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**WEEKLY
IMPORTANT
ARTICLES**

ForumIAS

- * Right to Privacy a fundamental right
- * Triple Talaq : SC judgement
- * Rohingya Muslims : Stateless citizens
- * Article 35 : How necessary is it?
- * Solid Waste Management

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Polity and Constitution

Right to privacy is a fundamental right now

Privacy is a constitutionally protected right emerging primarily from the guarantee of life and liberty in Article 21 of the Constitution (Important for GS-1 Preparation)

Context:

The nine –judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that individual privacy is intrinsic to life and liberty and an inherent part of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Article 21 of the Constitution.

What is Right to Privacy?

According to Justice Chandrachud, Right to Privacy has different meaning Including i) spatial control; (ii) decisional autonomy; and (iii) informational control.

- **Spatial control** denotes the creation of private spaces.
- **Decisional autonomy** comprehends intimate personal choices such as those governing reproduction as well as choices expressed in public such as faith or modes of dress.
- **Informational control** empowers the individual to use privacy as a shield to retain personal control over information pertaining to the person.

Why Right to Privacy is Important?

- According to Brandeis and Warren Right to Privacy is one of the rights, most valued by civilized men.
- The essence of liberty in a democratic society is the right of individuals to autonomy, to be generally free from state and corporate interference in their lives, which can be ensured only by Right to Privacy.
- People who have no rights of privacy are vulnerable to limitless intrusions by governments, corporations, or anyone else who chooses to interfere in your personal affairs.
- Mutual trust enforced by a legal right between the government and citizens will ensure a progressive society.

What are the constitutional provisions dealing with privacy?

Article 21

- The Constitution of India does not specifically guarantee a “right to privacy”
- However, Article 21 of the Constitution of India states that “No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law”.
- Article 21 interprets that the term ‘life’ includes all those aspects of life which go to make a man’s life meaningful, complete and worth living.

What are the various cases dealt with right to privacy in India?

Cases:

- **M.P. Sharma vs Satish Chandra case (1954)**, which involved a challenge to the constitutionality of search and seizure of documents from a person against whom a FIR was lodged.
- **The Kharak Singh vs State of Uttar Pradesh case (1963)**, in which the petitioner Kharak Singh challenged the constant surveillance on him by U.P police on grounds of violation of article 19 and 21.
- **Gobind Vs State of Madhya Pradesh case (1975)**, where Supreme Court recognized Right to Privacy as implicit in the Right to Life and Personal Liberty guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution. However, court made it clear that this was not an absolute right and reasonable restrictions can be imposed on basis of public interest.
- **ADM Jabalpur Vs Shukla case (1976)** where a constitutional bench shamelessly declared that under emergency provisions no one could seek the assistance of court in India to try and save his liberty, life or limb threatened to be taken by the state.
- **Maneka Gandhi Vs Union of India case (1978)**

What was the Supreme Court's verdict?

- The **Right to Privacy is protected as an intrinsic part of the right to life and personal liberty** under Article 21 of Part III of the Constitution.
- The apex court held that **privacy is a natural right** that inheres in human beings because they are human beings.
- The state does not bestow natural rights on citizens.
- The SC ruled that **Natural rights like privacy exist equally in all individuals** without any discrimination on the basis of class, strata, gender or orientation.
- It also spoke of the **right to marriage, procreation, privacy of home and the right to be left alone as other facet of privacy.**
- The apex court also ruled that dignity cannot exist without privacy. Both reside within the inalienable values of life, liberty and freedom which the Constitution has recognized.
- The court also ruled that **privacy is the ultimate expression of the sanctity of the individual.** It is a constitutional value which straddles across the spectrum of fundamental rights and protects for the individual a zone of choice and self-determination.

What are the various features of Right to Privacy?

- Privacy is a **constitutionally protected right** emerging primarily from the guarantee of life and liberty in Article 21 of the Constitution.
- It includes the **preservation of personal intimacies, sanctity of family life, marriage, procreation, the home and sexual orientation.**
- Privacy connotes a right to be left alone. It safeguards individual autonomy and recognizes one's ability to control vital aspects of his/her life.
- Privacy is **not an absolute right**, but any invasion must be based on legality, need and proportionality.
- **Informational privacy is a facet of this right.** Dangers to this can originate from both state and non-state actors.

What were the various arguments involved?

1- Arguments by government:

- The centre had argued against the recognition of privacy as a fundamental right.
- The centre had assured the court that privacy would be protected through parliamentary statutes.

2- Arguments by Court:

- The court chided the Centre for describing right to privacy as an “elitist construct.”
- Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal had argued that privacy was the concern of a few, while schemes like Aadhaar, which require citizens to part with their biometric details to the state, reduce corruption and benefit millions of poor.

Right to privacy is an absolute right or not?

- The court ruled that Privacy is not an absolute right.
- The government can introduce a law which “intrudes” into privacy for public and legitimate state reasons.
- But an individual can challenge this law in any of the constitutional courts of the land for violation of his/her fundamental right to privacy.
- There are many grounds on which government can impose restrictions.

What are the various grounds on which restrictions can be imposed?

- The right to privacy can be restricted by procedure established by law and this procedure would have to be just, fair and reasonable.
- Reasonable restrictions can be imposed on the right to privacy on the following grounds:
- Interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- The security of the State.
- Friendly relations with foreign State.
- Public order, decency or morality.
- In relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence; (Article 19(2) of the Constitution of India, 1950).
- The right to privacy can be restricted if there is an important countervailing interest which is superior to it.
- The right to privacy can be restricted if there is a compelling state interest to be served.
- The protection available under the right to privacy may not be available to a person who voluntarily introduces him- or herself into controversy.

What implications the ruling would have on different sections?

The Supreme Court ruling will impact the different sections of society:

Implications on Aadhaar:

- Aadhar initiative requires collection of personal data from residents of India, and this has resulted in controversy regarding its potential to be missed.
- The SC ruling will impact daily lives of the people since it has implications for matters ranging from collection and sharing of personal data to the government’s move to make Aadhaar mandatory for benefits of social welfare scheme.

- A five-judge bench, which referred the matter to the nine-judge bench, would decide whether the scheme is a reasonable restriction on the fundamental right to privacy.
- The apex court would test whether the purpose of collecting the personal data is a “legitimate state interest” beneficial for the public.
- The Judgment also may open the Aadhaar-programme account number linkage issue.
- The apex court’s judgement would also have an effect on a pending petition filed by parliamentarian Jairam Ramesh, challenging the passage of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and other Subsidies, Benefits, and Services) Act 2016 on March 2016 as a Money bill.

Implications on rights of gay community (Section 377):

Explained in the next article

Implications on Internet and financial firms using personal data:

- The apex Court also touched upon several key facets of privacy such as informational privacy in the digital age and urged the government to quickly bring in a data protection law to deal with these fast-changing technological developments.
- The judgment may have a bearing on the pending challenge to a 2016 **contract entered into between Whatsapp and Facebook in 2016** to share user information including messages, pictures, and videos, etc.
- There are potential implications here for data collected by firms in finance and ecommerce, and by app developers.
- Government must put in place a robust regime for a data protection. It must bring a balance between individual interest’s legitimate state concerns.

On Society:

- The verdict can also impact restrictions on **right to convert and choice of food**.
- Such laws and rules will be more vulnerable to legal challenge.
- India has a number of state-level laws against conversion and several states have restricted on animal slaughter.

On Government:

- The broad implication is that the **government cannot frame any policy or law that completely takes away the citizen’s right to privacy**.
- It can only place reasonable restrictions on limited grounds such as national sovereignty and security, public order, decency, etc as mentioned in Article 19(2) of the Constitution.

Civil liberties:

- **The verdict strikes down the states power to suspend civil liberties during emergencies**.
- By doing so, **it overruled the Emergency era** ruling made in the ADM Jabalpur case that had said that State suspend and take away the liberty of citizens during a proclamation of Emergency.

LGBT community cheerful after Supreme Court ruling on right to privacy

(The Supreme Court recently said that right to privacy and the protection of sexual orientation lie at the core of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Articles 14, 15 and 21 of the Constitution.)

Context:

The Section 377 of IPC has been under discussion after recent Supreme Court verdict on the “Right to Privacy”.

What was Supreme Court verdict on homosexuality in the privacy judgment?

- The Supreme Court, in its judgment on privacy, said that **right to privacy and the protection of sexual orientation lie at the core of the fundamental rights** guaranteed by **Articles 14, 15 and 21**.
- The court noted that **sexual orientation is an essential attribute of privacy**, and no individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Some of the important statements by SC are as follows: -
 1. "A minuscule fraction of the country's population constitutes lesbians, gays, bisexuals or transgender is not a sustainable basis to deny the right to privacy,"
 2. "The purpose of elevating certain rights to the stature of guaranteed fundamental rights is to insulate their exercise from the disdain of majorities, whether legislative or popular,"
- **The court held the 2014 verdict upholding section 377 of the Indian Penal Code is flawed.**

What was the judgement?

- The nine -judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court on Thursday ruled that **individual privacy is intrinsic to life and liberty** and an inherent part of the fundamental rights enshrined in the Article 21 of the Constitution.
- The **ruling has a bearing on the constitutional validity of Section 377** of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) which criminalises acts “against the order of nature.

What is section 377 of IPC?

- Section 377, titled “unnatural offences” was enacted by the British after the first War of Independence in 1857 but came into force in 1862.
- It says, “Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to fine.
- Homosexual intercourse was made a **criminal offense under Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860.**
- **Prior to that, sexual activities, including amongst homosexuals, were not penalised in India.**

What is LGBT?

- LGBT stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender and along with heterosexual they describe people's sexual orientation or gender identity.

What implications the ruling would have on Section 377?

- The nine judges unanimously overruled the two earlier judgements of the apex court that right to privacy is not protected under the Constitution.
- Five judges including Chief Justice Khehar, held that sexual orientation is part of a person's fundamental right to privacy.
- The judgment gives a new lease of life to the prolonged fight to decriminalize Section 377 of the IPC, a colonial-era provision criminalizing consensual sexual acts of LGBT adults in private.
- **The judgment has made it clear that LGBT citizens like anyone else enjoy not just the right to privacy, but right to equality, right to free expression and right to life.**

What are some important previous developments in section 377?

- In 2009, the Delhi High Court decision in Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of Delhi found Section 377 and other legal prohibitions against private, adult, consensual, and non-commercial same-sex conduct to be in direct violation of fundamental rights provided by the Indian Constitution.
- On 11 December 2013, the Supreme Court set aside the 2009 Delhi High Court order decriminalizing consensual homosexual activity within its jurisdiction.
- On January 28, 2014, Supreme Court dismissed the review Petition filed by Central Government, NGO Naz Foundation and several others, against its December 11 verdict on Section 377 of IPC.
- On December 18, 2015, Shashi Tharoor, a member of the Indian National Congress party, introduced the bill for the decriminalization of Section 377, but the bill was rejected by the house by a vote of 71-24.
- On February 2, 2016, the Supreme Court decided to review criminalization of homosexual activity.

What need to be done to ensure LGBT Community rights?

- Most people gained independence from the British, the LGBT community, and gay men in particular, in India have remained chained to Section 377.
- It is high time that the chains are broken and a significant population gets rid of Section 377 so that gay men and the LGBT community can live their lives with dignity.
- In the process of revision of section 377, the Supreme Court (SC) may draw inspiration from the recent verdict of primacy of privacy which has been recognized as one of the Fundamental Rights.
- India as the world's largest democracy may also take inspiration from the world's youngest democracy Nepal - which has included non-discriminatory laws for the LGBT community in its constitution.
- With this step, Nepal became the first ever Asian country and third country in the world after South Africa and Ecuador to provide full protection to the LGBT people in its constitution.

SC ruling on Triple Talaq

Context

- The latest ruling on instant talaq completely and unconditionally invalidates talaq-e-bid'a and renders it bad in law.
- The Koranic procedure of talaq is the only way by which a Muslim husband will be able to divorce his wife from now on.

About Triple Talaq:

- Triple Talaq refers to a process of divorce whereby the husband utters the word "Talaq" thrice in one sitting thus getting out of the marriage contract.
- This practice is controversial and has different interpretation among different sects of Islam.
- This practice has been legally recognized in many countries of the world like Saudi Arabia.
- At the same time, this practice has been banned by law in many countries of the world such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Tunisia, Indonesia, Algeria, Iran, Iraq etc.
- This practice is valid in Sunnis only, while most shia nations recognized it to be invalid.
- However, this practice of Triple Talaq is still valid in India.
- Attorney general, Mukul Rohatgi, who argued that the only way gender justice could be secured for Muslim women was to enact a law and bring all talaq (not just triple talaq) under judicial scrutiny.

The minority opinion

- They declared talaq-e-bid'a to be an essential part of the Hanafi faith and gave it protection under Article 25(1).
- This opinion is based on the flawed theological premise that a religious custom which has been in vogue for several centuries automatically becomes integral to the denomination that practises it.
- One fails to understand how after having declared instant triple divorce a fundamental right under Part III of the Constitution the judges could direct the state to bring a law against it.
- The minority view also failed to appreciate the fact that hadees quoted by the AIMPLB were comparatively less authentic than those cited in High Court judgments relied upon by the petitioners which were from the six most authentic Sunni hadees books (Sihah Sitta).

What are the achievements from the judgment?

- The biggest achievement is harmonization of constitutional equality with Koranic egalitarianism.
- It was done by endorsing the Koranic law of talaq mentioned in Shamim Ara case and declaring talaq-e-bid'a to be "manifestly arbitrary" and violative of Article 14 because it allows a Muslim man to break the marriage "capriciously and whimsically" without attempting to save it through reconciliation.
- On these grounds, Section 2 of the 1937 Act was struck down as being void to the extent that it recognizes and enforces instant talaq.

Bad theology

- The purpose of the Shariat Act was to declare Shariah as the "rule of decision."
- Any practice that goes against the Shariah cannot be legally protected.
- Talaq-e-bid'a falls outside the Shariah because it goes against its primary source, the Koran. Therefore, what is bad in theology is bad in law as well.

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Constitutional protection to personal law

- The personal laws of all communities in India enjoy constitutional protection.
- As these laws are sourced from religious scriptures in most cases, the Apex Court cannot but uphold the right of individuals and groups to profess, practise and propagate everything that forms an essential part of their religious scripture, subject to the provisions of Article 25(1).
- It may be pointed out here that the Koranic procedure of talaq that was implicitly upheld in this judgment does not in any way violate any constitutional values.

Implications of the verdict

- The biggest goal attainment for Muslim women is the realization that talaq-e-bid'a in any of his manifestations will not dissolve the marriage.
- It renders redundant not just halala but the incorporation of a platitudinous advisory against instant talaq in the nikahnama.
- There is also scope now to amend the 1937 Act, even without designating it as statutory law, to exclude talaq-e-bid'a from the definition of the word "talaq" mentioned in Section 2, and make the Koranic procedure of talaq gender-neutral.
- Indeed, all provisions of the Shariah mentioned in the 1937 Act can be similarly redefined to bring them in conformity with the humanitarian teachings of the Koran and the Prophet.
- This judgment will also encourage legally and theologically informed Muslim intellectuals to establish mediation centres across India under the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanism to help Muslim couples amicably resolve their marital disputes.

Urgent requisite to lookout for Rohingyas

Context

- In Myanmar/Burma, the Rohingya are living with very limited access to basic services and almost negligible livelihood opportunities due to strict movement restrictions.
- The statelessness of and the discrimination against the Rohingya must urgently be addressed.

Who are the Rohingyas?

- The Rohingya are an **ethnic Muslim minority group living primarily in Myanmar's western Rakhine state.**
- They practice a Sufi-inflected variation of Sunni Islam.
- The estimated one million Rohingya in Myanmar account for nearly a third of Rakhine's population.
- **The Rohingya differ from Myanmar's dominant Buddhist groups ethnically, linguistically, and religiously.**

What is the crisis?

- The Rohingya crisis is a human rights crisis with serious humanitarian consequences.
- The unfair policies of the Myanmar government in Rakhine state have resulted hundreds of thousands of Rohingya to flee since the late 1970s.

- In 2012, Violence broke out, when a group of Rohingya men were accused of raping and killing a Buddhist woman.
- Groups of Buddhist nationalists burned Rohingya homes and killed more than 280 people, displacing tens of thousands of people.
- Since 2012, the region's displaced population has been forced to take shelter in filthy refugee camps.
- On October 9 2016, three border posts on the border of Myanmar and Bangladesh were attacked by a group of Islamic militants leading to the death of nine policemen.
- The attack, that was reported to have been carried out by Rohingya Solidarity Organisation, was soon followed by a counter terrorism insurgency carried out by the Tatmadaw (Burmese military).
- The conflict intensified on August 25, 2017, when Muslim insurgents of Rohingya origin attacked security posts in Rakhine.

Why the issue of ethnicity for Rohingya?

- The Rohingya trace their origins in the region to the fifteenth century when thousands of Muslims came to the former Arakan Kingdom.
- Majority of them belonged to Chittagong in present day neighbouring country, Bangladesh and were brought over by the British to work as farm labourers.
- The massive rate at which they entered Arakan was a cause of great resentment among the local population, among whom a strong sense of nationalism developed.
- Many others arrived during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Bengal and the Rakhine territory were governed by colonial rule as part of British India.
- Since independence in 1948, successive governments in Burma, renamed Myanmar in 1989, have refuted the Rohingya's historical claims and denied the group recognition as one of the country's 135 ethnic groups.
- Both the Myanmar government and the Rakhine state's dominant ethnic Buddhist group, known as the Rakhine, reject the use of the label "Rohingya."

Myanmar government's attitude towards Rohingyas

- Rohingyas have been stripped of their citizenship during the rule of military Junta.
- They lack political representation, which means these communities are unable to effect the political processes, leading to careless government towards Rohingyas.
- Government policies, including restrictions on marriage, family planning, employment, education, religious choice, and freedom of movement have institutionalized systemic discrimination against the ethnic group.
- Widespread poverty, weak infrastructure, and a lack of employment opportunities exacerbate the cleavage between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya.

Plight of the tribe

- The Rohingya are largely identified as illegal Bengali immigrants, despite the fact that many Rohingya have resided in Myanmar for centuries.
- Their plight has been worsening by the responses of many of Myanmar's neighbors, which have been slow to take in refugees for fear of a migrant influx they feel incapable of handling.

What is the attitude to Rohingyas among countries of the region?

- **Thailand:** Its navy says that it has given aid to migrant boats in its waters and has indicated it may allow refugee camps on its shores. But it is turning boats away and does not want permanent settlers.
- **Malaysia:** This is the choice of destination for most Rohingya travellers because it is predominantly Muslim and short of unskilled labourers. But Malaysia has ordered its navy to repel them.
- **Bangladesh:** Sometimes allows them to live in camps on its south-eastern border and sometimes sends them back to Myanmar. It is estimated there are currently about 200,000 Rohingyas living in refugee camps, many in squalid conditions.
- **Indonesia:** Has made it clear they are not welcome, turning away boatloads of migrants. It has accepted those rescued by fishermen but has warned them not to rescue any more. A group of migrants who made it ashore in early May may be expelled, the government has warned.

Rohingyas in India

- There are an estimated 36,000 Rohingya Muslims in India today, concentrated in the seven states of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir and Delhi.
- India has been receiving Rohingya refugees and allowing them to settle in different parts of the country over the years particularly after the communal violence in Rakhine state in 2012.
- In December 2012, External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid visited Rakhine state and donated \$1 million for relief in the violence hit state.
- However, Delhi has not made any official pronouncement.
- Delhi stance on the Rohingyas is firm; they are welcome as long as the Rohingyas obtain a valid visa and have a refugee card.
- Without a refugee card, the Rohingyas can't claim land, health benefits or education for their kids.
- According to a Reuters report, only 9000 of the 36,000 Rohingyas who live in India are registered.

Why such distant stand by India?

- India has not involved itself so far in resolving the plight of Rohingyas with its neighbor.
- With India having no solution or expertise to offer, it is a good reason to stay away.
- India has real security interests which depend on the goodwill of the Myanmar regime.
- In 2015, for instance, following an attack by Naga rebels on a security convoy in Manipur, Indian forces carried out a covert raid across the border - with the quiet nod from Yangon. Delhi does not want that trust to be eroded.
- A new Muslim militant minority across India's eastern border poses a severe security threat to the stability in Bangladesh and, in turn, across Assam and northeast India.
- Several thousands of Rohingya refugees already reside in India and with support from activists they could disrupt Delhi's relations with Myanmar.

What stake does India have in resolving this crisis?

- A stable and democratic Myanmar will naturally gravitate towards New Delhi.
- The Rohingya crisis, if it remains unsettled, can become a path toward radicalization and pose a greater security threat for India.

- There are reports of increasing radicalization among sections of the Rohingya community.
- A December 2016 report by the International Crisis Group spoke precisely about this challenge and highlighted how rights violations can lead to radicalization.

What should be done?

- There is not much that India can do to help Rohiyangas.
- The escalating violence in Rakhine State can best be solved by allowing access to international observers and humanitarian aid
- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) needs to abandon its consensus and non-interference approach and perceive the ongoing problem as a regional problem.
- It would require some ASEAN disciplining of Myanmar, the time for that has arrived.
- An independent international investigation is needed to address the grave abuses being reported out of the country and to deter further abuses.

SC to hear Rohingya plea for help

- The Supreme Court on 1st September 2017 agreed to hear an urgent plea made by two Rohingya Muslim immigrants.
- The plea is against the government's proposed move to deport their 40,000-strong refugee community back to their native Myanmar.
- The two immigrants say that the Centre's move to deport the refugees to Myanmar violated the constitutional guarantee that the Indian state should protect the life and liberty of every human being, whether citizen or not.
- The immigrants added that The proposed deportation is contrary to the constitutional protections of Article 14 (equality), Article 21 (right to life) and Article 51(c) (respect for international law and treaty obligations) of the Constitution.
- Most importantly if the refugees are deported, they may be executed.

Legal and constitutional status of Refugees in India

- While law and order is a State subject under the Indian Constitution, international relations and international borders are under the exclusive purview of the Union government.
- **India has not signed the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention on the Status of Refugees, or its 1967 Protocol.**
- **1967 Protocol** stipulates the rights and services host states must provide refugees.
- Provisions of the Constitution in India mainly govern the law relating to citizenship or nationality.
- The Constitution of India provides for **single citizenship** for the entire country. The provisions relating to citizenship are contained in **Articles 5 to 11 in Part-II of the Constitution of Indian.**
- Indian laws do not even mention the term 'refugee', there are no clearly defined rights and duties for refugees.
- India's approach towards refugee differs case by case basis.

Refugees and related terms?

Refugees: 1951 United Nations Convention defines 'refugee' as "A person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)

Those persons, who are fleeing persecution and human rights violations from one region of the country and have sought refuge in another region of the same country, fall under this category. Such persons cannot be categorized as 'refugees' as they have not crossed any international border.

Migrant: A migrant is basically anyone who moves to a different place, within his country or outside its borders.

Asylum seeker

- An asylum seeker is an individual **who is seeking international protection**. In countries with individualised procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it.
- **Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker.**

Stateless person: A stateless person is a person who, under national laws, does not have the legal bond of nationality with any State.

In Constitution, a range of 'special provisions' for states other than J&K too

Context

Article 370 that grants special autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) has always been debated. However, Jammu & Kashmir is not the only state for which special provisions have been laid down in the Indian Constitution.

What is Article 370?

- Article 370 **provides temporary provisions** to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, **granting it special autonomy**.
- The **most prominent among the "special privileges"** available to J&K is the **ban on non-residents from acquiring property** in the state and voting in the legislative Assembly elections under article 35A.

Why Article 370 is so much in debate?

- The special status accorded to Jammu & Kashmir in the Constitution has **prevented its “full integration”** into the Indian Union.
- **Ban or non-resident to acquire property** and voting in the legislature, both the privileges are under challenge in the Supreme Court in a case against the constitutional validity of Article 35A.

What is Article 35A?

- Art 35A, which **empowered the J&K Constitution to define “permanent residents”** of the state, is an offshoot of Art 370 of the Indian Constitution.
- It was added to the Constitution through The Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order, 1954, issued by the President under Art 370.

Why was Article 370 incorporated in the Constitution?

- In 1947, Jammu & Kashmir negotiated the **terms and conditions of its entry into the Indian Union**.
- It acceded to the Union on Defence, Foreign Affairs and Communication, but wanted its own Constitution, to be drafted by its own Constituent Assembly.
- Art 370, which determines the contours of J&K's relations with the Centre and exists as the constitutional cord between J&K and New Delhi.
- It was introduced in the Indian Constitution after Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and J&K Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah negotiated it for five months between May and October 1949.

Is J&K, the only state to be granted with such special provisions?

- **J&K is not the only state that has been granted with special provisions.**
- India Constitution has laid down a large number of safeguards **to as many as 11 other states.**
- Part XXI of the Indian Constitution, ‘Temporary Transitional and Special Provision’, includes, apart from Article 370 – Temporary Provisions with respect to the State of Jammu and Kashmir – special provisions for 11 other states, listed under Articles 371, 371A to 371H and 371J.

Is Article 370 different from Article 371, 371 A-H and 371 J? If yes, how?

- The special provisions laid down in Art 371, 371A-H, and 371J **are not as far reaching as Art 370.**
- One important difference between Articles 370 and 371, and Articles 371A-H and 371J, is that while the **latter set of provisions were incorporated into the Constitution by Parliament through amendments under Art 368** (which lays down the “power of Parliament to amend the Constitution and procedure therefor”), **Articles 370 and 371 have been part of the Constitution from the time of its commencement** on January 26, 1950.

What does the grant of such special provisions imply?

- The existence of these provisions shows that **along with J&K, other princely states, too, negotiated the terms and conditions of their entry** into the Union, or sought special constitutional protections in view of their unique needs and conditions.
- Each of these constitutional provisions is rooted in historical reasons.

The role of press in strengthening democracy in India

Context:

Gauri Lankesh, a senior Kannada journalist known for her criticism of Hindu extremism, was recently shot dead.

Introduction:

- The killing again raised the question on freedom of press and challenges that Indian press is facing in present scenario.

What is Freedom of press?

- In India, freedom of the press has been treated as part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by **Article 19(1) (a)** of the Constitution.
- The Indian constitution guarantees the “**freedom of speech and expression**” as a fundamental right of every citizen of India.

Why freedom of press is necessary?

- It checks on Government and Administrators
- The duty of a free press is to raise voice against any social ill or wrong.
- It works towards **strengthening the sovereignty and integrity** of a nation
- It helps in **building an environment** where the people of the country can cultivate unity and harmony.
- **A free press is fundamental to a democratic society.**
- The press provides the platform for a multiplicity of voices to be heard.
- At national, regional and local level, **it is the public's watchdog, activist and guardian** as well as educator, entertainer and contemporary chronicler.
- In India, the media have played a key role in **providing information** to the people about social and economic evils.

India's ranking in Press Freedom Index

- In its annual World Press Freedom Index, Reporters without Borders has ranked India at 136 of 180 countries.
- The country's ranking has slipped by three spots from last year's 133rd ranking.

Why India has slipped in ranking?

- Journalists are on the target of online smear campaigns by the most radical nationalists.
- The journalists who are critical of government are being gagged by prosecutions
- Some prosecutors invoking Section 124a of the penal code, threatening to invoke anti-sedition act.
- Journalists are being murdered, and with this life-threatening environment, Indian journalists are being forced into self-censorship
- Other factors which have resulted in India's low ranking on the list are the cut-down of internet in Jammu & Kashmir and limited internet coverage in sensitive areas.

What are the criticisms that Indian press is facing today?

Press is the fourth pillar of democracy, but in the largest democracy of the world it is facing serious challenges.

- **Freedom of press:** Instances like in the case of NDTV shutdown for reporting during Pathankot attack, weak whistle –blower protection act, defamation suits etc. have restricted the freedom of press.
- **Paid News,** a nexus between media persons and politicians seems to have taken firm roots in India.
- The Election Commission is reported to have identified more than 1,400 cases of paid news between 2009 and 2013.
- **Biasness of reporters,** editors etc. have dented the image of news channels and newspapers.
- **Corporate and political lobbying and ownership.**
- **Yellow journalism:** Unnecessary sensationalisation of issues to fetch TRP meddles with the real content of news.
- **Weak regulation:** only a self-regulating body like PCI (Press Council of India) has little power or legislative backup to regulate the press.
- **Advent of social media;** Competition for instant and quick news and reporting without first checking the facts.
- **Media trials:** Often media declares the verdict immediately after an allegation. This is contempt of court and also violates right to reputation of an accused who later gets evicted.

What are the legal provisions related to freedom of press?

- In Romesh Thapar v. State of Madras, the Supreme Court acknowledged, “Freedom of speech and of the press lay at the foundation of all democratic organisations”,
- In India, freedom of the press has been treated as part of the freedom of speech and expression guaranteed under the constitution vide Brij Bhushan and Another vs the State of Delhi, AIR 1950 and Sakal papers(P) Ltd vs Union of India, AIR 1962

What are the restrictions available on Press?

- The restrictions that apply to the “freedom of speech and expression” also apply to the “freedom of press and media”.
- **Article 19(2),** provides reasonable restrictions on the following grounds:
- In the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- Security of the state, public order, decency, or morality, or in relation to contempt of courts, defamation,
- Freedom of press is not absolute in India.

What need to be done for securing freedom of press?

- The Supreme Court is the “Upholder and Protector of the Constitution. It is essential that proper reform is brought about by way of Legislation or Precedent by the SC to ensure the legitimacy of news and the “Freedom of the Press”.
- A regulatory body comprising both of media persons and government bodies should be established to give media a fair play and check its arbitrariness at the same time.
- Reform should come from within the media especial from senior editors and journalists. They should start exposing cases of fake news, conflict of interest, making the working of press more transparent.
- The legislative backup for PCI to give it more power for regulation is also required.

Conclusion:

- In a developing country like India the press have a great responsibility to fight against backward ideas like casteism and communalism, and other social evils.

- Large section of the people in India are backward and ignorant, so it is necessary that modern ideas are brought to them and their backwardness removed so that they become part of enlightened India. The free and fearless press plays a key role here.

Behind SC verdict on places of worship, Article on taxpayers' money and religion

Context:

- During the Gujarat riots of 2002, 567 places of worship, including 545 of Muslims, were damaged.
- In a legal battle on the compensation to be paid, the **Supreme Court last week upheld a state government compensation scheme while setting aside a Gujarat High Court order**, which too had held the state liable to pay compensation.

Background:

- The **legal battle began in 2003** with a petition in the high court by an organisation called Islamic Relief Committee, Gujarat (IRCG).
- Following reports of the National Human Rights Commission on the state government's alleged failure to protect life and properties; IRCG filed its petition seeking compensation for "restoration of the damaged, desecrated and destroyed places of worship".
- **IRCG stressed the principle of *res ipsa loquitur***, which infers negligence on the ground that the incident concerned would not have happened without negligence.
- It contended that if this principle were applied, the government was liable to pay compensation for the loss in view of "**principles of public wrong**".

High court ruling:

- **In 2012, the high court ruled** that it was the government's duty to restore the damaged places of worship, irrespective of the religion, to its original position as it existed at the time of destruction,"
- The **court directed the government to collect the money spent on restoration** from the persons found guilty of the destruction.

What was the High Court's judgment?

- **The state government scheme sets a limit of Rs. 50,000** for each damaged structure, and certain conditions for eligibility.
- The **High Court verdict**, said, it was the government's duty to restore all the damaged places of worship to their original position, and asked it to collect the amount from those found guilty of the destruction.
- While the high court order did not set a limit for the compensation, it tasked principal district judges with fixing the amount.

Supreme Court verdict:

- The Supreme Court ruled that a "**substantial part of taxpayers' money cannot be granted for repairing religious structures**" under Article 27, which prohibits promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.

Compensation amount:

- The **high court appointed the state's principal district judges** as special officers for deciding the amount of compensation for restoration of the religious places in the respective districts.
- The **state government accepted the recommendations** of a committee it had set up.
- It **passed a resolution in 2013** to pay ex gratia assistance up to Rs 50,000 to all religious places damaged or destroyed during the riots – at par with assistance provided for damaged/destroyed houses – subject to certain conditions, including that the place should not be unauthorised or located in the middle of road, and that an FIR should have been lodged at the time of the incident.
- **In October 2013, the government filed an affidavit in the Supreme Court** and informed it that it had issued a notification on compensation, and that it was not implemented since the matter was pending.
- ICRG, for its part, filed an affidavit stating that the principal judges, as directed by the high court, had arrived at the conclusion that the “quantum of compensation, payment up to Rs. 50,000 only as against the quantified quantum, would be travesty of justice”.

Article 27

- In its petition, **the state challenged the inference** that the properties were damaged due to “failure or inability or negligence on the part of the state”.
- “The state has not failed in fulfilling its constitutional obligation of protecting the liberty and dignity of its entire people.
- The state did its best with available resources to protect the lives of its people,”
- **Another point the government raised, citing Article 27**, was “whether public money, collected from taxpayers, can be spent on repairing religious structures”.
- **Article 27 says, “No person shall be compelled to pay any taxes**, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination.”
- The Supreme Court cited the verdicts in Prafull Goradia v Union of India (2012) and Archbishop Raphael Cheenath S V D vs State of Orissa (2009).
- In the first case, the two-judge bench has opined that object of Article 27 is to maintain secularism.
- The article would be violated if the substantial part of any tax collected in India, were to be utilized for promotion or maintenance of any particular religious denomination.

Economy

RBI's Demonetization data report

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) Annual Report reveals that **almost all demonetized notes have been returned to the central bank.**

What does the report says?

- The RBI, in its annual report said that as on June 30, 2017, **banks had received Rs. 15.28 lakh crore, out of the total Rs. 15.44 lakh crore** worth of old Rs. 500 and Rs. 1,000 notes that were withdrawn from the system on November 2016.
- The number does not include the old notes with District Central Cooperative Banks.
- It also does not include the notes within Nepal.
- According to RBI's report, the total **currency in circulation is about Rs. 2 lakh crore short** of the pre-demonetisation period.
- This is partly due to the increase in focus on printing of lower denomination currency notes.

What is the current controversy?

- With nearly 99 % of banned Rs. 1,000 and Rs. 500 notes back with the RBI, the question is now being raised about the economic rationale and success of demonetization.
- Now the major concern many experts are raising is that demonetization may hurt the economy in short as well as medium term.

What is the meaning of demonetization?

- **Demonetization is the act of stripping a currency unit** of its status as legal tender.
- It occurs whenever there is a change of national currency.
- Demonetization is necessary whenever there is a change of national currency. The old unit of currency must be retired and replaced with a new currency unit.
- The opposite of demonetization is remonetisation where a form of payment is restored as legal tender.
- **Demonetization can also be referred to as the process of moving people from a cash-based system to a cashless system**

Background:

- On November 8, 2016, Prime Minister announced that Rs 500 and Rs 1000 denomination notes will become invalid.
- The government introduced new notes of Rs 2,000 and Rs 500.
- **There was also no change effected in any other form of currency exchange** like cheque, Demand draft (DD), payments made through credit cards and debit cards.
- The move was taken with the intention to curb the menace of black money, fake notes and corruption by reducing the amount of cash available in the system.

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Was this the first time the government has introduced demonetization?

- This was **not the first time** the government is following the policy of demonetisation of high-value currency.
- The **first instance** of demonetisation by the government was implemented **in 1946** when the RBI demonetised Rs 1,000 and Rs 10,000 notes.
- Later, higher denomination bank notes (Rs 1000, Rs 5000 and Rs 10000) were re-introduced in 1954.
- **Morarji Desai government demonetised these notes in 1978.**
- According to data provided by RBI Rs 10,000 note was printed in 1938 and 1954 and was subsequently demonetised in 1946 and 1978 respectively.

How the ground realities are different from the stated aims of demonetization?

Black Money:

Objective of demonetization:

- By withdrawing the high currency notes, the government had reckoned that those **holding unaccounted cash or black money would** not deposit in the banking system, thereby hitting this hoard.
- The expectation was that notes worth over Rs 4 lakh crore would not return to the central bank.

In reality:

- **Nearly 99 per cent of banned notes back with the RBI.**

Digital Transactions:

Objectives of demonetisation:

- One of the aims was to bring about a **shift from a cash based economy** towards more digital or electronic forms of transactions.
- After demonetization, there was a spurt in electronic transactions through prepaid wallets, debit and credit cards, NEFT (National Electronic Fund Transfer).
- From 671.49 million transactions in November last year, it rose to 957.50 million in December at the end of the government's deadline on cash withdrawal.
- July data shows that the number of transactions was 862.38 million, lower than in December.

In reality:

- There is **no evidence of expansion of digitization in any major economy through demonetization.**

Cash in circulation:

Objectives of demonetization:

- One of the objectives was that the **quantum of cash operating in the system must gradually come down.**
- According to the RBI data, notes issued decreased by 11.79% to Rs 15.06 lakh crore in June 2017, from Rs 17.07 lakh crore in June 2016.
- As digitalisation increases and the amount of cash circulating in the system declines, the cost of printing currency for both the RBI and the government will come down too.

In reality:

- The RBI spent Rs 7,965 crore to print new currency notes from July 2016 to June 2017, more than twice the Rs 3,421 crore in the same period the previous year.
- **India's cash to GDP ratio** an indicator of the amount of cash used in the economy is around 12 to 13 per cent, much higher than major economies including the US, the UK and Euro area but below that of Japan (about 18 per cent).

Anonymity of cash owners:

Objectives:

- One of the arguments from government's side has been that the **anonymity about ownership of cash operating in the system has ended**, with more people depositing it in the banking system.
- The government claims that it now has details of all those who had deposited cash during demonetization period.
- One of the objectives of demonetization was to put identity on the cash holdings in the economy.

In reality:

- The Income tax department, through its "Operation Clean Money" project launched in January, has tracked 13.33 lakh accounts with cash deposits of around Rs 2.89 lakh crore, and received over **9 lakh responses** so far.
- If the Income tax department is able to prove that a **good proportion of this was not legitimate money**, the outcome could meet this objective.

Tax base:

Objectives:

- One of the stated objective of demonetization was to **increase the tax base**.
- For this, personal income tax return has increased by over 25% as those dealing in cash were compelled to deposit it in banks.
- According to the e-filed ITR forms in FY 2011-12, the number of individuals who an e-filed form was up 81.5% over the previous year.
- In 2012-13, it was up 30.75%.

In reality:

- India's tax-to-GDP ratio is at 16.6% is well below the emerging market economies (EME) and OECD averages of about 21% and 34% respectively.
- The real measure would be not just increasing the number of those filling income tax, but also how it translates into higher revenues.
- More people may be added to the returns-filing list but **if significant number of these people have income below the taxable limit, the gain will be limited**.

Mutual funds, etc.

- **According to the government estimates, the savings in the form of investment** in equity mutual funds, life insurance premiums and other products have risen after demonetization.
- According to the government, assets under management of mutual funds up 54% by June-end 2017 from March 2016.

In reality:

- The growth in mutual funds, however, has been a story over the past few years.

- Assets under management of the Indian mutual funds industry have risen six-fold over the last decade, with the Systematic Investment Plan gaining popularity in the last couple of years.
- In a low-inflation scenario, investors used to higher returns on safer bank deposits have shifted to mutual funds and other instruments, with deposit rates sliding.

RBI payout:

- The RBI transferred a surplus of only Rs 30,659 crore this year to the government, compared to Rs 65,876 crore last year.
- Over the last few years, such transfers have given a huge boost to the government as these non-tax revenue receipts help bridge its fiscal deficit.

In reality:

- After demonetization, huge printing and other costs have been blamed for eating into the central bank's earnings.
- The lower payout was also because the RBI transferred Rs 13,140 crore towards its Contingency Fund, unlike in the last three years when there was hardly any bolstering of this reserve.
- The RBI had to incur a cost on carrying out reverse repo auctions in the post-demonetisation period to absorb excess liquidity when banks were flooded with cash deposits.
- The RBI had to pay banks, which in turn hit its interest income, besides appreciation of the rupee which would have impacted the value of its assets.

What are the consequences of demonetization?

1- Positive consequences:

- The growth in the direct tax base.
- The switch in the financial holdings of households from cash to bank deposits
- The increased use of digital payment

2- Negative consequences:

- The main negative economic consequence of demonetisation has been the disruption of unorganized supply chains that are dependent on cash transactions.
- Demonetisation lead to decline in economic growth to a three year low of 5.7 per cent.
- RBI report had revealed that nearly 99 per cent of the scrapped currency notes had come back to the banks, and it would become 100 per cent if cash in the pipeline is accounted for.

How the government has planned to track evaders?

Post demonetization, although it is not completely clear how the government is planning to check and track tax evaders, the following steps have been taken to achieve the same:

- Basic identification is made mandatory for any exchange or deposit of cash. Moreover, all the deposits made over Rs. 2.5 lakh will be directly reported to the IT department by the bank concerned.
- In order to check the conversion of black money into gold or jewellery, government has asked all the jewellers to verify the permanent account number (PAN) of their customers.
- **Operation clean money:** It is an initiative launched by the Income Tax Department (CBDT) for e-verification of large cash deposits made during the period from 9th November to 30th December 2016.

What are the pros of this move?

The system is expected to prove positive for the economy in the long run:

- It will boost the formal economy in the long run as black money hoarders will not be able to make their money white.
- Middle class citizens may get benefitted from the short-term fall in real estate prices.
- This move along with the implementation of GST is likely to make the system more efficient, accountable and transparent.

Conclusion:

For an economy on the path of reform, with many more reforms still to come, long-term sustainable impact can be achieved only when we strengthen the policy-making process.

Centre Set Up Panel to Suggest on New Jobs

Context

The government has constituted a new task force led by NITI Aayog vice-chairman Rajiv Kumar to recommend measures to increase employment by promoting labour-intensive exports.

What is the reason for setting up a new panel?

- NITI Aayog has recently released a report suggesting India is facing "severe underemployment" and not only unemployment.
- Contrary to some assertions that India's growth has been 'jobless'
- While the Indian workforce has high aspirations, a majority of the workers are still employed in low-productivity, low-wage jobs in small, micro and own-account enterprises.
- An urgent and sustained expansion of the organized sector is essential to address India's unemployment and under-employment issue.

What is the key strategy? What is the shift in the policy?

Following is the main strategy and change in policy:

- The most important strategy is to enable a shift towards more labour-intensive goods and services that are destined for exports.
- Given the importance of exports in generating jobs, India needs to create an environment in which globally competitive exporters can emerge and flourish.
- The committee has been asked to submit its report by November 2017.

Case of Bank's independence in monetary policy making

Context

The authority and responsibility of drafting and implementing monetary policies lies solely in the hands of the Central Banks. Thus, there exists independence of central banks from elected governments. But the concern is – it *actually* possible for central bank to be independent of the government?

What is Monetary policy?

Monetary policy is the process by which the **monetary** authority of a country, like the central bank or currency board, controls the supply of money, often targeting an inflation rate or interest rate to ensure price stability and general trust in the currency.

What is the rationale behind the independence of Central Banks in forming monetary policies?

- **The rationale for entrusting monetary policy fully to central banks is well understood:** politicians, overly tempted during the electoral cycle to create more money, pose a threat to economic stability.
- **Central bank independence is predicated on an economic axiom:** *that money and debt are strictly separable.*
- Debt can be traded domestically
- Money, on the other hand, cannot default and is a means, rather than an object, of exchange.

Does this axiom of independence holds?

- **Clearly, in today's world, this axiom does not hold.**
- With the rise of financialization, **commercial banks have become reliant on one another** for short-term loans, mostly backed by government bonds, to finance their daily operations.
- The **liquidity requirement** that is needed to back daily operations, has acquired the properties of money: it used as a means of exchange and also as a store of value.
- Now, as banks issue more inter-bank money, the financial system **requires more government bonds** to back the increase.
- The growing inter-bank money supply fuels **demand for government debt**

Why is the independence of Central Banks continuously diminishing?

- In this new financial world, central banks' independence is becoming meaningless, because the money they create represents a shrinking share of the total money supply
- With the **rise of inter-bank money**, backed mostly by government debt, fiscal policy has become an essential factor in determining the quantity of actual money that backs capitalism.
- In fact, the **more independent a central bank, the greater the role of fiscal policy.**
- For example, in the eurozone, Germany's tight fiscal policy is creating a shortage of *bunds* (German government bonds), which is limiting both the European Central Bank's (ECB) capacity to implement its quantitative easing policy and commercial banks' ability to produce more inter-bank money.

What should be role of governments in framing monetary policies?

- Central banks can and should remain unchallenged with regard to its position.

- But **governments should be given a greater say in domestic money creation** and greater independence from the central banks, by establishing a parallel payments system based on *fiscal money or, more precisely, money backed by future taxes.*

How would fiscal money work?

- *Fiscal Money* or Tax Discount Bonds (TBDs) are issued by the state and backed by the future tax revenues.
- Fiscal money would be solely based on the tax authority's digital platform, using the existing tax file numbers of individuals and companies
- Anyone with a tax file number (TFN) receives a free account linked to their TFN.
- Individuals and firms will be able to add credit to their TFN-linked account by transferring money from their bank account, in the same way that they do to pay taxes.
- In practice, once, say, €1,000 has been transferred to one's TFN-linked account, a personal identification number (the familiar PIN) is issued, which can be used either to transfer the €1,000 credit to someone else's TFN-linked account or to pay taxes in the future.
- These time-stamped future tax money, or fiscal money, can be held until maturity or be used to make payments to other taxpayers.
- As fiscal money approaches maturity, taxpayers not in possession of the fiscal money will raise the demand for it.
- The Treasury would control the total supply of fiscal money, using the effective interest rate to guarantee that the nominal value of the total supply never exceeds a percentage of national income, or of aggregate taxes, agreed to by the legislature.

How beneficial fiscal money is?

- Fiscal money would provide a source of liquidity for governments, bypassing the bond markets.
- It would limit the extent to which government borrowing fuels inter-bank money creation.
- And by competing with the banks' payment system, it would reduce the cost of fees customers currently pay
- Fiscal money constitutes a transparent, transaction-cost-free, public payment system monitored by every citizen (and non-citizen) who participates in it.
- Fiscal money is politically attractive as well. Governments could use any slack in money supply to top up the FTN-linked accounts of families in need, or to pay for public works, making it appealing to progressives.

Focus on 'Impactful' Smart City Projects: Centre

What is a 'smart city'?

- There is no universally accepted definition of a smart city.
- The conceptualization of Smart City varies from city to city and country to country, depending on the level of development, willingness to change and reform, resources and aspirations of the city residents.

- Urban planners ideally aim at developing the entire urban eco-system, which is represented by the **four pillars** of comprehensive development –**institutional, physical, social and economic infrastructure**.

Smart Cities Mission of the Government of India

- It is an urban renewal and retrofitting program by the Government of India with a mission to develop 100 cities all over the country making them citizen friendly and sustainable.
- The **Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs** is responsible for implementing the mission in **collaboration with the state governments** of the respective cities.

Questions raised on the mission

- Smart city is a misnomer, because only small pockets of a city are to be developed.
- Only 79 projects with total budget of Rs. 841 crores have been completed.
- Another 204 projects, with a budget of Rs.7963 crore, are under implementation.
- Projects worth Rs 1.14 lakh crore are still on the drawing board stage.
- To accelerate the work, the ministry has now decided to award World Bank and Agence Francaise de Developpement (AFD) funds on competitive basis.

Focus on 'impactful' Smart City projects

- The Union ministry has asked the states to push up implementation of 'impactful' projects which will make the mission more visible.
- The Centre and State governments together have identified 261 projects worth Rs 32600 crore under this category.
- These projects are expected to have visible and transformative impact.
- However, there is no clear definition of what 'impactful' means.
- These projects will be commenced by November 2017 so that they are completed in time for the next Lok Sabha polls in 2019.
- The list of 'impactful' projects varies from Museum of Urban History in Bhubaneswar, to rejuvenation of water bodies in Coimbatore, to 5 km-long heritage walk in Warangal etc.

Need of Labour reforms in India

(India have about 85 -90 % of the workforce employed in informal sector on which labor laws are not applicable)

Context:

In an Ease of Business report NITI Aayog said that the government should reform labour laws and make them more flexible to make it easier to do business in the country.

Introduction:

- **The report was jointly prepared by NITI Aayog and IDFC Institute.**
- The report was based on an enterprise survey of 3,276 manufacturing firms.

- According to survey's finding, **firms in labour-intensive sectors find compliance with labour-related regulations particularly onerous.**
- The survey found that more enterprises in labour-intensive sectors reported that **finding skilled workers, hiring contract labour and terminating employees was a major or a severe obstacle.**
- Such sectors also reported a significantly **higher average time taken for environmental approval** and more days lost due to strikes and lockouts.

Related statistics:

- India have about 85 -90% of the workforce employed in informal sector on which labour laws are not applicable
- **The World Bank ranked the country at a low 130th position** last year **in ease of doing business,** an improvement of just one position from the previous year.
- The **government wants India to be ranked in the top-50 nations** in terms of ease of doing business. The next update to the ranking is expected later this year.
- India was **ranked within the top 50 countries** in parameters such as: -
 - Protecting minority investors (13th),
 - Getting electricity (26th) and
 - Getting credit (44th).
- The **areas where India ranks poorly** as per the World Bank ranking includes: -
 - Dealing with construction permits(185th)
 - Registering property (138th),
 - Paying taxes (172nd)
 - Enforcing contracts(172nd)
 - Trading across borders(143rd)

What are the labour related issues facing India?

1. Huge Informal Sector:

- India have about 85 -90 % of the workforce employed in informal sector on which these laws are not applicable.
- These are micro firms employing as low as 5-10 persons.
- These employers are discouraged to expand their businesses, by such huge number of regressive laws.
- Labour working in these informal sectors doesn't have understanding of laws to that level and services of Lawyers to ensure compliance is much expensive.
- Huge majority of workforce get **no formal training.** This results in low productivity and low value addition
- **Entry and exit Barriers** for firms and Job security for workers
- The issue of retrenchment is also one of the major problems. Law for this provides that government approval should be taken before retrenchment of the workers (If industrial dispute act applies).

2- Surplus Labour Force:

- Labour market in India is suffering from surplus labour force.

- A huge number of labourers are rendered surplus due to lack of adequate demand arising out of both primary, secondary and tertiary sector.

3- Unskilled Labour:

- Another major problem of labour market in India is that there is a growing number of unskilled labourers in the country.
- In the absence of adequate vocational institutes, skill formation among the labour force in the country is very slow.

4- Lack of Absorption of Skilled Labour:

- Another major problem of labour market in India is that there is a growing number of unskilled labourers in the country.
- In the absence of adequate vocational institutes, skill formation among the labour force in the country is very slow.

5- Imperfections and Work Culture:

Labour market in India is also suffering from some imperfections, like:

- Lack of adequate information regarding jobs
- Lack of suitable agency for the proper utilisation of labour force
- Child labour practices
- Lack of proper manpower planning etc.
- Such imperfections have been resulting in various hurdles in the path of absorption of labour force smoothly.
- Work culture among the Indian labour force is not at all good.

6- Militant Unionism:

- Labour market in India is also facing the problem of militant unionism.
- In some productive sectors and that too in some particular states, trade unions are not adhering to healthy practices.
- This has led to militancy in the union structure and its activities, which is detrimental for the greater interest of the nation.

7- Unemployment:

- Labour market is also facing a serious problem of unemployment.
- A huge number of work forces of our country remain unemployed throughout the year or some part of the season.
- This has led to the problems like disguised unemployment, seasonal unemployment, general unemployment and educated unemployment.

8- Lack of Labour Reforms:

- Labour market in India is also suffering from lack of adequate labour reforms provision

What is the Legal Status of labors in India?

- The **Article 246**(with 7th schedule) of the Indian constitution puts the issues related to labour and labour welfare under the concurrent list.
- However, the exceptional matters related to labour and safety in mines and oilfields and industrial disputes concerning union employees come under Union List.
- Our constitution has many articles directed toward their interests for e.g. **Article 23** forbids forced labour, 24 forbids child labour (in factories, mines and other hazardous occupations) below age of 14 years.
- **Article 43A** was inserted by 42nd amendment – directing state to take steps to ensure worker’s participation in management of industries.
- There are approx. 144 central and state laws, most or all of which seek compliance from industries.

What are the laws dealing with labours in India?

- 1- **Industrial Disputes Act (1947)**: Major issues are with Chapter V-B and Section 9-A
- 2- **Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act (1970)** : There are various issues around this legislation
- 3- Various Issues with **Trade Union Act (1926)**.

What are the government’s steps to tackle labour related problems?

- The Labour Ministry soon likely to ratify two key international conventions on child labour marking an important step towards eradicating child labour. The move followed amendment to Child Labour Act.
- India has so far **ratified 45 conventions of International Labour Organisation**, out of which 42 are in operation.
- **Abolition of child labour** is one of the goals of government under Nation’s Sustainable Development of 2030.
- The Centre has made **changes to the draft of the Factories Act, 1948**, to allow states to take a call on the number of workers a unit has to employ to be covered under the law.
- **Rajasthan** has been the pioneer in labour reforms. It has relaxed the provisions of the Factories Act, Industrial Disputes Act, Apprentices Act and Contract Labour Act.
- **Madhya Pradesh** has amended at least 20 labour laws, including 17 central ones, such as the Industrial Disputes Act, Factories Act and Shops and Establishments Act.
- **The Maharashtra** law department has amended the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act to make it applicable only to establishments in which 50 or more workers are employed.
- Government has recently **Proposed Labour Code on Wages with the following features:-**
 - Undifferentiated definition of workers
 - It will provide social security cover to the entire workforce in the country, including self-employed and agricultural workers.
 - Factories employing even a single worker will have to contribute towards social security benefits, as per the proposal

What are the solutions?

- **Social safety net** for workers in order to enable capacity building of workers.
- **Social security** should be provided by means such as Insurance Pensions, Provident Funds.
- The Government assistance needs to present in above areas particularly in case of startups and small-scale industry.
- **India's Demographic Dividend:** India is expected to generate 51 million jobs till 2019, it is imperative to streamline all laws, to facilitate manufacturing sector in India so as economy could absorb new human resource inflow.
- There is expected **increase in productivity of agriculture sector**, which will result substantial shift to industry
- The challenge is highlighted in the new round of rural distress. It shows once again that the only viable way to break the cycle of distress is through labour-intensive industrialization, as was done in so many other Asian countries, including China.
- Making the Indian labour market less rigid.

Conclusion:

- The government needs to bring more investor-friendly labour laws at the national level and reforms such as deregulating labour laws.
- Governments should maintain balance between workers' rights and industrial growth by legislation.
- The reforms need inclusive growth, so that its various implications on laborers are also addressed.

NITI aayog's report on ease of doing business in India

Context:

- **Niti Aayog recently launched the Ease of doing business report** based on an enterprise survey of 3,500 manufacturing firms across the nation.
- The survey has been conducted, **along with the IDFC Institute**, to assess the business regulations and enabling environment across India from firm's perspective.
- The report sharply delineates the manufacturing sector's problems.

Introduction and comparison with World Bank's 'Ease of Doing Business'

- The report, 'Ease of Doing business – An enterprise survey of Indian states', said starting a business in India took longer than that estimated by the World Bank.
- The survey has been conducted, along with the IDFC Institute, to assess the business regulations and enabling environment across India from firm's perspective.
- The survey only takes inputs from firms in the formal manufacturing sector. It does not cover unorganized manufacturing and the services sectors that constitute the vast majority in India.
- Further, it is important to note that the **methodology of the present Enterprise Survey differs from that of the World Bank's Doing Business Survey**

- While the **World Bank Survey covers 10 parameters** handled by the states and the central government, this survey primarily deals with issues handled by the State Governments
- The ease of doing business report based on an enterprise survey comes in the backdrop of the fact that India needs to create an environment that fosters globally competitive firms, capable of driving and sustaining economic growth.

How the findings differ to World Bank findings?

- Firms in many states take considerably **less time in obtaining approvals** than reported by the World Bank data.
- In some states such as Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, **getting a construction permit** takes even fewer days.
- It took enterprises about half the **time to resolve legal disputes** as was reported in the World Bank Survey.
- The survey indicates that the **government's efforts to improve business environment** are showing results on the ground.

What are the other major findings this report?

- Newer and younger firms report a more favourable business environment in that they **take less time in obtaining approvals** than older firms, suggesting an improvement in the business environment.
- Young firms report that most regulatory processes do not constitute a major obstacle to their doing business.
- Survey has also found out **improved competitive federalism** among states in improving business environment.
- **Enterprises in high growth states** are less likely to report major or very severe obstacles as compared to enterprises located in low-growth states.

What are the areas where firms are lagging?

- There is **low awareness** among the enterprises about the steps being undertaken by them to the improve ease of doing business.
- On average, only about 20% of start-ups are reported to using single windows clearance introduced by state governments.
- **Labor regulations** are a bigger constraint for labor intensive firms.
- **Bigger firms are facing more regulatory barriers** in comparison to the smaller firms
- Firms with more than 100 employees took significantly longer to get necessary approvals than smaller firms with less than 10 employees.

A troubling roadmap for Indian economy

Context:

India GDP growth rate slowed to 5.7% in Q1 of 2017-18 on the back of destocking ahead of GST implementation and the lingering impact of demonetization.

What is the current status of Indian economy?

- According to the latest report of World Bank's ease of doing business index for the year 2017, India has been ranked **at 130th position** among the 190 countries
- India's economic growth unexpectedly slowed to 5.7% in the June quarter, the slowest pace in three years.
- **Manufacturing growth slowed** to 1.2% in the June quarter from 5.3% in the preceding quarter while mining activity contracted by 0.7%.
- **Construction activity revived marginally** from the negative print (-3.7%) in the March quarter to 2% in the June quarter, signs that the impact of demonetisation is receding.
- Trade, hotels, and transportation, impacted by demonetisation in the March quarter (6.5%), rebounded to grow 11.1%
- Growth in government spending held up close to double digits at 9.5%, continuing to support overall economic growth.
- latest Controller General of Accounts data which showed that the government exhausted 92.4% of fiscal deficit target within the first four months (April-July) of the fiscal year 2017-18.
- While **private consumption slowed** from the March quarter, **investment demand turned positive** in the June quarter after contracting in the previous quarter.
- The **second volume of the Economic Survey** reported that **deflationary impulses is weighing on the economy**, which is likely to miss the 7.5% upper band of its forecast growth range this year.
- The first volume of the Economic Survey released in January had projected growth in the range of 6.75-7.5% in 2017-18 against 7.1% in 2016-17.
- The central bank's annual report released recently reiterated its forecast for gross value added (GVA) to grow at 7.3% in 2017-18, as against 6.3% in 2016-17.

What are the challenges that Indian economy is facing?

Vulnerability of rupee:

Following reasons are responsible for this:

- Rising crude oil prices after OPEC deal on production cut that will push up import bill.
- Sluggish service export
- US fed hikes that will reduce interest rate gap between India and the US and induce capital outflows from India's debt market.
- Slowing net FDI inflows.

Macroeconomic stability under pressure:

- Macroeconomic stability will be under pressure in this year because of the following reasons:
- Continued low commodity prices especially of crude oil have helped Indian government contain fiscal deficit and rein in inflation. However, oil prices are hardening again. This is not good for India's current account balances.

Increasing divergence between consumption and investment:

- Consumption has remained steady (growing at 6 to 7%) till demonetization.
- **Investment as measured by gross fixed capital formation has been in the negative zone for the last three quarters.**

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- The reason for negative zone of investment is due to deleveraging of corporate balance sheets, lower capacity utilization and demand slump in both domestic and in export markets.
- It fell 1.9% in the last quarter of FY 2015-16; further fell 3.1% in first quarter and 5.6% in the second quarter of the current financial year.
- **Increased government's spending on implementation of 7th Pay Commission award** will limit the government's spending on infrastructure and other productive ventures.

Demonetization:

- Demonetization induced reduction in consumption demand decline in the sales of businesses.

GST conundrum:

- **Multiple GST rates** mean that there will be unending classification disputes and scope for discretion and inspector raj is not going away anytime soon.
- **SMEs and informal sector** which have been hit hard by demonetization are also the one to be hit hard by GST.
- This would be a worry factor for policy makers as over 90% of India's workforce is employed by SMEs.

The problem of Jobless growth:

- The problem of jobless growth will continue to hurt India.
- This has the potential to gradually turn the country's **demographic dividend into demographic disaster** with serious long-term implications for demand for homes and consumer goods.
- Indian banking system is over-exposed to the real estate sector which is suffering from buyer's disinterest.
- Higher NPA: The NPAs have been adversely affecting the banking system in the country

Inflation:

- India is failing to meet its target inflation rate every year.

Low level of technology:

- Due to illiteracy, use of advanced or sophisticated technology is rather an exception in India.

Service sector which has been a driving force behind India's development in previous years is declining.

Other challenges:

- **Sustaining the growth momentum and achieving an annual average growth of 7-8% in the next five years.**
- **Simplifying procedures and relaxing entry barriers for business activities.**
- Checking population growth.
- Boosting agriculture growth through diversification and development of agro processing.
- Expanding industry to integrate surplus labour
- Developing world-class infrastructure for sustaining growth in all the sectors of the economy.
- Allowing foreign investment in more areas
- Effecting fiscal consolidation and eliminating the revenue deficit through revenue enhancement and expenditure management.
- Empowering the population through universal education and health care, India needs to improve its Human Development Index (HDI) rank,

What were the steps taken by the government for economic reform in India?

- Raising the FDI limits.
- steps taken to introduce a bankruptcy code
- reform the public-sector banks
- making auctioning and environmental clearance process transparent,
- pushing forward financial sector reforms and on-going efforts to modernise the monetary policy
- The Government has taken various measures to deal with the issue of Non-Performing Assets (NPAs) in Banking Sector especially in case of Public Sector Banks (PSBs).
- The government has been making efforts to further improve the ease of doing business and aims to bring the country in the top 50.

What measures need to be taken for economic reform in India?

In order to attain the status of egalitarian society, there is need to step up appropriate measures:

- **Public investment revival** will give the needed boost.
- There is need for **bringing more transparency in the system**
- The Indian economy requires a fundamental rebalancing across multiple macroeconomic parameters.
- Need to rebalance savings and investments.
- The **share of manufacturing in GDP must be stepped up in** accordance with the employment imperative and the need to build an advanced knowledge-intensive.
- India's financial sector requires modernization and integration with the larger global system.
- There is need to **expand India's global integration** in terms of the flow of goods, services, technology and funds must be greatly expanded.
- The government needs to create right conditions of governance, macroeconomic stability, and policy framework for private sector entrepreneurship to flourish.

Conclusion:

As India is moving towards an economic superpower, there is need to expedite socio-economic reforms and take appropriate steps for overcoming institutional and infrastructure bottlenecks inherent in the system. Availability of both physical and social infrastructure is central to sustainable economic growth.

Environment and disaster management

Natural capital and sustainable development

Context

- PM Modi recently said, “There is need to re-imagine the country’s natural ecosystems as its ‘natural capital’”
- Natural capital, if managed suitably can maximize the benefits of economic growth and development for any Nation.

What is natural capital?

- Natural capital is world’s **stocks of natural assets** which include geology, soil, air, water and all living things.
- Natural capital provides for a **wide range of services, often called ecosystem services**, which make human life possible.
- The most obvious ecosystem services include the food we eat, the water we drink and the plant materials we use for fuel.

What are the issues related to natural capital?

- Just like Financial capital, natural capital too needs to be managed well.
- Exploiting too much stock from our natural environment, leads to debt which needs to be paid back
- Exploiting the stocks of natural capital without allowing recovering run the risk of local, regional or even global ecosystem collapse.
- Poorly managed natural capital becomes an ecological, social and economic liability.

Is natural capital really valuable in financial terms?

- There have been many studies that have calculated natural capital’s value in financial terms.
- **The financial value of India’s forests is estimated to be \$1.7 trillion.**
- Mexico’s mangrove forests provide an annual \$70 billion to the economy through storm protection, fisheries support, and ecotourism
- Street trees in California provide \$1 billion per year through atmospheric regulation and flood prevention

How crucial is natural capital for any nation’s development?

- India is one of the 17 most ecologically diverse countries, boasting 11% of the world’s flora and fauna
- With increasing economic activity, natural capital assets are on the decline affecting
 1. The quality of life
 2. Potentially giving rise to future inefficiencies in the economy
- Ecosystem services resulting from natural capital makes human life possible
- They provide services worth trillions of US dollars per year in equivalent terms and constitute food, fibre, water, health, energy, climate security and other essential services for everyone.

- Nine earth systems have been identified which mark the safe zones, beyond which there is a risk of 'irreversible and abrupt environmental change'.

What are the steps that should/must be taken to ensure balance in our ecosystem?

- Business needs to consider measuring its impacts and dependencies as it would have a direct impact on capital assets
- There is the need for a comprehensive evaluation system that takes undesirable side-effects of economic activities into account
- It is necessary that we are aware of the limitations of natural capital and its role as a primary support system for the economy.

Risk mitigation

- Natural capital thinking can also create opportunities to innovate and adopt newer, more efficient technologies.
- Companies can consider environmental stress tests for issues such as natural disasters, air pollution, resource scarcity and climate.
- Making natural capital thinking the norm requires a strong policy push
- Adoption of valuation frameworks such as the Natural Capital Coalition's Natural Capital Protocol
- Integrating natural capital assessment and valuation into our economic system is critical in a truly sustainable future for India

Solid Waste Management in India-An Overview

Context:

The collapse of a wall of garbage in east Delhi's Ghazipur area is a stark reminder that solid waste management rules are perfectly being ignored which can lead to deadly consequences.

What is waste?

- Waste is defined as any material that is not useful and does not represent any economic value to its owner, the owner being the waste generator.

What is Solid Waste?

- Depending on the physical state of waste, wastes are **categorized into solid, liquid and gaseous.**
- Solid Wastes are categorized into **municipal wastes, hazardous wastes, medical wastes and radioactive wastes.**

What is Municipal Solid Waste (MSW)?

It is defined as any waste generated by household, commercial and/or institutional activities and is not hazardous.

Impact of Waste Dumping

Environmental impact

- **Release of methane** from decomposition of biodegradable waste under anaerobic conditions which can cause fires and explosions. It is also a major contributor to global warming.
- **Problem of odour** especially during summers
- Migration of leachates to receiving water

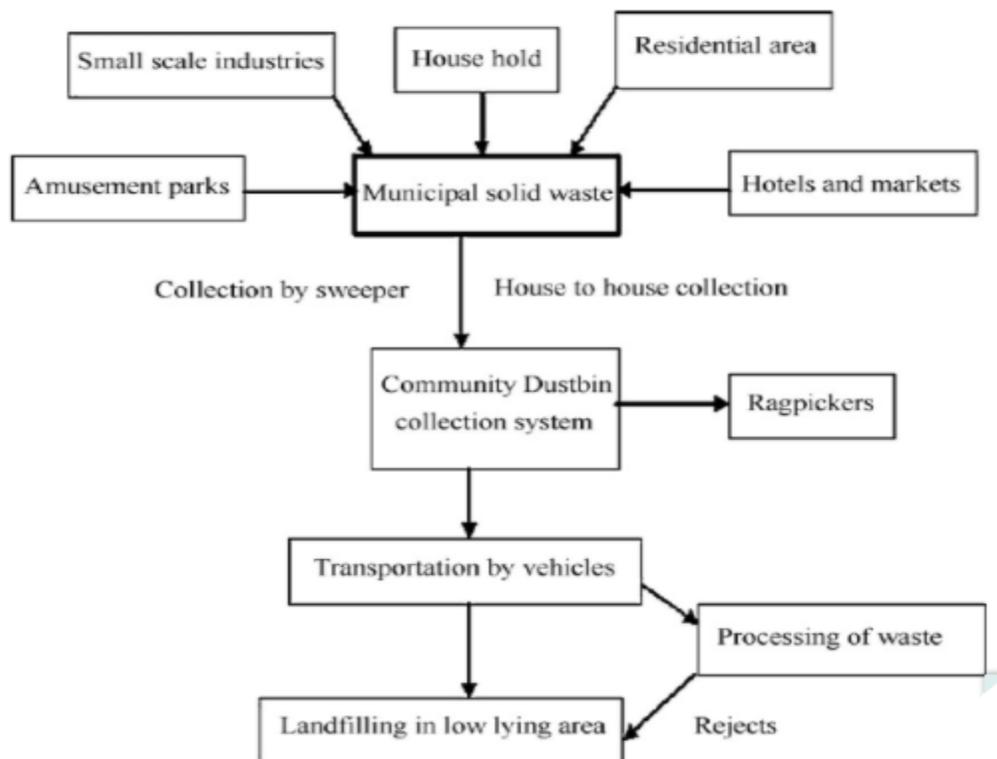
Health Impact:

- Uncontrolled burning of waste **releases fine particles** which are a major cause of respiratory disease and cause smog.
- Dumping sites provide **breeding sites for mosquitoes** thus increasing the risk of diseases such as malaria, dengue

What is Solid Waste Management?

Solid Waste Management is a term that is used to refer to the **process of collecting and treating solid wastes**. It also includes solutions for recycling items that do not belong to garbage or trash.

Solid Waste Management System in India



Source: R.P Singh et.al, 2014 "Management of urban solid waste: Vermicomposting a sustainable option"

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Key Waste Management Legislations in India

- The MoEF issued **MSW (Management and Handling) Rules 2000** to ensure proper waste management in India.
- **Municipal authorities are responsible for implementing these rules** and developing infrastructure for collection, storage, segregation, transportation, processing and disposal of Municipal solid waste
- The Solid Waste Management Rules were **revised in 2016**.

What are the key features of Revised Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016?

- The **Rules are applicable beyond Municipal areas** and extend to urban agglomerations, census towns, notified industrial townships, areas under the control of Indian Railways, airports, airbase, Port and harbour, defence establishments, special economic zones, State and Central government organizations, places of pilgrims, religious & historical importance.
- The **source segregation of waste** has been mandated to channelize the waste to wealth by recovery, reuse and recycle.
- **Responsibilities of Generators** have been introduced to segregate waste in to three streams:
 1. Wet (Biodegradable),
 2. Dry (Plastic, Paper, metal, wood, etc.) and
 3. Domestic hazardous wastes (diapers, napkins, empty containers of cleaning agents, mosquito repellents, etc.)
- Segregated wastes should be handed over to **authorized rag-pickers** or waste collectors or local bodies.
- **Integration of waste pickers/ rag pickers** and waste dealers in the formal system. This is to be done by State Governments, and Self Help Group, or any other group to be formed.
- Generator will have to pay '**User Fee**' to waste collector and for 'Spot Fine' for Littering and Non-segregation.

What are the problems associated Solid Waste Management System in India?

1. The increasing solid waste quantities strain the Solid Waste Management System
2. Inappropriate technology
3. Absence of stakeholders at local body level- As a result recoverable resources embedded in discarded materials are lost due to dumping
4. Inadequate human resource
5. Lack of funds
6. Lack of an integrated system which leads to low efficiency
7. Apathy on the part of Management and common people

What are the changes required to improve waste management in India?

1. Behaviour modification among citizens and institutions.
2. Municipal bodies should have an integrated system to transport and process what has been segregated at source.
3. Periodic assessments of the preparedness of urban local bodies to ensure proper management of wastes

4. Political Capital is needed to make required bye-laws and enforce them
5. Improved technology to ensure better solid waste management
6. Large Human Capital is required to follow through on all aspects from planning to implementation.
7. Funds to support planning, research, and implementation

Delhi's air pollution puzzle

Context:

According to a WHO report, Delhi has the worst air quality among the megacities (cities with the population of at least 14 million)

What does the WHO report say?

- There were 4.24 million deaths globally in 2015 attributable to PM2.5 (fine particulate matter with a diameter less than 2.5 micrometre)
- India accounted for 26% of the total deaths globally- 1.09million
- Among the megacities, Delhi has the worst air quality

What is the existing framework to tackle air pollution in Delhi?

- A graded response action plan was enforced on 12th January 2017.
- The plan describes a series of measures to be implemented by the court-mandated, Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA) in coordination with relevant state agencies.
- Based on the air quality the grades have been classified as Emergency, Severe, Very Poor and Moderate poor.
- It is the first legal framework for coordination among Delhi's various pollution controlling agencies and its neighbouring states.

What was the need to devise such a plan?

- In November 2016, Delhi was engulfed in a toxic smog when the PM2.5 level rose to 999 micrograms (mg)/metre cube (m³) – much higher than the Indian ambient air quality standard of 60mg/m³, and the WHO standard of 25mg/m³ – on a 24-hour average basis.
- This led to widespread public protests.
- In 2016, the supreme Court had termed Delhi's air "a public health emergency" and had asked the Union government to prepare a graded response action plan specifically for the city

What is the need to have coordination with neighbouring states to curb air pollution in Delhi?

- The sources of PM2.5 air pollution in Delhi are both internal and external
- The contribution of the neighbouring states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab to Delhi's air pollution is mainly due to the burning of crop residue.
- The contribution is variable and depends on the time of the year. It varies from 26% during winters to 12% during summers

What does 'graded response' to air pollution mean?

A graded response lays down **stratified actions that are required to be taken** as and when the concentration of pollutants, in this case particulate matter, reaches a certain level.

Which other cities have tried such a system?

- Paris
- Beijing
- Singapore

What are the measures recommended in the 'Graded response action plan' for Delhi?

- Traffic rationing schemes
- Ban on construction activities and banning diesel generators if the air quality hits the "severe" mark (PM_{2.5}>250 mg/m³),
- Other measures include: closing brick kilns, stone crushers, hot mix plants and intensifying public transport services and increasing the frequency of mechanised cleaning and sprinkling of water on roads

How far has the graded response action plan been successful in Delhi?

- Official data from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) indicates that the air continues to be unhealthy in Delhi even after the 'graded response action plan' was launched.
- Air quality in Delhi has failed to meet National PM_{2.5} health standards and WHO air quality guidelines of PM_{2.5}

What are the reasons for the failure of the graded action programme?

The CPCB and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCB) face institutional, technical and manpower constraints.

1. Manpower shortage: All SPCBs have a combined manpower shortage of 35% to 40%. This hampers the ability of the EPCA to enforce the plan.
2. Technical issues:
 - Delhi has 15 air pollution monitoring stations manned by the CPCB, of which only 10 are functional. Many of these are not properly calibrated and there are quality concerns on the data they generate.
 - Lack of well-equipped air pollution forecasting Platform
 - Lack of coordination among the agencies of Delhi and its neighbouring states

How India is suffering from Man-made disasters**Context**

The root cause of man-made disasters in August is the conscious errors of omission and commission by the state

Tragic month of this year

- The month of August was a disaster-filled month for India.
- Dozens of infant deaths in a government-run hospital in Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh,

- frenzied rioting after a godman was convicted in the rape of two followers,
- Untold deaths and millions displaced in massive floods in Bihar,
- A night of horrendous commutes in Mumbai following torrential rains,
- The aftermath of significant flooding in the North-East— these marked only the most notable disasters during the month.

Water, waterlogging, and waterborne disease

- What is common to the disasters above is that they are all about water, related disease.
- And that they are man-made with a collapse in administration and a sharp political failure

The Gorakhpur deaths

- The Gorakhpur deaths that took place early in August were allegedly due to the lack of oxygen supply in the hospital.
- The tragedy exposed the weakness of the entire public health system
- The incident exposed a severe shortage of trained nurses, doctors and an absolutely failed political and administrative system with dysfunctional incentives and accountability.
- Japanese encephalitis overwhelms the region due to rampant mosquito breeding consequent to annual floods in the low-lying region.
- The impact, particularly on the rural poor, continues year after year.
- The Kosi flooded again this year and 500 people are dead and nearly 17million have been rendered homeless in Mithila.

Way ahead

- State complicity in illegal construction is the primary reason for the repeated collapse.
- The sycophancy of the political establishment simply to align with vote banks is reaching a new high.
- Rioting by lawless goons was an issue because the political and administrative machinery has been totally captured by such godmen.

Air pollution diminishing India's Solar success

Context:

- According to experts, air pollution is diminishing India's capacity to harness power from the sun, undermining billions being invested in renewables as the energy-hungry giant emerges as a solar superpower.

Introduction:

- New research has found the smog and dust that sickens millions across India every year is also sapping solar power generation by more than 25 percent, far beyond levels previously thought.
- In the first study of its kind, U.S. and Indian scientists measured how man-made particles floating in the air and deposited as grime on solar panels combined to seriously impair sunlight from converting to energy.
- Presently in India, it could amount to roughly 3,900 MW of lost energy – six times the capacity of its largest solar farm, a gigantic field of 2.5 million panels.

- Experts highlighted that these huge losses will only compound as India realises its grand solar ambitions.

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Social Issues (Health, Education, hunger, Poverty etc.)

Japanese Encephalitis: How to combat the deadly disease

Context:

Japanese Encephalitis epidemics cases are reported from many parts of India But, it is highly endemic in Eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Why in news?

- Recently, the virus has spread its deadly sting in Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur, where 70 children have lost their lives due to the infection.
- Doctors in endemic region in U.P. have found cases with similar symptoms but without the virus, leading to some debate over the cause of the disease.

Related statistics:

- According to a report by the Directorate of National Vector Borne Diseases Control Programme (NVBDCP), 26,686 cases of encephalitis were reported in Uttar Pradesh between 2010 and August 2017.
- Of this, 24,668 cases were of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) and 2,018 of Japanese Encephalitis (JE).
- Out of those reportedly suffering from AES, 4,093 died in the same period. On the other hand, there were 308 JE deaths registered in the state – 15 percent of the total people who suffered from JE between 2010-2017.

What is Japanese Encephalitis?

- Japanese Encephalitis (JE) is a **mosquito-borne viral infection** of the brain.
- The virus appears to have originated from its ancestral virus in the mid-1500s in the Indonesia-Malaysia region and evolved there into different genotypes later.
- As per the World Health Organisation (WHO), the disease occurs in many parts of Asia with an estimated 68,000 clinical cases every year.
- **JE is one kind of encephalitis which falls under a spectrum of disease called Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES).**

What are the symptoms of JP?

- It can present with fever, headache, vomiting, fits and can have rapid progression to disorientation and even coma over a span of hours or days.
- If the patient survives the acute stage, long-term sequence in the form of permanent neurological damage can occur.
- The incubation period of JEV is 2 to 15 days.

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- A **vast majority of infections are asymptomatic**, while only 1 in 250 infections develops into encephalitis.
- Mental status changes, **neurologic symptoms**, weakness, and movement disorders might develop over the next few days.
- **Seizures are common**, especially among children.

What is the geographical distribution of this disease?

- JE occurs in a large number of **countries of Asia**, including Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Korea, Thailand, Vietnam, South-eastern Russian Federation and the Indian subcontinent.
- In recent decades, JE has gradually **spread to previously non-affected Asian regions**.

What are the affected regions in India?

- **Uttar Pradesh and Bihar** are the two states which have **witnessed an increasing number** of encephalitis-related deaths over the past few years.
- The bulk of deaths, **nearly 90%** in the last five years due to **Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES)** including Japanese Encephalitis, were in four states: Uttar Pradesh, Assam, West Bengal and Bihar.
- While Japanese encephalitis virus continues to be one of the most common causes of acute viral encephalitis, Eastern equine encephalitis virus (EEEV), Hendra virus (HeV), enteroviruses (ENV), Chandipura virus (CHPV), Nipah (NiV), Kyasanur forest disease (KFD), Herpes simplex, poliovirus and measles virus are among the various other diseases related to it.
- At least **80% of the cases of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome** in India have mostly been identified in Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.
- In a document released by the Indian Council of Medical Research, it has been stated that JE affects children below 15 years in south Indian states, whereas it affects people of all age groups in north India.

What are the causes of JE?

- It is the inflammation of the brain caused by a virus – the JE virus – which is transmitted by **female Culex mosquitoes** to human beings.
- The first case of JE was documented in 1871 in Japan.
- This virus mainly survives in pigs, ardeidae birds and in mosquitoes.
- JE **primarily affects children**. Most adults in endemic countries have natural immunity after childhood infection, but individuals of any age may be affected.
- Monsoon being the breeding season for the mosquitoes, the case of AES and JE usually increase during the rainy season.

What are the Preventive measures?

- Spreading **awareness** about a potentially fatal disease like Japanese Encephalitis is essential
- The mosquitoes that transmit the virus to human beings live in **dirty stagnant water, paddy fields and ditches**. Measures should be taken for that.
- **Taking personal precautionary measures** against mosquito bite is essential. This can be achieved by wearing fully covered clothing and using mosquito repellents.

- Presently, there is no particular cure for Japanese Encephalitis.
- Treatment involves supporting the functions of the body as it tries to fight off the infection.
- **Rest, fluids, and use of pain relievers** and medication to reduce fever may relieve some symptoms.
- People traveling to high-risk areas should take precautions to avoid mosquito bites to reduce the risk for JE.
- **Reduce exposure to mosquitos** during peak hours (dawn and dusk).
- People who are infected should avoid being bitten by mosquitoes while they are unwell
- Early case detection and treatment

What are the recent examples of this disease?

Gorakhpur tragedy:

- Two days ago, the nation woke up to disturbing news of the death of 60 children within 48 hours at a government-run hospital in Gorakhpur.
- The shocking death of over 60 children within a week in Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur district has raised alarms reflecting the failed apathy of the medical condition of the state.
- Administration has maintained that the deaths occurred due to Japanese encephalitis virus, and case of Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES).

What are the challenges in combating JE?

- **Lack of reliable data** and research
- **Lack of accessibility** to public health care.
- When it comes to **public spending on healthcare**, India is lags behind abysmally.
- **Lack of infrastructure** facilities in hospitals.
- **Lack of unclear data** on disease burden
- Lack of access to clean water and toilets.
- In March, the State government launched a JE vaccination drive in 38 districts in UP. But it was not supplemented with access to clean water and sanitation.
- The efficacy of the JE vaccine is between 85-90%.
- While India was facing trouble in importing JE vaccine from China, the government took proactive measures including a high-level delegation meeting with Chinese officials to resolve the issue at the earliest.

What were the government steps to tackle JE?

- The Government of India **introduced the JE vaccine** in high priority areas including Uttar Pradesh.
- **JENVAC was the first vaccine manufactured in the public-private partnership mode.**
- JE vaccines were introduced under the Universal Immunization Programme. They were to be administered to infants in two doses between 9-12 months and 16-24 months.
- **Large vaccination campaigns** were held in the country's 11 most affected districts in 2006, 27 districts in 2007, 22 districts in 2008 and 30 districts in 2009.

- UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath, launched a massive immunization campaign in 38 districts across the state to combat the deadly Japanese Encephalitis (JE) that claims hundreds of lives each year.
- The **Swachhh Bharat campaign** is being linked to the drive against encephalitis
- The health ministry launched a flagship immunization programme ‘**Mission Indradhanush**’ to include four new vaccines. The missions, currently providing coverage against seven life-threatening diseases and will soon include vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis for adults.

Conclusion:

The government needs to start a national programme in public private partnership mode for prevention of this deadly disease.

India’s battle for gender equality

Context:

The recent judicial judgments on triple talaq and right to privacy and the verdict in the Gurmeet Ram Rahim case have reinvigorated the conversation on women’s safety and gender equality.

Introduction:

- These cases have shown the light on some of the social structures and practices that work to threaten constitutionally enshrined principles of equality and justice.

What is gender inequality?

- Gender inequality refers to unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals wholly or partly due to their gender.
- It arises from differences in socially constructed gender roles.

What is the India’s position in Global rankings?

Gender Inequality is also reflected in India’s poor ranking in various global gender indices.

- According to the **Global Gender Gap Report** released by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2011, India was ranked 113 on the Gender Gap Index (GGI) among 135 countries polled.
- India also scored poorly on overall female to male literacy and health rankings.
- **UNDP’s Gender Inequality Index- 2014:** India’s ranking is 127 out of 152 countries in the List. This ranking is only above Afghanistan as far as SAARC countries are concerned
- **World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index- 2014:** India’s ranks at 114 in the list of 142 countries of the world. This Index examines gender gap in four major areas:
 - 1- Economic participation and opportunity: **134th**
 - 2- Educational achievements: **126th**
 - 3- Health and Life expectancy: **141st**
 - 4- Political empowerment: **15th**

What is the India's position in other measures?

- In the last decade, while India's GDP has grown by around 6%, there has been a **large decline in female labour force participation** from 34% to 27%.
- **Crimes against women** show an upward trend, especially brutal crimes like rapes, dowry, deaths, and acid attacks.
- In 2011, there were **919 girls under age six per 1000 boys**, despite sex determination being outlawed in India.
- According to the National Family and Health Survey of 2005-06, **37 % of married women have been victims of physical or sexual violence** perpetrated by their spouse,
- Over 60% of women, between the ages of 20-24, with **no education, were married before 18**.
- Regarding **domestic violence**, there are several gaps in the implementation of laws at the state level, as 82 % respondents are dissatisfied with the complaint redressal of government institutions such as helplines and police stations.
- Only 72 % of the stakeholders involved in addressing domestic violence issues were aware of all the various provisions under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act.
- As per other statistics, as of 2012, 40 % of all government **schools lacked a functioning common toilet**, and another 40 % lacked a separate toilet for girls.

What are the legal and constitutional safeguards against gender inequality?

1- Constitutional safeguards:

- Indian Constitution provides for positive efforts to eliminate gender inequality.
- The **Preamble** to the Constitution talks about goals of achieving social, economic and political justice to everyone and to provide equality of status and of opportunity to all its citizens.
- **Article 15** of the Constitution provides for prohibition of discrimination on grounds of sex also apart from other grounds such as religion, race, caste or place of birth.
- **Article 15(3)** authorizes the State to make any special provision for women and children.
- The **Directive Principles of State Policy** also provides various provisions which are for the benefit of women and provides safeguards against discrimination.

2- Legal safeguards:

Various protective Legislations have also been passed by the Parliament to eliminate exploitation of women and to give them equal status in society.

- **The Sati (Prevention) Act, 1987** was enacted to abolish and make punishable the inhuman custom of Sati.
- **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961** to eliminate the practice of dowry.
- **The Special Marriage Act, 1954** to give rightful status to married couples who marry inter-caste or inter-religion.
- **Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Bill** (introduced in Parliament in 1991, passed in 1994 to stop female infanticide and many more such Acts.
- **Section 304-B** was added to the Indian Penal Code, 1860 to make dowry-death or bride-burning a specific offence punishable with maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

What are the reasons for gender inequality in India?**1- Cultural institutions:**

- Cultural institutions in India, particularly those of patrilineal (inheritance through male descendants) and patrilocal (married couples living with or near the husband's parents), play a crucial role in perpetuating gender inequality.

2- Preference for sons:

- A culturally ingrained parental preference for sons - emanating from their importance as caregivers for parents in old age - is linked to poorer consequences for daughters.

3- Dowry system:

- The dowry system, involving a cash or in-kind payment from the bride's family to the grooms at the time of marriage, is another institution that disempowers women.
- The incidence of dowry has been steadily rising over time across all region and socioeconomic classes.

4- Patriarchal mind-set:

- Patriarchy is a social system of privilege in which men are the primary authority figures, occupying roles of political leadership, moral authority, control of prosperity and authority over women and children.

5- Poverty and lack of education:

- Extreme poverty and lack of education are also some of the reasons for women's low status in society.
- Poverty and lack of education derives countless women to work in low paying domestic service, organized prostitution or as migrant laborers.

What can be done to deal with gender inequality in India?

India is still a lagging when it comes to gender equality, and changing this situation is an urgent task.

- **Need for policy initiatives** to empower women as gender disparities in India persist even against the backdrop of economic growth.
- **Improvements in labour market prospects** also have the potential to empower women. This will also lead to increase in marriage age and school enrolment of younger girls.
- **Feminism** could be a powerful tool that lets children shed stereotypes that they may hold and question those of others.
- The need of the hour is **to introduce feminism in schools**, both in terms of curriculum and practice.
- A world free of prejudice and generalisation would be amenable to progress in the truest sense.
- Sessions on principles of mutual respect and equality must be made a regular affair in schools.
- Inculcating gender equality in children could go a long way towards ridding society of regressive mindsets, attitudes, and behaviours.

- **Educating Indian children** from an early age about the importance of gender equality could be a meaningful start in that direction.

What are the steps initiated by Judiciary?

- Bombay High Court in March 2016 has ruled out a judgement that "Married daughters are also obligated to take care of their parents". This is a very bold step towards breaking the traditional norms of the defined roles in the society.

Conclusion:

- For India to maintain its position as a global growth leader, more concerted efforts at local and national levels and by the private sector are needed to bring women to parity with men.
- Increasing the representation of women in the public spheres is important and can potentially be attained through some form of affirmative action, an attitudinal shift is essential for women to be considered as equal within their homes and in broader society.

Lynching emerges as a disastrous face in India

Context:

- In the last few years, cow vigilantism has been the catalyst of violence across India.
- The government fails to respond to mob violence in line with constitutional principles.

Briefing of the incident:

- Just when on 29th June 2017 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a public statement about condemning for killing in the name of cow protection, a small mob lynched a man in Jharkhand.
- The victim was beaten to death for allegedly carrying beef.

Mob Violence in India

- Growing incidents of mob violence in many parts of the country are a matter of serious concern.
- It is an act of violence by a crowd of people often unknown of the legitimacy of cause behind ongoing violence.
- It may include Performing anger, destroying public property, ransacking offices of opponents and media outlets, beating up opponents

Aspects of the problem:

- One of the major aspects of such lynching is executed either for religion or caste.
- The second aspect is the individual notions of justice in its crudest form over the constitutional ideals. It is a deep-rooted problem in Indian polity.
- Many are of the opinion that Muslim men are becoming soft targets in the name of beef trade.
- They further added that these lynching are not accidents but a deliberate act of few groups supported by the administration.
- The minorities were the target of 51 percent of violence centred on bovine issues over nearly eight years (2010 to 2017).

- Moreover, millions of people in the minority Muslim and lower-caste Hindu communities depend on work in the meat and leather industries.
- Finally, with every lynching new excuses are found to justify the violence, statistics are reeled out of lynching during a previous administration in an attempt to create a moral equivalence between a murder and targeted violence.

Government's negligence

- Governments at both the Central and state levels must take on themselves for such violence in the nation.
- The Government has often looked away, and in some instances, been direct enablers, either victim-blaming or equivocating.
- The judiciary too has not always played its role adequately either.
- As for example, Mahesh Chandra Sharma's *Jago Janta Society v. State of Rajasthan & Ors*, 2017 ruling in the Rajasthan high court recommends in making the cow the national animal, and life imprisonment for cow slaughter – and made it clear that his ruling was informed by religion.
- Lynching does not find mention in the Indian Penal Code. No particular law has been passed to deal with lynching.
- Lynching is one of the standard techniques of popular politics in India, which are rarely prosecuted or even treated as crimes.

Consequences:

- When the government is unable to control such lynching, the state's capacity to keep society's worst impulses in check is further eroded.
- The recent lynching in Jharkhand has provoked the Muslim women to pick up arms in future to save their men. If this happens so, there will be a massive communal violence.
- Each violent event hardened community boundaries, none more so than the widening divide between the majority and the minority.

Recent Supreme Court's Order

- **Supreme Court ordered the States and the Union Territories to appoint nodal police officers in every district to crack down on such groups.**
- The court exhorted the Centre to uphold its constitutional mandate under Article 256 and direct the States to act against the groups.
- The court directed the Centre to respond to a submission by senior advocate Indira Jaising, for Mr. Gandhi, that the government cannot wash its hands of its constitutional responsibility under Article 256.
- The Centre has maintained that violence by 'gau rakshaks' was a 'State subject' and it had no role to play, though it condemned all forms of violence.

Solution:

- There's an urgent need for police reforms by improving organizational capabilities or insulating the police from political pressure.
- A concrete result will require political will to initiate reforms.
- Government needs to hold the law and order machinery accountable through transparent mechanisms when it fails to deliver.

- Mob violence in India has stemmed from ignorance and would recede with education and modernity.

A Case for Universal Medical Care

Context

- In the wake of 17-year-old S. Anitha's suicide in Tamil Nadu, the discussion on the impact of centralised tests on federalism has gained momentum.
- Critics claim that a centralised test cannot often fully capture the educational realities of every state and students like Anitha who graduate from state boards are at the receiving end of the limitations of such tests.

What is NEET?

- The National Eligibility cum Entrance Test or NEET-UG is an entrance examination in India, for students who wish to study any graduate medical course) or postgraduate course in government or private medical colleges in India.
- NEET-UG (Undergraduate), for MBBS and BDS courses, are conducted by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE).
- NEET-UG replaced the All India Pre-Medical Test (AIPMT) and all individual MBBS exams conducted by states or colleges themselves in 2013

Problems of medical care in India

- The piecemeal approach to the problem of providing medical care in India, treating medical education as though it can be separated from medical employment
- The skewed distribution of medical personnel with over 75% of doctors in urban areas where only a third of the people live.
- A large number of post-graduate doctors and super specialists are underemployed. The problem starts right at the stage of medical admission.
- Permitting private medical education was clearly a concession to powerful pressure groups who sought to circumvent the difficult entry barriers to medical education by buying their way.
- These colleges are filled with the children of doctors, bureaucrats, businessmen and others who seek the social recognition that a medical degree bestows. Anybody with money, irrespective of aptitude, gained entry to some of these colleges

How does NEET address these issues?

- Under NEET, Private colleges can no longer admit whoever pays the highest even if the examination marks are very low. The rule of reservation is applied after the test scores are obtained. Therefore, it satisfies the need for affirmative action.
- Unlike marks in the twelfth standard, which can be only obtained once, NEET offers a candidate the chance of another attempt. What the syllabus should be and who should conduct the test can be negotiated
- Bottom line of NEET is One Nation, One Exam, One exam for admissions into all the Post Graduate Medical courses in the country (except AIIMS, PGIMER, JIPMER).

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- In NEET, there is **no difference in Syllabi for any of the State graduates** as all MBBS graduates have a unified course curriculum.
- **A student can write a single exam and apply to different Universities** with same test score, where merit list will be prepared by the universities with all the students applied.

Why are some states opposed to it?

- State Governments see NEET as an infringement on the rights of States.
- They also feel that it will be disadvantageous to students from state Board schools and those from rural areas where the standards may not be as high as CBSE.
- So, States argue that NEET may end up hurting their students and benefiting the CBSE students who may not be from their states or may be urban elite

What does constitution says about it?

- When the Constitution was enacted, education was listed as a state subject.
- But as part of the 42nd amendment brought in by Indira Gandhi's government, education was among the five subjects moved to the concurrent list, thereby allowing both the Centre and states to legislate on it.
- Now Given the Centre's residuary powers, in matters of conflict, states must abide by the Centre's decision.

Way forward

A common national test for professional courses is faultless, in principle. In this connection, it will address the problem of private institutions selling medical courses at astronomical prices to candidates who may lack aptitude. Yet, it is important that the ground is properly prepared before the implementation of a common test.

International Relations

Understanding the Chinese mind Post-Doklam

Context

- Post the stand-off between India and China over the Doklam plateau, the two sides agreed to step back and disengage, thus avoiding a confrontation.

Background

- India-China had earlier positioned an additional 3000 troops since the initial face-off at the Sikkim-Bhutan-Tibet tri-junction, on which all three countries have claims.
- China was asserting that Indian soldiers are trespassing into the disputed Doklam area of the Sikkim sector, which China claims as part of its territory.
- China removed an old bunker of the Indian Army located at the tri-junction of India, China and Bhutan in Sikkim by using a bulldozer after the Indian side refused to accede to its request to dismantle it.
- China was also building a road in Doklam, which was opposed and stopped by Indian soldiers.
- The Chinese however claim that they were constructing the road within their territory, which led to jostling between the two sides and demolition of the bunker.
- After more than a month of standoff both governments decided to withdraw their troops.

What is left unclear?

- The Indian side has pulled back its personnel and equipment to the Indian side of the boundary, while China has agreed to make 'necessary adjustments and deployment' on its part.
- It is unclear, however, whether China will patrol the region, which it claims to have been doing earlier. Road construction will not continue for the present.

India's reason

- India's actions in Doklam are easy to detect, viz. going to the help of a treaty partner in its time of need, a decision which incidentally has security ramifications for India.

China's reason

- China's reasons are more complex and complicated but, nevertheless, cannot be easily wished away.

Current situation

- China and India have a kind of competitive coexistence.
- While professing friendship, both sides have mutual suspicion for each other at times prompting several degrees of alienation.
- Both countries remain wary of each other's intentions and actions.

China shaping its policies

- The BRICS summit and the 19th Party Congress both have high priority for China.
- China is trying to reshape the regional and international order, and is keen to fine-tune its 'Great Power diplomacy'.
- It, hence, needs to be seen as preferring peace over conflict.
- It is well-positioned to achieve this if it maintains its present course.
- Any interruption, by indulging in a conflict with nations small or big, would not only damage but derail the levels of progress that are essential to achieve this objective.

Undersea line from Iran to port cheap gas'

Context

Indian must push for a trans-national deep-water gas pipeline from Iran bypassing Pakistani EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone).

What is the plan?

- South Asia Gas Enterprise Pvt. Ltd. (SAGE) is looking to lay the underline sea pipeline, travelling first to Oman and then to the coast of Gujarat.
- The study says that the cost of landed gas through this pipeline would be \$2 cheaper in comparison to importing LNG.
- SAGE is looking for the support of Indian government for pipelines.
- The pipeline is planned to carry 31.5 million standard cubic meters gas per day.
- The pipeline can be built in 2 years of the necessary approval required for it's operationalization.

What would be the benefits for India?

- It will be used as an alternative to the IPI pipeline as India has not been participating for the talks of this pipeline since 2007.
- This 1,300-km undersea pipeline from Iran will avoid Pakistani EEZ.
- LNG through pipelines could be procured at rates less than the price of LNG available in the spot market and even cheaper compared to the rates of domestic fields supply gas.

Time to rethink importance of BRICS

Context

India had joined BRICS with the aspiration to build a multipolar world, but recent rise and standoff with China has compelled India to rethink achieving this objective by BRICS.

What is the Effect of rise of China on objective of BRICS formation?

- China has encroached into and reduced India's space in the Subcontinent and also in the India Ocean.
- It has become a lot more insistent and dominant in the bilateral disputes with India.

- BRICS as a whole has been working towards the construction of a “**multipolar world**”, which for long, was the code word for hedging against American unilateralism.
- But **now with China’s rising dominance** in the world map and with its bullish attitude towards India; construction of “multipolar Asia” or “balancing China” is turning out to be equally important.

What’s the story behind formation of BRICS?

- **After the Cold War**, India faced a twin challenge – (i) the collapse of the Soviet Union and (ii) re-engaging of India with the United States and the West in order to adapt to the globalizing world.
- But at the same time, India was apprehensive about the West’s interventionist policies especially on issues like – human rights, Kashmir and nuclear non-proliferation.
- To be able to bear the brunt of negative impact of its fall out from the unipolar world, **India chose to attach itself with Russia’s** banner for a great “strategic triangle” of eastern powers, involving Russia, China and India.
- This pairing up on part of India, caused serious tension in its engagement with the great American powers.
- Indian leaders would stand up in Washington and talk of a “natural alliance” with the sole super power, America. At the same time, India would sit down with Russia and China to call for a “multipolar world”.
- More than the evident hypocrisy, the problem was about managing multiple contradictions that India was facing with post-Cold War.
- The strategic triangle involving India, China and Russia eventually expanded into the BRICS with the inclusion of Brazil and South Africa.

What are the challenges faced by India owing to its engagement in BRICS?

- As two more countries, joined the forum, the internal environment within the BRICS changed, but the external environment altered the dynamics of the BRICS nation within itself and also with the world and posed a lot many challenges for India.
 - **The rise of China dramatically altered the orientation of the BRICS.** China’s massive economic weight in the forum – its GDP is now more than twice that of the other four members put together.
 - Thus, the **internal balance in the BRICS has changed in favour of Beijing.**
1. **For Russia**, BRICS was a way of creating political leverage against the United States and the West, but China saw it as an instrument to expand China’s own global economic influence.
 2. **China’s Belt and Road Initiative**, which has become the main vehicle for China’s economic power projection, has added to India’s concerns about China’s rise.
 3. **India’s engagement in BRICS and its simultaneous deepening strategic partnership with the United States and Japan** looked like a friendly peace-preferring gesture from India, till there was no major tensions between the great powers – US, Russia, China and Japan.
 4. It has **become difficult for India to maintain its “multi-alignment”** as the great power harmony was followed by renewed tensions between them.

How India is rebalancing its strategies now?

- **In the past**, India preferred BRICS over the partnership with the West.
- **At current**, it is more inclined towards judging issues by their magnitude and implications for India's national interest rather than following a presumed ideological correctness and thereby not choosing a side and maintaining a dynamic stand.
- Given the warmth between Russia and China and both the countries willingness to cut deals with the US on their own terms, **India's concern is now less towards ideological posturing and more about repositioning** its position in changing great power equations.

What future strategy should India adopt?

1. India will have to stand up and also **stand against (if required) China** where necessary and at the same time, cooperate with it wherever possible.
2. India has to **rescue its long-standing partnership with Russia** but should also remain aware that Russia has its own imperatives.
3. It also has to **continue deepening strategic ties with the United States** but at the same time acknowledge America's sharp internal divisions.
4. India also has to **gear itself** to be prepared to face or undergo compulsions to arrive at compromises with a rising China.

India, U.S. eye state-level engagement mechanism**Context**

- India and the U.S. are working on **establishing a state-level engagement mechanism** to widen and deepen bilateral trade and investment ties.

State Engagement Task force' (SET)

- The U.S.-India Business Council (USIBC), will disclose within a fortnight a 'State Engagement Task force' (SET) **ensuring American and Indian companies align their interests with the priorities of the State governments** of both the countries.

Engagement for improving ties

- The move has come as India and the U.S. are set to carry out a comprehensive review of bilateral trade ties.
- Priorities sectors in the exercise will be defence and energy.

The main focus

- The focus in defence would include **Lockheed Martin's proposal to make F-16 fighter jets** in India.
- There is also sale of General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. or GA-ASI's 'Guardian Remotely Piloted Aircraft' to India.
- **Energy ties** would be covering exports of U.S. natural gas, transfer of U.S. technology on oil and gas refining, as well as the conclusion of pacts between Nuclear Power Corp. and Westinghouse Electric for six nuclear reactors in India and related project financing.

- **Smart cities** are the other priority areas including Ajmer, Allahabad and Visakhapatnam.
- **Regional airport development** in India through public private partnership, e-commerce, digital payments and medical devices is also point of focus.

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Science and Technology

As ISRO launch fails, glitch in space waits for fix

Context

- ISRO declared the IRNSS-1H launch a failure after a heat shield failed to separate, preventing the satellite from being deployed in space by PSLV-C39, the launch vehicle.

What went wrong?

- The performance of PSLV-C39 went to plan up to the point when the satellite had to be inserted in orbit.
- During the operation, the heat shield did not get separated.

IRNSS-1H

- **IRNSS-1H was the eighth in a series of IRNSS** (Indian Regional Navigation Satellite Systems) satellites to get launched by ISRO since July 2013.
- **IRNSS-1H was among nine satellites** (seven for the navigation service, two backup) indented at Rs 1,420 crore for IRNSS.

NavIC

- It is an Indian navigation satellite constellation, comprising of seven satellites.

What was IRNSS-1H supposed to do?

- It was launched to create a constellation to provide satellite-based navigation services over the Indian subcontinent on the lines of the global positioning system (GPS) created by the United States.
- **IRNSS-1H was intended to replace IRNSS-1A**, which developed problems last year.
- IRNSS-1H would have augmented “the existing seven satellites of NavIC constellation”.
- It was supposed to sit in a sub-Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (sub-GTO).

What kind of problems made a replacement necessary?

- The first satellite launched on July 1, 2013, had developed problems, rendering the satellite ineffective for navigation services.
- The **Three Rubidium Atomic Frequency Standard (RAFS) clocks of IRNSS-1A have stopped working**. But the rest of satellite components are functioning perfectly.
- The satellite is still being used for messaging activity.
- There is a talk of launching a replacement site.

Importance of the clocks

- Atomic clocks act as a **key component in a navigation system**.
- The ISRO satellites are **equipped with three clocks each** - one clock being the primary timekeeper and two acting as backup.
- **Accurate timekeeping is important for navigation system** as a person's position on earth is subject to the accurate calculation of delays in signal transmission from the satellite to earth.

- Clocks are so important because if you don't have the right clocks and even if you don't consider the relativity theory of Einstein the error would be more than 500 metres in one hour.

What went wrong with the clocks?

- The Three RAFS clocks supplied by a European manufacturer, Spectratime, which were used by the ESA for its Galileo satellite navigation system, developed problems.
- These failures seem to have a consistent signature, linked to probable short circuits, and possibly a particular test procedure performed on the ground.

How has ISRO addressed the problems with the IRNSS clocks?

- The atomic clocks in new satellites are modified versions of the original clocks provided by Spectra time under a 4-million-euro deal signed in 2008.
- ISRO has been carrying out modifications of clocks acquired from Spectratime to overcome technical issues.

After the failed launch, what can ISRO do?

- ISRO has one more satellite in its kitty. A new satellite could be launched in the next few months to make up for the loss.

How do these satellites work?

- IRNSS intends to provide two services –
 - **Standard Positioning Service** for general users and a Restricted Service, which is an encrypted service only for authorized users like the defence forces.
 - **NavIC** is designed to provide accurate position information services to users in India as well as the region, up to 1,500 km from the boundary.
 - For NavIC to become ubiquitous in the subcontinent, ISRO will sell its capabilities to general positioning service providers like mobile phone manufacturers, vehicle manufacturers etc.

Couldn't existing satellite systems have provided such services?

- One primary reason for the development of the indigenous Indian system is the reliability that it offers when used for defence purposes.

What is the payload on IRNSS-1H?

- IRNSS-1H had both a navigation payload and a ranging payload.
- The ranging payload of IRNSS satellites has a C-band transponder to determine the range of the satellite.
- The navigation payload is meant to transmit navigation service signals to users on earth while operating in the L5-band and S-band. Part of the navigation payload is high-accuracy RAFS clocks.

Planets orbiting TRAPPIST-1 may have water

Context:

- According to scientists, the Earth-sized planets orbiting the ultracool TRAPPIST-1 dwarf star 40 light-years away may have substantial amounts of water and could be habitable.

Introduction:

- An international team of astronomers used the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope to estimate whether there might be water on the seven planets orbiting in the nearby TRAPPIST-1 planetary.
- The results suggest that the outer planets of the system might still harbour substantial amounts of water.
- This includes the three planets within the habitable zone of the star, lending further weight to the possibility that they may indeed be habitable.
- In February this year, astronomers had announced the discovery of seven Earth-sized planets orbiting the ultra cool dwarf star TRAPPIST-1, 40 light-years away.
- Scientists used the Space Telescope Imaging Spectrograph (STIS) on the Hubble telescope to study the amount of ultraviolet radiation received by the individual planets of the system.

