

Monthly Magazine-June 2018

National News

General Studies-I : Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.

1. India most unsafe for women: poll

- India has been ranked as the most dangerous country out of the **world's 10 worst countries for women**, behind Afghanistan, Pakistan and Somalia, according to a poll conducted by the **Thomson Reuters Foundation**.
- The same poll conducted in **2011** had placed India at the **fourth place**. The findings are based on **perceptions of experts on women's issues**.
- India was followed by **Afghanistan, Syria, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Yemen, Nigeria and the U.S.** — in that order.
- The question on **cultural practices** targeting women included offences such as infanticide, acid attacks, female genital mutilation, child marriage, forced marriage, physical abuse or mutilation as a form of punishment.
- The other category in which India ranked the worst was **sexual violence** which comprised rape as a weapon of war, domestic rape, rape by a stranger, lack of access to justice in rape cases, sexual harassment and coercion into sex as a form of corruption.
- **Respondents** were asked to name the **five most dangerous countries** for women and then asked to name the worst country under six different categories.
- Respondents **included academics, aid and development professionals**, health workers, policy makers, NGO workers, journalists and social commentators.

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-II : Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

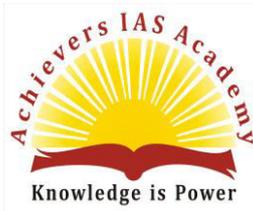
1. Centre not to file counter-affidavit on Article 35A

- The Centre has decided not to file any “counter-affidavit” on Article 35A, which has been **challenged** in the Supreme Court through a **Public Interest Litigation (PIL)** petition.
- Article 35A allows the Jammu and Kashmir legislature to decide the “**permanent residents of the State**”, prohibits a non-State resident from buying **property** in the State and ensures reservation **in employment for residents**
- Article 35A was incorporated into the Constitution by an **order of the then President Rajendra Prasad** on the advice of the Jawaharlal Nehru Cabinet in 1954.

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- It grants a **special status** to Jammu and Kashmir.
- The **Constitution (Application to Jammu and Kashmir) Order** followed the 1952 **Delhi Agreement** between Nehru and the then Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, which extended Indian citizenship to the ‘State subjects’ of Jammu and Kashmir.

Source: The Hindu

2. Free fall

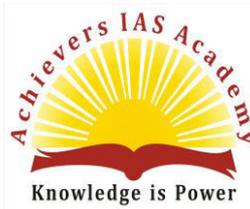
The Tamil Nadu government’s attitude towards news media has hit a new low

- Any which way one looks at the **Puthiya Thalaimurai case**, one conclusion is inescapable: it is a direct attack on **press freedom**.
- That the Tamil Nadu government could have slapped a case against the Tamil news channel under **Section 153A** of the Indian Penal Code (pertaining to **promoting enmity between groups**), and other sections of the law, would be laughable if it wasn’t so unspeakably appalling.
- The cause for the action was certain **remarks made by a couple of the TV channel’s guests** who had participated in a roundtable discussion on current affairs before an invited audience.
- Although it was a right-wing section of the audience that was disruptive, first information reports (FIRs) were filed against the two guests — who, from all accounts, said nothing that was inflammatory — as well as the reporter and management of Puthiya Thalaimurai.
- All the more shocking is the fact that this was done even before the roundtable discussion on the **role of protests was aired**.
- Any debate in Tamil Nadu on whether protests such as the protracted and heated **anti-Sterlite agitation** are politicised is bound to evoke radically divergent views.
- But it is extraordinary that people have been booked for either hosting such a **debate or merely expressing their views in it**.
- If proof was needed that the Tamil Nadu government was acting in a vindictive way, it was provided by another, and even more insidious, attempt to intimidate Puthiya Thalaimurai.
- As for those subscribers who are linked to Arasu via analogue, the channel has become simply unavailable in many areas.
- Around 60% of the 1.5 crore homes that have cable television are serviced by Arasu, which was set up to link homes to television through **multi-system operators and local cable operators at an affordable cost**.
- As Arasu has grown in influence, **private players no longer enjoy the patronage** that they did earlier.
- Lately, there have been apprehensions that the **State government is using its domination of the distribution space** to bring news coverage by TV channels in line.
- There have been allegations that access to a couple of other news channels were disrupted as well; some have found themselves pushed back in the slots allotted by the Arasu network.

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- This is why many in the media have been led to believe that the rationale or purpose for coming down on Puthiya Thalaimurai with such a heavy hand is to send a larger message to the rest of the media.
- The only way the Tamil Nadu government can prove they are wrong is by withdrawing **the FIRs registered in this case.**

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-II : Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

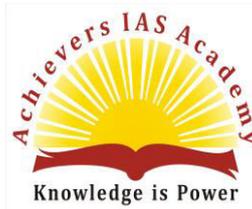
1. Power crisis

- One crisis, many causes. The **immediate provocation** for Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal sitting on a dharna at the residence of the Lt. Governor might have been a **run-in with the bureaucracy**, but the crisis is rooted in the **understanding (or misunderstanding) of the constitutional limits** of the powers of the elected government in **the National Capital Territory** of Delhi.
- The Aam Aadmi Party government has a **history of confrontation with the Centre** on the question of who is the administrative head of a region that is less than a State and more than a **Union Territory**.
- Since the party came to power in 2015, the **demand for Delhi to be given the status of a full-fledged State**, allowing it among other things powers over the **police**, has become strident.
- Differences extend to the LG's discretionary powers to appoint the Chief Secretary, with the AAP nursing a grouse that the bureaucratic cadre came directly under the Centre.
- Matters came to a head **when Chief Secretary Anshu Prakash was assaulted** during a late-night meeting in Mr. Kejriwal's presence.
- Since then, officials have been in a non-cooperative mode, only attending statutory meetings, skipping what they term are "**routine**" meetings and **not taking phone calls** from Ministers.
- Mr. Kejriwal and his Cabinet colleagues decided on the dharna in protest, but instead of forcing a solution, they may have precipitated a crisis.
- Members of the BJP responded with a dharna at the Chief Minister's residence, completing the political spectacle.
- In adopting the **politics of protest** as part of its quest to expand the powers of the elected government, the AAP is putting **governance at risk**.
- Instead of mounting a **legal challenge to the Centre's efforts** to further curtail the limited powers of the Delhi government, Mr. Kejriwal chose to **respond politically**.

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- While he might like to be seen as a constitutional functionary whose hands are tied by an overbearing Centre, he is coming across as someone who is keener on a bigger fight on a bigger stage than as one eager to fulfil his constitutional mandate.
- The dharnas might end, but **the underlying causes of the present crisis will not disappear** without the Centre and the Delhi government agreeing on the terms of engagement through the office of the Lt. Governor.
- The BJP cannot mock Mr. Kejriwal out of politics; the **Centre will have to deal with him**, and work jointly with the AAP government for the welfare of Delhi's citizens — something it has failed to do.
- The way to fight the AAP cannot be by placing handcuffs on the Delhi government. As for the AAP, it should learn to make **the best of the system before demanding more autonomy**.
- To push the constitutional limits to acquire more meaningful powers is fine, but it cannot be at the cost of failing to do **whatever is possible within the current framework**.

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-II : Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary

1.SC notifies new roster for judges

- The Supreme Court on Sunday notified a new roster for the allocation of cases to judges, which will come into effect **from July 2** when the top court reopens after summer vacation.
- Like the previous roster notified on February 1, the new roster says that the **Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra** will hear all **public interest litigation petitions**, besides pleas on social justice, elections, habeas corpus and contempt of court.
- **Justice Ranjan Gogoi**, the seniormost judge after the Chief Justice, will deal with **labour laws, indirect taxes**, personal law and company law cases.
- The roster was put in the public domain for the first time in **February** after Justices Chelameswar, Gogoi, M.B. Lokur and Kurian Joseph held **an unprecedented press meet** in January questioning the allocation of sensitive PIL petitions and crucial cases to judges junior to them.
- The notification lists the matters that will be heard by Benches headed by the CJI and 10 other judges — Gogoi, Lokur, Joseph, A.K. Sikri, S.A. Bobde, N.V. Ramana, Arun Mishra, A.K. Goel, R.F. Nariman and A.M. Sapre.

Source: The Hindu

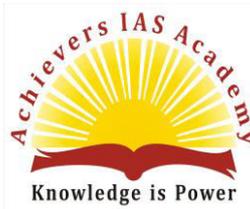
General Studies-II : Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.

1.NITI Aayog to Release First Delta Ranking under the Aspirational Districts Programme

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- NITI Aayog will release the **First Delta Ranking** of the Aspirational **Districts Programme tomorrow**, i.e. June 29, 2018. The ranking will measure the **incremental progress made by districts** between March 31, 2018 and May 31, 2018.
- The districts have been ranked in a **transparent basis on parameters** across Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure through **49 key performance indicators**.
- The rankings are publicly available through the **Champions of Change Dashboard**, which includes data entered on a real-time basis at the district level.
- The Delta ranking seeks to highlight the Districts who have achieved incremental progress between the months of March 2018 and May 2018.

Source: PIB

2. Centre may scrap UGC, proposes new regulator

UGC vs HECI

1 The UGC's regulatory power included quality assessment and giving grants. The HECI will just ensure academic quality while MHRD will give grants

2 The UGC conducted inspections to assess institutions. The HECI will practically do away with these and shift to a regime of "transparent disclosures" instead

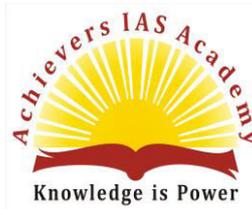
3 The UGC published lists of bogus institutions. The HECI will be empowered to shut down substandard institutions

- The government is set to **replace the apex higher education regulator**, University Grants Commission (UGC), with a **higher education commission** by **repealing the UGC Act, 1951**.
- The Centre has placed in the public domain a **draft Bill** for eliciting suggestions from educationists.

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- The draft Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Act, 2018, **takes away funding powers** from the proposed regulator and gives it **powers to ensure academic quality**.
- There is **no plan to merge all higher education regulators**, as was proposed through a planned agency called **HEERA**, which was supposed to be put in place as a **super regulator**.
- The new regime **separates the academic and funding aspects** of higher education.
- While HECI will be in charge of ensuring academic quality in universities and colleges, the **Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD)** – or **another mechanism** that will be put in place later – will be responsible for **funding universities and colleges**.
- Another key feature of the draft legislation is that “the Regulator will have powers **to enforce compliance to the academic quality standards** and will have the power to **order closure of sub-standard and bogus institutions**”

Source: The Hindu

3.Paper setters to receive training

- **The National Testing Agency**, which is being set up to relieve the Central Board of Secondary Education (**CBSE**) of the burden of conducting multiple examinations, will also **train paper setters** to set **better question papers and provide better model answers**.
- The agency’s mandate as envisaged by the **Ministry of Human Resource Development** is to put in place a robust system for the conduct of examinations.
- The National Testing Agency is expected to conduct some of the examinations that the CBSE has been conducting till now, Mr. Javadekar, who held a review of the proposed body on Sunday, said.
- **Eventually, the new body will take over all examinations** from the CBSE, except the **10th and 12th** board examinations.
- Among the examinations that will be transferred to the NTA are the prestigious Joint Entrance Examination (**JEE**) for admission to engineering colleges like the IITs and NITs and the National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (**NEET**) for admission to all medical colleges in the country, except AIIMS and JIPMER, Puducherry.
- The creation of NTA was approved by the Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister in November 2017. After a one-time grant of ₹25 crore to the NTA, it is **supposed to become financially self-sustainable**.

Source: The Hindu

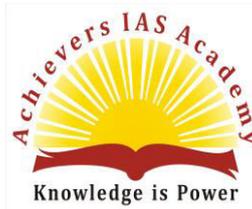
4.Ethics first

- **Transplantation of human organs** is today a mature programme in many States, making it possible for people with **kidney, liver, heart and lung failure** to extend their lives.

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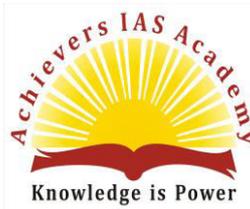
- Heart and lung transplants are **expensive and less widely available**, compared with kidney and liver procedures.
- **State governments, which have responsibility** for health care provision, are expected to ensure that the organs that are **altruistically** donated by families of brain-dead people are given to recipients **ethically**, and as mandated by law.
- **Priority for citizens enrolled in the State** and national waiting lists over foreign nationals is laid down in the **Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Rules**.
- When the law is clear, it is extraordinary that seemingly preferential allotment of hearts and lungs has been made to **foreign patients** in Tamil Nadu — in 2017, foreigners accounted for **25% of heart transplants and 33% of lung transplants**.
- The State is a **pioneer** in orderly and transparent allocation of deceased-donor organs, and has worked consistently **to eliminate commerce in kidneys procured from poor living donors**.
- The Transplant Authority of Tamil Nadu has served as a model for other States that now have their own programmes.
- Every effort must be made to ensure that it retains this high reputation, and organs **go to the most suitable recipients** on the rule-based parameters of **domicile, citizenship, Indian origin** and foreign nationality, in that order.
- Organ transplants display a maturity curve over time, with a rise in the number of procedures **improving outcomes and reducing costs**.
- Heart and lung transplants are **complicated procedures**. Few Indian patients are willing to opt for one, compared to kidney and liver.
- Kidney and liver programmes have reached a high level of maturity, resulting in rising demand.
- Most of these organs go to citizens. Tamil Nadu offers a **subsidy** for poor patients for a liver transplant.
- Any **inquiry** into the allocation of hearts and lungs to foreigners should, therefore, shed light on the factors that led to the decisions, including **whether registered citizens were overlooked**
- It should cover such issues as the **capacity of district-level hospitals** to perform transplants, and arrangements to **air-lift organs**, since domestic patients are unable to afford flight facilities.
- Such measures will make it possible to utilise more hearts and lungs, and offer them to domestic recipients.
- **Enrolling all domestic patients through State registries** should be the priority for the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation, set up by the Centre with that mandate.
- Nothing should be done to erode the confidence of the kin of brain-dead people who donate organs with no expectation of gain.
- Hospitals and professionals who engage in commerce or unethical behaviour should have **no place in the system**.

Source: The Hindu

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5.Sanitation Action Plans Prepared for 10 New Swachh Iconic Places

- The Swachh Iconic Places initiative aims to achieve a distinctly **higher level of sanitation at these places**, especially in the **peripheries and approach areas**.
- The Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) initiative of the Swachh Bharat Mission, coordinated by the **Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation**
- **Ten new heritage sites** of the country today firmed up action plans for raising their sanitation standards to exemplary levels. These Places are Sri Raghavendra Swami Mutt Mantralayam (Andhra Pradesh), Hazarduari Palace (West Bengal), Shri Brahma Sarovar Temple (Haryana), Vidur Kuti Temple (Uttar Pradesh), Mana village (Uttarakhand), Pangong Tso (Jammu and Kashmir), Shri Nag Vasuki Temple (Uttar Pradesh), Nupi Keithel (Manipur), Sree Dharma Sastha Temple (Kerala) and Kanvashram (Uttarakhand), which constitute **Phase-III** of the Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) initiative of the Swachh Bharat Mission, coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation.

Source: PIB

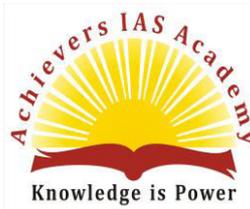
6.Keralites face highest risk of cardiovascular disease, finds study

- A study based on two recent national surveys of nearly 8,00,000 adults between 34 and 70 years, has found that people of Kerala — **across sexes** — **were most at risk of cardiovascular diseases** while those in Jharkhand were least likely to have the condition.
- A gender break down, however, puts the **women of Goa at highest mean cardiovascular risk** at 16.73% while men in Himachal Pradesh and Nagaland were most vulnerable with mean cardiovascular risk of 24.23%.
- The surveys carried out between 2012 and 2014, found **wide variations in the average 10-year risk** of a fatal or nonfatal cardiovascular disease event among States.
- A paper published on June 19 in PLOS Medicine found the risk ranging from a low of 13.2% for both sexes in Jharkhand to 19.5% in Kerala.
- The study, led by researchers at **Public Health Foundation of India and Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health**, found that adults in urban areas, as well as those with a higher household wealth, tended to have a greater cardiovascular risk.
- The study used the data from the **District Level Household Survey-4 (DLHS-4)** and the second update of the **Annual Health Survey (AHS)**. The surveys covered 27 of the 29 States and five of the seven Union Territories.
- With 19.90%, adults living in urban areas, Kerala had the highest mean risk, followed by West Bengal (19.12%) and Himachal Pradesh (18.97%).
- In contrast, those living in urban areas of Daman and Diu had the lowest mean risk (12.60%), followed by Bihar (13.63%) and Arunachal Pradesh (14.71%).
- In general, the cardiovascular risk is **lower in rural areas compared with urban areas**.

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- In the case of **Kerala**, the difference between highest mean risk in rural (19.23%) and urban areas (19.90%) is meagre. The same questionnaire and methodology was used throughout to collect clinical, anthropometric, and biomarker measurements.
- While **smoking was more prevalent in poorer households and rural areas, wealthy households** and urban locations faced risks from **high body mass index, high blood glucose and high systolic blood pressure**.

Source: The Hindu

7. Maternal mortality ratio in the country drops to 130 from 167

- The latest **Sample Registration System (SRS)** data indicating the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has brought glad tidings.
- As per the data, the **MMR (number of maternal deaths per 1,00,000 live births)** has dropped from 167 (in 2011-2013, the last SRS period) to 130 for the country.
- This 28% drop is an achievement arising from painstakingly reducing the MMR in each of the States.
- **Kerala remains at the top with an MMR of 46** (down from 61). Maharashtra retains its second position with 61, but the pace of fall has been much lower, dropping from 68 during 2011-13. Tamil Nadu with 66 (79) is in the third position.

Source: The Hindu

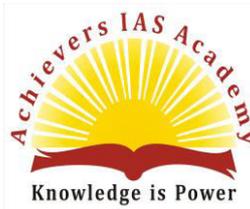
8. NEET nostrums

- There was no uncertainty over the **medical admission process** this year in Tamil Nadu.
- There were **no attempts to get an exemption** from the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET).
- And, willy-nilly, as many as **1.14 lakh aspirants took the examination** that has been **made mandatory by the Supreme Court** as the sole admission window for medical colleges.
- Yet, the **poor performance of students** from Tamil Nadu in the entrance test has demonstrated that the State is still far from being 'NEET-ready'.
- It is true that a well-intentioned beginning has been made to **upgrade the syllabus and to make students more competitive**.
- However, only 45,336 candidates, or 39.6% of those who took the test, qualified for admission.
- Along with Maharashtra, this is **the lowest ratio in the country**. What is important is that these candidates are merely eligible for admission, and far fewer students are actually likely to get admission.

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- Further, the chances of many of the candidates in the lower percentiles gaining entry into a **government medical college** are quite low, and many of them may not be able to afford to pay for seats in **private colleges**.
- Proponents of NEET may maintain that its objectives — ensuring **uniformity in standards of medical education** by admitting students on the basis of a common national test and **eliminating capitation fee** for medical courses in private institutions — are being successfully met.
- However, it is a moot question whether the **commercialisation of education has been really eliminated**, and whether the admission policy is sufficiently inclusive for this **large and diverse country**.
- **Lavish advertisements**, as well as interviews with toppers, make it quite obvious that those who can **afford expensive coaching classes** have a distinct advantage in this system.
- Like many other competitive examinations, NEET has spawned a **coaching industry**, with some parts of the country proving to be ideal locales for **academic sweatshops**.
- Many of those in the top percentiles have attended long-term coaching classes as well as crash courses, **paying exorbitant fees**.
- There is anger in Tamil Nadu against this perceived **socio-economic asymmetry** built into the medical admission process that keeps medical courses out of bounds for **disadvantaged sections**.
- Such feelings intensified as a result of at least **two young women committing suicide** after they failed to clear NEET.
- One of them had enough marks in her **higher secondary examination** to gain admission to a medical college, if the State government had its own admission system.
- But overall, there is no escaping the fact that the country is committed to having uniform standards in medical education, and that this can play a role in meeting the important objective of **maintaining standards in health care**.
- NEET is **here to stay** and **State governments** are now best-advised to upgrade academic standards and prepare their students better.
- This will help in seeing that India's healthcare infrastructure continues to get a **steady inflow of medical manpower** drawn from all sections of society.

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-II : Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.

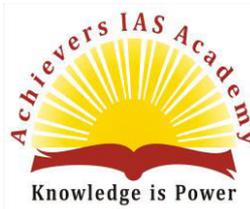
1. Centre cannot guarantee power supply to all villages, says official

- While it is the **Centre's responsibility to connect households** and villages to the power grid or provide them alternative sources of electricity, it **cannot guarantee the supply** of electricity to them

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- The actual supply is the responsibility of the **power distribution companies** in each State, the official told The Hindu.
- The Centre has **claimed 100% electrification of all villages** and 83% of all households across the country. It has said that all households will be **electrified by the year-end**.
- In some cases, the **electrification infrastructure such as cables and transformers were stolen** days after they were installed, leaving the target village **unelectrified** in reality but connected on paper. In other cases, electricity was supplied for just a few hours a day.
- Despite the government **pegging India as a power surplus nation**, almost every State in the country reels under power cuts, **especially during peak summer**.
- This, according to power sector analysts, is because discoms are still very **inefficient**, with the costs they incur in the transmission far outweighing revenue. Government data show discoms across the country, on an average, lose ₹0.22 a unit of electricity supplied.
- However, the Power Ministry has claimed that this situation is improving rapidly under the Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojana (**UDAY**), with Power Minister R.K. Singh recently saying that **discom losses have drastically reduced** to ₹17,352 crore in 2017-18 from ₹51,096 crore in the previous year.
- Sector specialists, however, say that while the performance of discoms is improving, they are still **not at the performance level to supply electricity 24x7**. The only hope of the utilities is continued **assistance** from the State governments.
- The first is their **financial** health. Most of them are not financially capable to do this. Secondly, only some of the discoms have the **infrastructure** to supply good quality power on a sustained basis. But if the respective **State governments continue to give financial support and assurances** to the discoms, then this could definitely improve

Source: The Hindu

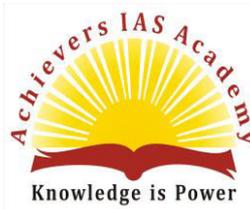
2. Drive Ola, Uber: no commercial licence needed

- In a move that could rapidly expand the pool of available drivers, the State's transport department has decided to issue a notification allowing people who hold a **valid private light motor vehicle (LMV)** driving licence to ply taxis, **without having to obtain a commercial licence**.
- Since May this year, taxi aggregators such as **Ola and Uber** have been inviting people with a valid licence to join their platforms and boost their income. But many were hesitant, as the **transport department hadn't taken a clear position on this**. The aggregators had based their pitch on a **Supreme Court order** of July 3, 2017
- The Court's order **did away with the system of obtaining a separate** commercial licence to drive a taxi. Now anyone can become a taxi driver if he has a valid driving licence
- The **Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** had in April this year come out with an advisory asking State governments to **comply** with the order. **Karnataka** has now taken the lead.

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- Bengaluru has a huge scarcity of drivers. The tourism sector alone needs at least 20,000 more. If rules are simplified, it will encourage **women**, too, to take up jobs.
- We had asked the State government to issue a notification, as this insistence on a commercial licence was continuing even after the court order
- If people holding private LMV licences are allowed to drive a taxi, it will have negative **impact on existing drivers**, as their earnings will come down

Source: The Hindu

3.Shillong bags Smart City tag

- As the Smart Cities Mission enters its **fourth year**, the Centre has finally announced the **100th and the last city** which will be part of the project: Shillong.
- This announcement also sets the **end date for the mission as June 2023**, as every city gets **five years to complete its projects**, according to a senior mission official.
- **The first 20 cities** were selected in January 2016, and they should now be at the **halfway point** of their mission.
- The total proposed investment in the 100 cities will be **₹2.05 lakh crore**, according to a statement by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs**

Objective: To develop 100 cities all over the country making them citizen friendly and sustainable

Eight critical pillars of India's Smart City Program are:

1. Smart Governance
2. Smart Energy
3. Smart Environment
4. Smart Transportation
5. Smart IT & Communications
6. Smart Buildings
7. Smart Health Hospitals
8. Smart Education

Source: PIB

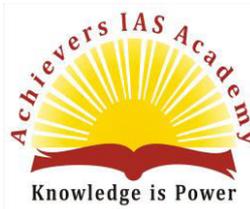
4. 'New auto policy may be finalised in three months'

- The new National Auto Policy, which may seek **emission-linked taxation** on automobiles and a technology- agnostic **green mobility roadmap**, is likely to be finalised in the next three months
- Discussions with various stakeholders have been on for the past six months to frame the new policy, which envisages having a **single nodal regulatory body** for the automobile industry

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- There has also been a discussion on **strengthening the FAME India** (Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric & Hybrid Vehicles) scheme further for the faster adoption of eco-friendly automobile technologies
- In terms of emission, it has been suggested to have a **comprehensive long-term plan** with definite time-lines under the new auto policy, the source added.
- The draft of the policy released earlier had recommended **rationalisation of the GST structure** for automobiles that is currently based on length, engine displacement, engine type and ground clearance.
- It had called for replacing the current classification criteria with a **composite criterion based on vehicle length and CO2 emissions**.
- The draft policy had recommended that vehicle length-based classification will **target reduction in vehicular congestion and CO2 emissions** based classification will align with the overall vision of green mobility and **reduction in green house gas(GHG) emissions**.
- The policy is expected to define **thresholds for length and CO2 emissions** with the objective of neutralising the impact on GST revenue.

Source: The Hindu

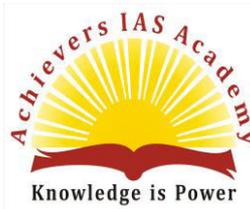
5.Solace for homebuyers

- The Insolvency and **Bankruptcy Amendment (Ordinance) Act, 2018**, received the President's assent on June 6.
- The amendment to the Code was brought about with a view to balance the **interests of various stakeholders**, especially the interests of **home buyers**.
- In the context of insolvency proceedings of a company involved in real estate development, this ordinance benefits homebuyers by treating such buyers as **financial creditors** under the Code.
- **Prior** to the amendment, homebuyers were neither treated as financial creditors nor as operational creditors but as an '**unsecured creditor**', because of which they were not able to **initiate insolvency proceedings against a defaulting developer**.
- In case of a developer facing liquidation, as per the liquidation waterfall, homebuyers would get only the balance proceeds after paying off insolvency costs, workmen dues, **financial creditors and government dues**.
- By virtue of the amendment, homebuyers are now classified as an '**allottee**' under a 'real estate project'. The two terms have their respective meanings as defined under **Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 (RERA)**.
- Any amount raised from an allottee under a real estate project is deemed to be an amount having the commercial effect of a borrowing.
- Therefore, under the Code, the **amounts paid by homebuyers to a developer will be treated as financial debt** and homebuyers will be categorised as financial creditors.

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- In the position of a financial creditor, homebuyers can **jointly or individually file a petition to initiate insolvency proceedings** against a defaulting developer company.
- The term ‘financial debt’ as defined under the Code has been amended to include any amount raised by a developer from an allottee under a real estate project and these amounts are deemed to have the commercial effect of a borrowing.
- Therefore, transactions entered into by homebuyers with developers would fall under the definition of ‘financial debt’ and the default contemplated under RERA will **entitle home buyers to initiate proceedings under the Code.**

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-II : Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.

1.Couples in live-in relations cannot adopt, says CARA

- **The nodal body for adoption** in the country has barred partners in live-in relationships from adopting a child on the ground that **cohabitation without marriage is not considered a stable family** in India.
- The Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) permits a **single woman to adopt a child of any gender**, while single men can adopt only boys.
- In case an applicant is **married**, both spouses must give their consent for adoption and **should be in a stable marriage for at least two years**. Candidates must be **physically fit, financially sound, mentally alert** and highly motivated to adopt a child, as per the **Adoption Regulations 2017**.
- The **Supreme Court** has on several occasions said that a live-in relationship is **neither a crime or a sin**.
- Last month, the Supreme Court had said that adult couples have the right to live **together even if they were not married**.
- It said that even the legislature recognised live-in relationships through the provisions under the **Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005**.
- Under the Act, women in a live-in relationship have been accorded protection as it allows females living with a male person in a relationship in the nature of marriage to file a **complaint of domestic violence**.

Source: The Hindu

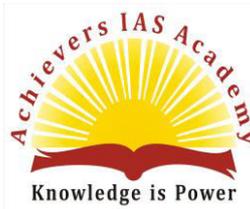
General Studies-II : Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and Bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.

1.India not ready to sign the Hague treaty

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- The government is not yet ready to sign the Hague treaty on inter-country abduction of **children by parents fleeing a bad marriage**, said a senior official of the Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD).
- There has been immense pressure from the U.S. on the government to sign the treaty though the government has long held the view that the decision could lead to harassment of **women escaping marital discord or domestic violence**.
- A committee constituted by the Centre to examine legal issues involved in international parental abduction submitted its report in April, opposing a central provision of the Hague Convention.
- It said that **the criterion of habitual residence of the child**, which is used to determine whether the child was wrongfully removed by a parent as well as to seek the return of the child to the country of habitual residence, was **not in the best interest of the child**.
- The government is contemplating assigning **the National Commission for Protection of Children** the responsibility to adjudicate on such cases along with a judicial expert.

*The Hague Convention is a multi-national treaty that seeks to protect children **wrongfully removed** by one of the parents from the custody of the other parent.*

Source: The Hindu

2. Wave of lynchings

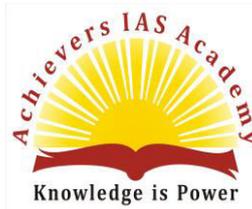
Local authorities must show good faith, and facilitate policing to deal with mob violence

- The events that led up to the **brutal assault on Monday of two men in Uttar Pradesh's** Hapur district on the outskirts of New Delhi are unclear — but one of them died and the other sustained injuries.
- The family of the dead man, Qasim, a 45-year-old **cattle trader**, says that he had set out when he heard about the possibility of cattle being on sale, and the next thing they heard was that a mob had set itself upon him, killing him.
- Sameyddin's relatives say he had been out getting grass for his cattle when he spied the mob attack on Qasim — he tried to run to safety, but was beaten up nonetheless.
- Qasim's son says his father's death was the outcome of a conspiracy. Others in the village say locals were on edge following **rumours that cow smuggling was afoot**.
- And administration officials say it may all have been a case of road rage. Investigations are on, so what actually transpired is not definitively known yet.
- But given lynchings across north India by 'cow protection' vigilantes, it is not difficult to miss the **communal dangers** here.
- Elsewhere, from **Tamil Nadu in the south to Assam in the Northeast**, men and women have been lynched on suspicion that they were out to **kidnap children**.

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- To give just a few examples, in May, a homeless man in Pulicat, north of Chennai, was battered to death on such suspicion, as was a **car-borne woman pilgrim in Tiruvannamalai district**, who offered some sweets to children while seeking directions.
- This month, in Assam's Karbi Anglong district, **two men from Guwahati were killed by a mob** on the same anxiety that they were looking to kidnap children.
- In many cases — including in Tamil Nadu and Assam — such **public concern was created** or heightened by warnings that were circulated on **social media**.
- Yet, irrespective of whether the lynchings are due to fear of kidnappings or are deliberate acts by cow protection vigilantes, the authorities should not treat the **crime of murder and the allegations that enrage a mob with the same equivalence**.
- Murder is murder, but the killing of another human being by a murderous crowd out to **enforce mob justice or avert an imagined crime** takes an **extraordinary toll of the civilities of wider society**.
- The police must make it clear, by word and action, that murder and mob violence will **be strictly dealt with**.
- Yet, the administration must also reckon with a **new challenge: the use of social media**, especially WhatsApp groups and forwards, to spread fear and panic.
- **Responses such as surveillance and Internet shutdowns** are not just impossible — in a free society, they are **inadvisable**.
- What is needed is an administration that **reaches out to local communities** to keep them in the loop in order to **check trouble-makers** — and that conveys sufficient **good faith so individuals will trust** it to keep the peace and sift real threats from mischievous rumours.

Source: The Hindu

3.National Dam Safety Authority in the works

An eye on dams

The Dam Safety Bill envisages the following functions for the National Dam Safety Authority:

- Liaise with State dam safety organisations and owners of dams for standardising safety-related data and practices
- Investigate dam failures and have the authority to fine States that are found amiss in implementing safety measures
- Look into "unresolved points of issue" between States which share dam territory and look to "eliminating potential causes for inter-state conflicts"



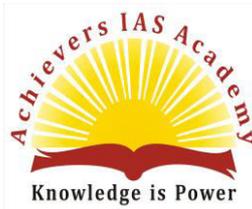
India has over 5,200 large dams; nearly 450 are under construction

- The **Union Cabinet**, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved a proposal for introduction of the **Dam Safety Bill**, 2018 in Parliament.

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- The Bill envisages a **National Dam Safety Authority**, which will liaise with State-level dam safety organisations and the owners of dams for standardising safety-related data and practices.
- The NDSA will **investigate dam failures** and have the authority to fine the States that are found remiss in **implementing safety measures**.
- It will look into “**unresolved points of issue**” between the States which share dam territory and look to “eliminating potential causes **for inter-State conflicts**,” an official release said.
- A case in point is the **Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala**, which is a perennial flashpoint between the State and neighbouring Tamil Nadu.
- The **Chennai floods of 2015** due to unusually heavy rain were thought to have been compounded by an unprecedented release of water from the Chembambakkam dam into the Adyar.
- Due to **lack of legal and institutional architecture** for dam safety in India, dam safety is a perennial concern.

Source: The Hindu, PIB

General Studies-III : Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.

1. Indian money in Swiss banks surges

- The amount of money Indians hold in Swiss bank accounts **surged more than 50%** in 2017 to 1.01 billion Swiss francs (₹7,000 crore), Swiss National Bank data show.
- The increase **reverses a three-year downtrend** amid India’s clampdown on suspected black money stashed there
- Money parked by Indians in Swiss banks rose more than 50% to 1.01 billion Swiss francs (₹7,000 crore) in 2017, reversing a three-year downward trend **amid India’s clampdown on suspected black money stashed there**.
- **In comparison**, the total funds held by **all foreign clients of Swiss banks rose about 3%** to 1.46 trillion francs or about ₹100 lakh crore in 2017, according to the official annual data released on Thursday by the Swiss National Bank (SNB), the central banking authority of the Alpine nation.
- The surge in Indian money held with Swiss banks comes as a **surprise** given India’s **continuing clampdown on suspected black money stashed** abroad, including in the banks of Switzerland that used to be known for their secrecy for years.

Source: The Hindu

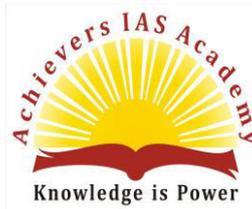
2. Reality check

- RBI report warns that the worst on NPAs may be yet to come. Urgent changes are needed

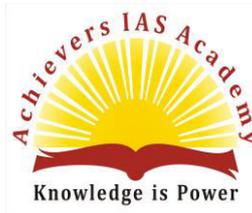
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- The worst is far from over for Indian banks. The **financial stability report** released by the Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday has warned that the gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) of scheduled commercial banks in the country **could rise** from 11.6% in March 2018 to 12.2% in March 2019, which would be the **highest level of bad debt in almost two decades**.
- This puts at rest the **hope of a bottoming out of the NPA crisis** that has affected the banking system and **impeded credit growth** in the economy.
- The GNPA of banks under the prompt corrective action framework, in particular, is expected to rise to 22.3% in March 2019, from 21% this March.
- The RBI believes that this will **increase the size of provisioning for losses** and affect the **capital position of banks**. In fact, the capital to risk-weighted assets ratio of the banking system as a whole is expected to drop from 13.5% in March 2018 to 12.8% in March 2019.
- The **deteriorating health of banks** is in contrast to the **economy**, which is on the path to **recovery**, clocking a healthy growth rate of 7.7% during the last quarter.
- The RBI, however, has warned about the rising **external risks** that pose a **significant threat to the economy and to the banks**.
- The **tightening of monetary policy by the United States** Federal Reserve and increased borrowing by the U.S. government have already caused credit to flow out of emerging markets such as India.
- The **increase in commodity prices** is another risk on the horizon that could pose a significant threat to the rupee and the country's fiscal and current account deficits.
- All these factors could well **combine to increase the risk of an economic slowdown** and exert pressure on the entire banking system.
- A major highlight of the financial stability report is the central bank's finding that **public sector banks (PSBs) are far more prone to fraud** than their private sector counterparts.
- This is significant in light of the huge scam unearthed at a **Punjab National Bank** branch earlier this year.
- The RBI notes that more than **85% of frauds could be linked to PSBs**, even though their share of overall credit is only about 65%.
- This should come as no surprise given the **serious corporate governance issues** faced by public sector banks, which to a large extent also contributed to the lax lending practices that are at the core of the NPA crisis.
- In his foreword to the report, RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya has noted that governance reforms at PSBs, if implemented, can help improve their **financial performance and also reduce their operational risks**.
- For now, the RBI expects the government's **recapitalisation plan** for banks and the implementation of the **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code** to improve the capital position of banks.
- These reforms can definitely help. But unless the government can gather the courage to make **drastic changes to aspects of operational autonomy** and the **ownership** of PSBs, future crises will be hard to prevent.



Source: The Hindu

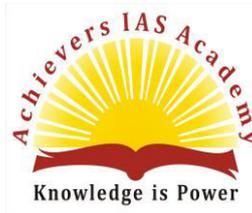
3. Transmission troubles

- In February, in its latest statement of intent to **resolve poor monetary transmission**, the RBI said it would instruct banks to **switch** base rate customers to the marginal cost of funds-based lending rate (**MCLR**) system from April 1, 2018.
- In April 2016, it had introduced the MCLR regime, **scrapping the base rate regime**, in place since 2010.
- “Since MCLR is more sensitive to policy rate signals, it has been decided to harmonise the methodology of determining benchmark rates by linking the Base Rate to the MCLR,” it had said.
- This was supposed to push banks to **lower lending rates**. Currently, under the base rate system, the lending rate at State Bank of India is 8.7%. The one-year MCLR rate is just 8.25%.
- This difference of 45 basis points could make a significant difference in borrowing costs, especially for **smaller firms and retail consumers relying on equated monthly instalments**.
- In the RBI’s assessment, a **large proportion of outstanding loans** and advances continues to be linked to the **base rate system**. This perhaps triggered the February statement.
- Yet, the RBI is yet to operationalise that intent. One can understand the **banks’ reluctance** to switch to the lower MCLR-based rates, given the multiple pressures they face, including **record levels of non-performing assets and losses, and significant treasury losses**.
- The RBI, which has often faced flak for poor monetary transmission, shouldn’t be swayed by these concerns.
- An RBI study estimates that public sector banks **could take a ₹40,000-crore hit** on revenue if they allow all base rate borrowers to switch to the MCLR rate.
- The RBI, which has just allowed banks to spread the booking of losses on the treasury front over four quarters — after talking tough about such rollovers — may not want to hurt them more.
- But this creates an **unfair situation as new borrowers get MCLR rates** while the older ones continue on the **higher base rate system**.
- While a base rate customer can shift to the MCLR regime only by paying a **fee**, this outcome is not too different from the previous attempt by the RBI eight years ago to influence transmission by shifting to **base rates from what was called a Benchmark Prime Lending Rate regime**.
- There was **no sunset clause** included then. For troubled banks, this is an **asset-liability mismatch** issue. Given the need to **revive the economy through consumption** and fresh investment, this impasse needs to be broken.

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Source: The Hindu

4.RBI blames PNB board for fraud

- Blaming the board of directors of the Punjab National Bank for the embezzlement of over ₹13,000 crore by jeweller Nirav Modi and his uncle Mehul Choksi, the Reserve Bank of India on Tuesday, in a written reply to the **Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance**, said all “**three lines of defence**” built in the banking system failed in this case.
- The central bank said all financial institutions were adequately **warned** about dealing with **Letters of Undertaking (LoUs)**, the primary tool of embezzlement by Nirav Modi.
- The RBI said it was the **primary responsibility of the PNB board** to understand the risks in issue of LoUs without collateral and to manage them through controls.
- It said each bank should have three lines of defence: first, the **officer** sanctioning the loan; second, at the **managerial** level; and third, the **internal audit**. “In the case of PNB, there seems to have been failure of all the three lines of defence.”
- The RBI told the panel that its **supervisory process** does not constitute an audit of banks.
- The RBI wants a say in **appointment of managerial positions**, including the power to supersede the Board of Directors and make application for winding up the errant banks.

Source: The Hindu

5.CIL notifies coal e-auction for sectors such as cement, steel

- Coal India Ltd. on Thursday announced the commencement of the fourth tranche of auction of coal linkages for **non-regulated sectors** such as **cement, steel/sponge iron, aluminium** and others. This includes **captive power plants** too, CIL said in a regulatory filing.
- About 57 million tonnes of coal were earlier put on offer through the three tranches of e-auction since June 2016.
- These went to the **various non-regulated user sectors**, including cement, sponge iron and captive power plants. The grades were that of thermal coal.
- The auction is conducted by **MSTC Limited** (formerly known as Metal Scrap Trade Corporation).
- The Cabinet Committee aimed at putting in place a **transparent mechanism** to enable the user sectors to secure coal **linkages irrespective of the size of the industry** or their geographic location, through a **market mechanism**.
- The move to allot coal through this route follows the decision taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (**CCEA**) in this regard two years ago.

Source: The Hindu

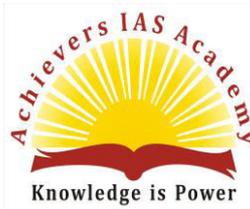
6.More than 2.25 lakh shell firms may be struck off from the register of companies

- More than **2.25 lakh shell firms** may be struck off from the register of companies

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- The Centre said it has **identified 2,25,910 companies** whose names are to be struck off from the register of companies during the current financial year 2018-19.
- This comes on the top of the removal of 2,26,166 companies from the register during the previous financial year.
- **The Task Force on Shell Companies** had so far confirmed a total of 16,537 shell companies on the basis of the information received from the various law enforcement agencies, according to the Centre.
- It had also narrowed down a list of 16,739 companies identified on the basis of having **100% common directorships** with the confirmed shell companies.

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-III : Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.

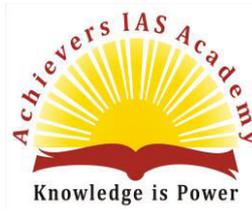
1. Centre allows pulses import despite overflowing godowns

- The Union government has allotted quotas for import of pulses and is enforcing an additional **import agreement with Mozambique** at a time when domestic stocks are at their highest, **domestic production is expected to be high** and prices are crashing.
- Farmers and millers are unhappy with the situation, but the government says it is balancing the needs of **Indian consumers and commitments to foreign trade partners** on the one hand and the interests of Indian farmers on the other.
- The final allocations of import quotas — totalling two lakh tonnes of tur or arhar dal, and 1.5 lakh tonnes each of moong and urad — were made at a meeting at the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) on Monday.
- Those amounts represent a quantitative restriction that was slapped on pulses imports in August 2017 in response to a glut in domestic supply and falling prices, which continues this year.
- On the back of a good monsoon forecast, the Agriculture Commissioner predicts domestic pulses production of 24 million tonnes in 2018-19, slightly higher than last year's.
- However, the DGFT issued a notice last month exempting pulses imports from Mozambique from the restrictions.
- In 2016, in the wake of soaring pulse prices and angry consumers, India signed an MoU to double pulses imports — mostly arhar — from the east African nation over a five-year period.
- This obligates India to buy 1.5 lakh tonnes from Mozambique this year. The government has also explored the possibility of **similar long-term agreements with countries such as Kenya.**

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Source: The Hindu

2.Sweet nothing: on bailout scheme for sugarcane farmers

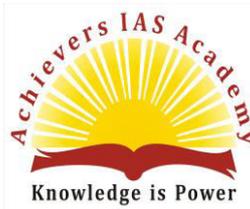
- A little over a month after the Centre proposed a **special cess under the GST** to help alleviate distress among sugarcane farmers, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved a **₹7,000- crore package for the sugar sector** last week.
- This package, with a mix of assured **minimum pricing and special incentives for increasing molasses and ethanol production** to gainfully mop up the glut of sugar in the country, is independent of the cess proposal that was expected to raise ₹6,700 crore.
- To put this in perspective, **sugar mills' dues to farmers** stand at ₹22,000 crore. Under the proposed bailout scheme, the government will procure sugar from mills at a fixed minimum price to help **them clear dues to farmers**, and also offer them other financial assistance.
- Only about ₹1,175 crore, however, will be used towards procurement of refined sugar from mills to create a buffer stock of 30 lakh tonnes. This is a fraction of the 63.5 million tonnes output expected in the two sugar seasons from October 2017 to September 2019
- With the **record output**, sugar **prices have dropped** from an average of ₹37 a kg in the previous season to ₹26 in the current season.
- The **bailout plan** promises to pay ₹29 a kg. Sugar mills say this is below their production cost of ₹35 a kg, though it may dissipate their immediate liquidity problems to an extent.
- Rating agency Crisil reckons that the fixed price for sugar at mill gates and the buffer stock will at best help **mitigate about 40%** of the outstanding arrears to sugarcane farmers.
- And as production will rise again in the coming season, so will the extent of arrears.
- The rest of the package will take time to materialise, with ₹4,440 crore of loans and ₹1,332 crore of interest **subsidies for greenfield and brownfield distillery capacities**.
- Over time, this **could help to use excess sugar for the manufacture** of alcohol or ethanol, but it will not be soon enough to address the present crisis.
- All said and done, the Centre's sweetener for the sector does little to address **structural problems** and sticks to old-style pricing and stock-holding interventions instead of signalling a shift to market-driven cropping decisions.
- The **political compulsions** driving the bailout are obvious, given that the sugarcane crisis was a rallying cry in the by-election in Kairana in Uttar Pradesh, which the BJP lost.
- But that is no excuse for not thinking the package through. Perpetuating the complex web of **state controls in a politically-sensitive sector** is no solution.
- The best way to address the problem of excess supply in the long run is to ensure some **linkage between the price paid** for sugarcane and the end-products it is used for; and encouraging the feedback from market prices to inform farmers' future cropping decisions.
- The current sops-driven **solution could distort the agriculture sector further**.

Source: The Hindu

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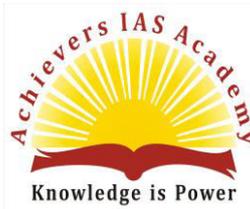
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General Studies-III : Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment Disaster and disaster management.

1.Green ambitions

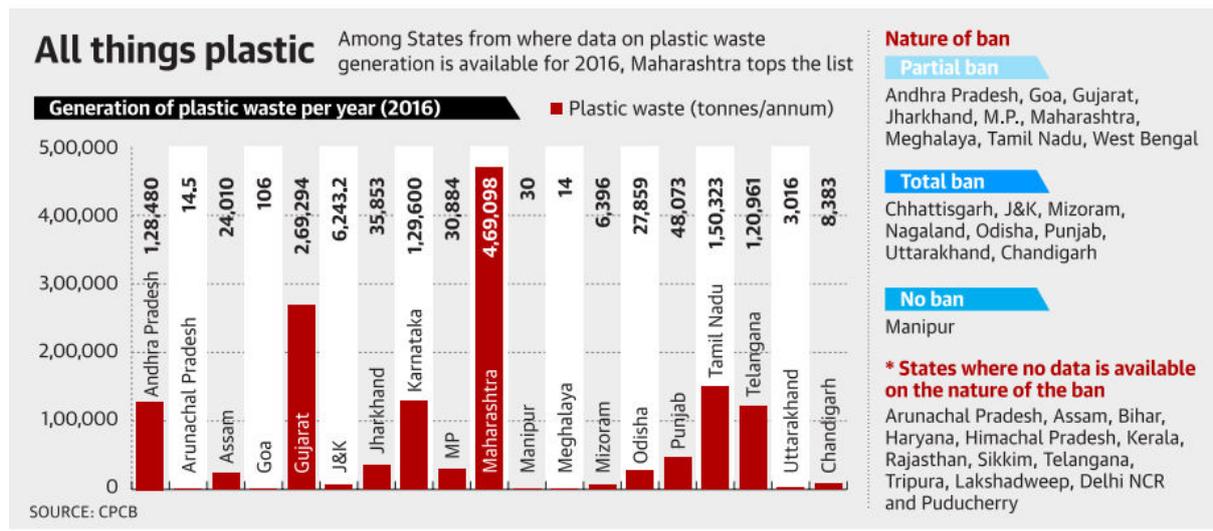
- In a surprising statement this month, Union Power Minister R.K. Singh said India would **overshoot its target of installing 175 gigawatts** of capacity from renewable energy sources by **2022**.
- India was on track, he said, to hit **225 GW of renewable capacity** by then. This is a tall claim, considering India has **missed several interim milestones** since it announced its 175 GW target in 2015.
- The misses happened despite renewable capacity being augmented at a blistering pace, highlighting how ambitious the initial target was.
- **Technological and financial challenges** remain: both wind and solar generation could be **erratic**, and India's **creaky electricity grid** must be modernised to distribute such power efficiently.
- Meanwhile, **wind and solar tariffs have hit such low levels** that suppliers are working with **wafer-thin margins**. This means **small shocks** can knock these sectors off their growth trajectories.
- The obstacles have capped capacity addition to **69 GW till date**, with India missing its 2016 and 2017 milestones.
- To hit its 2022 target of 175 GW, 106 GW will have to be added in four years, **more than twice the capacity added in the last four**.
- In the solar sector alone, which the government is prioritising, **policy uncertainties loom large**.
- **Manufacturers of photovoltaic (PV) cells** have demanded a 70% safeguard duty on **Chinese PV imports**, and the Directorate General of Trade Remedies will soon take a call on this. But any such duty will deal a **body blow to solar-power suppliers**, who rely heavily on Chinese hardware, threatening the growth of the sector.
- There is also the problem of the **rooftop-solar segment**. Of the current goal of 100 GW from solar energy by 2022, **40 GW** is to come from rooftop installations, and 60 GW from large solar parks.
- Despite being the fastest-growing renewable-energy segment so far — rooftop solar clocked a compound annual growth rate of 117% between 2013 and 2017 — **India only hit 3% of its goal by the end of 2017**, according to a Bloomberg New Energy Finance report. The reason?
- **Homeowners aren't warming up** to the idea of installing photovoltaic panels on their terraces because the **economics does not work out** for them. Compared to industries and commercial establishments, a home typically needs less power and will not use everything it generates.



- So, **homeowners need to be able to sell electricity** back to the grid, which in turn needs a nationwide “**net-metering**” policy.
- As of today, **only a few States have such policies**, discouraging users elsewhere.
- The good news is that even if India hits the 175 GW target, it stands to meet its greenhouse-gas emission goal under the **Paris climate agreement**.
- This in itself will be a worthy achievement. Overshooting this target will be a plus, but until the government tackles **the policy challenges, it must hold off on implausible claims**.

Source: The Hindu

2.States’ claim on fighting plastic only strong on paper

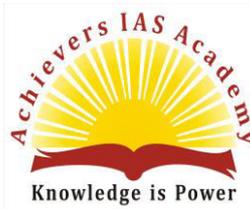


- According to the Centre’s **Plastic Waste Management (PWM) Rules, 2016**, all States have to annually apprise the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) on the steps taken to reign in plastic use, whether a **ban** is in force, and the strength and performance of a recycler and waste-processing network.
- The latest such report — as of July 2016 — notes that **only 24 States and Union Territories have complied** with these directions.
- Most States, while claiming a ban, qualify it by saying that the ban **is imposed in specific towns or cities**.
- Or that it is focussed on **particular categories of plastic**. Take Assam. Its performance report states that while there is a “complete ban” on plastic carry bags in Kamrup, Sonitpur, Nalbari, Dibrugarh, it allows the import of “substandard plastic carry bags”, provided the Commissioner of Taxes, Assam is informed.
- In **Gujarat**, the estimated plastic waste **generation** is approximately 2,69,294 tonnes per annum and there are nearly 689 plastic waste **recyclers**, all of them registered.

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- But only **Gandhinagar** — the capital city but with less than 4% of neighbouring Ahmedabad’s population — **has an “explicit” ban** on the use of plastic carry bags.
- **Delhi, which reportedly generates the largest quantity of plastic waste** in the country, has **not provided information** on its plastic management initiatives to the CPCB.
- It is observed that **most of the States/UTs have not set up proper monitoring system** for use of carry bags as per the specified guidelines. It has been observed that those States/UTs, who have imposed complete ban on use and sale of plastic carry bags, the plastic bags are **stocked, sold and used indiscriminately**.
- Besides, **substandard carry bags** (<50 micron) are used widely in other States/UTs, violating **PWM Rules, 2016**
- India generates an estimated 32 million metric tonnes of packaging waste each year, of which plastic waste constitutes **16%**. **But only 60%** of the collected plastic waste is **recycled**.
- Around 43% of manufactured plastics are used for **packaging**, most of it **“single-use” plastic**. So far, not a single one of the 24 States that report their plastic waste management performance have **plans in place to tackle single-use plastics**.
- **Kerala and Sikkim**, are the States with the most creditable plastic waste management policies. Sikkim has a system of **buying back plastic from consumers**.

Source: The Hindu

Life in plastic

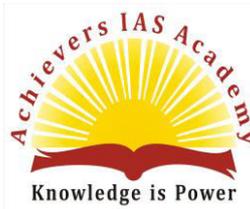
It’s far from fantastic. India’s framework on discouraging its use is in disarray

- As a **major producer of plastic waste** that ends up in the oceans, India is arguably the best place to host **World Environment Day**.
- Union Environment Minister Harsh Vardhan has said the government means business, and the UN theme, **“Beat Plastic Pollution”**, will not remain an empty slogan.
- His claim would have inspired greater confidence had India taken its own rules on waste management seriously.
- Both the **Solid Waste Management Rules and the Plastic Waste Management Rules** of 2016, which built on previous regulations, **mostly remain on paper**.
- State governments have simply **not given them the necessary momentum**, and the producers of plastic articles that are invariably used just for a few minutes have shown little concern about their negative environmental impact.
- The Centre’s somewhat liberal estimate shows over 60% of about 25,000 tonnes of plastic waste generated daily is collected.
- That essentially means a staggering 10,000 tonnes of trash is being **released into the environment, a lot of it going into the sea**.
- Also, not every piece of plastic collected by the system **is scientifically processed**.

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- It is no surprise, therefore, that the **Ganga-Brahmaputra-Meghna** river system is on the **UN map of 10 rivers** worldwide that collectively carry the bulk of the plastic waste into the oceans.
- The effects are evident: they threaten **marine life** and the well-being of people, as microplastics are now found even in **drinking water**.
- In their response to the crisis, communities and environmentally minded individuals are ahead of governments and **municipal authorities**.
- **They segregate waste, compost at home, conduct “plastic free”** social events and help recover materials that would otherwise just be dumped in the suburbs and wetlands.
- But, valuable as they are, voluntary efforts cannot achieve what **systemic reform can**.
- It is the Centre’s responsibility to ensure that the **Environment (Protection) Act**, the overarching law that enables anti-pollution rules to be issued, is implemented in letter and spirit.
- Ideally, regulation should help **stop the manufacture of single-use plastic articles** such as carry bags and cutlery, and encourage the use of **biodegradable materials**.
- There is a challenge here, though. The provisions of the Plastic Waste Management Rules require manufacturers of compostable bags to get a **certificate from the Central Pollution Control Board**, but this has not stopped **counterfeit** products from entering the market.
- Local bodies mandated under rules to ensure segregation, collection and transfer of **waste to registered recyclers** have spectacularly failed to fulfil their responsibilities.
- **The State Level Monitoring Committees** provided for under the rules have not been made accountable.
- The waste management framework is dysfunctional, and Mr. Vardhan’s assertions on beating plastic pollution alone will not inspire confidence.
- India and the world face a plastics crisis. Solving it will take **more than slogans**.

Source: The Hindu

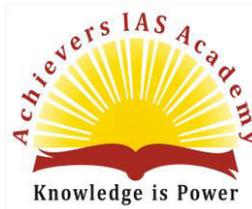
3. Proposed water aerodrome in Chilika Lake likely to face green hurdle

- The Airports Authority of India has proposed to set up a water aerodrome in Chilika Lake for **starting amphibious aircraft operations** in Odisha.
- For six months between October and March, Chilika turns into a temporary habitat for **lakhs of migratory and residential birds**.
- If an aircraft flies at **low height**, there is every chance of the **birds getting hit**. While the **bird population** will be in danger, **safety of passengers** of amphibious aircraft will also be jeopardised
- Noise pollution generated by close to 10,000 boats has already taken a toll on the **endangered Irrawaddy dolphins** in the lake. The amphibious aircraft operation would add to the woes.

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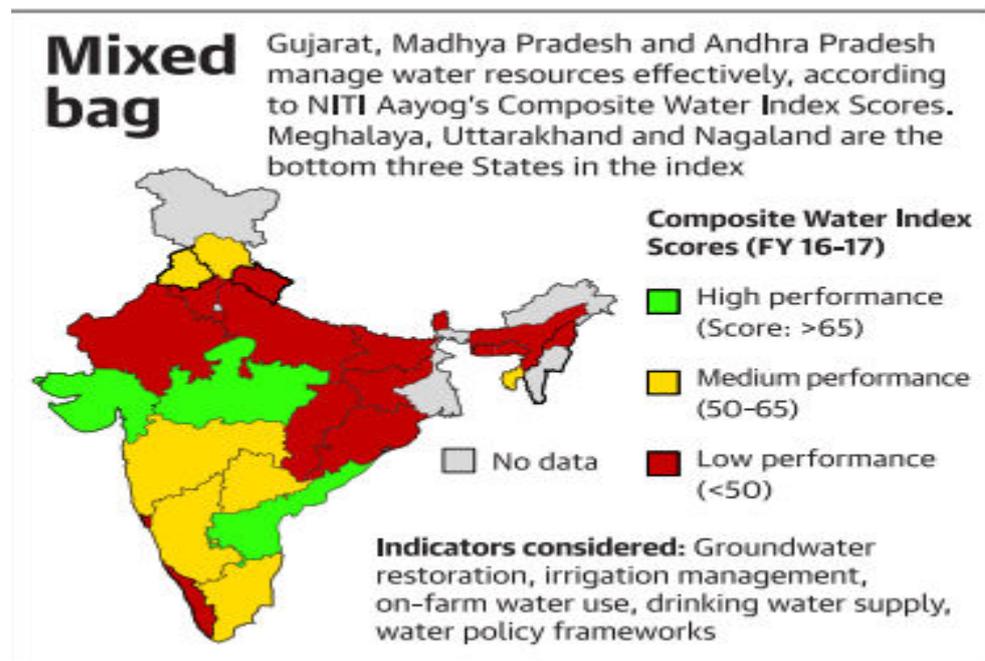
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- As many as 155 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins were spotted in Chilika, which is the **single largest habitat of this species in the world**. After clearing the lake of illegal man-made enclosures, dolphins have now started moving freely in all sectors.
- Meanwhile, the Odisha government has decided to **regulate boat operation** in the lake following the death of six passengers in a recent boat tragedy. It has made **life jackets mandatory for tourists** and GPS on the boats.

Source: The Hindu

4. India is facing its worst water crisis: NITI Aayog

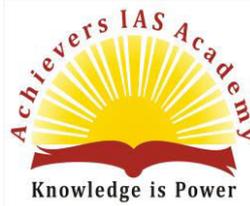


- The NITI Aayog on Thursday released the results of a study warning that India is facing its “worst” water crisis in history and that **the demand for potable water will outstrip supply by 2030**, if steps are not taken.
- Nearly 600 million Indians faced **high-to-extreme water stress** and about 2,00,000 people died every year because of **inadequate access to safe water**.
- Twenty-one cities, including **Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad**, will run out of **groundwater** by 2020, affecting 100 million people, the study noted. If matters are to continue, there will be a 6% loss in the country’s **Gross Domestic Product by 2050**, the report says.

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- Moreover, **critical groundwater resources**, which accounted for 40% of the water supply, are being **depleted at “unsustainable” rates** and up to 70% of the supply is **“contaminated,”** the report says.
- The observations are part of a study that ranked 24 States on **how well they managed their water.**
- Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh took the top three spots, and Jharkhand, Bihar and Haryana came in last in the ‘Non-Himalayan States’ category.
- **Himachal Pradesh** — which is facing one of its **worst water crises** this year — led a separate eight-member list of States clubbed together as ‘North-Eastern and Himalayan.’
- These two categories were made to account for different hydrological conditions across the two groups. About 60% of the States were marked as “low performers,” and this was cause for “alarm.”
- Many of the States that performed badly — Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Chhattisgarh — accounted for **20-30% of India’s agricultural output.**

Source: The Hindu

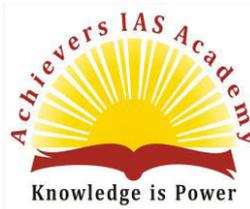
5.Parched or polluted

- India’s water crisis is clear and present, with implications for the health of the entire population.
- According to the **Composite Water Management Index** developed by Niti Aayog, **70% of the water resources** are identified as polluted. This is based primarily on data supplied by States for calculating the index.
- If the water accessible to millions is contaminated, the problem is infinitely worse than that of **availability.**
- The **system of ratings for States** is based on their performance in **augmenting** water resources and watersheds, investing in infrastructure, providing **rural and urban drinking water**, and encouraging **efficient** agricultural use.
- It presumes that this ‘hall of fame’ approach will foster “competitive and cooperative federalism”.
- What emerges from the early assessment is that States such as **Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh,** Karnataka, Maharashtra, Punjab and Telangana **have initiated reforms** for judicious water use, while populous ones such as **Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have failed** to respond to the challenge.
- **Tamil Nadu**, which has a middling score, does well on **augmentation** of water sources, but is **abysmally poor in ensuring sustainable** use for farming.
- The trends that the data reflect of high to extreme stress faced by 600 million people call for speedy reforms.

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- Two areas that need urgent measures are **augmentation of watersheds** that can store more good water, for use in agriculture and to serve habitations, and strict pollution control enforcement.
- In this context, the Committee on Restructuring the Central Water Commission and the Central Ground Water Board, chaired by **Mihir Shah**, has called for a user-centric approach to water management, especially in **agriculture**.
- It advocates **decentralisation of irrigation commands**, offering higher financial flows to well-performing States through a **National Irrigation Management Fund**.
- Clearly, awarding an index rank should help advance such schemes, making States feel the need to be competitive.
- Yet, such approaches **may not resolve seemingly intractable inter-State river disputes**.
- As the Cauvery issue has demonstrated, State governments would rather seek **judicial intervention** than be accused of bartering away the rights to a precious resource under a shared, cooperative framework.
- **Groundwater extraction patterns** need to be better understood through robust **data collection**; less than 5% of about 12 million wells are now under study.
- Steady urbanisation calls for a **new management paradigm**, augmenting sources of clean drinking water supply and **treatment technologies** that will encourage reuse.
- Pollution can be curbed by **levying suitable costs**. These forward-looking changes would need revamped national and State institutions, and updated laws.
- A legal mandate will work better than just **competition and cooperation**; it would make governments accountable.

Source: The Hindu

6.Flood warning: govt. teams up with Google

- With the monsoon under way, **Union Water Resources Ministry** has teamed up with **Google** to generate flood warnings.
- If there are **signs of an imminent flood**, a **Google Maps** user will be able to see what regions are likely to see **water logging first** and if their neighbourhood is under threat.
- Currently, the **Central Water Commission (CWC)** warns of floods based on the rising water levels in reservoirs and if these are nearing a dam's '**danger marks**.' Last year, it began a trial programme to **give 3-day flood forecasts**.
- The India Meteorological Department now provides inputs to the CWC on whether **heavy rainfall is likely and if this could translate** into large amounts of rain water overflowing from river banks or catchments.
- An experimental version of the exercise will likely begin this monsoon and — said the IMD meteorologist — will be offered "**free of cost**" as part of the company's "**Corporate Social Responsibility**."

Source: The Hindu, PIB

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7. 'Uranium contamination in Rajasthan groundwater'

Unsafe aquifers

Sixteen States show a high prevalence of uranium concentrations above the WHO provisional guideline value (30µg/L)

- India has no standards for uranium levels in groundwater
- There have been reports of high levels of uranium in Andhra Pradesh
- Over-pumping of groundwater causes a decline in water levels
- This induces oxidation conditions that enhance uranium enrichment in shallow groundwater

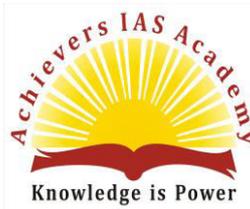


Source: "Large-Scale Uranium Contamination..." Rachel M. Coyte et al.

- Many parts of Rajasthan may have high uranium levels in their groundwater, according to a study by **researchers at the Duke University** in North Carolina, United States, and the Central Groundwater Board of India.
- The main source of uranium contamination was "**natural**," but human factors such as **groundwater table decline and nitrate pollution** could be worsening the problem.
- The WHO has set a provisional safe drinking water standard of **30 micrograms of uranium per litre**, a level that is consistent with the U.S. EPA standards.
- Despite this, uranium is not yet included in the list of contaminants monitored under the **Bureau of Indian Standards' Drinking Water Specifications**.

Tainted by uranium

- The groundwater contamination across India must be probed, and safe sources identified
- Reports of widespread **uranium contamination in groundwater** across India demand an urgent response.
- A study, published in **Environmental Science and Technology** Letters, has found over 30 micrograms per litre (mcg/l) of the heavy metal in parts of **northwestern, southern and southeastern India**.
- Drinking such water can damage one's **kidneys**, and the World Health Organization prescribes 30 mcg/l as an upper limit.
- Unfortunately, the residents of the regions surveyed were using the contaminated wells as their **main source of drinking water**.



- These findings highlight a **major gap in India's water-quality monitoring**. As the **Bureau of Indian Standards** does not specify a norm for uranium level, water is **not tested regularly** for it.
- This is despite the fact that evidence of uranium contamination has **accumulated from across India over the last decade**. A 2015 **Bangalore** study, for example, found uranium levels of over 2000 mcg/l in the **southern** part of the city.
- Other studies found levels of over 500 mcg/l in **Andhra Pradesh** and Telangana. The Environmental Science paper adds new data to this body of evidence by sampling wells in **Rajasthan and Gujarat**.
- The health effects of drinking uranium-tainted water merit special attention. A few small animal and human studies have found that the **heavy metal damages the kidneys**.
- The studies indicate that this is a **chemical effect**, rather than a radiological one, even though uranium is radioactive.
- But the **chronic effects of uranium consumption are still unknown**. Could there be, for example, a link between the high rates of **chronic kidney disease (CKD)** in India and uranium exposure?
- In a survey conducted between 2005 and 2010, an Indian registry found 8,385 CKD cases with no known cause. One cluster of mystery disease, located in Srikakulam district in Andhra Pradesh, has stumped epidemiologists for years.
- It is impossible to say if these clusters have anything to do with groundwater contamination, unless **researchers look at it systematically**.
- Another critical area of research is the **mechanism by which uranium enters groundwater**. The Environmental Science paper identified **two types** of terrains with heavy contamination.
- In Rajasthan and other northwestern regions, uranium occurs mostly in **alluvial aquifers**; while in southern regions such as Telangana, **crystalline rocks** such as granite seem to be the source.
- When groundwater is **over-extracted** from such soils, the researchers suggest, the uranium is exposed to air, **triggering its release**.
- These hypotheses must be explored, because they will help determine where to **find safer water**.
- This is what happened in **West Bengal**, where a decade of research revealed why the **contaminant arsenic** mainly occurred in **shallow** aquifers.
- Researchers found that a combination of geological and chemical triggers brought arsenic to the Ganga delta in the Holocene era, and then released it into the sediments from that period.
- Similar **research** across India's uranium hotspots can uncover who is at risk, and how to protect them.

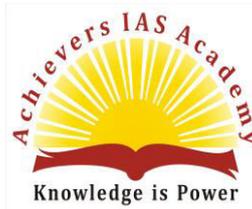
Source: The Hindu

8. Rising temperature to cut living standards

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- Six hundred million Indians could see a dip in **living standards by 2050** if temperatures continue to rise at their current pace, according to an analysis by the **World Bank**.
- Seven of the 10 severest or **most vulnerable ‘hotspots’ in India** would be located in **Maharashtra**; the rest would be in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.
- In the **absence of a major climate mitigation**, nearly 148 million Indians will be living in these severe hotspots in 2050, according to the report.
- States in the **central, northern and northwestern parts of India** emerge as the **most vulnerable**.
- **Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh**, which are predicted to experience a decline in living standards of more than 9%, are the top two ‘hot spot’ States in India, followed by Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Maharashtra.
- India’s **average annual temperatures are expected to rise by 1°C to 2°C** by 2050, even if preventive measures are taken along the lines of those recommended by the Paris climate change agreement of 2015.
- **If no measures are taken**, average temperatures in India are predicted to **increase by 1.5°C to 3°C**.
- Economists at the World Bank correlated these climate projections with **household consumption data** (a proxy for living standards) in Nepal, Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, **and extrapolated it to 2050**.
- Using **publicly available climate models** that project how rising temperatures will affect rainfall and seasons, the researchers concluded that if emissions continued at the current pace, **India could see a 1.5% decline in its GDP by 2030**.
- However, were some corrective actions to be taken — like India concertedly implementing its **National Action Plan on Climate Change** and States implementing their domestic climate change **mitigation plans** — **this could be halted to 1.3%**.

Source: The Hindu

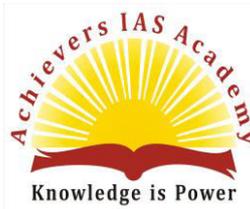
9.Environment Day bouquet: 539 species discovered in India in 2017

- As many as 539 new species of **plants and animals** were discovered by scientists and taxonomists in the country in 2017, say publications from two major survey organisations: the **Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) and the Botanical Survey of India (BSI)**.
- Released on Tuesday, World Environment Day, Animal Discoveries, 2017 from the ZSI lists 300 newly discovered species of fauna.
- Plant Discoveries, 2017 lists as many as 239 newly found flora species.
- Besides these discoveries, the **biodiversity** in the country recorded another 263 species with 174 new records of animals and 89 of plants found.
- The **Western Ghats and the Himalayas** are home to most of the plant and animal discoveries.

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- While the Western Ghats contributed 19% of the discoveries of species and sub-species of plants, the number was 37% in terms of animal discoveries.
- The Himalayas contributed 35% of all plant discoveries (18% of the plant discoveries from the western Himalayas and 17% from the eastern Himalayas).
- In terms of animal discoveries, over 18% of the new species were discovered from both the eastern and western Himalayas.
- Among the States, **Kerala recorded the highest number of discoveries** — 66 species, sub-species and varieties of plants and 52 species of animals.

Source: The Hindu

10.Nitrogen emissions going up: study

- Nitrogen particles make up the largest fraction of **PM2.5**, the class of pollutants closely linked to **cardiovascular and respiratory illness**, says the first-ever quantitative assessment of nitrogen pollution in India.
- While the burning of crop residue is said to be a key contributor to winter smog in many parts of North India, it contributes over 240 million kg of **nitrogen oxides (NOx: a generic term for the nitrogen oxides that are most relevant for air pollution, namely nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide)** and about 7 million kg of nitrous oxide (N₂O) a year.
- Though **agriculture remains the largest contributor to nitrogen emissions**, the non-agricultural emissions of nitrogen oxides and nitrous oxide are growing rapidly, with sewage and fossil-fuel burning — for power, transport and industry — leading the trend.
- **Agricultural soils contributed to over 70%** of N₂O emissions from India in 2010, followed by waste water (12%) and residential and commercial activities (6%).
- **Cattle account for 80%** of the ammonia production, though their annual growth rate is 1%, due to a stable population.
- India is globally the biggest source of **ammonia** emission, nearly double that of NO_x emissions.
- The authors suggest that **nutrient recovery/recycling** from waste water for agriculture could cut down N₂O emissions from sewage and waste water by up to 40%.

Source: The Hindu

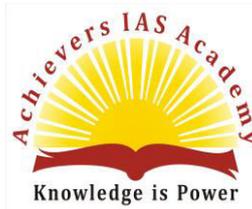
General Studies-III : Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.

1.ISRO offers battery technology to firms

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- The drive for **indigenously made lithium ion batteries** on a large scale has got a push with the Indian Space Research Organisation offering its **production technology** to Indian industry.
- An RFQ (request for quotation) issued on Tuesday invites **multiple qualified companies or start-ups** to use its power storage technology to produce a range of Li ion cells for many purposes, mainly **EVs or electric vehicles**.
- The Li ion cell production initiative is part of the government's plan to achieve **100% EVs in the country by 2030**.
- Li ion battery is much in demand for use in **handy consumer electronics** goods too.
- Currently the batteries **are imported mostly from China, South Korea and Taiwan**.
- To drive the Indian EV dream of the coming decades, national think tank NITI Aayog has also earlier called for setting up local production.

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-III : Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

1.Ceasefire ends, ops against J&K militants to resume

- Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday that the government has decided not to extend the **suspension of operations** (SoO) in Jammu and Kashmir and that operations against terrorists would resume.
- The SoO was announced on May 16, when the month of **Ramzan** started.
- The prime reason for the decision was the enhanced threat to the **Amarnath yatra** that commences on June 28
- By ignoring the government's initiative, the **Hurriyat Conference had failed** to seize the opportunity.
- There were **multiple incidents** reported in the month of Ramzan. It would have reflected badly on the government if taking advantage of the SoO militants attack the Amarnath yatrias
- Last year, **eight persons were killed when a bus** carrying pilgrims from Gujarat was attacked by **Lashkar-e-Taiba militants**.

Source: The Hindu

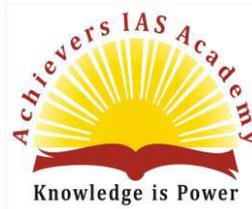
2.Act of intimidation: on Shujaat Bukhari murder

- The death of Shujaat Bukhari in a terrorist attack at close range in Srinagar has taken away a journalist who held **bold and independent opinions** on the conflict in Kashmir and how it should be resolved.

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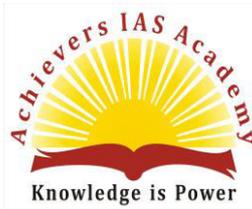
- In the choice of target and the timing of the murder, the attack sends out a chilling message: that on the eve of Id-ul-Fitr and in the closing days of the government's **Ramzan ceasefire against militants**, there are forces **determined to gut the emerging consensus** for extending the cease-ops and preparing the ground for dialogue.
- Bukhari, given the credibility he had painstakingly built with reportage that conveyed the **complex reality of life in the Valley**, was a prominent advocate of the ceasefire and the need to extend it.
- Whichever terrorist group chose to kill him would have been aware of the **consequences of his death**.
- This has been a **dark week in Jammu and Kashmir**. **Two security personnel** with Bukhari were killed in the attack in Srinagar's Press Colony.
- On Thursday too, the body of Aurangzeb, a jawan with the 44 Rashtriya Rifles who had been kidnapped while on his way home for the Id holiday, was found in Pulwama district riddled with bullets.
- In Bandipora, two militants and an Army jawan were killed. Days earlier, terrorists killed **two policemen** in Pulwama.
- It is easy to spot the insistence to pull Kashmir back into the cycle of violence that was sought to be broken by the ceasefire.
- It is a challenge that the governments at the Centre and the State, as well as the security forces, would have been prepared for, and they must not allow these provocations to dim the case for a more humane outreach.
- J&K Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti must not be rendered a lonely voice for truce and dialogue.
- Bukhari's killing highlights the **dangers that reporters and editors** face in the country — his death draws a direct line to the attacks on countless journalists, including the murders last year of **Gauri Lankesh** in Karnataka and **Santanu Bhowmik** in Tripura.
- Bukhari himself has been abducted before, in 2006.
- He survived that ordeal, but had to work thereafter with security cover, something no reporter would envy. That **his guards died with him** on Thursday underlines the vulnerability of both those who are guarded and those who guard.
- It also underscores the irreplaceable role of the journalist in Kashmir, where daily lives are negotiated amid conflicting narratives, ideologies and affinities.
- To reconcile these, the reporter needs to have in his tool kit an open heart, the persistence to tease out stories and connect all dots, no matter how they may disturb nationalist or separatist sentiments.
- **Without information, reconciliation is impossible**. Over the decades, Bukhari enlightened readers even as he mentored journalists as the editor and founder of Rising Kashmir, and earlier as The Hindu's correspondent

Source: The Hindu

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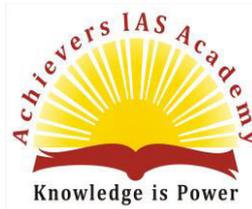
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General Studies-III : Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges

1. Violence in the hills

- The spark for the week-long incidents of violence in downtown Shillong was a lie spread through **WhatsApp**, the ubiquitous messaging platform that has increasingly become an **unfiltered medium** for **hate and rumour-mongering**.
- A scuffle between members of the **Mazhabi Sikh community**, long-time settlers in the Punjabi Lane area of the city, and a **Khasi youth** and his associates over a local matter was amicably settled between representatives of the communities.
- But a **fabricated story** that the youth had succumbed to injuries sustained in the scuffle led to large numbers of Khasi protesters laying siege to Punjabi Lane, demanding that the **Sikh residents move from the area**.
- That the “settlers” have been in Shillong for more than a century and a half, having been originally brought there by **the British colonials** to work as **manual scavengers**, and have since integrated themselves within Shillong, has not insulated them from being described as outsiders.
- The administration did well to protect the dwellers of Punjabi Lane from physical harm, but **mob violence** persisted until curfew was imposed and the Army put on stand-by.
- Spokespersons of the **Khasi Students’ Union**, whose members were part of the agitation, continue to insist that the Punjabi Lane residents be moved from Shillong’s commercial heart to its outskirts.
- Picturesque Shillong is no longer just an idyllic hill station; it is a bustling city that has grown in **an unplanned manner** and requires reforms such as zoning regulation.
- But the agitators’ demand to shift the Sikh residents is unreasonable and must be resisted.
- In fact, the **Meghalaya High Court had stayed an order** by the District Commissioner to evict the residents from Punjabi Lane (also known as Sweepers’ Colony) in 1986.
- **Tribal angst over economic issues leading to the scapegoating** of non-tribal long-time residents reflects the continued **failure** to forge a more inclusive politics in Meghalaya.
- Today, there are enough provisions of affirmative action for the tribal people — **80% reservation for the Khasi, Jaintia, Garo** and other tribes in jobs and professional studies.
- Yet, **discontent persists** over the lack of adequate jobs in the State, especially in urban areas. A Labour Bureau report on employment in 2015-16 found Meghalaya to have among the **highest urban unemployment rates (13.4%)**.
- Discontent over lack of opportunities in the past had led to incidents such as the **violent targeting of the Bengali** community in 1979 and **Nepalis** in 1987, many of whom then fled the State.
- To prevent a repeat of those incidents, the government must stand by and protect the Sikh residents, and **not give in to the nativist arguments** of the protestors.



- And as calm is restored, Meghalaya's politicians and civil society leaders must forge a more **inclusive vision of the State's demographics**.

Source: The Hindu

International News:

General Studies-II : India and its neighborhood- relations.

1.India, China discuss 'Oil Buyers Club'

- With oil producers' cartel **OPEC playing havoc with prices**, India discussed with China the possibility of forming an 'oil buyers club' that can negotiate better terms with sellers as well as **getting more U.S. crude oil to Asia to cut dominance of the oil block**.
- Production cuts by OPEC have led to international oil prices hitting a **four-year high** last month that forced a ₹3.8 per litre raise in petrol and ₹3.38 a litre increase in diesel prices. Rates started to cool towards month end and retail prices have been cut thereafter.
- Pradhan wants to form an oil buyers' club with **China, Japan and South Korea** to take up issues like **premium being charged** from Asian buyers.
- At the IEF meeting, India and China agreed to join hands to have a **collective bargaining power against cartelisation** of oil producers. Singh's visit was to take this forward with concrete proposals for cooperation, the source said.
- So far, India has **not been able to bargain** better rates from the Gulf-based producers of the oil cartel, OPEC.
- **Instead of getting a discount for bulk purchases**, West Asian producers such as Saudi Arabia, charge a so-called 'Asian Premium' for shipments to Asian buyers, including India and Japan, **as opposed to Europe**.

Source: The Hindu

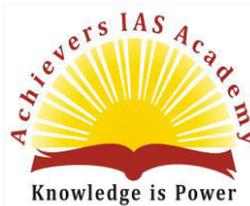
2.Seychelles stalls project for Indian naval base

- The Seychelles National Assembly **will not ratify India's plans** to build a naval base in the **western Indian Ocean region**.
- Officials of the Seychelles government announced the decision on Friday when the country's President, Danny Faure, arrived in India on a six-day state visit.
- News reports suggest that the Opposition members in the Seychelles National Assembly argued against allowing India to build a naval base on the strategically located **Assumption island**, saying it would **infringe on the country's sovereignty**.
- The government said the proposal to seek ratification of the project would not be presented to National Assembly as the **Opposition had already said it would not clear it**, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Barry Faure told Reuters over telephone.

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- Seychelles has indicated that **instead** of allowing India to run the base, it would like to **develop a coast guard facility** at the Assumption.
- **The Indian project** was to include a facility for **Indian ships and an airstrip** that would allow New Delhi to guard the energy lanes vital to India's economy.
- The National Assembly's decision follows several protests by civil society activists in the archipelago nation who have urged the government to remain **non-aligned and avoid tilting towards either India or China**.
- Leader of the Opposition Wavell John Charles Ramkalawan had earlier stated that he would block the government's move to seek clearance from National Assembly.

Source: The Hindu

3. India voices concern over housing project

- India has voiced concern to **Sri Lankan authorities** over a housing project in the island's **Tamil-majority north and east**, to be executed by a **Chinese company**, citing the Resettlement Ministry's "lack of **transparency**" in choosing the builder.
- According to a recent report in Sri Lankan newspaper Sunday Times, Indian officials have questioned the government's decision to award a **huge contract — to build 40,000 homes — to a Chinese company**, reportedly without a fair **tendering** process.
- In May, Sri Lanka's Resettlement Ministry obtained Cabinet clearance for the project, which involves China Railway Beijing Engineering Group Co. Ltd and its local representative.
- The Indian mission has **not commented on the issue formally**, but sources in Colombo confirmed that top officials had flagged the issue.
- They particularly raised the "opaque" manner in which the Ministry finalised the project, apparently "**excluding**" **experienced companies** from India that would have been interested.
- **India's owner-driven scheme of 46,000 homes** across the north and east is nearly complete. Additionally, it is building 14,000 houses in the central highlands.

General Studies-II : Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

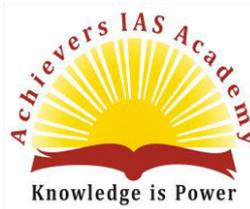
1. How a failing port gave China vital foothold

- Over years of **construction and renegotiation** with China Harbor Engineering Co., one of Beijing's largest state-owned enterprises, the Hambantota Port Development Project distinguished itself mostly by **failing**, as **predicted**.
- With **tens of thousands of ships passing by** along one of the world's busiest shipping lanes, the port **drew only 34 ships** in 2012. And then the port became China's.

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- The transfer gave **China control of territory** just a few hundred miles off the shores of a rival, **India**, and a strategic foothold along a critical commercial and military waterway.
- The debt deal also intensified some of the harshest accusations about President Xi Jinping's signature **Belt and Road Initiative**: that the global investment and lending programme amounts to a **debt trap for vulnerable countries** around the world, fuelling **corruption and autocratic behaviour** in struggling democracies.
- During the **2015 Sri Lankan elections**, large payments from the Chinese port construction fund flowed directly to **campaign aides and activities for Mr. Rajapaksa**, who had agreed to Chinese terms at every turn and was seen as an **important ally in China's efforts** to tilt influence away from India in South Asia.
- The payments were **confirmed by documents and cash checks** detailed in a government investigation seen by The New York Times.
- Though Chinese officials and analysts have insisted that China's interest in the Hambantota port is **purely commercial**, Sri Lankan officials said that from the start, the **intelligence and strategic possibilities** of the port's location were **part of the negotiations**.
- **Indian officials**, in particular, fear **that Sri Lanka is struggling** so much that the Chinese government may be able to dangle **debt relief in exchange for its military's use** of assets like the Hambantota port — though the **final lease agreement with China forbids military activity** there without Sri Lanka's invitation.

Source: The Hindu

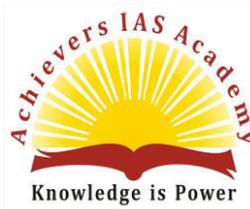
2. Sketchy deal

- When it comes to crude oil prices, **politics dwarfs everything else**. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) on Friday agreed **to increase its daily output** to address the problem of rising crude oil prices.
- Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Khalid al Falih announced that the cartel's output would be increased by about a million barrels a day beginning in July.
- The official statement released by the group, however, failed to mention **any solid numbers** regarding the **planned increase in production**.
- It simply stated that OPEC countries would "strive" to adjust production levels in order to conform to the terms of the production cut deal reached in 2016.
- Unsurprisingly, in the absence of any clear intent on the part of OPEC to guide prices lower, the price of the **benchmark WTI crude increased by as much as 5%** after Friday's announcement of a production increase.
- OPEC members had in late 2016, it is worth noting, agreed to a **historic deal to cut** output by 1.2 million barrels a day in order to end a supply glut and raise the price of oil.
- Since then, the cartel has in fact managed to overshoot its production cut target following **unexpected outages in countries such as Venezuela** and Libya, contributing to the **steep rise in oil prices**.

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- In May, for instance, **OPEC overshoot its production cut target** by 624,000 barrels a day.
- The lack of any clear commitment from OPEC to raise production suggests that the threat of a supply shock still looms over the global economy. But, for now, the deal allows stakeholders in the energy market to save face.
- **The pressure on Saudi Arabia, the de facto leader of OPEC**, to be seen as doing something to tackle rising oil prices was clear, going into the meeting on Friday.
- U.S. President Donald Trump has been vocal in recent months about the **need to bring down rising oil prices** that threaten to put the **global economy under stress**.
- Other oil-importing economies, especially **emerging markets** such as India that have been affected by the rising cost of oil imports, have also been exerting pressure.
- The present deal could help the Saudis **appease major oil consumers to some extent**. Meanwhile, **Iran**, which has been opposed to raising OPEC output as it would lower prices, is set to **suffer a marginal loss as it lacks spare capacity to ramp up production**.
- This works in favour of its rival, Saudi Arabia, which can recover from the impact of lower prices by **capturing market share**.
- The deal, however, still allows Iran to save face by projecting the proposed output increase simply as a return to the original OPEC agreement framed in 2016.
- Whether all this **politicking** will bring a stable reduction in global oil prices remains to be seen

Source: The Hindu

3. India notifies higher tariffs on U.S. imports

- India on Wednesday notified higher tariffs on **several items imported** from the U.S., including **agricultural products** such as apples, almonds, chickpeas, lentils, and walnuts, and industrial inputs such as **some grades of iron and steel products**.
- This is the latest salvo in the **ongoing tariff tiff** between the U.S. and several of its trading partners.
- The notification, however, says these higher tariffs would come into effect from **August 4**, **leaving room for further discussions between the U.S. and India** before the new rates are implemented.
- Wednesday's action follows the **government's notification to the World Trade Organization** last week that it was imposing tariffs, amounting to \$240 million, in retaliation for the U.S. duty on steel and aluminium.

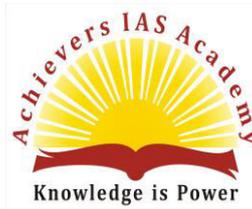
Dangerous spiral

- The global trade war is hotting up as **major economies continue to impose** tariffs on each other.
- India is the latest to join the **tit-for-tat battle** by slapping tariffs as high as 50% on a list of 30 goods imported from the U.S.

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- Earlier this week, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that he had ordered his administration to frame new tariffs on \$200-billion worth of **Chinese imports**.
- This was in retaliation to tariffs on \$50- billion worth in **American goods** imposed by China last week in response to Mr. Trump’s earlier round of tariffs on Chinese goods.
- The **first shot in the spiralling trade war was fired by the U.S.** in March when Mr. Trump unveiled tariffs to discourage the **import of steel and aluminium into the country**.
- The latest round of tariffs imposed by the U.S. will be the highest in terms of the value of goods.
- In all, U.S. tariffs will now affect Chinese goods worth \$450 billion — to put this in perspective, total Chinese imports into the U.S. last year were worth around \$500 billion.
- The **European Union also joined the trade** war this month, imposing tariffs on \$3.3 billion of American goods.
- While the India-U.S. tariff tiff could escalate, the amounts being discussed right now are minuscule compared to those under threat in the **unfolding U.S.-China situation or even the spat between the U.S. and the EU**.
- India’s notification to the WTO says that U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminium would cost India \$241 million, and that the tariffs imposed on the U.S. would bring in a commensurate amount.
- It has also indicated its preference to **deal with the issue through dialogue**, and not “measures and counter-measures”.
- For long, **global financial markets largely ignored risks** of an all-out trade war among major economies, but things are **changing quickly**.
- The **Dow Jones Industrial Average fell** by as much as 1.6% on Tuesday, while the **Shenzhen Composite Index** was down 5.8% for the day.
- This fresh round of volatility suggests investors may be beginning to take threats of a trade war more seriously. The fact is that **all sides engaged in a trade war eventually lose**.
- The longer it goes on, the greater the cost as growth slows down under the **increasing burden of taxes**. The **only gainers** in a trade war will be **special interest groups**, such as the U.S. steel industry, which also happens to be a **major vote bank** for Mr. Trump.
- Even retaliatory tariffs aimed at pushing back the U.S. may only perpetuate the vicious negative-sum game instead of bringing the war to an end.
- Mr. Trump’s **rejection of the G-7 communique** that endorsed a “**rules-based trading system**” for the world suggests there may be no offer of truce from his side any time soon.
- Nevertheless, **global powers must try their best** to bring an end to the ongoing trade war before it gets out of hand.

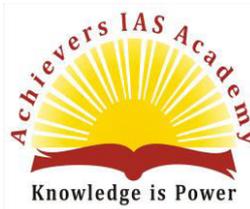
Source: The Hindu

4.Defend the deal

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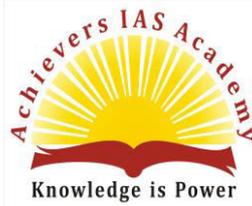
- **Iran's notification to the UN** that it would launch a plan to increase its **uranium enrichment capacity** illustrates the risks associated with the **U.S. withdrawal** from the nuclear deal last month.
- The **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action**, reached among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, besides Germany, the European Union and Iran, in 2015, curtailed Tehran's nuclear programme in return for the lifting of **international sanctions**.
- But after President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the agreement and threatened to impose new sanctions on Iran, its survival is in question.
- For now, the **other signatories say they remain committed** to the agreement. But almost a month after Mr. Trump announced his decision, they are yet to come up with a **framework to salvage the deal**.
- The latest Iranian announcement is perhaps aimed at turning the heat up on European powers to come up with guarantees that the deal's benefits will be in place even with U.S. sanctions.
- According to the deal, **Iran can enrich uranium, but under tight restrictions**.
- Iran now says it would open a centre for the production of new centrifuges at its **Natanz** facility, which could be used for enrichment. Tehran could argue that it is not technically violating the agreement as long as it does not produce centrifuges.
- But the move to open a production facility, that too soon after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei called for preparations to speed up uranium enrichment, could be seen as a **provocative step by the remaining parties to the agreement**.
- Instead of such posturing, both Iran and Europe would do well to **shift their focus to preserving the integrity** of the agreement.
- If Europe remains politically committed to the agreement as it claims, there have to be proper measures to **circumvent the impact of U.S. sanctions**.
- It is not yet clear whether European companies will make any **significant investments in Iran**, or even continue to do business in the country, once **U.S. sanctions** start targeting them.
- Earlier, European countries had discussed providing companies that do business with Iran **special financing from the European Investment Bank** and passing legislation to protect them from U.S. sanctions — but no decision has been taken so far.
- The EU says it can create conditions for Iran to continue to benefit from the deal but is wary of giving any guarantee.
- Iran has made it clear that the U.S. withdrawal **should not affect its oil exports** and access to the **SWIFT international bank payments** messaging system.
- The way forward is to continue a dialogue to find an economic and legislative package that would shield European companies and Iranian economic interests from U.S. sanctions.
- For that, Europe has to assure Iran it will **stand up to U.S. pressure**, as Iran remains cooperative and compliant with the terms of the 2015 agreement.

Source: The Hindu

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5. Road map laid for India-U.S. meet

High-stake agreements

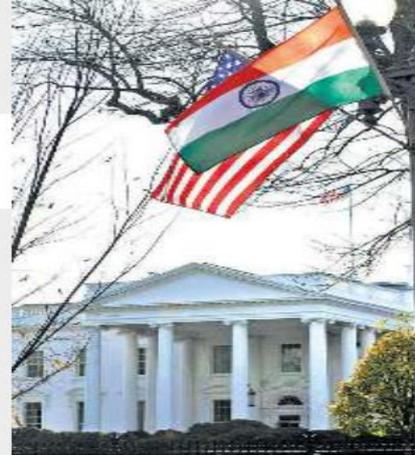
Of the three foundational defence pacts between India and the United States, only one has been signed

COMCASA: The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement facilitates transfer of encrypted communication systems, and is a key requirement for the U.S. to share high tech military hardware

COMCASA and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (**BECA**), which facilitates exchange of geospatial information, are pacts not signed yet due to severe criticism

- It was feared that signing these agreements would mean compromising India's age-old military ties with Russia and access to their weaponry systems

LEMOA: Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement. India signed the pact in 2016. The agreement gives militaries of both the nations access to each other's military facilities, without making it automatic or obligatory, mostly for the purposes of refuelling and replenishment

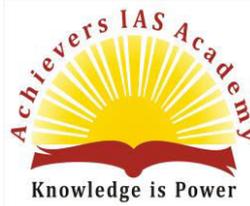


- Indian and U.S. experts began a **three-day consultations** on Monday to find meeting points in bilateral relations in preparation for the first-ever meeting of the **Ministers for External Affairs and Defence** with their U.S. counterparts next month.
- The July meeting in Washington DC between Sushma Swaraj and Nirmala Sitharaman and their U.S. counterparts, called the **two-plus-two discussions**, is expected to further cement the India-U.S. engagements.
- According to officials, among the key focus areas of the meeting that began here on Monday morning is finding a breakthrough in concluding the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (**COMCASA**), one of the **four foundational agreements** that helps the U.S. to intensify its **defence cooperation with a partner nation**.
- Apart from the foundational agreements, the U.S. is also keen on a broad based **intelligence-sharing agreement** with India as the two countries have vastly expanded their counter-terror cooperation. In this context, the fourth foundational agreement, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (**BECA**), will be significant.
- COMCASA and BECA are the two foundational agreements that India is **yet to sign**.
- It has already signed the General Security Of Military Information Agreement (**GSOMIA**) and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (**LEMOA**).
- The most significant of them is LEMOA, which gives **both nations access to each other's military facilities**. But it does not make it automatic or obligatory.
- The U.S. has been engaging India since 2002 on the foundational agreements, but successive governments have been **wary of giving in to the U.S. demands**.
- The **COMCASA will facilitate transfer of encrypted communications systems**. The agreements are a key requirement by Washington for **sharing h-tech military hardware**, especially armed drones which the U.S. is willing to supply to India. Sale of armed drones is high on the agenda of the 2+2 dialogue.

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- India had concerns on some of the **clauses and the language**, which both sides would attempt to address in the discussions.
- As part of improving high tech cooperation, India and the U.S. announced the ambitious **Defence Technology and Trade Initiative** and India was designated a **major defence partner**. But it has not made **any progress**.

Source: The Hindu

6. 42 more Indians detained in U.S.

- At least 42 Indians have been detained at a facility in **New Mexico** for **illegal entry** into the United States, in the second such episode that has come to light this week.
- Earlier this week, it emerged that 52 Indians were being detained in a federal prison in Oregon.
- The U.S. agencies enforcing immigration **do not automatically notify missions** of the countries from where the **detainees** come.
- Indian officials approached the **Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)** after hearing from community leaders about the new batch of detainees.
- The ICE confirmed that at least 42 detainees at the Otero County Detention Centre in New Mexico, not far from the El Paso border crossing from Mexico, are Indians.
- It is likely that more cases of Indians being detained will emerge, as the Trump Administration continues with its '**zero tolerance**' **enforcement of immigration laws**.
- It is unclear whether the detainees want any **consular assistance** at all. The detention centres allow detainees to contact anyone they want, but they can refuse to meet or talk to visitors.
- The news of the new batch of Indian detainees emerged from **Indian Americans** who had spoken to them in recent days.
- **Indian officials said it was unclear** when these people were detained.
- Contrary to earlier information from U.S. lawmakers, who visited detainees in the Oregon prison, there is **no separation of families or children** from their parents among Indian detainees.

Source: The Hindu

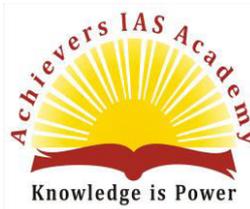
7. Familiar moorings

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's **visit to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore**, three of India's most important partners in Southeast Asia, could not have come at a more important moment in **Indian foreign policy positioning**.
- In the past few months, the government has shifted considerably in its signalling, with Mr. Modi **visiting China and Russia** for **informal summits** with Presidents Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, respectively.

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- The fact that these visits have taken place at a time **the U.S. administration** has sharpened its aim at China and Russia with sanctions and threats of a trade war suggests Mr. Modi is also attempting to **moderate India's strategic posturing on the global stage**, and striving for a more balanced approach in what it increasingly sees as an uncertain world.
- India has also maintained its commitment to relations with the U.S. in order to build a **“free and open” Indo-Pacific region**, maintain the “international rules-based order”, and **work together to combat terrorism** and terror financing — as they have done more recently at the UN and the Financial Action Task Force.
- Meanwhile, India's membership of both the **Quadrilateral** (with the U.S., Japan and Australia) and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** (the Russia-China-led grouping of Central Asian countries, whose summit Mr. Modi will attend this week) is also an **indicator of the new balance that New Delhi seeks**.
- It is significant that in Singapore Mr. Modi chose the platform of the Shangri-La Dialogue of defence leaders of the Asia-Pacific region to emphasise Indian **“strategic autonomy”**.
- In his speech on the concept of the **“Indo-Pacific”** he referred to India's relations with Russia, the U.S. and China.
- Given his government's particular distaste for the term in the past, it is telling that Mr. Modi appeared to be channelling some of the **“Bandung spirit of 1955”** that led to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, when he praised Singapore for teaching the world the importance of making **“free and fair choices”** and **“embracing diversity at home”**.
- While warning the world about the possible return of “great power rivalries”, he emphasised the **importance and centrality of the ASEAN** in the concept of the Indo-Pacific.
- The “principled” vision Mr. Modi projects is a departure from the **transactionalism and pragmatism** espoused by many in South Block over the last few years.
- However, it may also be a return to familiar moorings of Indian foreign policy, necessitated by what the Prime Minister identified as the “shifting plates of global politics and the fault lines of history”.

Source: The Hindu

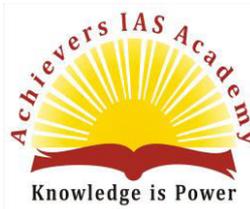
8.A vicious cycle

- Nobody wants to lose a **trade war**. The **European Commission** on Wednesday announced it would impose tariffs as high as 25% on imports worth \$3.3 billion from the U.S. beginning July.
- A whole range of **American goods**, from motorbikes and jeans to peanut butter and orange juice, will now face higher taxes when sold in the European Union zone.
- The Commission is also mulling import duties on more American goods if the trade war with the U.S. intensifies.

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- Europe is not alone in waging a battle against imports from the U.S.; **China, Mexico and Canada** have joined hands in response to President Donald Trump's decision to impose tariffs on steel and aluminium imports.
- Last week, the U.S. imposed a **25% tax on steel and a 10% tax on aluminium imports** from the EU, Mexico and Canada.
- The first salvo in this ongoing trade war, however, was fired by Mr. Trump in March this year, when he imposed **tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminium** to protect American producers.
- **Workers in America's manufacturing sector** have played a key role in Mr. Trump's **electoral success**, so his zealotry to be seen to be protecting their interests is unsurprising.
- However, consumers in America and the rest of the world are likely to suffer as their respective governments make it **costlier for them to access foreign goods and services**.
- Judging by their actions, it is now clear that America's major trading allies would not really want to lose this trade war against the U.S.
- The sad fact, however, is that at the end of the day **nobody actually wins a destructive trade war**.
- Tariffs that seek to disadvantage foreign producers in favour of domestic producers, whether they are imposed by the U.S. or any of its major trading partners such as Europe or China, **only increase the burden of taxes**.
- What this leads to eventually is slower global economic growth. The World Bank has warned that the effect of the increased use of tariffs to regulate international trade could be similar to the **significant drop in global trade** after the financial crisis a decade ago.
- Countries that are protesting America's metal tariffs in the name of free trade are also only encouraging further protectionism when they impose retaliatory tariffs.
- As former Reserve Bank of India Governor **Raghuram Rajan** aptly put it, the ongoing trade war is a **"lose-lose situation"** for the warring parties.
- The only winners will be special interest groups and consumers in countries that do not engage in the tit-for-tat tariff war, but their winnings will come at the **cost of global growth**.
- It is high time countries worldwide come together to promote the cause of free trade.

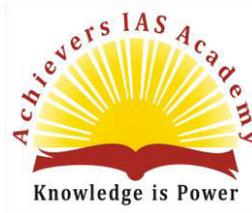
'Harley Davidson tariff to be among issues on table during Indo-U.S. talks'

- The U.S. demand to reduce import tariffs on American Harley Davidson motorcycles will be among a series of trade disputes on the table and **India will respond "appropriately"** during the talks between Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu and his counterpart, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, in Washington next week, Mr. Prabhu said here.
- The talks come on the back of several measures taken by the U.S. on its trade policy that have affected India, including imposing 25% tariffs on **steel and aluminum imports, restrictions on H1B visas** and the cancellation of **spouse visas** as well as taking to the WTO disputes over Indian barriers on **poultry and pork and price caps on medical devices**.

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Source: The Hindu

9. U.S. wants India out of S-400 deal

- The United States is trying to discourage India from buying large defence systems from Russia, an action that **may attract sanctions**, according to a senior official of the State Department.
- **Countering America's Adversaries through Sanction Act (CAATSA)**, a 2017 law, requires that countries that have significant defence cooperation with Russia be sanctioned by America.
- India is planning to buy five S-400 Triumph air defence systems for around \$4.5 billion from Russia.

Source: The Hindu

10. Trump-Kim meet ends with promise

- U.S. President Donald Trump said North Korean leader Kim Jong-un pledged at a **historic summit** on Tuesday to move towards complete **denuclearisation**, while the U.S. promised its old foe security guarantees.
- The start of negotiations, aimed at banishing what Mr. Trump described as North Korea's "very substantial" nuclear arsenal, could have far-reaching ramifications for the region, and in one of the biggest surprises of the day, Mr. Trump said he would **stop military exercises** with old ally South Korea.
- President Donald Trump stunned the region by announcing that he was **halting the annual U.S.-South Korean military drills** and wanted to remove the 28,500 U.S. troops stationed in the South as a deterrent against North Korea.

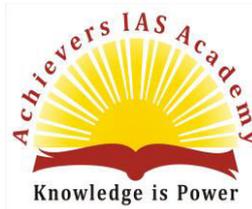
Historic handshake

- The historic summit between U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Singapore is an **affirmation of the power of diplomacy**.
- Until a few months ago, the two countries had been **trading nuclear threats**, as the North raced along with its nuclear weapons programme.
- Now, as Mr. Trump shook hands with Mr. Kim, who had once said the U.S. President was "mentally deranged", it was a reminder of Richard Nixon's ground-breaking 1972 visit to Beijing.
- Through the day, both Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim were keen on casting the "**comprehensive**" **meet in a positive light**.
- The two whimsical leaders deserve full credit for this thaw in relations, given the **decades of hostility and the quick diplomacy** that pulled the Korean peninsula back from the brink of war.

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- It all began with the **new South Korean President** Moon Jae-in's expansive outreach to the North. Mr. Kim reciprocated by sending athletes to the **Winter Olympics** in South Korea in February.
- As the relationship between the Koreas improved rapidly, Mr. Kim invited the U.S. President for a meeting. Mr. Trump accepted at once, surprising America's allies and rivals.
- However, it was not certain whether the meet would take place. Mr. Trump once called it off after **threats and counter-threats escalated**.
- But the appetite for **rapprochement** was clearly greater on both sides, and the rendezvous was back on track.
- In the brief joint statement after their meeting, Mr. Kim iterated his "firm and **unwavering commitment to complete denuclearisation**" of the Korean Peninsula, while Mr. Trump offered **security guarantees** to the North.
- Mr. Kim had earlier promised to denuclearise the peninsula in return for security assurances, while Mr. Trump had promised that the North would be welcomed into the international community as a respectable member and be allowed to **prosper economically**.
- The two leaders have put these demands and promises into a document that could guide future diplomatic engagement. Mr. Trump also announced that he would end the regular American "**war games**" with South Korea, a concession to the North.
- While the summit itself was a big success given the distance both countries covered in a relatively short span of time, **it is too early** to say whether Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim can pull off a Nixon-Mao type breakthrough.
- The joint statement provided **few specifics on how denuclearisation** can take place or how North Korea's steps to dismantle its arsenal will be monitored. There are no deadlines mentioned.
- There is **no reference to China**, North Korea's only ally. There has been no word on whether the two will establish **formal diplomatic ties**.
- Besides, being **unpredictable and impulsive**, Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim must also stare down hardline elements in their respective administrations. This bold beginning must not be wasted.

Source: The Hindu

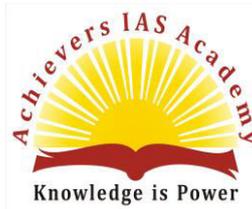
11. Islands apart

- Ties between India and the Maldives have **nosedived**, to the benefit of neither
- **Recent moves** by Abdulla Yameen, President of the Maldives, have put Malé on a collision course with New Delhi.
- Even the **presidential election**, which India has been calling for, is a point of contention.
- On Thursday, India criticised the government for its **incarceration of former President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom** and Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed, sentenced to 19 months in prison for an alleged plot to unseat Mr. Yameen.

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- India called the trial a sham, saying the sentencing put a question mark on the **credibility** of the presidential election process.
- This tough talk may not be taken kindly to in Malé.
- There has been a series of setbacks in India-Maldives ties, starting from March 2015 when Prime Minister Narendra Modi **cancelled a visit** in a show of disapproval of the treatment of **Mohamed Nasheed**, then in prison facing treason and terror charges.
- Since then, India has called out many actions of Mr. Yameen’s government, including the conduct of **polls**, treatment of the **judiciary** and, in February, his declaration of a state of **emergency**.
- On the last, it also rejected Mr. Yameen’s offer to send an envoy to explain his decision. Bolstered by a newly **strengthened relationship with China**, Mr. Yameen showed no inclination to heed India’s advice.
- The strain is now evident in two areas where India-Maldives ties had been the strongest: strategic relations and people-to-people engagement.
- The Maldives has conveyed to India that it will not extend beyond June 30 the **lease of Indian helicopters or the visas of personnel manning them**.
- This signals a marked downturn in **defence cooperation between the two countries**, which normally coordinate maritime and EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) patrols together.
- Meanwhile, hundreds of Indians offered **employment** in the Maldives at resorts, hospitals and colleges have been **denied work visas** for the past few months.
- The Yameen government must **reconsider these policies**. India too must pause to consider why relations have soured so badly.
- Until a few years ago, the **Maldives affirmed an “India First” policy**. The fact that the Maldives is the only country in the **neighbourhood** that Mr. Modi hasn’t visited is one reason, but there are many others.
- India’s vocal protests on **democratic rights in the Maldives** have been at variance with the past policy of taking a more muted line in public while encouraging democracy in official conversations.
- Mr. Gayoom also ran a near-**autocracy** for three decades from 1978, and India’s interventions always aimed at **strengthening the government there**, with any misgivings conveyed only through quiet diplomacy.
- India has been the **first port of call** in crisis for Maldivian leaders; when Mr. Nasheed was deposed in 2012, it was at the Indian embassy that he sought refuge. It’s time to restore the **bilateral trust**.

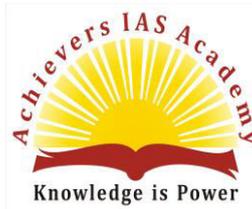
Ministry takes up Maldives visa row

- The government is treating the issue of visa denials to hundreds of Indians, who have been offered work in the Maldives, “with utmost importance,” The Hindu was told on Thursday.

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- “The Ministry of External Affairs has taken up the matter strongly at various levels and has urged the Maldivian government to abide by the terms of the **bilateral visa regime in place since 1979**

Source: The Hindu

General Studies-II : Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

1.India’s rank marginally improves in peace index

- India’s rank has marginally improved in “global peacefulness”, at a time when there is an **overall decline of global peace** owing to escalation of violence in West Asia and North Africa.
- Pakistan’s rank too has improved marginally, according to the Global Peace Index (GPI), released by **Australia-based Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP)**.
- The IEP, world’s leading think tank that develops metrics to analyse peace and quantify its economic value, released the 12th edition of the **GPI, or measure of global peacefulness**
- **Syria remained the least peaceful** country in the world, a position that it had held for the past five years.
- **Iceland continues to remain the most peaceful** country in the world, a position it has held since 2008.

Source: The Hindu

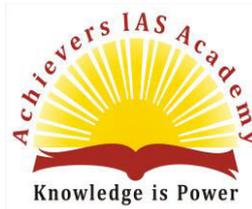
2.UN India business forum, NITI Aayog form consortium to help women entrepreneurs

- The UN India Business Forum and the **Women Entrepreneurial Platform** of NITI Aayog on Thursday formed a consortium to reduce **gender disparities in start-up investments** by providing mentorship and networking opportunities and accelerating financial and market linkages for women entrepreneurs.
- UN India-NITI Aayog Investor Consortium for Women Entrepreneurs will bring together key ecosystem **stakeholders, including venture capitalists and impact investors**, international donor and funding agencies, private sector partners and state governments, according to a joint statement.
- The consortium aims to strengthen women’s entrepreneurship by creating an enabling **ecosystem** for investments.
- Women entrepreneurs will be identified through key partners, including **WEP, UN Women, and UNDP**. The consortium secretariat will then connect entrepreneurs with relevant members.
- Indian women entrepreneurs continue to face challenges in **accessing investors and raising capital**.

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- Sustainable development has the potential to open up markets worth \$12 trillion around the world by 2030.

Source: The Hindu

3. World Bank nod for ₹6,000 cr. groundwater recharge plan

- To address concerns about **depleting groundwater reserves** in India, the government has joined hands with the World Bank to execute a ₹6,000-crore scheme called the **Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)**.
- The scheme is to be **implemented over a period of five years** from 2018-19 to 2022-23, according to a statement from the Union water Ministry. It is yet to be cleared by the Cabinet.
- The Atal Bhujal Yojana “aims to **improve ground water management** in priority areas in the country through **community participation**,” the statement said.
- The **priority areas** identified under the scheme fall in Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, which represent about **25% of the total number of over-exploited**, critical and semi-critical blocks in terms of groundwater in India.
- According to **a sample assessment in 2011**, groundwater in 19 of India’s 71 districts — about 26% — **were critical or exploited**, meaning that nearly as much or more water was being pulled out than their reservoirs’ **natural recharge ability**.
- In another assessment in 2013, they included groundwater blocks in districts that had gone **saline**, and this percentage was up to 31%.

Source: The Hindu

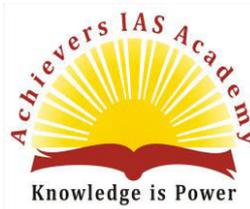
4. U.S. quits UN human rights body

- The United States on Tuesday announced its withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) terming it “hypocritical and self-serving.”
- U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley blamed the UNHRC for **bias against Israel and refusing to eject members** who are violators of human rights.
- Announcing the decision at the State Department, the officials named Russia, China, Cuba and Egypt for thwarting U.S. efforts to reform the Council.
- The UNHRC has been among the targets of President Donald Trump’s politics against **global organisations and treaties**.
- Under his presidency, the U.S. has withdrawn from the **U.N. climate treaty and the UNESCO**.
- UNHRC was founded in 2006. Then President George W. Bush was dismissive of the body. Under President Barack Obama, the **U.S. joined it in 2009**.
- The latest confrontation between the U.S. and UNHRC followed the **body’s criticism of Israel** in the aftermath of the recent killing of protesters in the **Gaza Strip**.

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- The U.S. decision also comes against the backdrop of **global criticism of the Trump administration's policy of separating children** and parents detained for **illegally entering the U.S**

Source: The Hindu

5. World's hungry population on the rise again, says UN report

- The number of hungry people in the world has **risen for the first time in more than a decade**, according to a United Nations report released on Wednesday.
- There are now approximately 38 million more **undernourished** people in the world, rising from 777 million in 2015 to 815 million in 2016, the year for which the latest statistics are available.
- According to the **UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2018 report, conflict is now one of the main drivers** of food insecurity in 18 countries.
- After a prolonged decline, world hunger appears to be on the rise again. **Conflict, drought and disasters** linked to **climate change** are among the key factors causing this reversal in progress
- Noting the increasing impact of extreme events related to a changing climate, the report said **economic losses attributed to disasters** were estimated at over \$300 billion in 2017.
- While there is **little country-specific data** in the report, it does examine the performance of various regions in **meeting the 17 SDGs**, which were adopted by UN member nations in 2015. The deadline to meet them is **2030**.
- **South Asia, which includes India, has seen child marriage rates plunge**, with a girl's risk of getting married in childhood dropping by 40% from 2000 to 2017.
- On the other hand, **water stress levels for many countries** in the region are above 70%, indicating **fast-approaching water scarcity**.
- More than nine out of 10 people living in **urban areas** around the world are breathing **polluted air**, with southern Asia scoring the worst in this area.
- While **electricity and sanitation deficits in south Asia** are still poor, the report noted efforts are being made to close the gap.
- Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires immediate and **accelerated actions actions by countries** along with collaborative partnerships among governments and stakeholders at all levels.
- This ambitious agenda necessitates **profound change that goes beyond business as usual**

Source: The Hindu

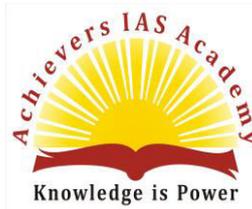
6. For nutrition security

- The UN's **State of Food Security and Nutrition** in the World report for 2017 has important pointers to achieve **nutrition policy reform**.

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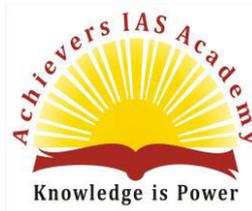
- At the global level, the five agencies that together produced the assessment found that the gains achieved on food security and better nutrition since the turn of the century **may be at risk**.
- Although absolute numbers of people facing **hunger and poor nutrition** have always been high, there was a **reduction in the rate of undernourishment** since the year 2000.
- That has slowed from 2013, registering a **worrying increase in 2016**. The estimate of 815 million people enduring **chronic food deprivation** in 2016, compared to 775 million in 2014, is depressing in itself, but more important is the finding that the deprivation is **even greater among people who live in regions affected by conflict** and the extreme effects of **climate change**.
- In a confounding finding, though, the report says that child undernutrition rates continue to drop, although **one in four children is still affected by stunting**.
- These are averages **and do not reflect the disparities among regions, within countries and between States**.
- Yet, the impact of the **economic downturn, many violent conflicts, fall in commodity export revenues**, and failure of agriculture owing to drought and floods are all making food scarce and expensive for many.
- They represent a **setback to all countries** trying to meet the Sustainable Development Goal on ending hunger and achieving **food security and improved nutrition**.
- India's efforts at improving access to food and good nutrition are led by the **National Food Security Act**.
- There are **special nutritional schemes** for women and children operated through the States. In spite of such interventions, **14.5% of the population suffers from undernourishment**, going by the UN's assessment for 2014-16.
- At the national level, 53% of women are **anaemic**, Health Ministry data show.
- What is more, the Centre recently said it had received only 3,888 complaints on **the public distribution system (PDS)** over a five-year period. All this shows that the Centre and State governments are woefully short on the commitment to end undernourishment.
- Institutions such as the **State Food Commissions** have not made a big difference either. **Distributing nutritious food** as a public health measure is still **not a political imperative**, while ill-conceived policies are making it difficult for many to do this.
- The report on nutritional deficiency should serve as an opportunity to evaluate the role played by the PDS in bringing about **dietary diversity for those relying on subsidised food**.
- In a report issued two years ago on the role played by rations in shaping household and nutritional security, the NITI Aayog found that families **below the poverty line consumed more cereals and less milk** compared to the affluent.
- Complementing rice and wheat with **more nutritious food items** should be the goal.

Source: The Hindu

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Other Issues in News:

1.Operation NISTAR Successfully Culminates with Safe Disembarkations of 38 Indian Nationals at Porbandar

- Indian Naval Ship Sunayana entered Porbandar harbour at 0900 hrs today on 07 Jun 2018 after successfully evacuating 38 Indian Nationals at/ off **Socotra** Islands during a swift **Humanitarian and Disaster Relief** Operation (HADR), code named Operation NISTAR.
- The Indian Nationals were stranded for **nearly ten days** after severe Cyclonic Storm – **Mekunu** devastated the area around Socotra Island.

Source: The Hindu

2.After Nipah, dengue scare in Kerala

- Sporadic cases of mosquito-borne diseases are being reported across district just days after the Health Department **claimed to have contained the Nipah outbreak**.
- As many as 180 suspected cases and 14 confirmed cases of **dengue** fever, three cases of **Japanese Encephalitis (JE)**, including one death, and five **malaria** cases were reported since June 1.
- Dengue cases have been reported frequently from **hilly areas**, such as Puthuppady, ever since the district started getting **summer showers**.
- According to the data provided by the Integrated Disease Surveillance Project, 50 suspected dengue cases were reported on June 11 alone, and 20 cases on June 12.

Source: The Hindu

3.India calls UN report on Kashmir fallacious

- India on Thursday rejected a report from the UN that called for an international investigation into the **alleged incidents of human rights abuse by Indian forces in Kashmir**.
- A statement from the Ministry of External Affairs said the first-ever UN report on human rights situation was “**fallacious**.”

Source: The Hindu

4.U.S. tariff to hit imports from China

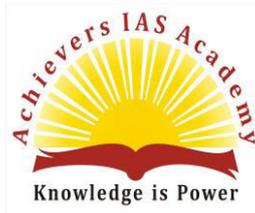
- U.S. President Donald Trump announced hefty tariffs on \$50 billion of Chinese imports on Friday in a move that looks set to **ignite a trade war between the two economies**.
- Mr. Trump said in a statement that a **25%** tariff would be imposed on a list of **strategically important imports** from China. He also vowed further measures if Beijing struck back.

Source: The Hindu

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5.Children ‘capture’ wildlife with camera traps

- A majestic **tiger** in a waterhole in **Sindhudurg**; two leopards with three cubs in Raigad; a difficult-to-spot **porcupine** in Ratnagiri: these aren't the portfolio of a professional wildlife photographer.
- They're just a few of the 200-odd pictures shot on camera traps set up by school children from rural **Maharashtra** as part of the unique **E-mammal Citizen Science Project**.
- The project, aimed at grassroots conservation through collection of **scientific information by children**, is being implemented by the Bombay Natural History Society (**BNHS**), along with the Sahyadri Nisarga Mitra (SNM).
- It started in 2105, with three schools joining their **contemporaries in Mexico and the U.S.** In its second phase in 2017, the project included 2,000 children in Class VIII and IX in 20 schools in Palghar, Thane, Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, Kolhapur and Satara districts.

Source: The Hindu

6.India, Bangladesh navies to join hands

- India and Bangladesh have agreed to institute a Coordinated Patrol (**CORPAT**) as an annual feature between the two navies.
- Over the last few years, the **Navy has expanded its assistance** to countries in the region through “material support, training, EEZ (Exclusive Economic Zone) surveillance, provisioning of platforms, hydrographic assistance, **joint exercises and offering slots in professional training courses.**”
- The Navy regularly conducts CORPATs with **Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand**. It also conducts EEZ surveillance of Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles on their request.

Source: The Hindu

7.Hyderabad may house first government blockchain centre

- The Centre is considering a **proposal** to set up a Centre of Excellence for blockchain technology in Hyderabad to drive innovation.
- The proposal has been submitted by **C-DAC Hyderabad**, along with the Institute for Development and Research in Banking Technology (IDRBT) and Veermata Jijabai Technological Institute (VJTI), Mumbai.
- **IT firms** such as Infosys, TCS, Wipro and Cognizant had made significant investments in blockchain technology, **while banks had already started using the technology**

Source: The Hindu

All The Best

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