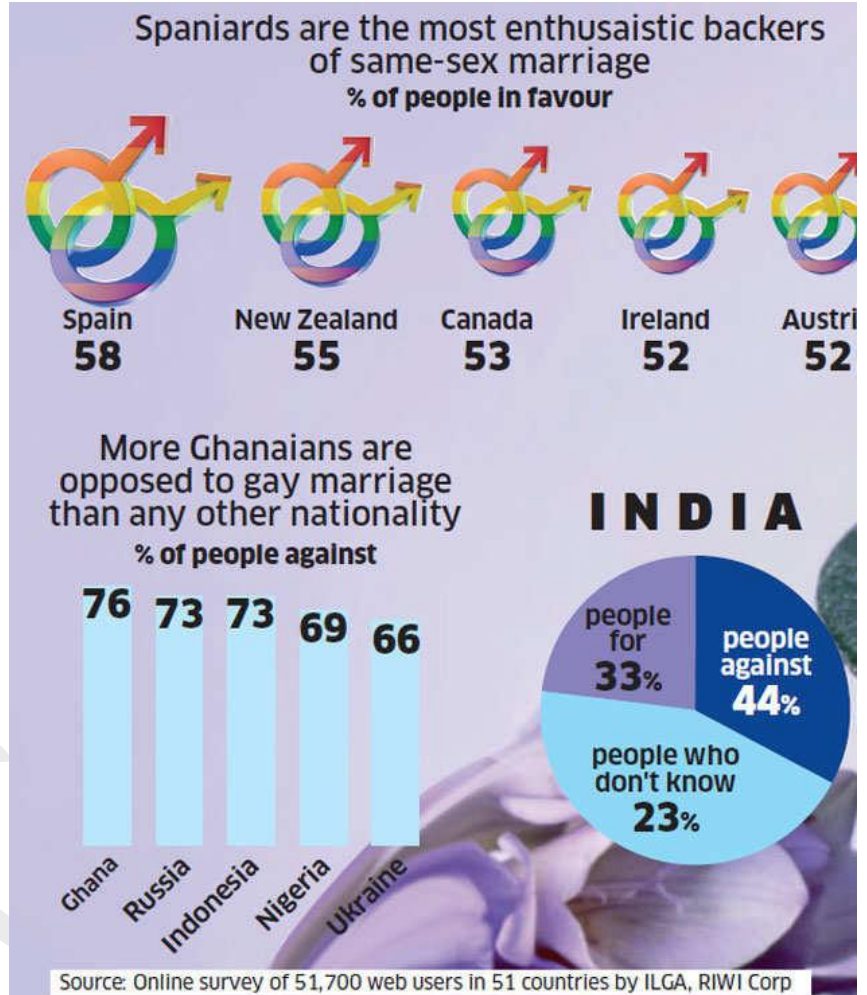
The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955:

- The main purpose of the act was to amend and codify the **law relating to marriage** among Hindus and others.
- Besides amending and codifying Sastrik Law, it **introduced separation and divorce**, which did not exist in Sastrik Law.

- This enactment brought **uniformity of law for all sections of Hindus**. In India there are **religion-specific civil codes** that separately govern adherents of certain other religions.
- Present case, the Madurai Bench judgment, however, **breaks new ground** when it comes to the **interpretation of the statutory terms** found in the Hindu Marriage Act, especially that of **bride (pertaining to women)**.
- It states that the **expression “bride”** occurring in **Section 5** of the Hindu Marriage Act cannot have a **static or immutable meaning**.
- As noted in Justice G.P. Singh’s Principles of Statutory Interpretation, the court is **free to apply the current meaning of a statute to present-day conditions**.

Constitutional validity of Section 377:

- The present judgment is truly path-breaking for the LGBTQ community, which is **denied equal protection of laws with regard to civil rights**.
- **Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code** is a section of the Indian Penal Code introduced in 1864 during the British rule of India. It makes sexual activities **“against the order of nature” illegal**.
- On 6 September 2018, the Supreme Court of India ruled that the **application of Section 377** to consensual homosexual sex between adults was unconstitutional, irrational, indefensible and manifestly arbitrary, but that Section 377 remains in force relating to sex with minors, non-consensual sexual acts.



Availing Civil Rights to LGBTQ community:

- Ever since the Supreme Court of India **decriminalized homosexuality** by ruling out the **Section 377** of the Indian Penal Code, the country has come a long way in **providing justice** to the LGBTQ community.
- The court has also asked the state government to issue an order **to put a ban on sex-reassignment surgeries** on inter-sex infants and children. He also added that an intersex child is entitled to stay with the family.
- According to justice, the government should also **launch awareness campaigns** to make parents understand that the **birth of an intersex child** is not something to be ashamed of.
- Ordering the State to create an awareness campaign in this regard, the court said **recent Tamil films** like Peranbu and Super Deluxe were **encouraging trends**.

Conclusion:

- ❖ At the preliminary hearings before the Supreme Court in **Navtej Singh Johar**, the Solicitor General, representing the Government of India, sought the **curtailing of the scope** of the case to that of the **constitutional validity of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code, 1860 alone**.
- ❖ The Supreme Court, consequently, did **not have an opportunity** to examine the **bundle of rights** that were to naturally arise from the **striking down of Section 377**.
- ❖ Therefore, in this context, the present judgment is **truly path-breaking** for the LGBTQ community, which is **denied equal protection of laws** with regard to civil rights.

- ❖ The decision comes as a **major step towards progress** for the country as one firmly believes that ***love comes in all shapes and sizes.***
- ❖ We are in hope for the other states to follow suit and wish to hear similar rulings like this in the future.



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RSTV/LSTV/AIR SYNOPSIS

1. SPACE DEBRIS

(TOPICS COVERED:

PRELIMS: Current events of national and international importance, General Science)

MAINS: GENERAL STUDIES III – Science and Technology)

Link: https://youtu.be/O9Njf66Z-XU?list=PLVOgwa_DiGzpAFPXUHGaiPSNvmwd8zEzQ

- On March 27th 2019, **India** has successfully tested a **state-of-the art missile technology** by **shooting down its own satellite** parked at **Low Earth Orbit (LEO)** under “Mission Shakti”. The **anti-satellite test** placed the country in **elite group of countries** (US, Russia and China) with such a capability.
- But the **NASA** has said that the **debris** created due to this has increased the **risk to international space station (ISS)**.
- **India**, on the other hand, has said that the test was conducted is well **within 300 km range** while ISS orbits the earth at an altitude of 330-435 km. The little debris created would fall back to earth within weeks.

SPACE DEBRIS:



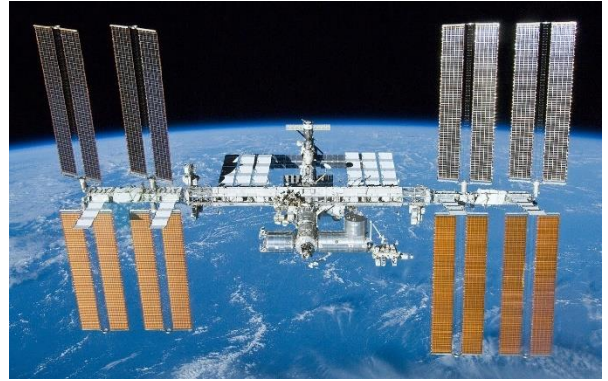
An illustration showing Space Debris around Earth

- A **SPACE DEBRIS** may refer to a **natural debris** found in the solar system (asteroids, comets and meteoroids) or debris from the mass of defunct, **artificially created objects** (like old satellites and spent rocket stages) in space, especially earth orbit.
- **Collision with debris** can create a **hazard to a spacecraft** by damaging its solar panels, optics, etc due to its **extremely high speed**. Momentum is directly proportional to velocity and a high momentum creates a **large force of impact**.
- Space debris can take any **random path** in space.
- Space debris are **tracked by radar and optical detectors**.
- As per **European Space Agency (ESA)**, as of January 2019, count of space debris is:
 - Large debris (> 10cm in size) = 34,000
 - Debris (1 – 10 cm size) = 9,00,000
 - Debris (<1cm size) = 128 million.

INTERNATIONAL SPACE STATION:

- It is a **space station** (habitable artificial satellite in low earth orbit).
- Its first component was **launched in orbit in 1998** and more pieces were added in coming years.
- **Astronauts** from various nations have visited ISS **since 2000 continuously**.
- It consists of pressurised habitation modules, solar arrays, radiators, experimental bays, robotic arms, etc.

- It serves as a **laboratory in space** for conducting various experiments in biology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, etc in a **zero-gravity environment**.
- It maintains an orbit with an **altitude between 330 and 435 km**, in the centre of the **Thermosphere layer** of atmosphere. It **circles the Earth in 92 minutes**.
- It is a joint programme between **5 participating space agencies**:
 - (i) **NASA (United States)**: National Aeronautics and Space Administration
 - (ii) **Roscosmos (Russia)**
 - (iii) **JAXA (Japan)**: Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency
 - (iv) **ESA (Europe)**: European Space Agency
 - (v) **CSA (Canada)**: Canadian Space Agency



CONCLUSION:

- ❖ Space debris are a point of concern due their large momentum despite small size.
- ❖ The debris of Mission Shakti Anti-satellite mission was generated at an altitude much below the orbit of ISS.
- ❖ So, as the possibilities of them hitting ISS are seen quite low by Indian experts. But NASA is keeping a track on them for its own safety concerns.



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