



INSIGHTSIAS

SIMPLIFYING IAS EXAM PREPARATION

INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

SEPTEMBER 2019

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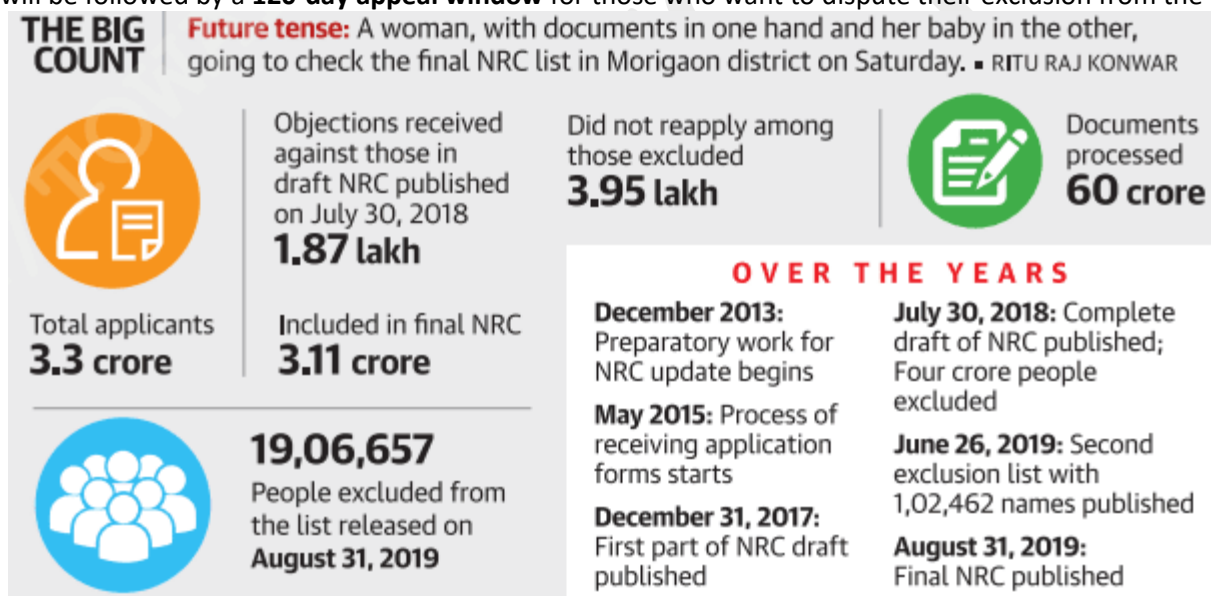
INSIGHTS into EDITORIAL

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. A FLAWED PROCESS THAT PLEASED NONE

Context:

- **More than 19 lakh people in Assam** were left facing an uncertain future as the final National Register of Citizens (NRC) was released, 14 years after a decision on it was first taken and four years after the exercise to compile it began in full swing under the **monitoring of the Supreme Court**.
- The **final draft NRC** published in July last year had **included 2.89 crore** of the 3 crore-plus applicants, excluding over 40 lakh people.
- Over 36 lakh of these people had filed “claims” against the exclusion, while of the 2.89 crore included, around 2 lakh people had had objections filed against their names.
- The NRC exercise was **technically an updation of the 1951 Assam NRC**, which had been prepared based on that year’s Census.
- It took the cut-off date to determine citizenship as **24th March (Midnight), 1971** (the start of the Bangladesh war), decided as per the Assam Accord.
- The NRC exercise had been undertaken under the supervision of the Supreme Court, and the final NRC list, will be followed by a **120-day appeal window** for those who want to dispute their exclusion from the list.



About National Register of Citizens (NRC) of Assam:

- It is the register containing **names of Indian Citizens**. It was prepared first in 1951 after the **conduct of the Census of 1951**.
- It is **used to identify** who is a bona fide Indian citizen and those who fail to enlist in the register will be deemed illegal migrants.
- The **first draft of the updated National Register of Citizens (NRC)** of Assam has been published recently by the Office of the State Coordinator of NRC on **December 31, 2017**.
- The objective behind updating and publishing the 1951 NRC is to compile a list of the names of **genuine Indian citizens residing in Assam** and, in the process, detect foreigners (read Bangladeshis) who may have illegally entered the state after March 24, 1971.

Vulnerable sections in proofing their citizenship:

- **Women have no birth certificates**, are not sent to school, and are married before they become adults. Therefore, **they fail to claim their rights**.
- **Impoverished migrant workers** often travel to other districts of Assam in search of work, as construction workers, road-builders and coal-miners.

- In the districts to which they migrate, the local police frequently record their names as illegal immigrants from Bangladesh.
- The police then mark them out as **illegal immigrants**. Hence the **lack of proof**, has excluded them from the register.
- With the **entire burden of proving citizenship on their shoulders** and the arbitrary and **opaque multiple forums** to which they are summoned, people deprived of both education and resources are caught in a **confusing bureaucratic maze**.

People who are excluded from the updated NRC:

- Individuals excluded from the final list of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam will **not become stateless** and will continue to **enjoy equal rights** available to all Indians till they have **exhausted all the remedies** available under the law.
- Those left out are **not foreigners** until the tribunals set up to determine their fate pronounce them so. The process could go all the way to the Supreme Court.
- The Home Ministry has also **extended the time to file appeals** against exclusion in the **Foreigners Tribunal from 60 to 120 days**.
- As a result, the **courts in India will be burdened and get exhaustive** as the appeal period is short and cases are far too many which may further clog the process. At present, there are **100 FTs in Assam and 200 more will be functional soon**.
- The Tribunals are required to **dispose of the cases within six months**.
- Appellants can then approach the High Court and Supreme Court.
- They will **get a window of 10 months** to prove their citizenship before being sent to detention centres.
- But protests across the spectrum expressing concern over the excluded, suggest the **judiciary-led process** was perhaps **largely robust and the errors** were more procedural than targeted.
- The State government and many political parties have **promised to offer legal help** to those excluded, but such assistance should have been forthcoming from the time the updating exercise was rolled out on the ground in 2015.
- Instead, it was mostly left to sundry organisations and concerned activists to come to the aid of hundreds of thousands oblivious of documentation novelties such as legacy data.

Certain Limitations in the NRC process

- They were **often rejected for small discrepancies**, such as in the English-language spelling of Bengali names or in the age even though it is well-known that most rural people do not know their dates of birth. Many of them **do not have legal land records**.
- In the middle of the NRC process, an **arbitrary category was introduced** of the 'indigenous' Assamese, who were treated **much more leniently** even when they could not produce the required documents.
- There have been instances where **due to lack of procedural safeguards**, Tribunals have issued notices to entire families, instead of just the **suspected "foreigner"**. This makes the **entire family vulnerable to orders of the Tribunal**.
- Administrative and procedural discrepancies affect the **marginalised and vulnerable** the most as they are not able to **produce enough documents in limited time due to their limited access**.
- The **burden of proof was shifted to the residents** to prove that they were citizens, based on documents such as those linked to birth, schooling and land ownership which impoverished and unlettered rural residents anywhere would find hard to muster.

Conclusion:

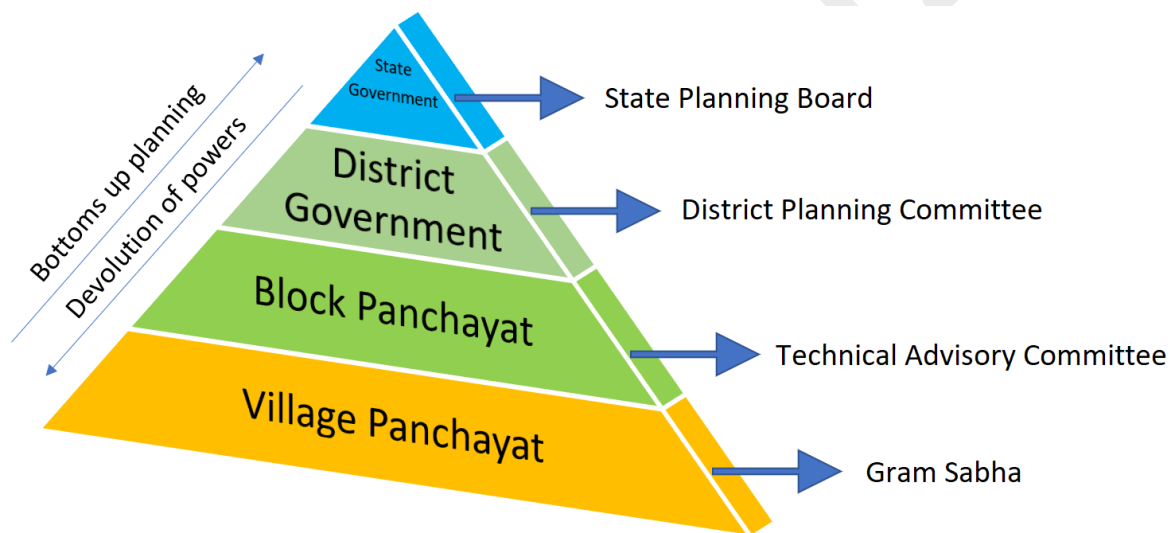
- Assam has **six detention camps** and the government is planning to **build more for illegal migrants** within existing jails.
- The state government has proposed to build a seventh detention camp with a capacity for 3,000 people. However, the **list of illegal migrants is in lakhs which these detention centers won't be able to accommodate**.
- Although, **India has no fixed policy for "stateless" persons**. The only aspect that is more or less clear here is that a **"stateless" person will not have voting rights**. As of now, nothing is clear about their rights to work, housing and government healthcare and education.

- Options being bandied about include **instituting a system of work permits**, a renewed attempt to nudge Dhaka to take in some of the declared foreigners with appropriate deal sweeteners or **'friendly' State governments** volunteering to share some of the burden.
- If not deported or detained in a camp, such people would officially be entitled as non-citizens.
- It is important and essential for the union government to **proactively come out** with an **equitable, predictable and transparent plan on the way forward**, for those who will be **identified as 'foreigners'**.

2. THROTTLED AT THE GRASS ROOTS

Introduction:

- Democratic decentralisation** is barely alive in India. Over 25 years after the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments (establishment of panchayats and municipalities as elected local governments) **devolved a range of powers and responsibilities** and **made them accountable** to the people for their implementation, very little and actual progress has been made in this direction.
- Local governments **remain hamstrung and ineffective**; mere agents to do the bidding of higher-level governments.
- Democracy has not been enhanced in spite of about **32 lakh peoples' representatives being elected to them every five years**, with great expectation and fanfare.



73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were passed by Parliament in December, 1992:

- A study for the **Fourteenth Finance Commission by the Centre for Policy Research**, shows that all States have formally devolved powers with respect to **five core functions**:
 - water supply, sanitation, roads and communication, streetlight provision and the management of community assets to the gram panchayats.
- Devolution**, envisioned by the Constitution, is not mere delegation.
- It implies that precisely **defined governance functions** are formally assigned by law to local governments, backed by **adequate transfer of a basket of financial grants and tax handles**, and they are **given staff** so that they have the necessary wherewithal to carry out their responsibilities.
- The Panchayats have been endowed with **de-centralisation of powers and authority** as may be necessary to function as institutions of self-government and social justice.
- Providing real functional autonomy** at the village level is at the core of the amendment Act.
- There is a need for the state political leadership to **accept the importance of PRIs**, and devolve power to them as mandated in the Constitution of India.
- Building the capacities of the PRIs not as mere implementers of the projects but as planners and evaluators would help strengthen the institution.
- There is also a **need for elected local leaders to come together with their constituents**, and demand more control and autonomy as enshrined to them by the Constitution of India.
- Above all, local governments are to report primarily to their voters, and not so much to higher level departments.

Key issues need to address in Local-self governments:

- The Constitution mandates that panchayats and municipalities shall be elected every five years and enjoins States to devolve functions and responsibilities to them through law.
- The constraint lies in the **design of funding streams** that transfer money to local governments.
 - First, the volume of money set apart for them is **inadequate to meet their basic requirements**.
 - Second, much of the **money given is inflexible**; even in the case of untied grants mandated by the Union and State Finance Commissions, **their use is constrained** through the imposition of several conditions.
 - Third, there is **little investment in enabling and strengthening local governments** to raise their own taxes and user charges.
 - The last nail in the devolution coffin is that **local governments do not have the staff to perform even basic tasks**.
 - Furthermore, as most staff are hired by higher level departments and placed with local governments on deputation, **they do not feel responsible** to the latter; they function as part of a **vertically integrated departmental system**.

Corruption at Lower Levels of Hierarchy:

Given diverse habitation patterns, political and social history, it makes sense to mandate States to **assign functions to local governments**.

- However, A **market chain of corruption operates**, involving a partnership between elected representatives and officials at all levels.
- Yet, there is no evidence to show that corruption has increased due to decentralisation.
- **Decentralised corruption** tends to get exposed faster than national or State-level corruption.
- People erroneously perceive higher corruption at the local level, **simply because it is more visible**.

State governments are in Postponement of Local Body Elections:

In addition to above structural problems were not bad enough, in violation of the **constitutional mandate of five yearly elections** to local governments, States have often **postponed them**.

- In 2005, when the Gujarat government postponed the Ahmedabad corporation elections, a Supreme Court constitutional bench held that **under no circumstances can such postponements be allowed**.
- Subsequently, the Supreme Court rejected other alibis for election postponement, such as delays in determining the seat reservation matrix, or fresh delimitation of local government boundaries.
- Yet, **in Tamil Nadu**, panchayat elections have **not been held for over two years** now, resulting in the **State losing finance commission grants from the Union government**.

Way Forward to eliminate Corruption at Local Government levels:

To curb these tendencies, first, **gram sabhas and wards committees in urban areas have to be revitalised**:

- The constitutional definition of a gram sabha is that it is an **association of voters**.
- Because of our erroneous belief that the word 'sabha' means 'meeting', we try to regulate **how grama sabha meetings are held** and pretend that we are **strengthening democracy**.
- **Cosmetic reforms of the gram sabha** by videography of their meetings, does little for democracy.
- Consultations with the grama sabha could be organised through **smaller discussions where everybody can really participate**.
- Even new systems of **Short Message Services, or social media groups** could be used for facilitating discussions between members of a grama sabha.

Second, **local government organisational structures have to be strengthened**:

- Panchayats are burdened with a **huge amount of work** that other departments thrust on them, **without being compensated** for the extra administrative costs.
- Local governments must be enabled to hold **State departments accountable** and to **provide quality, corruption free service to them**, through service-level agreements.

Third, **we cannot have accountable GPs, without local taxation**:

- Local governments are **reluctant to collect property taxes and user charges fully**.

- They are happy to implement **top-down programmes** because they know that if they collect taxes, their voters will never forgive them for **misusing their funds**.
- The connection between tax payment and higher accountability is well known, but we wish to ignore these lessons.

Conclusion:

- **India's efforts in decentralisation** represent one of the **largest experiments in deepening democracy**.
- **Decentralisation** is always a messy form of democracy, but it is **far better than** the operation of criminal politicians at the higher level who appropriate huge sums of tax-payer money, without any of us having a clue.
- We can keep **track of corrupt local government** representatives; at the higher level, we will never know the extent of corrupt deals that happen.
- We have given ourselves a **reasonably robust democratic structure for local governance** over the last two decades and more.
- It is for us to give **life to this structure**, through the **practice of a robust democratic culture**.
- Devolution of powers is important because it ensures that decisions are made closer to the local people, communities and businesses they affect.
- Devolution will **provide greater freedoms and flexibilities at a local level**, meaning panchayats/municipalities can work **more effectively to improve public services for their area**.

3. A MILESTONE IN GREATER TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY

Context:

- The State Government of Rajasthan has recently launched the **first-ever public information portal named "Jan Soochna Portal-2019"**.
- Jan Soochna Portal (JSP) is a **remarkable achievement** in advancing the Right to Information (RTI).
- The portal aims to **provide information to the public** about government authorities and departments empowering them **with access to useful information**.
- The portal was developed by the government officials in close collaboration with the IT professionals and civil society groups.

Jan Soochna Portal-2019:

- The launch of this portal is in accordance with the **true spirit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act** and ensures compliance with **Section 4(2) of the RTI Act** that mandates the public authorities to proactively disclose information in the public domain.
- It initially gives information of about 13 government departments on a single platform.
- **Information related** to the availability of food grains & ration shops, implementation of schemes and their beneficiaries, land records and social security pensions, inter alia, will be available on a real-time basis on this platform.



- **Information kiosks** in village panchayats and self-service e-Mitra centres in the towns will be established to enable the people to access the information.
- The **Department of Information Technology** will serve as the nodal department for the development, operationalization, and maintenance of the JSP.
- With different sections divided into districts, blocks and panchayats, the **portal empowers the common people with access to useful information.**
- It will also help to ensure that the responsibilities are carried out smoothly, the advisory group will be the monitoring agency.
- **Grievance redressal officers** will be appointed so that citizens can keep a check upon the accountability aspect of the State government.

Draft guidelines should be implemented in Letter and Spirit:

- Now, the people would not need to file applications separately under the law to obtain information. They could freely access the information publicly.
- However, there are **huge challenges** with regard to **maintenance issues** and ensuring that there is **no let-up in the availability of information.**
- With this in mind, draft guidelines have been framed for the **development and maintenance of the JSP.**
- Once implemented, this will ensure that the information system **continues uninterrupted.**
- Various departments of the government of Rajasthan, called Line Departments, have been given a set of obligations that they are expected to fulfil.
- For example, they are expected to **ensure digitisation of records.** In addition, the Department of Information Technology will serve as the **nodal department for the development, operationalisation and maintenance of the JSP.**
- This department has been informed of its obligations, which includes adherence to the norms and standards laid down by a digital dialogue advisory group.
- To ensure that the responsibilities are carried out, the **advisory group will be the monitoring agency.**
- **Grievance redressal officers** will be appointed so that citizens can make the State government truly accountable.

Right to Information (RTI) Act:

- RTI Act was enacted in 2005 with the **aim to secure the citizens' access to information which is under the control of public authorities.**
- The primary purpose behind this enactment was to **promote transparency and accountability** in the working of every public authority.
- **Section 4 of the RTI Act** requires suo-moto disclosure of information by each public authority.
- In 2018, an amendment was proposed to the RTI Act that aimed at giving the Central government the **power to fix the tenure and salaries** of state and central information commissioners, which are **statutorily protected under the RTI Act.**
- The proposed move may dilute the autonomy and independence of Information Commissioners.

Training for citizens to create awareness:

- The **digital divide is a serious problem in India.** To bridge this gap, utmost care must be taken to ensure that access points are open and free for all.
- What is important is that a **tremendous amount of information** is available on the files of the government of Rajasthan, which till date could **only be accessed through the filing of RTI applications.**
- However, with the use of technology and digitisation of records and information, this information is made freely available on the JSP.
- To this extent, there is no need for anyone to take recourse to the RTI Act and await a response. All information can be accessed immediately, free of cost.
- The government of Rajasthan has also taken steps to **train citizens so that they are aware of the facilities available.**

Conclusion:

- JSP is unique for it **ensures both- transparency accompanied by accountability.**
- The need is to **host the JSP in decentralized locations,** right down to the municipal ward and panchayat levels.

- This will ensure that people have **access to welfare schemes**, revenue activities such as mining, and other service delivery issues such as health and education.
- The portal would eventually turn out to be **an effective medium for the digital dialogue** with the people as well as a **strong instrument for ensuring transparency in governance**.
- The need of the hour is that **other State governments must follow** the Rajasthan government's pioneering initiative and make people, including the marginalized sections, a **part of the governance process**.

4. ALL THE PRESIDENT'S MEN

Context:

- According to author, the recent **appointment of five Governors by the President** must be viewed with grave scepticism.
- By nominating persons who are deeply embedded within the Party ecosystem, the Union Government has sent the clear and ominous signal that **constitutional principles and judicial diktats** are secondary to the propagation of the party's ideology.
- This place the entire edifice of the Constitution in an extremely precarious position and calls for a review of the process of gubernatorial appointments.

Constituent Assembly debates on the appointment of Governor:

- The process of gubernatorial appointments is **anything but transparent**.
- We know little more than the fact that the President has appointed a person as Governor **"by warrant under his hand and seal"**.
- The Constituent Assembly debates on this issue reveal divergent views and considerable deliberation.
- On May 30 1949, Sardar Hukum Singh had argued in **favour of providing a panel of names, elected by the State Legislature**, for the President to choose from.
- Fellow member, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar backed the appointment of a Governor by the President with the hope that the **"Cabinet at the Centre would also be guided by the advice" of the State Cabinet**.
- Adding to the debate, G. Durgai Bai spoke in favour of an appointment mechanism in order to **"place the Governor above party politics, above factions and not to subject him to the party affairs"**.
- Supporting this proposition, then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru indicated his preference for a Governor who would be "acceptable to the Government of the province and yet he must **not be known to be a part of the party machine** of that province".
- A cursory look at the Governors who have been appointed since 1950, under the Constitution, tells us that the fear expressed by the various members of the Constituent Assembly was not imaginary.

Constitutional provisions related to Governor:

- **Article 163:** It talks about the discretionary power of governor.
- **Article 256:** The executive power of the Union shall extend to the giving of such directions to a State as may appear to the Government of India to be necessary for that purpose.
- **Article 257:** The executive power of the Union shall also extend to the giving of directions to a State as to the construction and maintenance of means of communication declared in the direction to be of national or military importance:

PRESIDENT KOVIND APPOINTS

5 NEW GOVERNORS, 1 LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR



Brigadier Dr BD Mishra (retired) Governor of Arunachal Pradesh
Satya Pal Malik Governor of Bihar
Banwarilal Purohit Governor of Tamil Nadu
Jagdish Mukhi Governor of Assam
Ganga Prasad Governor of Meghalaya
Admiral Devendra Kumar Joshi (retired) Lieutenant Governor of Andaman and Nicobar Islands

- **Article 355:** It entrusts the duty upon Union to protect the states against “external aggression” and “internal disturbance” to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of Constitution.
- **Article 356:** In the event that a state government is unable to function according to constitutional provisions, the Central government can take direct control of the state machinery. The state’s governor issues the proclamation, after obtaining the consent of the President of India.
- **Article 357:** It deals with Exercise of legislative powers under Proclamation issued under Article 356 by the central government.

B.P. Singhal vs Union of India (2010):

- A five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court looked at the scope of the Union’s power **to remove Governors** in the landmark case of B.P. Singhal v. Union of India (2010).
- **The President**, in effect the central government, has the power to remove a Governor at any time without giving him or her any reason, and without granting an opportunity to be heard.
- However, **this power cannot be exercised in an arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable manner.**
- The power of removing Governors should only be exercised in rare and exceptional circumstances for valid and compelling reasons.
- The mere reason that a Governor is at variance with the policies and ideologies of the central government, or that the central government has lost confidence in him or her, is not sufficient to remove a Governor.
- **Thus, a change in central government cannot be a ground for removal of Governors, or to appoint more favourable persons to this post.**

A decision to remove a Governor can be challenged in a court of law:

- In such cases, first the petitioner will have to make a prima facie case of arbitrariness or bad faith on part of the central government.
- If a prima facie case is established, the court can require the central government **to produce the materials** on the basis of which the decision was made in order to **verify the presence of compelling reasons.**
- Elucidating the specific functions of the Governor, the Supreme Court said that the Governor is “**not an employee of the Union Government, nor the agent** of the party in power nor required to act under the dictates of political parties”.
- The Court further anticipated that there “may be occasions when he may have to be an **impartial or neutral Umpire** where the views of the Union Government and State Governments are in conflict”.
- **The Sarkaria Commission (1988)** recommended that Article 356 should be used in **very rare cases** when it becomes unavoidable to restore the breakdown of constitutional machinery in the State.
- The commission recommended that before taking action under Article 356, a warning should be issued to the state government that it is not functioning according to the constitution.
- “**Justice V.Chelliah Commission**” (2002) recommended that Article 356 must be used sparingly and only as a remedy of the last resort after exhausting all actions under Articles 256, 257 and 355.
- The “**Punchhi commission**” recommended that these Articles 355 & 356 be amended. It sought to protect the interests of the States by trying to curb their misuse by the Centre.

Conclusion:

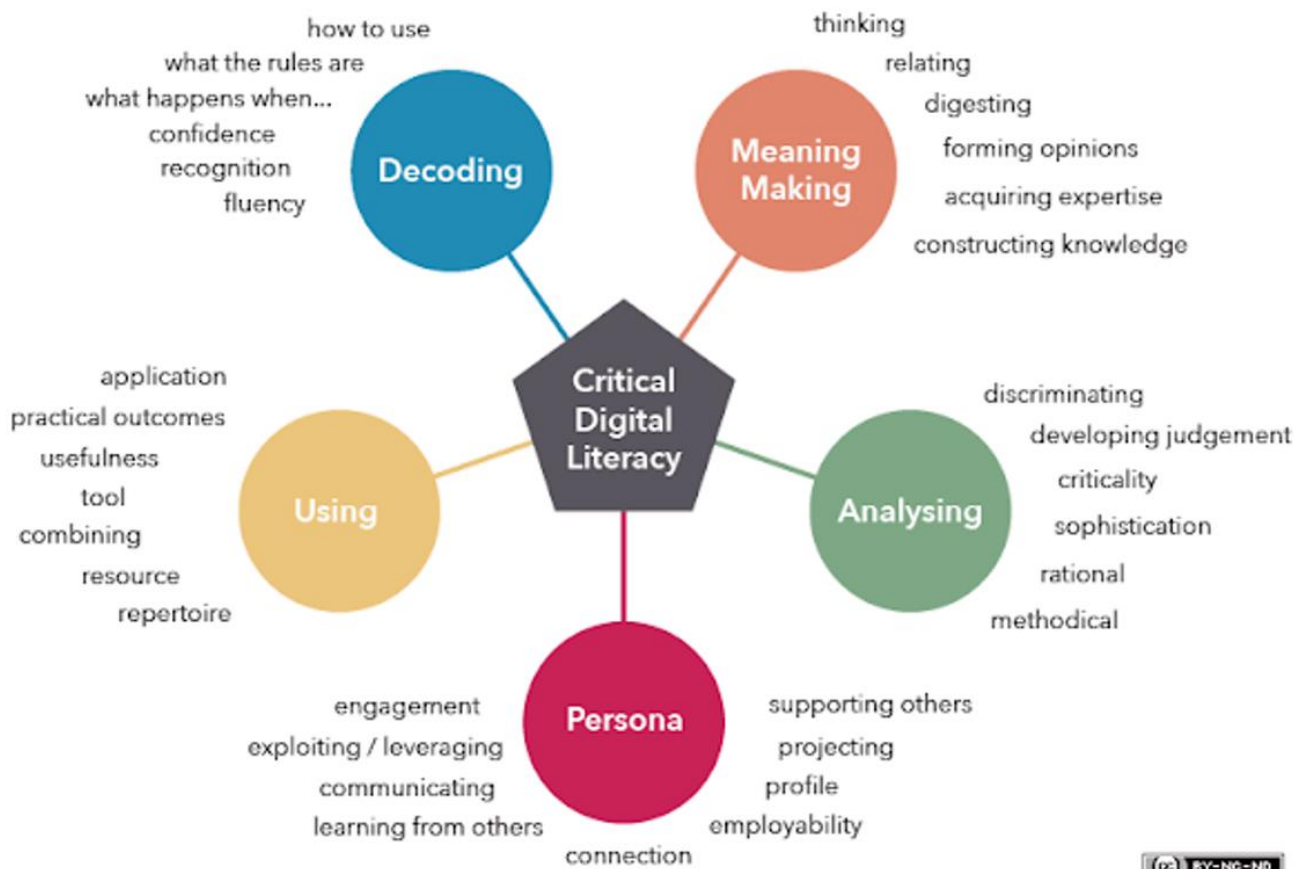
- The **S R Bommai verdict** allows the Supreme Court to investigate claims of **malafide in the Governor’s report**, a similar extension **to cover malafide in the invitation process** could be a potential solution.
- The role of governor is **indispensable** for the successful working of the **constitutional democracy.**
- Governor of a state must **refrain from aligning** to any political ideology. **The virtue of impartiality** must be withheld to **ensure a free and fair election** in a democracy.
- The ‘procedure for appointment of governors should be clearly laid down’ and conditions of appointment must also be laid down and must assure a fixed tenure for the governor so that the governor is not under the constant threat of removal by the central government.
- It is necessary to invest the office of the Governor with the **requisite independence of action** and to rid them of the **bane of ‘instructions’** from the Central Government.
- It is suggested that the **exercise of ‘discretionary powers’** by the Governors should be **‘guided by the healthy and democratic conventions’.**

- For the smooth functioning of a democratic government, it is equally important that the **governor must act judiciously, impartially and efficiently** while exercising his discretion and personal judgment.

5. INEQUALITY OF ANOTHER KIND

Context:

- Recently, in **Faheema Shirin v. State of Kerala**, the Kerala High Court declared the **right to Internet access as a fundamental right** forming a part of the **right to privacy and the right to education under Article 21** of the Constitution.
- While this is a welcome move, it is important to recognise the **right to Internet access as an independent right**.
- While the Kerala High Court judgment acknowledges the role of the **right to access Internet in accessing other fundamental rights**, it is imperative that the right to Internet access and digital literacy be recognised as a right in itself.



Digital Literacy in India:

- Digital literacy refers to the **wide range of skills**, which are necessary to emerge successful and adapt to the digital world. It also refers to skill set which is essential for access and gaining information.
- In recent times, several government and private sector services have become digital. Some of them are only available online.
- This leads to a **new kind of inequality, digital inequality**, where social and economic backwardness is exacerbated due to information poverty, lack of infrastructure, and lack of digital literacy.
- Moving governance and service delivery online** without the requisite progress in Internet access and digital literacy also does not make economic sense.
 - For instance, Common Service Centres, which operate in rural and remote locations, are physical facilities which help in delivering digital government services and informing communities about government initiatives.
- While the state may be saving resources by moving services online, it also has to spend resources since a large chunk of citizens cannot access these services.

India's deep digital literacy divide:

- While India asserts itself as one of the **world's largest growing economies**, a recent report by the **Digital Empowerment Foundation** indicates that **30% of our population lags on basic literacy and thrice that for digital literacy**.
- The government launched **Digital India in 2015** to digitally empower every citizen.
- While its potential benefits are unquestionable, challenges remain, including delayed infrastructure development, bandwidth availability, personal computer penetration and the capacity to scale.

Digital Inequality:

- According to the **Deloitte report**, 'Digital India: Unlocking the Trillion Dollar Opportunity', in mid-2016, **digital literacy in India was less than 10%**.
- We are moving to a global economy where knowledge of digital processes will transform the way in which people work, collaborate, consume information, and entertain themselves.
- The **Bharat Net programme**, aiming to have an **optical fibre network** in all gram panchayats, is to act as the **infrastructural backbone** for having Internet access all across the country.
- However, the project has **consistently missed all its deadlines** while the costs involved have doubled.
- Similarly, the **National Digital Literacy Mission** has barely touched 1.67% of the population and has been struggling for funds.
- This is particularly worrying because Internet access and digital literacy are dependent on each other, and creation of digital infrastructure must go hand in hand with the creation of digital skills.
- This has been acknowledged in the **Sustainable Development Goals** as well as by the Indian government and has led to the **Digital India mission**.
- Offering services online has cost and efficiency benefits for the government and also allows citizens to bypass lower-level government bureaucracy.
- However, in the absence of Internet access and digital literacy enabling that access, there will be **further exclusion of large parts of the population**, exacerbating the already existing digital divide.

The importance of digital literacy:

- **Internet access and digital literacy** have implications beyond access to government services.
- Digital literacy allows people **to access information and services**, collaborate, and navigate socio-cultural networks.
- In fact, the definition of literacy today must include the **ability to access and act upon resources and information** found online.

In this framework the state would have:

- A positive obligation to **create infrastructure for a minimum standard and quality** of Internet access as well as capacity-building measures which would allow all citizens to be digitally literate and
- A negative obligation prohibiting it from engaging in conduct that impedes, obstructs or violates such a right.
- Recognising the right to internet access and digital literacy will also make it easier to **demand accountability** from the state, as well as encourage the legislature and the executive to take a more proactive role in furthering this right.
- The courts have always interpreted **Article 21 as a broad spectrum of rights** considered incidental and/or **integral to the right to life**.
- A right to Internet access would also further provisions given under **Articles 38(2) and 39 of the Constitution**.
- It has now become settled judicial practice to read fundamental rights along with directive principles with a view to defining the scope and ambit of the former.

If India were to optimise the opportunities emerging out of the modern digital economy, we would need to **leverage the full potential of our digital investments**, through a standardised set of programmes implemented at various levels via the machinery of governments, corporates and education institutions.

Conclusion:

- The government has acknowledged this and has initiated certain measures in this regard.

- We are living in an **'information society'**. Unequal access to the Internet creates and reproduces **socio-economic exclusions**.
- It is important to recognise the **right to Internet access** and **digital literacy** to alleviate this situation, and allow citizens increased access to information, services, and the **creation of better livelihood opportunities**.
- Creation of digital infrastructure must go hand in hand with the **creation of digital skills**.

6. THE NATIONAL POPULATION REGISTER, AND THE CONTROVERSY AROUND IT

Context:

- In the backdrop of the **National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam** excluding **19 lakhs among the 3.3 crore** who had applied, the resurrection of the **National Population Register (NPR) project** has added to the uncertainty around the idea of citizenship in the country.
- Even as issues of privacy associated with Aadhaar continue to be debated in the country, the NPR is on a drive **to collect detailed data on residents of India**.
- What has added to the conversation is Home Minister floating the **idea of "one nation, one card"** and asserting that the NRC would be implemented across the country.

What is National Population Register (NPR)?

- The National Population Register (NPR) is a **register of the 'usual' residents** of the country.
- A usual resident is defined as a person who has **resided in a local area for the past six months or more**, or a person who intends to reside in that area for the next 6 months or more.
- The database under the NPR will be maintained by the **Registrar General of India and Census Commissioner of India**, Ministry of Home Affairs.
- The NPR is prepared at the local (Village or sub-Town), sub-District, District, State and National level, under **provisions of the Citizenship Act 1955** and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.
- It will be **mandatory for every usual resident of India** to register in the NPR.
- The exercise will be carried out during the **house-listing phase of Census 2021**, during April to September 2020, in all the states and union territories, except Assam, where a National Register of Citizens was recently released.

Differences between Census and NPR:

- There are **two crucial differences** between the census and NPR processes.
- First, the census doesn't ask for **individual identity details**, and at the end of the day, is a macro exercise.
- The NPR, on the other hand, is designed to **collect identity details** of every individual.
- The second is that census data is **protected by a confidentiality clause**. The government has committed that it will **not reveal information** received from an individual for the headcount.
- Officials said the NPR would serve as the **mother database to verify citizenship** if a nationwide NRC is carried out later.
- The home ministry used the **example of the Ujjwala scheme**, under which **subsidised gas cylinders** are given to below-poverty-line families, to underline the importance of data in **shaping welfare policy**.

Positives of National Population Register (NPR) project:

- Population census is an exercise that helps to provide people the benefits of the government schemes. National Population Register will help government solve many issues in the country.
- A digital NPR will help in **solving several issues**, like law and order and gender equality.

Helping Hand

NPR will seek verification of biometrics from UIDAI
Exercise will be carried out across country, except Assam

To be conducted between April 1, 2020, and Sept 30, 2020

Those holding Aadhaar not required to give biometrics for NPR

NPR will have both biometric & demographic details

15 demographic parameters included in NPR



- It would be a solution to the **multifarious problems** facing the country – from effective maintenance of law and order to an efficient implementation of welfare schemes like MGNREGA, food security and nutrition campaigns.
- NPR will prove to be a **game changer in the country**. Digital census has many benefits.
- If a child takes birth and attains the age of 18, then he/she should be able to vote automatically **without applying for a voter identification card**.
- A Census helps us plan our **social welfare and entitlement schemes** better, through NPR India would have a **multipurpose identity document** that will have all details like Aadhaar and PAN card.

However, Data privacy reservations:

- The fact that **Aadhaar details will be added to the NPR database** has given rise to concerns of data privacy.
- The NPR has **raised anxieties around the idea of citizenship** in the country.
- Even as a debate continues on Aadhaar and privacy, the NPR intends to collect a much larger amount of personal data on residents of India.
- The **idea of conducting a nationwide NRC** would only happen on the basis of the upcoming NPR.
- After a list of residents is created, a nationwide NRC could go about verifying the citizens from that list.
- In the past, reports have stated that Aadhaar data has been **compromised on multiple occasions** even as the UIDAI continues to deny that there have been breaches.
- The personal data that the government is planning to collect for NPR is quite large and there are concerns whether the government is equipped to **protect the citizens' data**.
- Apart from data privacy, concern has also been voiced over the exercise as a whole.
- NPR will be the base for a nationwide National Register of Citizens and will be similar to the list of citizens of Assam released recently.
- During the NRC exercise, there were several instances where some members of a family featured in the draft list while the others did not.
- The idea of NPR is a likely cause for worry since there **could be such discrepancies** in the NPR as well.

Conclusion:

- The **2021 census** would conclude on March 1 midnight and a revisional round would be conducted between March 1, 2021 and March 5, 2021 to include them who left from the exercise.
- It will be **mandatory for every usual resident of India to register in the NPR**.
- While registering with the NPR is mandatory, furnishing of additional data such as PAN, Aadhaar, driving licence and voter ID is voluntary. Making it mandatory will invite unnecessary litigation.
- The NPR will **collect both demographic data and biometric data**.
- Using technology for collecting census data is a great idea, but **enumerators should be trained adequately**.
- There are **15 different categories of demographic data**, ranging from name and place of birth to education and occupation, that the Register General of India is supposed collect in the NPR.
- For biometric data it will depend on Aadhaar, for which it will seek Aadhaar details of the residents.
- As of now there is **no proposal to make it mandatory**. We are also reposing trust in citizens. No document is being asked for or being verified against the details provided. The pilot project has shown that almost all the people are willing to share this data.

ECONOMY

1. MARINE FISHERIES BILL ADDRESSES A REGULATORY VOID

Context:

- A **Marine Fisheries Regulation and Management (MFRM) Bill 2019** is in the public domain for discussion.
- The **annual fishery potential of the country's EEZ is about 5 million tonnes**.
- This indicates that marine fisheries resources are **not overexploited** and there is a **marginal scope for tapping of more resources** from the sea in a sustainable manner.
- **Fisheries is a State Subject**, fishing in the IW and TS come within the purview of the States concerned.

- Other activities in the TS and activities, including fishing beyond the TS up to the limit of EEZ, are in the Union List.

- **Utilising it judiciously** is an important priority of the government that was underscored by the formation of a new fisheries ministry.

- Comprehending the Bill's rationale requires understanding the United Nations Convention on the

Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements under which India has obligations to frame laws.

Making Fisheries Industry Sustainable:

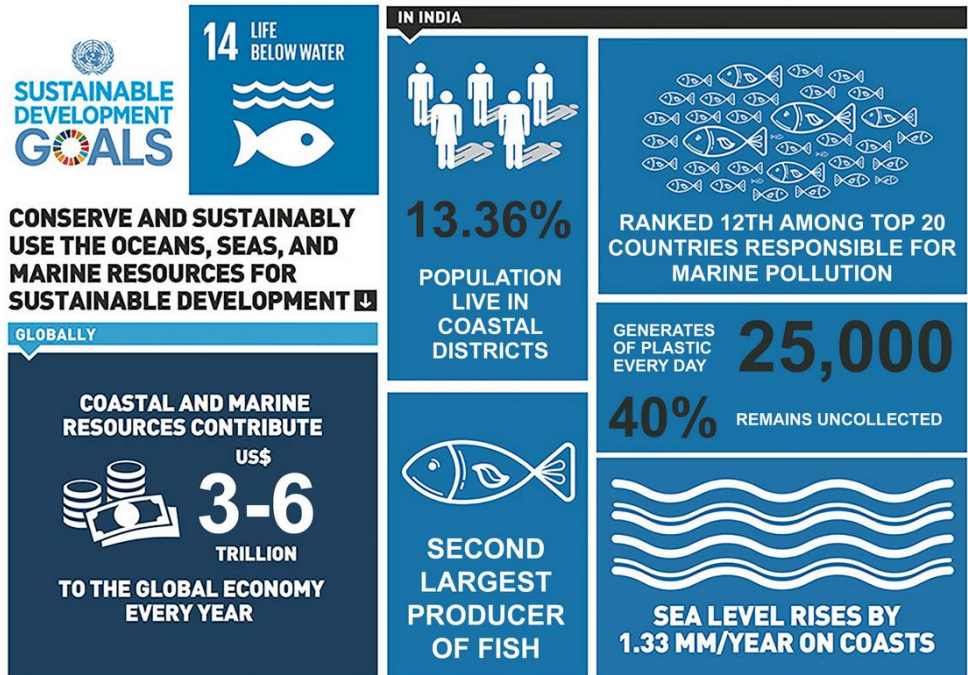
- **Sustainable Development Goal 14** commits countries to unite over what is a truly **global responsibility** – the protection of our oceans and the lives that depend on it.
- By 2020, countries commit to **achieving the sustainable management of marine ecosystems**, and in another five years, significantly **reduce marine pollution** of all kinds.
- This will require an **international scientific partnership**, regulation of harvesting and fishing, and enhance our research and knowledge on issues critical to the survival of life below water.

Laws related to the Fisheries Sector:

- Since **fisheries is a state subject**, fishing in the IW and TS come within the purview of the states concerned.
- Other activities in the TS and activities, including fishing **beyond the TS up to the limit of the EEZ**, are in the **Union list**.
- No Central government, so far, has framed laws covering the entire EEZ. The Bill attempts to make up for this.
- The Bill is also a response to discussions **on fisheries' subsidies at the WTO since the Doha Round of 2001**.
- India has been defending the rights of developing nations for **special and differential treatment**.

Marine Fisheries Regulation and Management (MFRM) Bill 2019:

- Developed countries contend that nations without laws to **manage fisheries in their respective EEZs** are not serious about unregulated fishing.
- The MFRM Bill is India's response to such sentiments.
- The Bill **prohibits fishing by foreign fishing vessels**, thus **nationalising our EEZ**.
- An Indian fishing vessel desirous of fishing in the EEZ, **outside the TS, must obtain a permit**.
- This requirement has been contested by the fishing industry particularly small-scale operators.



United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982:

- Under UNCLOS, which **India ratified in 1995**, the sea and resources in the water and the seabed are **classified into three zones**: the internal waters (IW), the territorial sea (TS) and the exclusive economic zone (EEZ).
- The IW is on the **landward side of the baseline**. It includes gulfs and small bays. Coastal states treat IW like land.
- The territorial sea (TS) extends **outwards to 12 nautical miles** from the baseline: coastal nations enjoy sovereignty over airspace, sea, seabed and subsoil and all living and non-living resources therein.
- The exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extends **outwards to 200 nautical miles** from the baseline.
- **Coastal nations have sovereign rights** for exploration, exploiting, conserving and managing all the natural resources therein.

- The bill proposes **notifying management plans for fishing** on a regular basis, related to conservation of endangered species and mitigating pollution.

The Present Bill needs to address following:

- The proposed law **does not take into consideration major concerns** such as livelihood of fishermen, sustainability of marine fisheries, rights of traditional fishermen, their job security, and management issues.
- The Bill **lacks congruence with important regional fishery agreements**.
- It is incomplete compared to the regulations in **other coastal nations**.
- However, it is necessary for the **sustainable future of the marine fishing industry**. The Bill respects the jurisdiction of our coastal states over the TS.
- There is a faulty assumption in the Bill that **only large-scale vessels fish outside the TS**.
- Actually, thousands of small-scale fishing crafts **regularly venture into such areas**. Their **freedom to access fish outside the TS** will cease if the Bill becomes law.
- A few **exemption clauses to safeguard their livelihoods** should be incorporated in the Bill.
- The new bill hands over monitoring of fishing regulations to the Coast Guard and even **small violations can land fishermen in jail**.
- Bigger vessels, particularly trawlers, registered and licenced under state departments, will **need a permit to fish**. This is a welcome measure to manage the fishing sector.

Conclusion:

- The proposed bill argued about the social security for fish workers and calls for protection of life at sea during severe weather events.
- State governments, fisher associations and the fishing industry representatives should **not blindly oppose the entire Bill** on the basis of **their fears of the fishing permit**. They should argue for **greater “cooperative federalism”**.
- Fish cannot be bound by territoriality diktats of the Centre or states.
- **Cooperative governance** between them over different territories (IW, TS and EEZ) is key to the **sustainable management of marine fisheries**, which should now **ideally go into the Concurrent List**.
- Small-scale fish workers should demand making the **entire IW and TS completely free of trawling** using the FAO/UN Small-Scale Fisheries Guidelines to support their arguments.
- This will **raise their incomes**, ensure a steady supply to consumers, heal the coastal areas and **curb the bane of destructive fishing**.

2. BIG BANK THEORY: ON PUBLIC SECTOR BANK MERGERS

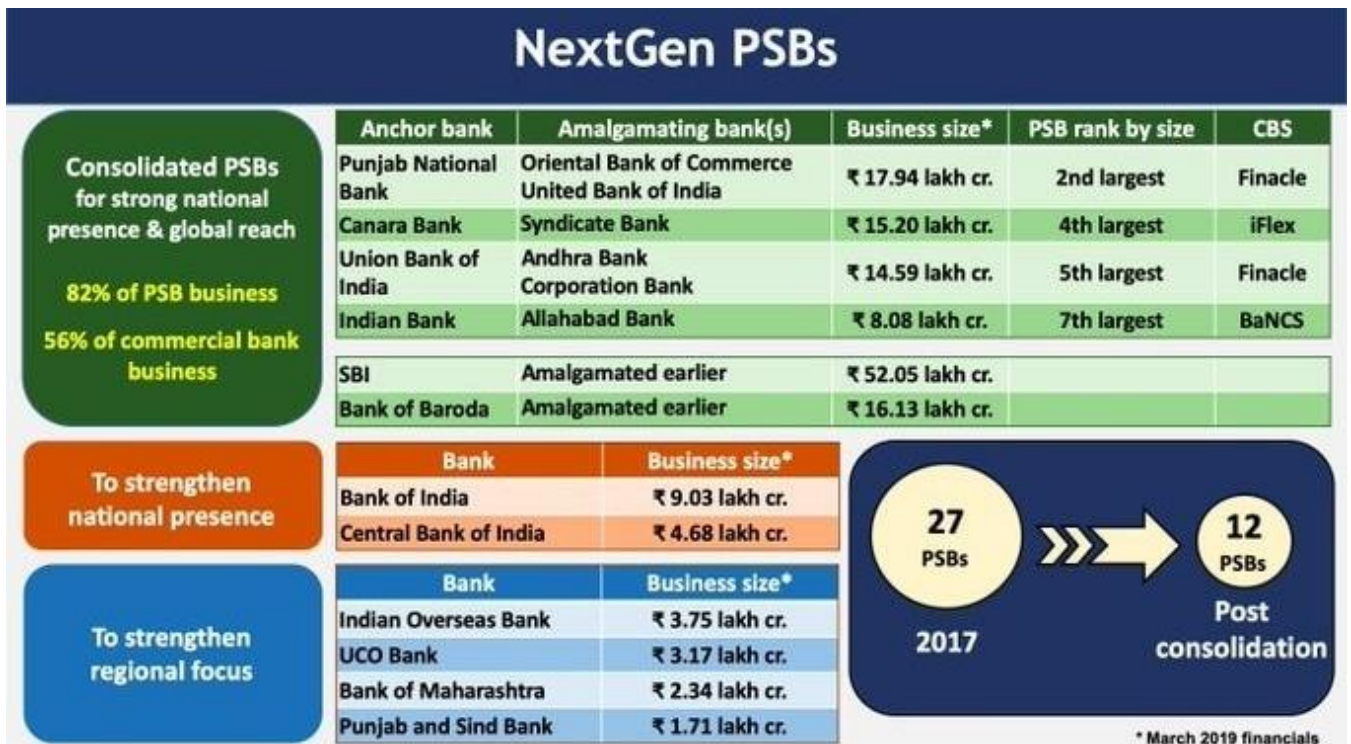
Context:

- In second set of **major policy announcements** to address economic concerns, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced **merger of six public sector banks (PSBs) with four better performing anchor banks**.
- This comes as a mega banking realignment by the Narendra Modi government in **order to streamline their operation and size**.
- For its sheer magnitude, the scale and the ability to disrupt the status quo, the **mega bank mergers** announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman must go down as the **most significant the banking industry** has seen in the five decades since nationalisation.

Number of public sector banks in India is 12:

- The Oriental Bank of Commerce (OBC) and the United Bank of India (UBI) have been merged into the **Punjab National Bank (PNB)**. The PNB will now be the **second largest PSU bank** after the State Bank of India, which earlier saw a similar consolidation with all its associates merging with it.
- The Syndicate Bank has been merged with the Canara Bank while the Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank will be merged with the Union Bank of India.
- Besides this, the Allahabad Bank will merge into the Indian Bank. This will make it the seventh largest state-owned bank in India.

- With this announcement of merger of banks, the **total number of PSU banks will come down to 12**. Before 2017, when the government rolled out bank-merger plan, the number of public sector banks in India was 27.
- Last year, the government had merged Dena Bank and Vijaya Bank with Bank of Baroda, creating the **third-largest bank by loans** in the country.



Bank employees stage protest against Centre's merger plan:

- Members of the All India Bank Employees' Association staged a protest here against the Centre's decision to merge 10 public sector banks **into four entities**.
- Employees of all public and private sector banks wore black badges to work as a mark of protest to the government's decision.
- The Association's General Secretary said the government's move was **"ill timed" and needs a review**.
- They alleged the merger of public sector banks would mean closure of six banks.
- However, Finance minister allayed fears of job losses following the proposed merger of public sector banks, saying **not even one employee shall be removed following the amalgamation**.

Challenges that requires immediate Attention:

- **Narasimhan Committee in late 1990s** had recommended shutting down of the weaker banks and **not merging them** with the strong ones as is being done now.
- Current mergers **may face more friction**. In the present case, the mergers are mostly among larger banks, with **absorbing bank not necessarily in strong health**.
- However, given the merged banks are on **similar technology platform**, the integration should be smoother.
- Further initially there will be **more focus on management streamlining**, which would impact the loan growth and reduce focus on strengthening asset quality in the short term.
- The key reforms to be made are at the board level, including in appointments, especially of government nominees. **Professionalism in governance** is a key to the success not just the size of the banks.
- It has been argued that a failure of a very large bank may have adverse impact on the economy as witnessed during the financial crisis of 2008. The 2008 crisis highlighted that presence of large financial institutions **pose systemic risk** to the economy and such institutions are too big to fail.
- Although It enables the consolidated entities to meaningfully **improve scale of operations and help their competitive position**.
- However, at the same time, there will **not be any immediate improvement** in their **credit metrics** as all of them have **relatively weak solvency profiles**.

- While there may be some geographical synergies between the banks being merged, unless they realise cost synergies through branch and staff rationalisation, the mergers may not mean much to them or to the economy.
- Further, in event of any such crisis in future, the onus would lie on the government to bail out the institutions, thus posing a moral hazard.

Other Reform Measures needed:

- Out of the 10 banks that the government has decided to merge to create four, nine have **net non-performing assets (NPAs) of over 5%**. Only Indian Bank's net NPA is below 5%, at 3.75%, as on March 31, 2019.
- United Bank of India, for example, has a net NPA of 8.67% as on March 31 with provision coverage ratio (PCR) of only 51.17%. As a result, the merged entity will have a net NPA of 6.61% and PCR of 59.59%.
- United Bank of India is also under the prompt corrective action framework (PCA) of the RBI due to high NPA.
- The **amalgamation will require harmonisation of asset quality and provisioning levels** among the merging banks and may **spike the credit provisions** this year as was seen in the recent merger of Bank of Baroda.
- Given the **sizeable capital infusion** being announced for amalgamating banks, the merger was unlikely to be credit negative for merging banks.
- Other **reform measures were aimed** at increasing the engagement of non-official directors, allowing bank boards to reduce or rationalise the number of committees, and increasing the effectiveness of the directors on the Management Committees of Boards by increasing the length of their terms.

Conclusion:

- Finance Minister said the government was planning no more banks mergers after the current announcement. The FM said the earlier bank mergers had resulted in **rapid growth, high profit and valuation gains**.
- Finance Ministry mentioned that banks would play an important role in making India a **\$5 trillion economy**, for that they **needed more lending capacity** so they could provide **better services using modern technology**.
- Consolidation is the way forward. The FM said with the merger of these banks, the **bigger banks would focus on international markets**, while **middle-level banks would focus on the national market**.
- Along with merger the focus should be **on adequate reforms in governance and management of these banks**.

3. WHAT IS THE ECONOMICS BEHIND E-VEHICLE BATTERIES?

Introduction: Shifting gears in the transition to electric vehicles (EVs):

- The NITI Aayog proposed to **ban the sale of all internal combustion engine (ICE) powered three-wheelers post March 2023**.
- It also suggested that **all new two-wheelers below 150cc sold after March 2025 should be electric**.
- In consonance with these proposals, The Union Budget has announced a bold move to make a transition to electric vehicles, and **offered a tax incentive for the early adopters**.
- Its stated vision to leapfrog into an era of electric mobility and domestic vehicle manufacturing, **led by public transport and commercial vehicles**, is forward-looking.
- It is also inevitable because poor air quality and noise pollution have sharply affected the quality of life, and pose a **serious public health challenge**.

Reasons for you to choose an electric car over a petrol or diesel vehicle:

- **Charge up at home, at work and around town** – electric cars can be charged anywhere there is a power point, just like charging your cellphone.
- **Pollution-free driving** – Battery electric vehicles (BEVs) don't have a tailpipe and produce no exhaust emissions that cause local air pollution.
- **Noise reduction** – EVs are quieter than petrol or diesel vehicles.
- **80% reduction in CO2 emissions in New Zealand** – this significant reduction in emissions is because 80% of New Zealand's electricity is generated from renewable sources. There are also many other advantages to using this home-grown energy compared with using imported fossil fuels.

- **Fewer lifecycle emissions** – even when you take into account raw material extraction, battery manufacture, vehicle manufacture and shipping, BEVs emit 60% fewer climate change emissions over the full life cycle than for petrol vehicles.
- **More efficient** – electric cars can convert up to 90% of energy from their batteries into motive energy. This compares to 20% – 30% for a petrol or diesel vehicle.

Cost structures of conventional vehicles and electric vehicles:

- The portion of the **costs of the drivetrain of EVs**, the system in a motor vehicle which connects the transmission to the drive axles in comparison to the cost of the entire vehicle is **four percentage points lower** when compared to ICE vehicles.
- This is primarily due to **less parts in the electric drivetrain**. However, the **battery pack takes up nearly half the cost of an electric vehicle**.
- For any meaningful reduction in the physical value of EVs, the **cost of battery packs needs to reduce significantly**.
- Even as the automobile industry had objected to the think-tank's proposal and called for a **practical approach in framing electric vehicle-related policies**, there has been the worry that **EVs are still not financially viable** because of various costs associated with their manufacture and use.

Costs, charging infrastructure making it difficult for EV as a good value proposition:

- The predominant battery chemistry **used in EVs is lithium-ion batteries (Li-ion)**. No new technologies are on the horizon for immediate commercial usage.
- The cost of the materials or key-components of the battery, namely the cathode, anode, electrolyte, separator, among others, contribute the most (60%) to the total cost. Labour charges, overheads and profit margins account for the rest.
- **Labour is a relatively minuscule component of the overall cost**. Any reduction in the cost of the battery pack will have to come from a reduction in materials cost or the manufacturing overhead.

Where does India stand on EV adoption?

- In India, EV adoption will be driven by two-wheelers rather than cars in high numbers on because India's mobility market is driven more by two wheelers. According to the **NITI Aayog, 79% of vehicles on Indian roads are two-wheelers**.
- Three-wheelers and cars that cost less than ₹10 lakh account for 4% and 12% of the vehicle population, respectively.
- Two-wheelers will also **need smaller batteries** when compared to cars and hence the overall affordable cost. **India needs to manufacture Li-ion cells in-house**.
- Now, cells are imported and "assembled" into batteries.
- **Setting up a Li-ion manufacturing unit** requires high capital expenditure. But battery manufacturing in India is expected to grow as electric vehicles grow.

Conclusion:

- Presently, **most of India's electricity** is generated **using conventional sources**.
- In 2018-19, over **90% of India's electricity** was generated **from conventional sources**, including coal, and **around 10%** was produced **from renewable sources** such as solar, wind and biomass.
- In conventional ICEs, petrol or diesel fuels the engine. However, in EVs, batteries are not the fuel; electrons supplied by the battery fuel the vehicle. The battery is a device that stores electrons/energy **which is sourced from electricity (majority is conventional sources)**.
- **Understanding specific local needs** for early demand and adaptation will be the key to making **effective targeted investments**, matching demand and supply, and enabling quick returns on investments.

Way Ahead for shifting to E-Vehicles:

- While the rate of electricity generated from renewable sources has increased over the years, more needs to be done for their adoption.
- This is because the **EV-charging infrastructure needs to be powered through renewable sources to make it truly sustainable**.

- Therefore, **Affordable charging** will make these vehicles and commercial three-wheelers attractive because operating costs are a fraction of petrol and diesel equivalents.
- **Swapping the battery at convenient locations** with one that is pre-charged, especially for commercial vehicles that run longer and need a quick turnaround, is worth considering.
- A **longer-term policy priority** has to be the **setting up of lithium battery production and solar charging infrastructure** of a scale that matches the ambition.

Cost dynamics

The battery pack forms a significant portion of the price of an electric vehicle (EV). With the cost of Lithium-ion (Li-ion) batteries falling over the years and the fact that the proportion of costs needed to build a drivetrain (the group of components that deliver power to the driving wheels) is much less for an EV has made it a feasible buy, especially for Indian consumers in the near future



Chart 1: Overall cost break-up

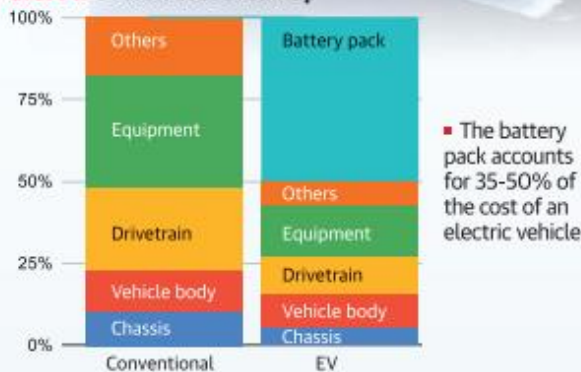
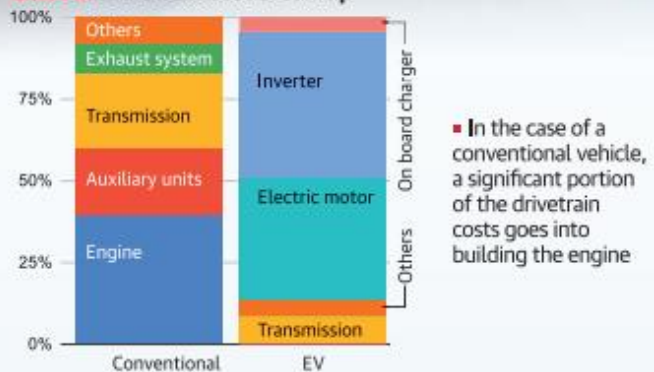


Chart 2: Drivetrain cost break-up



Source: Paper titled "An Overview of Costs for Vehicle Components, Fuels, Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Total Cost of Ownership 2017", University of California, Davis

Chart 3: Lithium-ion battery cost break-up



Chart 4: Price drop of Li-ion batteries



4. FACTORING IN SAFETY: ON STRONGER WORKER SAFETY LAW

Introduction:

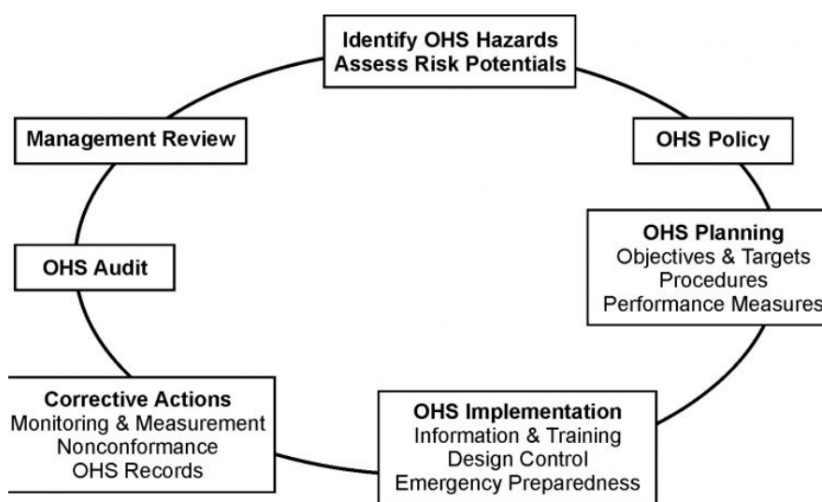
- **Safety, Health, welfare and improved Working Conditions** are pre-requisite for well-being of the worker and also for economic growth of the country.
- As healthy workforce of the country would be **more productive** and occurrence of less accidents and unforeseen incidents would be economically beneficial to the employers also.
- A **safe work environment is a basic right**, and India's recent decades of high growth should have ushered in a framework of guarantees.
- However, India's record in promoting occupational and industrial safety **remains weak** even with years of robust economic growth.
- Making work environments safer is a low priority, although the productivity benefits of such investments have always been clear.

The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019:

- Unfortunately, successive governments have not felt it necessary to ratify many fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO) covering organised and unorganised sector workers' safety, including the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981.
- The Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha by the Minister of Labour and Employment.
- The **Code applies** to establishments **employing at least 10 workers**, and to all mines and docks. It does not apply to apprentices.
- Further, it makes special provisions for certain types of establishments and classes of employees, such as **factories, mines, and building and construction workers**.
- The Code **repeals and replaces 13 labour laws** relating to safety, health and working conditions. These include the Factories Act, 1948, the Mines Act, 1952, and the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970.

Features of the Bill:

- **Relevant authorities:** All establishments covered by the Code must be **registered with registering officers**.
 - Further, **Inspector-cum-facilitators** may inquire into accidents, and conduct inspections of establishments.
 - Both these authorities are appointed by the central or state government. Additionally, the government may require certain establishments to set up safety committees comprising representatives of employers and workers.
- **Advisory Bodies:** The central and state governments will **set up Occupational Safety and Health Advisory Boards** at the national and state level, respectively.
 - These Boards will advise the central and state governments on the standards, rules, and regulations to be framed under the Code.
- **Duties of employers:** The Code specifies **several duties of employers**. These include:
 - Providing a workplace that is **free from hazards** that may cause injury or diseases, and



Occupational Health and Safety Management System

- Providing **free annual health examinations** to employees, as prescribed. In case of an accident at the workplace that leads to death or serious bodily injury of an employee, the employer must inform the relevant authorities.

Rights and duties of employees: Duties of employees under the Code include:

- Taking care of their own health and safety,
 - Complying with the specified safety and health standards, and
 - Reporting unsafe situations to the inspector.
 - Every employee will have the right to obtain from the employer information related to safety and health standards.
- **Working Hours:** Work hours for different classes of establishment and employees will be provided as per the rules prescribed by the central or state government.
 - For overtime work, the worker must be **paid twice the rate of daily wages**.
 - Female workers, with their consent, may work past 7pm and before 6am, if approved by the central or state government.
 - **Leave: No employee may work for more than six days a week.**
 - However, exceptions may be provided for motor transport workers.
 - Workers must receive paid **annual leave for at least one in 20 days** of the period spent on duty.
 - For sales promotion employees, **medical leave must be provided** for at least one-eighteenth of the period of service. During medical leave, the worker must be **paid half his daily wages**.
 - **Working conditions and welfare facilities:** The employer is required to **provide a hygienic work environment** with ventilation, comfortable temperature and humidity, sufficient space, clean drinking water, and latrine and urinal accommodations.
 - Other welfare facilities may be provided as per **standards prescribed by the central government**.
 - These facilities may include separate bathing places and locker rooms for male, female and transgender employees, canteens, first aid boxes, and creches.
 - **Offences and penalties:** Under the Code, an offence that **leads to the death** of an employee will be **punishable with imprisonment** of up to two years, or a fine up to five lakh rupees, or both.
 - Further, courts may direct that at least 50% of such fine be given as compensation to the heirs of the victim.

Applicable to Migrant Workers too:

- In order to **ensure wider coverage**, the definitions of Working Journalists and Cine worker have also been modified to include workers employed in electronic media and all forms of audio-visual production.
- Similarly, the **definition of inter-state migrant worker** has also been proposed to be modified to include those migrant workers who are being employed directly by the employer from other States without contractor or agent.
- This proposal would enhance the coverage of the safety, health and working conditions provisions manifold as compared to the present scenario.

Conclusion:

- With the ultimate aim of **extending the safety and healthy working conditions** to all workforce of the country, the **Code enhances** the ambit of provisions of safety, health, welfare and working conditions from existing **about 9 major sectors** to all establishments **having 10 or more employees**.
- It is evident that the Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions has some **unique new initiatives** for both workers and employers.
- It promotes health, safety, welfare and better working conditions of workforce by **enhancing the ambit of a dynamic legislation** as compared to the existing sectoral approach limited to few sectors.
- Besides, it also drastically **rationalises the compliance mechanism** with one license, one registration and one return for the establishments under the ambit of the Code thereby saving resources and efforts of the employers.
- Thus, it balances the requirements of worker and employer and is beneficial to **both the constituents of the world of work**.

5. WHY INDIA'S GROWTH FIGURES ARE OFF THE MARK

Context:

- The economic growth rate (quarterly) of India has been **sliding for the last five quarters** from 8% to 7% to 6.6% to 5.8% and now to 5%.
- Yet, experts have been talking of a **7% annual rate of growth**; every quarter when the rate of growth has been announced, they have argued that things have bottomed out and that the rate would rise henceforth.

Investment rates are not Increasing despite cut in Interest rates in consistent:

- The **Economic Survey** in 2019 talked of a **growth rate of 7%** for the current year. The **Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, in its August policy statement, talked of a slowdown to 6.9%, from the 7% predicted in June and 7.2% predicted before that.
- The **Asian Development Bank** cut its growth forecast **from 7.2% to 7%** in April 2019.
- Similar is the case with the **IMF which cut its forecast** for the year **from 7.3% to 7%**. So, they all talked of a 7% rate of growth when a year earlier it had fallen below that.
- In June 2019, the stock market was at a record high and yet the investment rate did not rise.
- Data from the **Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd.** shows that investment proposals are at a 14-year low.
- In the last year, the RBI has cut interest rates four times and by a total of more than 1%; but the **investment rate has not budged**.

Organised sector	Unorganised sector
Organised sector refers to the employment which is regular and also well paid.	The Unorganised sector includes employment which is not under the control of the government. Thus, jobs here are not regular and also low-paid.
They have to follow the rules and regulations mentioned by the government such as Factories Act, Minimum Wages Act, Payment of Gratuity Act, Shops and Establishments Act, etc.	The employment under this sector mostly comes outside the control of the government. There are rules and regulations but mostly not followed by people.
They get several benefits for working in the organised sector such as paid leave, payment during holidays, provident fund, gratuity, etc.	They don't have any benefits of working overtime, paid leave, holidays, leave due to sickness, etc.
They have the security of their jobs.	Employment here is not secure.
This sector is called organised because the people here have to follow some procedures, even if they are working on their own, they have to register under government and follow their instruction.	This sector is called unorganised because the job here is not secure, the worker may be asked to leave due to less work. All this depends on what the employer wants.

Why the government Agencies are not so far off with their estimates:

- The reason is that **they are not independent data gathering agencies** and depend on official data.
- So, if official data is erroneous, their projections would also turn out to be incorrect.
- Clearly, the government is **interested in projecting a good image** and so discounts bad news and ramps up data.
- **Experts argue that** if the economy is growing at 5 or 6%, which is historically a good rate of growth, why is **investment rate not rising and consumption in the economy stagnant?**

- The alternative explanation is that the rate of growth is **much less than 5%**; that is why investment rate and consumption are stagnating or declining.

Where does the problem originate from?

- It is **from the unorganised sector** which has been in **decline since demonetisation**.
- This sector **producing 45% of the output and employing 94% of the workforce**, has been in decline, which is pulling down the rate of growth of the economy.
- It was further **hit by the Goods and Services Tax** though it is either exempt from it or there is a simplified provision for this sector.
- In fact, according to a **report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO)**, the **share of informal workers** in total employment in India is **around 90%** (unorganised sector plus contractual workers in the organised sector).
- The concerning aspect is that a large number of jobs in the unorganised sector have **very low productivity and no job benefits and social security**.
- There is a **large wage differential amongst workers** in the organised and unorganised sectors.
- Moving towards formalisation of the economy through the goods and services tax (GST) is a step in the right direction, but still there is a long way to go for most workers in the informal sector.

Official GDP figures doesn't take consideration of Unorganised Sector:

- In simple terms, the reason is that the data **for this sector is collected once in five years** (called reference years) since the sector has **tens of millions of units** for which data cannot be collected monthly, quarterly or even annually.
- In between the reference years, the data is **only projected on various assumptions**.
- The government document on estimating advance annual estimates and quarterly estimates makes this clear.
- For estimating quarterly growth, it uses, "**latest estimates** of Agricultural Production, Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and performance of key sectors like, Railways, Transport other than Railways, Communication, Banking, Insurance and Government Revenue Expenditure".
- Except for agriculture, these belong to the **organised sector of the economy**.
- Even for the annual estimates, basically **data for the organised sector are used** like in the case of mining, banking, hotels and restaurants, and transport. For construction, steel, glass, etc are used which are also derived from the **organised sector production**.
- Thus, the implicit assumption is that the **organised sector can be a proxy for the unorganised sector**.
- But with the economy suffering **three shocks in quick succession** over the last three years which **adversely impacted the unorganised sector**, this assumption does not hold true.
- Most of the experts have implicitly accepted the government's fallacious argument and have thus fallen behind the curve.

According to the **latest PLFS report**, unemployment amongst urban males with secondary and higher education is at a **high of 9.2%**, while that for rural males is even higher, at 10.5%. This leads us to question the **very edifice of India's education system**.

According to the **India Skills Report 2019** (by Wheebox, the online talent assessment company), the employability score of the country is **at a low of 47%**.

This highlights the need to **tune our education system to make it suitable for job requirements**.

Conclusion:

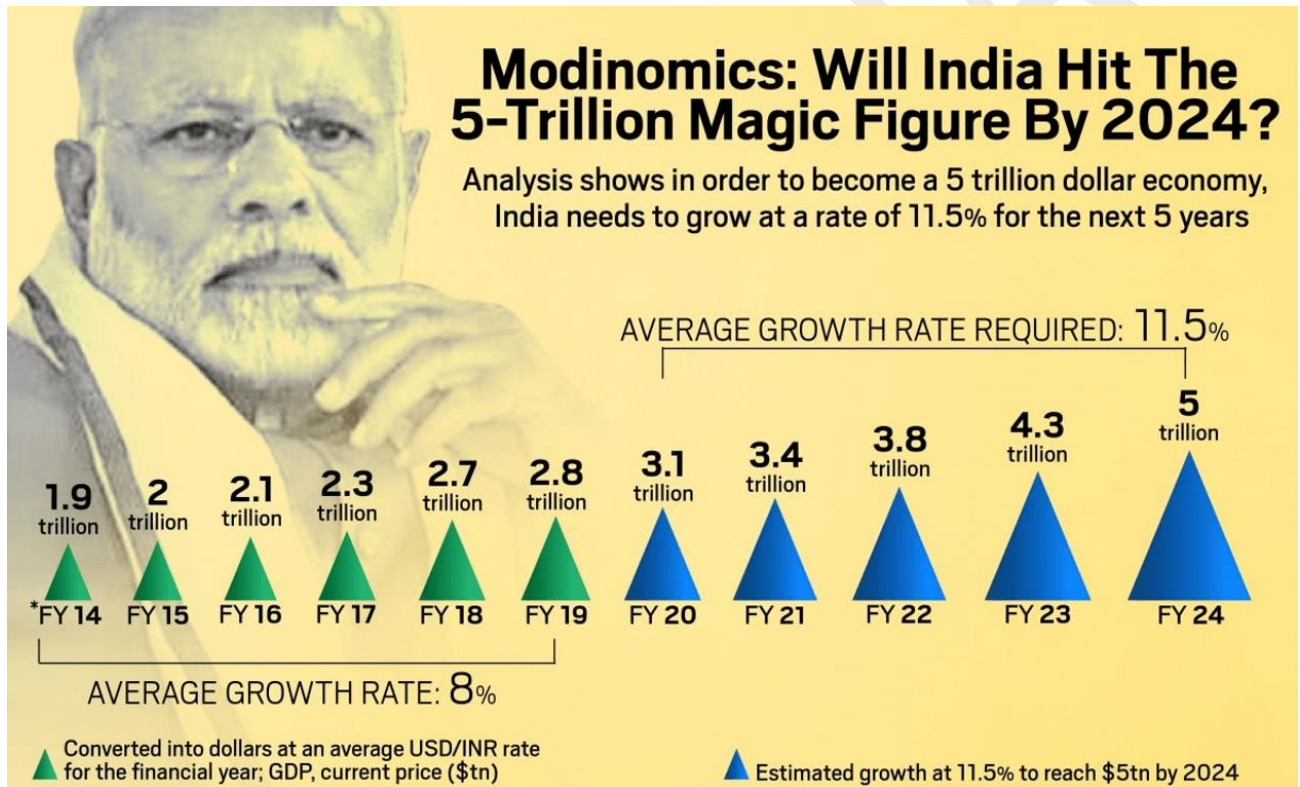
- **The investment rate** has hovered at around 30% for the last several years because the **capacity utilisation in the economy has been around 75%**.
- Unless this rises, fresh investment will mean even lower capacity utilisation and lower profitability since capital will be underutilised.
- In brief, the **official data only represents the organised sector**.
- To incorporate the unorganised sector, **data from alternative sources need to be used**.
- The **decline in the workforce, the rise in the demand for work** under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, etc. suggests that the unorganised sector has declined by at least 10%.
- If this is taken into account, the current rate of growth is much less than 5%.

- If the government does not accept this, then it must **reveal the rate of growth of the unorganised sector** that it is using in its estimates and which is not based on using the organised sector as a proxy.

6. THE SLOW CLIMB TO THE TRILLION-ECONOMY PEAK

Introduction:

- On Independence Day, the Prime Minister expressed confidence that **India would be a \$5-trillion economy in 2024**.
- The size of the India economy is currently around **Rs 190 lakh crore** (GDP at current market prices, 2018-19) which **comes out to be \$2.8 trillion**, converting it in dollar terms taking average exchange rate of the financial year.
- This means the Indian economy needs to **almost double its size in next five years** to realize the target of reaching the \$5 trillion mark.
- However, this is surprising as the impact of economic growth on major development goals examples being improvement in education, health and overall human development/human capital formation;
- Expansion in productive employment for all and environmentally sustainable development, etc depends on the **nature and composition of growth**.



Share in wealth need to be addressed first:

- The economic growth experience in India in recent decades has shown that growth has had an **adverse impact** on all these **developmental goals**.
- **Credit Suisse**, for example, has shown recently that **1% of the wealthiest in India increased their share in wealth from 40% in 2010 to more than 60%** in the last five years, and the **richest 10% in India own more than four times wealth** than the remaining 90%.
- That is, if we proceed on the **same growth path**, a large part of the increase in wealth and GDP will be claimed by the top 10% richest population in India.
- In other words, the **top 10% will take away the lion's share of the \$5-trillion incomes** if and when we reach the target of \$5-trillion economy.

Gaps in education, health have to be fulfil for growth in Employment:

- Our growth experience so far shows that the **rate of growth of employment has declined with increasing economic growth**.

- We have now reached a stage where the economy is suffering from the **highest ever unemployment rate**.
- With rising population and, consequently, the labour force, India will soon experience demographic disaster rather than demographic dividend.
- The **literacy rate** has grown very slowly and according to the United Nations, India's literacy was 71.1% in 2015.
- India is now far behind many African countries such as Rwanda, Morocco and Congo in terms of literacy.
- According to the **Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2018**, about 70-74 % children (in the age group 6-14 years) go to school regularly; far fewer go to secondary school.
- However, as against the norm of 6% of GDP, the government spend is around 4% of GDP on education.
- It is the same when it comes to the story of health, where the decline in malnutrition, particularly among women and children is very slow; against the norm of 3% of GDP, the government spends around 1.5% of GDP on health.
- Finally, in the process of growth in India, there has been a **severe depletion and degradation of environmental resources**.
- A recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report has warned India of the **seriousness of climate change** and its severe adverse impact on the environment and the livelihood of masses.

Human Capital Formation will solve the Unemployment and Unskilled Problem:

- Another major concern about reaching the aim of a \$5-trillion economy is that at present the economy is experiencing a severe slowdown.
- It would be very difficult to raise the rate of growth to reach \$5 trillion in 2024 unless we **focus on human capital formation and address the real reasons** for the slowdown.
- As **NITI Aayog** has observed recently, the present crisis is the worst crisis India is facing since the Independence.
- The rate of economic growth, at 5%, is the lowest in the last few years. Also, the **rates of savings and investment** in the Indian economy **have declined**, as also **exports and total credit**.
- Among the major industries, the **automobile industry** is experiencing continuous decline, which has led to the **retrenchment of 3.5 lakh workers** so far.
- Apart from the ancillaries of the automobile industry, many other industries are declining fairly rapidly too examples are diamond cutting and polishing, textiles and garments, and **several Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)**.
- **Human capital formation** will give a big push to start-ups and MSMEs. And, finally, the government should also focus on promoting labour intensive sectors such as gems and jewellery, textiles and garments and leather goods.

Crisis in agriculture:

- All this has affected trading and business units. Agriculture is in crisis today on account of **rising costs of inputs and low prices of produces**, and **low public investments in this sector**.
- Again, **agricultural real wages are in decline** and non-farm wages are constant if not declining; urban wages are also declining in recent years.
- As a consequence of all these developments, there is a crash in the aggregate demand in the economy.

By Following a Keynesian Approach:

- What is needed urgently is for the government to increase public expenditure in **investing in agriculture** — in infrastructure, inputs, extension, marketing and storage and training — and in **providing profitable prices to farmers**.
- It should also **raise funds for the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** to push up demand by following a Keynesian approach.
- It should raise public employment by **filling all vacant sanctioned posts** in the Central and State governments, which would be around 2.5 million jobs.
- The government should also **regularise contract, casual and "honorary" jobs** and make them regular jobs.
- Increasing additional jobs for **ensuring basic health and good quality education up to secondary level** to all so that any meaningful skill formation is possible should be another aim.

Increasing the aggregate Demand is the need of the hour:

- The government should not worry about the fiscal deficit ratio as these measures will address the major problems of the economy.
- What we witness, however, is that **public expenditure is declining continuously** in the last few years, As the **Centre For Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd.** has pointed out, **public expenditure has declined** to the minimum in the last five years.
- Steps such as rolling back some budgeted tax proposals, providing a stimulus package to industries, raising foreign direct investment flows, reducing Goods and Services Tax to help industries are not likely to **increase much aggregate demand** in the economy.
- Also, **reduction in repo rate by the Reserve Bank of India** and asking banks to pass on reduced rates to customers, **recapitalisation of banks by Rs.70,000 crore** to raise liquidity in the economy and
- other steps to **ease credit flows** to the economy are all supply side measures; **the real problem is a crash in the aggregate demand.**
- There is an **urgent need for a quantum jump in public expenditure** on education, health and Infrastructure in order to fill wide gaps in infrastructure, training and retraining of teachers and doctors and to ensure a strong follow up on the quality of life and improve in living standards.

SCIENCE & TECH

1. CHANDRAYAAN-2 LANDER: ISRO CONTINUES EFFORT TO CONTACT VIKRAM

Context:

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) came **tantalisingly close** to creating history in the early hours of September 7 when the **robotic lander Vikram** followed the **predetermined descent trajectory** and came just within 2 km of the lunar surface before contact was lost.
- While it is unfortunate that the lander failed to safely touchdown, it is apt to remember that ISRO was **attempting powered landing** for the first time.
- To put it in perspective, there have been **38 attempts so far** by other countries to land a rover on the moon and have succeeded only a little more than half the time.
- This April, **Israel's Beresheet lunar lander** crashed to the lunar surface.
- But early January this year, China's Chang'e-4 touched down on the lunar far side and deployed **the Yutu-2 rover** to explore the **South Pole-Aitken basin**.

From Pole to Pole
2 expeditions. 110 years apart.

As Chandrayaan 2 prepares to explore the mysteries of the Moon's south polar region in 2019, we pay tribute to the Nimrod Expedition — Ernest Shackleton's mission to explore the Earth's South Pole in 1909.

1909 Expedition to the Earth's South Pole	2019 Expedition to the Moon's South Polar Region
Duration of the journey: 10 months	Duration of the journey: 2 months
Mission timespan: 9 days	Mission timespan: 14 days
Average temperature: -60 °C to -10 °C	Average temperature: -157 °C to 121 °C
Number of participants: 16 men	Number of participants: One nation

The infographic features a central image of Earth and the Moon. On the left, a portrait of Ernest Shackleton is shown. The ISRO logo is in the top right corner.

Chandrayaan-2 was a highly complex mission:

- It represented a **significant technological leap** compared to the previous missions of ISRO, which brought **together an Orbiter, Lander and Rover** to explore the unexplored south pole of the Moon.
- This was a **unique mission** which aimed at studying not just one area of the Moon but all the **areas combining the exosphere, the surface as well as the sub-surface** of the moon in a single mission.
- The **Orbiter** has already been placed in its **intended orbit around the Moon** and shall enrich our understanding of the **moon's evolution and mapping of the minerals and water molecules** in the Polar Regions, using its eight state-of-the-art scientific instruments.
- The **Orbiter camera** is the highest resolution camera (0.3m) in any lunar mission so far and shall provide **high resolution images** which will be immensely useful to the **global scientific community**.
- The precise launch and mission management has **ensured a long life of almost 7 years** instead of the planned one year.
- **The Vikram Lander** followed the planned descent trajectory from its orbit of 35 km to just below 2 km above the surface.
- All the systems and sensors of the Lander functioned excellently until this point and proved many new technologies such as variable thrust propulsion technology used in the Lander.
- The success criteria were defined for each and every phase of the mission and till date **90 to 95% of the mission objectives** have been accomplished and will continue contribute to Lunar science, notwithstanding the loss of communication with the Lander.

ISRO trying to establish communication with the Lander:

- In Vikram, **the velocity** was successfully **reduced from about 6,000 km per hour** at the start of the descent at 35 km altitude to a **few metres per second (7.2Km/hr)** before communication snapped.
- That strongly indicates that powered landing went as per plan till about 2 km altitude from the lunar surface.
- The more difficult part is **to restore contact with the lander**. That would depend on how much damage it has suffered, and whether its communication unit is intact.
- The individual instruments onboard the lander as well several of its components are capable of sending signals that can be picked up either through other nearby space assets or by the ground station.
- Every such signal will offer valuable clues to its current state and what it could have gone through.
- Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) chairman K Sivan was quoted as saying that the **lander had been located on the Moon**, and a thermal image of it had been taken by instruments on board the Chandrayaan-2 orbiter that is going around the Moon in a near-circular orbit of 100 km.
- It has been further said efforts **to re-establish contact with the lander** had not yet been successful.
- Vikram was designed to **absorb the shock of an impact even at 5 metres/second (18 km/hr)**.
- At the rate it was decelerating, it could not even have attained a speed of 5 metres/second before touchdown.
- It is likely to have hit the Moon at a far greater speed, possibly damaging itself and instruments on board.

With the help of Orbiter:

- The **orbiter is safe** in the **intended orbit around the moon**. And with the "precise launch and mission management", its **life span will extend to almost seven years**.
- **Carrying eight of the 13 payloads**, the orbiter will spend the next nearly seven years making **high-resolution maps** of the lunar surface, **mapping the minerals**, understanding the moon's evolution, and most importantly looking for water molecules in the polar regions.
- Some of the impact craters in the **South Pole are permanently shadowed** from sunlight and could be **ideal candidate sites to harbour water**.
- Water on the moon would, in principle, be **used for life support and manufacturing rocket fuel**.
- With the U.S. wanting **to send astronauts to the South Pole by 2024**, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), in particular, will be keen on data from the **Chandrayaan 2 orbiter**.
- **Gaganyaan mission** depends on **Isro's error-free control** over launch of crewed spacecraft, ability to eject in case of faulty launch, wherewithal to support life in space and re-entry of the spacecraft into the Earth's atmosphere.

Conclusion:

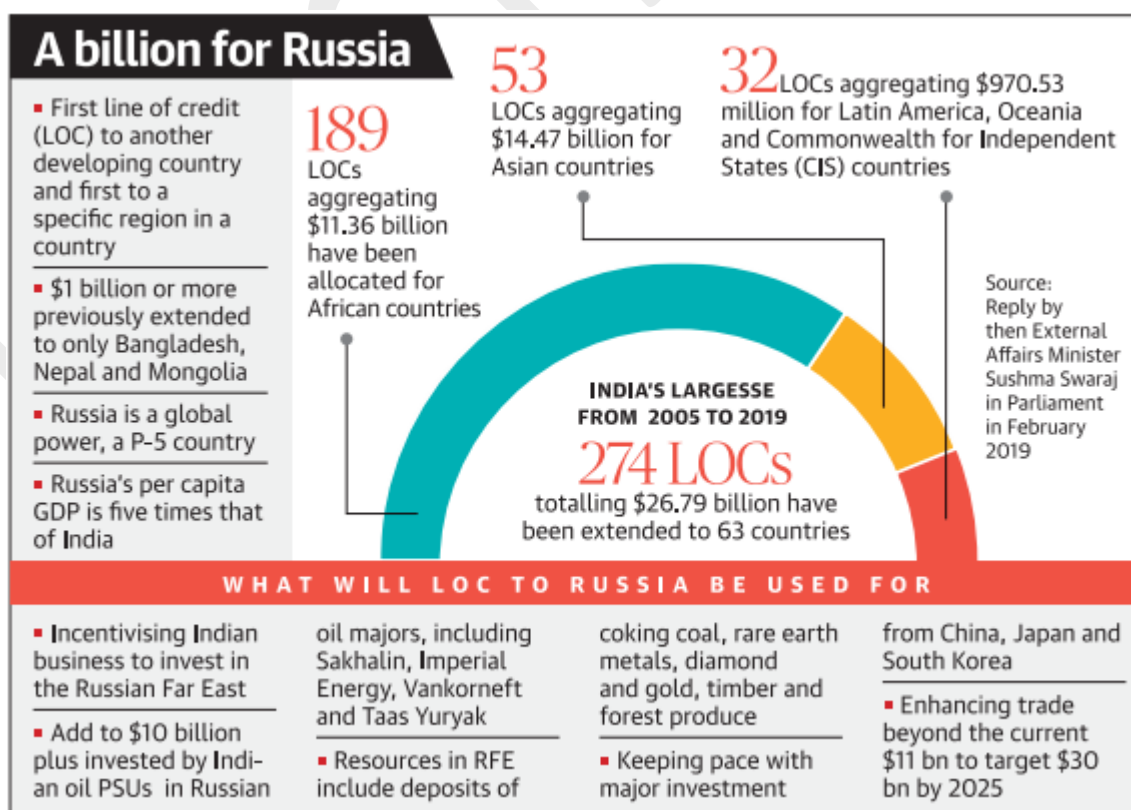
- Since the launch of Chandrayaan-2, not only India but the **whole world watched its progress** from one phase to the next with great expectations and excitement.
- The **ISRO's Moon Impact Probe** and **NASA's Moon Mineralogy Mapper** on board Chandrayaan 1 had already provided **evidence of the presence of water** in the thin atmosphere of the moon, on the surface and below.
- A NASA study last year found regions, **within 20° of each pole** in general and within 10° in particular, **showed signs of water**.
- The Chandrayaan 2 orbiter will now possibly reconfirm the presence of water on the moon.
- The science produced by the Chandrayaan-2 mission, too, might remain **completely unaffected** by what has happened to the lander, though the hype surrounding the landing attempt might not let people forget this failure very soon.
- But there would also be very important learning for ISRO to be **implemented in its future missions**.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. BEAR HUG: ON INDIA STRENGTHENING RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

Context:

- Speaking at the **Eastern Economic Forum** in Vladivostok, set up by Russian President to attract investment to the farthest **outlying East Siberian and Arctic-pole areas** of the country, Indian Prime Minister Mr. Modi said that the announcement of the extend a **\$1 billion Line of Credit to Russia's Far East region (RFE)**.
- It expected to **help finance Indian business projects** in the region, will be the **"take-off point for Act Far East"**, and will further strengthen bilateral ties.
- Prime Minister Mr. Modi, who arrived in Russia on a two-day visit, is the first Indian Prime Minister **to visit the Russian Far East Region**.
- Critics pointed out that while **Russia's GDP figures** are far behind India's in recent years (\$1.6 trillion vs \$2.6 trillion at current prices, 2017), the GDP per capita for the **average Russian is five times that for the average Indian**.



Delegation-level talks at the 20th Annual Summit:

- India and Russia are **against “outside influence” in the internal matters** of any nation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said after **comprehensive talks** with Russian President Vladimir Putin aimed at **finding new horizons of bilateral cooperation** in areas like trade, defence, space, oil and gas, nuclear energy and maritime connectivity.
- The two countries discussed ways **to bolster cooperation in trade and investment**, oil and gas, mining, nuclear energy, defence and security, air and maritime connectivity, transport infrastructure, hi-tech, outer space, counter terrorism and **people-to-people ties**.
- Russia has backed **India’s move on Jammu and Kashmir**, saying that the changes in the status are **within the framework of the Indian Constitution**.

Enormous scope of Trade and Business have to explore between India and Russia:

- PM Modi said a proposal has been made to have a **full fledged maritime route between Chennai and Vladivostok**.
- The two leaders “agreed to facilitate, in all possible ways, **exploring the impressive potential of our strategic partnership** to the full, demonstrating its **special and privileged nature** which has emerged as an anchor of stability in a complex international situation.”
- The two sides “**prioritise strong, multifaceted trade and economic cooperation** as the foundation for further expanding the range of India-Russia relations,” it added.
- The two leaders decided to take the **bilateral trade from the current \$11 billion to \$30 billion by 2025**.
- The two sides noted the **pace of progress** achieved in the construction of the remaining four of the **six nuclear power plants at Kudankulam**.
- Modi said **Russia will help train Indian astronauts** for the manned space mission — **Gaganyaan**.
- Noting that close cooperation in military-technical fields is a pillar of Indo-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.
- The statement said the two sides vowed to **upgrade their defence cooperation**, including by fostering joint development and production of military equipment, components and spare parts.
- They shared the view that “**implementation in good faith** of universally recognised **principles and rules of international law** excludes the practice of double standards or imposition of some States of their will on other States.”
- The two sides expressed their support for an **inclusive peace and Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation** in Afghanistan.
- They reaffirmed their commitment to building an **equal and indivisible security architecture** in Asia and the Pacific region.
- They called for **reform of the UN Security Council to reflect contemporary global realities**.
- Russia expressed its support for **India’s candidacy for a permanent membership of the UNSC**.

India’s attempt to not only keep a traditional friend close, but **to ensure some space** in the current clinch between Russia and China. China’s cross-border investment in RFE accounts for 71% of the total direct foreign investment of \$33 billion.

Conclusion:

- A joint statement issued later said the two sides “**underlined the primacy of international law** and emphasised their commitment to the purposes and the principles stated in the **UN Charter** including the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of member states.”
- India and Russia have **identified several new areas of cooperation**.

About Eastern Economic Forum:

- It was established by a decree of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, in 2015.
- The aim is **supporting the economic development of Russia’s Far East**, and to expand international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region.
- PM Modi became **first Indian prime minister** to visit the **Russian Far East Region**. He visited the place to participate in the 20th India-Russia annual summit with President Putin and the fifth meeting of the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF).
- An area of special interest for India is the **exploration of hydro carbon reserves along the coast of Russia’s Far East**.
- The countries have to **achieve \$ 30 billion bilateral trade target** set by both the countries for 2025.
- In the past year alone, India has **contracted defence deals worth about \$14.5 billion from Russia**.

- These range from **deep sea exploration** to building knowledge based economies based on science and technology, innovation, robotics and artificial intelligence, focussing on infrastructure, skill development, agriculture, shipbuilding, railways, aviation and greater connectivity, especially people-to-people contacts.
- The two countries decided to **setup more than 20 Russian designed nuclear units** in India in the next 20-years.
- Above all, the **push to 'Act Far East'** allows India to demonstrate its commitment to an area of concern for Moscow, thus **reassuring its traditional partner** that in an **increasingly polarised world**, India is **confident of working with multiple alignments**, even if they are at cross purposes with each other.

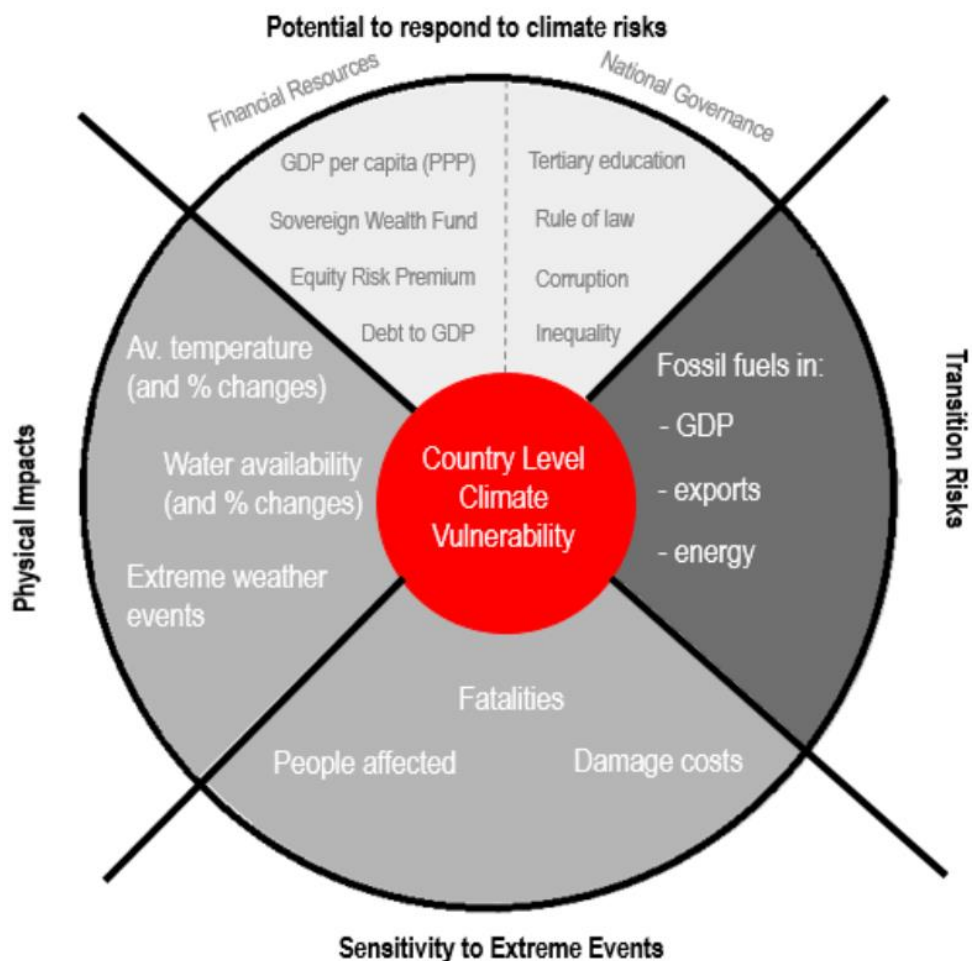
ENVIRONMENT

1. INDIA'S CLIMATE SCORE: HIGH ON VULNERABILITY, LOW ON RESILIENCE

Context: India most vulnerable country to climate change – HSBC report:

- **HSBC's 2018 assessment** of India being the country the most vulnerable to climate change is of great significance.
- However, against scientific warnings, **carbon emissions** continue to rise in China, the U.S. and India, three of the biggest emitters.
- Brazil, under its President Jair Bolsonaro, is encouraging under the false pretext of promoting economic growth **unprecedented deforestation of the Amazon rainforest**.
- As forest fires worsen global warming, the hardest hit by the **resulting floods, storms, heatwaves and droughts will be in India**.

HSBC methodology for scoring climate vulnerability



HSBC assessment of most Vulnerable nations to Climate Change:

- Report of HSBC Global Research ranks 67 countries for their vulnerability to climate change.
- The report highlights the **risks for investors** as countries move towards a lower carbon future, and reveals that India and other South and South-East Asian countries are **most at risk**.
- Whilst **Nordic countries are best placed** to weather the effects of a changing climate.
- HSBC's index and other such measures relating to the climate risk consider the **exposure or sensitivity of countries to climate impacts** on the one side, and their **ability to cope** on the other.
- Add to these two factors the **intensity of the climate hazard** itself and we can see how India's ranking on the index is, in all likelihood, worsening each year.
- Of the four nations assessed by HSBC to be most vulnerable, India has said climate change could **cut agricultural incomes**, particularly unirrigated areas that would be hit hardest by rising temperatures and declines in rainfall.
- Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Philippines are susceptible to extreme weather events, such as storms and flooding.
- Pakistan was ranked by HSBC among nations **least well-equipped** to respond to climate risks.
- **South and southeast Asian countries** accounted for **half of the 10 most vulnerable countries**. Oman, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Mexico, Kenya and South Africa are also in this group.
- The five countries least vulnerable to climate change risk are **Finland, Sweden, Norway, Estonia and New Zealand**.
- In its last ranking in 2016, HSBC only assessed G20 countries for vulnerability to climate risk.
- **Brazil** is not alone in mistakenly thinking that **slashing environmental regulations** would raise economic growth.
- The U.S., India and others are following this prescription to varying degrees.
- To be sure, **cutting hurdles to investment** can boost short-term growth and benefit interest groups.
- But **damaging the environment** in this way would be self-defeating in today's fragile ecology, as it would impact long-term growth and well-being.

For India: High Vulnerability for Indian Coastal States and landlocked regions:

- **Increasing temperatures and changing seasonal rainfall patterns** are aggravating droughts and hurting agriculture across the country.
- **Extreme storms** like the one that hit Odisha this year and the floods that swept Chennai in 2015 are the new normal. These events become more damaging when infrastructure is not resilient.
- A number of Indian States have **experienced extreme heatwaves** in the past three years, and the nation's capital recently recorded a **temperature of 48°C**, its hottest day in 21 years.
- India's exposure to climate hazards is heightened by the location of its **vast coastline in the eye of the storm**, across the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea.
- It also has a **high population density** located in harm's way.
- For instance, Kerala, which experienced intense floods and landslides in 2018 and 2019, is among the States with the highest density.
- How badly this exposure will **affect lives and livelihoods** depends both on the degrees of vulnerability and resilience to climate impacts.

Not only does climate change **result in rising temperatures**, it can **alter water cycles and lead to extreme weather events** that risk food, water and energy supplies.

How a **country responds to climate change** will be increasingly important, affecting the economic growth and prosperity of nations.

Way Forward: Building Resilience around Coastal Areas:

- In the face of such danger, India is not doing enough **to boost its coastal and inland defences**.
- It also needs to do more to **build resilience in the sectors** of agriculture, fisheries, manufacturing, energy, transport, health, and education.
- The priority for spending at the national and State levels **for disaster management needs to rise**.
- **Adequate resources** must also be allocated for implementing climate action plans that most States have now prepared.

- Increasing the ability to adapt to the adverse impacts of climate change and foster climate resilience, and making **finance flows consistent** with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and **climate resilient development**.

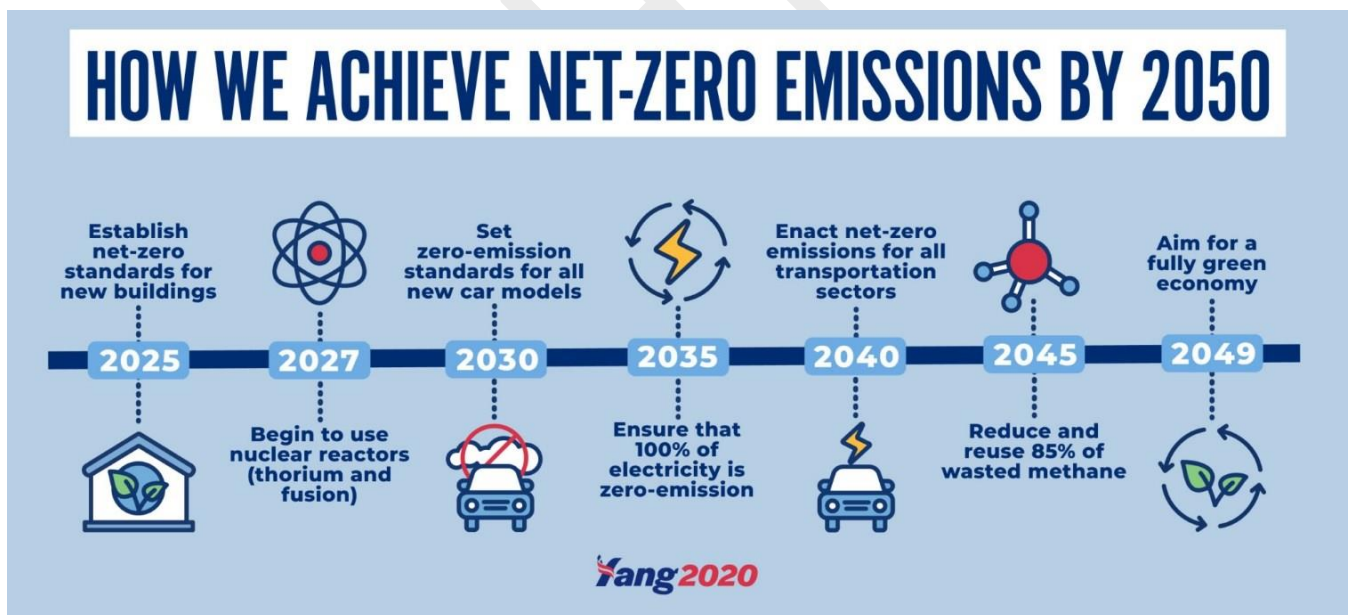
Conclusion:

- Indeed, India should be **alarmed at ecological destruction** even in faraway places like Amazon.
- As the country that is **most at risk for climate damage**, it should lead in pressing the global community to take sweeping climate action.
- Meanwhile, the nation must **reinforce its infrastructure and adapt its agriculture and industry**.
- Equally, it also needs to replace urgently its fossil fuels **with renewable energy**.
- Brazil must **reverse course** on the mindless destruction of the Amazon rainforest.
- Amidst this dangerous setting, **global leadership** must act with far **greater urgency**, and countries, including India, ought to switch rapidly from polluting fossil fuels to **cleaner renewable energy**, while building much **stronger coastal and inland defences** against climatic damage.

2. A CASE FOR A DIFFERENTIAL GLOBAL CARBON TAX

Context:

- The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (**IPCC**) **report** suggests that we, as humankind, might have **just over a decade left to limit global warming**.
- The IPCC says total global emissions will **need to fall by 45% from 2010 levels by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050**.
- If these targets are not met, **tropical regions of the world**, which are densely populated and happen to be mainly concentrated in the global South, are likely to be **most negatively affected** because of their low altitudes and pre-existing high temperatures.
- Some impact of this was already felt during the **Tamil Nadu water crisis** this year.



Sharing the burden to avert the danger of Climate Change problems:

- The **global South**, which has historically **contributed less to the problem** (and even at present its per capita carbon emissions are much smaller in comparison to the countries in the global North), happens **to be at the receiving end of the lifestyle choices made by the global North**.
- Although time is running out, a genuine global consensus **on the mitigation of this problem** is unfortunately missing.
- In the absence of a collective agreement, the environment is becoming the casualty.
- The bottom line is that both the worlds need to contribute to avert this danger in their self-interest.
- At the same time, the **burden of adjustment cannot be equal** when the underlying relationship between the two worlds has been historically unequal (climate injustice funnel).

What is the correct balance in terms of sharing this burden?

- A just approach would involve a **global sharing of the responsibility among countries** according to their respective shares in global emissions.
- Currently, the most accepted **model of mitigating strategy** has been the carbon trading process. However, it has its own limitations.
- Therefore, the proposal, a **Just Energy Transition (JET)**, on the contrary, is premised on a **sense of global justice** in terms of climatic fallouts and the respective contributions of the countries.
- It will also **help the resource-poor developing countries** to make the energy transition without having to worry about the finances unduly.
- Instead, the current experiences of the developing countries point to the contrary.

How can this injustice be corrected while making the planet a better place to live in for future generations?

- The first priority is to **fundamentally change the energy infrastructure**, which requires **massive investments** for the **green energy programme** across the world.
- Experts suggest that those on the **top of the funnel**, apart from funding their own energy transition, **partially support the transition for the countries at the bottom** and this sharing of the burden of development be done in a way **which inverts this injustice funnel**.
- For a successful energy transition to greener renewable sources, countries have to **spend around 1.5% of their GDP**.
- There is a proposal that the global energy transition be financed through a **system of the global carbon tax**.
- Since the total global carbon emissions are 36.1 billion metric tonnes of CO₂, this **amounts to a global carbon tax of \$46.1 per metric tonne**.

Who subsidises whom and by how much?

- Currently, the **global average of carbon emissions is 4.97 metric tonne per capita**.
- All the countries with emissions above this level (68 in all) are “payers” to finance energy transition for ‘beneficiary’ countries (135 in number), which are emitting below this level.
- The **total amount of “carbon compensation”** made by the payer nations comes to **around \$570 billion**.
- Those countries which emit more than the global per capita average pay for their own transition plus fund a part of the energy transition of those who are below this average.
- So, those at the **receiving end of climate injustice** are **duly compensated** for even as the entire world transitions to greener earth as a result of this **process of carbon tax sharing**.

The Effective Carbon Tax:

- It can be evaluated by adding (subtracting) the **carbon compensation amount to (from) each of the countries**.
- The **two top ‘payer’ countries** in terms of absolute amounts of transfers are the U.S. and China since their emissions are **higher than the global average**.
- The **total amount of “carbon compensation”** made by the payer nations comes to around \$570 billion. The distribution of this amount across the payer countries is based on their distance from the global average.
- The distribution of this fund across the compensated countries is also based on **how lower their emissions are in comparison to the global average**.

Conclusion:

- In terms of ‘**compensated’ countries**, **India comes at the top** due to its population size and its distance from the global emissions’ average (**India has per capita emissions of 1.73 metric tonne**).
- The other suspects are all countries from the global South, but this list springs a few surprises like France, Sweden, and Switzerland.
- What this tells us is that **even high-income countries** which have currently **kept their per capita emissions low** are beneficiaries of this globally-just policy.
- With China in the first list and some of the first world countries in the second, it’s obvious what this policy wants to achieve.
- It wants **all nations to climb down the emissions ladder** without necessarily having to give up on their standard of living. It’s a **global green Robin Hood tax**.

- Climate change is a global problem, and a global problem needs a global solution.

3. THE NATIONALIST HINDRANCE TO CLIMATE ACTIONS

Context:

- UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called on all leaders to come to New York on 23 September with **concrete, realistic plans** to enhance their **nationally determined contributions by 2020**, in line with **reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 45 per cent** over the next decade, and to **net zero emissions by 2050**.
- Recent weather events bring into focus the likely **implications of a warming world**.
- This summer saw Delhi-like temperatures across southern Europe; Hurricane Dorian rendered large parts of the Bahamas unliveable; and witnessed simultaneous raging fires in the Amazon, central Africa and even Siberia.
- Scientists are increasingly able to link these individual events **with climate change** the heat wave in France and Germany was made eight to 10 times more likely by climate change.
- Yet, concentrations of carbon dioxide continue to rise, and current country pledges would not stem this **increase even by 2030**.

Adverse Impacts of Climate Change:

- The **impacts of climate change** are being felt everywhere and are having very real consequences on people's lives. Climate change is disrupting national economies, costing us dearly today and even more tomorrow.
- **Global emissions** are reaching record levels and show no sign of peaking.
- The last four years were the **four hottest on record**, and winter temperatures in the **Arctic have risen by 3°C** since 1990.
- **Sea levels are rising, coral reefs are dying**, and we are starting to see the life-threatening impact of climate change on health, through air pollution, heatwaves and risks to food security.

UN Climate Action Summit 2019:

- There is a growing recognition that **affordable, scalable solutions** are available now that will enable us all to leapfrog to cleaner, more resilient economies.
- The latest analysis shows that if we act now, we can **reduce carbon emissions within 12 years** and hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C and even, as asked by the latest science, to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.



- Thankfully, we have the **Paris Agreement – a visionary, viable, forward-looking policy framework** that sets out exactly what needs to be done to stop climate disruption and reverse its impact.
- The Summit will bring together governments, the private sector, civil society, local authorities and other international organizations to develop **ambitious solutions in six areas**:
 - A global transition to renewable energy;
 - Sustainable and resilient infrastructures and cities;
 - Sustainable agriculture and management of forests and oceans;
 - Resilience and adaptation to climate impacts; and
 - Alignment of public and private finance with a net zero economy.

Areas which can rapidly change the climate change adverse effects:

- Mobilizing public and private sources of finance **to drive decarbonization** of all priority sectors and advance resilience;
- Accelerating the shift away from fossil fuels and **towards renewable energy**, as well as making significant gains in energy efficiency;
- Transforming industries such as Oil and Gas, Steel, Cement, Chemicals and Information Technology;
- Reducing emissions, increasing sink capacity and enhancing resilience within and across forestry, agriculture, oceans and food systems, including through biodiversity conservation, leveraging supply chains and technology;
- Advancing mitigation and resilience at urban and local levels, with a focus on new commitments on low-emission buildings, mass transport and urban infrastructure; and resilience for the urban poor;
- Advancing global efforts to address and manage the impacts and risks of climate change, particularly in those communities and nations most vulnerable.

In addition, there are **three additional key areas**:

- **Mitigation Strategy**: to generate momentum for ambitious Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and long-term strategies to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.
- **Youth Engagement and Public Mobilization**: To mobilize people worldwide to take action on climate change and ensure that young people are integrated and represented across all aspects of the Summit, including the six transformational areas.
- **Social and Political Drivers**: To advance commitments in areas that affect people's well-being, such as reducing air pollution, generating decent jobs, and strengthening climate adaptation strategies and protect workers and vulnerable groups.

A path for India without compromising for Developmental Activities:

- First, that the prospects of effective global action required to address climate change are **so weak** is extremely bad news for India.
 - We are a **deeply vulnerable country to climate impacts**. It would behove India not to be a status quo player in this context, but to **argue for enhanced global collective action**.
- Second, India has the potential to show the pathway to **accelerating action on climate change** even while pursuing its development interests.
 - A notable example is its **energy efficiency track record**, which helps limit greenhouse gases even while saving the nation energy.
 - However, there are inconsistencies in India's story as a climate champion. India is justifiably recognised for **promoting renewable energy**, yet also muddies the waters by sending mixed signals on **future coal use**.
 - The choice of Houston — the U.S. oil capital — for the Indian Prime Minister's recent public event, risks signalling that India sees its energy independence as tied to enhanced fossil fuel use. While some **increase in fossil fuel** is **inevitable** for India, the messaging is **incoherent at best**.
 - India needs domestic energy policies that are more **clearly and coherently tuned to a future low carbon world**.
- Third, such a domestic message would position India to be a **true global climate leader**, rather than a leader only among climate laggards.
 - India and China, both jostling for influence in African nations but also both losers from climate impacts, jointly help ensure that Africa's development is powered by renewable energy rather than fossil fuels and based on an energy efficient future.

- Such an agenda could bring together economic, environmental and political gains.
- The UN Summit is likely to teach us hard lessons about climate politics in an era of nationalism.
- The pathway to **enhanced action** is unlikely to override entrenched national politics, powered by international suasion.
- Instead, the aim should be to make accelerated climate action congruent with an **enlightened notion of national interest** by focusing on key actions in **rapidly changing areas** such as energy and urbanisation.
- India can build a **diplomatic approach** on a **firm domestic foundation** that takes seriously climate change as a factor in its future development pathway.

Conclusion:

- To be **effective and credible**, these plans cannot address mitigation alone: they must show the **way toward a full transformation of economies** in line with **sustainable development goals**.
- They should not create winners and losers or add to economic inequality; they must be **fair and create new opportunities and protections** for those negatively impacted, in the context of a just transition.
- And they should also include **women as key decision-makers**: only gender-diverse decision-making has the capacity to tackle the different needs that will emerge in this coming period of critical transformation.
- India can lead the pathway to accelerating action on climate change **without sacrificing development goals**. Energy Efficiency Programs which can lead to 50,000 tonnes and reduction of 110 million tonnes of carbon dioxide.

4. CLIMATE JUSTICE THROUGH JUDICIAL DIKTAT

Context:

- A Supreme Court order for **demolishing a set of apartments** in Maradu, a suburb in Ernakulam, has **caused a legal and political crisis**.
- The deadline for demolishing the **four backwater-facing high-rise apartments** ended. However, the **350-odd families residing** there have refused to move.
- Residents of these four complexes were on a hunger strike at the Maradu Municipality office.
- Based on various committees and other inputs, the Environment Ministry issued **fresh CRZ Rules** in December 2018, which **removed certain restrictions** on building, streamlined the clearance process, and aimed to encourage tourism in coastal areas.

Background of the Issue:

- In 2006, the **Maradu panchayat** had granted **building permissions** for constructing the apartments.
- However, after a **directive from the local self-government department**, the panchayat issued a show-cause notice to the builders for **violating Coastal Regulatory Zone (CRZ) rules**.
- The builders got a stay order from the Kerala High Court in 2007 which allowed them to continue construction.
- The High Court ruled in favour of the builders stating that they can't be held responsible for the **failure of local authorities** to comply with **statutory provisions**.
- The **Kerala State Coastal Zone Management Authority (KCZMA)** approached the Supreme Court, which constituted a three-member panel to examine whether **the buildings violated CRZ norms**.
- Based on the panel's report that the **buildings fell within CRZ-III**, the Supreme Court ordered the **demolition of the apartments**.
- After dismissing the review petitions, the apex court ordered the **demolition to be completed by September 20**.
- During a **suo motu hearing on the lack of action** on the part of the State in carrying out its order, the apex court pulled up the Kerala Chief Secretary, **accusing the State authorities of "playing with nature"**.

Coastal Regulation Zone rules:

- CRZ Rules **govern human and industrial activity** close to the coastline, in order to protect the fragile ecosystems near the sea.

- They sought to **restrict certain kinds of activities**, like large constructions, setting up of new industries, storage or disposal of hazardous material, mining, or reclamation and bunding, within a certain distance from the coastline.
- The **basic idea is**: because areas **immediately next to the sea** are extremely delicate, home to many **marine and aquatic life forms**, both animals and plants, and are also **threatened by climate change**, they need to be protected against unregulated development.
- The government notified **new CRZ Rules** with the stated objectives of promoting **sustainable development and conserving coastal environments**.
- For the so-called **CRZ-III (Rural) areas**, two separate categories have been stipulated.
- In the densely populated rural areas (**CRZ-IIIA**) with a population density of 2,161 per sq km as per the 2011 Census, the no-development zone is now 50 m from the high-tide level, as against the 200 m stipulated earlier.
- In the **CRZ-IIIB category** (rural areas with population density below 2,161 per sq km) continue to have a no-development zone extending up to 200 m from the high-tide line.
- The new Rules have a **no-development zone of 20 m for all islands** close to the mainland coast, and **for all backwater islands in the mainland**.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE NOTIFICATION

<p>1 As per CRZ, 2011 Notification, for CRZ-II (Urban) areas, Floor Area Ratio (FAR) had been frozen as per 1991 Development Control Regulation (DCR) levels. In the CRZ, 2018 Notification, it has been decided to de-freeze the same and permit FAR for construction projects, as prevailing on the date of the new Notification.</p>	<p>3 Tourism infrastructure to be promoted: Temporary tourism facilities such as shacks, toilet blocks, change rooms, drinking water facilities etc. are permissible in the NDZ of the CRZ-III areas. However, a minimum distance of 10 m from HTL should be maintained.</p>	<p>4 The procedure for CRZ clearances has been streamlined. Only projects located in the CRZ-I (Ecologically Sensitive Areas) and CRZ IV (area covered between Low Tide Line and 12 nautical miles seaward) shall be dealt with for CRZ clearance by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The powers for clearances with respect to CRZ-II and III have been delegated at the state level.</p>
<p>2 CRZ-III has been divided into two separate categories:</p> <p>(a) CRZ-III A - These are areas with a population density of 2161 per sq km as per 2011 Census. Such areas shall have a No Development Zone (NDZ) of 50 m from the High Tide Line (HTL) as against 200 m stipulated in the 2011 notification.</p> <p>(b) CRZ-III B - Areas with population density of below 2161 per sq km as per 2011 census shall continue to have an NDZ of 200 m from the HTL.</p>	<p>5 For islands close to the main land coast and for all backwater islands NDZ of 20 m has been stipulated.</p> <p>6 Specific guidelines for the conservation and management of Ecologically Sensitive Areas.</p> <p>7 In order to address pollution in Coastal areas treatment facilities have been made permissible in CRZ-I B area subject to necessary safeguards.</p> <p>8 Defence and strategic projects accorded necessary dispensation.</p>	

Supreme Court adopted Technocratic Proceduralism for Demolition:

- While the demolition is ostensibly for **protecting the environment**, the Supreme Court order **doesn't sufficiently explain** how the constructions in question **damage the environment**.
- Instead of a jurisprudence on environmental justice, it **adopted technocratic proceduralism** for arriving at its verdict.
- Ironically, more serious environmental damage is likely to be caused by the demolition of the apartments.
- A **report by IIT-Madras** has highlighted that **air pollution caused by the demolition** would pose **severe health hazards** to those residing nearby, besides the long-term environmental costs of the debris generated.
- **Fearing the "collateral damage"** of the demolition, a person residing close to the apartments has filed a petition in the Supreme Court opposing the unplanned implosion/explosion of the buildings.
- The case highlights the **pathologies of executive and judicial decision-making** on environment and urban development in India.

- While State authorities and courts were complicit in allowing the buildings to be constructed in the first place, **liability is now being placed squarely on the apartment owners.**
- In some regards, it is a continuation of the jurisprudence based on court-appointed committees rather than hearing affected parties that resulted, especially in Delhi, in the demolition of numerous “illegal slums”.

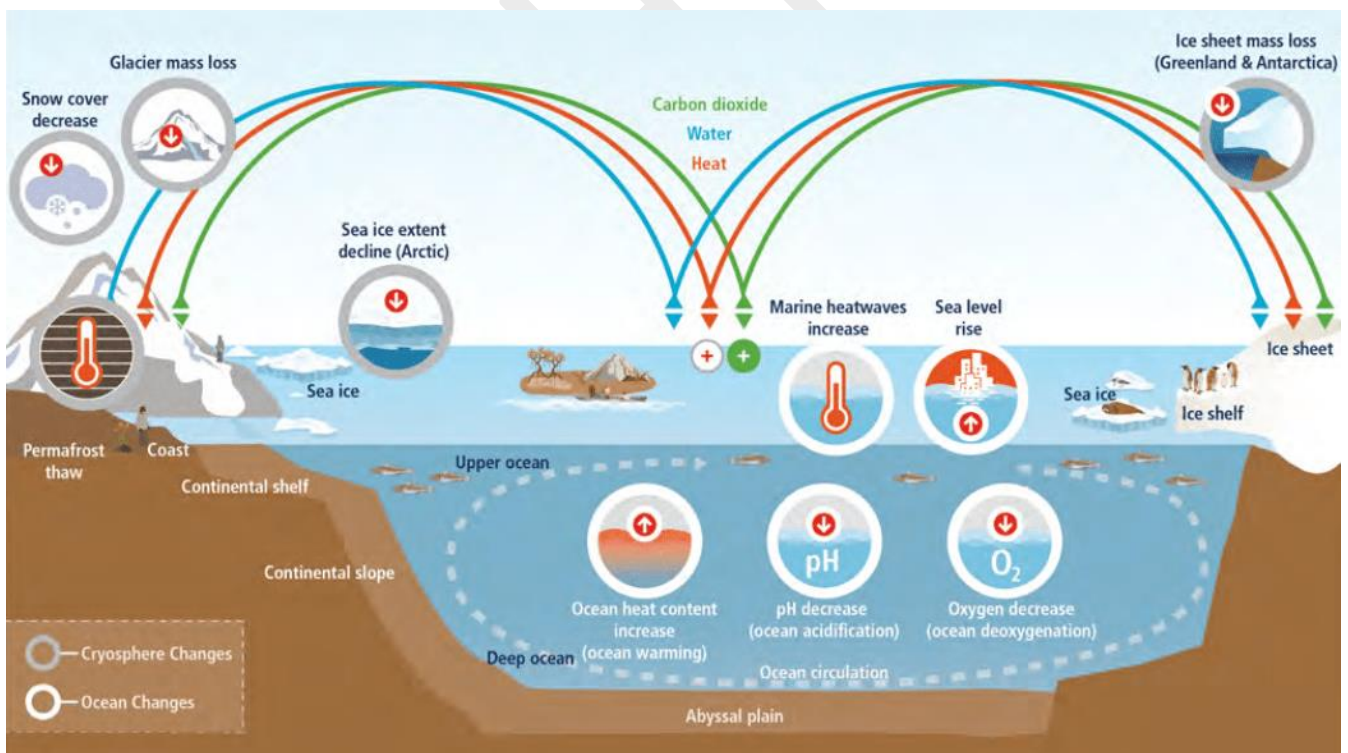
Conclusion:

- Though many cases are **pending before the Kerala High Court and the Supreme Court** regarding the **encroachments on backwater islands**, the state government has not effectively presented its arguments facilitating the encroachments to continue.
- The state government should put pressure on the Union Government **to restrict the relaxations on CRZ to the coastal community.**
- For **environmental justice**, what we **need is a strong environmental governance system** that enables all stakeholders **to prevent violations** instead of the court becoming India’s new demolition man.
- We need to promote safe housing, residential places and promoting responsible tourism which will be helpful for the **development of the coastal community.**

5. WHY THE LATEST IPCC REPORT ON OCEANS MATTERS

Context:

- A new report issued by the **UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** paints a troubling picture of the **world’s ice and oceans.**
- The ocean effects of climate change, from warming waters to ocean acidification to sea level rise, are already altering the weather, fisheries, and coastal communities.
- The United Nation’s climate panel makes crystal clear that the **planet’s oceans, snow and ice are in dire trouble** and the damage is causing harm to the people who depend on them.
- Even with aggressive efforts to lower greenhouse gas emissions, **many nations will struggle to adapt.**



Present condition of Ocean and Polar regions:

- All people on Earth **depend on the ocean and cryosphere** — the frozen regions of our planet.
- Together they **provide vital services to humanity**, including food, fresh water and energy.
- But they also **perform critical services**, including the uptake and redistribution of carbon dioxide and heat.

- Yet, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere says **human-induced climate change** is harming the health and function of the ocean and cryosphere in a number of ways.
- **Glaciers and ice sheets are shrinking.** Global sea level is rising at more than twice the rate of the 20th century.
- The ocean is warming, becoming more acidic and losing oxygen. Fifty per cent of coastal wetlands have been lost over the last 100 years.
- Species are shifting, **biodiversity is declining** and **ecosystems are losing** their integrity and function.
- The strain on the ocean and cryosphere has direct and indirect effects, threatening human health, food security, fresh water and livelihoods.

Ocean Ecosystem has been deteriorating faster than ever:

- “Over the 21st century, the ocean is projected to **transition to unprecedented conditions,**” the IPCC report says, with the exact degree of change controlled by the **levels of greenhouse gas emissions.**
- The IPCC report state that the ocean has already **taken up more than 90% of the excess heat in the climate system** since 1970, the surface is becoming **more acidic,** and **oxygen is being depleted** in the top thousand meters of the water column.
- All those conditions are projected to get worse in the years ahead.
- Ocean scientist and former NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco joins Ira to talk about the risks to the ocean, its effects on the global ecosystem, and how the ocean can also help to blunt some of the worst climate outcomes—if action is taken now.
- The IPCC special report on **the 1.5°C goal,** for example, said it was possible to keep the rise in temperature to within 1.5°C, but for that the world would need to **bring down its greenhouse gas emissions to half of its 2010 levels by 2030, and to net zero by 2050.**
- **Net-zero** is achieved when the total emissions is balanced by the amount of **absorption of carbon dioxide** through **natural sinks** like forests, or removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through technological interventions.

Way Forward: What can we do?

- A relatively straightforward solution to curbing biodiversity loss, especially in the face of climate change, is **expanding the global network of large-scale protected areas on land and ocean.**
- While highlighted by the report, the importance of this management practice is also old news.
- Protected areas have been implemented for years to **conserve marine ecosystems,** and are now being implemented across the world.
- Studies continue to show that **strict protected areas,** which limit or prohibit human use, safeguard biodiversity while also **enhancing resilience** to environmental impacts, including climate change.
- Indeed, high-profile initiatives like **EO Wilson’s Half-Earth Project** argue that people must protect **at least half of the planet to ensure human survival.**
- But protected areas are not enough. The report also highlights an even more challenging, yet crucial, component of the solution: **Rapid reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** must be achieved across institutional boundaries.
- The global nature of the issue demands a **globally coordinated effort** toward ambitious cuts in emissions.

Conclusion:

- The new IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere makes clear that no action on climate change is not a viable path forward.
- The **United Nations Climate Action Summit,** which convened intended to do that the goal of the meeting was to **identify realistic plans** toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions **by 45 per cent** during the next decade and further to **net-zero by 2050.**
- Seventy-seven countries announced efforts **toward net-zero emissions by 2050.** Multiple businesses voiced intentions to **follow Paris Agreement targets** to reduce emissions.
- During the same time, **trees and forests** absorbed almost 11.2 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide every year from the atmosphere.
- The sum total of these processes meant that land, and the vegetation on it, was **removing about 6 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide** from the atmosphere annually.

- Widespread climate strikes, led largely by young people, are also a sign of a **broader social response to climate change**.

SECURITY ISSUES

UAPA DECLARED TERRORISTS UNDER NEW ANTI-TERROR LAW

Context:

- Recently, amendments to the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act ("UAPA")**, India's signature **anti-terrorism legislation**, allowing the Central government to **designate individuals as "terrorists"**, caused a furore.
- According to statistics published by the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, 922 cases were reported under UAPA in 2016, which was 5% less than what was recorded in 2014, with 976 cases.
- At the same time, it was up by 3% from 2015 (897 cases). In total, 2,700 cases were registered over 2014, 2015 and 2016.
- In response, it was argued that the UAPA provided for a **system of checks and balances** which would ensure that **governmental abuse** could be swiftly reviewed and rectified.

Government's Argument:

- Terrorist acts are committed **not by organizations but by individuals**.
- Declaring an organization as a terrorist organization will not stop the individuals behind it.
- India faces one of the highest threats of terrorism** in the world and therefore its counter-terrorism mechanism must be stringent.
- USA has a very successful example of **counter-terrorism mechanism**, especially after 9/11, and has been successful in curbing terrorist activities.
- Not designating individuals as terrorists, would give them an **opportunity to circumvent the law** and they would simply gather under a different name and keep up their terror activities.
- A specialised investigating agency, **NIA, cannot be dependent on state police** for approval for **seizure of property** related to terrorism that has inter-state and international ramifications.
- Investigation by **inspector rank officer** would help **solve the human resource crunch in the NIA**.
- This move would quicken the delivery of justice in UAPA related cases, which are reviewed by senior officers at various levels.

Combating terror

The Ministry of Home Affairs on Wednesday declared four individuals as terrorists under the recently amended Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. A look at its provisions:

- It empowers the government to designate individuals as terrorists. Previously, only an organisation could be designated as one

- It empowers the National Investigation Agency (NIA) to seize properties, which previously required permission from the Director General of Police

- Also, it allows NIA officers, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases. Before, only Deputy Superintendent

or Assistant Commissioner of Police or above, could do so

- Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) chief Masood Azhar, Hafiz Saeed of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, his deputy Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhvi and underworld don Dawood Ibrahim have been designated as terrorists



Under Masood Azhar's leadership, JeM carried out an attack on the Pathankot air base

Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA):

- The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 aims at the **effective prevention of unlawful activities** across India and abroad.
- The UAPA, an upgrade on the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act TADA (lapsed in 1995) and the Prevention of Terrorism Act – POTA (repealed in 2004) was originally passed in the year 1967.
- Its main objective was to **provide powers to central agencies and states to deal with terrorist activities**.
- The Key amendments are:** To designate **individuals as terrorists** on certain grounds provided in the Act.
- The Act empowers the Director General of NIA to grant approval of **seizure or attachment of property** when the case is investigated by the said agency.
- The Act empowers the officers of the NIA, of the **rank of Inspector or above**, to investigate cases of terrorism in addition to those conducted by the DSP or ACP or above rank officer in the state.

Concerns raised are:

- Experiences of Anti-terror laws in India such as **POTA** (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and **TADA** (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act) reveals that they are **often misused and abused**.
- Opposition parties have criticised the new law, whose **constitutional validity** has been challenged by the Association for Protection of Civil Rights in the Supreme Court through a public interest litigation.
- Critics argue that the new law gives **unfettered powers to investigating agencies**.
- Critics warned that vesting such **sweeping powers** in the hands of the **political executive** would prove to be a recipe for abuse, and for political and social persecution.
- Opposition parties have raised concern over the law, saying it could also be used **against political opponents and civil society activists** who spoke against the government may be **branded as “terrorists.”**
- It would appear to be a **very basic principle of justice** that if an association is to be banned for unlawful activities, then the **material on the basis of which that ban is justified** is put to the association so that it has a chance to defend itself.
- To take a decision on the **legality of a ban** by looking at **secret material** that is withheld even from the association itself is exactly akin to condemning a man unheard.
- Some experts feel that it is **against the federal structure** since it neglects the authority of state police in terrorism cases, given that **‘Police’ is a state subject under 7th schedule** of Indian Constitution.

Conclusion:

- **Terrorism is a global problem** and the UN along with several other countries, have provisions in their laws to designate individuals as terrorists.
- An **individual’s psychology is the birth place of Terrorism**, rather than an institution.
- If, in the first place, an individual is stopped from attracting other individuals into terrorism by providing ideological and financial support, this menace can be finished.
- Hence, designating an individual as terrorist, after following the **due process of law**, is of **prime importance to nip terrorism in the bud**.
- Union Minister for Home Affairs replying to the debate on the Bill, appealed to the House to pass the bill unanimously to send a strong message to the world that **terrorists are the enemies of humanity and India is committed to finish terror from its soil**.

MISCELLANEOUS

1. PUTTING ACCIDENT VICTIMS AT THE CENTRE OF VEHICLES LAW

Context:

- It is well known that **India is one of the most accident-prone countries** in the world, accounting for **nearly 1,50,000 deaths, 10% of all motor vehicles-related fatalities worldwide**.
- According to the **2018 report of the World Health Organization**, the highest number of road accidents occur in India worldwide. Even China, the most populous country, is behind us in this regard.
- As per the report of the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 2017**; there are about **5 lakh road accidents** occurred in India every year in which around 1.5 lakh people are killed.
- There are around **1.49 lakh people died in 2018** in the road accidents with Uttar Pradesh registering the maximum spike in fatalities.
- So in order to prevent the menace of road accidents; the central government has amended the **Motor Vehicle 1988** by the **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill 2019**.
- Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 has been implemented throughout the country since September 1, 2019. Now the **penalty has been increased 10 times on various violations**.

Features of the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019:

- The debate often revolves around **how to minimise road accidents** by incorporating **deterrents into laws** and ignores the interests of the victims.
- The discourse concerning the **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019** has only followed this trend, as is evidenced by the disproportionate press coverage given to the enhanced penalties to be levied on offenders.

- **Compensation for road accident victims:** The Bill increases the **minimum compensation** for hit and run cases as follows: (i) in case of death, from Rs 25,000 to two lakh rupees, and (ii) in case of grievous injury, from Rs 12,500 to Rs 50,000.
- **Recall of vehicles:** The New Bill allows the central government to order for recall of defected motor vehicles which may harm the environment, or the driver, or other road users.
- **Road Safety Board:** The National Road Safety Board, will be created by the central government to advise the central and state governments on all aspects of road safety and traffic management.
- **Offence and Fines:** The new Bill has increases fines for several offence under the Act.
 - Fine for Drink and Driving: Now the fine is increased from Rs 2,000 to Rs 10,000 along with imprisonment of 6 months. On the repetition of this act fine would be Rs. 15,000.
 - Rash driving will cost fine of Rs. 5000 earlier it was Rs.1000.
 - Driving without driving licence will be fined Rs 5000 instead of 500 earlier.
- **Offence by Juveniles is a new category introduced.** Now Guardian of the Juvenile / owner of the vehicle shall be fined Rs. 25,000 with 3 yrs imprisonment. For Juvenile to be tried under Juveniles Justice Act. Registration of Motor Vehicle shall be cancelled.
- If a **vehicle manufacturer fails to comply** with motor vehicle standards, the penalty will be a fine of up to Rs 100 crore, or imprisonment of up to one year, or both.
- If a **contractor fails to comply with road design standards**, the penalty will be up to Rs.1 lac.
- Under **section 196 of the Motor Vehicle Act, 2019** driving without Insurance will be fined Rs 2000.
- Under the **section 194 D of the act**; riding without Helmets will be fined to Rs 1000 and disqualification for 3 months for licence.
- Under **section 194B of the Act**; driving without seat belt will cost Rs. 1000.
- **Speeding / Racing will be fined Rs 5,000** instead of Rs 500 earlier.
- Under section 194 E of the Act; not providing way for emergency vehicles will cost Rs 10,000.
- This **lack of victim-centricity in the discourse**, though deplorable, is unsurprising.
- The fact that the **National Crime Records Bureau** does not collate data pertaining to the socio-economic and demographic profile of victims of traffic accidents is a testament to the relative apathy shown by the state machinery.

Encouraging the role of Good Samaritans:

- The Bill defines a **Good Samaritan** as a person, who renders emergency medical or non-medical assistance to a victim at the scene of an accident.
- The assistance must have been In good faith or by Voluntary or Without the expectation of any reward.
- Such a person will **not be liable for any civil or criminal action** for any injury to or death of an accident victim, caused due to their negligence in providing assistance to the victim.
- It will be optional for the **Good Samaritans to disclose their identity to the Police or the medical personnel.**

Cashless treatment: Motor Vehicle Accident Fund:

- Additionally, the Act now requires insurance companies and the government to notify schemes relating to **cashless treatment during the 'Golden Hour'** — the period of first 60 minutes from the occurrence of an accident when the risk of fatality can be minimised to the greatest extent.
- Further, it mandates **compulsory insurance of all road users**, including pedestrians, who will be covered **through a 'Motor Vehicle Accident Fund'**. Lastly, it also provides for interim relief to be provided to the claimants.
- These provisions, well-intentioned, are no doubt steps in the right direction.

Delays in settlement need to be addressed:

- Another problem highlighted by the apex court for which the **new Act does not provided any remedy** is that of **procedural delays** on the part of tribunals in claims settlement.
- The provision for interim compensation is bound to bring some respite to the victims but another unaddressed concern makes this stipulation susceptible to criticism.
- An **absence of in-built safeguards in the compensation mechanism** allows for the money to be frittered away by unscrupulous relatives, touts and agents, especially in cases where the victim or his nearest kin are poor and illiterate.

- It is to address this concern that the **Supreme Court in Jai Prakash case** suggested payment in the form of monthly disbursements of smaller amounts over a longer period of time to victims or their kin, as **against a lump-sum award**. This has been overlooked by the new Act.
- The question still remains how effectively the provisions will be implemented **by state authorities**. Concerns have been raised regarding **dilution of power of the states** in terms of granting licences and other procedures, as the **matter is in the Concurrent List**.

DRIVE WITH CARE
Amendment to the Motor Vehicles Act seeks heavier penalties for traffic violators

₹200 Overloading of passengers (per seat)	₹5,000 Penalty for ricing (Up from ₹500)	₹1 lakh New penalty on aggregators for violations of licensing conditions (minimum ₹25K)
₹1000 Penalty for no seat belt (up from ₹100)	₹5,000 Driving without licence (Up from ₹500)	₹5,000 Penalty for dangerous driving (up from ₹1,000)
₹1,000 Penalty for not having child restraint	₹15,000 Drunken driving (Up from ₹2,000)	
	₹10,000 Driving despite disqualification (Up from ₹500)	

Punishment for offences relating to construction & maintenance of vehicles

DEALER	₹1 lakh per vehicle and 1 year imprisonment
MANUFACTURER	penalty up to ₹100 cr
DEALER SELLING SAFETY EQUIPMENT	Up to ₹1 lakh
CONSUMER	₹5,000 or 6 months imprisonment or both

2019

New Bill protects good Samaritans, has stricter punishments for violations by juveniles

It will help us meet our international commitment under the Brasilia Declaration to halve the road crash deaths

Piyush Tewari, founder of SaveLife Foundation

- Understandably, many of the points raised above cannot be specified statutorily.
- Hence, the government needs to **notify an institutional framework** which encourages advocacy for victims and **facilitates access to the various services**.

Conclusion:

- As far as road safety is concerned, **discipline is imperative**.
- If implemented in right spirit, the law can change road habits of all by not only imposing stiffer penalties, but also trying to **inculcate a sense of responsibility among the citizens**.
- After the passing of this bill Road and transport Minister says that the Bill will provide an **Efficient, Safe and Corruption Free Transport System in the Country**.

2. UNDESIRABLE AND DIVISIVE: ON AMIT SHAH'S PUSH FOR HINDI

Context:

- Union Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion that **Hindi**, as the most spoken language, could **work to unite the country** continued to draw **sharp reaction from the Opposition parties**.
- It may be customary for the Union Home Minister, who is also **in charge of the Department of Official Language**, to make a pitch for greater use of Hindi in official work on the **occasion of 'Hindi Diwas'**, observed every year **on September 14**.
- However, Home Minister's remarks this year have raised the hackles of political leaders in some States that do not speak Hindi.
- Critics argued that Union Home Minister's "announcement that Hindi should be treated as the national language runs **contrary to the spirit of the Constitution and our country's linguistic diversity**".

Indian Constitution on Languages:

- The **Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution** lists 22 languages, which have been referred to as **scheduled languages** and given recognition, status and official encouragement.

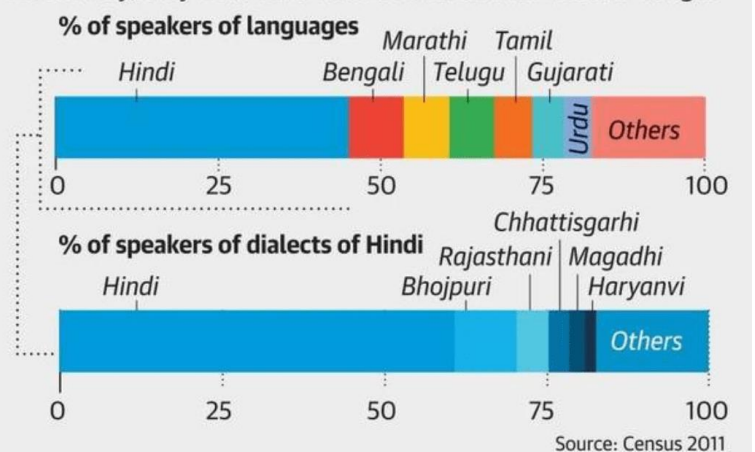
- **Article 29 of the Constitution of India** protects the interests of minorities.
- The Article states that any section of the citizens who have a “...distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same.”
- In addition, the Government of India has awarded the **distinction of classical language** to Kannada, Malayalam, Odia, Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu.
- Classical language status is given to languages which have a **rich heritage and independent nature**.
- **Article 343(1)** of the Constitution provides that Hindi in Devanagari script shall be the Official Language of the Union.
- **Article 343(2)** also provided for continuing the use of English in official work of the Union for a period of 15 years (i.e., up to 25 January 1965) from the date of commencement of the Constitution.
- **Article 343(3)** empowered the parliament to provide by law for continued use of English for official purposes even after 25 January 1965.
- **Article 350A** facilities for **instruction in mother-tongue at the primary stage**.
- **Article 350B** provides for the establishment of a **Special Officer for linguistic minorities**.
- The Officer shall be **appointed by the President** and shall investigate all matters relating to the safeguards for linguistic minorities, reporting directly to the President.
- The President may then place the reports before each house of the Parliament or send them to the governments of the states concerned.
- Despite the misconceptions, Hindi is not the national language of India. The **Constitution of India does not give any language the status of national language**.
- Accordingly, **section 3(2) of the Official Languages Act, 1963 (amended in 1967)** provides for continuing the use of English in official work even after 25 January 1965.
- The Act also lays down that **both Hindi and English** shall compulsorily be used for Resolutions, General Orders, Rules, Notifications, Administrative Reports, Press Communiques etc.
- The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union were supposed to be the international form of Indian numerals, distinct from the numerals used in most English-speaking countries.

Data: Just 26% of Indians speak Hindi as mother tongue:

- A language is an umbrella term which contains **many mother tongues**.
- **43% of Indians** speak the Hindi language, which **includes many mother tongues** such as Bhojpuri, Rajasthani & Hindi.
- Only about 26% of Indians speak Hindi as mother tongue under the broader Hindi language grouping (according to Census 2011).
- **Close to 40% of the Hindi language speakers** speak mother tongues other than Hindi.
- Despite being spoken by a large number of people, Bhojpuri and Rajasthani are not listed as scheduled languages, while **Bodo and Nepali** which are spoken by relatively fewer people are in the **Eighth Schedule**.

One language, many dialects

Only 60% of total Hindi-speakers speak the native Hindi dialect. Effectively, only 26% have native Hindi as their mother tongue



What is the backdrop to the Hindi imposition row?

- Some States has been **traditionally opposed** to any attempt to **introduce Hindi** as a **compulsory language** of learning or administration.
- The origin of the linguistic row, however, goes back to the **debate on official language**.
- In the Constituent Assembly, Hindi was voted as the official language by a single vote.

- However, it added that **English would continue** to be used as an associate official language for 15 years.
- The Official Languages Act came into effect on the expiry of this 15-year period in 1965. This was the background in which the anti-Hindi agitation took place.
- However, as early as in 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru had given an assurance in Parliament that **English would continue to be in use as long as non-Hindi speaking people wanted it.**

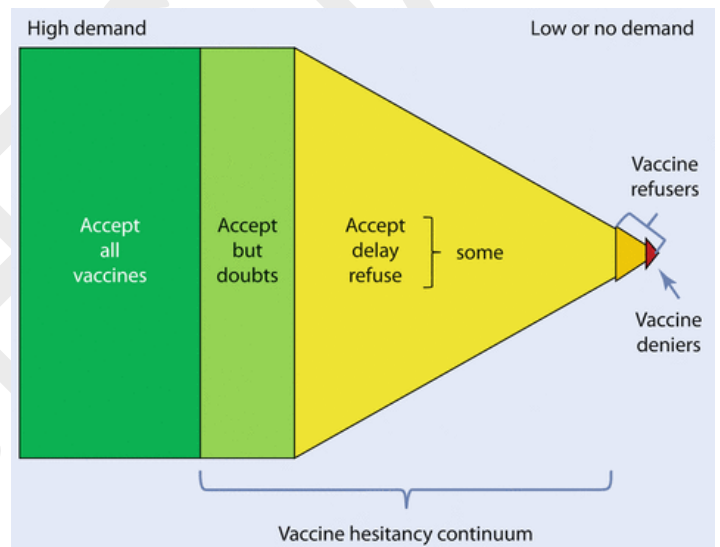
Conclusion:

- It is our strength that we have **many languages and dialects**. We have to see that a foreign language does not overtake a native language.
- Experts reviewed that it would be disastrous for the **country's famed diversity** if the promotion of Hindi is considered a step towards a 'one nation, one language' kind of unity.
- According a hegemonic role to the "most-spoken" language in the country may promote cultural homogenisation, but that is hardly desirable in a country with a **diverse population, a plural ethos and is a cauldron of many languages and cultures.**
- Further, **national identity cannot be linked to any one language**, as it is, by definition, something that transcends linguistic and regional differences.
- The need today is to **respect, protect and nurture diversity of our nation so that unity is ensured.**

3. DEADLY SPREAD: ON 'VACCINE HESITANCY'

Introduction:

- The world is facing **multiple health challenges**.
- These range from **outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases** like measles and diphtheria, increasing reports of drug-resistant pathogens, growing rates of obesity and physical inactivity to the health impacts of environmental pollution and climate change and multiple humanitarian crises.
- The **threat from vaccine hesitancy**, which is defined as the "reluctance or refusal to vaccinate despite the availability of vaccines", only appears to have grown more dangerous to public health.
- There has been a **sharp increase** in the WHO European region too with 90,000 cases recorded in the first six months that more than the numbers recorded for the whole of 2018.
- The measles infection spread in the European region has been unprecedented in recent years that around 1,74,000 cases from 49 of the 53 countries between January 2018 and June 2019.
- Last month the U.K., Greece, the Czech Republic and Albania lost their measles elimination status.



About Measles Infection:

- With a **30% increase in measles cases** worldwide in 2018, the World Health Organization, in January 2019, included 'vaccine hesitancy' as one of the 10 threats to global health.
- Measles is a **deadly disease** which can lead to –Pneumonia, Diarrhoea and other deadly threats. Measles is an acute illness caused by a virus of the **paramyxovirus family**.
- **According to the WHO:** Measles cases **rose 300% worldwide** through the first three months of 2019 compared to the same period last year.
- Measles, which is **highly contagious**, can be entirely prevented through a two-dose vaccine.
- The reason for rise is attributed to impact of anti-vaccination stigma.
- Most measles-related deaths are caused by complications associated with the disease. Serious complications are more common in children under the age of 5, or adults over the age of 30.
- The most serious complications include blindness, encephalitis (an infection that causes brain swelling), severe diarrhoea and related dehydration, ear infections, or severe respiratory infections such as pneumonia.

- Severe measles is more likely **among poorly nourished young children**, especially those with **insufficient vitamin A**, or whose immune systems have been weakened by HIV/AIDS or other diseases.
- The **respiratory disease measles** remains a leading cause of death among young children, despite the fact that a safe and effective vaccine has been available for 40 years
- It is one of the **most contagious diseases** and many children who do not have sufficient immunity contract measles if exposed.
- During the first few weeks after contracting measles, a **child's immune system becomes weakened**, and a normal cold or diarrhoea can become a life-threatening illness.

Vaccine Hesitancy: A generation at risk:

- Vaccine hesitancy, which is **defined by WHO** as a “delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccination services”, has been reported in more than 90% of countries in the world.
- In many areas, **immunisation for measles, a vaccine-preventable disease** that was largely eliminated following widespread use of the **measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine**, has decreased to less than the 95% threshold set by WHO as that required for herd immunity.
- Vaccine hesitancy is **threatening the historical achievements** made in reducing the burden of infectious diseases, which have plagued humanity for centuries.
- According to a **March 2019 report**, only 52% respondents from 28 EU member states agree that vaccines are definitely effective in preventing diseases, while 33% felt they were probably effective.
- More alarming is that **48% of the respondents** believed that **vaccines cause serious side effects** and 38% think vaccines actually cause the disease that they are supposed to protect against.
- It found younger people (18-34 years) and those with less education are less likely to agree that the **measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) vaccine is safe**.
- If we fail, the future health of **unvaccinated children** and their communities will suffer greatly.

India has fourth highest number of measles cases in the world: WHO

- India has taken **several initiatives to protect its children** and has made significant progress in decreasing measles incidence and related mortality and morbidity.
- **However, Children under the age of one** get infected by the virus the most in India as they have the **highest incidence rate** of 76.4 per million population, according to WHO.
- Moreover, this is the same age bracket that has received highest number of zero doses of measles vaccination between July 2018 and June 2019.
- After a surge in measles cases in 2018, there have been around 3,65,000 measles cases reported from 182 countries in the first six months of 2019.
- The biggest increase, of 900% in the first six months this year compared with the same period last year, has been from the WHO African region, with the Democratic Republic of the **Congo, Madagascar and Nigeria** accounting for most cases.

Misinformation need to be Addressed:

- A striking similarity was seen in India too. A **2018 study** found **low awareness to be the main reason why 45% of children** missed different vaccinations in 121 Indian districts that have higher rates of unimmunised children.
- While 24% did not get vaccinated due to apprehension **about adverse effects**, 11% were reluctant to get immunised for reasons other than fear of adverse effects.
- Thus, much work remains to be done **to address misinformation**.
- With social media playing a crucial role in spreading vaccine disinformation, the commitment by Facebook to **“reduce distribution” of vaccine misinformation** will be helpful in winning the war against vaccine deniers.
- Measles vaccine not only **provides lifelong protection** against the virus but also **reduces mortality** from other childhood infections.
- This is because measles viruses kill immune cells, leaving the child vulnerable to infectious diseases for two to three years.

Conclusion:

- **Paediatricians and family doctors** have a key role in helping parents appreciate the benefits of vaccination.

- Physicians advice has been shown to be the most important predictor of vaccine acceptance.
- All child health workers must **promote vaccination** conflicting advice from medical professionals is especially damaging and must be afforded sufficient time with each family to effectively do so.
- **Increasing and maintaining vaccination uptake** is vital for vaccines to achieve their success.
- **Governments and Health policy makers** also play an essential role in promoting vaccination, educating the general public, and implementing policies that reduce the public health risks associated with vaccine hesitancy.
- Addressing low vaccination requires an adequate understanding of the determinants of the problem, tailored evidence-based strategies **to improve uptake, and monitoring and evaluation** to determine the impact and sustainability of the interventions.
- Only a **collaborative effort** between paediatricians, family doctors, parents, public health officials, governments, the technology sector, and civil society will allow myths and misinformation around vaccination to be dispelled.

4. WHY HAS INDIA BANNED E-CIGARETTES?

Context:

- The Union Cabinet approved the promulgation of the **Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertisement) Ordinance, 2019** with immediate effect.
- As a result, anyone violating it will be imprisoned for up to one year or fined up to Rs.1,00,000 or both for the first offence.
- **Storage of electronic-cigarettes** shall also be **punishable**. Besides health concerns, the government is concerned that e-cigarettes can “seriously undermine and derail the government’s efforts to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use”.
- The ordinance will need to be approved by Parliament when it meets in November.

Up in smoke

Wednesday’s move follows an advisory by the government in 2018 to all States to consider banning e-cigarettes

- e-cigarettes are brought from China and other countries and are not manufactured in India. They are also available online

- WHO too urged member countries to take appropriate steps. It does not endorse e-cigarettes as cessation aids

- 16 States & one Union Territory have already banned them. The Indian Council of Medical Research, in a recent paper, had recommended a complete ban on them



- They are marketed as being safer than conventional cigarettes but this is false. Available literature suggests that they may act as gateway products to induce non-smokers to nicotine-use

About E-CIGARETTE:

- E-cigarettes are the most common form of **Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS)**. These are basically devices that do **not burn or use tobacco leaves**.
- Instead, they vaporise a solution using a battery. This vapour is then inhaled by the user.
- E-liquid is composed of **five ingredients**: vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.)
- **Propylene glycol** is the ingredient that produces **thicker clouds of vapor**.
- The World Health Organisation says, **adding that these solutions** and emissions also contain some solutions that are **considered to be “toxicants”**.
- In terms of shape and size, most e-cigarettes resemble ordinary cigarettes, cigars and smoking pipes, but of late brands have started experimenting with newer designs that may resemble whistles, pens etc.
- The **U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)** has not approved e- cigarettes as an alternative to reduce smoking.
- One study found that though e-cigarettes led to higher percentage of people quitting smoking, nearly 80% of quitters were still vaping.

Are e-cigarettes addictive?

- According to a **National Youth Tobacco Survey, 2018** carried out by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), over **6 million kids in the U.S.** are using e-cigarettes.
- A 2015 survey cited by The **Truth Initiative** (an anti-tobacco organisation) found that almost 60% of those who used e-cigarettes also smoked cigarettes, called as **dual users**.
- A **meta-analysis of 25 studies** found that smokers who used e-cigarettes as a cessation aid were 27% less likely to quit smoking.
- High school students in the U.S. who used e-cigarettes at least once in 30 days increased from 11.7% in 2017 to 20.8% in 2018; the increase was 48% for middle school children.
- **Flavours in e-cigarettes** have been cited as one of the **top three reasons** for children to use them.
- The misconception that “e-cigarettes are less harmful than other forms of tobacco such as cigarettes” is another main reason. Youth who use e-cigarettes may be more likely to **go on to smoke conventional cigarettes**.

Important Reasons for Banning:

- The total economic cost **attributable to tobacco use for all diseases in 2011** amounted to Rs 1,04,500 crore, which is equivalent to **1.04% of the GDP**.
- The disease burden due to tobacco poses **enormous and inequitable economic loss to society** and also presents a formidable challenge to the country’s health care systems.

The Health ministry listed a number of reasons to justify the ban on e-cigarettes These included:

- Threat to country’s tobacco control efforts
- Hindrance in achieving targets envisaged under Sustainable Development Goals, National Monitoring Framework for Prevention and Control of non-communicable diseases and National Health Policy, 2017
- Overall interest of public health of the youth and pregnant women as well
- Addictive nature of nicotine
- Scant scientific evidence for use of e-cigarettes as effective tobacco cessation aids
- Safety concern of flavours in combination with nicotine
- The government also cited **Article 47 of the Indian Constitution** to justify the ban on e-cigarettes.
- **Article 47 reads:** “Duty of the State to **raise the level of nutrition and the standard of living and to improve public health**.”
- The State shall regard the *raising of the level of nutrition* and the standard of living of its people and the **improvement of public health** as among its primary duties and, in particular, the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption except for medicinal purposes of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health.”
- The **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** too had cautioned against the growing use of e-cigarettes citing studies which noted that use of e-cigarettes could have **adverse effects on humans**, which include DNA damage, carcinogenic, cellular, molecular and immunological toxicity, respiratory, cardiovascular and neurological disorders, and **adverse impact on foetal development and pregnancy**.

Conclusion:

- This decision is a follow up of a 2018 advisory that the central government had sent to all state governments asking them to consider banning e-cigarettes.
- Prior to this announcement, **15 states and one Union territory** had already **banned e-cigarettes**.
- These include: Punjab, Karnataka, Mizoram, Kerala, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, Puducherry, Rajasthan, Meghalaya, Odisha and Nagaland.
- The government said the decision to ban e-cigarettes is **aimed at protecting the youth**, the section that is **most vulnerable to the health hazards** of e-cigarettes.
- These variety of e-cigarette products come with attractive appearances and multiple flavours and their use has **increased exponentially** and has acquired **epidemic proportions** in developed countries, especially among youth and children.
- It said the ban on e-cigarettes will help “protect population, especially the youth and children, from the risk of addiction through e-cigarettes”.



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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

1. IMPORTANCE OF VOTING

Introduction:

- This year, India celebrated its **9th National Voters Day** on January 25. The voters' day celebration was initiated in 2011 by the then President of India, Pratibha Devi Patil, on the 61st foundation day of Election Commission of India. Established in 1950, the Election Commission of India is an organisation that aims to increase the participation of number of voters and to encourage newly eligible voters. National Voters' Day 2019 was celebrated in over six lakh locations covering about ten lakh polling stations all over the country. President Ram Nath Kovind was the chief guest at the main function, organised by the Election Commission of India in the Capital. The best electoral practices and national awards were conferred to officers for their exceptional performance in conducting elections. **'No voter to be left behind' is the chosen theme** for this year's celebration and it is also the focus in the upcoming Lok Sabha Elections.

Recent Electoral Reforms:

The steady increasing electoral participation points out to the positive interventions made by Election Commission of India to secure the same. Free and fair elections attract more voters. The measures taken by ECI to attract voters include:

- Employing **"Awareness Observer"** across the country in order to compile a report on voting numbers and reasons behind low or high participation in each constituency so that ECI can work upon the hurdles.
- **Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)**
 - VVPAT is a method of providing **feedback to voters using a ballot less voting system**.
 - The VVPAT is an **independent printer system attached with Electronic Voting Machine (EVM)** that allows the voters to verify that their votes are cast as intended. It generates a paper slip every time a voter casts his vote, recording the party to whom the vote was made. The VVPAT slip is kept in a sealed cover.
 - VVPAT slip counting takes place in the VVPAT counting booths under the close monitoring of the returning officer and direct oversight of the observer.
- Introducing **Short Message Service and Toll Free Numbers** so that people can ask details regarding enrolment process and address of polling station
- **None of the Above:**
 - The Supreme Court, in September 2013, upheld the right of voters to reject all candidates contesting the elections, saying it would go a long way in cleansing the political system of the country.
 - The apex court directed the Election Commission to have an option of 'None Of The Above' (NOTA) on the electronic voting machines (EVMs) and ballot papers in a major electoral reform.

Election Commission of India:

- The Election Commission of India is an autonomous constitutional authority responsible for administering election processes in India.
- The body administers elections to the Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, state legislatures, and the offices of the President and Vice President in the country.
- The Election Commission operates under the authority of Constitution per **Article 324**, and subsequently enacted Representation of the People Act.

Role of ECI:

- Guardian of Free & Fair Elections.
- Issues a Model code of Conduct for political parties and candidates to conduct elections in free & fair manner.
- Registration of Political Parties and Allotment of Symbols
- The Election Commission has fixed the legal limits on the amount of money which a candidate can spend during election campaigns.
- Use of Scientific and Technological Advancement like introduction of EVM and computerizations of the electoral rolls.
- Election Commission – A Tribunal for Adjudication.
- Checking Criminalization of Politics.
- Cancellation of Polls due to rigging at any polling booth.
- The Election Commission has the power to disqualify a candidate if he or she does not file election returns within a prescribed period.

- Thus, India became the 14th country to institute negative voting. However, NOTA in India does not provide for a 'right to reject'. The candidate with the maximum votes wins the election irrespective of the number of NOTA votes polled.
- **Live Monitoring of Sensitive Areas** to ensure that no mischievous activities are carried at the polling station
- **Systematic Voters Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP)**
 - SVEEP is a programme of multi interventions through different modes and media designed to educate citizens, electors and voters about the electoral process in order to increase their awareness and participation in the electoral processes.
 - SVEEP is designed according to the socio-economic, cultural and demographic profile of the state as well as the history of electoral participation in previous rounds of elections and learning thereof.
 - Now it includes enhanced interaction with the citizens through social media, online contests and voters' festivals; awareness about new initiatives of linking EPIC with AADHAAR and National Voters' Service Portal and a regularised yearly plan of activities.
 - In addition to target groups of women, youth, urban voters and the marginalized sections, the inclusion of groups like service voters, NRIs, persons with disabilities, prospective voters/ students is of primary focus.
- Replacing ballot papers through electronic voting machine to make the voting process easier.
- **Electoral Bonds:**
 - Cash donations have been replaced by banking transactions.
 - Electoral bonds have made the whole transaction secretive and opaque.
 - Only the government knows who gave how much to which party.
- Organizing **National Voters' Day, Voter Fest and employing school children and renowned personalities as ambassadors** to persuade people to cast their votes.

Challenges:

- **Money power:**
 - The increasing role of money power in the form of voter bribery and funding of political parties
- **Paid news:**
 - The manipulation of the media through paid news and other means.
- **Criminalization of politics :**
 - Over the last two decades, the influence of criminals in the political arena has shown a tremendous increase.
 - According to Vohra report the nexus between the criminal gangs, police, bureaucracy and politicians has come out clearly in various parts of the country.
 - Political parties continue to put up criminals as candidates.
- **Misuse of caste and religion for electoral gains :**
 - The use of religion, caste, community, tribe, and any other form of group identity for electoral gain or for gathering political support should not be allowed.
- **Issue of electoral bonds :**
 - Analysts said the move could be misused, given the **lack of disclosure requirements for individuals purchasing electoral bonds.**
- **Black money :**
 - Electoral bonds make electoral funding even more opaque. **It will bring more and more black money into the political system.**
- With electoral bonds **there can be a legal channel for companies to round-trip their tax haven cash to a political party.**
 - If this could be arranged, then a businessman could lobby for a change in policy, and legally funnel a part of the profits accruing from this policy change to the politician or party that brought it about.
- These bonds **share two characteristics with tax havens** secrecy and anonymity.
- Electoral bonds eliminate the 7.5% cap on company donations which means even loss-making companies can make unlimited donations.
- **Hate speech by politicians**

- **EVM tampering issue and the case for VVPATs**
- **Financial transparency in political parties:**
 - This is also one of the fundamental deeper political reforms that is a necessary precondition that must be satisfied before any meaningful electoral reforms can actually take place on the ground
- **Ensuring the independence of the ECI:**
 - Independence of the ECI, the manner of appointment of the CEC and ECs was debated.
 - One member proposed ratification of CEC's appointment by the Legislature, but the Constituent Assembly disagreed and it simply provided for the CEC to be appointed by the President, leaving it to the Legislature to enact a suitable law.

Way Forward:

- The political class as well as the election commission should **come together to find ways to decriminalize the elections.**
- Entry of criminals in politics should be taken in more serious manner.
- Electoral reforms should be taken to take care of mushrooming in coalition politics.
- Alternative kind of methods such as proportional representations should be looked after.
- **Facilitate internal migrants to vote** which comprise 25-30% of the population.
- **Proxy voting** for NRI's should be looked upon.
- **Consenses** among all stakeholders concerned.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJpk2f8-BgA>

2. NRC (NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS)

Introduction:

- On 31st August, the updated National Registry of Citizens was released in Assam after a Supreme Court deadline. **Of the 3.3 crore applicants, 3.11 crore figured in the final citizens' list, while about 19 lakh residents were excluded.** This led to protests about an uncertain future of such a large number of people. The government, however, has allayed all such fears, saying no person whose name is not there in the final list will be detained till he / she exhausts all legal remedies.
- **The excluded people have about 120 days to appeal against their exclusion to the foreigner tribunals.** To speed up the process 200 new tribunals have been made functional in addition to the already existing. If they are not satisfied with the tribunals, people can also move to high court and the Supreme Court for redressal. The NRC exercise is the biggest in India, carried out under the supervision of the Supreme Court to weed out illegal immigrants, as well as their descendants, settled illegally in India.

NRC: Timeline

- 1951: First NRC prepared
- First NRC to check illegal inflow of people.
- 2013: SC directs state to update NRC
- 2015: Process to update NRC begins
- 2018: Draft released; 4,007,707 names excluded
- June 2019: Additional Draft excludes 1,02,462 people.
- August 31: 19 lakh people left out of NRC

Proof needed:

- Existence of name in the legacy data: The legacy data is the collective list of the NRC data of 1951 and the electoral rolls up to midnight of 24 March 1971.
- Proving linkage with the person whose name appears in the legacy data.

Why was it updated?

- The process of NRC update was taken up in Assam as per a Supreme Court order in 2013. In order to wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other adjoining areas, NRC updation was carried out under The Citizenship Act, 1955, and according to rules framed in the Assam Accord.

Why is March 24, 1971 the cut-off date?

- There have been several waves of migration to Assam from Bangladesh, but the biggest was in March 1971 when the Pakistan army crackdown forced many to flee to India. The Assam Accord of 1985 that ended the six-year anti-foreigners' agitation decided upon the midnight of March 24, 1971 as the cut-off date.

Who is a citizen in Assam?

- The Citizenship Act of 1955 was amended after the Assam Accord for all Indian-origin people who came from Bangladesh before January 1, 1966 to be deemed as citizens. Those who came between January 1, 1966 and March 25, 1971 were eligible for citizenship after registering and living in the State for 10 years while those entering after March 25, 1971, were to be deported.
- Back in 1951, it had recorded 80 lakh citizens in the State. Since then, the process of identification of illegal immigrants in Assam has been debated and become a contentious issue in the State's politics. A PIL was filed in the Supreme Court seeking the removal of "illegal voters" from the electoral rolls of Assam and the preparation of the NRC as required under the Citizenship Act, 1955 and its rules. A six-year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1979. It culminated with the signing of the Assam Accord on August 15, 1985.

NRC Verification:

- The process of NRC update was taken up in Assam as per a Supreme Court order in 2013.
- It was done in order to wean out cases of illegal migration from Bangladesh and other adjoining areas.
- NRC updation was carried out under The Citizenship Act, 1955, and according to rules framed in the Assam Accord
- The verification involved house-to-house field verification, determination of authenticity of documents, family tree investigations in order to rule out bogus claims of parenthood and separate hearings for married women.

Why a separate National Register of Citizens?

- This is because of a history of migration.
- During British rule, Assam was merged with Bengal Presidency for administrative purpose.
- From 1826 to 1947, the British continuously brought migrant workers to Assam for cheap labour in tea plantations.
- Two major waves of migration came after British rule. • First after Partition, from East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).
- Then in the aftermath of the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.
- This eventually led to an agitation during 1979-85, led by the All Assam Students' Union.
- It culminated in the 1985 Assam Accord, under which illegal migrants were to be identified and deported.

IMDT Law:

- Enquiries were initiated in 3,10,759 cases
- Only 10,015 persons declared illegal migrants.
- 1,481 illegal migrants physically expelled.

Assam Accord?

- The Assam Accord (1985) was a **Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed between representatives of the Government of India and the leaders of the Assam Movement in New Delhi on 15 August 1985.**
- The accord brought an end to the Assam Agitation and paved the way for the leaders of the agitation to form a political party and form a government in the state of Assam soon after.
- As per the Accord, **those Bangladeshis who came between 1966 and 1971 will be barred from voting for ten years.** The Accord also mentions that **the international borders will be sealed and all persons who crossed over from Bangladesh after 1971 are to be deported.**
- Though the accord brought an end to the agitation, some of the key clauses are yet to be implemented, which has kept some of the issues festering.
- Clause 6: Constitutional, legislature and administrative safeguards.
- Clause 6: Protect, preserve and promote cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of Assamese people.
- Clause 7: Government renews commitment for economic development of Assam.
- Clause 7: Special emphasis on education and Science and Technology.

This exercise of compiling the NRC in the first place has sparked a debate around its **social, political and economic consequences**.

Social consequences of illegal migration

- **Crisis of identity:** The influx of immigrants created a crisis of identity among the indigenous. Their cultural survival will be in jeopardy, their political control will be weakened and their employment opportunities will be undermined by such illegal migration. The recent Bodo-Muslim violence in the BTAD has its root on the issue of illegal migration.
- **Environmental degradation:** Large areas of forest land were encroached upon by the immigrants for settlement and cultivation. The state experienced declining percent of land area under forest from 39% in 1951-52 to about 30% now.
- **Difficult to identify the illegal migrants:** Due to the similar language spoken by illegal migrants from Bangladesh and the indigenous Bengali speaking Muslim of Assam, it becomes difficult to identify and deport the illegal migration from Assam soil.
- **Community tension:** The commission on integration and Cohesion found that tension usually exist with the presence of high levels of migration combine with other forms of social exclusion like poverty, poor housing etc.

Economic consequences

- **Increase financial burden:** Immigration has increased pressure on the part of state government, as the government has to increase the expenditure on education and health facilities to the immigrants.
- **Displacing native workers:** There is a fear particularly during a recession that immigrants take jobs which would otherwise be taken by local people; in particular place and circumstances there can be competition and conflict.
- **Decreases wage level with the increase of population:** Illegal immigrants in every year have been adding a good number of people in Assam. It is one of the main reasons of population explosion. Due to this there is a possibility of decreasing wage level.

Political consequences

- **Assam agitation:** The failure of government to respond the issue of illegal migration led to the agitation by the Assamese under the leadership of All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) and All Assam Student's Union (AASU). Assam witnessed governmental instability, sustained civil disobedience campaigns and worst cases of ethnic violence. Assam accord was the result of this agitation.
- **Illegal voters:** Most of the Bangladeshi immigrants have got their names enlisted in the voting list illegally, thereby claiming themselves as citizens of the state. The immigrant's population act as a vote bank for the political parties in Assam.
- **Issue of terrorism:** Pakistan's ISI has been active in Bangladesh supporting militant movements in Assam (Lt Gen S K Sinha, 1998). It is alleged that among the illegal migrants there are also militants, who enter into Assam to carry out the terrorist activities.

Migration of outsiders into Assam has a long history, initially people of neighbouring states came to the state in search of work but illegal influx of Bangladeshi's over decades has assumed political significance.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FCRN21DTLgg>

3. SEDITION LAW AND DEBATE

Introduction:

- A legal opinion sought by the Centre on a Law Commission report on the British era seditious law has stated that "**Section 124A – sedition as interpreted by the Supreme Court is necessary**". In short, it is unlikely that the IPC section on sedition is diluted or scrapped. In September 2016, the Supreme Court had reiterated that a larger bench had already provided necessary safeguards that should be followed by all authorities, and "every magistrate is bound by what it said in the Kedar Nath case". It was referring to the order in **Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar, 1962**, in which a **Constitution Bench had ruled in favour of the Constitutional**

validity of Section 124A, but had added a vital caveat: that a person could be prosecuted for sedition only if his acts caused “incitement to violence or intention or tendency to create public disorder or cause disturbance of public peace”. In August last year, the Law Commission submitted a “consultation paper” to the Centre on the need for changes in the law, pointing out that even the United Kingdom abolished sedition laws ten years ago saying the country did not want to be quoted as an example of one using such draconian laws. A report in the Indian Express said – while a final decision on whether to dilute the law or not is yet to be made public, but various stakeholders including state governments and law enforcement agencies, have expressed the need to retain the law without changes.

- The law on sedition is a hangover from India’s colonial past. It was drafted by Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay and became a part of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1870. It was then used as a tool to oppress the freedom movement and suppress all forms of dissent by Indians against the British rule. Stalwarts of the Indian freedom struggle such as Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak were also victims of this oppressive law.
- It is ironic that the UK—the country that introduced the law in India — repealed sedition as a crime over a decade ago for being violative of the right to free speech. The UK acknowledged that sedition was a product of a bygone era and had no place in modern society when freedom of speech is considered an integral part of a meaningful democracy. It added that this relic was now being misused in countries previously under its rule to suppress political dissent and restrict freedom of speech.
- In USA, the First Amendment stands as a strong safeguard against the restriction of the freedom of speech and expression. Following a long history of judicial pronouncements on the legality of sedition, the US Supreme Court, in the case of *Brandenburg v Ohio*, held that mere advocacy against the government was not prohibited — not seditious unless and until such advocacy was directed towards inciting lawless action. Australia repealed the section on sedition in 2010.

What is Sedition?

- Sedition’ is **an offence incorporated into the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1870. Section 124A** of the IPC defines sedition and says:
 - whoever by words either spoken or written or by signs or by visible representation or otherwise brings or attempts to bring into hatred or contempt, the government established by law; or
 - whoever by the above means excites or attempts to excite disaffection towards the government established by law, has committed the offence of sedition.
- The offence is punishable with imprisonment for life.

What you need to know about Sedition law?

- The sedition law was incorporated into the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in 1870 as fears of a possible uprising plagued the colonial authorities. Most of this penal code was retained intact after 1947. Despite demands to scrap it, the law of sedition remains enshrined in our statute book till today.

Courts have interpreted 124A of Indian penal code in many cases relate to 124A section:

- **Kedar Nath Singh Vs State of Bihar 1962:** constitutional bench of Supreme Court made clear that allegedly seditious speech & expression may be punished **only if speech is an incitement to violence or public disorder**. Subsequent cases have further clarified the meaning of this phrase.
- **Indra Das vs. State of Assam & Arup Bhuyan vs State of Assam:** Supreme Court stated that **only speech that amounts to “incitement to imminent lawless action” can be criminalised**.
 - Therefore, advocating revolution or advocating even violent overthrow of State, does not amount to sedition, unless there is incitement to violence & more importantly, incitement is to imminent violence.
- **Maneka Gandhi case, 1978:** The Maneka Gandhi judgment was a balanced judgment and is one of the best judgments that Indian Supreme Court has ever given.
 - The judgment’s importance can be seen today also because the way in which the bench construed Article 21 and expanded its horizons has given way for the resolving of problems left unsolved by the Parliament.
 - The SC stated that Criticizing and drawing general opinion against the Govt. policies and decisions within a reasonable limit that does not incite people to rebel is consistent with the freedom of speech.

- The judgment **saved the citizens from unquestionable actions of Executive.**
- **Balwant Singh v. State of Punjab:** In one of most important judgements in this regard, Supreme Court **overturned the convictions for sedition(124A IPC)** and Promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc (153 A IPC).
 - In this case, accused raised slogans such Khalistan Zindabad, Raj Karega Khalsa (Khalsa will rule) & Hinduan Nun Punjab Chon Kadh Ke Chhadange, Hun Mauka Aya Hai Raj Kayam Karan Da (Hindus will leave Punjab, we will rule) i.e. a few hours after Indira Gandhi's assassination.
 - Despite the slogans clearly undermining Indian sovereignty and government, SC acquitted or free from charge or verdict of not guilty the accused because the slogans did not imminently incite violence.
 - Thus, **even advocating secession of country or violent overthrow of government, does not attract sedition unless there is imminent incitement to violence.**
 - **'Incitement' rather than 'advocacy' is the important element of section 124A.**

Dark side of Applying Sedition Law:

- **Before Independence**, this charge was used by the **British to suppress the freedom movement.**
- Ironically, the same draconian law has become a tool that the country is now using against its own people.
- During colonial period section 124-A was interpreted by the privy council in a way to suppress **every act that expressed discontent against the government.**
- Many freedom fighters were slapped with these charges for invoking feelings of nationalism and educating people of India against the policies adopted by the colonial power.
- Draconian laws such as the Section 124-A only serve to give a legal veneer to the regime's persecution of voices and movements against oppression by casting them as anti-national.
- Figures of the **National Crime Records Bureau** reveal that in the two years preceding the JNU case, there were a total of 77 sedition cases.
- Beyond the high-profile urban cases, the reach of Section 124-A has extended even to faraway places. An entire village in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu had sedition cases slapped against it for resisting a nuclear power project. Adivasis of Jharkhand, resisting displacement, topped the list of those slapped with sedition in 2014.
- **Instead of critically analysing why citizens**, be they in Kashmir or Chhattisgarh or Bhima Koregaon, are driven to dissent, the government is using an **iron-fist policy with the sedition law playing a leading role to completely shut out contrarian views.**

Way Forward:

- Educate law enforcing agencies
- The word 'sedition' is thus extremely nuanced and should be applied with caution
- All speech-related offences should be made bailable offences; this would lessen the harmful impact of using arrest and custody as a way of harassing anyone exercising their rights under Article 19(1) (a). The **chilling effect on freedom of speech and expression** must be erased.
- Awareness building.
- Forming a committee involving Government and renowned civil society members while deciding cases under section 124 A.
- To limit the discretionary power as much as possible through better and comprehensive drafting of guidelines.
- The offences should be made non-cognisable so that there is at least a judicial check on the police acting on the basis of politically motivated complaints.
- In the case of offences under Sections 153A ("promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence, language, etc, and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony") and 295A of the Indian Penal Code, it is mandatory under Section 196(1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure **to obtain prior sanction of the government before taking cognisance of the offences.** This needs to be extended to the offence of sedition under Section 124A.
- In the case of hate speech, it is important to **raise the burden of proof on those who claim that their sentiments are hurt rather than accept them at face value.**
- And finally, it is crucial that courts begin to **take action against those who bring malicious complaints against speech acts.**

Conclusion:

- **Freedom of Speech and Expression** is a **fundamental right** under **Article 19(1)(a)**.
- **Article 19(2) imposed reasonable restrictions**. Moreover, the first Amendment to the Constitution on June 18, 1951, imposed further restrictions.
- To call for the overthrow of a **stale and fearful social system** is not sedition.
- The argument used **against the scrapping of the sedition law** is that the Supreme Court has repeatedly observed that the mere possibility of **misuse of a provision** does not per se invalidate the legislation.
- Democracy has no meaning **without freedoms** and sedition as interpreted and applied by the police and governments is a negation of it.
- Hence, before the law loses its potency, the Supreme Court, being the **protector of the fundamental rights** of the citizens has to step in and evaluate the law.
- To uphold the **idea of democracy** that the **founders of the Constitution** envisioned, **India should deliberately avoid using the word sedition from its statute books and everyday vocabulary**. Hoping that reason prevails over politics when it **comes to freedom**.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xa19FBolb3E>

4. INCREDIBLE INDIA

Introduction:

- In just two years, **India has moved up six places to rank 34th in the world travel and tourism competitiveness index**. It is the biggest improvement among the top 25 per cent of all countries ranked in the report over 2017. India, which accounts for the majority of South Asia's. The World Economic Forum that prepared the report credits India's good showing to its rich natural and cultural resources and also the strong price competitiveness. In a list of top 35 tourist destinations

Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Index 2019

- The **Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report** was first published in 2007 by the World Economic Forum.
- The index is a measurement of the factors that make it attractive to develop business in the travel and tourism industry of individual countries, rather than a measure of a country attractiveness as a tourist destination.
- The report ranks selected nations according to the Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI), which scores from 1 to 6 the performance of a given country in each specific subindex.
- Based on region's proportion of employment in tourism industry.
- WEF engage in year long review process.
- Part of UN SDG's
- Features tourism in 3 SDG
- 140 countries ranked within 4 sub-indices
- **Pillars by Subindexes**
 - **SUBINDEX A: ENABLING ENVIRONMENT**
 - Pillar 1: Business Environment
 - Pillar 2: Safety and Security
 - Pillar 3: Health and Hygiene
 - Pillar 4: Human Resources and Labour Market
 - Pillar 5: ICT Readiness
 - **SUBINDEX B: T&T POLICY AND ENABLING CONDITIONS**
 - Pillar 6: Prioritization of Travel & Tourism
 - Pillar 7: International Openness
 - Pillar 8: Price Competitiveness
 - Pillar 9: Environmental Sustainability
 - **SUBINDEX C: INFRASTRUCTURE**
 - Pillar 10: Air Transport Infrastructure
 - Pillar 11: Ground and Port Infrastructure
 - Pillar 12: Tourist Service Infrastructure

- SUBINDEX D: NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
 - Pillar 13: Natural Resources
 - Pillar 14: Cultural Resources and Business Travel
- 14 pillars comprised of 90 indicators.
- Spain ranked number 1
- France, Germany, Japan, US complete top five
- UK 6th, Australia 7th, Italy 8th, Canada 9th, Switzerland 10th
- Asia Pacific is one of fastest growing T & T regions.
- Japan most competitive T & T economy.
- China largest T & economy, 13th most competitive globally
- Pakistan ranked 121; is least competitive country in South Asia.
- Pakistan ranked 134 in favourable safety and security conditions.

India's Ranking:

- Air infrastructure= 33
- Ground and port infrastructure= 28
- International openness= 51
- Natural resources= 14
- Cultural resources= 8
- Price competitiveness= 13
- Business environment= 89th to 39th
- Overall T & T policy= 79th to 69th
- Infrastructure= 58th to 55th
- ICT readiness= 112th to 105th
- Enabling Environment= 98
- Tourist service infrastructure= 109
- Environment sustainability= 128th

Global Travel and Tourism Sector:

- 2018: Generated 10.4% of all global economic activity
- 2018: Recorded 3.9% growth
- Contributed record \$8.8 trillion and 319 million jobs worldwide
- Accounts for one in five of new jobs created worldwide
- Estimated to contribute 100 million jobs globally in ten years.

India's Tourism Industry:

- Currently India is the seventh largest tourism industry.
- 29 states, 4000 cities, rich history, incredible diversity
- India all set to become third largest in next 10 years
- Tourism contribution to economy to double
- Expected to add 5.23 crore jobs in 2028
- India doing well in medical tourism, business tourism, ecological tourism, pilgrimage tourism, historical tourism, adventure tourism.

Steps to promote Tourism:

- Atithi Devo Bhavah Campaign
- Incredible India Campaign
- Swadesh Darshan Scheme
- PRASHAD
- Reforms in Visa process
- Online option of applying for tourist visa
- E-visa facility available to citizens of 163 countries
- India ranks 8th among 100 countries on most valuable nation brands list

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMqDlxepHec>

5. THE THIRD CHILD NORMS

Introduction:

- **The Uttarakhand High Court passed an order denying maternity leave to women in government jobs in case they have a third child.** In an order dated September 17, Chief Justice Ramesh Rangnathan and Justice Alok Kumar Verma of the Uttarakhand High Court quashed an earlier order by a single bench. The double bench of the High Court overruled the single bench order accepting the contention of the state government, which had challenged the single bench order issued by Justice Rajeev Sharma in July 2018. The single bench order had been delivered on a PIL filed by Haldwani-based nurse Urmila Masih challenging a government rule not to provide maternity leave to women in case of a third child. Masih had said that the government's rule to not provide maternity benefits in case of a third child violates **Article 42 of the Constitution of India and Section 27 of the Maternity Benefit Act**. The government challenged the order of the single bench by filing a special appeal and contending that the petitioner could not claim benefits of the maternity act as she already had two children and could not be granted maternity leave for her third child in consonance with the "second provision of the fundamental rule 153".

Maternity Benefit Act

Need

- With the advent of modern age, as the number of women employees is growing, the maternity leave and other maternity benefits are becoming increasingly common.
- But there was no beneficial piece of legislation in the horizon which is intended to achieve the object of doing social justice to women workers employed in factories, mines and plantation.

Objective:

- Providing maternity leave and benefit to women employee to protect the dignity of motherhood by providing for the full and healthy maintenance of women and her child.

Applicability of Maternity Benefit Act, 1961

- The Act is to regulate the employment of women in certain establishments for certain period before and after child-birth and to provide for maternity benefit and certain other benefits.
 - It applies to every establishment being a factory, mine or plantation including any such establishment belonging to Government and to every establishment wherein persons are employed for the exhibition of equestrian, acrobatic and other performances.
 - It will also apply to every shop or establishment within the meaning of any law for the time being in force in relation to shops and establishments in a State, in which ten or more persons are employed on any day of the preceding twelve months.

Key Amendment to the Act

The provisions of **The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017** is effective from April 01, 2017.

The amendments seek to improve infant mortality rate (34 per 1,000 live births) and maternal mortality rate (167 per 100,000 live births).

- Increased Paid Maternity Leave:
 - The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act has increased the duration of paid maternity leave available for women employees from the existing 12 weeks to 26 weeks.
 - Under the Act, this benefit could be availed by women for a period extending up to 8 weeks before the expected delivery date and remaining 18 weeks can be availed post childbirth.
 - For women who are expecting after having 2 children, the duration of paid maternity leave shall be 12 weeks.
- Maternity leave for adoptive and commissioning mothers
 - Every woman who adopts a child shall be entitled to 12 weeks of maternity leave, from the date of adoption
- Work from Home option:
 - This may be exercised after the expiry of the 26 weeks' leave period.

- Depending upon the nature of work, women employees may be able to avail this benefit on terms that are mutually agreed with the employer.
- Crèche facility
 - The Act makes crèche facility mandatory for every establishment employing 50 or more employees.
 - Women employees would be permitted to visit the crèche 4 times during the day.

The Maternity Benefit Amendment Act makes it mandatory for employers to educate women about the maternity benefits available to them at the time of their appointment.

Article 42: Provision for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief

The State shall make provision for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief.

Arguments against the verdict:

- Every Indian citizen has got certain fundamental rights and reproduction is the right that every woman of this country has.
- To have child or not is her prerogative.
- Population control is needed but denying any maternity benefits to a woman, given the ground that it is her third child affects her fundamental right to live a life with dignity and enjoy all the benefits of fundamental rights which every Indian citizen has.
- It is not the 3rd child's fault so denying it protection and benefits goes against.
- Even maternity benefit act does not say that you should have only certain number of children.
- Child needs nutrition during that phase and if not given, that child will be the liability on the country.
- Government might have to spend more on that child rather than saving.
- Health being state subject, the enforcement is unequal.
- Women of a particular state should not be deprived from their fundamental rights.
- Maternity Benefit has been brought with much discussion.
- This verdict of Uttarakhand High Court is against the very spirit, principles and the concept of maternity benefit.
- Increase in abortions and female infanticide.

Arguments for the verdict:

- Helps to ease the overpopulation problems.
- It is seen as practical by some families.
- Lowers poverty rates.
- To endorse third child maternity benefit policy will **counter its own family planning measures.**
- **We struggling to keep the TFR so it is a right step.**
- By promoting a maternity leave **it might actually endorse the third child which may go against.**

Way Forward:

- Education awareness.
- Women empowerment
- Incentivizing birth control
- Changing mindset.
- **Contraceptive tools available to both women and men.**
- **Financial benefits for having fewer childrens.**
- Regulation rather than banning.
- Innovative ideas for family planning
- **We need to focus on women that unemployed and rural sector.**

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3J8LMirwCg>

1. RBI'S SURPLUS FUND

Introduction:

- **The Reserve Bank of India has decided to transfer 1.76 Lakh crore rupees in dividend and surplus reserve to the govt.** This came after the RBI board accepted the recommendations of **Bimal Jalan committee** on transfer of excess reserve funds to the govt. The total amount to be transferred by RBI to govt includes 1,23,414 crore rupees surplus for the year 2018-19 and 52,637 crore rupees as excess provisions identified according to the revised economic capital framework or ECF. This transfer of record surplus funds from RBI is expected to boost overall revenue for the govt and meet its fiscal deficit target.

What is economic capital framework?

- Economic capital framework refers to the risk capital required by the central bank while taking into account different risks. The economic capital framework reflects the capital that an institution requires or needs to hold as a counter against unforeseen risks or events or losses in the future.

Why it needs a fix?

- Existing economic capital framework which governs the RBI's capital requirements and terms for the transfer of its surplus to the government is based on a conservative assessment of risk by the central bank and that a review of the framework would result in excess capital being freed, which the RBI can then share with the government.
- The government believes that RBI is sitting on much higher reserves than it actually needs to tide over financial emergencies that India may face.
- Some central banks around the world (like US and UK) keep 13% to 14% of their assets as a reserve compared to RBI's 27% and some (like Russia) more than that.
- Economists in the past have argued for RBI releasing 'extra' capital that can be put to productive use by the government. The Malegam Committee estimated the excess (in 2013) at Rs 1.49 lakh crore.

Every year RBI transfer the surplus to government:

- **RBI is not a commercial organisation** like banks and other companies owned or controlled by the government to pay a dividend to the owner out of the profit generated.
- What the RBI does is transfer the surplus excess of income over expenditure to the government.
- **Under Section 47 of the RBI Act**, "after making provision for bad and doubtful debts, depreciation in assets, contributions to staff and superannuation funds and for all other matters for which provision is to be made by or under this Act or which are usually provided for by bankers, the balance of the profits shall be paid to the Central government".

Why RBI needs excess reserves?

- The RBI needs adequate capital reserves for monetary policy operations, currency fluctuations, possible fall in value of bonds, sterilisation costs related to open-market operations, credit risks arising from the lender of last resort function and other risks from unexpected increase in its expenditure.

Suggestions of Bimal Jalan committee:

The panel recommended a **clear distinction between the two components of the economic capital of RBI i.e. Realized equity and Revaluation balances.**

- Revaluation reserves comprise of periodic marked-to-market unrealized/notional gains/losses in values of foreign currencies and gold, foreign securities and rupee securities, and a contingency fund.
- Realized equity, which is a form of a contingency fund for meeting all risks/losses primarily built up from retained earnings. It is also called the Contingent Risk Buffer (CBR).
- The Jalan committee has given a range of 5.5-6.5% of RBI's balance sheet for Contingent Risk Buffer.
- Adhering to the recommendations, the RBI has decided to set the CBR level at 5.5% of the balance sheet, while transferring the remaining excess reserves worth ₹52,637 crore to the government.
- If CBR is below the lower bound of requirement, risk provisioning will be made to the extent necessary and only the residual net income (if any) transferred to the Government.
- However keeping CBR at a lower range of 5.5% will reduce RBI's space to manoeuvre monetary policy.

- The RBI has maintained the view that it needs to have a stronger balance sheet to deal with a possible crisis and external shocks

Sources for RBI:

- A significant part comes from RBI's operations **in financial markets**, when
- It intervenes for instance **to buy or sell foreign exchange**;
- **Open Market operations**, when it attempts to prevent the rupee from appreciating;
- As income from **government securities** it holds;
- As returns from its **foreign currency assets** that are investments in the bonds of foreign central banks or top-rated securities;
- From **deposits with other central banks** or the Bank for International Settlement or BIS;
- Besides lending to banks for **very short tenures and management commission** on handling the borrowings of state governments and the central government.
- RBI buys these financial assets **against its fixed liabilities** such as currency held by the public and deposits issued to commercial banks on which it does not pay interest.

Expenditure for RBI:

- The RBI's expenditure is mainly on **printing of currency notes**, on staff, besides commission to banks for **undertaking transactions** on behalf of the government and to primary dealers that include banks for underwriting some of these borrowings.
- The central bank's total costs, which includes expenditure on printing and commissions forms, is **only about 1/7th of its total net interest income**.

Ways through which the fund can be used prudently:

The amount could either be used to **provide a fiscal stimulus to the economy**-which is in the **grip of a slowdown**-

- It could be used **to reduce off-balance sheet borrowings**.
- The other option is **to use it to meet an expected shortfall in revenue collections**.
- In the Union budget, the government had presented an optimistic scenario of raising Rs 4.76 lakh crore in additional resources to meet budget expenses.
- However, since there is a clear slowdown ahead, this revenue target may not be met, in which case the surplus from the RBI would be used to bridge the shortfall.
- Normally, the money is transferred to the **Consolidated Fund of India** from which salaries and pensions to government employees are paid and interest payments done, besides spending on government programmes.
- The large pay-out can help the government **cut back on planned borrowings and keep interest rates relatively low**.
- If the government manages to meet its revenue targets, the windfall gain can lead to a **lower fiscal deficit**.
- The other option is to **earmark these funds for public spending or specific projects**, which could lead to a **revival in demand in certain sectors and boost economic activity**.
- If the tax revenue growth picks up, then the government can use the additional money to **clear the dues of the Food Corporation of India and fertiliser companies** to minimise spillover of deficits to the next year.
- The additional funds can also be used to spend on **much-needed capital expenditure**.

Views of Economists:

- Some economists have welcomed the move as it will help the government counter the shortfall in revenue and tax collection.
- Since inflationary pressure is low, economists believe that the move will not have a negative impact in the long run.
- Another group of economists which include the likes of Raghuram Rajan and former RBI governor Urjit Patel said earlier that the move could put RBI in a vulnerable position apart from diminishing its autonomy.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQ5VIm3Iznk>

2. BIG BANK REFORMS

Introduction:

- Half a century after the nationalisation of banks, the centre govt has now announced a mega plan to **merge 10 public sector banks in to four large entities**. This will bring down the total number public Sector Banks in the country to 12 from 27 in 2017. Punjab National Bank, Oriental bank of commerce and United Bank of India will merge to become the second largest bank after SBI. Canara Bank and Syndicate Bank merger will create 5th largest lender of the country and the merger of Union Bank, Andhra Bank and Corporation Bank will create 6 largest Bank. Announcing this merger plan Finance Minister said this will help in consolidating strong national presence and global reach of these banks. This was **followed by 55000 crore rupees recapitalisation plan for the merged entities and 6 other banks** enabling them to enhance their lending capacity.

What is the mega merger plan?

- A situation in which two **banks** pool their assets and liabilities to become one **bank**. Because this can have a significant impact on the financial industry, the Federal Reserve subjects **mergers** involving **bank** holding companies to more intensive regulation.
- **Bank of scale** which would enable India to meet its aspiration of 5 trillion economy.
- If we aspire than we need industries, entrepreneur in those industries and credit.
- As economy will grow we even need bank to keep pace.
- It is seen as an attempt to revive a relatively weaker bank with two healthier on
- The success of this merger, according to analysts, is crucial for future such attempts.

Need for Consolidation:

- PSBs are fragmented, especially in comparison with other key economies.
- The merger will enable the **government to pay closer operational attention** to the enlarged institution.
- To protect the financial system and depositors' money.
- **To build capacity to meet credit demand and sustain economic growth.**
- The need to bridge geographical gaps.
- In **1991 Narasimham Committee** suggested that India should have fewer but stronger PSBs.

Positives:

- Capital will be higher when merged together and will give a feeling of a **stronger bank**.
- Large banks with **larger lending capacity**.
- It will provide **efficiencies of scale** and help improve the quality of corporate governance for the banks.
- Improvement in operational efficiency.
- Cost of funds for the merged entity is expected to come down.
- Bigger banks can attract more Current Account, Savings Account (CASA) deposits.
- Banks will have the capacity to raise resources without depending on the State exchequer.
- Improve the capacity of the banking system to absorb shocks that the markets may cause to it.
- Technical inefficiency is one of the main factors responsible for banking crisis. The scale of inefficiency is more in case of small banks. Hence, merger would be good.
- Mergers help small banks to gear up to international standards with innovative products and services with the accepted level of efficiency.
- This will also end the unhealthy and intense competition going on even among public sector banks as of now. In the global market, the Indian banks will gain greater recognition and higher rating.
- The volume of inter-bank transactions will come down, resulting in saving of considerable time in clearing and reconciliation of accounts.
- The burden on the central government to recapitalize the public sector banks again and again will come down substantially.
- Mergers **make sure there is common unifying messaging**.

Challenges:

- Merger will affect regional flavour and end regional focus.
- The argument that size is going to determine the future of the bank in a globalised scenario is facile. Remember the fate of large global banks, which collapsed during the global financial crisis? On the contrary, small banks have survived the crisis due to their nimbleness and the niche areas they operate in.
- Immediate negative impact would be from pension liability provisions (due to different employee benefit structures) and harmonisation of accounting policies for bad loans recognition.
- There are many problems to adjust top leadership in institutions and the unions.
- Mergers will result in shifting/closure of many ATMs, Branches and controlling offices, as it is not prudent and economical to keep so many banks concentrated in several pockets, notably in urban and metropolitan centres.
- The weaknesses of the small banks may get transferred to the bigger bank also.
- New power centres will emerge in the changed environment. Mergers will result in clash of different organizational cultures. Conflicts will arise in the area of systems and processes too.
- When a big bank books huge loss or crumbles, there will be a big jolt in the entire banking industry. Its repercussions will be felt everywhere.
- Also, India right now needs more banking competition rather than more banking consolidation. In other words, it needs more banks rather than fewer banks. This does not mean that there should be a fetish about small-scale lending operations, but to know that large banks are not necessarily better banks.
- Integration of technology platforms and cultures of these organisations.
- The quantum of Gross NPA (GNPA) cannot change and will still have to be addressed.
- Mergers are not the panacea in the context of PSBs

What should be ensured by the government?

- The government shall not have any hidden political agenda, in bank mergers.
- All stakeholders are taken into confidence, before the merger exercise is started.
- After mergers, **shares of public sector banks shall not be sold to foreign banks, foreign institutions and Indian corporate entities**, beyond certain limit.
- Whenever further divestment (dilution of government holdings) takes place, the government share holdings **shall not fall below 51% under any** This will ensure that the ownership and control of public sector banks remain with the government.
- The central government shall **not rush through the process** of bank mergers.
- The decision with regard to selection of smaller/weaker banks for merger with larger/stronger banks is to be taken carefully and grouping of various banks for this purpose is the key issue involved. The government shall not yield to pressure from any political or social groups.
- The acquiring bank shall not attempt to dominate or subsume the acquired bank. Good aspects of both the banks before merger shall be combined, in order to instil confidence in all stakeholders and to produce better results.
- Personnel absorbed from the smaller bank shall undergo brief, intermittent training programs to get acquainted with the philosophies, processes and technology in the new environment. The management must be ready with a good roadmap for this and allot considerable budgetary resources for this purpose.
- There shall be conscious and organized efforts to synthesize the differing organizational cultures, for the mergers to yield the desired results.

Conclusion:

- Over the years **economy has grown steadily, banking reforms have been steady and now it is the time for transformative change.**
- **Merger is a good idea** but should be carried out with right banks for right reasons.
- Without addressing the governance issues in the banks, merging two or three public sector banks may not change the architecture.
- Need proper management structure and selection of impactful CEO's.
- Merger only doesn't improve performance matrix, it should happen with the package of many other things like having additional capital.

- For **economic growth to happen huge companies need credit and capital** so actually mergers should have happened few years earlier.
- Piecemeal consolidation will not provide a lasting solution and what is required is an integrated approach from all stakeholders including the government.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWR5zFLenJ4>

3. CHALLENGES IN TELECOM SECTOR

Introduction:

- **The Department of Telecommunications has asked the finance ministry to offer some GST-related relief to telcos and to bring down import duties of network equipment**, but the ministry is not considering any other company specific relief measures as sought by Vodafone Idea. Speaking to reporters, telecom secretary Aruna Sundararajan said the industry needs to speak in a cohesive voice while seeking further financial relief. Sundararajan was speaking after a meeting of the Digital Commission and her comments come a day after industry body Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) wrote to telecom minister Manoj Sinha, urging that the Rs 35,000 crore input tax credit due to telcos from the government be adjusted against spectrum payments and levies as a measure to help carriers overcome financial distress. But, the letter added, that Jio has a dissenting view on the matter. The industry had also called for a rollback of the basic customs duty increase on several telecom equipment in October 2018 and the duties imposed on printed circuit boards used in them in a bid to curb non-essential imports and address its current account deficit as well as encourage the 'Make in India' initiative.
- **India is currently the world's second-largest telecommunications market** with a subscriber base of 1.20 billion and has registered strong growth in the past decade and half. The Indian mobile economy is growing rapidly and will contribute substantially to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to report prepared by GSM Association (GSMA) in collaboration with the Boston Consulting Group (BCG). As of January 2019, India has witnessed a 165 per cent growth in app downloads in the past two years.
- The liberal and reformist policies of the Government of India have been instrumental along with strong consumer demand in the rapid growth in the Indian telecom sector. The government has enabled easy market access to telecom equipment and a fair and proactive regulatory framework that has ensured availability of telecom services to consumer at affordable prices. The deregulation of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) norms has made the sector one of the fastest growing and a top five employment opportunity generator in the country.

Market Size:

- With 604.21 million internet subscribers, as of December 2018, India ranks as the world's second largest market in terms of total internet users.
- Further, India is also the world's second largest telecommunications market, with total subscriber base of 1,183.51 million at the end of March 2019
- Moreover, in 2017, India surpassed USA to become the second largest market in terms of number of app downloads. The country remained as the world's fastest growing market for Google Play downloads in the second and third quarter of 2018.
- Over the next five years, rise in mobile-phone penetration and decline in data costs will add 500 million new internet users in India, creating opportunities for new businesses.

Investment/Major development:

- With daily increasing subscriber base, there have been a lot of investments and developments in the sector. FDI inflows into the telecom sector during April 2000 – March 2019 totalled to US\$ 32.82 billion, according to the data released by Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT).

Some of the developments in the recent past are:

- During the first quarter of 2018, India became the world's fastest-growing market for mobile applications. The country remained as the world's fastest growing market for Google Play downloads in the second and third quarter of 2018.
- Bharti Airtel is planning to launch 6,000 new sites and 2,000 km of optical fiber in Gujarat in 2018-19.

- The number of mobile wallet transaction increased 5 per cent month-on-month to 325.28 million in July 2018.
- As of June 2018, BSNL is expected to launch its 5G services by 2020.
- Vodafone India and Idea Cellular have merged into 'Vodafone Idea' to become India's largest telecom company, as of September 2018.

National Digital Communications Policy 2018

Objectives:

The key objectives of the policy are:

1. Broadband for all;
2. Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector;
 - Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India's GDP from ~ 6% in 2017;
1. Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017;
2. Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains; and
3. Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.

These objectives are to be achieved by 2022.

Features:

The policy aims to

- Provide universal broadband connectivity at 50 Mbps to every citizen;
- Provide 1 Gbps connectivity to all Gram Panchayats by 2020 and 10 Gbps by 2022;
- Ensure connectivity to all uncovered areas;
- Attract investments of USD 100 billion in the Digital Communications Sector;
- Train one million manpower for building New Age Skill;
- Expand IoT ecosystem to 5 billion connected devices;
- Establish a comprehensive data protection regime for digital communications that safeguards the privacy, autonomy and choice of individuals
- Facilitate India's effective participation in the global digital economy;
- Enforce accountability through appropriate institutional mechanisms to assure citizens of safe and
- Secure digital communications infrastructure and services.

Government Initiatives

The government has fast-tracked reforms in the telecom sector and continues to be proactive in providing room for growth for telecom companies. Some of the other major initiatives taken by the government are as follows:

- The Government of India is soon going to come out with a new National Telecom Policy 2018 in lieu of rapid technological advancement in the sector over the past few years. The policy has envisaged attracting investments worth US\$ 100 billion in the sector by 2022.
- The Department of Information Technology intends to set up over 1 million internet-enabled common service centres across India as per the National e-Governance Plan.
- FDI cap in the telecom sector has been increased to 100 per cent from 74 per cent; out of 100 per cent, 49 per cent will be done through automatic route and the rest will be done through the FIPB approval route.
- FDI of up to 100 per cent is permitted for infrastructure providers offering dark fibre, electronic mail and voice mail.
- The Government of India has introduced Digital India programme under which all the sectors such as healthcare, retail, etc. will be connected through internet.

Challenges facing Indian telecom sector are:

- **Financial Health of the Sector:** Gross revenue has dropped by 15% to 20% for the year 2017-18 over the preceding year for the incumbents and overall sector revenue has dropped. Also, there is drop in voice and data revenue per user
- **Limited Spectrum Availability:** Available spectrum is less than 40% as compared to European nations and 50% as compared to China. Hence, it is imperative that spectrum auctioning at sustainable prices is the need of the hour. Also, government auction spectrum at an exorbitant cost which makes it difficult for mobile operators to provide services at reasonable speeds.

- **High competition and tariff war:** Competition heating up post entry of Reliance Jio. Other telecom players have to drop in tariff rates both for voice and data
- **Lack of Telecom Infrastructure in Semi-rural and Rural areas:** Service providers have to incur huge initial fixed cost to enter semi-rural and rural areas. Key reasons behind these costs are lack of basic infrastructure like power and roads, resulting in delays in rolling out the infrastructure.
- **Poor fixed line penetration:** India has very little penetration of fixed line in its network whereas, most of the developed countries have a very high penetration of fixed lines
- **High Right-of-Way (ROW) cost:** Sometimes, states governments charge a huge amount for permitting the laying of fibre etc.
- **Lack of trained personnel** to operate and maintain the cellular infrastructure.
- **Delays in Roll Out of Innovative Products and Services:** Substantial delays in roll out of data-based products and services are hampering the progress of telecom sectors. This is primarily due to the non-conducive environment resulting out of government policies and regulations.
- **Low Broad Band Penetration:** Low broadband penetration in the country is a matter of concern and the government needs to do a lot more work in the field to go up in the global ladder.
- **Over the top services:** Over the Top (OTT) applications such as WhatsApp, OLA, Viber and so on do not need permission or a pact with a telecommunications company. This hampers the revenue of telecommunication service provider.
- **License fee:** The license fee of eight per cent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue including five per cent as Universal Service Levy (USL) is one of the highest in the world.

Measures needed:

- **Infrastructure Sharing:** Since telecom business is heavy on capex and as much as 40%– 60% of the Capex is utilized for setting up and managing the Telecom infrastructure. By sharing infrastructure, operators can optimize their capex, and focus on providing new and innovative services to their subscribers.
- **Availability of Affordable Smart Phones and Lower Tariff Rates:** This would increase tele penetration in rural areas.
- **Curb on predatory pricing:** government should fix a minimum price to save the industry from price war
- **Lower License fee:** The license fee of eight per cent of the Adjusted Gross Revenue including five per cent as Universal Service Levy (USL) is one of the highest in the world.
- **Reduce reserve price for spectrum auction:** In the past, some of the operators participated recklessly in these auctions leading to exaggerated prices — much above their true valuations. Reasonable reserve prices for the market mechanisms induce “truthful bidding”, and not leading to “winners’ curse” as witnessed in some of the previous auctions.
- The government should increase the network area through optical fibre instead of copper which is expensive. This is necessary to ensure last mile connectivity.
- The government needs to prepare a ground for easy right-of-way permissions and lower cost of right-of-ways
- The government should spend large on R&D and create an environment that makes India capable of manufacturing and even exporting hardware components like mobile handsets, CCTV Cameras, touch screen monitors etc.

Conclusion:

- The telecom sector in India have to deal with various challenges like maintaining the sufficient spectrum, Adoption of new technologies faster to be able to use new features and techniques to serve the customers with better and feature rich service, Government and regulatory agencies, various mobile handsets available from various companies brings lot of issues and content partners etc.
- Also, it is evident from the current scenario that the Voice alone will not be sufficient to generate revenue and hence the focus is required to be shifted towards various data services.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MgJTk8GMN6M>

4. NATIONAL RESOURCE EFFICIENCY POLICY

Introduction:

- The Ministry released Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy envisions a **future with environmentally sustainable and equitable economic growth, resource security, healthy environment (air, water and land), and restored ecosystems with rich ecology and biodiversity**. The Draft National Resource Efficiency Policy is guided by the principles of (i) reduction in primary resource consumption to 'sustainable' levels, in keeping with achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and staying within the planetary boundaries, (ii) creation of higher value with less material through resource efficient and circular approaches, (iii) waste minimization, (iv) material security, and creation of employment opportunities and business models beneficial to the cause of environment protection and restoration.
- Use of natural resources and materials form the backbone of global economies and in turn of human development and well-being. Driven by rapid economic and population growth, the demand for natural resources, especially materials have grown manifold over the last few decades. In the endeavor for economic growth, natural resources have been largely indiscriminately exploited, adversely impacting the environment and biodiversity. Further, cross linkages between resource use, climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss has been scientifically well established. Concerns over rapidly depleting vital resources and adverse impacts on natural environment have lately gained greater prominence, resulting in increasing focus on judicious use of resources globally through combination of conservation and efficiency measures and advocating transition towards circular economy.
- India, as one of the fastest growing economies with GDP at 2.6 trillion USD, has increased its material consumption to six times, from 1.18 billion tonnes in 1970 to 7 billion tonnes in 2015, however this economic growth has been coupled with inherent cost on natural environment. The material consumption is projected to more than double by 2030, in order to provide for increasing population, rapid urbanization and growing aspirations. The projected pace of economic development is going to put pressure on already stressed and limited resources and may lead to serious resource depletion and environment degradation affecting the economy, livelihoods and the quality of life. Further, material use is also closely associated with the problem of increasing wastes, which when suitably processed could deliver valuable secondary resources.
- India as a signatory to UN Sustainable Development Goals is committed to provide for sustained economic growth along with sustainable use of natural resources and safeguarding environment. Resource efficiency has a vital role towards mitigation of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss. It is thus, imperative for India to charter and take the path of economic development supported with efficient use of resources.

SDGs directly linked with Resource Efficiency

- Goal 2 (End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture)
- Goal 6 (Availability and sustainable management of water)
- Goal 7 (Access to affordable, reliable and secure energy)
- Goal 9 (Build resilient infrastructure)
- Goal 11 (Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable)
- Goal 12 (Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns)

Key features:

- It **aims** to streamline the efficient use of these resources with minimum negative impact on environment.
- It seeks to set up a **National Resource Efficiency Authority (NREA)** with a core working group housed in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and a members group with representations from different ministries, state/union territory, and other stakeholders.
- The authority would be supported by an **Inter-Ministerial National Resource Efficiency Board** to guide on the aspects critical to its implementation.
- It also plans to **offer tax benefits** on recycled materials, green loans to small and medium Enterprises (SMEs) and soft loans to construct waste disposal facilities, apart from setting up **Material Recovery Facilities (MRF)**.

- Manufacturers and service providers would also be required to use more recycled or renewable materials and awareness would be created among consumers to indicate the shift.
- Idea of the national policy is to drive the country towards **circular economy** through efficient use of available material resources, based on principle of 6R and 'green public procurement'.
- **The 6R stands for reduce, reuse, recycle, redesign, re-manufacture and refurbish** while the very premise of 'green public procurement' is to procure products with lower environmental footprints such as secondary raw materials and locally sourced materials.
- It also pitches for moving towards '**zero landfill**' approach in the country, hinting at possibility of imposing 'landfill taxes' and 'high tipping fees' for bulk generators of waste so that they can move towards optimal use of materials and better waste management.

Challenges:

- According to data available, **India's resource extraction of 1580 tonnes/acre is much higher than the world average of 450 tonnes/acre, while material productivity remains low.**
- **Water is fast becoming scarce** while **deteriorating air quality** has emerged as a major threat to human life.
- There has been massive **soil degradation**, with 147 million hectares (Mha) of a total of 329 Mha land area hit.
- **Import dependency is nearly 100% for the majority of the 'most critical' materials** -cobalt, copper and lithium that find extensive application in high-end technology industry.
- Over **80% of crude oil that is processed in the economy is imported**, alongwith 85% of its coking coal demand. Extraction of non-metallic minerals is crippled with challenges.
- To add to the problems, the **country's recycling rate is just about 20-25% compared with 70% in developing countries in Europe.** The situation will only aggravate as India is likely to double its material consumption by 2030.

Resource Efficiency (RE) and Resource Productivity:

- Resource efficiency (RE) implies judicious use of earth's limited resources to achieve maximum benefit for sustained human well-being while minimizing the adverse impacts on environment. It is the ratio between a given benefit or result and the natural resources use required for it.

Circular Economy (CE):

- Circular economy (CE) is an alternative to the traditional linear economy in which resources are kept in use for as long as possible, extracting the maximum value, recovering and regenerating products and materials at the end of each service life.

Action Plans

- Action Plans with timeframe of 3 financial years will be prepared by NREA in consultation with concerned ministries, state/union territory governments, government agencies and stakeholders. Resource efficiency strategies will be developed for specific sectors and regions by the concerned governing authorities (Central Ministries/State Governments) in consultation with stakeholders, which will lay out sector/region specific scope, targets, timelines, action plans and interventions. NREA will adopt these resource efficiency strategies into the 3 year Action Plans, for monitoring and reviewing progress, in consultation with concerned government authorities (Central Ministries/State Governments), agencies and stakeholders.

Monitoring Progress

- Monitoring of progress of the action plans is critical to the successful implementation of resource efficiency. NREA will lay out the targets, set of inventory data points on which reporting by concerned sectors will be made, resource efficiency indicators and reporting time frames. Concerned implementation agencies will lay out simple and effective monitoring frameworks for respective sectors and will be responsible to provide data points inputs to be fed into the national database. Progress on tasks undertaken for capacity building, pilot studies, research and development will also be reported by the concerned stakeholders to NREA.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iemxHx1Zgl>

5. PRODUCTIVITY & SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction:

- In today's world of manufacturing raw materials are taken from the environment, turned into new products which are then disposed after use. This is a linear process with a beginning and an end and in this process limited raw materials will eventually run out. Also waste accumulated in this process incurs additional expenses related to its disposal and pollution. **In a circular economy however products are designed for durability, reuse and recyclability.** In this process almost everything is reused, remanufactured, recycled back into a raw material or used as a source of energy. Experts say that by embarking on a circular economy transformation, India can build a more resource efficient system even as it continues to grow and scale new heights.

Circular Economy:

- A **circular economy** (often referred to simply as "circularity") is an economic system aimed at eliminating waste and the continual use of resources.
- Circular systems employ reuse, sharing, repair, refurbishment, remanufacturing and recycling to create a closed system, minimising the use of resource input and the creation of waste, pollution and emissions.
- The circular economy aims to keep products, equipment and infrastructure in use for longer, thus improving the productivity of resources.
- All 'waste' should become 'food' for another process: either a by-product or recovered resource for another industrial process, or as regenerative resources for nature, eg compost.
- This regenerative approach is in contrast to the traditional linear economy, which has a 'take, make, dispose' model of production.
- Proponents of the circular economy suggest that a sustainable world does not mean a drop in the quality of life for consumers, and can be achieved without loss of revenue or extra costs for manufacturers.
- The argument is that circular business models can be as profitable as linear models, allowing us to keep enjoying similar products and services.

Circular economy principles:

There are ten principles that define **how circular economy should work:**

- **Waste becomes a resource:** is the main feature. All the biodegradable material returns to the nature and the non-biodegradable is reused.
- **Second use:** reintroduce in the economic circuit those products that no longer correspond to the initial consumers' needs.
- **Reuse:** reuse certain products or parts of those products that still work to elaborate new artifacts.
- **Reparation:** find damaged products a second life.
- **Recycle:** make use of materials found in waste.
- **Valorization:** harness energy from waste that can't be recycled.
- **Functionality economy:** circular economy aims to eliminate the sale of products in many cases to establish a system of rental property. When the product completes its main function returns to the company, where it is dismantled for reusing the valid parts.
- **Energy from renewable sources:** elimination of fossil fuels to produce the product, reuse and recycle.
- **Eco-design:** considers and integrates in its conception the environmental impacts throughout the life cycle of a product.
- **Industrial and territorial ecology:** establishment of an industrial organizational method in a territory characterized by an optimized management of stocks and flows of materials, energy and services.

India's initiatives:

- With mission-oriented policies such as UDAY, UJWALA, Swachh Bharat, etc in combination with government initiatives like Make in India, Digital India, Start-up India campaigns which aim to enhance competitiveness and create more jobs, India is poised for growth and it is important to disseminate information on sustainability to all stakeholders. MSMEs utilizing Lean Management cluster Scheme (LMCS), Zero-effect-

zero-defect (ZED) scheme and schemes for Energy efficiency provide a comprehensive frame work to attain sustainability using the Circular Economy approach (i.e. Make -Use- Return).

The challenge to put circular consumption into practice can be addressed by:

- Adopting a triple bottom line approach and the 3R principles which are based on Reduce, Recycle, Reuse, Make and Use.
- Using various capacity building interventions.
- Adopting mission mode policy approaches at the government level.

Future actions required to lead the way to transition to circular economy

- To consider discarded materials/ products as legitimate raw materials with circular economy approach.
- Buildings can be designed to be adaptable to changing needs and contribute to the regenerative urban ecosystem.
- Combining local knowledge and traditional methods (like working with a large variety of species) with modern technology (like precision farming, and digitally enabled asset and knowledge-sharing system).
- Building vehicles that rely on zero-emission propulsion technology could reduce GHG emission, pollution, and dependence on imported fossil fuels.
- Indian businesses can foster innovation to address challenges more rapidly by collaborating with research institutions.
- Collaboration among stakeholders to address key issues to achieve systemic change. For example, inroads to addressing India's solid waste management challenge could be made by connecting all kinds of actors along the value chain.
- Tapping activities of the informal economy (e.g existing repair and recycling activities for vehicles), in cooperation with the public sector or other organizations.

Conclusion:

- India knows how to manage resources when it comes to sorting, separating, and the other low hanging fruits. But, when it comes to advanced technologies, there is scope for India to incorporate some expertise. This can be done by creating a nexus between the research institutions and industry.
- There is a need for a coherent roadmap that ushers mutually complementary and boosting transition towards a circular economy. This is an opportunity which India should harness, to take the lead in a circular model of development—sans sacrificing economic growth.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IM-NTe8Owr4>

SCIENCE & TECH

1. CHANDRAYAAN 2- BIG TAKEAWAYS

Introduction:

- It's been over six days that Chandrayaan -2's lander Vikram lost contact with its ground stations. But the Indian Space Research Organisation has not lost hope. The space agency's team is making all efforts to restore communication with the lander at ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network in Bengaluru. Hope revived for crores of Indians after the lander was spotted by the on-board cameras on the orbiter. Images showed the lander is intact, lying in a tilted position, with rover Pragyan possibly still confined inside. But despite what happened to the lander, **Chandrayaan-2 mission achieved 90 to 95 per cent of its objectives.** The orbiter is healthy, safe and in Lunar orbit. It is expected to provide extensive information about the Moon, and also what minerals and water it has.

Chandrayaan-2 mission:

- In September 2008, the Chandrayaan-2 mission was approved by the government for a cost of Rs 425 crore.
- It is India's **second mission to the moon.**
- **It aims to explore the Moon's south polar region.**
- It was launched onboard **India's most powerful launcher – GSLV MK-III.**

- The mission is an important step in India's plans for planetary exploration, a program known as **Planetary Science and Exploration (PLANEX)**.
- There are **three components of the mission**, an orbiter, a lander and a rover.
- **The mission payloads include** — Terrain Mapping Camera which will generate a Digital Elevation Model (DEM) of the entire moon, Chandrayaan 2 Large Area Soft X-ray Spectrometer which will test the elemental composition of the Moon's surface Solar X-Ray Monitor which will provide solar X-ray spectrum inputs for CLASS.
- The orbiter is deployed at an **altitude of 100 kilometers above the surface of the Moon**. The lander is separated from the orbiter, and execute a soft landing (but could not is what is said) on the surface of the Moon, **unlike the previous mission which crash landed near the lunar south pole**.
- The lander, rover and orbiter will perform **mineralogical and elemental studies of the lunar surface**. The rover is named **Pragyan**.
- The mission's lander is named **Vikram after Dr Vikram A Sarabhai**, the Father of the Indian Space Programme.
- **If ISRO achieves the feat in its first attempt, it will make India only the fourth country to soft-land on the lunar surface**. The erstwhile Soviet Union, the U.S. and China are the only countries to have achieved lunar landings.

Chandrayaan 2: The Journey

- **July 22:** Chandrayaan 2 launched
- **August 14:** Successfully enters Lunar Transfer Trajectory
- **August 20:** Successfully enters Lunar orbit
- **September 2:** Vikram successfully separates from orbitor
- Two de-orbiting maneuvers performed successfully.
- **Sept 7:** Successfully completes rough braking phase

Soft landing:

- A soft-landing protects the object from impact while a hard landing doesn't.
- Soft-landing ensures that the object is able to carry out further experimentation on the target planet or satellite, mostly with the help of a rover vehicle.
- Soft-landing on any planetary surface is complicated. **Vikram was to use five thrusters** — four at the corners and one at the centre to make its final descent.
- Maintaining the required velocity with such thrusters is difficult as a fine balance among them needs to be maintained.
- Then there is the issue of moon dust which could wreck the engines of the thrusters.

GSLV Mk-III:

- **Developed by ISRO**, the **Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle Mark-III is a three-stage vehicle**.
- Primarily designed to launch **communication satellites into geostationary orbit**.
- It has a **mass of 640 tonnes that can accommodate up to 8,000 kg payload to LEO and 4000 kg payload to GTO**.
- GSLV Mk-III vehicle is **powered by two solid motor strap-ons (S200), a liquid propellant core stage (L110) and a cryogenic stage (C25)**, that has been designed for carrying the four-tonne class satellites.
- The **C25 is powered by CE-20, India's largest cryogenic engine**, designed and developed by the Liquid Propulsion Systems Centre

Chandrayaan-2 to have 3 components — Orbiter, Lander and Rover:

- **Chandrayaan 2** is India's second lunar mission with **three modules: the Orbiter, Lander (Vikram) and Rover (Pragyan)**.
- The Orbiter and Lander are mechanically interfaced and stacked together as an **integrated module** inside the launch vehicle, GSLV MK-III.
- Rover is housed inside Lander.
- After the launch into an earth-bound orbit by GSLV MK-III, the integrated module reached the moon orbit using the **orbiter propulsion module**.

- Chandrayaan spacecraft, with a mass of 3.8 tonne, has **three modules** comprising of the **Orbiter, Lander (Vikram) and Rover (Pragyan)**.

Lander (Vikram):

- This was first time that ISRO is attempting to **soft-land a module** in extra-terrestrial Space.
- Once the Lander and Rover, enter the Moon's gravity, they would be in a **state of free fall**. That could end up in crash-landing and destruction of instrument.
- Because of **lack of air to provide drag**, these instruments cannot make use of parachute like technologies.
- To enable a smooth landing, the speed of the Lander just ahead of touchdown should be **6 kilometres per hour or less**.

Rover (Pragyan):

- The Rover, a **six-wheeled solar-powered vehicle**, will detach itself and slowly crawl on the surface, **making observations and collecting data**.
 - It will be equipped with two instruments, the primary objective is to study the **composition of the surface** near the lunar landing site, and determine its abundance of various elements.
 - It is designed in such a way that it will have power to spend a lunar day or 14 Earth days on Moon's surface.
 - The mission cost of Chandrayaan-2 with regard to the satellite was **Rs 603 crore**. Cost of GSLV MK III is Rs 375 crore.
- ✓ According to the ISRO, Orbiter, with scientific payloads, would orbit around the moon. **Lander would soft land on the moon** at a predetermined site and deploy Rover.
 - ✓ The scientific payloads on board Orbiter, Lander and Rover are expected to perform **mineralogical and elemental studies** of the lunar surface.
 - ✓ Orbiter will have a lifespan of 7.5 years not just 1 year as said earlier as there is lot of fuel left in it.

What the Orbiter will do?

- Terrain Mapping camera 2 will **map lunar surface**
- Look for presence of **major elements** on the moon
- Solar X-ray monitor will **observe X-rays emitted by Sun and its corona**
- Orbiter's high resolution camera will provides high resolution images
- Imaging IR spectrometer will **map for mineralogical data**.
- Dual Frequency synthetic aperture radar will **map polar regions, estimate water ice in poles**.
- Atmospheric compositional explorer 2 will **study composition of lunar neutral exosphere**.

Space experts and media across the globe have also called the loss of moon lander Vikram as nothing more than a partial loss but now that the lander has been spotted lying in the single piece, ISRO scientists are holding out hope and continuing efforts to revive communication with it.

Chandrayaan 2: The positives

- **Successful initiation of operational service of GSLV MK III**
- GSLV MK III has carrying capacity of 4000 kgs; can be commercialized.
- Precise placement into orbit saved fuel, giving orbiter prolonged life around moon.
- Orbiter earlier predicted to have **one year life span could now go on for 7.5 years**.
- Orbiter carries 7 of 13 major payloads of the mission.
- Camera, spectrometers can offer insights into origin and evolution of moon.
- Will generate **3D terrain map, study mineral distribution**.
- Orbiter has already sent images.
- Data generated by such missions yield results for long time.
- Vikram got extremely close (i.e 2.1 kms) to realizing soft landing, providing many lessons.

ISRO'S Future missions:

- **Aditya-L1**
 - First planned probe to study Sun's corona
 - Launch proposed in 2019-2020
- **Astrostat 2**
 - 2020= Plan to launch second observatory in space
 - To replace Astrosat 1
 - Discover new planets
 - Decode origins of the universe
- **Gaganyaan**
 - Plan to send 3 Indians to space by 2022
 - By GSLV MK III
- **Second mission to Mars**
 - 2022-23: Mars orbiter mission 2
 - Will have orbiter.
 - May also include lander and rover
- **Shukrayaan 1**
 - To study atmosphere of planet Venus
 - Fly-by mission over Venus
 - Planned for 2023
- **Chandrayaan 3**
 - ISRO'S joint mission with Japan
 - 2024: Explore moon's south pole
- **India's own space station**
 - Proposed space station to weigh 20 tonnes
 - Astronauts can stay for 15-20 days
 - Orbit 400 kms above Earth
 - Launch planned 5-7 years after Gaganyaan.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIP2nid8Srl>

2. DATA: THE NEW GOLD

Introduction:

- Prime Minister Modi, who addressed the grand 'Howdy, Modi!' event in Houston, described data as the "new oil" and the "new gold". He also indicated that **India was in a strong position to lead the world in the industry 4.0 revolution, that relies on big data analytics and digital technology to improve manufacturing.** Making a strong pitch to potential investors in America, the Prime Minister also referred to the cheap cost of mobile data in India and referred to the increasing use of digital technology to set up businesses, facilitate economic transactions and interact with the government.
- A new India build on a strong foundation of data and digital technology. Data in India can drive growth, industrial revolution 4.0 and bring governance closer to those governed.
- Making a strong pitch to potential investors in the United States, the Prime Minister also referred to the cheap cost of mobile data in India and referred to the increasing use of digital technology to set up businesses, facilitate economic transactions and interact with the government.
- "Today it is said that data is the new oil. I will also add that data is the new gold. Industry 4.0 is focused on data. Now, please listen carefully, if there is one country in the world where data is cheapest, then that is India," the Prime Minister said, adding, "Digital India is India's new face to the world".
- "There was a time when filing tax returns was a headache. It would take months. But, on August 31, on only one day, nearly 50 lakh Indians filed their I-T returns online... that is nearly double Houston's population," the PM said, highlighting the use of digital technology by his government.
- In March, a study by a United Kingdom-based price comparison website showed India provided mobile data at the lowest rates in the world. In INR terms, Indians paid Rs. 18 per GB of data against a global average of Rs. 600

What is Data?

- Plain facts are data
- Processed and organized in context, data becomes information.

Processed data:

- Helps decide objectives, design tasks, recruit talent.
- Complete tasks.

Digital India:

- **Digital India** is a campaign launched by the Government of India in order to ensure the Government's services are made available to citizens electronically by improved online infrastructure and by increasing Internet connectivity or by making the country digitally empowered in the field of technology. The initiative includes plans to connect rural areas with high-speed internet networks. Digital India consists of three core components: the development of secure and stable digital infrastructure, delivering government services digitally, and universal digital literacy.

Key Projects:

- Digilockers
- in
- SBM Mobile app
- eSign framework to enable citizens to digitally sign document online
- Online registration system launched under eHospital application
- DeitY platform for large scale digitization of records.
- Deployment of Wi-Fi hotspots under BSNL.

Achievements:

- Over 12,000 rural post office branches linked digitally.
- Common services centres grew to reach 3.76 lakh.
- Bharat Net has reached 1.29 lakh gram panchayats.
- eKYC launched to open bank accounts.
- Total number of digital payments transactions at Rs 332.34 cr.
- Electronics manufacturing has doubled.

Digital Economy:

- Digital economy is defined as an economy that focuses on digital technologies, i.e. it is based on digital and computing technologies. It essentially covers all business, economic, social, cultural etc. activities that are supported by the web and other digital communication technologies.

There are three main components of this economy, namely,

- 1) e-business
- 2) e-business infrastructure
- 3) e-commerce

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vcFc6kKKOgQ>

Industrial Revolution 4.0:

- The **Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0)** is a term that describes present technological age. It is the fourth industrial era since the inception of the initial Industrial Revolution of the 18th century.
- The key elements of the fourth revolution are the fusion of technologies ranging from the physical, digital to biological spheres. Prime Minister gave an institutional shape to the expression by launching the **Centre for Fourth Industrial Revolution in India**.

Characteristics of IR 4.0:

- It is characterized by a fusion of technologies that is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres.
- It brings together digital technology and the physical world to create a new range of products and services.
- The possibilities of billions of people connected by mobile devices, with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity, and access to knowledge, are unlimited.
- And these possibilities will be multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing.
- The revolution is evolving at an exponential rather than a linear pace and it is disrupting almost every industry in every country.

1. INDO-PACIFIC: STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

Introduction:

- External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar who was on a two day visit to Russia has said that **Indo Pacific is one of the new concepts and approaches thrown up by the changing world**. With various countries and international forums using the term **Indo Pacific in their official statements**, it is gaining currency in recent times.
- India, France and Australia have held track **1.5 dialogue** to identify security challenges and sustainability issues in the Indo Pacific region. Safeguarding freedom of navigation and keeping Indo Pacific stable was a crucial item on the agenda during Prime minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron's annual summit in Paris.

Indo-Pacific:

- **Indo-Pacific is a concept that is more than recent**, it is the decade back we started talking about it but its rise is significant.
- There is an understanding that **the Indian and Pacific ocean area is linked strategic theatre**.
- Indo-Pacific is a "natural region" ranging "from the shores of Africa to that of the America.
- Increasing use of the term Indo-Pacific recognises India's centrality to global influences.
- It is a **multipolar region**, contributing more than half of the world's GDP and population.
- The motivation for a larger bloc always comes from the sheer size, resources it owns, and, the scope and size of the economies of scale that it can generate.
- A "stable, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific Region" is an "important pillar" of India's strategic partnership with the United States.
- The emphasis shown by the **US on the 'Indo-Pacific'** can be termed as its strategic initiative towards India.
- It gives it a unified strategic understanding.
- The Pentagon has already begun using the new term in the US official documents.
- This is, in fact, a region in which several Asian powers are once again rising, especially in geo- economic terms.
- The US military has renamed its Pacific Command to US Indo-Pacific Command.
- This shows the rising significance of India in America's strategic calculations.
- ASEAN is one of the crucial building blocks of the Indo-Pacific
- United States, India, Japan, and Australia — the "Quad" group — is emphasizing "Indo-Pacific" as a new strategic space.
- The main important thing about it is that it recognized the strategic interconnection and common problem and challenges in the Indian and Pacific ocean.

India's Role/Approach:

- **Open, integrated and balanced approach**.
- Today India plays a key role in the Pacific, East Asia and Southeast Asia.
- **'Act East Policy'** is aimed at substantial improvement of India's relations with Southeast Asia.
- India is also trying to make innovative use of trade and diplomacy as its strategic arsenals.
- However, as far as India is concerned, this **linkage between** the Indian Ocean and the Pacific traversing the waters of Southeast Asia is nothing new.
- In 2004, the **Indian Maritime Doctrine** alluded to "the shift in global maritime focus from the Atlantic-Pacific **combine to the Pacific-Indian**".
- Therefore, beyond the Indian Ocean, the Western Pacific has for some time now been identified as falling within the **ambit of India's security interests**.

Why Indo-Pacific region?

- Maintaining **regional stability**.
- Strong ties with the US are seen as a vital tool for enhancing India's strategic posture.
- For the long-term vision of national interest.

- China's increasingly active presence in the Indian Ocean region as well as its efforts to expand geopolitical reach in Asia and beyond by the use of trade and military.
- In the present time, the control of sea lanes and ports would be the game
- China seems to have taken the lead with its geopolitical project—the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI).
- For adhering to freedom of navigation, adherence to rules-based order and stable trade environment.
- For free sea and air lanes, connectivity and upholding international rules and norms.

Significance of Indo-Pacific region for India:

- India is planning to put greater energy to the IORA because the heart of its Indo-Pacific policy is rooted in the Indian Ocean. ***This integrates the blue economy part of the Indian policy with the security part.***
- In its Indo-Pacific diplomacy, India has repeatedly placed Asean at the centre of its policy.
- Asean by itself does not actually speak as a united entity, particularly when confronted by China's overwhelming presence, ***for, while Asean is wary of China, it is equally wary of the US and its allies, preferring to keep the Asean region outside great power politics.***
- ***It is this that India wants to address and engage with Singapore, Vietnam and now Indonesia are key partners in the region for India. This will also involve the Quad and taking this new grouping to the region.***

Shangri-La Dialogue:

- The dialogue also called as **IISS Asia Security Summit was launched in 2002 by British think tank the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Singaporean government.**
- This annual dialogue brings together defence ministers and military chiefs from 28 Asia-Pacific countries to talk about security in the region.
- **It gets its name from the location of the meeting, the Shangri-La hotel in Singapore.**

ASEAN role in Indo-Pacific:

- Central to Modi's speech was the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) unity**, which he said was essential for a **stable future for the region** and that Asean lies at the **heart of the new Indo-Pacific**.
- India's stress on the **centrality and unity of ASEAN** for securing the region and maintaining a rules-based order is important.
- A **united ASEAN backed by major powers** will be able to counter an expansionist China.
- China, which is looking to expand its **footprint in the Indian Ocean**, will be forced to focus **more on South China Sea**.
- This can be offset if countries like India, the US and Japan work together to **build infrastructure** and provide **development assistance** to these countries to prevent them from falling under Chinese influence.

Challenges:

- The region is highly heterogeneous in terms of economic size and level of development, with significant differences in security establishments and resources.
- It also faces complex challenges in terms of economy, security and the environment.
- China is keeping a close watch at India's engagement through strategic dialogues, military exercises and security agreements with many Indo-Pacific countries.
- China's military build-up in the South China Sea and its sweeping territorial claims across the strategic water ways.
- Terrorism
- There are still challenges for India, especially how it will **integrate the Quadrilateral initiative** which got revived in 2017 with **its larger Indo-Pacific approach**.
- There are differences between **India's vision** and the **S.'s strategy** for the Indo-Pacific even as countries like China and Russia view the Indo-Pacific with suspicion.
- The renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to **S. Indo-Pacific Command** as well as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act in December 2018 showcase Washington's more serious engagement with the Indo-Pacific

Conclusion:

- **Economically and strategically**, the global centre of gravity is shifting to the **Indo-Pacific**. If the region's stakeholders don't act now to fortify an open, rules-based order, the security situation will continue to deteriorate—with consequences that are likely to reverberate worldwide.

- The maintenance of peace, stability and security in, upon and over the seas; unimpeded lawful commerce; freedom of navigation and overflight and other internationally lawful uses of the oceanic and air space; and the protection and preservation of marine resources, as well as a sustainable and responsible fishery–framework, are all critical towards building a regional consensus on maritime security and cooperation in Indo-Pacific.
- ASEAN must form the geographic core to any Indo-Pacific architecture.
- Build-up of India’s naval capabilities, if India has to emerge as one of the main players in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Maintain a balance** between the interests of all stakeholders.
- **Commerce and connectivity** in particular will have to be prioritised if India is to take advantage of a new opening for its regional engagement.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfmNyiXuJPs>

2. INDIA & G7 SUMMIT

Introduction:

- **The G7 summit addressed a host of issues from climate change to India’s membership for the Nuclear Suppliers’ groups (NSG) and the global trade, taxation mechanism for technology companies among others.** But the big focus was also on **India’s move to do away with Article 370** on Jammu and Kashmir.
- The move Pakistan has been trying to take up at the international level but the world has once again thrown their weight behind India and reiterated that Kashmir is a solely an internal issue of India. In another major development, the United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) understood India’s position on its bid for Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and said that he is willing to help on the matter.

What is G7 Summit?

- G7 Summit is an event conducted annually where world leaders from seven powerful economies of the world come together to discuss burning issues happening around the globe.
- They, by mutual understanding, also form policies or figure out remedies for the concerned issue.

G7

- The G7, originally G8, was set up in 1975 as an informal forum bringing together the leaders of the world’s leading industrial nations.

The summit gathers leaders from the European Union (EU) and the following countries:

- Canada
- France
- Germany
- Italy
- Japan
- The United Kingdom
- The United States

G7: Background:

- The Group of Seven or G7 originally came into being in 1975 when the heads of the world’s six leading industrial nations- the US, UK, France, Germany (West), Japan and Italy decided to hold a meeting in the wake of the oil shock of 1973 and the following financial crisis. The six countries were joined by Canada in 1976.
- The G7 has conducted 44 summits from 1975-2018, discussing a wide range of global issues including foreign policy and security issues. The inaugural summit was the result of a joint initiative by the then French President Valery Giscard d’Estaing and West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt.

How did G7 become G8?

- Russia was formally inducted as a member in the group in 1998, which led G7 to become G8.
- However, Russian President Vladimir Putin’s condemnable act of moving Russian troops into eastern Ukraine and conquering Crimea in 2014 drew heavy criticism from the other G8 nations.

- The other nations of the group decided to suspend Russia from the G8 as a consequence of its actions and the group became G7 again in 2014.

G7 Summit: First summit

- Its first summit was held at **Rambouillet, France**, in **1975**.

What does the G7 do?

- The G7 was formed initially to discuss economic and political concerns prompted by the 1973 oil crisis – when members of OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Export Countries, increased the price of oil and cut global supplies to countries seen as having backed Israel in the Yom Kippur War.
- Since then, the group has expanded its brief to cover a large number of international issues, including energy security, trade, climate change, global health issues, gender equality, poverty – and any other topic the country holding the G7 presidency chooses to put on the agenda.
- Today, the G7 are reckoned as the seven wealthiest and most advanced nations in the world because China, which holds the second largest net worth in the world, nonetheless has a low net worth per individual and an economy that has not yet fully modernized.

The G7 fill out numerous global top lists:

- Leading export countries
- Largest gold reserves
- Largest nuclear energy producers
- Top contributors to the UN budget

Significance:

- G7 is capable of setting the global agenda because decisions taken by these major economic powers have a real impact. Thus, **decisions taken at the G7 are not legally binding, but exert strong political influence.**

The 2019 G7 Summit, presided over by France, will focus on fighting inequality. France has identified the following five objectives for the Summit:

- 1) fighting inequality of opportunity, promoting in particular gender equality, access to education and high quality health services
- 2) reducing environmental inequality
- 3) strengthening the social dimension of globalization
- 4) taking action for peace against security threats and terrorism
- 5) tapping into the opportunities created by digital technology and artificial intelligence (AI).

India at G7:

- PM Modi is a participant at the 45th G7 summit at the special invitation of French President Emmanuel Macron, as India is not a member of the group of seven.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) referred to the invitation as a “reflection of the personal chemistry” between the two leaders and also recognition of India as a major economic power.
- PM Modi reached Biarritz, France for the summit on August 25 after his three-nation tour of France, UAE and Bahrain.

Following are the key takeaways from the G7 summit:

- **G7 might consider reinstating Russia**
 - US President Donald Trump pressed the G7 group to reinstate Russia as a permanent member of the grouping, saying it would be better to have Russia inside the group than outside.
 - However, no consensus was reached on whether or not to invite Russia to the next year’s G7 summit in the United States. French President Emmanuel Macron said that he and German Chancellor Angela Merkel would be organizing a summit in the coming weeks with the Russian and Ukrainian leaders to obtain results on the Ukraine crisis.
- **Trump open to talks with Iran**
 - Donald Trump said that he was open to meet Iran’s President under the right circumstances to end the confrontations over the 2015 nuclear deal and that talks were underway to see how countries

could open up credit lines to keep Iran's economy afloat. Trump, however, ruled out compensating for losses suffered by Iran and made crippling sanctions.

- **Trump opens doors to a possible trade deal with China**
 - The G7 leaders had expressed concern during their summit meeting that Trump's trade war with China could spiral outward and called for a sensible resolution.
 - However, US President Donald Trump in a welcoming move opened the path for a possible trade deal with China following days of an intense trade war. The US-China trade war has had a damaging effect on the global economy and overall GDP.
- **Trump skips session on 'climate and biodiversity'**
 - The G7 summit this year laid increasing focus on climate change amid a backdrop of the burning Amazon, a month after the Earth recorded its hottest month ever.
 - However, US President Donald Trump who claimed to be an environmentalist in a press conference later notably skipped the climate crisis meeting of the G7. Trump defended his absence saying that the US wealth is based on energy exports and he is not going to lose it on dreams.
- **India- Pakistan tensions expected to lighten**
 - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi while interacting with the media alongside US President Donald Trump said that all issues between India and Pakistan are bilateral and that is why India does not want to trouble any third country.
 - Modi reiterated that India and Pakistan were together before 1947 and he was confident that the two nations can discuss and resolve these issues bilaterally.
- **G7 leaders support Hong Kong's autonomy**
 - The G7 leaders confirmed the existence and importance of the Sino-British Joint Declaration of 1984 on Hong Kong and called for violence to be avoided.
- **US-UK trade deal**
 - US President Donald Trump vowed to work out a very big trade deal, bigger than ever with the United Kingdom after Brexit. The US president stated that the British would lose the anchor
- **US-Japan trade agreement**
 - US President Donald Trump announced locking of a new trade agreement with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan.
 - The deal aims to secure market access for several American agricultural goods and Japan has agreed to purchase large sums of corn from the US around their ankle after leaving the EU.

Criticisms against G7?

- G7 gatherings tend to attract thousands of protesters, and it is protested by thousands every year.
- Many protesters claim the G7 – which has no representative from any African, Russian or Middle Eastern nation – is completely outdated.
- Protest groups also use the worldwide platform as a stage to lobby and campaign on issues that are important to them.
- G7 leaders are creating a wide gap between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' both in their countries as well as across the globe, according to a new report published by non-profit Oxfam International. As a result, **they are making the fight against alleviating poverty more difficult, claimed the report.**

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJrRwQ2xNUk>

3. INDIA AFRICA PARTNERSHIP

Introduction:

- Africa is world's second largest continent both in terms of land and population with **55 countries** which account for about **15 percent of world's population**. India and Africa have a long and rich history of interaction marked by cultural, economic and political exchanges based on the principle of south cooperation. In the recent years a number of steps have been taken to further strengthen these relations. Speaking at the Valedictory session of the **national conference on India Africa Relations in changing global order** Vice President Venkaiah Naidu has said **that India and Africa have a lot of common interests and both have vital stakes in each other's progress, peace and prosperity.**

- The foundations were laid by Mahatma Gandhi. According to him, there will be a “**commerce of ideas and services and not of raw materials and goods like imperialist powers**”. The present government continues to take this approach as the foundation of India’s Africa Policy.

Importance of Africa:

- **Geostrategic**
 - Africa is critical to India’s security, especially the Horn of Africa region, because of its proximity with India. The threat of radicalism, piracy, organized crime emerge from this region
- **Economic**
 - Africa can help us in diversifying our energy sources, which is one of the stated objective of our Integrated Energy Policy
 - Africa also contains rich reservoir of valuable minerals, metals including gold and diamond
 - Africa provides a space for Indian investment
 - Africa has ample agricultural land which can address India’s food security. India is looking at leasing land in Africa to overcome the land deficit that we face in terms of arable land
- **Geopolitical**
 - Support of African countries is important for India’s aim of gaining a permanent seat in UNSC
 - Africa provides a space for displaying both India’s soft and hard power
 - India has been actively involved in peace and stability of African countries through UN Peace keeping operations. India is involved in capacity building of African countries. Africa is also the largest beneficiary of India’s ITEC programme

Strategies adopted by Indian government:

- Pan African level engagement
- Partnership with regional organization
- Development partnership through IBSA and BRICS
- Bilateral engagement with countries
- Involving Indian communities and Indian Diaspora

Africa is at a critical juncture:-

- Economic growth of the continent is estimated to be 3.2 percent in 2018.
- It also houses six of the world’s fastest growing economies- the World Bank estimates Ethiopia will grow at 8.2 percent.
- Several African countries have been providing incentives to attract foreign investors and partners in growth

Nature of the relationship so far:-

- India’s Africa policy over the past few decades has oscillated between passive and reluctantly reactive at best. **Strategic apathy toward the continent was obvious on many fronts.**
- Most of the countries in Africa did not feature in India’s larger foreign policy matrix, but until recently there wasn’t any significant attention paid to the continent.
- Indian leaders seldom travelled to African nations .
- The narrative of India’s contemporary relationship with Africa is dominated by the **historicity of their interactions**, the century old trade partnerships, socio-cultural linkages built by a thriving diaspora, nationalist movements during the Nehruvian era that supported anti-imperial struggles, and shifting geopolitical tides with the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM).
- Beyond this rhetoric, what kept driving this relationship forward was the acquisition of critical assets by State Owned Enterprises (SOE) looking to diversify the energy basket away from West Asian nations and other commercial ventures by Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) and Multi-National Companies (MNC).

The relationship changed and there are areas where both India and Africa can work together:

- Currently, India’s forte in the continent has been **developmental initiatives** such as Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC), Team 9, and Pan Africa e-network among others are aimed at building institutional and human capacity as well as enabling skills and knowledge transfer.
- **Conscious attempt at evoking morality** to reflect an “alternate model of development” by using terms such as “win-win cooperation” to describe New Delhi’s approach to Africa.
- One of the new trends in this relationship has also been the **role played by sub-national organizations and state governments that have been crafting independent relationships with African counterparts.**

- For example, Kerala is planning on importing Cashew from African countries for its processing plants that are running low on raw material.
- Similarly, Ethiopia and South Africa are working with Kudumbashree, a self-help group created by the Government of Kerala aimed at eradicating poverty and empowering women, to find ways to localize and adapt the model in their respective countries.
- A unique factor that sets Indian interactions apart is that there is **palpable goodwill for people of Indian origin**, a sense of familiarity and cultural connection, with Bollywood movies and songs often acting as a bridge.
- **China role:-**
 - Whereas India's policy has focused on job creation in the countries it has invested in, China has tended to bring in its own labour causing resentment among the locals.
 - The Chinese model has often been criticised for creating huge debts for the nation in which it sets up projects, the Nairobi-Mombasa rail link being one example of this.
 - The \$ 4 billion project has left Kenya with enormous debts and the Chinese military base in Djibouti has raised fears that Beijing is abandoning its non-interference policy in the region
- **Role of Indian businesses:-**
 - Indian businesses are active across geographic spaces and sectors in Africa. Agri-business, engineering, construction, film distribution, cement, plastics, and ceramics manufacturing, advertising, marketing, pharmaceuticals, and telecommunication are only some of the sectors that have Indian players.

Way Forward:

- First, we need to take **direct control of our development programme** instead of handing our funds to intermediaries whose **priorities are often different from India's**.
- To make an impact, our aid should be **disbursed bilaterally and aligned with national priorities** of the recipient state, which should be a substantial stakeholder and co-investor in schemes and projects from initiation to operation.
- Second, India's development assistance should prefer the countries **with its substantial interests**, both existing and potential.
 - For instance, **Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Ghana, Angola and Algeria** are India's top six trading partners in Africa, accounting for nearly **two-thirds of its trade** and **half its exports** to the continent; yet, they do not figure commensurately in India's developmental pecking order.
 - India's own needs for raw materials, commodities and markets should be factored in its aid calculus.
- Third, we ought to **prefer aiding countries** which are willing to help us from access to their natural resources to **using our generics**.
- Fourth, the aided project selected should **be compatible with local requirements**. They should be **cost-effective, scalable, future ready and commercially replicable**.
- Fifth, for greater transparency, India should **prefer its public sector to implement the aid projects**.
- Sixth, the Indian Head of Mission in the recipient African state must be an **integral part of the aid stream** including project selection, co-ordination and implementation.
- Apart from empowering our diplomacy, this would ensure better harmonisation between our aid and economic objectives.
- Finally, the aforementioned should **not distract us from our duty** to provide the **needed humanitarian assistance to Africa**: to be rendered promptly and with sensitivity, but without noise.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-t7MrYpTAw>

4. PM AT EASTERN ECONOMIC FORUM

Introduction:

- Speaking at the Eastern Economic Forum at Vladivostok, Prime Minister Modi **while unveiling the "Act Far East" policy, extended 1 billion dollar Line of Credit to Russia's Far East**. The Prime Minister also reiterated that India will walk shoulder-to-shoulder with Russia, its time-tested friend, in its development of the resource-rich Far East region. Act Far East Policy comes in succession to Modi governments 'Act East Policy' which was developed soon after his government came into power first time in 2014. Addressing the plenary

session of the Eastern Economic Forum, the Prime Minister said that his government has engaged nations in the East Asia under India's new "Act East" policy. The mandate of Eastern Economic Forum is aimed at developing the business and investment opportunities in Russia's Far East Region.

The Far East:

- The Far East is the easternmost part of Russia.
- The macro-region borders two oceans, the Pacific and the Arctic, and five countries (China, Japan, Mongolia, the United States and the DPRK).
- The Far Eastern region spreads over four time zones and various climate zones: from northern deserts to subtropics.
- The Far Eastern Federal District covers more than a third of the country's territory.
- The area of the region is 6.952.555 km², which is about 41% of the area of the entire country (the largest federal districts in terms of size).
- Over the past few years, the Far East has been a dynamically developing part of the Russian Federation. Unique mechanisms such as Advanced Special Economic Zones are to create a favourable investment climate.
- The Far East is rich in natural resources. The macro-region extracts **98%** of Russian diamonds, **80%** of stannary, **90%** of borax materials, **50%** of gold, **14%** of tungsten, and **40%** of fish and seafood. About **1/3** of all coal reserves and hydro-engineering resources of the country are here. Forests of the region comprise about **30%** of the total forest area of Russia.

Eastern Economic Forum:

- The Eastern Economic Forum 2019 was took place on 4–6 September in Vladivostok on the Far Eastern Federal University (FEFU) campus.
- The Eastern Economic Forum was established by decree of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin in 2015 to support the economic development of Russia's Far East and to expand international cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

What is India's interest in the EEF?

- Prime Minister Modi has described the **EEF as a "historic opportunity" to give new impetus to the cooperation between India and Russia.**
- He has said that the relationship between the two countries has **"special chemistry, special ease", even pointing out that Siberian cranes migrate to "my home state Gujarat".**
- Going beyond the bonhomie and historical ties, India is also a key customer of the Russian arms industry.
- In March, India entered into a joint venture with Russia to manufacture the legendary Kalashnikov assault rifles in India. In 2018, Russia sold the S-400 advanced air defence system to India.
- India is interested in expanding the level of trade between the two countries. An area of special interest for India is the exploration of hydrocarbon reserves along the coast of Russia's Far East.

Trade and Business:

- PM Modi said a proposal has been made to have a **full fledged maritime route between Chennai and Vladivostok.**
- The two leaders "agreed to facilitate, in all possible ways, **exploring the impressive potential of our strategic partnership** to the full, demonstrating its **special and privileged nature** which has emerged as an anchor of stability in a complex international situation."
- The two sides "**prioritise strong, multifaceted trade and economic cooperation** as the foundation for further expanding the range of India-Russia relations," it added.
- The two leaders decided to take the **bilateral trade from the current \$11 billion to \$30 billion by 2025.**
- The two sides noted the **pace of progress** achieved in the construction of the remaining four of the **six nuclear power plants at Kudankulam.**
- Modi said **Russia will help train Indian astronauts** for the manned space mission —
- Noting that close cooperation in military-technical fields is a pillar of Indo-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.
- The statement said the two sides vowed to **upgrade their defence cooperation**, including by fostering joint development and production of military equipment, components and spare parts.
- They shared the view that "**implementation in good faith** of universally recognised **principles and rules of international law** excludes the practice of double standards or imposition of some States of their will on other States."

- The two sides expressed their support for an **inclusive peace and Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation** in Afghanistan.
- They reaffirmed their commitment to building an **equal and indivisible security architecture** in Asia and the Pacific region.
- They called for **reform of the UN Security Council to reflect contemporary global realities**.
- Russia expressed its support for **India's candidacy for a permanent membership of the UNSC**.
- India's attempt to not only keep a traditional friend close, but **to ensure some space** in the current clinch between Russia and China. China's cross-border investment in RFE accounts for 71% of the total direct foreign investment of \$33 billion.
- Despite concerns in India about growing closeness between Russia and Pakistan, **Moscow stood by India on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir**, arguing that **"India's decision [on Jammu and Kashmir] is a sovereign decision which is as per its Constitution" and that "Moscow follows a policy of non-interference in domestic affairs of countries."** After initially ignoring India, Russia also made a course correction on Afghanistan, recognising that India's involvement in Afghanistan remains necessary if the war-torn nation is to see long term stability.
- The challenge in front of India and Russia is that they need to transform a 20th century partnership and make it fit for the 21st century. Global trends are evolving rapidly and major powers are re-defining their ties with each other to match their contemporary requirements. New Delhi and Moscow cannot be fixated on the past and can't expect exclusionary bilateral ties from each other. The good news is that the top leadership has recognised the challenge and is ready to take corrective measures. The challenge is that this can't be a one off measure. It will have to be a continuous engagement to sustain the momentum created by regular outreach between the top leaders.
- Modi is right when he argues that the greatest achievement of the last 20 years in India-Russia ties is "trust." Both nations should build on this trust to carve out a modern, broad-based partnership more in sync with contemporary realities.

Conclusion:

- A joint statement issued later said the two sides **"underlined the primacy of international law** and emphasised their commitment to the purposes and the principles stated **in the UN Charter** including the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of member states."
- India and Russia have **identified several new areas of cooperation**.
- These range from **deep sea exploration** to building knowledge based economies based on science and technology, innovation, robotics and artificial intelligence, focussing on infrastructure, skill development, agriculture, shipbuilding, railways, aviation and greater connectivity, especially people-to-people contacts.
- The two countries decided to **setup more than 20 Russian designed nuclear units** in India in the next 20-years.
- Above all, the **push to 'Act Far East'** allows India to demonstrate its commitment to an area of concern for Moscow, thus **reassuring its traditional partner** that in an **increasingly polarised world**, India is **confident of working with multiple alignments**, even if they are at cross purposes with each other.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_iJD1V6C5s

5. INDIA- ASEAN FTA

Introduction:

- India and the 10-member ASEAN have agreed to initiate a review of the bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) in goods to make it **"more user-friendly, simple and trade facilitative"**. India is not happy about the fact that its trade deficit with ASEAN has widened significantly since the pact was implemented in January 2010. **A NITI Aayog study reveals that India's trade deficit with ASEAN doubled to \$10 billion in 2017 from \$5 billion in 2011.** A review of the India-ASEAN FTA could help improve utilisation in India by making the pact simpler and more user-friendly. In the joint statement, the Ministers welcomed the recommendations of the ASEAN-India Business Council to further promote the potential of bilateral trade through the utilisation of the

ASEAN-India FTA as well as **cooperation in some areas of mutual interest, such as financial technology, connectivity, start-ups and innovation, empowerment of youth, and women and MSME development.**

ASEAN–India Free Trade Agreement:

- The **ASEAN–India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)** is a free trade area among the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and India.
- The initial framework agreement was signed on 8 October 2003 in Bali, Indonesia and the final agreement was on 13 August 2009
- The free trade area came into effect on 1 January 2010.
- India hosted the latest ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi on 26 January 2018.
- In the financial year 2017-18, Indo-ASEAN bilateral trade grew by almost 14% to reach US\$81.3 billion. India's imports from ASEAN were valued at US\$47.13 billion while its exports to ASEAN stood at US\$34.2 billion.
- The ASEAN–India Free Area emerged from a mutual interest of both parties to expand their economic ties in the Asia-Pacific region. India's Look East policy was reciprocated by similar interests of many ASEAN countries to expand their interactions westward.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has agreed to India's long-pending demand to review the free trade agreement (FTA) between the two sides.

The exercise could help address India's concerns that it has not benefitted from the agreement and its goods trade deficit with the 10-member grouping has widened. The trade gap was \$22 billion in FY19, up from \$13 billion in FY18.

Need for review:

- While there are many benefits to the ASEAN-India FTA, there is concern in India that the agreement will have several negative impacts on the economy.
- As previously stated, the two regions aim to reduce their tariffs on a majority of their traded goods. This will allow them to increase the market access of their products. It is criticised, however, that India will not experience as great an increase in market access to ASEAN countries as ASEAN will in India
- India is not happy about the fact that its trade deficit with ASEAN has widened significantly since the pact was implemented.
- A NITI Aayog study reveals that India's trade deficit with ASEAN doubled to \$10 billion in 2017 from \$5 billion in 2011.
- One of the reasons for the growing deficit is the low utilisation of the FTA route by Indian exporters to ASEAN countries because of difficulties faced in negotiating the rules.
- A review of the India-ASEAN FTA could help improve utilisation in India by making the pact simpler and more user-friendly.

UNEQUAL BENEFIT

- Policymakers hold the view that FTAs have adversely impacted India's manufacturing, which the government is trying to boost through its Make in India initiative in order to generate jobs.
- The finance ministry has begun a review of India's FTA framework to assess the impact of such pacts on the overall economy.

Non-adherence to Origin Norms

- The country's premier think tank NITI Aayog has said that India's quality of trade has not improved after the FTA.
- There is no exit or review clause
- It said that liberalisation under the India-Asean FTA covers 75% of the two-way trade. India kept around 10% of tariff lines in exclusion.
- Strict regulatory measures
- These included motor vehicles, textiles, petroleum products, sugar, wheat, vegetable oil dairy products and other food products.
- However, Thailand, Philippines, Myanmar, Brunei and Vietnam kept a higher number of tariff lines under exclusion.

- The two sides have agreed to open their respective markets by progressively reducing and eliminating duties on 76.4% coverage of goods.
- Moreover, the surge in goods imports into India is accentuated by instances of non-adherence to origin norms and lack of full cooperation in investigating and addressing such breaches.
- In contrast, the utilisation of preferential tariffs by India under the India-Asean FTA is below 30% because of standards, regulatory measures and other non-tariff barriers in the region.
- Ships, boats, floating structures, mineral fuels, mineral oils and meat are India's largest exports to the grouping while telecom equipment, electrical machinery, mineral fuels, mineral oils and animal or vegetable fats and oils are the biggest imports.
- The review will help bring back manufacturing and it will also go a long way towards Make in India, helping our agriculture and bring more manufacturing and jobs to India

Way Forward:

- Indian business should realise the multifold market size that it will be able to tap by investing in this region.
- Need for maritime cooperation and centrality of trade for the prosperity of the strategic IndoPacific region.
- Simplifying agreement.
- India must speed up work on connectivity projects, such as the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway, and building new trade and transport linkages with all the ASEAN Nations.
- Stronger strategic and security relations with equally strong economic ties will create greater interdependence between India and the ASEAN members.
- There are tremendous opportunities in enhancing physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN.
- There is still much room to expand air links to support growing business and tourism.
- A robust maritime connectivity between India and ASEAN is crucial for realization of the full potential of the India ASEAN trade.
- An alternative, economic corridor based multimodal connectivity such as Mekong-India Economic Corridor may be promoted, which will connect Indian coast with unexplored Southeast Asian coast and beyond.
- Enhanced maritime connectivity would provide lower logistic costs, and motivate increased trade in goods and services.

Conclusion:

- India's geostrategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region depend on India's bilateral and multilateral engagements with the countries in the region.
- Maintaining cordiality with ASEAN as an organisation and with the individual Southeast Asian countries remains crucial for India.
- India's 'Look East' (later rechristened 'Act East') narrative of more than 25 years deserves more results. Improving economic relations with its close neighbours will spell the success or failure of such policy.
- It is important for India to analyse its ASEAN strategy more closely, as it has the potential to result in significant benefits in many fronts — economic, political and geostrategic.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOP0UudhDdg>

6. INDIA- SOUTH KOREA: STRATEGIC PARTNERS

Introduction:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on a two visit to South Korea. He holded a summit meeting with South Korea's President Moon Jae-in which is the second such meeting between both the leaders.
- Relations between both nations have made great stride in the recent past and have now become multidimensional owing to mutual good will , high level exchanges and convergence of interests.
- **India is among 10 trade partners of South Korea and 6th largest destination for Korean goods.** Korean investments in India have reached a cumulative figure of almost 6 billion dollars.
- **While India has Act East Policy, South Korea has its New Southern Policy which focusses on strengthening it's economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia and India.**

The Vision of the New Southern Policy

- **The Korean government's New Southern Policy aims to cultivate its relations with ASEAN and India as key partners in the southern region**, raise this partnership to the level of Korea's traditional four major diplomatic partners (the U.S., China, Japan, Russia), develop values that can be empathized with others, and build a mutually prosperous "people-centered" community.
- The New Southern Policy aims to form a multilateral economic and diplomatic framework to adjust to the U.S.'s priority on domestic concerns, which has been in full swing since the inauguration of the Trump administration, and to the expansion of China's influence across East Asia.
- The New Southern Policy **emphasizes the so-called "3P community," which stands for a community of People, Prosperity and Peace.**

Bilateral relations:

- Bilateral relations between India and South Korea, officially known as the Republic of Korea, were established in 1962 and upgraded to Ambassador-level in 1973.
- South Korea's open market policies found resonance with India's economic liberalization, and its 'look east policy' and 'act east policy'.
- The relations has become truly multidimensional, spurred by a significant convergence of interests, mutual goodwill and high level exchanges.
- During PM Modi's visit to ROK in May 2015, the sides elevated the ties to 'Special Strategic Partnership'.
- President Moon's India visit marked the 45th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic ties.
- Cooperate with India in areas like the **Indian ocean region**
- This kind of **bond between the two countries strengthens bilateral cooperation.**

Why India is important for South-Korea?

- One of the points that the Koreans have been making to India is that they see India as a country that is **now strategically important to them**
- **South Korea also finds in India a very acceptable partner.**
- India doesn't have edges which can create problems for them. They are aware of one factor which they have grown up with, which is the Pakistan factor.
- With new issues cropping up in ties with China and America, export-driven South Korea must find new markets.
- South Korea's economic growth has slowed, presenting it with important challenges.
- South Korea is targeting economies with the greatest growth potential like India.
- South Korea is too heavily dependent on China's market. So diversification is essential for South Korea.
- Moon sees India as central to NSP's success.
- Need cooperation for development in third countries, like capacity building programmes in Afghanistan.

Commercial relations:

- Very strong trade and investment relationship between India and South Korea.
- Modi personally inaugurated the Samsung factory in Noida, which will be one of the largest electronic manufacturing plants in the country.
- The economic imperatives are very strong between India and South Korea. Both India and South Korea have not been able to realize their potential till now.
- Economic engagement constitutes the core of our
- Trade and economic relations between India and South Korea gathered momentum after the implementation of CEPA in 2010.
- A civil nuclear cooperation agreement was signed in 2011.
- Korean majors like Samsung, LG, Hyundai and Kia have invested over \$5 billion in India.
- **From an Indian perspective, it is important to note that India has been deficient in the production of core technologies.** We have been good in services, however, we have been lacking in core technologies. However, if we were to cooperate with South Korea, and if we move in a particular direction, there is definitely space for both to work

Concerns:

- Both India and South Korea are **concerned about China's rise**, especially when China becomes assertive.
- Both are increasingly **worried about Chinese electronic presence in India**.
- There are some **basic problems which the leaders of India and South Korea would have to tackle. This is also related to the trust between the businesses of India and the businesses of South Korea**.
- the trust level between the business community of the two countries isn't at the level where it should be.
- Despite the formal announcement of a strategic partnership a decade ago, Delhi and Seoul have struggled to impart some real content into it.
- For India, which has begun to adopt the notion of an Indo-Pacific, Korea has not been at top of its regional priorities in Asia.
- Prosperity brought by globalisation to Asia over the recent decades is under stress.
- India has also been **complaining about a 50 billion USD trade deficit**.

Way Forward:

- India and South Korea should **regularize their summit meetings** and that they meet more frequently at the highest level. This will give directions to the business and industry in each country to work together.
- South Korea is the most technologically advanced nation in Asia after Japan. Therefore, **bringing them Japan on board would be an absolute boost to India's ability** to become a more powerful nation.
- There is an urgent need to strengthen **economic partnership**. As a trade war unfolds between US and China, **Delhi and Seoul** need to liberalise their own bilateral trade relations.
- India would need to work with South Korea on new generation technologies and core technologies, while at the same time consolidating the existing relationship.
- The two sides also need to focus on **expanding bilateral security and defence cooperation** and working together with other countries to **promote a stable Asian balance** of power system.
- Delhi and Seoul should focus on **building flexible middle power coalitions** in Asia to limit the impact of the current volatility in the relations between US and China.
- The business community of both countries must leverage opportunities arising from complementarities between the two economies **to enhance investment**, to promote joint ventures, and to work towards the **goal of raising bilateral trade to \$50 billion by 2030**.
- At a time when U.S. foreign policy is capricious and unpredictable, and China's is making purposeful moves towards global domination, it is important that the South Korea-India partnership grows and consolidates, to **contribute to stability in the region**.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQSPX2raWAI>

5. RCEP – CHALLENGES & WAY FORWARD

Introduction:

- The **7th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership ministerial meeting** of the 10 members of ASEAN countries and their six FTA partners, including India took place. The ongoing global uncertainties have added to the urgency to conclude the mega free trade agreement between these nations. The joint statement issued after the meeting, which reviewed the RCEP negotiations on September 8 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The 16 negotiating partners agreed that they should not lose the long-term vision of deepening and expanding the value chains in the RCEP. The grouping underscored issues raised by India by stating that certain developments in the global trade environment might affect the negotiating countries' individual positions. "The ministers underscored the RCEP will provide the much-needed stability and certainty to the market, which will in, turn boost trade and investment in the region. To this end, ministers reaffirmed their collective resolve to bring negotiations to a conclusion by the year-end.

RCEP:

- RCEP is proposed between the **ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand)**.

- RCEP negotiations were **formally launched in November 2012** at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- **Aim:** RCEP aims to boost goods trade by eliminating most tariff and non-tariff barriers — a move that is expected to provide the region's consumers greater choice of quality products at affordable rates. It also seeks to liberalise investment norms and do away with services trade restrictions.

Significance of RCEP:

- RCEP is the **world's largest economic bloc**, covering **nearly half of the global economy**.
- RCEP will provide a framework aimed at **lowering trade barriers and securing improved market access for goods and services** for businesses in the region.
- RCEP's share of the global economy could account for half of the estimated **\$0.5 quadrillion global GDP (PPP) by 2050**.
- The grouping envisages **regional economic integration**, leading to the **creation of the largest regional trading bloc in the world**.
- RCEP recognises the importance of being inclusive, especially to enable SMEs leverage on the agreement and cope with **challenges arising from globalisation and trade liberalisation**.
- Analysts suggest that there are **enormous export gains** that could accrue to India from RCEP under varying scenarios. This assumes even greater importance since our focus has been on **products with favourable terms of trade for India**.
- India endeavours to integrate with a region, which has been the most successful region of the world in terms of thriving regional value chains (RVCs). These RVCs necessitate **freer movement of professionals across countries in the region**.
- This is especially crucial in a scenario when the vector of **India's demographic dividend** is concomitant to the vector of the **"aging"** population in most RCEP countries.

Present Scenario:

- Negotiations on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), among 16 Asian and Pacific Ocean countries, have entered a decisive phase. And it would like to see a **"substantive agreement" on the trade deal** by the end of this year.
- At a meeting in Singapore, countries which still have issues with the outline of the agreements reached so far may be told politely to step aside and allow a smaller group to go ahead with finalising the RCEP, **with the option to join it at a later date**.
- India is among the countries that will have to take a call at this point considering the seriousness of the situation.
- Our dilemma still remains.

Why India should not miss RCEP?

- **We always stood for multilateral rule based international trade.**
- If India is out of the RCEP, it would make its **exports price uncompetitive with other RCEP members' exports** in each RCEP market, and the ensuing export-losses contributing to foreign exchange shortages and the subsequent extent of depreciation of the rupee can only be left to imagination.
- We should not be seen as walking out.
- Some of the sectors that have been identified as potential sources of India's export growth impulses under RCEP to the tune of approximately \$200 billion.
- There are more compelling trade and economic reasons for RCEP to become India-led in future, than otherwise.
- **India would get greater market access in other countries not only in terms of goods, but in services and investments also.**

Present form the RCEP agreement is not good for India:

- Our competitiveness in manufacturing is gone to get probably worsen, if we remove the protection which we today provide to Indian made goods it will lead to hard sort.
- Fear largely because we have trade deficit with both China and ASEAN.
- India's experience with the previously concluded FTA hasn't been good.

- The current account deficit (CAD) touched **8 per cent of GDP**, and the agreement in the present state of negotiations would mean forgoing a substantial part of the revenues.
- Greater access to Chinese goods may have impact on the Indian manufacturing sector. India has got massive trade deficit with China. In fiscal year 2017-18, the trade deficit with China was **\$63 billion**.
- Under these circumstances, India proposed differential market access strategy for China.
- Exports from ASEAN into India have grown far quicker than Indian exports to the bloc, which they attribute to the fact that India is a “**services economy**.”
- There are demands by other RCEP countries for lowering customs duties on a number of products and greater access to the market than India has been willing to provide.
- Apart from China, India is also losing out to financial and technological hub of Singapore, agriculture and dairy majors Australia and New Zealand, plantations of South East Asian countries, and pharmaceutical trade with China and the US.
- With e-commerce as part of the discussion, the Indian resistance at WTO of not letting the discussion on digital trade will weaken.
- The free movement of investments will benefit investors in the US, Singapore, Japan and China, but very few Indians will be taking advantage of this.
- New Delhi is also worried that the RCEP will open backdoor negotiations and may lead to the country losing out on TRIPS agreements. This may result in giving way to global majors in agriculture seed and pharmaceutical manufacturing.

Way Forward:

- All trade is based on comparative advantage and we have it in services sector which we need to look properly.
- Indian policymakers need to be mindful of domestic industry’s concerns before getting into a deal with respect to the RCEP.
- We need to focus on improving the competitiveness of the Indian economy.
- India must play its due role to get its due place in the regional economic configurations.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bGvN2uqNGoo>

ENVIRONMENT

1. FLOODS AND RIVER LINKING

Introduction:

- Some northern Indian states could receive rainfall during the next 4-5 days, but monsoon activity could be subdued in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra’s interiors, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana in the next 3-4 days, the India Meteorological Department said on Sunday. After recording above normal rains between July 6 and July 11, monsoon appears to be slowing down, sparking concerns in the agriculture sector, according to experts.
- Overall rainfall deficiency in the country till last Sunday was 12.5% over the long period average, an improvement from June’s 33% — the highest deficiency in June in four years. The sluggish monsoon has impacted the sowing of summer crops. But in northeastern India, floods have caused widespread damage, with several lives being lost as a result of flooding.
- **The interlinking project aims to link India’s rivers by a network of reservoirs and canals that will allow for their water capacities to be shared and redistributed.** According to some, this is an engineered panacea that will reduce persistent floods in some parts and water shortages in other parts besides facilitating the generation of hydroelectricity for an increasingly power hungry country.

Components:

- Since the 1980s, the interlinking project has been managed by India’s **National Water Development Agency (NWDA) under the Ministry of Water Resources**. It has been split into three parts:
 1. A northern Himalayan rivers interlink component.
 2. A southern peninsular component.
 3. An intra-State rivers linking component.

- The NWDA has studied and prepared reports on 14 projects for the Himalayan region, 16 projects for the peninsular India component and 36 intra-State river interlinking projects. However, various governments have shelved the idea for a number of reasons.

Why this is a good idea?

- India receives most of its rain during monsoon season from June to September, most of it falls in northern and eastern part of India, the amount of rainfall in southern and western part are comparatively low. It will be these places which will have shortage of water. Interlinking of rivers will help these areas to have water throughout the year.
- This will cut farmers dependence on monsoon rains by bringing millions of hectares of cultivatable land under irrigation.
- Crop productivity would increase and so would revenues for the State.
- Even one bad monsoon has a direct and debilitating economic impact.
- The river linking project will ease the water shortages in western and southern India while mitigating the impacts of recurrent floods in eastern India.
- The Ganga Basin, Brahmaputra basin sees floods almost every year. In order to avoid this, the water from these areas has to be diverted to other areas where there is scarcity of water. This can be achieved by linking the rivers. There is a two way advantage with this – floods will be controlled and scarcity of water will be reduced.
- Simultaneous floods and droughts continue to wreak havoc, destroying the lives and livelihoods of millions.
- India needs clean energy to fuel its development processes, and river water can be leveraged for this.
- Fulfilling water needs impact socio-economic life of people which will help end poverty.
- Need for interlinking of rivers to prevent inter-state water disputes.
- Potential benefits to transportation through navigation, as well as broadening income sources in rural areas through fishing.

Critics argue that:

- The idea that river linking would allow us to cope with flood in the north east and shortage of water in the Deccan is the positive aspect as pointed earlier but **misleading one too**. This floods come at the time when most parts of the country run short of water, we need to hold the water somewhere to use it in dry season but the amount of flowing in the short period of time in Brahmaputra and Ganga is so huge to store and use it later.
- Interlinking of rivers is a **very expensive proposal**. The amount required for these projects is so huge that government will have to take loans from the foreign sources which would increase the burden on the government and country will fall in a debt trap.
- The river interlinking project will **adversely affect land, forests, biodiversity, rivers and the livelihood of millions of people**.
- The Ken-Betwa link threatens about 200 sq. km of the Panna tiger reserve.
- Interlinking of rivers will lead to **destruction of forests, wetlands and local water bodies**, which are major groundwater recharge mechanisms.
- Less than positive experience that other countries have, like diversion of Amu Darya and the Syr Darya or the Australia's experiments in its Murray Darling basin.
- It causes massive **displacement of people**. Huge burden on the government to deal with the issue of rehabilitation of displaced people.
- Due to interlinking of rivers, there will be decrease in the amount of fresh water entering seas and this will cause a serious threat to the marine life.
- The Shah committee pointed out that the linking of rivers will affect natural supply of nutrients for agricultural lands through curtailing flooding of downstream areas.

Challenges:

- India has 18 percent of the world's population but only 4 percent of the usable water resources.
- **Variability in rainfall** is high which is the main source in the country, flood and drought simultaneously within the states of Bihar and Maharashtra.

- Irrigation potential from interlinking rivers will have limited impact. The net national irrigated area from big dams has decreased and India's irrigated area has gone up primarily due to groundwater.
- We don't have River basin plan yet in place.
- Large hydropower projects are no longer a viable option in India.
- Storing large quantities of waters. Most of the sites suitable for the big reservoirs are in Nepal, Bhutan and in the North-East—who are in opposition to big storage reservoirs.
- Water has now become a **political issue**.
- There are political challenges as well. Water transfer and water sharing are sensitive subjects.
- If the glaciers don't sustain their glacier mass due to climate change, the interlinking project will have limited benefit.
- Usually rivers change their course and direction in about 100 years and if this happens after interlinking, then the project will not be feasible for a longer run.

Way Forward:

- **To look at water as a strategic resource for development.**
- Environment is one issue where anyone of us should be concerned about.
- Best practices done by China and neighboring countries needs to be looked upon.
- The biggest, cheapest, most benign, possibly fastest and most decentralized storage option for India is the groundwater
- Invest in **water conservation, more efficient irrigation and better farm practices.**
- **Recycling** of water for internal usage as that of Israel.
- We need a **mandatory enforceable river policy** aimed at treating rivers as national treasure.
- Accumulation of silt in huge quantities, particularly the Ganga and its tributaries. These rivers need to be desilted.
- River linking in the south and other parts which was undertaken in the past has been going well so such model needs to be taken forward.
- Planting trees on the river banks is one way of bringing life back to the rivers.
- Forest catchments will need to be restored, wastewater from industries and towns will need to be treated, sand mining need to be stopped.
- Need to build the responsibility, capability and accountability in our water management institutions to revive our rivers.
- The judicious use of canal water, growing crops that are appropriate to a region, encouraging drip irrigation and reviving traditional systems such as tanks.

Conclusion:

- The river linking project is a great challenge and an opportunity to address the water issues arising out of climate change. The long-term solution to water scarcity lies in making the IRL project work by building a network of dams and canals across the length and breadth of the country. However, interlinking has to take place after a detailed study so that does not cause any problem to the environment or aquatic life.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2kAfeaD0sU>

2. RISING OCEANS, SINKING CITIES

Introduction:

- **Oceans act as a sponge for the ill effects of the climate change by absorbing heat and CO2 generated by greenhouse gas emissions.** However these same oceans are likely to unleash their wrath on a global scale. According to a draft report of United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change destructive changes have already been set in motion.
- **The draft report says that even with most optimistic emission reduction scenario , by the year 2050 many low lying megacities and small island nations will experience extreme sea level events every year.** Report says that the big four – **United States of America, China, India and European Union will face most devastating fall out of the ocean and ice related impacts of climate change.**

IPCC:

- The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** is an intergovernmental body of the United Nations, dedicated to providing the world with an objective, scientific view of climate change, its natural, political and economic impacts and risks, and possible response options.
- **The IPCC was established in 1988 by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)** and was later endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly.
- **Membership is open to all members of the WMO and UN.**
- The IPCC produces reports that contribute to the work of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the main international treaty on climate change.
- The objective of the UNFCCC is to “stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system”.
- The IPCC’s Fifth Assessment Report was a critical scientific input into the UNFCCC’s Paris Agreement in 2015.
- IPCC reports cover the “scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation.”
- The IPCC does not carry out original research, nor does it monitor climate or related phenomena itself. Rather, it assesses published literature including peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed sources.

Key Highlights of the draft report:

- The Earth could witness a **dramatic decline in fish stocks**, a 100-fold increase in the damage caused by superstorms and millions of people displaced by rising seas, if humanity does not reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- The report concludes that humanity must overhaul the way it produces and consumes almost everything to avoid the worst ravages of climate change and environmental degradation.
- It is due to be the fourth in a series of UN reports in recent months on the effects of climate change and specifically focuses on the planet’s oceans and cryosphere – areas composed of frozen water.
- {articleGUID}The destructive changes have already been set in motion, according to the report.
- Melting glaciers will first give too much, causing widespread flooding, and then too little, bringing drought, to billions who depend on them for freshwater, the report finds.
- Without cuts to man-made emissions, at least 30 percent of the northern hemisphere’s surface permafrost could melt by the end of the 21st century, unleashing billions of tonnes of carbon and accelerating global warming even more, the study says.
- The draft report concludes that even with the most optimistic emission-reduction scenarios, by 2050, many low-lying megacities and small island nations will experience “extreme sea-level events” every year.
- By the year 2100, “annual flood damages are expected to increase by two to three orders of magnitude”, or 100- to 1,000-fold, the summary for policymakers says.
- Even if the world manages to cap global warming at 2C, the global ocean waterline will rise enough to displace more than a quarter of a billion people, the report says.
- Earth’s two ice sheets, sitting atop Greenland and Antarctica, have lost roughly 400 billion tonnes of mass each year in the decade to 2015, becoming the main driver of the rising sea levels, the draft report’s summary says.
- “Even if the number is 100 or 50 million [displaced people] by 2100, that’s still a major disruption and a lot of human misery.

What is the 1.5-degree question?

- Since 1990s, countries started discussing climate change and began negotiating an international arrangement for tackling it together.
- The objective has been to limit rising global average temperatures to within 2°C from pre-industrial times.
- Periodic Assessment Reports produced by IPCC, suggest that the impacts of climate change could be “irreversible” and “catastrophic” if the rise in temperature was allowed to go beyond the 2°C ceiling.
- Small island states and the least developed nations, are likely to suffer the worst consequences of climate change.
- These countries asked that the goal should be to restrict the temperature rise within 1.5°C from pre-industrial times.

- A 1.5°C target demanded much deeper emission cuts from the big emitters, which in turn required massive deployment of financial and technological resources.
- The Paris Agreement ‘hold’ the increase in global average temperature to “well below” 2°C, it also promised to keep “pursuing efforts” to attain the 1.5°C target.
- Incidentally, the global average temperature has already risen by more than 1°C from pre-industrial times.
- At the current rate, the 1.5°C limit could be crossed as early as 2040.

So what happens at 2°C that does not happen at 1.5°C?

- Research found that limiting global warming to 1.5°C could prevent around 3.3 million cases of dengue every year in Latin America and the Caribbean alone.
- According to World Bank report, additional 150 million people could be at risk from malaria if the temperature was allowed to increase beyond 2°C.
- The world could have 25 million fewer undernourished people by the end of the century, if the 1.5°C goal was achieved.
- 350 million additional people could be exposed to deadly heat waves if the warming increased to 2°C as compared to 1.5°C.
- 5°C could prevent 153 million premature deaths due to air pollution by 2100, as compared to the 2°C scenario.
- The world could be 3% wealthier by 2100 in a 1.5°C scenario compared to a 2°C scenario.
- A UNDP report in 2016 claimed that a 1.5°C strategy could create double the number of jobs in the energy sector by 2050.
- Extreme weather events such as heavy rainfall and heat waves are likely to become more severe and frequent, and freshwater supply could fall sharply, in a 2°C world.

The change in sea levels is linked to three primary factors, all induced by ongoing global climate change:

- **Thermal expansion:** When water heats up, it expands. About half of the sea-level rise over the past 25 years is attributable to warmer oceans simply occupying more space.
- **Melting glaciers:** Large ice formations such as mountain glaciers naturally melt a bit each summer. In the winter, snows, primarily from evaporated seawater, are generally sufficient to balance out the melting. Recently, though, persistently higher temperatures caused by global warming have led to greater-than-average summer melting as well as diminished snowfall due to later winters and earlier springs. That creates an imbalance between runoff and ocean evaporation, causing sea levels to rise.
- **Loss of Greenland and Antarctica’s ice sheets:** As with mountain glaciers, increased heat is causing the massive ice sheets that cover Greenland and Antarctica to melt more quickly. Scientists also believe that meltwater from above and seawater from below is seeping beneath Greenland’s ice sheets, effectively lubricating ice streams and causing them to move more quickly into the sea. While melting in West Antarctica has drawn considerable focus from scientists, especially with the 2017 break in the Larsen C ice shelf, glaciers in East Antarctica are also showing signs of destabilizing.

Consequences:

- These rising sea levels pose a major threat to island nations and coastal areas meaning that these areas could be swamped and submerged by water anytime in the future.
- In countries like the United States, where almost 40 percent of the population resides in coastal areas, the flooding due to sea-level rise is expected to create adverse effects.
- Additionally, because of global warming and the resultant rising sea levels, there is a threat of extinction of several types of plants and animals which need and thrive only in the cold climate.
- Besides these, the rise in sea level would also make an impact on the lives on beaches.
- Animals are facing the threat of extinction, then humans living in coastal areas and island nations also face the threat of getting submerged in case a deluge happens.
- Rising sea levels could cause the water levels to increase and invade in the residential areas thus causing a lot of problem to the locales.
- And unlike other natural calamities, where migration could solve problems, in the case of rising sea levels and the expectant troubles, migration to other parts of the world will be futile because every land form in the globe is bordered by in one way or the other.

- Contamination of freshwater sources would also affect irrigation and farming, eventually leading us to a food crisis.
- One of the immediate impacts of the increasing sea level on the economy would be the threat posed the tourism industry.
- Since the total concentration of the water-bodies being more than two. Every day, little-by-little the glaciers in the Arctic and the Antarctic are melting thus giving way to rising sea levels and a little less chance to experience living for the future generation.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XQnUmopftow>

SECURITY ISSUES

YUDH ABHYAS 2019 | INDIA-US JOINT MILITARY EXERCISE

Introduction:

- The latest joint military exercise between India and the US began on September 5 and concluded on 18th September in Washington. This exercise is an important part of the ongoing defence co-operation between the two nations. **Named Yudh Abhyas, the exercise is one of the largest joint-running military training and defence co-operation endeavours between India and the US.**
- Indian and US Army soldiers were trained jointly on the howitzers and Chinook helicopters during their Yudh Abhyas 2019 exercise at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Washington. The aim of this exercise is to enhance interoperability between armies with the focus on enhancing counter-terror cooperation. The Yudh Abhyas series was started in 2002 at Agra in India and since then 15 editions have been held annually and alternately between India and US.

Yudh Abhyas:

- A joint military training, Exercise Yudh Abhyas – 2019 was conducted at Joint Base Lewis Mc Chord, Washington DC, from September 5-18 as part of the ongoing Indo-US defence cooperation.
- Yudh Abhyas is one of the largest running joint military training and defence corporation endeavours between India and the US.
- This is the 15th edition of the joint exercise hosted alternately between the two countries.
- Exercise Yudh Abhyas provides an opportunity to the armed forces of both countries to train in an integrated manner at Battalion level with joint planning at Brigade level.
- During the exercise, multiple scenarios are rehearsed with a view to understand each other's organisational structure and battle procedures which would result in a higher degree of 'jointmanship' that would further facilitate interoperability between the armed forces of the two nations to meet any unforeseen contingency across the globe.
- Both armies are jointly training, planning and executing a series of well-developed operations for neutralisation of threats of varied nature.
- One of the largest joint-running military training and defence co-operation endeavours between India and the US.
- Hosted alternately between the two countries.
- Both armies are jointly training, planning and executing a series of well-developed operations for neutralisation of threats of varied nature.
- Apart from this, academic and military discussions will be organized by experts from both sides to share each other's experiences on varied topics for mutual benefit.
- The rousing strains of 'Jana Gana Mana', the Indian National Anthem was played out by an American Army band during the joint Indo-US military exercise in Washington
- In the end, a joint exercise will be undertaken by both countries in an operational setting under a UN mandate. Experts from both sides will hold academic and military discussions to share each other's experiences on varied topics for mutual benefit.

Benefits:

- This joint military exercise between India and USA will offer a prospect to the armed forces of both countries to train in an integrated manner at Battalion level with joint planning at Brigade level.

- The joint military exercise will provide multiple scenarios with a view to understand each other's organisational structure and battle procedures.
- According to the official curtain-raiser of the Government of India, the exercise will result in a higher degree of collaboration that can further facilitate interoperability between the armed forces of both countries to meet any unforeseen contingency across the globe.
- Yudh Abhyas 2019 is also significant because it provides an ideal platform to learn from each other's expertise and experiences of planning and execution of operations.

Joint Military Exercise:

India & UK

- 2005: Emerald Mercury
- Exercises conducted in 2007 and 2008
- 2011: Ajeya Warrior IV
- 2013: Ajeya Warrior V
- 2017: Ajeya Warrior VII

India & Russia

- INDRA: Bi-annual military exercise started in 2003
- To boost cooperation between Russian and Indian navies
- 2017: First Tri exercise between Indian and Russia
- INDRA- 2017 involved exercises with army, navy and air force
- INDRA- 2019: Slated for December 2019
- INDRA- 2019: Eight tactical episodes involving armed forces

India & France

- Joint exercise with armies called 'Shakti'
- Garuda: Indo- France joint exercise involving air force.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qds_U_elAyg

MISCELLANEOUS

1. TAPPING OVERSEAS INDIANS

Introduction:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi described **NRIs as India's brand ambassadors** and said they were the **symbols of the country's capabilities**. The prime minister was inaugurating the **15th Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas** convention in his parliamentary constituency of Varanasi. The theme of this year's convention was **'role of Indian diaspora in building new India'**. The Prime Minister of Mauritius Pravind Jugnauth was the chief guest of the convention, while Himanshu Gulati, Member of Parliament of Norway, was the special guest.
- "Diaspora" is an omnibus phrase which brackets people of Indian origin who have emigrated since the 19th century to all corners of the world. They spread the Indian Culture and traditions abroad benefitting India in general and send back remittances back home helping the foreign exchange reserves in particular. Over **31 million overseas Indians are living throughout the globe**. They are contributing in their countries and also participating in Indian development. Diaspora serves as an important phenomenon for non-state actors, soft powers in foreign policy analysis and an **'inevitable link'** between the home and host lands for the people. It is recognized that there is a **convergence of Diaspora policy and foreign policy** of a country due to the embedded role of Diaspora in the foreign affairs.

Government Initiatives:

- Government has made it easy for overseas Indians to invest in India.
- The government has started, since 2003, the Pravasi Bhartiya Diwas, to mark the contribution of the overseas Indian community to the development of India.
- Government is activating and energizing them.
- **Merger** of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs with the Ministry of External Affairs.

- India also allowed visitors from 43 countries, including the United States, Australia and Fiji, to receive visas upon arrival, replacing the previous process, which took weeks.
- Efforts have been taken to unify different diaspora organization.
- The **Overseas India Facilitation Centre** was set-up by the Government of India in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), to facilitate economic engagement of overseas Indians with India.
- The government evacuated Indian Diaspora in Yemen in 2015 through the Operation Rahat and from South Sudan through Operation Sankat Mochan.
- The government is emphasising more on youth and has started a scheme **“Know your country”**.
- **“Pravasi Kaushal Vikas Yojana”** targeting Indian youth seeking overseas employment.
- The Indian government is active on the social media and the government provides quick response and solves the problems of Indian Diaspora through the social media.

2. PRAVASI BHARTIYA DIVAS 2019

Context: *The 15th annual Pravasi Bhartiya Divas (PBD) was held in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.* Usually celebrated on or around 9th January, the grand scale of arrangements that went behind this year’s celebrations pushed the event to January 21-23.

- **Chief Guest:** The Prime Minister of Mauritius, Pravind Jugnath.
- **Theme:** “Role of Indian Diaspora in building New India”.
- **The first chapter of Pravasi Bhartiya Divas was held in 2003** to recognise the contributions of NRIs in academic and professional fields across the world.
- **The reason 9th January** is usually set aside for celebrating Pravasi Bhartiya Divas is that Mahatma Gandhi returned from South Africa on this day in 1915.
- **Significance:** These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and Indian communities in India for mutually beneficial activities. These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

New dimensions:

- There is now a linkage between Indian diasporic community and development of the country. Diaspora has become an important feature of India’s foreign policy today.
- There are special outreaches to Indian communities during high-level visits to the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Singapore, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.
- Diaspora policy not only focuses on the rich, industrialist, white collared professionals but gives **due respect to the working class population**.

Asset in Disguise:

- The Diaspora population bring technical and domain expertise to domestic start-ups and often **act as angel investors**.
- Diaspora Indian faculty abroad **volunteer time and resources** to help faculty on Indian campuses improve the quality of education — as in the case of member institutions of the Indo Universal Collaboration of Engineering Education.
- This was reflected in advancing projects whether through government arrangements or private commercial deals related to Make in India, Skill India, Digital India, Start Up India as well as those aimed at improving our infrastructure and transportation links and fostering all round sustainable development in urban or energy sectors.
- The diaspora can step up and act as Indian **‘ambassadors’**, as it is insufficient and ineffective for a country or its missions abroad to rely only on press releases to change public opinion.
- The diaspora can provide the **requisite strategic impulse**, which makes it all the more important to unlock their potential.

Way Forward:

- To ensure that Diaspora members feel welcomed on their arrival in India, easier procedures for immigration and customs clearances that are marked by courteous service are essential.
- Ease entry of foreign funds.

- Address the problems of our overseas blue-collar workers
 - Negotiating a Standard Labour Export Agreements with the host countries
 - Monitoring and supervision of our overseas workers by our Missions
 - compulsory insurance schemes covering the risks faced by our overseas workers
- Inclusive Diplomacy.
- PIOs make frequent visits to their home state or to visit their relatives. There should be greater focus on promoting tourism among 2nd generation PIOs.
- Welfare of Indian Women married to NRIs/PIOs
- Economic Development
 - Diasporic professionals are working in senior positions in manufacturing industry can be helpful in promoting India as an important destination for out-sourcing.
 - Government should also consider setting up Special Economic Zones, exclusively for projects to be set up by NRIs/PIOs.
 - The Government should consider issuing special infrastructure bonds for attracting NRI/PIO investments on the lines of the Israel Bonds.
- The challenge before India lies in the way it taps its widespread Diaspora's financial and intellectual capital.

Conclusion:

- In recent times, the government has laid a strong foundation by making **diplomacy people-centric with government's constant interaction** with the Indian diaspora. The Indian diaspora is the bridge between their nation and India where they can grow simultaneously for betterment of their citizens. The diaspora can provide the **requisite strategic impulse**, which makes it all the more important to **unlock their potential**.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6SGgWDH-sg>

3. MOTOR VEHICLE ACT: LIFE V/S FINES

Introduction:

- Several states have decided not to implement the new Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act citing steep penalties. Some states said it would overburden people while others said it would lead to higher levels of corruption. The Union Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari differed from what unconvinced states had to say. He said the high penalties under the amendment were undertaken after expansive deliberations and the key objective was to increase road discipline among citizens. India remains one of the top accident-prone nations in the world.
- As per Ministry of Road Transport and Highways data, 1.47 lakh people lost their lives due to road accidents in 2017; the scenario remains the same in 2019. Despite the data and the good intentions behind stricter penalties, states such as West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, Jharkhand and Maharashtra denied imposing stricter fines to boost road discipline. Meanwhile, other states like Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, and Kerala decided to reduce the rates that have been stated in the amended act.

The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2019

- The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill, 2019 was introduced in Lok Sabha on July 15, 2019 by the Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Mr. Nitin Gadkari. The Bill seeks to amend the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 to provide for road safety. The Act provides for grant of licenses and permits related to motor vehicles, standards for motor vehicles, and penalties for violation of these provisions.
 - (i) **Compensation for road accident victims:** The central government will develop a scheme for cashless treatment of road accident victims during golden hour. The Bill defines golden hour as the time period of up to one hour following a traumatic injury, during which the likelihood of preventing death through prompt medical care is the highest. The central government may also make a scheme for providing interim relief to claimants seeking compensation under third party insurance. The Bill increases the minimum compensation for hit and run cases as follows: (i) in case of death, from Rs 25,000 to two lakh rupees, and (ii) in case of grievous injury, from Rs 12,500 to Rs 50,000.
 - (ii) **Compulsory insurance:** The Bill requires the central government to constitute a Motor Vehicle Accident Fund, to provide compulsory insurance cover to all road users in India. It will be utilised for: (i) treatment of persons injured in road accidents as per the golden hour scheme, (ii) compensation

to representatives of a person who died in a hit and run accident, (iii) compensation to a person grievously hurt in a hit and run accident, and (iv) compensation to any other persons as prescribed by the central government. This Fund will be credited through: (i) payment of a nature notified by the central government, (ii) a grant or loan made by the central government, (iii) balance of the Solatium Fund (existing fund under the Act to provide compensation for hit and run accidents), or (iv) any other source as prescribed the central government.

- (iii) **Good samaritans:** The Bill defines a good samaritan as a person who renders emergency medical or non-medical assistance to a victim at the scene of an accident. The assistance must have been (i) in good faith, (ii) voluntary, and (iii) without the expectation of any reward. Such a person will not be liable for any civil or criminal action for any injury to or death of an accident victim, caused due to their negligence in providing assistance to the victim.
 - (iv) **Recall of vehicles:** The Bill allows the central government to order for recall of motor vehicles if a defect in the vehicle may cause damage to the environment, or the driver, or other road users. The manufacturer of the recalled vehicle will be required to: (i) reimburse the buyers for the full cost of the vehicle, or (ii) replace the defective vehicle with another vehicle with similar or better specifications.
 - (v) **National Transportation Policy:** The central government may develop a National Transportation Policy, in consultation with state governments. The Policy will: (i) establish a planning framework for road transport, (ii) develop a framework for grant of permits, and (iii) specify priorities for the transport system, among other things.
 - (vi) **Road Safety Board:** The Bill provides for a National Road Safety Board, to be created by the central government through a notification. The Board will advise the central and state governments on all aspects of road safety and traffic management including: (i) standards of motor vehicles, (ii) registration and licensing of vehicles, (iii) standards for road safety, and (iv) promotion of new vehicle technology.
 - (vii) **Offences and penalties:** The Bill increases penalties for several offences under the Act. For example, the maximum penalty for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs has been increased from Rs 2,000 to Rs 10,000. If a vehicle manufacturer fails to comply with motor vehicle standards, the penalty will be a fine of up to Rs 100 crore, or imprisonment of up to one year, or both. If a contractor fails to comply with road design standards, the penalty will be a fine of up to one lakh rupees. The central government may increase fines mentioned under the Act every year by up to 10%.
 - (viii) **Taxi aggregators:** The Bill defines aggregators as digital intermediaries or market places which can be used by passengers to connect with a driver for transportation purposes (taxi services). These aggregators will be issued licenses by state Further, they must comply with the Information Technology Act, 2000.
- It is well known that **India is one of the most accident-prone countries** in the world, accounting for **nearly 1,50,000 deaths, 10% of all motor vehicles-related fatalities worldwide**. According to the **2018 report of the World Health Organization**, the highest number of road accidents occur in India worldwide. Even China, the most populous country, is behind us in this regard.
 - As per the report of the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, 2017**; there are about **5 lakh road accidents** occurred in **India every year** in which around 1.5 lakh people are killed. There are around **1.49 lakh people died in 2018** in the road accidents with Uttar Pradesh registering the maximum spike in fatalities.
 - So in order to prevent the menace of road accidents; the central government has amended the **Motor Vehicle 1988** by the **Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Bill 2019**. Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act 2019 has been implemented throughout the country since September 1, 2019. Now the **penalty has been increased 10 times on various violations**.

Challenges:

- Unfortunately, the states who are topping the list of accidents are avoiding the implementation.
- “Chalta Hai” attitude prevails.
- With a Fund already existing to provide compensation for hit and run accidents, **the purpose of the new Accident Fund is unclear**.
- History of corruption may ripe up to the highest.

- State governments will issue licenses to taxi aggregators as per central government guidelines. Currently, state governments determine guidelines for plying of taxis. There could be cases where state taxi guidelines are at variance with the central guidelines on aggregators.
- While the penalties for contravening provisions of the proposed scheme on interim relief to accident victims are specified in the Bill, the offences that would warrant such penalties have not been specified. It may be argued **that imposing penalties without knowing the nature of the offences is unreasonable.**
- States also have concerns about their powers being curtailed in the Motor Vehicle (Amendment) Bill.

Way forward:

- Power of compounding should be given to the police officers.
- Human intervention in deciding the crime/violation of rule should be minimized and proper technology should be put in place
- There is a need for an accountable and professional police force then only the record of traffic fatalities is likely to change.
- States must look at it as an opportunity to do something to reduce road accidents in their states.
- State governments must prepare for an early roll-out of administrative reforms prescribed in the amended law, such as
 - Issuing learner's licences online
 - Recording address changes through an online application
 - Electronic service delivery with set deadlines.
- Traffic police should have an app in which he can link a complaint.
- To eliminate corruption, all applications should be accepted by transport departments online, rather than merely computerising them.
- Campaign involving all stakeholders
- The law should be open for review.
- Protection from harassment for good Samaritans who help accident victims is something the amended law provides, and this needs to be in place.
- There is a need to incorporate the Safe System Approach in all aspects of road design, engineering and construction. This approach takes into account the possibility of human error and ensures that the surrounding environment and infrastructure are designed to save lives.
- Build up a campaign for safe roads for the fit vehicles on road and technology provides an opportunity to implement it.

Conclusion:

- "Alert today, Alive tomorrow". As far as road safety is concerned, **discipline is imperative.** If implemented in right spirit, the law can change road habits of all by not only imposing stiffer penalties, but also trying to **inculcate a sense of responsibility among the citizens.**
- After the passing of this bill Road and transport Minister says that the Bill will provide an **Efficient, Safe and Corruption Free Transport System in the Country.**

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DwQvfcWL4BQ>

4. BAN ON E- CIGARETTES

Introduction:

- The government on Wednesday **banned production, import and sale of e-cigarettes and similar products**, citing health risk to people, especially youth, and an ordinance has been brought in to make it an offence, entailing jail term up to three years as well as fine. First-time violators will face a jail term of up to one year and a fine of Rs one lakh, and for subsequent offences, a jail term of up to three years or a fine of Rs 5 lakh, or both have been prescribed. Storage of electronic-cigarettes shall also be punishable with an imprisonment up to 6 months or fine up to Rs 50,000 or both.
- The decision, taken by the Union cabinet, headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also hit the plans of foreign companies such as Juul Labs and Philip Morris International (PM.N) to enter the Indian market. E-cigarettes promoting trade bodies, users and other stakeholders slammed the government's move to ban

the “alternative” smoking device through the ordinance route, alleging it was a “draconian” step taken in haste to protect the conventional cigarette industry.

Promulgation of the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (production, manufacture, import, export, transport, sale, distribution, storage and advertisement) Ordinance, 2019.

- Any production, manufacturing, import, export, transport, sale (including online sale), distribution or advertisement (including online advertisement) of e-cigarettes shall be a cognizable offence punishable with an imprisonment of up to one year or fine up to Rs. 1 lakh or both for the first offence; and imprisonment of up to three years and fine up to Rs. 5 lakh for a subsequent offence.
- Storage of electronic-cigarettes shall also be punishable with an imprisonment up to 6 months or fine up to Rs 50,000 or both.
- The owners of existing stocks of e-cigarettes on the date of commencement of the Ordinance will have to suo-moto declare and deposit these stocks with the nearest police station.
- The Sub-Inspector of Police has been designated as the Authorized Officer to take action under the Ordinance.
- The Central or State Governments may also designate any other equivalent officer(s) as Authorized Officer for enforcement of the provisions of the Ordinance.

Electronic-cigarettes:

- Electronic-cigarettes are battery-operated devices that produce aerosol by heating a solution containing nicotine, which is the addictive substance in combustible cigarettes.
- These include all forms of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems, Heat Not Burn Products, e-Hookah and the like devices.
- These novel products come with attractive appearances and multiple flavours and their use has increased exponentially and has acquired epidemic proportions in developed countries, especially among youth and children.

Why is there a need to ban?

- No evidence of being a safe product and have a negative impact on health.
- No approval for e-cigarettes in India.
- Unlike the tried and tested nicotine and non-nicotine pharmacotherapies that are known to help people quit tobacco use, the WHO does not endorse e-cigarettes as cessation aids.
- The possibility of tobacco industry interference in tobacco cessation efforts through misinformation about the potential benefits of these products, which are presented as alternatives but in most cases are complementary to the use of conventional tobacco products, also is a present and real possibility.
- Apart from nicotine, e-cigarettes may also be used for delivery of other psychoactive substances.
- Scientifically proven nicotine replacement therapies, without the risks associated with e-cigarettes, exist in the form of gums, lozenges and patches for those willing to quit tobacco use.
- Widespread use and unchecked proliferation of e-cigarettes and the like devices would seriously undermine and derail Government’s efforts to reduce the prevalence of tobacco use.

Harmful effects:

- Considering the highly addictive nature of nicotine; safety concern of flavours in combination with nicotine; risk of use of other psychoactive substances through these devices; initiation of nicotine or psychoactive substances by non-smokers, especially adolescents and youth; dual use of e-cigarettes and conventional cigarettes; scant scientific evidence for use of e-cigarettes as effective tobacco cessation aids; threat to country’s tobacco control efforts; hindrance in achieving the targets envisaged under Sustainable Development Goals, National Monitoring Framework for Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases and National Health Policy, 2017; and in overall interest of public health as envisaged under Article 47 of the Constitution of India, the decision has been taken to prohibit/ban e-cigarettes including all forms of Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems [ENDS), Heat Not Burn Products, e-Hookah and the like devices.

Youngsters ill- informed:

- It is a preventive decision.
- The youngsters are hooked to e- cigarettes and range of Electronic Nicotine Delivery system and the reason being super marketing by a lot of ends selling firms which are now reaching young groups and telling them that it is not harmful.
- They are designing ends in a way to resemble cigarettes which becomes fashionable for young minds to get hooked.
- No evidences that these are harm reduction devices.

Demand to ban tobacco too:

- India is the largest market after China.
- E- cigarettes is not an approved tool of cessation.
- Already actions have been taken against tobacco under COPTA Act.
- Latest GATS survey shows that incidence of cigarettes smoking has come down by 6%.
- 6% of India's population is smoker.

Conclusion:

- E- cigarettes are very harmful and the ban should be welcomed.
- If anything harmful it should never be allowed in the interest of public health.
- 14 states in India and 30 countries have already banned it
- Robust implementation is the key.

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FuUvSz7mX8>