

**CURRENT EVENTS
AND
ANALYSIS
(November 2019)**

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CURRENT EVENTS AND ANALYSIS

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ECONOMY

MACROVIEW OF INDIAN ECONOMY:

GDP Growth Slows down to 4.5 Per cent in Second Quarter (July-September) of 2019-20

Indian Economy continued to register slower growth rate with second quarter (July-September) of 2019-20 registering a growth rate of 4.5 per cent which is the **slowest growth rate in six years (since 2013)**. **Manufacturing** registered a **negative growth** of (-) 1.0 per cent which is a worrying trend.

Recent Growth Rates at a Glance:

	<u>2018-19</u>	<u>2019-20</u>
April-June (Q1) :	8.0 Per cent	5.0 Per cent
July-September (Q2) :	7.0 Per cent	4.5 Per cent
October-December(Q3) :	6.6 Per cent	
January-March (Q4) :	5.8 Per cent	

Which sectors performed poorly?

- All the three sectors, Agriculture, Industry and Services recorded lower growth rate.

(Growth Rates)

<u>Sector</u>	<u>2018-19</u>	<u>2019-20</u>
Agriculture	4.9	2.1
Industry	6.7	0.5
Services	7.3	6.8
GDP	7.0	4.5

What is the major reason for declining growth?

- Weak domestic demand due to demonitisation, lack of credit growth, inadequate rise in incomes of people, and insufficient support for weaker sections housing programmes which have high multiplier effect on economy.

What are the options for Reviving Growth ?

Both Monetary measures and Fiscal measures.

Monetary Measures:

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been reducing benchmark interest rate i.e. repo rate continuously. Since February 2019, it has been reduced by 1.35 per cent.
- **Benefits:** Boost to investment and consumption due to low interest rates.
- **Actual Impact:** Banks did not pass on the benefits of rate cuts completely to the customers because Banks source much of the funds through public deposits (saving deposits and fixed deposits) which carry higher interest rates. Only small per centage of funds are sourced from RBI.

Why economic growth is important?

1. **Higher Revenues for the Government:** Growing economy increases the revenues of the Government in the form of higher tax collections.
2. **Higher Spending on Social Sector (health, education) and Development:** Higher revenues enable the government to spend higher amounts on both development and welfare programmes.

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3. **Job Creation:** Growth also leads to job creation in economy to some extent even though the exact extent of job creation is not captured in the economic growth.
 4. **Spill over effects on economy:** Increased spending by the Government as well as people benefitting from job creation enhances demand for goods and services.

Thus, higher economic growth is seen as a virtuous cycle for an economy i.e growth leading to higher consumption and higher consumption leading to higher demand which would be a continuous cycle. This continuous growth in the longrun is expected to lead to higher standards of living in a country (in terms of employment, access to education and healthcare).

What are the consequences of slow economic growth?

1. **Revenue Receipts:** Government's tax receipts will decline due to decline in economic activity.
2. **Fiscal Deficit:** Government will not be able to meet the fiscal deficit target due to mismatch between anticipated revenues and actual collections. Infact, the fiscal deficit in the first half of 2019-20 (April to October) has exceeded the full year target.
3. **Expenditure on development programmes:** The Government would have to reduce its expenditure on developmental programmes as revenue expenditure and welfare expenditure is fixed.
4. **Impact on State governments' Finances:** State Governments' Finances will be affected as there will be lesser devolution of share of taxes due to reduced collections.
5. **Impact on Jobs:** Slowing growth indicates the slowdown in job creation in the economy. Though economic growth does not exactly capture the exact extent of job creation, it has some impact on job creation in the economy.

What are the limitations of GDP?

Too much emphasis on GDP growth in an economy is criticised for the following reasons.

1. **Employment:** It does not capture the **employment creation** in the economy.
 2. **Economic Inequalities:** It also does not deal with **economic inequalities** in the economy.
 3. **Human Development:** It does not capture **human development indicators** like status of education, and healthcare which are crucial for human development.
- Hence, GDP is not seen as a wholistic indicator to measure economic progress and development in an economy.

Measuring above Indicators:

- To overcome the limitations of GDP growth, countries have started measuring the progress in above areas through separate surveys.
- In India, indicators on employment, poverty, health, education, etc. are captured through various surveys conducted by National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), concerned Ministries, Sample Registration Surveys of Census Office, etc.
- Globally, the United Nations measures Human Development of countries through Human Development index Report. It ranks countries by taking into account life expectancy, education, as well as percapita income. Hence, this is seen as a better indicator to measure human progress.
- United Nations also adopted Sustainable Development Goals 2030 to achieve qualitative progress in indicators related to human development like eradicating poverty, access to education, health, clean water, sanitation, reduction of inequalities, etc.

What is the difference between slowdown and recession in the economy?

- The slow growth rates in Indian economy led to debates on whether Indian economy is undergoing economic slowdown or recession.

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- **Recession** means **contraction** of GDP output (**negative growth**) for two consecutive quarters in an economy (decline in overall output when compared with corresponding quarters of the previous financial year).

Recession generally occurs in **developed economies** as their economies are huge (size of US economy is US \$ 20 trillion) and register annual growth rates between 0.5 per cent to 3 per cent. Because of low growth rates, the chances of these economies slipping into recession are higher.

- **Slowdown** is merely a **decline in the growth rate** of the GDP. Here, the GDP output in an economy increases but only registers lesser growth in increase when compared with previous quarters. For instance, Indian economy registered a growth rate of 4.5 per cent in second quarter of 2019-20 which is lower than 7.0 per cent growth registered in the corresponding period of previous year (2018-19).

Slowdown generally occurs in **developing countries** like India and China. These countries have been registering growth rates of more than 6 per cent for some years. Only in the last three quarters, India's GDP growth fell below 6 per cent.

Is India undergoing Recession?

- Indian economy is still growing although at a slower pace for the past two quarters (figures can be found in a glance information at the beginning of the article).
- Thus, Indian economy is growing at a slower rate, and is not in recession.

Union Government Approves Rs. 25,000 Crore Fund for Stalled Housing Projects

- On November 6, 2019, the Union Government approved the creation of an **Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)** with **Rs.25,000 crore** to provide **priority debt financing** for the **completion of stalled affordable and middle-income housing projects**.

What are the reasons for setting up the Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)?

- Demand for housing units in the country is declining.
- Real estate developers are facing cash flow problems due to slow and declining bookings for the new houses
- As a result, they are unable to complete the projects started by them.
- Banks are unwilling to extend further loans to these developers fearing defaults.
- According to the government's estimates, there are around 1,600 housing projects in which 4.58 lakh crore units are stalled.

How Does the Alternative Investment Fund help?

- **The Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) set up by the Government** will provide **priority debt financing** for the **completion of stalled housing projects** that are in the Affordable and Middle-Income Housing sector across the country.
- Government will invest Rs. 10,000 crore in the fund and act as sponsor. The remaining Rs. 15,000 crore will come from State Bank of India (SBI), Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC), sovereign wealth funds and pensions funds.
- The fund will be managed by SBICAP Ventures Limited.

Which Projects are eligible for accessing the Fund?

- All affordable and middle-income housing projects that are net worth positive (assets exceed liabilities), and registered with the Real Estate Regulatory Authority (RERA).
- In addition to the above, the following two categories will also be eligible for accessing funds.

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- a) those projects which have been declared as Non Performing Assets (NPAs) by banks, and
 - b) those **facing bankruptcy proceedings** under the **National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT)** but not referred for liquidation.

(Under, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, a National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) can initiate a insolvency resolution process when a company defaults on making payment to creditors. Interim Resolution Professional would be appointed and is given 180 days to find a resolution, which can be extended by 90 days. If the IRP fails to find a resolution by then, the company is liquidated to pay the creditors.)

- The **maximum finance** given under the Fund for any single project will be **Rs. 400 crore**.

What are the expected benefits of Fund ?

The creation of special window **in the form of Alternative Investment Fund (AIF)** for affordable and middle-income housing projects is expected to

- revive the real estate sector, and
- generate considerable employment.
- Besides, revival of the sector will also lead to demand for cement, iron & steel industries.

What is the definition of Affordable or mid-income housing under this Fund?

Affordable or mid-income housing means housing projects wherein housing units do not exceed 200 sq. m. (2152 square feet) carpet area and are priced as below:

- up to or less than Rs. 2 crore in Mumbai Metropolitan Region
- up to or less than Rs. 1.5 crore in National Capital Region, Chennai, Kolkata, Pune, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Ahmedabad
- up to or less than Rs. 1 crore in the rest of India.

Criticism on the Fund:

- The Fund may help in completing the stalled housing projects but may not address the problem of declining demand for new houses.
- The real estate prices are on consistent rise over the past decade in the country.
- There is also excess supply of housing units in the real estate sector which is leading to demand supply mismatch. Demand in metro areas is growing at only four to five per cent, while supply is growing in double digits and perhaps close to 20 per cent. There are over a million unsold housing units in the country.
- Hence, the ideal solution is to allow real estate sector to correct itself and adjust to the softening demand by reducing prices. But the promoters are unwilling to drop prices and lenders are also refusing to take a haircut (reduce the actual dues from a borrower through settlement).

Additional Information:

What are Alternative Investment Funds (AIF's):

- Alternative Investment Fund (AIF) is a **privately pooled investment fund** established or incorporated in India.
- It is set up by **sophisticated investors**, whether Indian or foreign, for investing in areas such as **real estate, private equity and hedge funds**.
- The fund could be set in the form of a **trust, a company, a limited liability partnership or a corporate entity**.
- The overall corpus of each AIF should be at least 20 crore and there should not be more than 1,000 investors at any point in time. Minimum investment from an individual is 1 crore.

What are different types of Alternative Investment Funds?

- Based upon the investment in the fund, they are divided into **three** categories - Category I AIF, Category II AIF, Category III AIF.
 - **Category I funds** invest in start-ups, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) Funds, Infrastructure funds and venture capital funds.
 - **Category II funds** include real estate funds, private equity funds, debt funds, etc.
 - **Category III AIFs** include
 - hedge funds,
 - funds which trade with a view to make short term returns, and
 - funds for which no specific incentives or concessions are given by the government.
- Category III AIFs** employ diverse or complex trading strategies and seek to leverage through investment in **listed or unlisted derivatives**. The objective is to take risk and earn higher returns on their investments

Who Regulates Alternative Investment Funds (AIF's)?

- **Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)** regulates the functioning of Alternative Investment Funds through its guidelines. The first such guidelines were issued in 2012.

FISCAL POLICY:

Finance Commission:

15th Finance Commission Term Extended

On November 27, 2019, the Union Government approved the extension of the term of the Fifteenth Finance Commission till October 30, 2020. It was also asked to submit two reports:

1. First Report for the first fiscal year 2020-21, and
2. Final Report covering Financial Years 2021-26.

About the 15th Finance Commission:

- 15th Finance Commission was constituted by the Union Government under the chairmanship of NK Singh on November 27, 2017 to give recommendations on division of proceeds of taxes between the Centre and the States for the five year period covering 2020-25, among other terms of reference.
- The term of the commission was originally set to end in October 2019, but was extended by one month to November 30, 2019. Now this term has been extended till October 2020 and asked to submit two reports.

Why was the Term extended?

Some of the recent developments alongwith terms of reference for the Commission are the reasons. These are

1. imposition of Model Code of Conduct in the country due to General Elections due which the consultations with the state governments were delayed,
2. recent decisions of the Union Government like reduction of corporate taxes,
3. reduction of GST rates by Good and Services Tax (GST) Council,
4. bifurcation of the State of Jammu & Kashmir into two Union Territories, and
(Union territories usually get their resources from the central government's share of the divisible pool)

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5. wide-ranging nature of terms of reference for the commission. For instance, the Commission has to recommend monitorable performance criteria for important national flagship programmes and examining the possibility of setting up a permanent non lapsable funding for India's defence needs. (*Further details are given additional information*).

The Finance Commission has to rework its recommendations taking the impact of above developments.

What is Finance Commission?

- It is Constitutional body under Article 280 of the Indian Constitution.
- It is constituted once in every five years by the President of India.
- The First Finance Commission was constituted under the chairmanship of Mr. K.C. Neogy on April 6, 1952.
- Fifteen Finance Commissions have been Constituted so far at intervals of every five years.

What are its Functions?

Major Functions:

Evaluate the state of finances of the Union and State Governments and **making recommendations** to the President of India regarding

1. distribution of tax revenues between the Union and the States and amongst the States themselves, and
2. principles which should govern the grants-in-aid of the revenues of the States out of the Consolidated Fund of India.

Other Recommendations are on

- measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Panchayats in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State;
- measures needed to augment the Consolidated Fund of a State to supplement the resources of the Municipalities in the State on the basis of the recommendations made by the Finance Commission of the State; and
- any other matter referred to the Commission by the President in the interests of sound finance.

Why Finance Commission?

- Under the federal structure envisaged in the Constitution, most of the taxation powers are with the Centre but the bulk of spending is done by the states.
- Such a federal structure requires transfer of resources from the Centre, which levies and collects the big taxes such as income tax and indirect taxes like excise and customs, to the states.
- Canada and Australia, which have federal governments, also have a similar tax-sharing system.

The recommendations of the Finance Commission also aim at

1. promoting fiscal stability, and
2. improving the quality of public spending.

Are Recommendations of the Finance Commission Binding on the Union Government?

- The **Constitution does not make the recommendations** of the Finance Commission **binding** on the government of the day.
- However, there is a strong precedent that governments generally go by the recommendations as far as sharing of revenues is concerned. These recommendations relating to distribution of Union taxes and duties and grants-in-aid are usually implemented by a presidential order.
- Other recommendations to be made by the Finance Commission, as per its Terms of Reference, are implemented by executive orders.

Additional Information:

The 15th Finance Commission, in addition to the general terms of reference, has the following unique and wide terms of reference.

While making its recommendations, the Commission shall consider

- the impact on the fiscal situation of the Union Government on account of substantially enhanced tax devolution to States following recommendations of the 14th Finance Commission;
- the impact of the GST on the finances of Centre and States; and
- the conditions that Gol may impose on the States while providing consent under Article 293(3) of the Constitution.

The Commission may also consider proposing measurable performance-based incentives for States in the following areas:

- Efforts made by the States in expansion and deepening of tax net under GST;
- Efforts and progress made in moving towards replacement rate of population growth;
- Achievements in implementation of flagship schemes of Government of India, disaster resilient infrastructure, sustainable development goals, and quality of expenditure;
- Progress made in increasing capital expenditure, eliminating losses of power sector, and improving the quality of such expenditure in generating future income streams;
- Progress made in increasing tax/non-tax revenues, promoting savings by adoption of Direct Benefit Transfers and Public Finance Management System, promoting digital economy and removing layers between the government and the beneficiaries;
- Progress made in promoting ease of doing business by effecting related policy and regulatory changes and promoting labour intensive growth;
- Provision of grants in aid to local bodies for basic services, including quality human resources, and implementation of performance grant system in improving delivery of services;
- Control or lack of it in incurring expenditure on populist measures; and
- Progress made in sanitation, solid waste management and bringing in behavioural change to end open defecation.

INFLATION:

Rise in Onion Prices and Measures Taken to Control by the Government

Onion Prices have increased in the the country with one kilogram onion costing more than Rs. 100 in many cities and towns.

Reasons for the Rise in Onion Prices:

1. **Fall in Production in Kharif Season (July-October):** There is a 30-40% reduction in the production of onions due to **delayed monsoons** followed by **untimely rains and cyclones** in September and October 2019.
2. Government has a **buffer stock** of 57,000 tonnes of Onions which was built by the Government through National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) during Rabi 2019 season. This bufer stock was released into the market due to the shortage of supply and rising prices.
3. Onions are a **perishable commodity** which means they can be stored under natural conditions only for a few days. The prices of perishable commodities are subject to high fluxuations depending on demand and supply.

Measures Taken by the Government to Check the Rise in Prices of Onions:

1. **Ban on Exports:** Export of Onions has been banned to improve the availability of onions in the domestic market and bring down the prices.

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2. **Imposition of Stock limits:** Government has **put stock holding limit on retailers and wholesale traders** under the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 to ensure **a constant and regular supply in the market.**

These limits are 100 quintals (10 tonnes) for retailers and 500 quintals (50 tonnes) for wholesalers. One quintal equals 100 kgs. These limits were further reduced to **2 tonnes on retailers and 25 tonnes on wholesalers.**

3. **Enforcing Stock Limits:** Centre has asked the State Governments to enforce the stock limits strictly and carry out anti-hoarding operations against the unscrupulous traders by organising raids.
4. **Import of Onions:** Government has approved import of onions upto 1.2 lakh tonnes to boost domestic supply and check the ongoing price rise.

Metals and Minerals Trading Corporation of India (MMTC), central public sector undertaking (PSU), has been directed to import one lakh tonnes through global tenders. It is importing onions from **Turkey, Egypt and European Union.** Private importers have also been allowed to import onions.

However, the **season for onion cultivation is mostly over across the world except for Turkey and Holland** and the Government is making all efforts to get stocks from these countries and **Egypt** as early as possible.

The country had **last imported 1,987 tonnes of onions** way back in **2015-16** when price has shot up significantly.

INDUSTRY:

Disinvestment:

Strategic Disinvestment of BPCL and Four Other Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSE's) Approved

In a major decision, the Union Government approved strategic disinvestment of five Central Public Sector Undertakings (CPSE's) including Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL), a Maharatna oil and gas company, on November 20, 2019.

What is Strategic Disinvestment?

It means two things:

1. Sale of substantial stake of Union Government's equity in Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) which could be **upto 50 per cent or more**, and
2. transfer of management control to the buyer i.e a private player.

Government Definition of Strategic disinvestment : Sale of substantial portion of the Government share holding in a central public sector enterprise (CPSE) which could be **upto 50% or higher**, along with transfer of management control to the buyer.

Why Strategic Disinvestment?

Strategic Disinvestment is guided by the basic economic principles.

1. **Promoting Competitive Markets:** Government should discontinue its engagement in manufacturing/producing goods and services in sectors where the **competitive markets have come of age** (meaning private sector has grown in size to compete and deliver better services).
2. **Infusing Efficiency:** Opening up sectors for private enterprise would bring in **efficiency to the sector of disinvestment.** Private players would bring in new management, technology and investment for the growth of these companies and may use innovative methods for their development.
3. **Economic Development of the Country:** Due to improved efficiency in management in private sector, strategic disinvestment contributes to general economic development of the country

Details of disinvestment in five CPSE's:

Company	Extent of Disinvestment Approved
1. Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited	53.29 per cent
2. Shipping Corporation of India Ltd. (SCI)	63.75 per cent
3. Container Corporation of India Ltd. (CONCOR)	30.80 per cent
4. Tehri Hydro Development Corporation India Limited (THDCIL)	74.23 per cent
5. North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO)	100.00 per cent

Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) to be exempted from strategic disinvestment:

- Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) is a major stakeholder in Numaligarh Refinery Limited (NRL) with 61.65% stake.
- BPCL's shareholding of 61.65% in NRL along with transfer of management control will not be given to a private player as India needs to secure fuel supplies for security forces in the north-east. Hence, BPCL's stake of 61.65% in NRL would be given to a Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) operating in the Oil and Gas Sector.

What is the current disinvestment policy of the Union Government?

1. Listing (placing shares in the list of stock market for sale) of profitable unlisted CPSEs to unlock their true potential,
2. disinvestment through minority stake sale in listed CPSEs (Government retains majority stake and ownership), and
3. strategic disinvestment of select CPSEs.

NITI Aayog identifies CPSEs for strategic disinvestment. It advises on the mode of sale, percentage of shares to be sold, and method for valuation of the CPSE.

How are the Funds generated through Disinvestment used?

- The proceeds of disinvestment are credited into National Investment Fund (NIF).
- NIF was constituted in November, 2005.
- Proceeds of disinvestment are used for the approved purpose, as decided from time to time. Initially, 75% of the annual income of the NIF was used for financing selected social sector schemes which promote education, health and employment. The residual 25% of the annual income of NIF was allocated to meet the capital investment requirements of profitable and revivable PSUs.
- But, the **policy of utilization** of disinvestment proceeds **underwent various changes over a period of time.**
- **Presently**, the disinvestment proceeds are credited to the existing NIF which is a 'Public Account' under the Government Accounts and the funds would remain there until withdrawn /invested for the approved purposes.
- The NIF is utilized for the following purposes:
 1. Subscribing to the shares being issued by the CPSEs so as to ensure that 51% ownership of the Government in CPSEs is not diluted.
 2. Preferential allotment of shares of the CPSE to promoters as per SEBI (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2009 so that Government shareholding does not go down below 51% in all cases where the CPSE is going to raise fresh equity to meet their Capital expenditure program.
 3. Recapitalization of public sector banks and public sector insurance companies so as to strengthen them through further capital infusion towards achieving the Basel III norms.
 4. Investment by Government in Regional Rural Banks (RRBs), India Infrastructure Finance Company Limited (IIFCL), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Exim Bank;

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5. Equity infusion in various Metro projects;
 6. Investment in Bhartiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited and Uranium Corporation of India Ltd; and
 7. Investment in Indian Railways towards capital expenditure.

How Much Money is Expected by the Government through the Strategic Disinvestment of five CPSE's now?

- At current market value, Government can raise about about Rs 78,400 crore from three CPSEs i.e. Rs 63,000 crore from selling its entire 53.3% stake in BPCL, Rs 2,000 crore by offloading 63.7% in Shipping Corporation of India, and Rs 13,400 crore from selling 30.8% of Concor (Container Corporation of India Ltd).
- The actual realisation from BPCL could be much higher on account of the premium the government will seek for giving up controlling stake from any strategic investor. Big international oil companies including Saudi Aramco may be keen on investing in BPCL, given the refiner's strong presence in fuel retailing among other things.
- A strategic investor will get access to BPCL's refining capacity of **37 million tonnes per annum** and around **15,000 retail outlets** in **India**, the world's third largest oil consuming nation (after United States and China).

Disinvestment Target for 2019-20:

- The government proposes to raise Rs 1.05 lakh crore from disinvestment in 2019-20 financial year.
- It had exceeded asset-sale targets of Rs 1 lakh crore in 2017-18 and Rs 80,000 crore in 2018-19.
- In 2019-20, by the end of September 2019, the government had only raised Rs 12,359 crore through disinvestment.

SOCIAL SECTOR:

Social Audit to be Extended to More Schemes

In November 2019, the Department of Rural Development (Union Ministry of Rural Development) decided to institutionalize the social audits in major schemes of Rural Development, starting with **National Social Assistance Scheme (NSAP)** and **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awaas Yojana-Grameen (PMAY-G)**

What is Social Audit?

- It is a mechanism where citizens themselves assess the impact of government schemes and programmes by comparing official records with the actual ground situation.
- The details of Government programmes are put up in the public and people evaluate the genuineness of the records.

What are its Advantages?

- Social audit makes **people** as the **auditors of Government spending**.
- It **checks corruption by promoting transparency** in the Government spending
- It also **ensures its accountability** to the public as people are involved in the evaluation of schemes and programmes.
- Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), which is a constitutional body, also recognized the role of the social audit in promoting transparency and accountability

MGNREGA, the first scheme, to have social audit:

- **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** was the **first to mandate Social Audits** by the Gram Sabha of all the projects taken up in the Gram Panchayat.

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- **MNREGA made social audit a statutory requirement.**

Section 17 of the MGNREGA, 2005, stated 'The Gram Sabha shall conduct regular social audits of all the projects under the scheme taken up within the Gram Panchayat'.

Other schemes under Social Audit:

- In addition to MGNREGA, few States have taken up social audit of other schemes as well.
- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) audits are done in Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya and West Bengal. National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) audits are done in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal.
- **Meghalaya became the first State to pass and roll out a social audit law to cover maximum departments.**

Meghalaya Legislature has enacted 'The Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017' which mandates social audit in 26 different schemes in Education, Health, Rural Development and other areas.

- Eight States have taken up Social Audit of 11 different schemes including Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meals (MDM).

Additional Information:

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G):

- The Union Government has set a goal of "Housing for All" by 2022. Towards this end, the Government is implementing Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Gramin (PMAY-G) in rural areas and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana- Urban (PMAY-U) in urban areas.
- PMAY-G is being implemented by Ministry of Rural Development while the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban (PMAY-U) is being implemented by Ministry of Housing & Urban Affairs.

Benefits under PMAY-G:

- Under PMAY-G, beneficiaries are provided unit assistance of Rs. 1.2 lakh in plains and Rs. 1.3 lakh in hilly states, difficult areas and IAP districts for construction of pucca house.
- In addition, beneficiaries are provided assistance of 90/95 persondays of unskilled labour wages through convergence with Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) and Rs. 12,000 for construction of toilets through convergence with Swachh Bharat Mission – Gramin (SBM-G), MGNREGS or any other dedicated source of funding.

INFRASTRUCTURE:

Telecom Companies Get 2 Year Moratorium on Spectrum Fee Payment

- On November 20, 2019, the Union Government approved **a two year moratorium for telecom companies on spectrum fee payment.**

Background:

- Telecom operators pay both licence fee and spectrum usage charges (SUC) on the Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR). They are liable to pay around **3 to 5%** (depending on telecom circle) of **AGR** as **spectrum usage charges**, and **8% of the AGR** as **licence fees**.
- In October 2019, the Supreme Court, in a long pending dispute between the Government and telecom companies over the definition of Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR), ruled in favour of the Government.
- It accepted the definition of the Union Government on Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) which included **noncore revenues** i.e those from handset sales, rent, dividends, interest income, profit from sale of

scrap, termination fees and roaming charges. **Telecom companies** had argued that **only revenue** derived from **licensed services (core services)** should be considered part of AGR. The dispute between the Government and the telecom companies was going on since 2003.

- As the telecom companies lost the case, the Supreme Court asked them pay spectrum fee and license fee on noncore revenues earned since 2003 along with penalty and interest.

Rs 1.47 lakh Crore Liability:

- As a result of Supreme Court ruling, telecom companies have to pay to the Government nearly Rs 1.47 lakh crore in license fee (LF) and spectrum usage charges (SUC). Of this, license fee amounts to Rs 92,642 crore, while SUC stood at Rs 55,054 crore.

Burden on Telecom Companies:

- The ruling of the Government imposed a huge burden on telecom companies as they have to pay penalty and interest in addition to the principal amount (i.e. money to be paid as license fee and spectrum usage charges on noncore revenues since 2003).
- The telecom industry is in severe financial stress with debt of more than Rs 7 lakh crore.
- Hence, the companies urged the government to assess the impact of the judgement and provide relief.

What the Telecom Companies Sought?

- The Telecom Companies sought moratorium of two years and 10 years term for payment of dues, waiver of interest, and penalty.

Decision of the Government:

- On November 20, 2019, the Union Government only approved a **two-year moratorium on payment of spectrum auction instalments to be paid for the years 2020-21 and 2021-22.**

Benefit of the Decision:

- The telecom can use the money available due to moratorium on payment of spectrum for payment of **past statutory liabilities (due to impact of Supreme Court ruling) and interest on bank loans.**

CAPITAL MARKET:

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Bars Karvy Stock Broking from Taking on New Clients

- On November 22, 2019, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) barred Karvy Stock Broking, a Hyderabad-based firm, from taking new clients in respect of its stock broking activities.

Background:

- Individuals who want to invest in stock markets either invest on their own or use the services of stock broking companies who have expertise in maximising profits through investments in stock markets.
- Karvy Stock Broking is one such firm based in Hyderabad. It manages the funds of investors who are technically called clients. Clients give power of attorney (a written authorisation to act trade on their behalf) to manage their investments. Power of Attorney gives the broking firm control over the clients' securities - to move them freely in and out of the clients' or investors' demat account.
- Karvy Stock Broking has more than a million retail broking customers and executes over two lakh transactions almost daily on behalf of its clients.

Why has the SEBI barred Karvy Stock Broking?

- Karvy had **pledged securities of over 95,000 clients** with various banks (ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, IndusInd Bank and Bajaj Finance) as **collateral** and **raised over Rs 600 crore in loans.**

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- These **funds raised through loans** have been **diverted** to its subsidiary company '**Karvy Reality**', a **real estate firm**.
 - The SEBI in its order stated that pledging of securities of clients of stock broking firms is not allowed.
 - The broking firm will not be able to further misuse clients' securities even if it has the power of attorney as the depositories have been given clear instructions by the SEBI in this regard

In India the stocks are held electronically by two depositories National Securities Depository Limited (NSDL) and Central Depository Services (India) Limited (CDSL). A stock broking firm logs into this depository and trades in stocks.

Membership Suspended:

- The Bombay Stock Exchange and the NSE have suspended the broking membership of Karvy.
- The NSE is conducting a forensic audit to ascertain further details regarding alleged misuse of client securities. A forensic audit is an examination and evaluation of a firm's or individual's financial records to derive evidence that can be used in a legal proceeding.

INDIA & WORLD ECONOMY:

India Opts out of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)

- On November 4, 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi while addressing the 3rd RCEP Summit held in Bangkok, Thailand, announced that India will not join the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.

Why India Refused to Join RCEP?

India stated that RCEP is **not a fair and balanced agreement** and joining it would hurt the **livelihood concerns** of Indians due to

- threat of cheap imports from China,
- India's growing trade deficit with RCEP countries,
- negative impact on sectors like textiles, dairy, and
- non redressal of India's concerns like specific rules of origin to ensure the trade pact was not abused by non-partner countries and an auto-trigger mechanism to protect it from a surge in imports.

1. Opposition within the Country:

The RCEP deal required **India to abolish tariffs** on

- more **than 70% of goods from China, Australia and New Zealand**, and
- nearly **90% goods from Japan, South Korea and Asean**. This would have made **imports to India cheaper** and **hurt domestic industry**.

Concerns over Cheap imports from China

Domestic industry particularly small and medium industries in India expressed deep concerns over cheap imports from China with which India already has huge trade deficit of US \$ 53 billion although it does not have any free trade agreement.

Electrical machinery, equipment, appliances, plastic articles, iron and steel, aluminium, ceramic products, man-made fibres and furniture are a few of the many goods that China dumps into India every year. Manufacturers of the above products fear increased dumping from China post the RCEP deal.

Powerloom weavers from across the country raised serious concerns that chinese textile and apparel manufacturers may dump their products in India. **China is the world's largest apparel exporter**. Lakhs of workers would be rendered **jobless** and **small and medium powerloom units will shut down** if cheap imports from china flood India.

Dairy Products: New Zealand sought access to the fast-growing dairy products market in India - together with wine, apples and kiwis - in return for easier norms for cross-border migration of Indian professionals (nurses, chartered accountants and IT experts).

Indian Dairy Industry Concerns:

New Zealand exports almost 93 per cent of its annual milk production (as milk and dairy products) while India is a negligible exporter. Allowing dairy products like skimmed milk powder (SMP), cheese and butter from New Zealand would hurt domestic dairying industry.

Currently, most milk and dairy products imports to India attract a peak customs duty of 64 per cent. Joining RCEP would have entailed India to substantially reduce customs duty which would lead to flood of imports from New Zealand. To face competition from New Zealand, local dairy companies may have to slash their milk procurement prices if cheap imports are allowed because global skimmed milk powder (SMP) prices are far lower than Indian rates - Rs160-170 a kg against Rs280-290 respectively. This would be disastrous for small Indian dairy farmers and impact the livelihood of almost 100 million rural households who are directly or indirectly dependent on dairying. An overwhelming 77 per cent of these households comprise small and marginal farmers.

2. Large Trade Deficits:

India also runs large trade deficits with at least 11 of the 15 RCEP members. China alone accounts for \$53 billion of India's \$105 billion trade deficit with these.

Joining RCEP would further widen the trade deficit and hurt the domestic industry as imports would become much cheaper because of low tariffs.

3. **Non Redressal of India's Concerns:** India was looking for **specific rules of origin** to ensure the trade pact was not abused by non-partner countries and an **auto-trigger mechanism** to protect it from a surge in imports.

As India runs a large trade deficit with RCEP countries, it was looking for specific protection for its industry and farmers from a surge in imports, especially from China.

4. India also stated that the global economic environment changed since the beginning of the RCEP negotiations in 2012.
4. The trade agreement was also seen as being detrimental to the government's Make in India initiative.

What are the Consequences of Not Joining RCEP?

- India may **lose market access** to Asian economies at preferential rates. The Indian economy is large, but the rest of the RCEP is eight times its size and offers great opportunities in trade in goods and services. RCEP would have opened new market for pharmaceutical industry and service sector in which it has an edge.
- Membership of RCEP would have made **Indian industry more competitive** and integrated with global supply chains.

For instance, opening of Indian economy post 1991, helped Indian industry to become more competitive. It helped both the consumers and producers in India.

Imports soared after 1991. But, as firms rapidly became more competitive, exports soared too. India's share of world exports, which had fallen to 0.5 per cent in 1991, rose to around 1.5 per cent by 2010. In 2017, India's share in world exports stood at 1.7 per cent.

Foreign firms invested in India, and Indian firms invested abroad. Exports were a substantial driver of our growth performance, contributing roughly a quarter of our record 8 per cent growth between 2000 and 2010. The Indian economy integrated with the world.

- Hence, dropping out of the RCEP is being seen as measure to protect the short-term interests of Indian industry instead of the long-term interest of enabling it to compete with the world.

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- Though there is a concern that free trade agreements are leading to large trade deficits, **trade patterns reflect underlying industrial competitiveness in an economy**. For instance, India's trade deficit with China increased massively even without free trade agreement which underscores the competitiveness of Chinese industries. Hence, by not joining RCEP, India faces the risks of **loosing market access** and **making indian industry globally uncompetitive**.

What are the Advantages if India joins RCEP?

- Cheaper goods to Indian consumers,
- higher export opportunities to Indian pharmaceutical industry due to reduced tariffs after joining RCEP, and
- possibility of enhancing competitiveness of Indian industries due to exposure to competition.

What is Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) ?

- **RCEP is a proposed trade pact between 16 countries:** 10 ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) countries and **six** other countries China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and until recently, India.

10 ASEAN Countries are Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam

- RCEP was supposed to link around 3.4 billion people and cover about 40 percent of global trade.
- The negotiations for this trade pact began in 2012.
- While India opted out, other countries in the RCEP committed to sign the RCEP Agreement in 2020.
- RCEP will now have 15 countries after India opted out.

Why ASEAN and Other Countries are Signing RCEP?

- ASEAN countries have free trade agreements with six countries: China, India, South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.
- Hence, Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was conceived as a platform to broaden and deepen the economic engagement in the Asia Pacific by bringing together ASEAN countries and its six free trade partners (China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India.)

What are the areas covered under RCEP?

- Trade in goods and services, Investment, Economic and Technical cooperation, Intellectual Property, Competition, Dispute settlement, E-commerce, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and other issues.

RC REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE

NATIONAL POLITY & SOCIAL ISSUES

JUDICIARY

SC under RTI:

Supreme Court Brings Its Office under the Right to Information (RTI) Act

On November 13, 2019, a five judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court headed by the then Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi ruled that the **Office of the Chief Justice of India (CJI)** is a 'public authority' under the **Right to Information (RTI) Act**.

This is a unique case where the 'Office of the Chief Justice of Supreme Court' refused to disclose information sought under Right to Information (RTI) Act. It first refused the information under RTI Act. The Central Information Commission (CIC) and the Delhi High Court directed the 'Office of the Chief Justice of Supreme Court' to disclose the information. Even then, it refused to disclose the information and moved the Supreme Court. Finally, a five bench constitution bench of the Supreme Court delivered the verdict bringing its office under the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Background:

- In 2007 and 2009, Right to Information (RTI) Activist **Subhash Chandra Agrawal** filed applications with the Office of Chief Justice of Supreme Court seeking information available with the Supreme Court on
 - 1) **declaration of assets** made by the Judges of Supreme Court, and
 - 2) **details of correspondence between the Collegium** and the **government** on the appointment of three Supreme Court judges - Justices HL Dattu, AK Ganguly and RM Lodha. They had superseded Justices AP Shah, AK Patnaik and VK Gupta.
- The details were not given to the RTI petitioner.

Reasons for Not Disclosing Details:

1. Disclosure poses **threat to independence of judiciary**.
2. Various provisions in the RTI Act which provide for non disclosure of information were also cited.

The RTI Act provides certain exceptions and safeguards with regard to **disclosure of personal information** (Section 8 (1) (e) of RTI Act),
information available in the form **fiduciary relationship** (Section 11 of RTI Act) ,
confidential third party information (Section 11 of RTI Act), etc.

Verdict of Delhi High Court:

- After the information sought by the RTI Activist was rejected, he moved the Central Information Commission (CIC) which directed the Chief Justice of India's office to disclose the details sought under the RTI Act.
- The Supreme Court challenged the direction of the Central Information Commission (CIC) in Delhi High Court.
- In September 2009, the single-judge bench of the Delhi High Court upheld the CIC ruling.
- The Supreme Court approached a bigger bench of the Delhi High Court against the single-judge verdict. The Delhi High Court constituted a special three-judge bench, which in November 2009 upheld the ruling of the CIC. It also ruled that
the office of the Chief Justice of India comes within the ambit of the Right to Information (RTI) law, and **judicial independence is not a judge's privilege**, but a responsibility cast upon him.

Appeal in Supreme Court:

- The judgement of Delhi High Court was challenged in the Supreme Court. The issue was dealt by a five member constitution bench which delivered its verdict on November 13, 2019.

Verdict of the Supreme Court:

Office of the Chief Justice of Supreme Court is a public Authority as the Office of the CJI is part and parcel of the Supreme Court which is a Public Authority. Hence, if the Supreme Court is a public authority, so is the office of the CJI.

- The Office of the Chief Justice of Supreme Court will come under the ambit of the Right to Information Act (RTI) Act. Hence, it should disclose information subject to the provisions of RTI Act.

1. Disclosure of Information on Assets:

a) *Disclosure not Against Privacy:*

- The Supreme Court **allowed disclosure of information** such as the **judges' personal assets** stating that **such disclosure satisfies larger public interest**.
- It stated that such **disclosure would not**, in any way, **impinge upon the personal information and right to privacy of the judges**.

The RTI Act (Section 8 (1) (j)) disallows disclosure of personal information which is not related to public interest or which leads to invasion of privacy. **But**, such information **can be disclosed if larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information**.

b) **Fiduciary Relationship Not Applicable:**

- The Bench upheld the Delhi High Court judgment of 2010 that the CJI does not hold information on the personal assets of fellow judges in a fiduciary capacity (involving trust).

Information held by a person in a fiduciary capacity is exempt from disclosure under RTI unless larger public interest justifies the disclosure of such information.

2. Disclosure of Process followed by the Collegium in selecting Judges:

- The Supreme Court stated that **a universal affirmative or negative answer is not possible**.
- Disclosure of procedure followed in judicial appointments will be subject to the **test of public interest**.
- Public interest test would be applied to weigh the scales and on balance determine whether information should be furnished or would be exempt.
- Procedures mandated in the RTI Act that specify that views of third parties (in this case, concerned judges whose information is asked) must be sought.

Official communication during the process of elevation of judges to the Supreme Court are treated as confidential third-party information. In such cases, the PIO should follow the procedure mandated in Section 11 of the RTI Act. That is, a notice should be first issued to the third party - the judge concerned - about the RTI request for information. The view of the third party should be considered before the PIO takes a call.

As per the RTI Act, except in the case of trade or commercial secrets protected by law, third party information disclosure may be allowed if the public interest in disclosure outweighs in importance any possible harm or injury to the interests of such third party.

Additional Information:

About the Right to Information (RTI) Act :

- Right to Information (RTI) Act was enacted by the Government in 2005.
- It is one **of the significant legislations enacted in independent India** aimed at **strengthening Indian democracy**.

Objectives of RTI Act:

- promoting **transparency** and **accountability** in the working of the Government, and
- containing **corruption** by **empowering the citizens** through **information**.

Significance of RTI Act:

- It **opened up the public institutions to the scrutiny by common citizens** by providing them with **legal right to information**.
- Every citizen has the right to put in an application requesting information or copies of records held by these bodies and such information should be given by the concerned body within 30 days.
- **Proactive disclosure:** The RTI Act also provides for proactive disclosure of maximum extent of information by public offices so that the need for requesting information by citizens becomes minimal (Sec.4 of RTI Act 2005).

What is Information?

- The **definition of Information** is exhaustive.

Information means any material in any form. It includes records, documents, memos, e-mails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, papers, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form. It also includes information relating to any private body which can be accessed by the public authority under any law for the time being in force.

Who are Covered under RTI Act?

- The Right to Information Act (RTI Act) covers **all levels of government Centre, State, district and local self governing bodies** like Panchayats and Municipal bodies.
- It also covers non-governmental organizations- i.e. NGOs, Voluntary organisations and other private bodies- that are financed substantially with public funds provided by the Government.

Movement Behind RTI Act:

- Right to information movement in India was started by the **Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sanghatan (MKSS)**, an organization for the **empowerment of workers and landless workers and rural poor**, in Rajasthan during the **early 1990s**. **MKSS** was led by **social activists** Aruna Roy, Nikhi Dey, Shankar Singh and Anshi.
- The MKSS started grass route movement, demanding access to government information on behalf of wage workers and small farmers who were often deprived of their rightful wages or their just benefits under the government schemes.
- Through their innovative concept of jansunvai or public hearing, MKSS started demanding information from local authorities regarding the wages, muster rolls, materials used for the construction of roads during famine relief work.
- The struggle of MKSS activists led to a nationwide demand for law to guarantee the RTI to every citizen, with wide spread support from social activists, professionals, lawyers and media.
- National Campaign for People's Right to Information was formed in 1996.
- Various State RTI laws were passed during this period, including Tamil Nadu (1997), Goa (1997), Rajasthan (2000), Maharashtra (2000) Karnataka (2000), Delhi (2001) and Assam(2002).
- In 2005, the United Progressive Alliance Government lead by Congress party got the Right to Information Act (RTI) 2005 enacted.

Judicial Delivery System:

**Uttar Pradesh's Justice Delivery System the Worst, Maharashtra the Best:
India Justice Report 2019**

- Maharashtra has topped the list of 18 large-medium States in the overall ranking of Indian States on justice delivery, followed by Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Punjab and Haryana.
- This is the first-ever ranking of states released by the India Justice Report 2019 on November 7, 2019.
- The justice delivery system in Uttar Pradesh is the worst among the large states.

About the Report:

- India Justice Report (IJR) 2019 is an initiative of Tata Trusts in collaboration with other organisations namely Centre for Social Justice, Common Cause, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, DAKSH, TISS- Prayas and Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy.
- The above organisations through a rigorous 18-month quantitative research brought out the 'India Justice Report 2019.'
- The Report brings together statistics from authoritative government sources of the **four pillars of Justice delivery - Police, Judiciary, Prisons and Legal Aid.**
- These four pillars have to function harmoniously for citizens to be satisfied with the delivery of justice.

All India Level Findings:

Vacancies:

- Vacancy is an issue across the pillars of the Police, Prisons and the Judiciary, with only about half the States having made an effort to reduce these over a five-year period. For instance, the country has about 18,200 judges with about 23 per cent sanctioned posts vacant.

Over five years, Gujarat was the only State to reduce vacancies across all posts: the Police, Prisons and Judiciary. Jharkhand saw an increase in the same posts over five years.

Women Representation:

- Women are poorly represented across the Justice system.
They account for 7 per cent of the Police , 10 per cent of Prison staff, and about 26.5 per cent of all judges in the High Court and subordinate courts.

Prisons:

- Prisons are over-occupied at 114 per cent, where 68 per cent are under-trials awaiting investigation, inquiry or trial.
- Undertrial prisoners, awaiting investigation, inquiry or trial, account for 68 per cent of the inmate population. In 33 States and UTs, the share of undertrial inmates was above 50 per cent . Over five years, only 13 States and UTs were able to annually reduce this population.

Free Legal Aid:

Police:

- The average area covered per rural Police station in 28 States and UTs, exceeded 150 sq. km, a benchmark given in 1981 by the National Police Commission.
- Legal services clinics, created for easily accessible Legal Aid and assistance, served 42 villages on average, nationally.

Low Budget Allocations:

- The Justice system is affected by low budget allocations.
- **India's per capita expenditure on free legal aid** - which 80 per cent of the population is eligible for - is very low. It is **75 paise per annum.**
- Nationally, as of March 2018, there is a shortage of 4,071 court halls against the sanctioned number of judges.

ELECTIONS:

Funds to Political Parties:

BJP Received Donations over Rs 700 Crores in 2018-19

- The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) received over **Rs 700 crore in donations** through **cheques and online payments** during financial year 2018-19 as per the details submitted by the party to the Election Commission in November 2019.

As per the election code, political parties are mandated to disclose all donations they receive in a financial year to the Election Commission.

- Progressive Electoral Trust, an electoral trust managed by Tatas, contributed half of this Rs. 700 crore money received by the BJP.
- Tata-controlled Progressive Electoral Trust gave **Rs 356 crore in donation to the BJP**, while Prudent Electoral Trust gave Rs 54.25 crore in donations.
- **Prudent Electoral Trust** is backed by top corporate houses including Bharti Group, Hero MotoCorp, Jubilant Foodworks, Orient Cement, DLF, JK Tyres, among others.
- The information provided by the BJP pertains to donations of Rs 20,000 and above that were received by the party through cheque or online payments.

Money Received through Electoral Bonds not included:

- Donations **received in the form of electoral bonds were not included in the filing**. Only money received through donations from individuals, companies as well as electoral trusts was submitted.

What are Electoral Trusts?

- Electoral Trusts were allowed in India in 2013 to **promote transparency in political funding, especially by industries and business houses**.
- **These are set up under the Companies Act**. Donations to political parties by firms are governed by provisions in the Companies Act.
- There are more than 20 registered electoral trusts registered as a company under the Companies Act.
- Electoral Trusts **do not receive contribution in cash**.
- **Individuals and companies** in India can make contributions to this electoral trusts.
- Permanent account number of the contributor who is a resident and passport number in the case of a citizen of India, who is not a resident, would be taken by the electoral trusts at the time of receiving any contribution.
- 95% of contributions received by the electoral trust, in any financial year, shall be distributed to political parties, within the financial year itself.
- Many corporates have set up electoral trusts to provide funding to political parties in a transparent manner.
- Some of the prominent electoral trusts are
 - ‘**Progressive Electoral Trust**’, controlled by Tatas,
 - ‘**Prudent Electoral Trust**’, the biggest electoral trust in India backed by Bharti Group, Hero MotoCorp, Jubilant Foodworks, Orient Cement, DLF, JK Tyres, etc., and
 - ‘**The New Democratic Trust**’, funded by three Mahindra companies.

How much Amount can Companies Contribute to Political Parties?

- Till 2017, Government allowed corporates to donate up to 7.5 percent of the net average profits earned in the preceding three years.

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- In 2017, the Union Government removed this limit on funding of companies to political parties by amending Section 182 of the Companies Act, 2013 which deals with contributions to political parties by firms.
 - In addition, the Government also made changes in the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 via the 2018 Finance Bill to allow foreign companies registered in India to make political donations.

SOCIAL ISSUES:

Communal Harmony:

Supreme Court Verdict on Ayodhya Dispute

On November 9, 2019, a five judge Constitution bench of Supreme Court, headed by the then Chief Justice of India Ranjan Gogoi, in its verdict on Ayodhya dispute

- unanimously allotted the disputed site 'Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid premises' in Ayodhya for the construction of Lord Ram Temple, and
- asked the Union Government to **set up a trust to manage the property and construct a temple for Lord Ram.**
- The Supreme Court also asked the Government to **allot** a "prominent and suitable" **five-acre plot for Muslims** to construct a mosque in Ayodhya.

What is Ayodhya Dispute in Brief?

- It is a **dispute** over Babri Masjid between two religious communities i.e Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya, Faizabad district (recently renamed as Ayodhya district), Uttar Pradesh.
- The total area of the Babri Masjid was 1500 square yards (0.3 acres) and adjacent to the Babri Masjid there are several structures of religious significance for the Hindus, such as the Sita Rasoi and a platform called the Ramchabutra. **Together**, the Babri Masjid and Hindu religious structures are located in a contiguous piece of land which is **2.77 acres**. This contiguous land was **divided into inner court yard** consisting of Babri Masjid, and **outer courtyard** consisting of Hindu religious structures. These two were divided by erecting a separate fence after the communal clashes in 1859.
- Cases over this dispute are going on since 1950's and the State of Uttar Pradesh acquired entire area of 2.77 acres comprising of the disputed premises and adjoining areas consisting of structures of religious significance for the Hindus

Why the Premises became a dispute?

- The disputed property i.e Babri Masjid is of immense significance to Hindus and Muslims. Both claim ownership of Babri Masjid. Hence, the disputed property is being called 'Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid premises'.

Claim of Hindus:

- The **Hindu community claims** that the place where Babri Masjid was located is the **birthplace of Lord Ram**, and **the Masjid was built by demolishing Lord Ram Temple.**

Claim of Muslims:

- The Muslim community claims that the historic Babri Masjid **built by the first Mughal Emperor, Babur, in 1528 on a vacant land.**

What is the Current Status of Babri Masjid ?

- The Babri Masjid was demolished by Hindu activists on December 6, 1992.

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- After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Union Government had acquired the entire 67.73 acres of land including the 2.77 acres of the disputed Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid premises in 1993 under the 'Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act 1993'.

Why did the Supreme Court Allot the Disputed Site to Hindus?

- According to the Supreme Court, both parties to the dispute (Hindus and Muslims) presented evidence in support of their claims, the **evidence provided by the Hindus in support of their claim was stronger** when compared with that of the Muslim parties to the dispute.

What was the evidence provided by Hindus?

Extensive evidence, both **oral** and **documentary**, was provided by the Hindu parties which included 533 exhibits and depositions of 87 witnesses traversing 13,990 pages.

1. **Scriptures and sacred writings**, which are of **much earlier period than 1528 (i.e prior to the construction of Babri Masjid)** appropriately describe the **Janma Asthan of Lord Ram at Ayodhya**. These are **Skanda Purana, Vaisnavakhanda, Ayodhya Mahatmya**, and Valmiki Ramayana.
2. Valmiki's Ramayana, whose composition dated back to the period Before Christ (BC) and is also the main source of knowledge of Lord Ram, **refers to Ayodhya as birthplace of Lord Ram**. According to this, Lord Ram was born at the palace of King Dasratha at Ayodhya.
3. Various Gazetteers and Travelogues also establish faith and belief of the Hindus that Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Ram.

The first Gazetteer 'East India Gazetteer' which was first published in 1828 mentioned reputed site of temples dedicated to Ram, Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman.

"Gazetteer of India" (1854), published by Edward Thornton, states that that the place of worship called as birthplace of Lord Ram was adjacent to 'Sita-Ki-Rasoi' and a Mosque was constructed by Babar.

The Historical Sketch prepared by P. Carnegie, Officiating Commissioner and Settlement Officer of Ayodhya and Fyzabad, in 1870 states that 'Ayodhya is to Hindus what Macca is to the Mohamedans and Jerusalem to the Jews'.

4. **Excavation of the disputed site by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** concluded that the mosque was not constructed on a vacant land.

The ASI had suggested the remains of a large pre-existing structure underneath the Babri mosque which was "non-Islamic" in nature.

The Supreme Court stated that faith and beliefs based on above scriptures and sacred writings, and supplemented by various Gazetteers and Travelogues cannot be held to be groundless.

Why was the evidence provided by Muslims not stronger?

1. Muslim parties **could not provide a record of ownership** of the inner court yard, where Babri Masjid was located, for the three centuries after the construction of the mosque in 1528 A.D.,
2. They also **could not offer evidence that 'namaz'** was offered in the mosque during these three centuries.

Why was 5 Acres Land allotted to Muslims?

Though the Supreme Court verdict went in favour of Hindus, it used its powers under Article 142 of the Indian Constitution and directed the Government to allot 5 acres of land to Muslims for following reasons.

- The demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 was illegal and a serious violation of the rule of law.
- The demolition **deprived the Muslims centuries-old Babri Masjid**.
- Hence, it is **necessary to provide restitution to the Muslim community** for the unlawful destruction of their place of worship.

What are the Positive Aspects of the Verdict?

- The unanimous verdict of the Supreme Court **brings closure to the dispute** which dates back to pre-independence days.
- By giving a **legal burial to a prolonged dispute** that began as a minor litigation, this verdict is likely to contribute to **peace** in the country.

What was a religious issue became a political issue in independent India after 1980. **Politicisation** and **communalisation** of the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title dispute **led to communal clashes** leading to **terrible loss of lives** and **property across the country**. More than 2000 people were killed in the communal clashes after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

History of Ramjanmabhumi-Babri Masjid Dispute:

- The Babri Masjid was built in **1528** by the first Moghul Emperor Babar.
- However, the site where Babri Masjid was built became a disputed site between Muslims and Hindus. Both claim ownership Babri Masjid.

Origin of the Dispute:

- **1856:** The first recorded incident of violence between Hindus and Muslims over the holy site took place. Nirmohis, a Hindu sect who claim to be custodians of the temple, claimed that a Lord Ram temple had been destroyed during Babur's times to build the mosque.
- **1859:** The British administration **erected a fence at the site** and **divided the premises into two parts:** the inner portion which would be used by the Muslim community and the outer portion or courtyard, which would be used by the Hindu community. The outer courtyard has several structures of religious significance for the Hindus, such as the Sita Rasoi and a platform called the Ramchabutra.
- **1934:** In 1934, there was yet another conflagration between the two communities. The domed structure of the mosque was damaged during the incident and was subsequently repaired at the cost of the colonial government.
- **1949:** Idols of Lord Ram were placed under central dome of the Babri Masjid.
- **1950:** Government takes over control of the inner court yard as the dispute between the two communities over their claims to worship and proprietorship over the structure would likely lead to a breach of peace.

Under the Magistrate's order, only two or three pujaris were permitted to go inside the place where the idols were kept, to perform religious ceremonies like bhog and puja. Members of the general public were restricted from entering and were only allowed darshan from beyond the grill-brick wall which separates inner court yard and outer court yard.

- **1950:** On January 16, 1950, a suit was instituted by a Hindu devotee, Gopal Singh Visharad before the Civil Judge at Faizabad, alleging that he was being prevented by officials of the government from entering the inner courtyard of the disputed site to offer worship. He sought a declaration allowing him to offer prayers in accordance with the rites and tenets of his religion (•Sanatan Dharm) at the •main Janmabhumi., near the idols, within the inner courtyard, without hindrance.
- **1959:** On December 17, 1959, Nirmohi Akhara, the sect which performed pujas for Lord Ram and maintained the temple, filed a suit before the Civil Judge at Faizabad claiming that its absolute right of managing the affairs of the Janmasthan and the temple had been impacted by the Magistrate's order. It sought handing over the management and charge of the temple to itself.
- **1961:** On December 18, 1961, the Sunni Central Waqf Board and nine Muslim residents of Ayodhya filed a suit before the Civil Judge at Faizabad seeking a declaration that the entire disputed site of the Babri Masjid was a public mosque and for the delivery of possession upon removal of the idols.
- **1986:** On January 25, 1986, an application was filed by one Umesh Chandra before the Trial Court for breaking open the locks placed on the grill-brick wall and for allowing the public to perform darshan within the inner courtyard. On 1 February 1986, the District Judge issued directions to open the locks and to provide access to devotees for darshan inside the structure.

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- In a Writ Petition filed before the High Court challenging the above order, an interim order was passed on February 3, 1986 directing that until further orders, the nature of the property as it existed shall not be altered.
 - **1989:** On July 1, 1989, a Suit was brought before the Civil Judge, Faizabad by the deity (Bhagwan Shri Ram Virajman.) and the birth-place (•Asthan Shri Ram Janam Bhumi, Ayodhya.), through a next friend for a declaration of title to the disputed premises and to restrain the defendants from interfering with or raising any objection to the construction of a temple.
 - **1989:** On July 10, 1989, all suits were transferred to the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad. On 21 July 1989, a three judge Bench was constituted by the Chief Justice of the High Court for the trial of the suits. On an application by the State of Uttar Pradesh, the High Court passed an interim order on 14 August 1989, directing the parties to maintain status quo with respect to the property in dispute.
 - **1991:** During the pendency of the proceedings, the State of Uttar Pradesh acquired an area of 2.77 acres comprising of the disputed premises and certain adjoining areas.
 - **1992:** On December 6, 1992. A large crowd destroyed the mosque, boundary wall, and Ramchabutra. A makeshift structure of a temple was constructed at the place under the erstwhile central dome. The idols were placed there.
 - **1993:** The Central Government acquired an area of about 68 acres, including the premises in dispute, by a legislation called the Acquisition of Certain Area at Ayodhya Act 1993 (•Ayodhya Acquisition Act 1993.).
 - **1996-2002:** The recording of oral evidence before the High Court commenced on 24 July 1996. During the course of the hearings, the High Court issued directions on 23 October 2002 to the Archaeological Survey of India (•ASI) to carry out a scientific investigation.
 - **2003:** On 22 August 2003, the ASI submitted its final report. The High Court heard objections to the report.

Evidence, both oral and documentary, was recorded before the High Court. As one of the judges, Justice Sudhir Agarwal noted, the High Court had before it 533 exhibits and depositions of 87 witnesses traversing 13,990 pages.

Besides this, counsel relied on over a thousand reference books in Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Turkish, French and English, ranging from subjects as diverse as history, culture, archaeology and religion.

- **2010:** On 30 September 2010, the Allahabad High Court held all the **three sets of parties** - Muslims, Hindus and Nirmohi Akhara (sect of priests who performed puja and maintained the Lord Ram temple) - as joint holders of the disputed premises and allotted a one third share to each of them.
- Civil Appeals and Special Leave Petitions were filed in Supreme Court against the judgment of the High Court.
- **2011:** On 9 May 2011, a two judge Bench of Supreme Court admitted several appeals and stayed the operation of the judgment of Allahabad High Court.
- On 10 September 2013, 24 February 2014, 31 October 2015 and 11 August 2017, this Court issued directions for summoning the digital record of the evidence and pleadings from the Allahabad High Court and for furnishing translated copies to the parties.
- **2019:** On January 9, 2019, the Chief Justice of India constituted a five judge Bench to hear the appeals.
- On February 26, 2019, this Court referred the parties to a Court appointed and monitored **mediation** to explore the **possibility of bringing about a permanent solution** to the issues raised in the appeals. On 8 March 2019, a panel of mediators comprising of (i) Justice Fakkir Mohamed Ibrahim Kalifulla, a former Judge of this Court; (ii) Sri Sri Ravi Shankar; and (iii) Mr Sriram Panchu, Senior Advocate was constituted. Time granted to the mediators to complete the mediation proceedings was extended on 10 May 2019.

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- Since no settlement had been reached, on 2 August 2019, the hearing of the appeals was directed to commence from 6 August 2019.
 - Final arguments were concluded in the batch of appeals on October 16, 2019.
 - **2019: On November 9, 2019**, the five judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered the final verdict on the dispute. The disputed site was allotted to Hindus for construction of Ram Temple. The Central Government was directed to give Muslims 5 acres of land at some other prominent place in Ayodhya. The court directed that Nirmohi Akhara should be given appropriate representation in the Board of Trustees that will be set up by the Central government.

Why did the Supreme Court Set Aside the Judgement of Allahabad High Court?

The Supreme Court set aside the Judgement of the Allahabad High Court for the following reasons:

1. The High Court dealt the case as a partition of property suit.
2. The disputed site all of 1500 square yards. Dividing the land will not subserve the interest of either of the parties or **secure a lasting sense of peace and tranquillity**.
3. Nirmohi Akhara could not have been granted an independent share of the land as they sought only management and charge of the temple (Priestly rights).

Religion and Gender Issues:

Supreme Court Keeps Decision on Sabarimala Issue in Abeyance; Seven Judge Bench to Look into role of SC in 'Essential Religious Practices'

- On November 14, 2019, a five judge bench of the Supreme Court which was hearing a review petition and several writ petitions on the September 2018 judgement of the Supreme Court which allowed entry of women in the age group of 10 to 50 into the Sabarimala Temple kept **a final decision in abeyance**.
- In September 2018, a five judge bench of the Supreme Court in 4:1 verdict stated that banning of women in the age group of 10 to 50 is not an **'essential religious practice'** and also against Right to Equality (Article 14 of the Indian Constitution).

Seven Judge Bench of Supreme Court to Decide to Deal with Essential Practices of Religion and the Role of the Courts:

- The Supreme Court in a majority verdict (3:2), stated that before a final decision is taken on the review petition and writ petitions by the Supreme Court, **a larger Supreme Court Bench of seven judges** would deal with and deliver an "authoritative pronouncement on the following questions.
1. **The extent to which a court can probe** whether a practice is **essential to a religion** or should the question be left to the respective religious head?
 2. Should "essential religious practices" be afforded constitutional protection under Article 26 (freedom to manage religious affairs); and
 3. What is the "permissible extent" of judicial recognition a court should give to Public Interest Litigations (PILs) filed by people who do not belong to the religion of which practices are under the scanner.

What is the concept of 'essential religious practice'?

- The **Constitution of India does not define** 'essential religious practice'.
Article 25 and Article 26 of the Constitution deal with religious freedoms.
Article 25 gives freedom of religion for an individual while Article 26 gives 'freedom to manage religious affairs to religious denominations (bodies).
- But, practices of religious bodies under Article 26 were challenged in the Supreme Court (Shirur Mutt case, 1954, and Durgah Committee case, 1962), on the ground that they violate other fundamental rights particularly Article 14 (Right to Equality) of the Indian Constitution. Hence, the Supreme Court evolved the concept of **'essential religious practice'**.

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- Through the concept of **'essential religious practice'**, the Supreme Court examines and gives constitutional legitimacy to religious practices.

Why did the Supreme Court Refer the concept of 'essential religious practice' to a seven member Constitution Bench?

- However, the Supreme Court gave **different judgements** on the issue of 'essential religious practice'.
- In the Shirur Mutt case, 1954 (Commissioner, Hindu Religious Endowments, Madras vs. Shri Lakshmindra Tirtha Swamiar of Shirur Mutt), a seven judge bench of the Supreme Court stated that 'essential religious practices' of a particular religious denomination should be left to be determined by the denomination itself.
- In Durgah Committee, Ajmer vs. Syed Hussain Ali & Others, 1962, a five judge bench of the Supreme Court stated that Supreme Court will have a role in deciding what is **'essential religious practice'** and it may exclude superstitious beliefs in the religion through its orders.
- The Supreme Court stated that the **apparent conflict in the above two judgements requires consideration** by a **larger Bench**.
- Moreover, an increasing number of petitions were being filed **questioning the validity of long-held religious practices and their restrictions on women**.

Three Other Cases Pending with the Court:

- At present, there are also three petitions with the Supreme Court against the following religious practices on the ground that these are against the Fundamental Rights particularly Article 14 (Right to Equality) of the Indian Constitution. These three petitions are against
 1. bar on Muslim women from entering mosques,
 2. the practice among Parsis to prohibit women who have married inter-faith from the sacred fire temple (Agyari) (Fire temple is the place of worship for Parsis), and
 3. female genital mutilation in the Dawoodi Bohra community, a shia sub sect of Muslims.

Like the Sabarimala issue, the above petitions concerned the tug-of-war between women's fundamental right to equality under Article 14 and the believers' right to freely practice religion (Article 25 and Article 26).

Hence, the Supreme Court felt that an authoritative pronouncement from the seven judge bench of the Supreme Court was necessary to

1. **put at rest recurring issues touching upon the rights** flowing from **Articles 25 [freedom of religion] and 26 [right of administration of property of religious endowments]** of the Constitution, and
2. **ensure consistency in judicial approach** for the **posterity**.

Brief History of the Sabarimala Temple Entry Issue:

- Women of menstruating age (10 to 50) were barred from entering the Sabarimala Ayyappa Temple in Kerala.
- Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Act of 1965, enabled the prohibition of women of in the in the age group of 10 to 50 from entry into Sabarimala temple.
- Women in the age group of 10 to 50 were prevented due to celibate nature of Lord Ayyappa. It is a centuries-old religious practice.

As per the tradition, the deity in Sabarimala, Swami Ayyappa, is a Naishtika Brahmachari, the one who observes staunch celibacy. Lord Ayyappa's celibacy will be disturbed if women devotees in the reproductive age group visit the shrine.

Malikapurathamma is the eternal lover of Ayyappa who is waiting for the Lord to marry her. Ayyappa has promised to break his celibacy to marry her in the year when there will be no new devotee visiting the holy shrine.

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- The ban on entry of women into Sabarimala Ayyappa temple was challenged in the Supreme Court on the grounds that it is discriminates women.
 - In September 2018, a five judge bench of the Supreme Court in 4:1 verdict stated that banning of women in the age group of 10 to 50 is not an '**essential religious practice**' in Hindu religion and the ban is also **against Right to Equality (Article 14 of the Indian Constitution)**.

Corruption:

India Corruption Survey 2019

About the Survey:

- Transparency International India (TII), a non-governmental organisation, and Local Circles, a social media firm, conducted the 'India Corruption Survey 2019'.
- The Survey covered 20 states in India and is based on 1,90,000 responses from people in 248 districts.

Findings of the Survey:

- More than 50% of Indians said they bribed government officials.
- According to the survey, **51 per cent Indians** surveyed paid bribe in the last 12 months.
- A **majority** of the 1.9 lakh respondents **said that bribery was the only way to ensure government officials complete their work**
- **Cash** is still the **primary mode to pay bribes**.
- 35 per cent of the respondents said they gave cash as bribe in the last 12 months to get their work done.
- 24 per cent of the respondents admitted to giving bribes several times in the last 12 months and 27 per cent admitted to paying bribes once or twice.
- 16 per cent said they always managed to get their work done without paying bribes.

Top Three Corruption Prone Departments in the country:

1. Property Registration and land issues,
 2. Police, and
 3. Municipal Corporation.
- Giving a bribe is an offence with upto seven years of imprisonment or fine or both, according to the Prevention of Corruption Act 2018.

Top Five States in Corruption:

1. Rajasthan.

78 per cent people in Rajasthan, participating in the survey, admitted to paying a bribe to get the work done. Of these, 22 per cent paid bribes several times (directly or indirectly), while 56 per cent bribed officials once or twice (directly or indirectly).

2. Bihar.

75 % of citizens admitted to paying a bribe to get their work done. Out this, 50 per cent paid off several times (directly or indirectly), while 25 % paid bribes once or twice (directly or indirectly).

3. Uttar Pradesh and Jharkhand:

Uttar Pradesh ranks third in the list where 74 % of citizens admitted to paying a bribe to get their work done. Nearly 57 % of people paid bribes several times (directly or indirectly), while 17 per cent paid off once or twice (directly or indirectly).

Jharkhand shares the third spot with UP, where 74 per cent citizens admitted to paying a bribe to get their work done. All of them paid off several times (directly or indirectly).

5. Telangana.

Telangana ranks 5th in the list of 'Most Corrupt States in India'. Approximately 67 per cent of citizens said that they paid bribes to get numerous pending work completed.

Least Corrupt States:

- Odisha, Gujarat, West Bengal, Kerala, Delhi, Haryana, and Goa reported low instances of corruption.

Sanitation:

Only 71% of Rural Households Had Access to Toilets: NSSO

- **Only 71% of rural households** had access to toilets as per the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) released on November 23, 2019.
- The NSO survey was carried out between July and December 2018.

Major Findings of the Survey:

According to the NSO,

- Almost 42% of rural households in Jharkhand had no access to a toilet at that time.
- In Tamil Nadu, the gap was 37%, followed by 34% in Rajasthan.
- In Gujarat, which was one of the earliest States declared "Open defecation free" (ODF) i.e 100% access to toilets and 100% usage, back in October 2017, almost a quarter of all rural households had no toilet access.
- The other major States listed also had significant gaps: Karnataka (30%), MP (29%), Andhra Pradesh (22%) and Maharashtra (22%).
- In the first week of October 2018, the **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Grameen) Mission** said that 25 States and Union Territories had been declared ODF, while toilet access across the country touched 95%. In reality, the NSO said 28.7% of rural households had no toilet access at that time.

Improvement over 2012:

- The NSSO, however, stated that **71% access to toilets was still a significant improvement** over the situation during the last survey period in 2012, when **only 40% of rural households had access to toilets**.
- Moreover, 95% of people with access to toilets in rural India used them regularly, indicating that the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan's efforts to change behaviour have borne fruit.

About Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM):

- The Union Government launched **Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM)** in 2014 to achieve **universal sanitation coverage** by 2nd October 2019, 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The Government claims that since October 2014, over 10 crore toilets have been built all over the country and 5,99,963 villages have been declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). 36 States/UTs are 100 per cent covered with Individual household Latrine (IHHL).

Road Accidents:

Road Accidents Cause 17 Deaths Per Hour in India

As per the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways annual report on road accidents in India released on November 19, 2019,

- **more than 1.5 lakh people lost their lives in road crashes** in the country in 2018.

This is an increase of 2.4% as compared to the year before (2017), when there were 1.47 lakh fatalities.

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- There were **53 crashes and the loss of 17 lives every hour in India**. On an average, **daily there were 1,280 road crashes and 415 deaths in India**.
 - Road traffic injuries constitute the eighth leading cause of deaths in India in 2018.
 - **India is the most unsafe country in the world for road users across 199 countries**, as reported by the Geneva-based World Road Federation's World Road Statistics 2018. It is followed by China (63,000 deaths) and the U.S. (37,000 deaths).

48% Fatalities in the Age Group of 18 to 35 :

- Of the total people killed in road crash deaths in 2018, **48% were between 18 years and 35 years old**. Minors involved in road crash deaths were at 6.6% of the total deaths.

Reasons for Crashes and Deaths:

- **Over-speeding** was the reason for maximum road accident fatalities (deaths).
64.4% of the road accident fatalities were due to over speeding.

Other Reasons:

- **drunken driving,**
- **driving on the wrong side,**
- **use of mobile phones while driving, and**
- **not wearing helmets and seat belts.**

Wearing helmets and seat belts critical for avoiding grievous injuries and fatalities:

- As many as 43,614 deaths or 28.8% of total road accident deaths in the country last year were caused due to "non-wearing of helmets".
- "Non-wearing of seat belts" was linked to 24,435 deaths or 16.1% of total road accident deaths in the country.
- Two-wheeler riders were the most vulnerable lot as 35.2% of those killed were two-wheeler riders. Cyclists, pedestrians and two-wheeler riders had 54% share of all dead in road accidents during last year (2018).

States with High Fatalities:

The highest road fatalities were observed in

- Uttar Pradesh (22,256),
- Maharashtra (13,261), and
- Tamil Nadu (12,216).

Need for implementation of Higher Penalties:

- The latest data highlights the urgent need on part of the States to implement key road safety provisions of the Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019 which provide for higher fines for safety violations. These provisions were to come into effect from September 1, 2019.
- However, a lot of States have opposed the implementation of the Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019 or have reduced the fines.
- Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Uttarakhand were among the States that heavily slashed the penalties levied under the amended law.
- Gujarat has slashed the new fines by upto 90%, citing humanitarian grounds. Tamil Nadu government has also decided to bring down penalties under the new Act.

Some of the penalties under the Motor Vehicles Amendment Act, 2019

<u>Penalty</u>	<u>New Amount</u>
- Driving without license	Rs 5,000
Driving despite disqualification	Rs 10,000
- Over-speeding	Rs 1000 - Rs 2000 for light motor vehicle, Rs 2,000 - Rs 4,000 for medium passenger or goods vehicles and impounding of driving license for second/ subsequent offence.
- Dangerous Driving	Imprisonment of 6 months to 1 year and/or fine of Rs. 1000- Rs. 5000 for first offence and imprisonment up to 2 years and/or fine up to Rs. 10000 for second offence.
- Drunken Driving	Imprisonment up to 6 months and/or fine up to Rs. 10000 for first offence and imprisonment up to 2 years and/or fine of Rs. 15000 for second offence.
- Offences relating to accident	Imprisonment of up to 6 months and/or fine up to Rs. 5000 for first offence and imprisonment up to 1 year and/or fine up to Rs. 10000 for second offence.

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FOREIGN RELATIONS

Indo-Sri Lanka:

President of Sri Lanka Visits India

After getting elected as President, Sri Lanka's new President, Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, in his first visit abroad as President, visited India from November 28 to 30, 2019.

(Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa is a former defence secretary of Sri Lanka and younger brother of Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa who served as President of Sri Lanka from 2005 to 2015.)

Outcome of the visit:

India announced

- a line of credit of \$400 million for infrastructure and development projects in Sri Lanka, and
- \$50 million fund to fight terrorism.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that

- a stable, secure and prosperous Sri Lanka is not only in India's interest but also in the interest of the entire Indian Ocean Region, and
- India would work closely with President Rajapaksa for the progress of both countries and peace, prosperity and security in our entire common region.

Closest Maritime Neighbor and a Trusted Friend:

- He stated that India is Sri Lanka's **closest maritime neighbor** and **a trusted friend**. Historical, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and civilizational contacts between both the countries are a strong foundation of close relations between the two countries.

Security and Development of Two Countries Inseparable:

- He also stated that the **security** and **development** of two **countries** are **inseparable** and therefore, it is natural that both countries should be aware of **each other's safety** and **sensibilities**.

Sri Lanka would be a Neutral Country: Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa

- Relations between India and Sri Lanka came under strain in recent years after Sri Lanka began forging close economic partnership with China under former President Mahinda Rajapaksa who is the elder brother of Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa.
- But, the new President Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa stated that he wanted Sri Lanka to be a "neutral country" and work with all the countries including both India and China.
- He stated that Sri Lanka **does not want to get in between the power struggles of** regional superpowers and as a small country Sri Lanka cannot get involved into this balancing acts.
- He stated that Sri Lanka will work with India as a friendly country and would not do anything that will harm India's interests.
- He also stated that Sri Lanka understands Indian concerns, so it cannot engage in any activity which will threaten the security of India.

On Chinese Investments in Sri Lanka:

- Asserting that Sri Lanka's involvement with China during the presidency of his elder brother Mahinda (from 2005-2015) was "purely commercial", Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa invited India, Singapore, Japan and Australia to invest in Sri Lanka. He stated that **Sri Lanka needs investments** and it **will not get involved in military and geo-political rivalry**.

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- Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa also said that **giving away the Hambantota port to China on a 99-year lease was a mistake** by the previous government headed by President Maithripala Sirisena. He stated that the deal has to be renegotiated as giving a strategically important economic harbour is not acceptable. China acquired Sri Lanka's Hambantota port in 2017 as a debt swap.

Indo-Germany:

German Chancellor Visits India

Highlights:

- German Federal Chancellor, Dr. Angela Merkel, visited India from October 31 to November 1, 2019 at the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- More than **20 agreements** were signed between both the countries for **cooperation in areas like** artificial intelligence, cyber security, green urban mobility, skill development, start ups, smart cities, higher education, agriculture, railways, civil aviation, coastal and maritime technology, sports, culture, etc.
- Germany announced **concessional finance of 1 billion euros (\$1.12 billion) on green urban mobility projects**. The funds will be used to finance several environment friendly projects such as the introduction of electric buses to replace the diesel buses for public transport in urban areas.
- Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Modi reiterated that the **Indo-German Strategic Partnership is based on the common values and principles** of democracy, free and fair trade, and rules-based international order, as well as on mutual trust and respect.

Key issues in the discussions included

- **jointly driving the digital transformation** through **innovation and frontier technologies**, especially **artificial intelligence**,
- making economic growth sustainable by cooperating on **climate change**,
- creating space for people to people contacts through legal mobility for **skilled labour**, and
- contributing to a reliable international order by strengthening and updating multilateral institutions.

Significance of India-Germany Relationship:

- Germany is **India's largest trading partner in Europe**. Bilateral trade between the two countries rose to \$24.06 billion in 2018-19 from \$22 billion in 2017-18.
- Germany is the **7th largest foreign direct investor in India since April 2000**. German companies have invested nearly \$12 billion in India since 2000. German investments in India are mainly in the sectors of transportation, electrical equipment, metallurgical industries, services sector (particularly insurance), chemicals, construction activity, trading and automobiles.

Indian corporate entities have invested over US\$ 7 billion in Germany. There are more than 200 Indian companies operating in Germany. Sectors such as IT, automotive, pharma and biotech have received a major chunk of Indian Investments. Major Indian software providers like Infosys, WIPRO and TCS have operations in Germany. Companies like Bharat Forge Limited, Ranbaxy, Piramal, Samtel, Hexaware Technologies, NIIT, Graphite India Limited, Hinduja Group, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories, Biocon, Hindustan National Glass, Mahindra and others have either acquired German companies or started their own subsidiaries

- There are more than 150 joint S&T research projects and 70 direct partnerships between Universities of both countries.
- There are about 1.5 lakh Indians and people of Indian origin in Germany mainly comprising of professionals, technocrats, businessmen/traders and nurses.
- As many as 20,000 Indian nationals are studying in Germany.

Details:

Strengthening Cooperation in the Field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Digital Transformation:

- Recognising that AI will fundamentally impact the way the world lives and works in the coming years both sides **agreed to work together** to foster, encourage and develop cooperation on Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies and thereby promote innovation and sustainable development.
- India and Germany would build a collaborative partnership by leveraging advantages on each side recognising increasing integration of hardware and software in developing internet of Things (IoT) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) solutions for societal benefits.
- Germany and India agreed on consulting each other on identifying best possible approaches on cyber security and also device methods to identify areas of mutual cooperation in this regard.

Expanding frontiers of Trade and Investment through Innovation and Knowledge

- The leaders underlined their determination to **enhance bilateral trade and investment**. Both sides confirmed the importance of a balanced **Free Trade Agreement between India and the EU** and agreed to deepen efforts to restart negotiations between the EU and India on the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement.
- Both leaders appreciated the sustained growth in bilateral investments. They also agreed to intensify efforts for an early conclusion of an investment protection agreement between the EU Member States and India.
- The leaders recognized the **importance of building an efficient pool of skilled human resources for creating sustainable livelihood and opportunities for the youth**. Both sides expressed their willingness to intensify their efforts to bridge the gap between the demand and shortage of skilled work force.
- Both sides expressed readiness to **support skill development** in new, innovative and sustainable technologies such as **renewable energy, e-mobility and energy-efficiency** and encourage the private sector of both countries to join in these efforts.

Taking Action for Climate and Sustainable Development

- Both the leaders acknowledged their joint responsibility for the protection of the planet and mitigating climate change through **enhanced promotion of renewable energy** and **increasing energy efficiency** at the same time reducing their carbon footprint. For both countries, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement serve as guiding frameworks in their cooperation.
- Both leaders **expressed grave concern about the currently inadequate global level of climate action** and called on all countries to step up their efforts. They stressed the need to undertake climate actions based on the **principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities**, in the light of different national circumstances.

Low-carbon and Sustainable Mobility Solutions:

- Both sides concurred that **providing low-carbon and sustainable mobility solutions** that serve the needs of all citizens is a key challenge for both, emerging and industrialized economies.
- Both sides agreed to foster cooperation on low-carbon mobility solutions and signed Indo- German Partnership Agreement on Green Urban Mobility under which Germany would provide concessional finance of Euros 1 billion to support improvements of green urban mobility infrastructure and services.

Sharing Global Responsibility:

Debt of Low Income and developing Countries:

- The Leaders stated that it is necessary to **contain the build-up of sovereign debt in developing and low income countries**, while allowing adequate access to financing. In this regard, both leaders underlined the importance of ensuring responsible, transparent, sound and sustainable financing practices for borrowers and creditors, both official and private.

Defence:

- India and Germany **acknowledged the need to further deepen bilateral defence cooperation** as strategic partners **to jointly address global and regional security challenges**. Germany will work towards **facilitating export of military equipment as well as technology sharing with India** according to relevant international, European and national rules.

Afghanistan:

- Both leaders reiterated their commitment to a stable, united, prosperous, pluralistic and peaceful Afghanistan. They called for a cessation of violence; preservation of the Constitutional order and the respect for the universal human rights of all Afghan citizens as enshrined in the Afghan Constitution. Germany appreciated India's contribution in development cooperation and rebuilding of Afghanistan.

Terrorism:

- Emphasising that **terrorism is a global scourge**, the two leaders expressed their strong concerns on global threat of terrorism and their resolve to jointly combat it. They **called upon all countries** to work towards rooting out terrorist safe havens and infrastructure, disrupting terrorist networks and financing channels and halting cross border movement of terrorists. They emphasised the need for stronger international partnership in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism, including through increased sharing of information and intelligence and in full compliance with the rule of law and international law, including human rights law, and international humanitarian law.

The two leaders called for the finalisation and adoption of the **Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT)** in March 2020.

Global Non-Proliferation Efforts:

- The leaders expressed their commitment to strengthen **global non-proliferation efforts**. India thanked Germany for its support for **India's accession to the Missile Technology Control Regime, Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement**. **Germany reiterated** its steadfast support for India's early accession to the **Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)** and in this context recalled the importance of India's constructive engagement in the areas of nuclear non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control.

Reform of UN Security Council :

- The two leaders underlined the steadfast efforts of the G-4 and other reform- oriented countries and groups in moving towards initiation of text-based negotiations on the Security Council reform to be initiated during the 74th session of the UN General Assembly.
- Both countries reiterated their full support to each other's candidatures for a permanent seat in a reformed and expanded UN Security Council. **Reforming the Security Council is central to safeguarding and strengthening the multilateral rules-based order.**

RC REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE

SUMMITS

BRICS Summit:

11th BRICS Summit Held in Brasilia, Brazil

- The 11th BRICS Summit attended by the heads of BRICS (**Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa**) was held in Brasilia, Brazil under the theme 'Economic Growth for an Innovative Future'.
- The Leaders reaffirmed fundamental commitment to the principle of sovereignty, mutual respect and equality and to the shared goal of building a peaceful, stable and prosperous world.

Strengthening and reforming the Multilateral System:

- They reiterated the **urgent need to strengthen and reform the multilateral system**, including the UN, the WTO, the IMF and other international organizations and stated that they will continue working to make **these institutions more inclusive, democratic and representative**, including through greater participation of emerging markets and developing countries in international decision-making.

UN Reforms:

The Leaders reaffirmed the need for a comprehensive reform of the UN, including its Security Council, with a view to making it more representative, effective, and efficient, and to increase the representation of the developing countries so that it can adequately respond to global challenges. China and Russia reiterated the importance they attach to the status and role of Brazil, India and South Africa in international affairs and support their aspiration to play a greater role in the UN.

Sustainable Development:

- They expressed commitment to **sustainable development** in its three dimensions - economic, social and environmental - in a balanced and integrated manner
- They reiterated the importance of the implementation of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and called for redoubled efforts for its timely implementation. They called on developed countries to fully implement their **Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments** and to provide developing countries with additional development resources.

Climate Change:

- The Leaders reiterated commitment to the implementation of the **Paris Agreement** adopted under the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances. We urge developed countries included in Annex II to scale up the provision of financial, technological and capacity-building assistance to developing countries to support mitigation and adaptation action.

Terrorism:

- The Leaders condemned terrorism and stated that it should not be associated with any religion, nationality or civilization and urged for concerted efforts to fight against terrorism under UN auspices in accordance with international law.

Combating Illicit Financial Flows (IFFs):

- They reaffirmed commitment to combating illicit financial flows (IFFs) and to closely cooperating within the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the FATF-style regional bodies (FSRBs), as well as in other multilateral, regional and bilateral fora.

Importance of Open Markets:

- The Leaders stated that global economic growth has weakened, and downside risks have increased. Trade tensions and policy uncertainty have taken a toll on confidence, trade, investment and growth. In this context, they recalled the **importance of open markets, fair, just and non-discriminatory business and trade environments, structural reforms, effective and fair competition, promoting investment and innovation, as well as financing for infrastructure and development.**

Background:

- BRICS comprises of five major emerging countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- BRICS countries together represent about
42% of the population,
23% of GDP, and
18% of the global trade.
- The acronym BRIC was coined by Goldman Sachs in 2001 to indicate the emerging powers that would be the five largest economies of the world in the 21st century alongside the United States. In 2006, BRIC countries started their dialogue at ministerial level. In 2009, BRIC countries meeting at the heads of state level was held. In 2011, with South Africa joining the group, the BRICS reached its final composition, incorporating a country from the **African continent.**

Areas of Cooperation:

- BRICS has developed **sectorial cooperations in different areas** such as science and technology, trade promotion, energy, health, education, innovation and fight against transnational crime. Currently, sectorial cooperation covers more than 30 subject areas.

BRICS Institutions:

- At the Fortaleza Summit (2014), in Brazil, two important institutions were created:
New Development Bank (NDB), and
Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA).
- So far, the NDB has approved more than 8 billion-dollars in infrastructure and renewable energy financing projects in the BRICS countries. The NDB has a subscribed capital of US\$ 50 billion dollars. The NDB headquarters is in Shanghai, China.
- The CRA is operational and is an important financial stability mechanism for countries affected by crises in their balance of payments. The total amount of resources initially allocated to the CRA is set to attain the US\$ 100 billion dollars mark. The countries' individual commitments are: China (US\$ 41 billion); Brazil (US\$ 18 billion); Russia (US\$ 18 billion); India (US\$ 18 billion); South Africa (US\$ 5 billion).

ASEAN-India Summit:

16th ASEAN India Summit Held in Bangkok, Thailand

- The 16th ASEAN-India Summit, attended by Leaders of ASEAN countries and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was held on November 3, 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The Leaders reaffirmed commitment to further strengthen and deepen the ASEAN-India Strategic Partnership in the coming years.
- They reiterated shared commitment to support ASEAN centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in the evolving regional architecture that is open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based.

ASEAN-led Mechanisms:

- ASEAN Leaders appreciated India's active participation and positive contribution to ASEAN-led mechanisms, including the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus).

Areas of Cooperation:

- The Leaders emphasized the need to enhance **ASEAN-India collaborative efforts** in **countering terrorism, radicalization, violent extremism, and transnational crimes**, and the **need to strengthen cooperation on cybersecurity**

Maritime Cooperation:

- They highlighted the importance of increasing **maritime cooperation**, including in specific areas such as **maritime connectivity** and **combating marine debris**, among others.

They reaffirmed commitment to strengthen ASEAN-India maritime cooperation through existing relevant ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF), to address common challenges on maritime issues.

Trade and Economic Relations:

- The Leaders welcomed the robust growth in trade and economic relations between ASEAN and India. Two-way merchandise trade between ASEAN and India grew by 9.8 per cent from 73.6 billion USD in 2017 to **80.8 billion USD in 2018**.
- They underscored the importance of further strengthening **trade and investment** between ASEAN and India in order to achieve the **trade target of 200 billion USD by 2022**.
- They reaffirmed that the full and effective utilisation of the **ASEAN-India Free Trade Area (AIFTA)** will not only contribute to the realisation of our 2022 trade target but also to the promotion of sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

Connectivity:

- The Leaders emphasised the importance of further strengthening ASEAN-India connectivity cooperation and reiterated intention to work towards the completion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project and its extension to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

India's Offer of Fellowships:

- ASEAN Leaders also expressed appreciation to India for **launching 1,000 doctoral fellowships for ASEAN students** at Indian institutes of technology which will **contribute to the development of ASEAN's human capital**.

Background:

- India's relations with ASEAN began in 1990's along with liberalisation of Indian economy.
- India's search for economic space resulted in the 'Look East Policy' i.e active engagement with India's eastern neighbours which did not receive focussed attention till then.

(In 2014, 'Look East Policy' became Act East Policy under the NDA Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.)

- **India became a sectoral partner of ASEAN in 1992**. India and ASEAN entered into a summit partnership in 2002. Since then, both sides have been actively engaged in fostering economic, security, political, and cultural cooperation. India and ASEAN became strategic partners in 2012.

India and ASEAN observed 25 years of their Dialogue Partnership, 15 years of Summit Level interaction and 5 years of Strategic Partnership throughout 2017

Economic Partnership:

- India signed a **Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with ASEAN countries** which came into **force January 1, 2009**. In 2015, **India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in Services and Investments** came into force.

Trade:

- ASEAN being **India's fourth largest trading partner**. India's trade with ASEAN stands at US\$ 81.33 billion in 2018, which is approximately 10.6% of India's overall trade. India's export to ASEAN stand at 11.28% of our total exports.

Investment:

- **Investment** flows are also substantial both ways, with ASEAN accounting for approximately 18.28% of investment flows into India since 2000. FDI inflows into India from ASEAN between April 2000 to March 2018 was about US\$68.91 billion while FDI outflows from India to ASEAN countries, from April 2007 to March 2015 was about US\$38.672 billion.

India-ASEAN Projects:

- India has been cooperating with ASEAN by way of implementation of various projects in the fields of Agriculture, Science & Technology, Space, Environment & Climate Change, Human Resource Development, Capacity Building, New and Renewable Energy, Tourism, People-to-People contacts and Connectivity etc.

Connectivity:

- India is implementing the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and the Kaladan Multimodal Project.
- India offered a Line of Credit of US\$ 1 billion to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN and a Project Development Fund with a corpus of Rs. 500 crores to develop manufacturing hubs in Cambodia, Laos Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) countries, which are less developed countries in ASEAN.

Science and Technology:

- India set up of an ASEAN-India Science & Technology Development Fund with a US\$ 5 million contribution from India to promote joint collaborative R&D research projects in Science & Technology.

Climate Change and Environment:

- India contributed to US\$ 5 million ASEAN-India Green Fund to support collaboration activities relating to **environment** and **climate change**. Some of the areas identified for collaboration under the Fund are **climate change, energy efficiency, clean technologies, renewable energy, biodiversity conservation** and **environmental education**.

East Asia Summit:**14th East Asia Summit Held in Bangkok, Thailand**

The 14th East Asia Summit (EAS), attended by the Leaders of 18 member countries including India, was held in Bangkok, Thailand on November 4, 2019.

Commitment to Further Strengthening EAS:

The Leaders reaffirmed commitment to further strengthening of the EAS as a premier Leaders-led forum to promote dialogue and cooperation on broad strategic, political, security and economic issues of common interest and concern with the aim of **promoting peace, stability, and economic prosperity in the region**,

They underscored the need to further strengthen the EAS to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in response to the needs of the rapidly changing regional and international landscape.

Marine Plastic Debris a Global Concern:

The Leaders recognised that marine plastic debris is a global concern and reiterated that cooperation in this area among EAS participating countries is needed because of the transboundary nature of this issue.

Regional Connectivity:

They underscored the importance of enhanced regional connectivity as a catalyst to ensure economic growth, resilience, sustainability, and social development

Security of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs):

The Leaders stressed the growing importance of security of and in the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), and reaffirmed the need to enhance cooperation to promote an open, secure, stable, accessible, peaceful ICT environment

Terrorism:

They condemned recent terrorist attacks in various countries and reaffirmed our commitment to countering violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism through the effective implementation of counterterrorism measures at the national, sub-regional, regional levels including under the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism.

Background:

The East Asia Summit is a **Leaders-led forum of 18 countries** of the **Asia-Pacific region** formed in **2005**.

Objectives: Regional peace, security and prosperity.

The concept of an East Asia Grouping was first promoted in 1991 by the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad.

Member Countries (18):

Ten ASEAN Member States (i.e. Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam), Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation and the USA. EAS is an initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN.

Areas of Cooperation:

There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS. These are - Environment and Energy, Education, Finance, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Natural Disaster Management, and ASEAN Connectivity.

India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.

In 2009, EAS Leaders endorsed the proposal for the revival of Nalanda University, an ancient seat of learning in India, to bring together the brightest minds from all the countries of Asia.

India has also contributed in the area of Natural Disaster Management. In 2014, the Virtual Knowledge Portal (VKP), a web based tool to share knowledge and best practices related to natural disaster risk assessment, mitigation and response among EAS countries, was launched. It is hosted by Natural Institute of Disaster Management, New Delhi.

ASEAN Summit:

35th ASEAN Summit Held in Bangkok, Thailand

- The 35th ASEAN Summit, attended by Leaders of 10 member ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Group, was held from November 2 to 3, 2019 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The Leaders **reaffirmed commitment to realise ASEAN as a region of lasting peace, security and stability, sustained economic growth, shared prosperity and social progress.**

Promoting Synergy Among ASEAN-led Mechanisms:

- They **underscored the need to continue promoting synergy among the various ASEAN-led mechanisms**, including the ASEAN Plus One, ASEAN Plus Three (APT), East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus).

Economic Partnership:

- The Leaders noted that ASEAN, as a region, continued to register a **positive performance in output, trade and investment**. The region's economy grew by 5.2 per cent in 2018, reaching a combined GDP of USD 3.0 trillion in 2018, to retain its position as the **fifth largest economy in the world**.

They noted **ASEAN's total merchandise trade reached USD 2.8 trillion in 2018**, of which 23.0 per cent was intra-ASEAN; and ASEAN's **total services trade reached USD 778.6 billion in 2018**, of which 15.7 per cent was intra-ASEAN. On investment, inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI) to ASEAN reached USD 154.7 billion in 2018, the highest to date, of which 15.9 per cent was intra-ASEAN.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) :

- The Leaders welcomed the conclusion of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)** negotiations and the commitment to sign the RCEP Agreement in 2020. This will significantly contribute to an open, inclusive and rules-based international trading system and expansion of value chains.

East Asia Summit (EAS):

- The Leaders **reaffirmed the importance of the East Asia Summit (EAS) as a Leaders-led forum for dialogue on** broad strategic, political, and economics issues of common interest and concern with the aim of promoting peace, stability and economic prosperity in the region.

Developing Human Capital :

- The Leaders reaffirmed commitment to **developing the human capital of member countries** as it is a critical element in driving competitiveness, prosperity and resilience for a sustainable future, amidst challenges from rapid demographic, environmental and technological transformations.

Peaceful Resolution of Disputes:

- The Leaders reaffirmed shared commitment to **maintaining and promoting peace, security and stability** in the region, as well as to the **peaceful resolution of disputes**, including full respect for legal and diplomatic processes without resorting to the threat or use of force, in accordance with the universally recognised principles of international law, including the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

Connectivity:

- They commended the significant progress of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 in strengthening ASEAN Community-building and promoting sustainable development.

Commitment to Preserve the Southeast Asian region Free of Nuclear Weapons:

- The Leaders reiterated **commitment to preserve the Southeast Asian region free of nuclear weapons** and all other weapons of mass destruction as enshrined in the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty) and the ASEAN Charter.

Cybersecurity Challenges:

- They recognised the growing sophistication and transboundary nature of cyberthreats and underlined the **need to address cybersecurity challenges** in a holistic manner to ensure an open, secure, stable, accessible and resilient cyberspace to support the ASEAN digital economy. We emphasised the need to enhance regional cybersecurity cooperation.

Climate Change:

- The Leaders reiterated commitment to implementing obligations under the Paris Agreement, taking effective climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, strengthening science-policy interface, and adopting an intergenerational people-oriented and people-centred approach to climate action.

Background:

- ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) was established in 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- **Member countries (10)** : Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei Darussalam, Viet Nam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia.
- **Objectives** are to **accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development** in the region through joint endeavours, and **promote regional peace and stability.**

INTERNATIONAL POLITY

Sri Lanka:

Gotabaya Rajapaksa Elected as Sri Lankan President

- Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa, a former defence secretary and brother of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, won in the Sri Lankan Presidential elections in November 2019.
- Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party secured 52.25 percent of the votes defeating his main opponent Sajith Premadasa of the ruling United National Party (UNP).

Factors that contributed to Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa's Victory:

- Security concerns in the country after the coordinated bombings in April 2019, and
- anti-incumbency against the ruling United National Party (UNP),
- Mr. Gotabaya Rajapaksa assured security following coordinated bombings in April 2019 that killed at least 269 people.
- Rajapaksa's campaign stressed on his credentials as the Defence Secretary that ended the bloody 26-year civil war.
- Majority of the Sinhalese who constitute 70% of the Sri Lankan population voted for Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Concerns of Minorities:

- Tamils and Muslims voted for Sajith Premadasa of United National Party (UNP). The UNP is popularly perceived as the liberal alternative to the nationalist Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) party.
- Tamils blame the Rajapaksas for the death of thousands of civilians at the end of the civil war in 2009, and the subsequent reluctance to probe war crimes and disappearances. Muslims are worried about being targeted by majoritarian elements backed by Gotabaya Rajapaksa.
- It remains to be seen how Mr. Gotabaya will deal with the Tamil-speaking areas of Sri Lanka's North and Muslim-dominated East.

Gotabaya, who is unpopular for his role in the war against LTTE in these areas, got less votes in all of the Northern Province's five districts and in three districts in the Eastern Province.

Sri Lanka Political System:

- Sri Lanka is a Democratic Republic and a Unitary State.
- The President is head of state, with executive powers.
- The President is elected for a five-year term by universal suffrage.
- The president may serve a maximum of two terms. (Following passage of the 19th amendment to the constitution in 2015, the President has two terms, which previously had no term limit.)
- The President heads the cabinet and appoints ministers from elected members of parliament.
- He may dissolve parliament only after four and a half years have passed since the start of the first session of the current parliament.

Legislature:

- The Parliament of Sri Lanka is a unicameral 225-member legislature with 196 members elected in open list proportional system and 29 seats given to the parties on the basis of national vote shares.
- Members are elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term.
- The parliament reserves the power to make all laws.
- The President's deputy, the Prime Minister, leads the ruling party in parliament and shares many executive responsibilities, mainly in domestic affairs.

Sri Lanka in Brief:

Commercial capital : Colombo

Administrative capital : Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte

Population : 21.2 million

Area : 65,610 sq km (25,332 sq miles)

Major languages : Sinhala, Tamil, English

Major Religions : Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity

Life expectancy : 72 years (men), 78 years (women)

Currency : Sri Lankan rupee

Bolivia:

Bolivian President Evo Morales Resigns and Flees to Mexico

- Mr. Evo Morales, President of Bolivia, resigned on November 10, 2019 and fled to Mexico after it granted him asylum.
- Asylum is a protection granted by a state to someone who has left their home country as a **refugee**.
- Under the Refugee Convention, 1951, states grant asylum to political refugee when he/she faces serious threat to life or freedom.
- Opposition senator Jeanine Áñez declared herself interim president, after President Evo Morales resigned and fled the country.

Why did Mr. Evo Morales flee Bolivia?

- In order to win outright in the first round, Bolivia's election law requires a candidate to win either 50 percent, or at least 40 percent with a ten-point lead over their nearest rival. In 2009 and 2014, Mr. Evo Morales got more than 60 percent of the votes.
- However, Opinion Polls prior to October 21, 2019 voting indicated that Morales was unlikely to win by that margin and that his main opponent, former president Carlos Mesa, could beat Morales in a second round.
- But, on October 20, 2019 evening, a preliminary rapid count based on 83.8 percent of votes showed Evo Morales leading with 45.3 percent against Mesa's 38.2 percent. Bolivia's electoral agency froze the vote count.
- On October 21, 2019, Bolivia's electoral agency started counting again, showing Morales surging ahead toward the 10-point difference needed to avoid the second round.
- The Organization of American States expresses concern over the new results, describing the shift as a "drastic and inexplicable" change and calling for respect for the "will of the citizens". Protests broke out across the country.
- To quell the unrest, Mr. Morales invited the Organization of American States (OAS), a regional body, to audit the election. Its report found that there had been 'manipulation' in some of the electoral data.
- The military sided with the protestors and said that it would not confront the people. Even the police forces rebelled against the Government and joined the protests.
- Finally, the Military called on the President to renounce his presidential mandate and allow peace to be restored and the stability maintained for the good of Bolivia.
- Hence, he fled the country after his resignation and took asylum in Mexico.

About Evo Morales:

- Mr. Evo Morales first came to power in 2006.
- He is the first indigenous President of Bolivia. Two-thirds of Bolivia's population are from indigenous communities.
- Bolivia has vast mineral resources, including the much-in-demand Lithium.
- Mr. Evo Morales was a leftist and implemented many welfare programmes for the indigenous people. Under his rule, Bolivia has seen a drop in extreme poverty, from 33% of the population in 2006 to 15% last year.

He also stepped up public investments, opened more schools and health clinics. The economy has also seen a steady growth rate.

Morales's version of socialism was less radical and more pragmatic than the model pursued by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. He nationalized oil and natural gas industry but left much of Bolivia's private sector intact and refrained from seizing large quantities of land from private owners. This nationalisation helped to increase the public spending on welfare and development.

Reasons for the downfall of Mr. Evo Morales:

- Mr. Evo Morales failed to groom second rung leadership in his party 'Movement for Socialism (MAS)' and wanted to continue in power as long as possible.
- Originally elected in 2006 for a five-year term, Morales called an early election in 2009 after the adoption of Bolivia's new constitution, which imposed a two-term limit for presidents. He then argued that this counted as his first term under the new constitution, so he should be allowed to run again in 2014, which the constitutional court allowed him to do.
- After winning reelection again, he held a referendum in 2016 to abolish term limits, which voters rejected.
- But, later he appealed to the constitutional court which lifted the term limits stating that this limit violated candidates' human rights. This had galvanised the Opposition, which claimed that the President's electoral participation itself was unconstitutional as the Constitution expressly limits the term of President to a maximum of two terms. They contested that the constitutional court which removed term limits was packed with Evo Morales loyalists.

Bolivia in Brief:

It is a landlocked country in South American continent.

Capital: Sucre (official), La Paz (administrative)

Population : 10.8 million

Area : 1.1 million sq km (424,164 sq miles)

Major languages : Spanish, Quechua, Aymara, Guarani

Major religion : Christianity

Life expectancy : 66 years (men), 71 years (women)

Currency : boliviano

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

SPACE :

NASA's Voyager 2 Enters Interstellar Space

NASA's Voyager 2 spacecraft has exited the heliosphere and entered the interstellar medium (ISM) on November 5, 2018, according to a study published in the Nature Astronomy journal recently.

- **Voyager 2 has become the second human-made object to enter the interstellar medium after Voyager 1 in 2012.** Both spacecraft Voyager 1 and 2 were launched within weeks apart in 1977 with varying mission goals and paths through space.
- Initially, both the spacecraft Voyager 1 and 2 were launched to study Jupiter and Saturn and last for five years. However, after successfully accomplishing the primary objectives, the missions were extended and they lasted over 40 years, making Voyager 2, which was launched weeks before Voyager 1, the longest NASA mission.
- Voyager 1 and 2 were launched separately because of their different trajectories and distances to reach their planetary targets.

What is interstellar medium (ISM)?

- **It is the space in between the stars which contains gas, dust and cosmic rays** (high energy protons and atomic nuclei)

What is the heliosphere?

- **It is a protective bubble-like region in the space within the interstellar medium, created by the solar wind** (a thin stream of electrically charged particles) and magnetic fields coming from the Sun.
- It extends way beyond the planets in our solar system
- **Heliopause** is the boundary of the heliosphere.
- **Heliosheath** is the turbulent region near the boundary of the heliosphere where the solar wind becomes turbulent as it interacts with the interstellar medium.

How was Voyager-2's entry into the interstellar medium identified?

- Voyager 2's entry into the interstellar medium is noted by a sudden change in the plasma density detected by the plasma science instrument on the spacecraft as it exited the heliosphere.
- The solar wind in the heliosphere has a hot and lower-density plasma characteristic, unlike the interstellar medium, which has a cooler and higher-density plasma characteristic.
- Voyager 1 had also detected a similar change in plasma density when it entered interstellar space in 2012

India Plans Chandrayaan-3 by the End of 2020

On 14 November 2019, officials of the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) said that India might go for Chandrayaan-3 mission, a second soft-landing attempt on the moon, in November 2020.

- On 7 September 2019, ISRO had lost contact with Chandrayaan-2's Vikram lander minutes before the planned soft landing near the lunar south pole.
- ISRO had announced that the lander has crash-landed.

ISRO appointed a committee to prepare a report on the proposed Chandrayaan-3 mission in 2020:

- The committee is taking into consideration the recommendations of the Failure Analysis Committee (FAC) that analysed what went wrong while landing Chandrayaan-2's Vikram lander.

Possible improvements to Chandrayaan-3 based on deficiencies in Chandrayaan -2:

Improved guidance algorithm for Chandrayaan-3 mission:

- The FAC committee identified a glitch in the guidance software and algorithm on Chandrayaan-2 as one of the main reasons for failure to soft-land Vikram lander on 7 September 2019.

Improved communication system on the lander while landing:

- In order to get the orientation of the lander right during the landing phase, ISRO plans to make the Chandrayaan-3 lander transfer images taken by its camera in real-time to the ground, from the beginning of powered descent onto the lunar surface.
- Chandrayaan-2s' lander took images but did not have the capability to transfer them in real-time.

Improved communication between the lander and the ground irrespective of the lander orientation after landing:

- ISRO plans to add more antennas on the lander, to avoid communication disruption if the lander does not land on all its four legs.

Improved power capability on the lander:

- ISRO is studying the possibility of accommodating solar cells on all four sides of the lander, to avoid power issues in the lander.
- Vikram lander had solar cells only on three sides.

Cartosat-3, High-Resolution Imaging Satellite, Successfully Launched by ISRO

On 27 November 2019, ISRO has successfully launched Cartosat-3, an advanced earth imaging, and mapping satellite, on the PSLV-C47 launch vehicle from Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.

Applications:

- The satellite will address the need in largescale urban planning, rural resource and infrastructure development, coastal land use, and land cover.
- Possible defence, and military use due to its high-resolution camera.

Launch Details:

- Along with Cartosat-3, the launch vehicle also carried 13 nano customer satellites belonging to two U.S. companies that were injected into their target orbits. The commercial satellites were launched under an agreement with the commercial arm of the ISRO, NewSpace India Ltd. (NSIL).
- Cartosat-3 was injected into a sun-synchronous orbit at 509 kms from Earth.
- For the first time, the launch vehicle was navigated using the indigenous Vikram processor, which was designed by ISRO and fabricated in India.
- For this mission, the XL or extended version of the PSLV vehicle was used, which has six more booster rockets strapped on to it.

What is a sun-synchronous satellite?

- Sun-synchronous satellites pass over a given point/location on the Earth at the same local solar time on the ground every single time.
- Sun-synchronous orbits are typically Low Earth Orbits (LEO) as they are at lower altitudes from the surface of the Earth.
- Sun-synchronous satellites are important for imaging, observation and to track changes in a region over many years

Why are they important for observation?

- as sun-synchronous satellites pass over a region at the same local solar time every time, the lighting conditions and sun-angle remain almost consistent varying only with seasons, which helps in avoiding extreme changes in the lighting, sun-angle and shadows which create an illusion of change.

Satellite Details:

- It is India's highest resolution civilian satellite
- Most advanced and complex Earth-imaging satellite built by ISRO so far.
- It has a resolution of 25cm, which means the satellite can image objects of the size 25 cm on the ground from its orbit about 509 km away.
- Cartosat-3 is the first in a series of high resolution, third-generation satellites planned for observing the Earth by ISRO. Cartosat-2 second-generation series offered the best resolution of 65 cm from ISRO.
- Cartosat-3 satellite is the 9th in the Cartosat series of satellites
- Cartosat-3's mission life is five years.

ENVIRONMENT :

National Green Tribunal (NGT) issues ultimatum to Environment Ministry of India to ban certain Reverse Osmosis (RO) Water Filtration Systems

On November 6, 2019, the National Green Tribunal reiterated to the Environment Ministry of India **to issue a notification restricting the use of Reverse Osmosis (RO) water purification systems** as per the standards given below as the amount of potable (drinking) **water that is disposed as waste during the purification process as 'Reverse Osmosis reject' water is high** which is around **3 litres for every 1 litre of water purified.**

National Green Tribunal ordered the Environment Ministry to release the above said notification by December 31, 2019. **The two main regulations which NGT demands the Environment Ministry to make are:**

- Ban Reverse Osmosis systems in areas where the **TDS (Total Dissolved Solids)** of the water is less than 500 mg/L as further purification of water will deplete it from essential minerals and will result in wastage of water that is rejected by the RO system and
- Bring regulations to use RO reject water for secondary purposes such as utensils washing, flushing, gardening (if TDS is below 2100 mg/l), cleaning of vehicles and floor mopping.

What is TDS?

TDS-Total Dissolved Solids represents the **total concentration of inorganic salts** like calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium called cations and carbonates, chlorides, sulfates, and nitrates called anions **plus the amount of organic matter that is dissolved in the water.**

Total dissolved solids are measured in milligrams per litre:

- Freshwater < 1500 mg/L TDS
- Brackish water 1500 to 5000 mg/L TDS
- Saline water > 5000 mg/L TDS

The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) of USA considers TDS levels of 500 mg/L safe. TDS levels higher than 1000 mg/L are not fit for human consumption.

Elevated levels of TDS, while not necessarily bad, can give water a bitter, salty, or brackish taste. Calcium and magnesium, two minerals commonly found in TDS, can cause water hardness (More calcium and magnesium causes hardness), scale formation, and staining.

Expert Committee appointed by the National Green Tribunal:

The Expert Committee constituted by NGT comprised of representatives of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC), Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Bureau of Indian Stan-

dards (BIS), Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, (IIT, Delhi) and the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute, Delhi (NEERI, Delhi) who **examined the wastage by RO systems which is 80% Reverse Osmosis reject water and they proposed options for secondary use of the reject water.**

What are the recommendations of the expert committee setup by National Green Tribunal?

- RO technology is generally not required for places that have piped water supplies from surface water sources like rivers, lakes and ponds, primarily supplied by Municipal Corporations/Municipalities.
- These sources have TDS levels far low as compared to ground water sources therefore RO water filter systems should be banned in such areas and instead Ultra-filtration with UV (or other disinfection systems) can serve the purpose.
- Water purifier market should be classified based on TDS (Total Dissolved Solids) level of water being supplied/ available in the area so that right Technology /product may be deployed based on input water TDS.
- Star Rating of RO Systems based on recovery or reduced wastage of water as practiced in other countries should also be made mandatory.
- Manufacturing of RO systems having recovery more than 60 % of water be made mandatory to minimize waste and generation of RO Reject. This recovery should be enhanced upto 75 % in phased manner in future.
- Municipalities should inform the citizens periodically about the TDS levels of the water supplied so they can choose appropriate filtration technology.
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation through State Rural Water Supply agencies should analyse water samples through a network of water testing laboratories.

What is the stand of RO manufacturers on the order issued by the National Green Tribunal?

- The stand of the Water Quality Indian Association (WQIA) representing the RO manufacturers is that RO system ensures availability of pure water.
- They do not dispute that only 20% water is recovered and 80% goes waste.
- Further justification given by them is that in 98 Districts of 13 Indian States, there is High TDS which can be purified only by RO systems.

What is the reaction of Environment Ministry of India?

- The Ministry has asked the Central Pollution Control (CPCB) to frame a holistic policy for use of RO technology and submit a draft notification but the ministry has not received the draft notification yet.
- They also stated that as issuing notification is a policy related matter, it comprises multidimensional features, Hence, region wise detailed consultation is required before notification is issued.

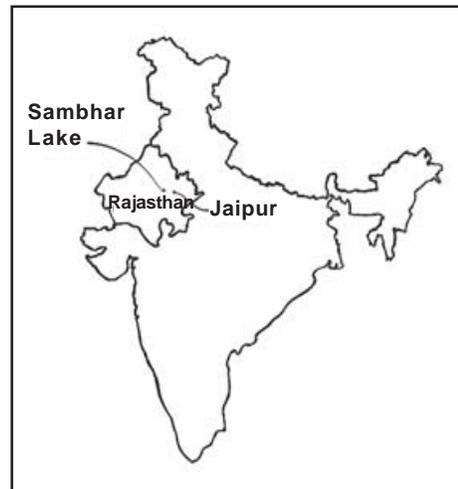
Botulism causes death of 17,000 migratory birds in Rajasthan's Sambhar lake

On November 10, 2019, bird deaths near Rajasthan's Sambhar lake, were first reported by Ornithologists who went to photograph the birds at the lake. The death toll of the birds reached to around 17,000 so far which is considered a large-scale Avian death disaster in recent history of India.

Facts about Sambhar lake:

- Sambhar Lake is **located in Nagaur, Jaipur and Ajmer districts of Rajasthan.** It is **India's largest inland saltwater lake** which **spreads across 190 to 230 square kilometres.**
- It is a **Ramsar site of international significance-**

- i) Ramsar site is a wetland site of international prominence under the Ramsar convention.
 - ii) Ramsar convention is a 1971 UNESCO intergovernmental environmental treaty
 - iii) It was put in place to establish national action and international co-operation to conserve wetlands.
- The lake attracts a host of **migratory birds** from various places across the globe.
 - It is an **eco-tourism hotspot** due to its scenic beauty and rich avian life.



According to an **investigative report by Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI) submitted on November 21, 2019**, the **cause of mass deaths of birds** near the lake was due to '**Botulinum**' toxin.

What is Botulinum toxin?

- Botulinum is a **neurotoxin** that affects the nerves causing paralysis.
- It is produced by a **bacterium named Clostridium botulinum**.

The toxin can cause

1. Food-borne botulism- the bacteria spreads through contaminated food
2. Wound botulism- bacteria grows in the wounds and infects them
3. Infant botulism -bacteria affects the intestines of infants
4. Avian and fish botulism are caused by contamination in lakes and ponds

Effects of botulinum toxin on the birds:

- The birds were found paralysed over wings and legs, showing neck-drooping syndrome.
- Carcasses of numerous species have been retrieved including plovers, common coot, black-winged stilt, northern shovelers, ruddy shelduck, and pied avocet.
- Omnivore(animals that feed on both plants and animals) and insectivore(animals that feed on insects) species were most affected.
- Infestation was observed on the carcasses of the dead birds

How does botulinum toxin contaminate lakes and ponds?

- The bacteria '**Clostridium botulinum**' is ubiquitously present in soils, dust, and the marine and freshwater sediments of wetlands, rivers, and lakes.
- **Decomposition of plants, algae, and animals** creates **anaerobic (oxygen void) environments** that **facilitate growth of C. botulinum**, which may then **enter into food webs leading to death and paralysis of animals**.

How did botulinum toxin contaminate the Sambhar lake?

- According to the investigative report by Indian Veterinary Research Institute there was heavy rainfall around the Sambhar lake area from July 8, 2019 to end of August which led to low salinity level in the lake which is a good condition for Crustaceans, invertebrates and plankton to grow.
- They harbour **Clostridium botulinum** bacteria in their bodies.

-
- After the water receded, the salinity levels increased which caused the death of Crustaceans, invertebrates and plankton.
 - Upon death, the bacteria multiplies in the carcasses and there is accumulation of the toxin.
 - Only omnivorous and insectivorous birds died which fed on the infected crustaceans, invertebrates and plankton. There was no death of the herbivorous birds.

What steps were taken to treat the infected birds and to stop the contamination from spreading?

- **Multiple rescue areas** were created and the **birds were given treatment by the state veterinarians and Wild Trust of India (WTI).**
- According to report from IVRI, 600 birds were rescued of which 268 died after rescue.
- **Jaipur collector Jagroop Singh Yadav stated that carcasses have been disposed.**
- However, Botulism toxin raises concerns of soil contamination and water contamination around Sambhar lake as part of the lake is leased to Sambhar Salts Limited, a central government undertaking which produces salt for human consumption.

Chief Minister of Rajasthan, Mr. Ashok Gehlot's reaction to the disaster:

- Chief Minister ordered that the State Wetlands Authority should be made operational.

National Green Tribunal's order about the disaster:

- The National Green Tribunal (NGT) on **November 20, 2019 directed a factual and action-taken report to be submitted jointly** by the **National Wetland Authority, Government of India, State Wetland Authority, Rajasthan, Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board and the district magistrate of Jaipur** in the case of migratory birds dying at Sambhar lake in Rajasthan.
- The **State Wetland Authority would be the nodal agency for coordination and compliance.** The report has to be furnished before January 22, 2020.

What is National Green Tribunal?

- The National Green Tribunal has been established under **The National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests** and other natural resources.
- The National Green Tribunal deals with environmental protection cases which hold public agencies responsible to maintain air quality, reduce forest land encroachment, mitigate pollution of rivers, reduce contamination of groundwater and such issues relating to the environment.

History of illegal tube wells around Sambhar lake that are affecting its ecosystem:

- **In 2017, National Green Tribunal bench of judges ruled that the then state government of Rajasthan should cancel allotment of salt pans in Sambhar lake as they run contrary to the mandate of Wetland Rules, 2010 framed under the Environment Protection Acts of 1986 and 2010.**
- In 2017, there were over 1,30,000 illegal tubewells in the wetland stealing brine (water strongly impregnated with salt) worth crores, these commercial activities are severely affecting the health of the ecosystem of Sambhar lake.
- **Natural brines occur underground, in salt lakes,** or as seawater and are **commercially important sources of common salt** and other salts, such as chlorides and sulfates of magnesium and potassium.

DEFENCE :

Trump Administration Decides to Sell Naval Guns Worth 1 Billion Dollars to India

On 19 November 2019, the Trump administration has notified the U.S. Congress (consisting of the House of Representatives and the Senate) its intention to sell naval guns worth 1 billion dollars to India.

- The notification of sale is required by law in the U.S.A.
- The notification mentions that the proposed sale will not change the primary military balance in the region

Type of naval guns to be sold to India by U.S.A.:

- **Thirteen MK-45 5inch/62 caliber naval guns in their latest version of (MOD4)**
- The naval guns are to be manufactured by the BAE Systems Land and Armaments

Benefits to India's navy according to the notification:

- Naval guns strengthen India's homeland defence,
- will provide India with the capability to conduct anti-surface warfare (against enemy surface ships) and anti-air defence (against enemy aircraft), and
- will enhance interoperability with the U.S. and other allied forces

Other countries that U.S. has sold or is selling these naval guns to:

Sold to:

- Australia, Japan, and South Korea
- Thailand (upgraded version of MOD 4 version naval guns)

To be sold to:

- Britain and Canada

HEALTH :

A New Subtype of HIV discovered

On November 8, 2019, researchers at **Abbott, a multinational pharmaceutical company, discovered a new subtype of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) called HIV-1 Group M, subtype L** after two decades of finding the last subtype of HIV. Nine subtypes of HIV-1 group M were discovered before this discovery.

What is Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and what are its groups and subtypes?

- HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus which can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome or AIDS if not treated.
- HIV attacks the body's immune system, specifically the CD4 cells (T cells), which help the immune system fight off infections.

Classification of HIV:

HIV is classified into two broad categories, HIV-1 and HIV-2. HIV-1 is the most predominant virus and accounts for 95% of all infections worldwide.

Groups within HIV-1:

The strains of HIV-1 can be classified into four groups N, M, O, P. Of these, **M is the 'major' group and is responsible for majority of the global HIV epidemic.**

The other three groups - N, O and P are quite uncommon.

Subtypes within HIV-1 group M:

Within group M, there are known to be at least nine genetically distinct subtypes of HIV-1. These are subtypes A, B, C, D, F, G, H, J and K.

What technology was used to find the new HIV subtype?

Researchers at Abbott used the **Next Generation Genome Sequencing technology** to make this discovery which sequences DNA(Deoxyribonucleic Acid) at a much faster rate than the previous Sanger sequencing technology.

What is DNA and DNA sequencing?

DNA is Deoxyribonucleic Acid which is present in the nucleus of all cells of all living organisms.

It consists of biological information needed for cell functioning in the form of sequences of four nucleotide bases of adenine (A), thymine (T), cytosine (C) and guanine (G) which are strung along ribbons of sugar- phosphate molecules in the shape of a double helix.

DNA sequencing is the process of determining the sequence of nucleotide bases (As, Ts, Cs, and Gs) in a piece of DNA. Nucleotide bases are the building blocks of DNA.

How is the NGS(Next Generation Sequencing) technology better than the previous technologies?

- Like many viruses **HIV mutates or changes its DNA sequence over a period of time.**
- Therefore, **by using the next generation sequencing technology researchers are able to stay ahead of the mutations in HIV by sequencing the DNA of the virus much faster making it easier to diagnose all the subtypes of HIV.**
- NGS is faster because it sequences millions of genes parallelly while previous Sanger Technology can sequence only a few genes at a time.
- **Large quantities of DNA can be sequenced** much more **quickly** and **cheaply** with next-generation methods than with Sanger sequencing. For example, in 2001, the cost of sequencing a human genome was almost \$100 million, in 2015 it was \$1245 and now it is around 600\$.

WHO Initiative to Expand Access to Affordable Insulin

On November 13, 2019 , The World Health Organization (WHO) announced the launch of **a pilot programme to prequalify human insulin in order to increase access to insulin by facilitating lower price by eliminating of monopoly. Thus, treatment for diabetes increases in low- and middle-income countries.**

What is a pilot programme?

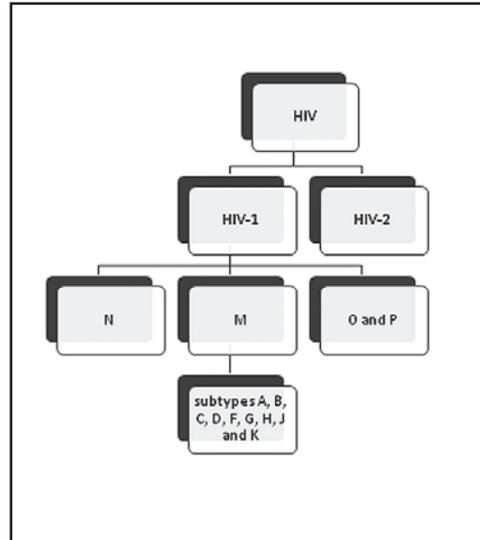
- A small-scale and short-term experiment that helps an organization learn how a large-scale project might work in practice.

What is human Insulin?

- Human Insulin is a form of bio-engineered insulin that is similar to the insulin produced by pancreas in the human body. It is used to treat diabetes.

What is prequalification of human Insulin?

- **Evaluating human insulin products to verify if they meet international standards is prequalification of human insulin.**



- Biotherapeutic products (BTPs) like human Insulin are highly complex biological medicines. Therefore, regulatory assessments of those products according to internationally acceptable standards is expensive and challenging in some countries.
- Therefore, WHO is inviting manufacturers to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) for product evaluation to the WHO Prequalification Team-Biotherapeutic Products (BTPs) who will evaluate the human insulin products according to international standards. The products that meet international standards will be made available in the International market.

Why is access to Insulin a problem in low, middle income and some high income countries?

- Insulin was discovered as a treatment for diabetes almost 100 years ago and has been on WHO's List of Essential Medicines since it was published in 1977.
- Currently, **three companies Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk and Sanofi are dominating 90% of the world insulin market.**
- In some countries, only one among these companies is **monopolizing the insulin market and setting high prices which makes insulin unaffordable in these countries** which are mostly low and middle income countries.
- In China and India, there are **domestic insulin companies that can help drive down the price**
- **High Income countries like USA with no regulation to control drug prices are witnessing a huge rise in Insulin prices** forcing patients to go without the essential drug leading to blindness, kidney problems and death. In Canada and Europe insulin prices are more controlled due to stringent regulations.

How will prequalification of insulin by WHO solve the insulin accessibility problem?

- WHO prequalification of insulin is **expected to boost access by increasing the flow of quality-assured products on the international market**, providing **countries with greater choice and patients with lower prices.**

Diabetes Epidemic in India-77 million Indians are Diabetic-Second Largest in the World

According to a report by **IDF (International Diabetes Foundation)** called **2019 Diabetes Atlas** released on **World Diabetes Day-November 14, 2019**, India has 77 million diabetics, the second highest number out of 463 million diabetics in the world.

Top 10 countries for number of adults in millions (20-79 years) with diabetes

Rank	Country	2019	Country	2030	Country	2045
1	China	116.4	China	140.5	China	147.2
2	India	77	India	101.0	India	134.2
3	USA	31	USA	34.4	Pakistan	37.1
4	Pakistan	19.4	Pakistan	26.2	USA	36
5	Brazil	16.8	Brazil	21.5	Brazil	26
6	Mexico	12.8	Mexico	17.2	Mexico	22.3
7	Indonesia	10.7	Indonesia	13.7	Egypt	16.9
8	Germany	9.5	Egypt	11.9	Indonesia	16.6
9	Egypt	8.9	Bangladesh	11.4	Bangladesh	15
10	Bangladesh	8.4	Germany	10.1	Turkey	10.4

Diabetes among adults(20-79 years) in India:

- According to the above mentioned report the **projections** for total **number of diabetics for India upto 2045 show India to continue to have the second largest diabetic population in the world.**
- The **prevalence of diabetes in India is greater than 9%** for the 20-79 years age group. Prevalence is the **proportion of a particular population found to be affected by a medical condition.**
- Diabetes is the **leading cause for morbidity among adults in India.** **Morbidity is the condition of being diseased.**

Diabetes among children and teenagers(0-19 years) in India:

- India has the **second largest number of children and adolescents aged 0-19 years with type 1 diabetes in the world (171,300).**
- Comprehensive National Nutrition Survey (CNNS) 2016-2018 conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, UNICEF and Population Council found that **10 per cent of children and adolescents up to the age of 19 are pre-diabetic in India** which will lead to type-2 diabetes if not prevented. **Obesity being the leading cause** for it.

What is Type-1 Diabetes and Type-2 Diabetes?

- **Type-1 Diabetes:** Type 1 diabetes, is a **chronic condition** in which the **pancreas produces little or no insulin.** Insulin is a hormone needed to allow sugar (glucose) to enter cells to produce energy. The **cause** for this type of diabetes could be **genetic** or **some viruses.** It mostly appears during childhood or adolescence.
- **Type-2 Diabetes:** Type-2 diabetes is also a **chronic condition** in which the **body resists the effects of insulin.** Obesity, unhealthy diet and sedentary lifestyle are the main causes. It mostly appears during adulthood but children are also being diagnosed with type-2 diabetes due to obesity in children.

What is a chronic condition?

- A **chronic condition** lasts for a longer period and needs **ongoing treatment.** Examples of chronic conditions are diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and cancer. **Prevention and management requires lifestyle changes.**

Need for Healthcare delivery system modelled for Chronic care in India:

- India's **current public health systems** are **mainly modelled for acute care** which treat conditions like injury, **communicable diseases** caused by viruses where effectiveness of treatment largely depends on frequent rapid intervention.
- However, **non-communicable diseases like diabetes** need a healthcare delivery system **modelled for chronic care** which require **multidisciplinary teams** that follow a **multidimensional approach for long term and on-going treatment** focusing on prevention and management of the disease with lifestyle changes and effective patient awareness.
- Example of a multidisciplinary team for diabetes and Hypertension consists of physicians (general practitioners, cardiologists, endocrinologists and nephrologists), nurses, dieticians, physical therapists, physical education instructors and psychologists.

Need for Early detection of diabetes and Pre-diabetes screening:

Early detection of diabetes:

- Early detection of diabetes is very important for effective treatment. Almost **50% of diabetics in India do not know that they are diabetic** as it is asymptomatic in most patients.
- Once diabetes is detected, on-going treatment with lifestyle changes like diet and exercise along with patient awareness of disease management and prevention are necessary.

Pre-diabetes Screening:

- Pre-diabetes screening is vital to control the epidemic of diabetes in India as the **prevalence of pre-diabetes is 14% in India in 2019 according to National Urban Diabetes Survey.**
- Pre-diabetes is the condition in which blood sugar level is higher than normal, but not yet high enough for you to be diagnosed with diabetes.

The double burden of disease in India:

- **Double burden of disease** is the **rise of both communicable and non-communicable diseases.**
- Research shows that **India has undergone an epidemiological transition from 1990 to 2016** with a **steady rise in Non-communicable diseases along with the existing burden of communicable diseases.**
- Epidemiology is the branch of medicine which deals with the incidence, distribution, and possible control of diseases and other factors relating to health.
- Epidemiological transition occurs in a country when developments in modern healthcare and medicine take place such as antibiotics used to treat communicable diseases, reduce infant mortality rates and extend average life expectancy and a transition with steady shift to chronic or non-communicable diseases occurs.
- In order to address the double burden of both communicable and non-communicable diseases, India needs a health care system that can handle both acute care (to treat communicable diseases) and chronic care (to treat non-communicable diseases).
- National Healthcare policy changes are needed to address this double burden along with effective implementation of the policies to handle the epidemic of diabetes in India.

Maternal Mortality Ratio Reduced to 122 in India

India's **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR)** saw a decline from

167 per 1 lakh live births in 2011-2013 to

130 per 1 lakh live births in 2014-2016, and

122 per 1 lakh live births in 2015-2017

according to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) 2015-2017 bulletin for MMR released on November 7, 2019.

Kerala Retains First Position:

Kerala, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu retained the first three places in reduction of Maternal Mortality.

Maternal Mortality Ratio

Rank	State	(2014-2016)	(2015-2017)
1.	Kerala	46	42
2.	Maharashtra	61	55
3.	Tamil Nadu	66	63

- 11 States in India have achieved the National Health Policy 2017 target of MMR 100 per lakh live births well ahead of 2020.
- Independent MMR data of Jharkhand (76), Chhattisgarh (141) and Uttarakhand (89) has been released for the first time in the SRS 2015-2017 bulletin.

Progress Across the States:

- To understand the maternal mortality situation in the country better and to map the changes, especially at the regional level, the government has **categorised states into three groups:**
 1. Empowered Action Group (EAG) - Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh/Uttarakhand and Assam,
 2. Southern States (Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu) and
 3. other states.
- The decline in MMR has been most significant in EAG States from 188 to 175. The ratio has reduced considerably from 77 to 72 per 1,00,000 live births among southern states and in the other states from 93 to 90.

Decline in Maternal Mortality Ratio in India at a Glance:

Survey	MMR
2004-2006	254
2011-2013	167
2014-2016	130
2015-2017	122

What is Maternal Mortality?

- Maternal mortality refers to death of a woman due to complications from pregnancy or child birth.
- Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death among women of reproductive age in developing countries. 99% of these maternal deaths occur in developing and underdeveloped nations as they lack adequate health care, and pregnant women have minimal access to skilled labor and emergency care.

What is Maternal Mortality Ratio?

- **Maternal Mortality Ratio** is defined as the number of maternal deaths per 100,000 live births during a given time period.

What are the Causes for Maternal Mortality?

The common reasons for Maternal Mortality are

1. postpartum hemorrhage (loss of blood which leads to drop in your blood pressure. This may lead to shock and death)
2. eclampsia (high blood pressure resulting in seizures during pregnancy),
3. obstructed labor (occurs due to reasons like malposition of the fetus, large size of fetus in relation to the maternal pelvic or pelvis may be contracted, which is more common when malnutrition is prevalent), and
4. maternal or postpartum sepsis (a life-threatening condition that arises when the body's response to infection causes injury to its own tissues and organs).

In above situations, pregnant women should have access to skilled labor and emergency care.

What are the Reasons for Decreasing Maternal Mortality in India?

- Increase in institutional deliveries,
- focus on quality and coverage of health services through public health initiatives under the National Health Mission, and
- focused approach towards aspirational districts (backward districts) to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable mothers.

Public Health Initiatives:

The following public health initiatives have played a key role in reduction of Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR).

1. LaQshya (Labour Room Quality Improvement Initiative) ,
2. Pradhan Mantri SurakshitMatritva Abhiyan (provide comprehensive and quality antenatal care, free of cost, universally to all pregnant women on the 9th of every month)
3. Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (a national initiative to make available better health facilities for women and child),
4. Janani Suraksha Yojana (is a safe motherhood intervention to promote institutional delivery among the poor pregnant women) and
5. Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (a direct benefit transfer (DBT) scheme under which cash benefits are provided to pregnant women in their bank account directly to meet enhanced nutritional needs and partially compensate for wage loss).

Sustainable Development Goals and MMR Target?

- The WHO lauded India's progress in reducing the MMR stating that the progress puts the country on track towards achieving the **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)** target of an **MMR below 70 by 2030**.

RC REDDY IAS STUDY CIRCLE

PERSONS, AWARDS & SPORTS

International Persons

Barbara Hillary (88), the first black woman to reach the North and South poles, died on November 26, 2019. Hillary reached the North Pole in 2007 at the age of 75, and the South Pole in 2011 at age 79.

National Persons

TN Seshan (86), former Chief Election Commissioner of India, passed away in Chennai on November 10, 2019. Prime Minister Narendra Modi noted that Seshan's efforts towards electoral reforms have made our democracy stronger and more participative.

T N Seshan was the 10th Chief Election Commissioner and served from December 12, 1990, till December 11, 1996.

Mr. Seshan brought in many reforms in the working of the election commission. He began the process of issuing **photo identity cards to voters** and **strictly enforced Model Code of Conduct**. He instituted the practice of **using election observers**, who were senior officers of the Income Tax Department. He also implemented Section 77 of the Representation of the People Act of 1951, which made it obligatory for candidates to keep **an accurate account of their expenditure and set a ceiling on the amount they could spend on their campaign**. Mr. Seshan monitored electoral expenses round the clock from a control room at the Election Commission headquarters. His work was recognised internationally when he was given the Ramon Magsaysay award for 1996.

Nabanita Deb Sen (81), award-winning poet, writer and acclaimed teacher, passed away in Kolkata on November 7, 2019. She won Sahitya Akademi award in 1999, and Padma Shri in 2000 and was a professor of comparative literature at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, until her retirement in 2002. She married Amartya Sen, the renowned Indian economist, in 1959 but their marriage ended in 1976.

Sudhir Dhar (87), renowned cartoonist whose works graced several newspapers in a career spanning 58 years, died on November 26, 2019.

Dhar began his career with The Statesman in 1961, after which he moved to Hindustan Times. His cartoons have also appeared in The Independent, The Pioneer, Delhi Times, New York Times, Washington Post and Saturday Review, among others.

G. Satheesh Reddy, Secretary of the Department of Defence R&D and chairman of DRDO, was conferred honorary fellowship by Royal Aeronautical Society (RAeS) London, the oldest aeronautical society in the world, in November 2019.

The Society's highest award was bestowed on Dr. Reddy for his pioneering technological contributions over the past three decades, which has enabled the country to realise frontline military systems and world class missile technologies. He has spearheaded 'Mission Shakti', the country's first Anti-Satellite Missile Test (ASAT) mission which demonstrated extremely high degree of precision and technological prowess, enabling India join a select group of four nations with such capability.

The Honorary Fellowship from RAeS is one of the world's highest distinctions for aerospace achievement awarded for only the most exceptional contributions to the aerospace profession. It is considered equivalent to the Nobel Prize in aerospace domain, and Dr. Reddy is the first Indian recipient of this prestigious award in over 100 years.

International Awards

UN Climate Action Award:

A project led by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) '**Mahila Housing Sewa Trust**' to organise and empower women in low-income households to increase their **resilience to impacts of climate change** won the '2019 United Nations Global Climate Action Awards' announced in November 2019.

'**Mahila Housing Sewa Trust**' is one of the 15 recipients of the 2019 United Nations Global Climate Action Awards which are given for practical examples across the globe to combat climate change.

'Mahila Housing Sewa Trust' encourages households to switch to more energy-efficient products, using sprinkler taps to reduce the flow of water, harvesting rainwater, etc. It builds capacities of women leaders from slum communities as Climate Saathis (Saathis is Hindi word for partner) to work with scientists, academicians, government and local entrepreneurs.

The Mahila Housing Sewa Trust's initiatives have benefitted 25,000 low-income families across seven cities in India, and neighbouring countries of Bangladesh and Nepal.

Infosys, India's second-largest Information Technology company, was also presented with the United Nations Global Climate Action Award in the 'Carbon Neutral Now' category.

With over 2,29,000 employees and clients in 46 countries, Infosys has a significant carbon footprint. A big part of the company's emissions come from the consumption of electricity required to run their offices and data centres. And, given the scale of its operations, emissions from business travel and employee commutes is particularly high.

Infosys has sought to address its significant carbon footprint in all aspects of its global operations. Infosys' approach to achieving carbon neutrality is based on three pillars: reducing energy consumption through energy efficiency, transitioning to renewable energy sources and offsetting emissions that are beyond its control through community-based carbon offsetting projects in partnership with various NGOs and agencies. Infosys has also promoted sustainable practices amongst its employees and vendors to reduce their footprint.

It is building new energy-efficient buildings and upgrading its existing buildings. Through its energy efficiency programs, Infosys has reduced 55.05% of its per capita energy consumption since 2008. 44% of Infosys' electricity requirements are met through renewable sources. The company aims to transition to 100% renewable energy by 2020.

It also runs a carbon offset programme that works with communities to reduce emissions and contribute to sustainable development. Over 100,000 rural families have benefited directly from Infosys' offset programme since 2016, while another 25,000 families are set to benefit from a project on biogas-fueled cooking and organic farming.

National Awards

55th Jnanpith Award :

Eminent Malayalam poet **Akkitham** was chosen for the 55th Jnanpith Award announced by the Jnanpith Selection Board in November 2019.

Born in 1926, Akkitham Achuthan Namboothiri, popularly known as Akkitham is one of the most revered names in Malayalam poetry. Akkitham has authored 55 books out of which 45 are collections of poems including Khanda Kavyas, Katha Kavyas, Charitha Kavyas and songs. Some of his celebrated creations include Veeravadam, Balidarsanam, Nimisha Kshethram, Amrita Khatika, Akkitham Kavithaka, Epic of Twentieth Century and Antimahakalam. His works have also been translated into many Indian and foreign languages.

A Padma Shri awardee, he has won several literary accolades including the Sahitya Akademi Award (1973), Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award (1972 and 1988), Mathrubhumi Award, Vayalar Award and Kabir Samman.

About the Award:

Jnanpith Award is a literary award given annually for the best creative literary writing to writers in any of the 22 "scheduled languages" recognised in the Indian Constitution.

The prize carries a cash award of Rs. 11 lakhs, a citation, and a bronze replica of Vagdevi (Saraswati), the goddess of learning. It is sponsored by the cultural organization **Bharatiya Jnanpith**.

The Jnanpith Award was instituted in 1961 by **Sahu Shanti Prasad Jain family**, the publisher of the 'Times of India' newspaper. The first award was given in 1965. Until 1982, it was presented for a specific work; thereafter, it was given for a writer's overall contribution to literature. Since then, the award has typically been given every year to one author, although in some years it has been jointly offered to two.

SPORTS

CRICKET

Deodhar Trophy (Ranchi, 2019 November)

India-B - Winner

India-C - Runner

India - South Africa Test Series (Ranchi, 2019 November)

India - Winner

South Africa - Runner

CHESS

Tata Stell Rapid and Blitz Tournament (Kolkata, 2019 November)

Magnus Carlsen (Norway) - Winner

Hikaru Nakamura (USA) - Runner

TENNIS

Davis Cup (Madrid, 2019 November)

Spain - Winner

Canada - Runner

Paris Masters Title (Paris, 2019 November)

Noak Djokovic (Serbia) - Winner

Denis Shapovalov (Canada) - Runner

Fed Cup (Perth, 2019 November)

France - Winner

Australia - Runner

BADMINTON

Fuzhou China Open (China, 2019 November)

Men's Singles:

Kento Momota (Japan) - Winner

Chou Tien-chen (Taiwan) - Runner

Women's Singles:

Chen Yufei (China) - Winner

Nozomi Okuhara (Japan) - Runner

Men's Doubles:

Marcus Fernaldi Gideon and Kevin Sanjaya Sukamuljo - Winner

Takeshi Kamura and Keigo Sonoda - Runner

Women's Doubles:

Yuki Fukushima and Sayaka Hirota - Winner

Lee So Hee and Shin Seung Chan - Runner

Mixed Doubles:

Wang Yi Lyu and Huang Dong Ping - Winner

Zheng Si Wei and Huang Ya Qiong - Runner

Hong Kong Open (Hong Kong, 2019 November)

Men's Singles:

Lee Cheuk-yiu (Hong Kong) - Winner

Anthony Ginting (Indonesia) - Runner

Women's Singles:

Chen Yufei (China) - Winner

Ratchanok Intanon (Thailand) - Runner

Men's Doubles:

Choi SolGuu and Seo Seung Jae (South Korea) - Winner

Mohammad Ahsan and Hendra Setiwan - Runner

Women's doubles:

Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan (China) - Winner

Chang Ye-na and Kim Hye-rin (South Korea) - Runner

RUGBY

World Cup (Yokomama, Japan, 2019 November)

South Africa - Winner

England - Runner

FORMULA ONE

Brazilian Grand Prix (Sao Paulo, 2019 November)

Max Verstappen - Winner

Gasly - Runner

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