

*Samkalp Study Material  
For Private Circulation*

# **Current Affairs Ready Reckoner**

## **For CSE Mains 2019**

*Compiled and Edited by*

*Dr. G. Prasanna Kumar IAS (Retd.)*

*And*

*Samkalp Staff*

**Brought out by Samkalp**

**As Study Material**

**Samkalp Bhawan**

**Plot No. 15, Sector - IV, R. K. Puram, New Delhi – 110022**

**Ph: 011-26196651, 32922202**

**Website: [www.samkalp.org](http://www.samkalp.org) Email: [samkalp86@gmail.com](mailto:samkalp86@gmail.com)**

## Contents

<b>Section</b>	<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
	Preface	
1	Global Outlook	
2	National Events	
3	International Events	
4	Major Government of India Decisions	
5	Important Acts and Bills	
6	Landmark Judgments	
7	Current Issues	

## Preface

‘Current Affairs’ occupies an important part of the preparation for all three stages of the Civil Services Examination, namely prelims, mains and interview. This Ready Reckoner has been compiled keeping in view the requirements of the Civil Services Personality Test to be held in early 2019.

The Ready Reckoner has been compiled from published sources like newspapers, news magazines and the internet, including government websites and the Wikipedia. I would like to acknowledge these sources with gratitude. Efforts have been made to include all the important developments during the period from 1 January to 15 November 2018.

I am extremely grateful to Shri R.S. Gupta IPS (Retd.), President, Samkalp, for entrusting the work of compilation of this Ready Reckoner to me for the sixth year in succession and for his valuable guidance.

Dear candidates, the Ready Reckoner is at the most a checklist and supplements your own efforts. You should develop a deeper understanding of the important topics through further reading and web surfing. The Ready Reckoner is mostly factual in nature, but I have tried to include pros and cons of important current issues, without passing a judgement. I would advise you to ask more probing questions to yourselves and try to find answers. In the Personality test you will be expected to analyse the issues and give logical explanation of your viewpoint.

All possible care has been taken to verify the correctness of the facts from authentic sources. However, it is possible that some important items may have escaped my notice and some minor errors may have inadvertently crept in.

I wish every candidate success in the Personality Test and a bright future in the service of the nation.

Dr. G. Prasanna Kumar

## Global Outlook

### India Development March Update 2018

- The World Bank Group in March 2018 released India Development Update 2018: India's Growth Story.
- Indian economy is likely to recover from the impact of demonetization and the GST, and growth should revert slowly to a level consistent with its proximate factors—that is, to about 7.5 per cent a year. Reaching growth rates exceeding 8 per cent will require continued reform, and a widening of their scope, aimed at resolving issues related to credit and investment, and enhancing the competitiveness of India's exporting sector. Maintaining hard-won macroeconomic stability, providing a definite and durable solution to the cleaning up of banks' balance sheets, realizing GST's growth and fiscal dividend, and regaining momentum on the unfinished structural reform agenda will be key for realizing these rates of growth. Accelerating the growth rate will also require continued integration into the global economy. For the country to achieve middle class status by 2047 growth rates must be sustained above 8 per cent for multiple decades. This requires a reform focus on moving to a more resource efficient growth path, making growth more inclusive and enhancing the effectiveness of the Indian public sector.
- The states and the centre are playing an important collective role in the implementation of the reform agenda. There have been continuous efforts to improve the business environment, to ease inflows of foreign direct investment (FDI), and to improve the credit behaviour through the introduction and strengthening of an insolvency and bankruptcy framework. These reforms have been complemented by measures to widen access to financial services, promote digital payment systems, and the implementation of the historic GST code. The latter has harmonized the tax rates across states for goods and services, and has the potential to boost interstate trade, formalize the economy, and expand the tax base.
- The priority areas for reform are investment, bank credit, exports and leveraging external conditions.
- **Investment:** Adopting a “Maximizing Finance for Development” approach that evaluates the comparative advantages of private vs. public financing would be helpful. The approach would necessitate seeking an efficient mix of public and private resources to finance India's long-term investment needs.
- **Bank Credit:** The allocative and operational efficiency of the public-sector dominated Indian banking sector is considered to be low across sectors and regions. The implementation of the new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is an important step towards improving the credit behaviour. However, the policy may take time to be effective in cleaning the balance sheets. Several complementary avenues to improve the functioning of the sector need to be considered. Besides recapitalization, a consolidation of public sector banks, revising their incentive structure to align it more closely with their commercial performance, ensuring a level playing field for private banks, and opening the space for greater competition would be important measures to durably enhance the stability and efficiency of the banking sector.
- **Exports:** Significant improvement in the competitiveness of Indian firms is key to developing India's role as an exporter. Among the many preconditions for India to improve its competitiveness are an infrastructural boost to bring it on par with the world's current manufacturing hubs. In addition, reforms to land, labour and

financial markets would be needed to assure the continued competitive supply and use of key production inputs. Finally, building on recent improvements to its doing business ranking, India can benefit from further strengthening the competitive business environment.

- **Leveraging External Conditions:** The global financing conditions are expected to tighten due to a further normalization of monetary policy by the United States and other advanced economies, and may have implications for India's cost of financing and financial markets. Hence, enhancing resilience and efficiency in domestic financing conditions will be even more important. Given the benign prognosis of oil prices, a further large hike in oil prices and its fall out on the Indian economy is not perceived to be a major risk.

## **World Economic Outlook, April 2018, Update July 2018**

- Published by IMF twice a year.
- The upswing in global investment and trade continued in the second half of 2017. At 3.8 percent, global growth in 2017 was the fastest since 2011. With financial conditions still supportive, global growth is expected to tick up to a 3.9 percent rate in both 2018 and 2019. This was retained in the July update. Advanced economies will grow faster than potential this year and next; euro area economies are set to narrow excess capacity with support from accommodative monetary policy, and expansionary fiscal policy will drive the US economy above full employment. Aggregate growth in emerging market and developing economies is projected to firm further, with continued strong growth in emerging Asia and Europe and a modest upswing in commodity exporters after three years of weak performance.
- In the July update, growth projections have been revised down for Argentina, Brazil, and India, while the outlook for some oil exporters has strengthened.
- Economic activity in 2017 ended on a high note – growth in the second half of the year was above 4 percent, the strongest since the second half of 2010, supported by a recovery in investment. Outcomes exceeded the October 2017 World Economic Outlook forecasts in the euro area, Japan, the United States, and China, and continued to improve gradually in commodity exporters. Financial conditions remain supportive, despite the recent volatility in equity markets and increases in bond yields following signs of firming inflation in advanced economies. With broad-based momentum and expectations of a sizable fiscal expansion in the United States over this year and the next, global growth is now projected at 3.9 percent for 2018–19, a 0.2 percentage point upgrade for both years relative to the October 2017 forecast.
- Anxiety about technological change and globalization is on the rise and, when combined with wider trade imbalances, could foster a shift toward inward-looking policies, disrupting trade and investment. Recent import restrictions announced by the United States, retaliatory actions announced by China and potential retaliation by other countries raise concerns in this regard and threaten to damage global and domestic activity and sentiment. Similarly, changes in US tax policies are expected to exacerbate income polarization, which could affect the political climate for policy choices in the future. Climate change, geopolitical tensions, and cybersecurity breaches pose additional threats to the subdued medium-term global outlook.
- All countries have room for structural reforms and fiscal policies that raise productivity and enhance inclusiveness—for instance, by encouraging experimentation and diffusion of new technologies, increasing labour force

participation, supporting those displaced by structural change, and investing in the young to enhance their job opportunities.

- Monetary accommodation needs to continue where inflation is weak, but a well-communicated, data-dependent normalization should follow in countries where inflation looks set to return to the central bank's target. Fiscal policies should start rebuilding buffers where needed, incorporate supply-side measures to bolster potential output, and promote inclusiveness.
- Emerging market economies should keep monitoring exposures to foreign currency debt.
- Continued progress toward the 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals will require low-income developing countries to implement policies that strengthen their fiscal positions, boost financial resilience, reduce poverty, and make growth more inclusive.
- Maintaining financial and regulatory reform momentum and preserving an open, multilateral trade system should take priority.
- Growth in India is projected to increase from 6.7 percent in 2017 to 7.4 percent in 2018 and 7.8 percent in 2019, lifted by strong private consumption as well as fading transitory effects of the currency exchange initiative and implementation of the national goods and services tax. Over the medium term, growth is expected to gradually rise with continued implementation of structural reforms that raise productivity and incentivize private investment.
- In the July update, India's growth rate is expected to rise to 7.3 per cent in 2018 and 7.5 per cent in 2019.
- Growth in China is projected to moderate from 6.9 per cent in 2017 to 6.6 per cent in 2018 and 6.4 per cent in 2019, as regulatory tightening of the financial sector takes hold and external demand softens.
- The corporate debt overhang and associated banking sector credit quality concerns exert a drag on investment in India. The recapitalization plan for major public sector banks announced in 2017 will help replenish capital buffers and improve the banking sector's ability to support growth. However, recapitalization should be part of a broader package of financial reforms to improve the governance of public sector banks, and banks' debt recovery mechanisms should be further enhanced.
- India has made progress on structural reforms in the recent past, including through the implementation of the goods and services tax, which will help reduce internal barriers to trade, increase efficiency, and improve tax compliance. While the medium-term growth outlook for India is strong, an important challenge is to enhance inclusiveness. The main priorities for lifting constraints on job creation and ensuring that the demographic dividend is not wasted are to ease labour market rigidities, reduce infrastructure bottlenecks, and improve educational outcomes.

## **World Economic Situation and Prospects 2018**

- Published by Development Policy and Analysis Division (DPAD) of UN.
- At the global level, growth is expected to remain steady at 3.0 per cent in 2018 and 2019.
- The recent acceleration in world gross product growth stems predominantly from firmer growth in several developed economies, although East and South Asia remain the world's most dynamic regions.

- Improved conditions have supported a modest revival in productive investment in some large economies.
- A firmer and more broad-based rebound in investment activity, which is needed to support stronger productivity growth and accelerate progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, may be deterred by elevated levels of trade policy uncertainty, considerable uncertainties regarding the impact of balance sheet adjustment in major central banks, as well as rising debt and a build-up of longer-term financial fragilities.
- Recent course adjustments in major trade relationships, such as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland's decision to withdraw from the European Union and the United States of America's decisions to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement and to reassess the terms of its other existing trade agreements, have raised concerns over a potential escalation in trade barriers and disputes. These could be amplified if met by retaliatory measures by other countries.
- Renewables account for more than half of all recently installed power capacity, but still provide only about 11 per cent of global power generation.
- Despite the slowdown observed in early 2017 and the lingering effects from the demonetization policy, the outlook for India remains largely positive, underpinned by robust private consumption and public investment as well as ongoing structural reforms. Hence, GDP growth is projected to accelerate from 6.7 per cent in 2017 to 7.2 per cent in 2018 and 7.4 per cent in 2019.
- Credit growth remains moderately subdued across the South Asian region, particularly so in industrial sectors in India. In response, the Indian Government has implemented a range of policy measures to address the relatively elevated levels of non-performing loans, for instance through a large recapitalization plan for State-owned banks and by implementing new insolvency proceedings.

## **Doing Business 2019**

- The World Bank Group on 15 October 2018 released the report titled 'Doing Business 2019: Training for Reform'.
- Doing Business 2019 measures the processes for business incorporation, getting a building permit, obtaining an electricity connection, transferring property, getting access to credit, protecting minority investors, paying taxes, engaging in international trade, enforcing contracts and resolving insolvency.
- Of the 190 economies measured worldwide, India improved its position by 23 positions and moved to 77<sup>th</sup> position.
- India implemented 6 business regulation reforms in 2017/18 and has the 5<sup>th</sup> highest improvement in the Ease of Doing Business score.
- India made starting a business easier by fully integrating multiple application forms into a general incorporation form.
- India unified all sales taxes into one new tax called the Goods and Services Tax (GST).
- Under its National Trade Facilitation Action Plan 2017-2020, India implemented several initiatives that improved the efficiency of cross-border trade, reducing border and documentary compliance time for both exports and imports.
- Enhanced risk-based management now allows exporters to seal their containers electronically at their own facilities; as little as 5% of shipments must undergo physical inspections. India also invested in port equipment, strengthened

management and improved electronic document flow. By implementing the Single Window Clearance System in Delhi and the Online Building Permit Approval System in Mumbai during the second half of 2017.

- India also continued to streamline and centralize its construction permitting process. Regarding getting electricity, newly-adopted regulations from the Delhi Electricity Regulatory Commission require that electrical connections be completed within 15 days of the application's acceptance.

## **Global Competitiveness Report 2018**

- Published by World Economic Forum, a Swiss non-profit foundation committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas, on 16 October 2018.
- The Global Competitiveness Index 2018 presents a framework and a corresponding set of indicators in twelve policy domains (pillars) for 140 economies.
- The 12 pillars are: Institutions; Infrastructure; ICT adoption; Macroeconomic stability; Health; Skills; Product market; Labour market; Financial system; Market size; Business dynamism; and Innovation capability.
- Of the BRICS grouping of large emerging markets, China is the most competitive, ranking 28<sup>th</sup> and with a score of 72.6. It is followed by the Russian Federation, which is ranked 43<sup>rd</sup>. These are the only two in the top 50. Next is India, which ranks 58<sup>th</sup>, up five places from 2017: with a score of 62.0, it registers the largest gain of any country in the G20. India is followed by South Africa, which falls five places this year to 67<sup>th</sup>. Last is Brazil, which slips three places to 72<sup>nd</sup> place.
- India is a remarkable example of a country that has been able to accelerate on the pathway to innovation (where it now ranks 31<sup>st</sup>, with a score of 53.8), due, particularly, to the quality of its research institutions. In spite of a high degree of entrepreneurship (61.1, 23<sup>rd</sup>), business dynamism is hampered by administrative hurdles. While Indian companies can access the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest market in the world (which translates into a perfect mark of 100.0 on the Market size pillar), the country would benefit from increased trade openness (136<sup>th</sup>) to drive productivity growth. More investments will be necessary to spur innovation beyond hubs of excellence and diffuse economic growth more broadly. This includes continuing to widen the adoption of ICT technologies (28.0, 117<sup>th</sup>) and improving the quality and conditions of human capital across the country, taking advantage of an extremely young population. India currently ranks 108<sup>th</sup> on the Health pillar and 96<sup>th</sup> on the Skills pillar of the index.
- In terms of adoption of ICT, India is among the weakest performers, with a score of 28.0 (117<sup>th</sup>), despite its vibrant IT sector.

## **Trade and Development Report 2018**

- Published by UNCTAD in September 2018.
- Recent growth estimates have been lower than forecast and show some deceleration. Eurozone growth in the first quarter of 2018 is estimated to have decelerated relative to the previous quarter, and is now the slowest rate since the third quarter of 2016; in the United States, the annualized gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate for the first quarter has been revised downward, from 2.3 per cent to 2.0 per cent,

significantly lower than the previous three quarters; and growth in the first quarter in Japan turned negative.

- Developing economies are holding out better, with first quarter growth for 2018 beating expectations in China and India, but no improvement and even deceleration in Brazil and South Africa. The Russian Federation, like many other oil exporters, has seen the benefits of higher prices. Indeed, commodity exporting regions are generally enjoying the recovery in prices, albeit with some recent signs of a slowdown.
- The core concern is the continued strong dependence of tepid global growth on debt, in a context of shifting macroeconomic trends. By early 2018, global debt stocks had risen to nearly \$250 trillion –three times global income – from \$142 trillion a decade earlier. UNCTAD’s most recent estimate is that the ratio of global debt to GDP is now nearly one third higher than in 2008.
- Private debt has exploded, especially in emerging markets and developing countries, whose share of global debt stock increased from 7 per cent in 2007 to 26 per cent in 2017, while the ratio of credit to non-financial corporations to GDP in emerging market economies increased from 56 per cent in 2008 to 105 per cent in 2017.
- Recent events – beginning with the financial crisis, through the sluggish recovery that has followed, to the fake news and data privacy scandals now grabbing headlines – have forced policymakers to face the inequities and imbalances produced by this agenda. Governments have begun to acknowledge the need to fill regulatory deficits that harm the public, to provide stronger safety nets for those adversely affected by technological progress and to invest in the skills needed for a twenty-first century workforce. But so far, actions have spoken more softly than words.

## **Human Capital Index 2018**

- The World Bank published a Human Capital Index in October 2018.
- India ranks 115<sup>th</sup> out of 157 countries. That’s much below its Asian peers, including China ranked 46, Indonesia (87), Malaysia (55). Singapore was ranked number one in the world followed by Japan, Hong Kong and Finland.
- A child born in India today will be 44 percent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she enjoyed complete education and full health.
- 96 out of 100 children born in India survive to age 5.
- In India, a child who starts school at age 4 can expect to complete 10.2 years of school by her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday.
- In respect of Harmonized Test Scores, students in India score 355 on a scale where 625 represents advanced attainment and 300 represents minimum attainment.
- Factoring in what children actually learn, expected years of school is only 5.8 years.
- 38 out of 100 children are stunted, and so at risk of cognitive and physical limitations that can last a lifetime.
- Interestingly, the HCI for girls is higher than for boys in respect of all parameters.
- The government, however, expressed reservation over the report questioning its utility.
- “There are major methodological weaknesses, besides substantial data gaps. For instance, for the schooling parameter, though quantity is assessed using enrolment rates reported by UNESCO, quality is gauged using harmonized test scores from major international student achievement testing programs,” the union government said in a statement.

## **Global Environmental Performance Index**

- The Global Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is produced jointly by Yale University and Columbia University in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.
- India, which was ranked 141 out of total 180 countries on the EPI rankings in 2016, has slipped further to the 177<sup>th</sup> position in 2018. Failure to improve its air quality, protect biodiversity and cut greenhouse gas emissions has been cited as reason for placing the country at the bottom, according to the State of India's Environment (SoE) 2018, published by Centre for Science and Environment.
- India ranks 178 out of 180 as far as air quality is concerned.
- India's low scores are influenced by poor performance in the Environmental Health policy objective. Deaths attributed to PM2.5 have risen over the past decade and are estimated at 1,640,113, annually [Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2017].
- Despite government action, pollution from solid fuels, coal and crop residue burning, and emissions from motor vehicles continue to severely degrade the air quality for millions of Indians.

## **World Urbanization Prospects 2018 Revision**

- Published by Department of Economic & Social Affairs (DESA) of UN.
- 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050.
- Future increases in the size of the world's urban population are expected to be highly concentrated in just a few countries. Together, India, China and Nigeria will account for 35% of the projected growth of the world's urban population between 2018 and 2050. By 2050, it is projected that India will have added 416 million urban dwellers, China 255 million and Nigeria 189 million.
- Tokyo is the world's largest city with an agglomeration of 37 million inhabitants, followed by New Delhi with 29 million, Shanghai with 26 million, and Mexico City and São Paulo, each with around 22 million inhabitants. Today, Cairo, Mumbai, Beijing and Dhaka all have close to 20 million inhabitants. By 2020, Tokyo's population is projected to begin to decline, while Delhi is projected to continue growing and to become the most populous city in the world around 2028.

## National Events

### Economic Survey 2018

- The GDP growth rate for the fiscal year 2017-2018 is pegged at 6.75% by the Economic Survey report. The government, in its advance GDP estimate, had estimated a growth of 6.5%.
- In the fiscal year 2019, the Indian economy is expected to grow between 7% and 7.5%.
- On the implementation of the Goods and Service Tax (GST), the survey said that there has been a 50% increase in number of indirect taxpayers; Large increase in voluntary registrations; distribution of GST base closely linked to size of economies; strong correlation between export performance and state's standard of living and India's formal sector was found to be substantially greater than currently believed, the economic survey said.
- The level of tax filers by November 2017 was 31% greater. The economic survey said that it translated roughly into about 1.8 million additional taxpayers due to demonetization-cum-GST, representing 3% of existing taxpayers.
- In comparison to developed countries, India collects a lower share of direct taxes in total taxes. For example, in India, states generate 6% of their revenue from direct taxes, as compared to 19% in Brazil. Rural local governments, in India, raise 6% of their total revenue from direct taxes as compared to 40% in Brazil. Urban local governments raise 44% of their revenue from their own sources.
- India jumped 30 places and was ranked overall 100 in the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Report 2018. However, on contract enforcement it was ranked at 164. Although the government has taken steps to improve contract enforcement, economic activity is getting affected by high pendency and delays across the legal system. The backlog in High Courts by the end of 2017 was around 3.5 million cases. Delays of economic cases (company cases, arbitration cases and taxation cases) in courts are leading to stalled projects, legal costs, contested tax revenues, and consequently reduced investment. Delays in power, roads, and railways projects led to an increase in almost 60% of the project costs.
- India saw high levels of investment and saving rates in the mid 2000's followed by a pronounced, gradual decline, returning back to normal levels. The ratio of gross fixed capital formation to GDP was 26.5% in 2003, 35.6% in 2007 and 26.4% in 2017. The ratio of domestic saving to GDP, was 29.2% in 2003, 38.3% in 2007, and 29% in 2016. A fall in both private investment, and household, and government saving have contributed to such decline between 2007 and 2017.
- The data on rainfall, temperature, and crop production shows a long-term trend of rising temperature, declining average precipitation, and an increase in extreme precipitation events. The average decline in rainfall between 1970's and 2000's is 26 mm in Kharif season and 33 mm in Rabi season. This has significant implications on agriculture, especially in unirrigated areas. Such changes in temperature and precipitation will result in estimated overall farm income losses of 15% to 18%, and further, 20% to 25% for unirrigated areas.
- The Agriculture growth in 2017-18 likely to be at 2.1%, while the Industry growth is likely to be 4.4%.
- Services growth for 2017-18 likely to be at 8.3% and the country's economy should witness improvement in next fiscal year.

- The share of real estate sector (including ownership of dwellings) accounted for 7.7% of India's overall GVA in 2015-16. Real estate and construction together are the second largest providers of employment. As per projections, it is estimated to employ 52 million by 2017, and 67 million by 2022.
- The IBC resolution process could prove a valuable technology for tackling this long-standing problem in the Indian corporate sector.
- The apparel sector has immense potential to drive economic growth, increase employment, and empower women in India. This is especially true as China's share of global apparel exports has come down in recent years. However, India has not, or not yet, capitalized on this opening.
- In the last three fiscal years, India experienced a positive term of trade shock. But in the first three quarters of 2017-18, oil prices have been about 16 per cent greater in dollar terms than in the previous year. It is estimated that a \$10 per barrel increase in the price of oil reduces growth by 0.2-0.3 percentage points, increases WPI inflation by about 1.7 percentage points and worsens the CAD by about \$9-10 billion dollars. Economic Survey calls for "policy vigilance" in coming year if high oil prices persist or stock prices correct sharply.
- The Headline inflation has been below 4 per cent for twelve straight months, from November, 2016 to October, 2017 and CPI food inflation averaged around one per cent during April-December in the current financial year. The Survey observes that the economy has witnessed a gradual transition from a period of high and variable inflation to more stable prices in the last four years.
- Current account deficit expected to average 1.5-2% of the GDP during 2017-18, while export growth is pegged at 12.1%.
- The survey said that India will need \$4.5 trillion investment in infrastructure by 2040.

### **Key Features of Union Budget 2018-2019**

- Expenditure: The government proposes to spend ₹24,42,213 crore in 2018-19, which is 10.1% above the revised estimate of 2017-18.
- Receipts: The receipts (other than net borrowings) are expected to increase by 12% to ₹18,17,937 crore, owing to higher estimated revenue from the goods and services tax and income tax.
- GDP growth: The government has assumed a nominal GDP growth rate of 11.5% (i.e., real growth plus inflation) in 2018-19. The nominal growth estimate for 2017-18 was 11.75%.
- Deficits: Revenue deficit is targeted at 2.2% of GDP, which is lower than 2.6% in the revised estimate of 2017-18. Fiscal deficit is targeted at 3.3% of GDP, lower than the revised estimate of 3.5% in 2017-18. Note that during the year, the government breached its budgeted target for both fiscal deficit (3.2%), and revenue deficit (1.9%).
- Agriculture: Currently, the Minimum Support Price for Rabi crops has been 1.5 times their cost. This is proposed to be extended to Kharif crops as well. This move will facilitate the objective of doubling farmers' income by 2022.
- Operation Greens will be launched on the lines of Operation Flood. It aims to promote farmer producers organisations, agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management. The operation aims to aid farmers and help control and limit the erratic fluctuations in the prices of onions, potatoes and tomatoes.

- In an effort to make the villages open defecation free and improving the lives of villagers, the Finance Minister announced the launch of Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan (GOBAR-DHAN). This will manage and convert cattle dung and solid waste in farms to compost, bio-gas and bio-CNG.
- Health: The National Health Protection Scheme will be launched to cover over 10 crore poor families, with a coverage up to ₹5 lakh per family per year.
- Education: A new scheme called 'Revitalising Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE) by 2022' will be launched, with a total investment of ₹1,00,000 crore in the next four years. This aims to promote investments in research and related infrastructure in premier educational and health institutions.
- By 2022, every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons will have an Ekalavya Model Residential School.
- Employee Provident Fund: Amendments will be made to the Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952 in due course to reduce the contribution of women employees to the Employee Provident Fund. This reduced contribution of 8% will be applicable for the first three years of their employment, as compared to the existing rate of 12% or 10% as applicable.

### **Karnataka to have separate State Flag**

- Karnataka government, on 8 March 2018, took a historic decision to have separate State flag.
- If Centre agrees to the proposal, Karnataka will be second state in the country to have a separate State flag, after Jammu and Kashmir. J&K has a special status under the Constitution.
- Under the Constitution, a flag is not enumerated in the Seventh Schedule. However, Article 51A ordains that every citizen shall abide by the Constitution and respect its ideals and institutions, the national flag, and the national anthem. There is no other provision regulating hoisting of flags, either by the States or by the public. It is clear that there is no prohibition under the Constitution to hoist any flag other than the national flag.
- The Flag Code of India, 2002 does not impose prohibitions on a State flag. On the contrary, in the provisions regarding hoisting of the national flag by the general public, private organizations, educational institutions, etc., the Code expressly authorizes the flying of other flags under the condition that they should not be hoisted from the same masthead as the national flag or placed higher than it.
- The Army, Navy, Air Force, and paramilitary forces have separate flags. They use these regularly in all their official functions, in national parades, and on Republic Day.

### **India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) Project**

- Multi-institutional effort aimed at building a world-class underground laboratory with a rock cover of approx.1200 m for non-accelerator based high energy and nuclear physics research in India.
- The project includes
- (a) construction of an underground laboratory and associated surface facilities at Pottipuram in Bodi West hills of Theni District of Tamil Nadu,

- (b) construction of a Iron Calorimeter (ICAL) detector for studying neutrinos, consisting of 50000 tons of magnetized iron plates arranged in stacks with gaps in between where Resistive Plate Chambers (RPCs) would be inserted as active detectors, the total number of 2m X 2m RPCs being around 29000, and (c) setting up of National Centre for High Energy Physics at Madurai, for the operation and maintenance of the underground laboratory, human resource development and detector R&D along with its applications. The underground laboratory, consisting of a large cavern of size 132m X 26m X 20m and several smaller caverns, will be accessed by a 2100 m long and 7.5 m wide tunnel.
- The initial goal of INO is to study neutrinos. Neutrinos are fundamental particles belonging to the lepton family. They come in three flavours, one associated with electrons and the others with their heavier cousins the muon and the Tau. According to standard model of particle physics, they are mass less. However recent experiments indicate that these charge-neutral fundamental particles, have finite but small mass which is unknown. They oscillate between flavours as they propagate. Determination of neutrino masses and mixing parameters is one of the most important open problems in physics today. The ICAL detector is designed to address some of these key open problems in a unique way. Over the years this underground facility is expected to develop into a full-fledged underground science laboratory for other studies in physics, biology, geology, hydrology etc.
- On 20 February 2015, the southern bench of National Green Tribunal issued notices to the central and state governments on a petition challenging the environmental clearance granted to the INO project.
- On 19 March 2018, Ministry of Environment overturned the NGT verdict as a special case. The approval is only conditional and it needs the consent of the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board and the National Board for Wildlife.

### **RBI switches back from GVA to GDP**

- The Reserve Bank on 5 April 2018 switched back to the gross domestic product (GDP)-based measure to offer its growth estimates from the gross value added (GVA) methodology, citing global best practices.
- Government had started analysing growth estimates using GVA methodology from January 2015 and had also changed the base year to 2018 from January 2018.
- While GVA gives a picture of the state of economic activity from the producers' side or supply side, the GDP model gives the picture from the consumers' side or demand perspective.
- Globally, the performance of most economies is gauged in terms of GDP. This is also the approach followed by multilateral institutions, international analysts and investors, and primarily they all stick to these norms because it facilitates easy cross-country comparisons.
- $GVA + \text{taxes on products} - \text{subsidies on products} = GDP$ .

### **Law Commission recommends BCCI to be a Public Body**

- The Law Commission of India on 18 April 2018 recommended the central government to include the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) along with its constituent member cricketing associations under the Right to Information (RTI) law regime.

- BCCI ought to be classified as ‘state’ within the meaning of Article 12 of the Constitution.
- When all other national sport federations are covered under RTI Act, why not BCCI?
- BCCI’s monopolistic activities, directly and indirectly, affect the fundamental rights of citizens, players, and other functionaries.
- The BCCI has enjoyed tax exemptions of “thousands of crores”, the report said. “To be precise, between 1997 and 2007, the total tax exemption amounted to ₹ 21,683,237,489/- (Twenty-one billion six hundred eighty-three million two hundred thirty-seven thousand four hundred eighty-nine).
- It would follow that the body/entity receiving such benefits would be a ‘public authority’, even though it may be a private, non-statutory or non-government body.
- If this recommendation is accepted, anyone can file PILs in the SC or HCs questioning the selection of players representing India, states and zones. PILs could also question the agreements signed by BCCI with other cricket playing nations and the International Cricket Council.
- In its July 2016 judgment, the SC had asked the commission to examine the legal framework to bring BCCI under the RTI Act.

### **Prompt Corrective Action of RBI on Public Sector Banks**

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in May 2014 issued and revised effective from April 2017 a Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework to maintain sound financial health of banks.
- It facilitates banks in breach of risk thresholds for identified areas of monitoring, viz., capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR), asset quality (which is tracked in terms of the net Non-Performing Assets ratio) and profitability measured in terms of Return on Assets (RoA), to take corrective measures in a timely manner, in order to restore their financial health.
- PCA will be invoked when the Bank’s financial conditions worsen below certain limits (trigger points).
- Thus, it is intended to encourage banks to eschew certain riskier activities, improve operational efficiency and focus on conserving capital to strengthen them.
- The framework is not intended to constrain the performance of normal operations of the banks for the general public.
- RBI has placed eleven PSBs, viz., Dena Bank, Central Bank of India, Bank of Maharashtra, UCO Bank, IDBI Bank, Oriental Bank of Commerce, Indian Overseas Bank, Corporation Bank, Bank of India, Allahabad Bank and United Bank of India under the PCA framework.
- According to Financial Stability Report June 2018 issued by RBI, SCBs’ Gross NPA ratio (which was 10.2 per cent in September 2017) may rise from 11.6 per cent in March 2018 to 12.2 per cent by March 2019. The system level capital to risk-weighted assets ratio (CRAR) may come down from 13.5 per cent to 12.8 per cent during the period.
- Macro-stress tests on public sector banks under PCA framework suggest worsening of their GNPA ratio from 21.0 per cent in March 2018 to 22.3 per cent by March 2019, with 6 PCA PSBs likely experiencing capital shortfall. They may have CRAR below the minimum regulatory level of 9 per cent by March 2019.

- The entire thrust of the current PCA framework is to prevent further capital erosion and more importantly, to strengthen the PCA PSBs to the point of resilience so that they can restart their normal operations as soon as possible.

### **Merger of Three Public Sector Banks**

- Finance Minister Arun Jaitley announced on 17 September 2018 the start of a process which will lead to the amalgamation of three public sector banks: Bank of Baroda, Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank.
- Once the process is complete it will lead to a bank with a combined business of Rs. 14.82 trillion, which will make it the third largest in India.
- Amalgamating a weak Dena Bank with stronger banks will lead to the new entity having better financial parameters and, thereby, enhances incremental credit flows.
- At the same time, this amalgamation and perhaps others ahead will mitigate the pressure on government to set aside money to meet recapitalisation needs of Basel III norms.

### **Public Credit Registry**

- Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on 6 June 2018 announced that it would set up, in a modular and phased manner, a Public Credit Registry (PCR), an information repository that collates all loan information of individuals and corporate borrowers.
- A credit repository will help banks distinguish between a bad and a good borrower and accordingly offer attractive interest rates to good borrowers and higher interest rates to bad borrowers.
- PCR can address the bad loans problem facing the banking system, as corporate borrowers will not be able to borrow from multiple banks without disclosing their existing debt.
- While the privacy of data will be protected, data would be available to stakeholders like banks on a need-to-know basis.

### **Cauvery Water Management Authority**

- Three days after the Karnataka Assembly election results and three months after the Supreme Court's order, the Union government on 1 June 2018 issued a notification for the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA).
- The authority will decide the sharing of the river water among the States of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.
- The authority's mandate will be to monitor the storage, apportion shares, supervise operation of reservoirs and regulate water releases with the assistance of the Regulation Committee. It will regulate water release by Karnataka at the Biligundulu gauge and discharge station.
- The CWMA will determine the total residual storage in the specified reservoirs on June 1 every year. "The share of each State will be determined on the basis of the flows together with the available carry-over storage in the reservoirs," the notification says.
- The withdrawals will be allowed on the basis of the share worked out for each State.
- If the Authority finds that any Government of the party States do not cooperate in implementing the decision or direction of the Tribunal, it can seek the help of the

Central Government for implementation of the Award of the Tribunal as modified by the Supreme Court vide Order of 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2018.

- On 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2018, the apex court had directed the government to form the CMA within six weeks in a verdict that marginally increased Karnataka's share of Cauvery water and reduced the allocation for Tamil Nadu.

## **Nipah Virus Outbreak in Kerala**

- Nipah virus was first detected during a major infectious disease outbreak in Malaysia in 1998-89 and the virus was named after the Sungai Nipah village on the banks of Nipah River in Malaysia.
- Nipah virus belongs to a genus of paramyxoviruses (Henipavirus), including the highly pathogenic Hendra virus found in Australia that can cause acute respiratory distress and encephalitis with mortality rates in excess of 70%.
- Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala was first alerted when three members of a family, two brothers (age 26 and 28) and their aunt (age 50), died on May 5<sup>th</sup>, May 18<sup>th</sup>, and May 19<sup>th</sup>, 2018 respectively, in a private hospital in Kozhikode district. They died with signs of viral encephalitis. Laboratory testing was initially conducted at the Manipal Centre for Viral Research using blood and fluid samples from this patient. The etiologic cause of their death due to Nipah virus encephalitis was confirmed by the National Institute of Virology in Pune.
- The outbreak was localized in Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala and claimed 17 lives.
- India has a poor record of outbreak investigations. About 10,000 people develop encephalitis-like symptoms each year but never get a diagnosis. Some regions, such as Uttar Pradesh's Gorakhpur and Bihar's Muzaffarpur, saw thousands of deaths in repeated annual outbreaks before the causes were established. On the other hand, the discovery of an exotic pathogen in the very second patient hit by an outbreak, and immediate response from the state health department helped in controlling the Nipah outbreak in a month's time and earned kudos from WHO and other agencies.
- Human-to-human transmission requires intimate contact with high levels of bodily secretions (respiratory secretions, saliva, urine, etc.). The risk of wide-spread transmission is therefore low.
- The question of how the patients contracted the virus remains a mystery, given that the only other Indian outbreaks have happened in West Bengal. But the strongest suspects now are Kozhikode's large fruit bat populations. The species were found to be carriers of the Nipah virus in both Malaysia and Bangladesh.
- The outbreak was contained and declared over on June 10, 2018.

## **Teen Murti-Haifa**

- The iconic Teen Murti Chowk of New Delhi has been renamed after the Israeli City Haifa. The announcement comes after the scheduled visit of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to India in January 2018.
- The Israeli city of Haifa was liberated from Ottoman occupation by Indian soldiers in the Battle of Haifa in 1918, during World War I.
- The three statues that is the focal point of the Teen Murti Chowk, often misinterpreted as having connections with Mahatma Gandhi, are in fact a symbol of tribute to three famous Indian state forces of Hyderabad, Mysore and Jodhpur, who

were part of the British imperial service cavalry brigade during the First World War, and had played a crucial role in overcoming Ottoman rule in Israel.

- A total of 44 Indian soldiers from the three princely states died during the liberation of Haifa.
- The battle to conquer Haifa is commemorated every year on September 23 as Haifa Day in Israel and special homage is paid to the Indian soldiers without whom the modern state of Israel may never have come into existence.

## **Gaganyaan**

- In the Independence Day address on 15 August 2018 from the Red Fort, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced that an Indian will go to space by 2022.
- Gaganyaan is an Indian crewed orbital spacecraft intended to be the basis of the Indian Human Spaceflight Programme. The spacecraft is being designed to carry three people, and a planned upgraded version will be equipped with rendezvous and docking capability.
- In its maiden crewed mission, Indian Space Research Organisation's largely autonomous 3.7-tonne capsule will orbit the Earth at 400 km altitude for up to seven days with a three-person crew on board.
- The crewed vehicle is planned to be launched on ISRO's GSLV Mk III in 2022. About 16 minutes after liftoff from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, the rocket will inject the spacecraft into an orbit 300–400 km above Earth. The capsule would return for a splashdown in the Bay of Bengal.
- This HAL manufactured crew module had its first uncrewed experimental flight on 18 December 2014.
- If the mission succeeds, India will become fourth nation in the world to send astronaut into space after USA, Russia and China.

## **Floods in Kerala**

- Since May 2018, unusually high levels of rain (256% more than the usual rain fall on August 8) took over the state of Kerala. The devastation that ensued resembled that of the 1924 floods.
- The devastation intensified by the middle of August. As of August 30, the final death toll stood at 483, with 15 people missing.
- At least a million people were evacuated, mainly from Pathanamthitta and Ernakulam districts. All 14 districts of the state were placed on red alert.
- According to the Kerala government, one-sixth of the total population of Kerala had been directly affected by the floods and related incidents.
- Thirty-five out of the fifty-four dams within the state were opened for the first time in history.
- The Government of India declared it a Level 3 Calamity, or “calamity of a severe nature”.
- The existing guidelines of State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF)/ National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF), do not contemplate declaring a disaster as a ‘National Calamity’.
- Voices were raised against Govt. of India's refusal to accept a \$100 million offer of aid to Kerala from the UAE Government. However, there was no formal announcement by the UAE Government.

- There is a provision in the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP) to accept foreign assistance, but the government has been following the policy on disaster aid decided in 2004, when then PM Manmohan Singh said, “We feel that we can cope with the situation on our own and we will take their help if needed.”
- The idea that India had become a large economy, and that accepting small aid moneys from countries was not in keeping with the times, had taken root during Atal Bihari Vajpayee’s first full term in office as Prime Minister.

### **Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS)**

- Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on September 17, 2018 launched two pilot projects, each covering a 5.5 km-border stretch in Jammu, under CIBMS.
- The CIBMS is a more robust and integrated system that is capable of addressing the gaps in the present system of border security by seamlessly integrating human resources, weapons, and high-tech surveillance equipment.
- It has three main components: a) new high-tech surveillance devices such as sensors, detectors, cameras, ground-based radar systems, micro-aerostats, lasers as well as existing equipment for round-the-clock surveillance of the international border; b) an efficient and dedicated communication network including fibre optic cables and satellite communication for transmitting data gathered by these diverse high-tech surveillance and detection devices; and c) a command and control centre to which the data will be transmitted in order to apprise the senior commanders about the happenings on the ground and thus providing a composite picture of the international border.

### **IL&FS Restructuring**

- IL&FS Ltd, or Infrastructure Leasing & Finance Services, is a core investment company and serves as the holding company of the IL&FS Group, with most business operations domiciled in separate companies which form an ecosystem of expertise across infrastructure, finance and social and environmental services.
- IL&FS Financial Services, a group company, defaulted in payment obligations of bank loans (including interest), term and short-term deposits and failed to meet the commercial paper redemption obligations due on September 14, 2018. On September 15, the company reported that it had received notices for delays and defaults in servicing some of the inter corporate deposits accepted by it. Consequent to defaults, rating agency ICRA downgraded the ratings of its short-term and long-term borrowing programmes. The defaults also jeopardised hundreds of investors, banks and mutual funds associated with IL&FS. The defaults sparked panic among equity investors even as several non-banking financial companies faced turmoil amid a default scare.
- The board of the cash strapped IL&FS met on 22 September 2018 to approve a resolution plan and discuss strategies for the company to raise funds to tide over the cash crunch.
- At the emergency meeting, IL&FS’s largest shareholder, LIC, which holds 25.34 per cent, is believed to have agreed to subscribe to the forthcoming rights issue and extend some immediate working capital loan.
- The annual general meeting of shareholders of IL&FS on September 29 had approved a rights issue of Rs. 4,500 crore and a debenture issue of Rs. 15,000 crore.

- Government of India was concerned that the Company would not be able to raise such capital when it was defaulting regularly and the same set of people responsible for the mismanagement continued to be in charge.
- On 1<sup>st</sup> Oct, 2018, the Government of India took steps to take control of the company and arrest spread of the contagion to the financial markets. A new board was constituted as the earlier board was deemed to have failed to discharge its duties. The new board consists of Uday Kotak, MD & CEO, Kotak Mahindra Bank and 5 others.

### **GSI's candidates for UNESCO Global Geopark Network status**

- Lonar Lake in Buldhana district, Maharashtra and St. Mary's Island and Malpe beach in Udupi, Karnataka are the Geological Survey of India's candidates for UNESCO Global Geopark Network status.
- An aspiring Global Geopark must have a dedicated website, a corporate identity, comprehensive management plan, protection plans, finance, and partnerships for it to be accepted. In mid-August, 2018, GSI moved ahead with the plan, setting a follow-up time frame of 100 days.
- St. Mary's Island, declared a national geo-heritage site in 1975, is estimated to be an 88-million-year-old formation that goes back to a time when Greater India broke away from Madagascar.
- Lonar crater became a geo-heritage site in 1979. It is relatively young geologically, at just 50,000 years old. A meteorite estimated to weigh two-million-tonnes slammed into the Earth, creating a 1.83-km diameter crater where the lake formed. It is distinguished by a near-perfect, circular ejecta blanket, which refers to earth thrown up during the collision, around it.

### **Sardar Patel Statue**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 31 October 2018 inaugurated a 182-metre statue of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel overlooking the Narmada river in Gujarat as a tribute to the country's 'Iron Man'.
- The Prime Minister recalled Patel's contribution in unifying the country after independence as he brought more than 500 princely states on a common platform to join the Union of India.
- Built at a cost of Rs. 2,989 crore, the 'Statue of Unity' is the world's tallest, given that it exceeds the height of China's Spring Temple Buddha by 177 feet.
- It was built by Indian construction major Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in 33 months. The statue was designed by Padma Bhushan-winning sculptor Ram V Sutar.

### **World's Largest Dome in Pune**

- Vice President Venkaiah Naidu inaugurated the world's largest dome and Peace Centre at the Maharashtra Institute of Technology, Vishwarajbaug, in Pune on 2 October 2018.
- The imposing monumental dome, clad in the finest marble, is the vision of Dr. Vishwanath Karad, founder-president and director general of the World Peace Centre0, MIT-Pune and MIT World Peace University.

- Karad has over the last 13 years painstakingly created the philosopher saint Shri Dnyaneshwara World Peace Prayer Hall and Library at the 62,500 sq. ft. monument at the Vishwarajbaug campus of MIT under the world's largest dome with a diameter of 160 feet, standing taller than the Vatican Dome, which has a diameter of 139.6 feet. The height of the dome at its apex is 263 feet.

### **Jal Marg Vikas Project**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 12 November 2018 inaugurated India's first multi-modal terminal on the Ganga river in Varanasi and received the country's first container cargo transported on inland waterways from Kolkata.
- This is the first of the four multi-modal terminals being constructed on the National Waterway-1 (River Ganga) as part of the World Bank-aided 'Jal Marg Vikas Project' of the Inland Waterways Authority of India. The total estimated cost of the project is Rs. 5,369.18 crore, which will be equally shared between the Government of India and the World Bank.
- The Jal Marg Vikas Project aims at developing the stretch of the river between Varanasi and Haldia for navigation of large vessels weighing up to 2,000 tonnes.
- Its objective is to promote inland waterways as a cheap and an environment-friendly means of transportation, especially for cargo movement. The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is the project implementing agency.

### **Bilaspur-Manali-Leh Railway Line**

- India railways in October 2018 announced its plan to link New Delhi and Ladakh by means of a railway line that will run along the India-China Border.
- The proposed Bilaspur-Manali-Leh Line would be the world's highest railway line once launched.
- The total expected length of Bilaspur-Manali-Leh line is 498 km, to be built at a cost of Rs. 83,360 crore, and will include India's first underground railway station in Keylong.
- At 5,360 meters above sea level, it would become the highest railway track in the world, overtaking the current record of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway.
- The line is strategically important and will provide all-weather surface connectivity to far-flung areas of Ladakh region. It will also boost tourist inflow, which will be beneficial for local population. Travel time from Delhi to Leh will reduce by half.

### **Digi Yatra**

- The Government on 4 October 2018 unveiled the Digi Yatra initiative under which the flyers can soon use facial recognition technology to enter the airport.
- With this initiative, the civil aviation ministry is looking to make ticket booking, airport entry and boarding pass security check-in digital. The technology will soon be operational at Bengaluru and Hyderabad airports. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) plans to roll out the initiative at Kolkata, Varanasi, Pune and Vijayawada airports by April next year.
- The initiative involves generation of Digi Yatra ID at the time of booking, a one-time facial verification at the departure terminal during his/her first travel, optional

linking of Aadhaar to airlines at the time of booking and a biometrics-based digital processing system for passenger entry and related requirements at the airport.

- The initiative would reduce the waiting time at airports and may lead to reduction in overall cost burden and ultimately to less fare.

### **65<sup>th</sup> National Film Awards**

- Dada Saheb Phalke Award: Vinod Khanna (Posthumous)
- Best Feature Film: 'Village Rockstars' (Assamese)
- Best Director: Jayaraj for 'Bhayanakam' (Malayalam)
- Best Actor: Riddhi Sen for 'Nagar Kirtan' (Bengali)
- Best Actress: Sridevi for 'Mom' (Hindi)

## **International Events**

### **India – Palestine Relations**

- India was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Palestine in 1988. In 1996, India opened its Representative Office to the Palestine Authority in Gaza, which later was shifted to Ramallah in 2003.
- A few weeks after his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, visited India, in February 2018 Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel.
- Modi reiterated India's support for the Palestinian cause, saying it "hopes that Palestine soon becomes a sovereign and independent country in a peaceful atmosphere".
- Both sides also signed a number of agreements for India-funded projects in the West Bank. India's policy objective is clear and rooted in political realism. It wants to maintain the balance in its relationship with both Palestine and Israel, and strengthen bilateral ties with each separately.
- Israel is a source of defence equipment and agricultural technology. But Israel also faces political isolation internationally over its occupation of the Palestinian territories and does not have diplomatic ties with most countries in West Asia. As reflected in the UNGA vote, international public opinion is overwhelmingly against the occupation. India, which has vital interests in the Gulf and enjoys good ties with the region's Muslim countries, cannot afford to be seen to be politically closer to Israel at the expense of ties with Palestinians.
- Traditionally, India has supported the creation of an independent Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Modi carefully avoided any reference to the borders or to the capital.
- Late last year India had voted along with a vast majority of member-states at the UN General Assembly against U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

### **India – Iran Relations**

- On 18 February 2018, during the visit of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to New Delhi, the two countries signed nine agreements, including a lease contract which will allow an Indian company to take over for 18 months operational control of facilities at Shahid Beheshti Port in Chabahar.
- Another important agreement signed was the one for Avoidance of Double Taxation and Prevention of Fiscal Evasion.
- Another major development during the exchange of agreements and MoUs was the ratification of the 2008 extradition treaty between the two countries.
- Iran is India's third-largest oil supplier after Iraq and Saudi Arabia.
- The US has told India and other countries to cut oil imports from Iran to "zero" by November 4 or face sanctions. The Trump administration brought back sanctions against Iran after pulling out the US from the Iran nuclear deal.
- The then US Ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, was in India in June 2018 and in her meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged on cutting oil imports, but was politely told that it would be difficult for India to make any significant cut. India shall be unwilling to bend under the US pressure, as its relations with Iran range

from the energy trade to connectivity projects, particularly the development of Chabahar Port, and cutting trade between the two countries could hurt India's long-term interests.

- If it rejects U.S. pressure, it risks sanctions as well as incurring the displeasure of its all-powerful friend and defence partner. If it yields, it risks its relationship with traditional partner Iran, access to important trade routes through Chabahar and the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC), as well as its international reputation.
- Supporting Trump's call to stop oil import shall not only violate the February 18 agreement but could push Iran away from India and would damage its agreement on the Chabahar Port. China is in multiple conflicts with the US and the largest purchaser of oil from Iran is unlikely to accede to the US requests. If India succumbs to Trump's demands, it would almost mean gifting the Chabahar Port to China.
- The US announced on 6 November 2018 that it has provided for an "exception" from certain sanctions to the Iranian port of Chabahar that India has developed and used for reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan.
- This exemption is in addition to "temporary allotments" — Significant Reduction Exemptions — from sanctions that the United States announced for India, China and six other major importers of Iranian crude oil on 5 November, when the second and final round of sanctions went into effect fully.

## **India-Russia Defence Deal**

- Russian President Vladimir Putin visited India in October 2018 and the two countries signed a \$5 billion deal for the Russian S-400 Triumf missile shield systems at the summit talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Putin on 6 October.
- The Russian-built S-400 Triumf — identified by NATO as the SA-21 Growler — is the world's most dangerous operationally deployed modern long-range surface-to-air missile system, and is considered much more effective than the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system developed by the US. The S-400 is a mobile system that integrates a multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, launchers, and a command and control centre. It can be deployed within five minutes, and is capable of firing three types of missiles to create a layered defence. It can engage all types of aerial targets including aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, and ballistic and cruise missiles within a range of 400 km, at an altitude up to 30 km. It can simultaneously track 100 airborne targets, including super fighters such as the US-built F-35, and engage six of them at the same time.
- It is important for India to have the capability to thwart missile attacks from the two likeliest quarters, Pakistan and China. Beijing signed a deal with Moscow in 2015 to buy six battalions of the S-400 system, and deliveries began in January 2018.
- In August 2017, President Donald Trump signed into law the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), which specifically targets Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Almost all major Russian defence manufacturing and export companies/entities including Almaz-Antey Air and Space Defence Corporation JSC, the manufacturers of the S-400 system, are on the sanctions list.
- In July 2018, the US communicated that it was ready to grant India (along with Indonesia and Vietnam) a waiver on the CAATSA sanctions.

## **India admitted to Wassenaar Arrangement**

- After its entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime in June 2016, India was on 7 December 2017 admitted as the 42<sup>nd</sup> member of the Wassenaar Arrangement – a global grouping that regulates transfer and access to conventional weapons and dual-use technologies.
- India's membership (in Wassenaar Arrangement) is expected to facilitate high technology tie-ups with Indian industry and ease access to high tech items for our defence and space programmes. The membership would create the grounds for realignment of India in the export control policy framework or other WA members, including eligibility for certain licensing exemptions.
- India still has to apply for licences for high-tech and dual-use exports, but from now, that process is expected to get easier. This is the second of four non-proliferation regimes India has joined after the India-US nuclear deal was cleared.
- The important aspect of three out of the four regimes is that China is not a member of them except for the NSG.

## **India joins Australia Group**

- After joining MTCR and Wassenaar Arrangement, on 19 January 2018 India formally became the 43<sup>rd</sup> member of the Australia Group (AG).
- AG is a cooperative and voluntary group of countries working to counter the spread of materials, equipment and technologies that could contribute to the development or acquisition of chemical and biological weapons (CBW) by states or terrorist groups.
- India could leverage its membership to MTCR, WA and AG for a deal on China's membership to these groups and India's own entry to the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). China has applied for membership to MTCR but has been kept out because of its strong history of proliferation.
- As far as membership of NSG is concerned, there is stiff opposition from China.

## **BRICS Summit 2018**

- The tenth annual BRICS summit, attended by the heads of state or heads of government of the five member states Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, was held in Johannesburg, South Africa from 25 to 27 July 2018.
- The Presidents of Argentina and Turkey were guests.
- The BRICS leaders have used the summit to reject the growing unilateralism and instead reiterate their commitment to the strengthening of multilateral institutions, calling for stronger intra-trade within member states.
- The leaders reaffirmed their commitment to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to provide equitable, inclusive, open, all-round innovation-driven and sustainable development, in its three dimensions — economic, social and environmental — in a balanced and integrated manner, towards the ultimate goal of eradicating poverty by 2030.
- The 'Johannesburg Declaration' also reiterated the commitment of the member countries towards cooperation in the fields of climate change, energy, agriculture and trade.

- They called for expeditious finalisation and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) by the United Nations General Assembly.
- They also supported an independent, viable, territorially contiguous Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security with Israel.

### **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**

- Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six Asia-Pacific states with which ASEAN has existing free trade agreements (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. The free trade agreement is scheduled and expected to be signed in November 2018 during the ASEAN Summit and Related Summit in Singapore, after the first RCEP summit was held on 14 November 2017 in Manila, Philippines. RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a proposed trade agreement which includes several Asian and American nations but excludes China and India.
- When finalized, RCEP will form the world's largest trading bloc.
- RCEP has the potential to deliver significant opportunities for businesses in the East Asia region, given the fact that the 16 RCEP participating countries account for almost half of the world's population; contribute about 30 per cent of global GDP and over a quarter of world exports. RCEP will provide a framework aimed at lowering trade barriers and securing improved market access for goods and services for businesses in the region.
- While the India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement was inked and enforced from January 1, 2010, India's goods trade deficit with ASEAN widened from \$4.98 billion in 2010-11 to \$14.75 billion in 2015-16, and then narrowed to \$9.56 billion in 2016-17. The huge goods trade deficit has led to questions on whether the pact is only helping ASEAN nations and not benefiting India. India wants a services pact to be included in the agreement.
- There are also concerns of the members including India, over agreeing to give greater market access to Chinese goods without gaining similarly in return.
- A large part of RCEP negotiations have focused on agreeing upon a common schedule of items for eliminating tariffs among members. Reaching an agreement has not yet been possible.
- Lately, spirits in the region have been lifted by India's decision to mark '2018' as the year of its deepening engagement with Southeast Asia and the coming of age of Prime Minister Modi's 'Act East' policy.

### **Paradise Papers**

- A massive trove of secret financial data was leaked by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) in November 2017. The financial data on how big corporates and ultra-rich individuals moved money to and from 19 tax havens to evade taxes was initially obtained by German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

- The leak, called the Paradise Papers, contains 13.4 million documents from two leading firms in offshore finance. Most of the data leak came from Appleby, a Bermuda-based legal services provider that facilitated setting up of offshore firms with low or zero tax rates. Singapore-based Asiaciti was the other firm that helped wealthy to move money to tax havens.
- India ranks 19<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in terms of the number of names in the offshore data leak. A total of 714 Indians have been named, including Amitabh Bachan, Vijay Mallya and Union Minister Jayant Sinha.
- The leak has revealed names of famous personalities like Queen Elizabeth II, lead vocalist of U2 band Bono and American singer Madonna. The Paradise Papers put the lid off on how about \$13 million of the Queen's private money was invested offshore into funds in the Cayman Islands and Bermuda by the Duchy of Lancaster, which handles investments for her 500 million pounds private estate.
- Government of India set up a Multi-Agency Group under led by CBDT Chairman to investigate the cases.
- The Supreme Court of Pakistan, on 28 July 2017, disqualified Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from holding public office, finding that he had been dishonest in not disclosing his employment in the Dubai-based Capital FZE Company in his nomination papers. On 6 July 2018, the court sentenced Sharif to 10 years imprisonment. He and his daughter Maryam were arrested on 13 July 2018.

## #MeToo

- #MeToo, with local alternatives in other languages, spread virally as a two-word hashtag used on social media in October 2017 to denounce sexual assault and harassment, in the wake of sexual misconduct allegations against film producer and executive Harvey Weinstein.
- The phrase, long used in this sense by social activist Tarana Burke, was popularized by actress Alyssa Milano, who encouraged women to tweet it to publicize experiences to demonstrate the widespread nature of misogynistic behaviour. She tweeted, "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too.' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem". Since then, millions of people have used the hashtag to come forward with their experiences, including many celebrities.
- The hashtag has been criticized for putting the responsibility of publicizing sexual harassment and abuse on those who experienced it, which could be re-traumatizing.
- Time magazine named "the Silence Breakers" its Person of the Year for 2017. These are the women and men who shared their stories of assault, harassment, and hostility and publicly named their alleged abusers.
- President Donald Trump nominated Brett Kavanaugh on July 9, 2018, to serve as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States. During the confirmation process, 3 women accused Kavanaugh of rape and sexual misconduct. In September 2018, Kavanaugh had the lowest polling rating of any Supreme Court nomination since such polls have been taken. Still the Senate confirmed his nomination to the Supreme Court and he was sworn in.
- The Indian celebrities who became targets of #MeToo movement include M.J. Akbar, Union Minister, who resigned on 17 October 2018, actor Nana Patekar and composer Anu Malik.

## WHO Launches REPLACE

- The World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2018 launched a comprehensive plan to eliminate industrially-produced artificial trans fats from the global food supply by 2023.
- Increased intake of trans fat (>1% of total energy intake) is associated with increased risk of coronary heart disease mortality and events. Trans fat intake is responsible for more than 500,000 deaths from coronary heart disease each year around the world.
- REPLACE provides a six-step action package for the global elimination of trans fat. This package supports governments to ensure the prompt, complete, and sustained elimination of industrially-produced trans fat from the food supply. The practical, step-by-step action package is supported by an overarching technical document that provides a rationale and framework for this integrated approach to trans fat elimination.
- The six areas of action are:
  - Review dietary sources of industrially-produced trans fat and the landscape for required policy change.
  - Promote the replacement of industrially-produced trans fat with healthier fats and oils.
  - Legislate or enact regulatory actions to eliminate industrially-produced trans fat.
  - Assess and monitor trans fat content in the food supply and changes in trans fat consumption in the population.
  - Create awareness of the negative health impact of trans fat among policy-makers, producers, suppliers, and the public.
  - Enforce compliance with policies and regulations.

## Political Crisis in the Maldives

- The Maldives Supreme Court on 1 February 2018 ordered the immediate release of high-profile prisoners including former President Mohamed Nasheed and former Vice-President Ahmed Adeeb. It also reinstated 12 Members of Parliament who had earlier been stripped of their seats — in effect giving the opposition coalition a majority, and making President Abdulla Yameen vulnerable to impeachment. The court said it believed in free and fair trials that were conducted without undue influence. The court annulled all proceedings against the jailed political prisoners, and ordered their release until a fair retrial was held. But it did not order the dismissal of the charges against them.
- Notwithstanding the wide measure of support and welcome accorded to the Supreme Court ruling by a large segment of the international community including the Secretary General of the United Nations, USA, UK, EU, India, Australia, Canada, etc., Yameen's administration contended that it was not possible to implement the ruling as this had been arrived at without hearing the government and also because it would lead to a serious law and order situation.
- The political crisis in the Maldives reached a flashpoint on 5 February 2018, as President Abdulla Yameen declared a 15-day state of Emergency in the country, suspending many citizen's rights, and giving the security forces sweeping powers to arrest and detain protesters and dissidents. He placed under arrest the Chief Justice and another senior justice of the Supreme Court, as well as his own half-brother

Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, the first President who ruled from 1978 till 2008 and who is now supporting the Opposition.

- As a result of threats and the strong arm methods employed by Yameen's security forces and agencies, on 6 February, the remaining three members of the Supreme Court reversed their earlier decision to free the nine arrested political prisoners.
- Presidential elections were held in the Maldives on 23 September 2018. Incumbent president Abdulla Yameen of the Progressive Party of Maldives was seeking re-election for a second five-year term. His only challenger was Ibrahim Mohamed Solih of the Maldivian Democratic Party, who was nominated as the joint candidate of a coalition of opposition parties. The result was a surprise victory for Solih, who received over 58% of the vote and was elected as the seventh President of the Maldives. He is due to assume office on 17 November 2018.

### **Political Crisis in Sri Lanka**

- The crisis centers around three main characters: President Maithripala Sirisena, ousted Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, and former strongman President Mahinda Rajapaksa.
- Sirisena and Wickremesinghe are ideological opponents who formed a coalition to defeat Rajapaksa in 2015 elections. Rajapaksa, who was president from 2005 to 2015, is considered close to China and not favourably disposed towards India.
- Wickremesinghe's government came under fire last year after handing over operations of a port to a Chinese company in a 99-year lease that the previous government had built in Rajapaksa's home district with Chinese loans. Rajapaksa described the deal to his left-leaning supporters as a bid by Wickremesinghe to privatize national assets. Wickremesinghe maintains that the deal helped the country avoid defaulting on debts accumulated during Rajapaksa's presidency.
- On October 26, 2018, the alliance between Sirisena and Wickremesinghe formally fell apart, with Sirisena naming Rajapaksa the new prime minister and suspending Parliament.
- After a week of upheaval, Sirisena announced he was dissolving Parliament and calling snap elections due on January 5. He later explained in a nationally televised address that he dissolved Parliament out of fear that lawmakers would come to blows over his October 26 decision.
- Wickremesinghe has been holed up in the prime minister's official residence in Colombo — surrounded by a skeleton security crew, supporters and Buddhist monks — since he was ousted and maintains he is the country's rightful leader. He has repeatedly called for Parliament to be reconvened so that he could prove his majority support among the country's 225 lawmakers.
- Sirisena has cited a general clause in Sri Lanka's Constitution stating that the president has the power to summon or suspend Parliament.
- Supreme Court petitioners challenging Sirisena's actions argue that a specific clause in the 19th amendment, added in 2015, stipulates that Parliament can't be dissolved until 4½ years after its election, unless 2/3 of Parliament requests it happen sooner. The current Parliament was elected in August 2015.
- The Supreme Court on 13 November stayed President Sirisena's order to dissolve Parliament until December 7.

### **General Data Protection Regulation of European Union**

- The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), agreed upon by the European Parliament and Council in April 2016, became effective on May 25, 2018.
- GDPR becomes the primary law regulating how companies protect EU citizens' personal data. Companies that fail to achieve GDPR compliance before the deadline will be subject to stiff penalties and fines.
- GDPR requirements apply to each member state of the European Union, aiming to create more consistent protection of consumer and personal data across EU nations. Some of the key privacy and data protection requirements of the GDPR include:
  - Requiring the consent of subjects for data processing
  - Anonymizing collected data to protect privacy
  - Providing data breach notifications
  - Safely handling the transfer of data across borders
  - Requiring certain companies to appoint a data protection officer to oversee GDPR compliance
- Simply put, the GDPR mandates a baseline set of standards for companies that handle EU citizens' data to better safeguard the processing and movement of citizens' personal data.
- The purpose of the GDPR is to impose a uniform data security law on all EU members, so that each member state no longer needs to write its own data protection laws and laws are consistent across the entire EU. In addition to EU members, any company that markets goods or services to EU residents, regardless of its location, is subject to the regulation. As a result, GDPR will have an impact on data protection requirements globally.
- What will worry companies across the world is GDPR's push for the right of access, which gives users in EU the ability to ask for what information a company has about them. This can be followed through with requests for correction or even erasure. It is going to be a struggle for any company to comply with such requests, given that they will have such data across multiple servers in different geographies and varied formats.

## **Currency Crisis in Turkey**

- Turkey is in the throes of a full-blown currency crisis, with the Turkish lira losing nearly 45 percent of its value since the start of the year. The currency crisis threatens to plunge the world's 18<sup>th</sup> largest economy into a financial crisis and trigger contagion in emerging markets and Europe.
- The primary reason for the ongoing rout in the lira, though, is poor economic management by the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The Turkish economy is overheating due to soaring inflation, which reached an annual rate of nearly 16% in July, mounting levels of foreign debt, and a very high current account deficit. Both the Turkish government and central bank are facing a serious loss of credibility.
- A key problem is that the country does not have enough foreign exchange reserves to prevent the slide.
- On August 10, US President Donald Trump announced higher tariffs on Turkish imports of steel and aluminium.
- Poor relations between Washington and Ankara have added to Turkey's economic woes, but given broader fundamentals it is only a proximate cause of the market mayhem. More than 30 percent of the lira's loss has come since June, when Erdogan

took over the office with new sweeping powers. Erdogan's authoritarian hand has distanced the country from traditional Western allies and hit confidence.

- India is less vulnerable relative to other emerging markets in terms of external debt and current account deficit. But if the crisis continues, it could hurt India.
- India's exports would slow down if the global situation deteriorates. Also, domestic liquidity could dry up as the RBI will have to reduce the flow of rupee in the system to strengthen the currency.
- The rupee, which was valued at 63.84 to the dollar at the end of 2017, briefly crossed the 70-mark in early trading on 14 August 2018, on account of the fall in the Turkish lira.
- The rupee's correct value may be closer to 70-71 to the dollar, and achieving that level will boost job-creating sectors like exports that have severely underperformed in recent years. In addition, with foreign exchange reserves currently around \$400 billion, India is comfortably placed.

### **Freefall of Venezuelan Economy**

- The annual inflation rate reached 83,000% in July 2018, according to a study by the opposition-controlled National Assembly.
- IMF predicts an inflation rate of 1,000,000% by the end of 2018.
- Prices have been doubling every 26 days on average. This has resulted in many Venezuelans struggling to afford basic items such as food and toiletries.
- Venezuela is rich in oil, and has the largest proven reserves in the world. Because it has so much oil, Venezuela has never bothered to produce much else. It sells oil to other countries, and with the dollars it earns, imports the goods Venezuelans want and need from abroad.
- Its oil revenues account for about 95% of its export earnings. But when the oil price plummeted in 2014, Venezuela was faced with a shortfall of foreign currency.
- The Government kept on printing new currency and hiked minimum wages regularly with an eye on the vote bank of the poor.
- According to United Nations figures, 2.3 million Venezuelans have left the country, mostly to Columbia, since 2014 when the economic crisis started to bite. They were forced to leave the country for want of essential goods and healthcare.
- On August 11, 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump said that he is "not going to rule out a military option" to confront the autocratic government of Nicolás Maduro and the deepening crisis in Venezuela.

### **China-South Asia Cooperation Forum (CSACF)**

- China, on 15 June, 2018, launched the 'First China-South Asia Cooperation Forum' (CSACF) in Yunnan Province. It was also attended by the Indian Consul-General in Guangzhou, Sailas Thangal. The parallel, yet unasked question, either at or outside the CSACF venue, was if the new Chinese initiative, alongside the more-visible Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could ring the death-knell for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), where it had failed to go beyond the 'Observer' status, to obtain full membership.
- India's presence and participation at the CSACF, though at the Consul-General level, is at variance from its boycott of the BRI, thus indicating a

clear delineation between trade and sovereignty issues. Indian boycott of the BRI was mainly because its Pakistan arm was passing through ‘occupied Kashmir’.

- China’s CSACF initiative comes at a time when the SAARC has been going through the throes of an existential dilemma, particularly in the context of continual India-Pakistan adversities and the larger institutional failure to make it comparable to the EU, ASEAN and other regional formations across the world. Almost since the launch of the SAARC, or even through the long run-up earlier, India was said to be uncomfortable with the idea of smaller neighbours using the proposed forum to ‘gang up’ against India, at times under the aegis of Pakistan.
- According to available figures, intra-SAARC trade is still at a low five per cent of their cumulative global trade, and still at around \$50-billion mark. Against this, as pointed out by Yunnan Province Governor Ruan Chengfa at the CSACF launch, China-South Asia trade shot up by 31 per cent in three years -- from \$ 93.3 b in 2015 to \$126.26 b this year.
- This does not mean that India is blind or silent about the CSACF initiative, which like China’s investments drive in the neighbourhood, could bind them eternally to Beijing, as much geo-politically and geo-strategically as it is economically. Given that most of India’s neighbours, barring Bhutan, have joined the BRI, and nations like Maldives have become increasingly hostile, India cannot be but alive to the emerging situation -- signing of huge investment deals not only with China but also with Pakistan, alongside Saudi Arabia.
- With Myanmar and Vietnam having already signed in on to the CSACF, China can still claim that it was not a challenge to or replacement for the SAARC. Instead, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), wherein India and Pakistan are also now members, China can say, the CSACF too is one more regional organisation, with specific sub-regional agenda.

## **US-China Relations**

- The Trump administration on 22 March 2018 announced sweeping tariffs on Chinese imports, worth at least \$50 billion, in response to what the White House alleged is Chinese theft of U.S. technology and intellectual property. Coming on the heels of tariffs on steel and aluminium imports, the measures targeted goods including clothing, shoes, and electronics and restrict some Chinese investment in the United States.
- China imposed retaliatory measures in early April on a range of U.S. products, stoking concerns of a trade war between the world’s largest economies. The move marks a hardening of President Trump’s approach to China after high-profile summits with President Xi in April and November 2017.
- In July the USA hiked tariffs on more than 800 Chinese products. China retaliated with its own tariffs on more than five hundred U.S. products.
- In October US vice-president Mike Pence accused China of economic and political aggression to try and dominate the world, and pledged to combat this in every realm and continent. He listed Chinese military adventures, economic and political espionage, theft of technology, and massive aid programmes including debt-trap diplomacy.

- As US and EU companies with a large manufacturing base in China seek to de-risk their operations by shifting some of it out, India can modify its domestic policies to corner the benefits, as was done by Vietnam and other Southeast Asian nations.
- In time, as the new Cold War approach gels, India's value as a long-term check on China's domination will grow steadily, and it can hope for more preferential treatment. Trump's efforts to open up the Chinese economy will yield India significant benefits.

## **Developments in North Korea**

- 2017 August – Tension rises in war of words with US over North Korean threat to fire ballistic missiles near US Pacific territory of Guam.
- 2018 January – First talks in two years between North and South Korea begin that leads to the North sending a team to the Winter Olympics in the South.
- 2018 April – Kim Jong-un becomes first North Korean leader to enter the South when he meets South Korean President Moon Jae-in for talks at the Panmunjom border crossing. They agree to end hostile actions and work towards reducing nuclear arms on the peninsula.
- 2018 June – Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump's historic meeting in Singapore seeks to end a tense decades-old nuclear stand-off.
- At a summit with the South's President Moon Jae-in in September 2018, Kim Jong-un offered to shut down its main Yongbyon nuclear complex if Washington takes "corresponding measures".
- On October 2, 2018, North Korea ruled out dismantling its nuclear arsenal in exchange for the US declaring an end to the Korean War, saying that a peace treaty should "never be a bargaining chip."
- The North has for decades demanded that the US formally declare the end of the 1950-53 conflict that was halted only with an armistice, saying an official end to the war would ease tensions on the flashpoint peninsula.
- US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo was due to hold talks in New York on 8 November 2018 with senior North Korean official Kim Yong Chol aimed at paving the way for a second summit between Mr Trump and Kim and at making progress on denuclearisation but the talks were called off.
- Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un are expected to meet early next year to continue talks on denuclearisation.

## **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)**

- India and the United States on 6 September 2018 signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) during the first ever '2+2' talks between the countries.
- Addressing the media in a joint statement with United States Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj said both nations have also agreed on working together towards entry of India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).
- The landmark COMCASA agreement is likely to open the way for sales of more sensitive US military equipment to India. The agreement was reached after Pompeo and United States Defence Secretary James 'Jim' Mattis met Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Swaraj in New Delhi for the dialogue.

- COMCASA comes as a major boost for India which was designated as a ‘Major Defence Partner’ in 2016 by the US.
- COMCASA is one of the three foundational defence pacts that need to be signed by a country in order to obtain high-tech military hardware from the US. Before COMCASA, India had signed only one of these agreements – Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) – in 2016. The two countries are yet to begin talks on the third agreement – Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).
- The agreement will give Indian military access to function on high-end secured and encrypted communication equipment which are installed on American platforms obtained by Indian Armed Forces. These platforms include C-130 J, C-17, P-8I aircraft, and Apache and Chinook helicopters.
- These agreements and Donald Trump administration’s decision to give India STA-1 status (Strategic Trade Authorization-1) shows the country’s importance in the US strategic calculus.

### **New Regime in Pakistan**

- Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf chief Imran Khan was on 18 August 2018 sworn in as 22<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister of Pakistan and was administered oath of office by President Mamnoon Hussain.
- The PTI had emerged as the single largest party with 116 of the 270 seats in the July 25 elections.
- Pakistan appears to emerge as a ‘hybrid state’, whereby the military establishment, acutely conscious of the costs of martial rule, has promoted an alternative framework so that there is a ‘buffer’ between the army and society. The recurring backlash and legitimate grievances of the people are borne by expendable politicians absolving the real authority behind the scene from any responsibility for governance and developmental failures.

### **UN Security Council reforms**

- On 25 September 2018, Sushma Swaraj, Minister for External Affairs of India hosted Aloysio Nunes Ferreira, Foreign Minister of Brazil, Heiko Maas, Federal Foreign Minister of Germany, and Taro Kono, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan at a meeting of the G-4 countries, during the 73<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.
- The G-4 Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to multilateralism. They stressed that adapting the United Nations to the contemporary needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century necessarily required reforming the Security Council. They stressed the need to safeguard the legitimacy and credibility of this UN organ which deals with international peace and security.
- They noted with concern that next year would mark 40 years since the inscription of the item “Question of equitable representation on and increase in the membership of the Security Council and other matters related to the Security Council” on the agenda of the General Assembly in 1979 and yet substantial progress had not yet been achieved.
- In his speech before the General Assembly, US President Donald Trump had attacked the UN Human Rights Council and the International Criminal Court.

“America is governed by Americans. We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism,” Trump said in the speech that made sweeping accusations against multilateral institutions.

- Germany and Japan contribute one-fifth of the UN budget while the four countries together have one-fifth of the world population.

## **Tsunami in Indonesia**

- On 28 September 2018 a powerful 7.5-magnitude earthquake shook the Indonesian island of Sulawesi.
- The earthquake and ensuing tsunami that devastated Central Sulawesi resulted in at least US\$ 911 million in economic losses, according to National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) data.
- 2,256 people have been killed, 4,612 injured and 223,751 displaced from their homes as a result of the disasters that hit the regions of Palu, Donggala, Sigi, and Parigi Moutong.
- The 7.5-magnitude earthquake appears to be the result of what is known as a strike-slip fault, which takes place as two blocks of crust grind against one another, largely in a horizontal direction. Tsunamis more commonly follow vertical movement in the crust, which disrupts the overlying water and can generate massive waves crashing onshore.
- Within five minutes of the 7.5 magnitude earthquake being detected on the Pacific Ocean floor, a warning was issued by the Indonesian Tsunami Warning network. But after three more warnings, the alert was withdrawn as nothing was visible on the ocean gauges or buoys. Therefore the Tsunami came as a surprise to scientists who found it difficult to explain.
- There could have been a mudslide on the ocean floor, which would have a cataclysmic effect on the bay. Alternatively, the earthquake could have triggered a mini-tsunami, which got amplified because of the geographic geometry of the area.

## **Asia Bibi Blasphemy Case**

- Asia Bibi, a Christian farm labourer of Sheikhpura District of Punjab, Pakistan, convicted of blasphemy by a Pakistani court and was sentenced to death by hanging in 2010. On 31 October 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan acquitted her based on insufficient evidence, on condition that she would not be allowed to leave Pakistan until the verdict has been reviewed.
- The charges stemmed from her neighbours’ anger that an “unclean” Christian had dared to share their drinking vessel. Her fellow fruit-pickers had demanded she convert to Islam. After she refused, a mob accused her of insulting the Prophet Muhammad—an offence punishable by death in Pakistan. The mother of five has languished in a windowless cell ever since, at great cost to her mental health.
- In 2011 Islamist extremists murdered Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan’s Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, who had dared to speak in Asia’s defence.
- On 2 November 2018, the Government of Pakistan and the Islamist Tehreek-e-Labbaik political party, which encouraged the protests against Asia Bibi, came to an agreement that barred Asia Bibi from leaving the country, in addition to releasing Tehreek-e-Labbaik protesters.

- On 7 November 2018, a release order arrived at New Jail for Women in Multan where Asia Bibi was incarcerated. She was then flown to PAF Base Nur Khan, prompting speculation that she was already en route to claim asylum in Europe. Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied the media reports that Asia Bibi has left Pakistan.

### **Mid-Term Elections in the USA**

- Mid-term elections were held in the United States on November 6, 2018. 35 of the 100 seats in the United States Senate and all 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives were contested. 39 state and territorial governorships, as well as numerous other state and local elections, were also contested.
- The Democratic Party won control of the House of Representatives and made gains at the state level, while the Republican Party expanded its majority in the Senate.
- The election results are considered a setback to Donald Trump's immigration policy as well as economic and foreign policies. It is also perceived as an endorsement of Barack Obama's policies, especially Obamacare. Supporters of Trump claim that the President's popularity has improved as he has performed better than the previous presidents in mid-term elections.

### **18<sup>th</sup> Asian Games 2018**

- India with a haul of 69 medals including 15 gold recorded its best-ever performance in the history of Asian Games at the 2018 edition held in the Indonesian cities of Jakarta and Palembang from 18 August to 2 September 2018.
- Rahi Sarnobat became the first Indian woman to win a gold medal in shooting at the Asian Games.
- Vinesh Phogat became the first Indian woman wrestler to win a gold medal at the Asian Games.
- Swapna Barman gave India its first ever Asiad gold in women's heptathlon event.
- Neeraj Chopra became the first Indian javelin thrower to win an Asiad gold.
- India failed to win gold in both men's and women's kabaddi events.
- China led the medal tally for the tenth consecutive time winning 289 medals including 132 gold.
- North Korea and South Korea marched under the Korean Unification Flag at the opening ceremony and for the first time competed as a unified team in some events, winning one gold medal as a unified team.
- Japanese swimmer Rikako Ikee was announced as the most valuable player of the Games.

### **Nobel Prizes 2018**

- The Nobel Prize in Physics 2018 was awarded "for groundbreaking inventions in the field of laser physics" with one half to Arthur Ashkin of the USA "for the optical tweezers and their application to biological systems" and the other half jointly to Gérard Mourou of France and Donna Strickland of Canada "for their method of generating high-intensity, ultra-short optical pulses". These inventions have revolutionised laser physics. Extremely small objects and incredibly rapid processes are now being seen in a new light. Advanced precision instruments are opening up unexplored areas of research and a multitude of industrial and medical applications.

- The Nobel Prize in Chemistry 2018 was awarded with one half to Frances H. Arnold (USA) “for the directed evolution of enzymes” and the other half jointly to George P. Smith (USA) and Sir Gregory P. Winter (UK) “for the phage display of peptides and antibodies.” They have been inspired by the power of evolution and used the same principles – genetic change and selection – to develop proteins that solve humankind’s chemical problems.
- The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2018 was awarded to James P. Allison (USA) and Tasuku Honjo (Japan) “for their discovery of cancer therapy by inhibition of negative immune regulation.” The Laureates has shown how different strategies for inhibiting the brakes on the immune system can be used in the treatment of cancer. Their discoveries are a landmark in our fight against cancer.
- The Nobel Prize for Peace was shared by Congolese gynaecologist Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad. Both laureates have made a crucial contribution to focusing attention on, and combating, war crimes. Denis Mukwege is the helper who has devoted his life to defending these victims. Nadia Murad is an Iraqi Yazidi human rights activist who was kidnapped in 2014 from her hometown Kojo and held by the Islamic State for three months. She is the witness who tells of the abuses perpetrated against herself and others. Each of them in their own way has helped to give greater visibility to war-time sexual violence, so that the perpetrators can be held accountable for their actions.
- The Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences 2018 has been awarded to William D. Nordhaus (USA) “for integrating climate change into long-run macroeconomic analysis” and Paul M. Romer (USA) “for integrating technological innovations into long-run macroeconomic analysis.” Their findings have significantly broadened the scope of economic analysis by constructing models that explain how the market economy interacts with nature and knowledge.
- The Nobel Prize for Literature was postponed (Two prizes will be announced in 2019) as a result of a sexual assault scandal. In April 2018, three members of the academy board resigned in response to a sexual-misconduct investigation involving author Jean-Claude Arnault who is married to board member Katarina Frostenson. Arnault was accused by at least 18 women of sexual assault and harassment. He and his wife were also accused of leaking the names of prize recipients on at least seven occasions so friends could profit from bets.

## **90<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards (Oscar 2018)**

- Best Picture: The Shape of Water
- Best Director: Guillermo del Toro – The Shape of Water
- Best Actor: Gary Oldman (Darkest Hour, as Winston Churchill)
- Best Actress: Frances McDormand (Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri)

## **Climate Change**

### **COP 23**

- Held in Bonn from 6<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> November 2017.
- First COP to be hosted by a small-island developing state with Fiji taking up the presidency, even though it was held in Bonn.

- It was also the first set of negotiations since the US, under the presidency of Donald Trump, announced its intention to withdraw from the Paris deal.
- There were two main concerns: first, developed countries had not yet delivered the promised \$100 billion per year in climate finance by 2020 agreed in 2009 at Copenhagen; second, the Doha Amendment, a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol for the years leading up to 2020, had still not been ratified by enough countries to bring it into force.
- Developing countries, including China and India, were particularly irked that pre-2020 action did not have a formal space on the COP23 negotiation agenda. They insisted space must be made to discuss it, arguing that the meeting of pre-2020 commitments was a key part of building trust in the rest of negotiations.
- At first, many developed countries dismissed these demands. However, in the end they conceded, and pre-2020 ambition and implementation formed a major part of the COP23 decision text agreed and published on 18<sup>th</sup> November.
- Two major outcomes were the Gender Action Plan, which highlights the role of women in climate action and promotes gender equality in the process, and the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform, which aims to support the exchange of experience and sharing of best practices on mitigation and adaptation.
- Fiji also launched the Ocean Pathway Partnership, which aims to strengthen the inclusion of oceans within the UNFCCC process.
- Parties agreed to work over the next few years on a series of issues linking climate change and agriculture. They agreed to streamline two separate technical discussions on this topic into one process.
- COP 24 will be held in Katowice, Poland in December 2018.
- On 8 October 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a “special report” titled “Global Warming of 1.5°C” on the actions the world needs to take to prevent global average temperatures from rising beyond 1.5°C as compared to pre-industrial times.
- Limiting global warming to 1.5°C compared to 2°C could go hand in hand with ensuring a more sustainable and equitable society.
- We are already seeing the consequences of 1°C of global warming through more extreme weather, rising sea levels and diminishing Arctic sea ice, among other changes.
- By 2100, global sea level rise would be 10 cm lower with global warming of 1.5°C compared with 2°C. The likelihood of an Arctic Ocean free of sea ice in summer would be once per century with global warming of 1.5°C, compared with at least once per decade with 2°C. Coral reefs would decline by 70-90 percent with global warming of 1.5°C, whereas virtually all (> 99 percent) would be lost with 2°C.
- Limiting global warming to 1.5°C would require “rapid and far-reaching” transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities. Global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) would need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050. This means that any remaining emissions would need to be balanced by removing CO<sub>2</sub> from the air. (For details read [http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15\\_spm\\_final.pdf](http://report.ipcc.ch/sr15/pdf/sr15_spm_final.pdf))

## Major Government of India Decisions

### Electoral Bond Scheme 2018

- Government of India notified the Electoral Bond Scheme 2018 on 2 January 2018. Electoral Bonds may be purchased by a person, who is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India. A person being an individual can buy Electoral Bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals. Only the Political Parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and which secured not less than one per cent of the votes polled in the last General Election to the House of the People or the Legislative Assembly of the State, shall be eligible to receive the Electoral Bonds. The Electoral Bonds shall be encashed by an eligible Political Party only through a Bank account with the Authorized Bank.
- Besides expenditure of individual candidates, political parties have to spend money on election campaigns, publicity, tours, travels and election related establishments. These expenditures run into hundreds of crores. Yet there has not been a transparent funding mechanism of the political system.
- The conventional practice of funding the political system was to take donations in cash and undertake these expenditures in cash. The sources are anonymous or pseudonymous. The quantum of money was never disclosed. The present system ensures unclean money coming from unidentifiable sources.
- A donor can purchase electoral bonds from a specified bank only by a banking instrument. He would have to disclose in his accounts the amount of political bonds that he has purchased. The life of the bond would be only 15 days. A bond can only be encashed in a pre-declared account of a political party. Every political party in its returns will have to disclose the amount of donations it has received through electoral bonds to the Election Commission.
- There will be some element of transparency in as much as all donors declare in their accounts the amount of bonds that they have purchased and all parties declare the quantum of bonds that they have received. How much each donor has distributed to a political party would be known only to the donor.

### Two-tier Security for Aadhaar

- Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) in January 2018 rolled out a new two-tier security process that came into effect from June 1.
- Aimed at eliminating the need to share and store Aadhaar numbers, the UIDAI has introduced the concept of a virtual ID, which an Aadhaar holder can use in lieu of his/her Aadhaar number at the time of authentication, besides sharing of 'limited KYC' with certain agencies.
- A Virtual ID (VID) will be a temporary 16-digit random number mapped with the Aadhaar number. There can only be one active and valid VID for an Aadhaar number at any given time and it will not be possible to derive the Aadhaar number from VID.
- Only the Aadhaar holder will be able to generate a VID and no other entity, including authentication user agencies (AUAs), can do it on their behalf.
- UIDAI has also brought in the concept of limited KYC. It has categorised its AUAs into Global AUAs and Local AUAs wherein the latter will get access to only need-based or limited KYC details.

- Global AUAs will have access to full demographic details of an individual along with the ability to store Aadhaar numbers within their system.

### **Government ends Haj subsidy**

- On 16 January 2018, Centre announced phasing out of subsidies for the annual Haj pilgrimage from this year.
- This is part of the government's efforts to empower minorities with dignity and without appeasement.
- The Centre's decision followed a 2012 Supreme Court order asking that subsidies for the Haj be phased out by 2022 and the money saved (around ₹450 crore annually) diverted to more welfare-oriented activities.
- The savings from ending Haj subsidy will be used for educational empowerment and welfare of girls from minority communities.
- In 2012, the Supreme Court of India found that Haj by Indian Muslims is funded to a substantial extent by the Government. The Court ruled that this subsidy is not only unconstitutional but inconsistent with the teachings of Quran. The Court cited Quran verse 97 in Surah 3, Al-e-Imran ordains as under: "In it are manifest signs (for example), the Maqam (place) of Ibrahim (Abraham); whosoever enters it, he attains security. And Haj (pilgrimage to Makkah) to the House (Ka'bah) is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses (for one's conveyance, provision and residence); and whoever disbelieves [i.e. denies Haj (pilgrimage to Makkah), then he is a disbeliever of Allah], then Allah stands not in need of any of the Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)".
- Considerable criticism has been levelled against the practice of giving subsidy, both by Hindu organisations opposed to state funding of private pilgrimage outside India and by Muslim groups who considered it 'un-Islamic'.

### **Transformation of Aspirational Districts**

- Launched by NITI Aayog in January 2018.
- Aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.
- The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a *Jan Andolan*. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.
- To enable optimum utilization of their potential, this program focusses closely on improving people's ability to participate fully in the burgeoning economy. Health & Nutrition (30% weightage), Education (30%), Agriculture & Water Resources (20%), Financial Inclusion & Skill Development (10%), and Basic Infrastructure (10%) are this programme's core areas of focus.
- After several rounds of consultations with various stakeholders, 49 key performance indicators have been chosen to measure progress of the districts. Districts are prodded and encouraged to first catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others in the spirit of competitive & cooperative federalism.

## **KUSUM Scheme**

- Announced in Union Budget 2018-19.
- To be implemented by the Ministry of New & Renewable Energy.
- ‘Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (KUSUM)’ which, inter alia, provides for:
  - (i) installation of grid-connected solar power plants each of capacity up to 2 MW in the rural areas;
  - (ii) installation of standalone off-grid solar water pumps to fulfil irrigation needs of farmers not connected to grid;
  - (iii) solarization of existing grid-connected agriculture pumps to make farmers independent of grid supply and also enable them to sell surplus solar power generated to DISCOM and get extra income; and
  - (iv) solarization of tube-wells and lift irrigation projects of Government sector.

## **Prime Minister’s Research Fellowship (PMRF) Scheme**

- The Government in February 2018 approved the Scheme ‘Prime Minister’s Research Fellowship (PMRF)’ at a total cost of ₹1650 crore for a period of seven years beginning 2018-19.
- Under this Scheme, the best students who have completed (in last 5 years) or are in the final year of B. Tech or Integrated M.Tech or M.Sc. in Science and Technology streams from IISc/IITs/NITs/IISERs/IIITs, with at least 8.0 CGPA, will be offered direct admission in Ph.D programme in the IITs / IISc, after going through the selection process.
- Such students will be offered a fellowship of ₹70,000/- per month for the first two years, ₹75,000/- per month for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, and ₹80,000/- per month in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> years.
- Apart from this, a research grant of ₹2.00 lakh will be provided to each of the Fellows for a period of 5 years to cover their foreign travel expenses for presenting research papers.
- A maximum of 3000 Fellows would be selected in a three year period.

## **Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006 – New Criteria of Classification**

- The Union Cabinet on 7 February 2018 approved change in the basis of classifying Micro, Small and Medium enterprises from ‘investment in plant & machinery/equipment’ to ‘annual turnover’.
- This will encourage ease of doing business, make the norms of classification growth oriented and align them to the new tax regime revolving around GST.
- At present the MSMED Act (Section 7) classifies the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) on the basis of investment in plant and machinery for manufacturing units, and investment in equipment for service enterprises. The criterion of investment in plant and machinery stipulates self declaration which in turn entails verification if deemed necessary and leads to transaction costs.
- Taking turnover as a criterion can be pegged with reliable figures available e.g. in GST Network and other methods of ascertaining which will help in having a non-discretionary, transparent and objective criterion and will eliminate the need for

inspections, make the classification system progressive and evolutionary, help in overcoming the uncertainties associated with the classification based on investment in plant & machinery/equipment and employment, and improve the ease of doing business. In addition the amendment will provide flexibility to the Government to fine-tune the classification of MSMEs in response to changing economic scenario without resorting to the amendment of MSMED Act.

### **Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY)**

- The Government has proposed Atal Bhujal Yojana (ABHY) aimed at sustainable ground water management with community participation in select over-exploited and ground water stressed areas in seven States (Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh).
- ABHY is designed as a Central Sector Scheme with a total outlay of ₹6,000 Crore and is proposed to be implemented with World Bank assistance.
- Groundwater, though replenishable, is ultimately a finite resource. Excessive withdrawal leads to depletion of the water stored underground, resulting in serious social, economic and environmental consequences.

### **NITI Forum for North East**

- The Union Government has issued order setting up the ‘NITI Forum for North-East’ in February 2018.
- The forum will be co-chaired by the Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER). The forum will have its Secretariat in the Ministry of DoNER.
- The NITI Forum for Northeast is tasked to identify various constraints on the way of accelerated, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the North East Region of the country and to recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints. It will also review the development status in the NER.
- Members of the Forum will include Secretaries of Ministries of Road Transport & Highways, Railways, Power, Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation, New & Renewable Energy, Health & Family Welfare, Human Resource Development, Environment, Forest & Climate Change. Chief Secretaries of North Eastern states of Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram will also be members of the Forum. Secretary, North East Council (NEC), Shillong will be Member Secretary. Joint Secretary (NE), MHA, besides a number of experts from various fields will also be members of the Forum.

### **Women Entrepreneurship Platform**

- NITI Aayog launched the Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP), on the occasion of International Women’s Day, on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018.
- The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem for women across India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their businesses.
- The platform aspires to substantially increase the number of women entrepreneurs who will create and empower a dynamic New India.

- These aspirations are manifest in the three pillars on which WEP is built:
  - *Ichha Shakti* (motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their enterprise),
  - *Gyaan Shakti* (providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship) &
  - *Karma Shakti* (providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up businesses).
- With an informative, interactive website to act as a dedicated resource and knowledge base, WEP aims to address the bottlenecks faced by both aspiring and established women entrepreneurs by streamlining information across government and private sector schemes and initiatives.
- From providing unique services such as credit evaluation of women-led startups by CRISIL and potential equity investments through an INR 10 crore fund established by DICE Districts, the WEP opens up avenues of growth and opportunity for women entrepreneurs.

## Poshan Abhiyaan

- On the occasion of International Women's Day, the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi launched the National Nutrition Mission (Poshan Abhiyaan) and Pan India Expansion of Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) covering all 640 districts of the Country at Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018.
- The Abhiyaan targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.
- The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.
- The following components will form the pillars of the Mission:
  - ICDS-CAS (Common Application Software)
  - Convergence
  - Behavioural change, IEC Advocacy
  - Training and Capacity building
  - Innovations
  - Incentives
  - Grievance Redressal.
- The following are the key Nutrition strategies and interventions:
  - IYCF (Infant and Young child feeding)
  - Food and Nutrition
  - Immunization
  - Institutional Delivery
  - WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)
  - De-worming
  - ORS-Zinc
  - Food Fortification
  - Dietary Diversification
  - Adolescent Nutrition
  - Maternal Health and Nutrition
  - ECD (Early childhood development)/ECCE (Early Childhood care and Education)
  - Convergence

- ICT-RTM (Information and Communication. Technology enabled Real Time Monitoring)
- Capacity Building

### **LaQshya program**

- Ministry of Health and Family Welfare announced the launch of program 'LaQshya', aimed at improving quality of care in labour room and maternity Operation Theatre (OT).
- The Program will improve quality of care for pregnant women in labour room, maternity Operation Theatre and Obstetrics Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and High Dependency Units (HDUs).
- The LaQshya program is being implemented at all Medical College Hospitals, District Hospitals and First Referral Units (FRU), and Community Health Centres (CHCs) and will benefit every pregnant woman and new-born delivering in public health institutions.
- The Program aims at implementing 'fast-track' interventions for achieving tangible results within 18 months. Under the initiative, a multi-pronged strategy has been adopted such as improving infrastructure up-gradation, ensuring availability of essential equipment, providing adequate human resources, capacity building of health care workers and improving quality processes in the labour room.
- The Quality Improvement in labour room and maternity OT will be assessed through NQAS (National Quality Assurance Standards). Every facility achieving 70% score on NQAS will be certified as LaQshya certified facility.
- India has come a long way in improving maternal survival as Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has reduced from 301 maternal deaths in 2001-03 to 167 in year 2011-13, an impressive decline of 45% in a decade.

### **Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission**

- The Union Cabinet on 21 March 2018 approved the launch of a new Centrally Sponsored Ayushman Bharat – National Health Protection Mission having central sector component under Ayushman Bharat Mission anchored in the MoHFW.
- Ayushman Bharat (AB) is an attempt to move from sectoral and segmented approach of health service delivery to a comprehensive need-based health care service. It adopts a continuum of care approach, comprising of two inter-related components.
- The first component, pertains to creation of 1,50,000 Health and Wellness Centres which will bring health care closer to the homes of the people. These centres will provide Comprehensive Primary Health Care (CPHC), covering both maternal and child health services and non-communicable diseases, including free essential drugs and diagnostic services. The first Health and Wellness Centre was launched by the Prime Minister at Jangla, Bijapur, Chhatisgarh on 14 April 2018.
- The second component is the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) which provides health protection cover to poor and vulnerable families. The Health and Wellness Centres will play a critical role in creating awareness about PM-JAY, screening for non-communicable diseases, follow-up of hospitalisation cases among others.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on 23 September 2018 launched the ‘Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Aarogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY)’, at Ranchi, hailing it as the “world’s biggest state-run healthcare scheme”.
- The scheme has the benefit cover of ₹5 lakh per family per year.
- To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.
- The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be 10.74 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) database.
- The beneficiaries can avail benefits in both public and empanelled private facilities.
- State Governments will be allowed to expand AB both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.
- AB will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes – Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).
- So far, 4 states, Telengana, Odisha, Kerala and Punjab as well as NCT Delhi have opted out of the scheme.
- For focused approach and effective implementation of PM-JAY, an autonomous entity, the National Health Agency (NHA) was established as a Society on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2018.
- A functioning health insurance system must ensure that patients are neither under-treated nor over-treated nor over-charged. Ensuring this requires adaptive price setting, third-party monitoring, strict regulation, and, quality improvements in public sector hospitals. All of which requires massive investments in state capacity.

### **Integrated Scheme for School Education**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, on 28 March 2018, approved the proposal of Department of School Education and Literacy to formulate an Integrated Scheme on School Education by subsuming Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2018 to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2020.
- The scheme comes in the backdrop of PM’s vision of Sabko Shiksha, Achhi Shiksha and aims to support the States in universalizing access to school education from classes pre-nursery to XII across the country.
- The vision of the Scheme is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from nursery to senior secondary stage in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal for Education. The main emphasis of the Integrated Scheme is on improving quality of school education by focussing on the two T’s – Teacher and Technology.
- The Scheme gives flexibility to the States and UTs to plan and prioritize their interventions within the scheme norms and the overall resource envelope available to them.
- It will help improve the transition rates across the various levels of school education and aid in promoting universal access to children to complete school education. The Scheme, by providing quality education, aims to equip the children with varied skills and knowledge essential for their holistic development and prepare them for the world of work or higher education in the future.

## **E-Way Bill**

- E-Way Bill is an electronic way bill for movement of goods which can be generated on the e-Way Bill Portal.
- When an e-way bill is generated a unique e-way bill number (EBN) is allocated and is available to the supplier, recipient, and the transporter.
- In the 26<sup>th</sup> meeting held here on 10 March 2018, the GST Council recommended the introduction of e-way bill for inter-State movement of goods across the country from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. For intra-State movement of goods, e-way bill system will be introduced w.e.f. a date to be announced in a phased manner but not later than 1<sup>st</sup> June, 2018.
- E-way bill is required to be generated only where the value of the consignment exceeds ₹50000/-.
- Public conveyance has also been included as a mode of transport and the responsibility of generating e-way bill in case of movement of goods by public transport would be that of the consignor or consignee.
- Railways have been exempted from generation and carrying of e-way bill with the condition that without the production of e-way bill, railways will not deliver the goods to the recipient. But railways are required to carry invoice or delivery challan etc.

## **Van Dhan Scheme**

- The Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi launched the Van Dhan Scheme of Ministry of Tribal Affairs and TRIFED on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2018 during the celebrations of Ambedkar Jayanti at Bijapur, Chattisgarh. Emphasizing the important role of value addition in increasing tribal incomes, he stated that Van Dhan, Jan Dhan and Gobar-Dhan Schemes had the potential to change the tribal-rural economic system. All these three schemes in tandem need to be promoted for this purpose by the State Governments.
- The establishment of “Van DhanVikas Kendra” is for providing skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility.
- Under Van Dhan, 10 Self Help Groups of 30 Tribal gatherers are constituted. They are then trained and provided with working capital to add value to the products, which they collect from the jungle. Working under the leadership of the Collector, these groups can then market their products not only within the States but also outside the States. Training and technical support is provided by TRIFED. It is proposed to develop 30,000 such centres in the country.

## **Indian Railways inducts Dynamic Tamping Express for improved Mechanised Track Maintenance**

- Indian Railway in April 2018 inducted three numbers of 09-3X Dynamic Tamping Express machines, the state of the art integrated track maintenance.
- The New 09-3X- Dynamic Tamping Express costing about ₹27Cr each is a latest high output integrated tamping machine having multiple functions, so far being carried out by different machines.

- It can measure pre & post track geometry, correct the track to required geometry, can tamp three sleepers simultaneously, stabilize and measure post tamping track parameters under load to ensure quality of work done. This eliminates the need for a separate stabilisation machine which reduces operating costs and track possession time.
- This machine will vibrate & compact the loose stone ballast after tamping for safe movements of trains.
- These machines have been manufactured in India under 'Make in India' initiative with imported components. 42 more such machines have been planned to be included in Indian Railway maintenance fleet over next three years.
- This will further improve the safety, reliability and economy in maintenance of tracks over Indian Railways. This will also eliminate manual measurement of track quality after maintenance.

### **Govt. bans imports of hormone Oxytocin**

- The Union government on 6 April 2018 banned imports of the hormone oxytocin to stop its misuse in the livestock industry, where activists say it causes hormonal imbalances and shortens the lives of milch animals.
- Often called the 'love hormone', oxytocin is released naturally in human bonding activities such as sex, childbirth and breastfeeding.
- India halted retail sales of the prescription-only drug in 2014, but regulators have struggled to curb illegal sales, and the volume of imports is unclear.
- Now the sale will be limited to registered government hospitals and clinics, a bar code system will be used on all forms of the drug to ensure tracking and prevent abuse.
- Oxytocin is a controversial hormonal injection that is used widely in the dairy industry, agriculture and horticulture. The drug's abuse in animals shortens their lives and makes them barren sooner. Even its misuse is reported among trafficked children, injected to accelerate puberty among girls. It is also being misused to speed up deliveries for pregnant women in overcrowded government hospitals.

### **GOBAR-DHAN scheme**

- The Government on 30 April 2018 launched the GOBAR (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources – DHAN) scheme.
- The scheme aims to positively impact village cleanliness and generate wealth and energy from cattle and organic waste. The scheme also aims at creating new rural livelihood opportunities and enhancing income for farmers and other rural people.
- The Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) comprises two main components for creating clean villages – creating open defecation free (ODF) villages and managing solid and liquid waste in villages. With over 3.5 lakh villages, 374 districts and 16 States/UTs of the country being declared ODF, the stage is set for ODF-plus activities, including measures to enhance solid and liquid waste management.
- The GOBAR-DHAN scheme, with its focus on keeping villages clean, increasing the income of rural households, and generation of energy from cattle waste, is an important element of this ODF-plus strategy. The scheme envisages the implementation of 700 bio-gas units in different states of the country in 2018-19.

## **Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan**

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on 21 April 2018 gave its approval for restructured Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA).
- This scheme will extend to all States and UTs of the Country and will also include institutions of rural local government in non-Part IX areas, where Panchayats do not exist.
- The scheme will have both Central Component – National Level activities including “National Plan of Technical Assistance”, “Mission Mode project on e-Panchayat”, “Incentivization of Panchayats” and State component – Capacity Building of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).
- The Central Component will be fully funded by the Government of India. However, Centre:State funding pattern for State Component will be 60:40 for all States, except North East and Hill States where Centre:State funding pattern will be 90:10.
- The implementation and monitoring of the activities of the scheme will broadly be aligned for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with main thrust on Panchayats identified under Mission Antyodaya and 115 Aspirational districts as identified by NITI Aayog.
- The approved scheme of RGSA will help more than 2.55 lakh PRIs to develop governance capabilities to deliver on SDGs through inclusive local governance with focus on optimum utilisation of available resources. The key principles of SDGs, i.e. leaving no one behind, reaching the farthest first and universal coverage, along with gender equality will be embedded in the design of all capacity building interventions including trainings, training modules and materials. Priority will be given to subjects of national importance that affects the excluded groups the most, e.g. poverty, primary health services, nutrition, immunization, sanitation, education, water conservation, digital transactions etc.

## **National Clean Air Programme**

- The government has formulated National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) as a medium term national level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner. The overall objective is to augment and evolve effective ambient air quality monitoring network across the country besides ensuring comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
- The NCAP focuses on collaborative and participatory approach covering all sources of pollution and coordination between relevant Central Ministries, State Governments, local bodies and other stakeholders.
- In order to ensure use of new technologies to combat the rising challenge of air pollution in India, a separate component on ‘Technology Assessment Cell’ has been envisaged under NCAP to evaluate the technologies for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
- The intended goal of the programme is to meet the “annual average air quality standards at all locations in the country in a stipulated timeframe”. In order to achieve this, all the 100 non-attainment cities would have to design city-specific action plans with specific timelines for implementation of listed initiatives.

- Devising air quality management plans for 100 non-attainment cities calls for detailed source apportionment (identification of pollution sources) studies for each city. The document stresses the need for taking up these studies in a phased manner. In addition to setting up of an Air Information Centre that would analyse and disseminate monitored data, an Air Quality Forecasting system is also being envisioned. In addition to city-specific source apportionment studies, the NCAP lays down the need for a national-level emission inventory. A technology assessment cell for evaluation of new pollution prevention and control technologies has also been proposed.
- The document highlights lack of indigenous studies establishing the correlation between exposure to air pollution and human health. A high-level apex committee and working group has, therefore, been constituted under the Indian Council of Medical Research and the MoEF&CC to overcome this deficit.

### **WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC)**

- The union cabinet on 2 May 2018 gave approval for India to accede to the protocol under World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products. India became a signatory to FCTC on 10 September 2003.
- This will be applicable to both smoking and chewing or smokeless tobacco (SLT) forms as negotiated and adopted under Article 15 of the WHO FCTC, of which India is a party.
- One of the key tobacco supply reduction strategies contained in Article 15 envisages elimination of all forms of illicit trade and tobacco products, including smuggling, illicit manufacturing and counterfeiting.
- Accession to such treaty will provide actionable alternatives against such prevailing practices that are affecting public health at large. India, being at the forefront of tobacco control, would be able to influence the international organizations including World Custom Organization in controlling such illicit trade.
- Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS) was carried out in 2009-10 and 2016-17. From GATS-1 to GATS-2 the prevalence of tobacco among adults (15 years and above) in India has reduced by 6 percentage points (from 34.6 to 28.6). The number of tobacco users has reduced by about 81 lakh.

### **National Policy on Biofuels – 2018**

- The Union Cabinet, on 16 May 2018, approved National Policy on Biofuels – 2018.
- The Policy categorises biofuels as “Basic Biofuels” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.
- The Policy expands the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing use of Sugarcane Juice, Sugar containing materials like Sugar Beet, Sweet Sorghum, Starch containing materials like Corn, Cassava, Damaged food grains like wheat, broken rice, Rotten Potatoes, unfit for human consumption for ethanol production.
- Farmers are at a risk of not getting appropriate price for their produce during the surplus production phase. Taking this into account, the Policy allows use of surplus

food grains for production of ethanol for blending with petrol with the approval of National Biofuel Coordination Committee.

- With a thrust on Advanced Biofuels, the Policy indicates a viability gap funding scheme for 2G ethanol Bio refineries of ₹5000 crore in 6 years in addition to additional tax incentives, higher purchase price as compared to 1G biofuels.
- The Policy encourages setting up of supply chain mechanisms for biodiesel production from non-edible oilseeds, Used Cooking Oil, short gestation crops.
- Roles and responsibilities of all the concerned Ministries/Departments with respect to biofuels has been captured in the Policy document to synergise efforts.
- The policy will help in reducing import of fuel, lead to a cleaner environment, help in improving municipal solid waste management and give additional income to farmers.

### **Swachh Iconic Places**

- The Swachh Iconic Places is an initiative under the Swachh Bharat Mission. It is a special clean-up initiative focused on 100 select iconic heritage, spiritual and cultural places in the country. The initiative is being coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation in association with the Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and the concerned State governments.
- The ten Iconic places in Phase I are: 1. Ajmer Sharif Dargah 2. CST Mumbai 3. Golden Temple, Amritsar 4. Kamakhya Temple, Assam 5. Maikarnika Ghat, Varanasi 6. Meenakshi Temple, Madurai 7. Shri Mata Vaishno Devi, Katra, J&K 8. Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri 9. The Taj Mahal, Agra 10. Tirupati Temple, Tirumala.
- 10 more iconic places each were added in Phase II and Phase III.
- The aim of this initiative is to make these places intensely clean and transform them as model ‘Swachh Tourist Destinations’, that will enhance the experience of tourists from home and abroad.

### **National Digital Library of India**

- The Union Human Resource Development Minister, Prakash Javadekar launched the new digital initiative of HRD Ministry ‘National Digital Library of India’ (NDLI) on the occasion of National Reading Day in New Delhi on 19 June 2018.
- NDLI is a project of the Ministry of Human Resource Development under the aegis of National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT). It is developed by IIT Kharagpur.
- The objective of NDLI is to make digital educational resources available to all citizens of the country to empower, inspire and encourage learning.
- NDLI is the Single Window Platform that collects and collates metadata from premier learning institutions in India and abroad, as well as other relevant sources. It is a digital repository containing textbooks, articles, videos, audio books, lectures, simulations, fiction and all other kinds of learning media.
- Anybody can access the digital library anytime and anywhere absolutely free of cost and will contribute greatly to the Government’s commitment towards “Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat”.
- The Library has 1.7 crore content from more than 160 sources, in over 200 languages.

- NDL India is designed to hold content of any language and provides interface support for leading Indian languages. It is being arranged to provide support for all academic levels including researchers and life-long learners, all disciplines, all popular form of access devices and differently-abled learners.

### **UIDAI makes face recognition feature mandatory for Aadhar**

- On 24 August 2018 UIDAI announced a phased rollout of the face recognition feature, starting with telecom service providers from September 15.
- Whenever an individual would seek authentication based on Aadhaar, the authorised machine/device being used for the purpose would also capture a picture of the face of the individual. The photo, along with the fingerprint or iris scan, would be sent to UIDAI, which will verify the details on its database, and thereafter send a confirmation of the authenticity of the individual based on the above.
- The authentication process is very sophisticated and will not be impacted by changes to a person's face, say, growing a beard.
- Failure to follow the process will be treated as a criminal offence by authentication agencies, punishable with imprisonment and fine under Section 42 and 43 of the Aadhaar Act, 2016.
- Services that most commonly require Aadhaar authentication include banks, the public distribution system and issuance of a mobile SIM card, new as well as replacements, but with the latest Supreme Court judgement (q.v.), the requirement would not be applicable to some of these services.

### **National Digital Communications Policy-2018**

- The Union Cabinet on 26 September 2018 approved the National Digital Communications Policy-2018 (NDCP-2018) and re-designation of the Telecom Commission as the “Digital Communications Commission”.
- The NDCP-2018 envisions supporting India's transition to a digitally empowered economy and society by fulfilling the information and communications needs of citizens and enterprises by establishment of a ubiquitous, resilient and affordable digital communications infrastructure and services.
- The ‘Customer focused’ and ‘application driven’ NDCP-2018 shall lead to new ideas and innovations, after the launch of advanced technology such as 5G, IOT, M2M, etc. which shall govern the telecom sector of India.
- The key objectives of the policy are:
  - i. Broadband for all;
  - ii. Creating four million additional jobs in the Digital Communications sector;
  - iii. Enhancing the contribution of the Digital Communications sector to 8% of India's GDP from ~ 6% in 2017;
  - iv. Propelling India to the Top 50 Nations in the ICT Development Index of ITU from 134 in 2017;
  - v. Enhancing India's contribution to Global Value Chains; and
  - vi. Ensuring Digital Sovereignty.
- These objectives are to be achieved by 2022.
- The policy advocates:-
  - i. Establishment of a National Digital Grid by creating a National Fibre Authority;

- ii. Establishing Common Service Ducts and utility corridors in all new city and highway road projects;
- iii. Creating a collaborative institutional mechanism between Centre, States and Local Bodies for Common Rights of Way, standardization of costs and timelines;
- iv. Removal of barriers to approvals; and
- v. Facilitating development of Open Access Next Generation Networks.

## **Important Acts and Bills**

### **Prevention of Corruption (Amendment) Act, 2018**

- Received assent of the President on 26 July 2018.
- The 1988 Act does not contain any provisions directly dealing with active domestic bribery, that is, the offence of giving bribe. Section 12 of the Act which provides for punishment for abetment of offences defined in section 7 or section 11, covers the offence indirectly.
- The Bill makes specific provisions related to giving a bribe to a public servant, and giving a bribe by a commercial organization.
- The Bill has replaced the definition of criminal misconduct. It now requires that the intention to acquire assets disproportionate to income also be proved, in addition to possession of such assets. Thus, the threshold to establish the offence of possession of disproportionate assets has been increased by the Bill.
- Powers and procedures for the attachment and forfeiture of property of public servants accused of corruption have been introduced in the Bill.
- The 1988 Act requires prior sanction of the competent authority to prosecute serving public officials. The Bill extends this protection to former officials.
- One of the fundamental features of the amended act is that a new section — Section 17A — has been inserted, which bars an “enquiry or inquiry or investigation” by an anti-corruption agency (CBI included) against a public servant in matters relating to the discharge of his official duties, without the prior approval of the Centre or the state government, as the case may be, or the disciplinary authority.

### **Fugitive Economic Offenders Act, 2018**

- Received assent of the President on 6 August 2018.
- It replaces the Fugitive Economic Offenders Ordinance, 2018 issued on 21 April 2018.
- The Bill allows for a person to be declared as a fugitive economic offender (FEO) if: (i) an arrest warrant has been issued against him for any specified offences where the value involved is over ₹100 crore, and (ii) he has left the country and refuses to return to face prosecution.
- Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) can file an application for declaration of fugitive economic offender for confiscation of their assets.
- Such cases will be tried under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA).
- Upon declaration as an FEO, properties of a person may be confiscated and vested in the central government, free of encumbrances (rights and claims in the property). Further, the FEO or any company associated with him may be barred from filing or defending civil claims.
- The bill has provision for appointment of an administrator to dispose of property of fugitive offender to pay off the creditors. Besides, it has provisions to override provisions of other existing laws.
- The existing laws under which such fugitive economic offender are tried include Recovery of Debts Due to Banks and Financial Institutions Act (RDDBFI), Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, (SARFESI) and Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code.

## **National Medical Commission Bill, 2017**

- Introduced in the Lok Sabha on 29 December 2017.
- On 29 March 2018, the Union Cabinet approved certain amendments in the Bill.
- NMC will replace the Medical Council of India, which had been in the centre of controversy due to accusations of corruption.
- The NMC will regulate medical education and practice. It will determine fees for up to 50% seats in private medical institutions and deemed universities.
- Final MBBS examination to be held as a common exam across the country and would serve as an exit test to be called National Exit Test (NEXT). It would also serve as the screening test for doctors with foreign medical qualifications in order to practise in India.
- The provision in the original Bill dealing with “bridge course” for AYUSH practitioners to enable them to practise modern medicine was removed.
- Stringent punishment for unqualified medical practitioners or quacks could be as severe as imprisonment of up to one year along with a fine up to ₹5 lakh.

## **Dam Safety Bill, 2018**

- The Union Cabinet on 13 June 2018 approved the introduction of the Dam Safety Bill, 2018. The draft Bill aims to provide proper surveillance, inspection, operation, and maintenance of all specified dams in the country to ensure their safe functioning. Key features of the draft Bill include:
- The Bill seeks to establish the National Committee on Dam Safety. The Committee will evolve dam safety policies and recommend necessary regulations.
- The State Committee on Dam Safety will ensure proper surveillance, inspection, operation, maintenance, and safe functioning of all specified dams in a state.
- The Bill establishes the National Dam Safety Authority as a regulatory body. The Authority will implement policies, guidelines, and standards for dam safety in the country. It will maintain a national level database of all dams in the country and the records of major dam failures. It will also look into unresolved issues between the State Dam Safety Organization of two states.
- The State Dam Safety Organization in every state will look into the safety aspects of the state specific dams.

## **DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018**

- On 5 July 2018, the Union Cabinet approved the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2018.
- The Bill seeks to “provide for the regulation of use and application of DNA technology for the purposes of establishing identity of certain categories of persons including the victims, offenders, suspects, undertrials, missing persons and unknown deceased persons and for matters connected therewith...” Its major features include:
- DNA Regulatory Board: The board, which will have regional offices as required, will certify labs authorized to carry out DNA testing, approve establishment of DNA databanks and supervise their functioning, and lay down procedures and guidelines for collection, storing, sharing and deletion of DNA information.
- The Secretary of the Department of Biotechnology will be the ex-officio chairman of the proposed DNA Regulatory Board.

- A National DNA Databank and certain regional DNA Databanks will store DNA profiles received from DNA labs in a specified format.
- The DNA data, including DNA profiles, samples and records, contained in any DNA labs and Databank “shall be used only for the purpose of facilitating identification of the person and not for any other purpose”. It will only be made available to facilitate the identification of persons in criminal cases in accordance with the rules of admissibility of evidence, to facilitate prosecution or defence, and in investigations relating to civil matters.
- DNA information cannot be taken from an arrested person without consent.
- In case a suspect or criminal refuses to give consent for DNA collection, and his/her DNA information is considered vital for investigation of a crime, the DNA information can be collected from him/her only with the approval of a magistrate.
- Disclosure of DNA information to unauthorized persons, or for unauthorized purposes, shall lead to penalties: up to three years in jail and up to ₹1 lakh as fine.
- Despite the government’s pitch that such a DNA bank will be useful in solving crimes, activists and lawyers have argued that India does not have a data protection law and that information like ancestry or susceptibility to a disease, or other genetic traits, is liable to be misused. It has also been argued that DNA tests have not led to an improvement in conviction rates in countries where legislation is already being followed.

### **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Second Amendment) Bill, 2017**

- Passed by Lok Sabha on 18 July 2018.
- The Right to Education Act, 2009 prohibits detention of children till they complete elementary education i.e., class 8. The Bill amends this provision to state that a regular examination will be held in class 5 and class 8 at the end of every academic year. If a child fails the exam, he will be given additional instruction, and take a re-examination.
- If he fails in the re-examination, the relevant central or state government may decide to allow schools to detain the child.
- There are differing views on whether children should be detained for failing examinations in elementary school. Some argue that automatic promotion reduces incentive for children to learn and for teachers to teach. Others argue that detaining a child leads to drop outs and does not focus on the systemic factors that affect learning such as quality of teachers, schools, and assessment.
- Section 16 of the Act provides that no child admitted in a school shall be held back in any class or expelled from school till the completion of elementary education. This provision was made in the said Act because examinations are often used for eliminating children who obtain poor marks, which compels children either to repeat the same grade or leave the school altogether. It was felt that compelling a child to repeat a class is both de-motivating and discouraging.
- States and Union territories have been raising the issue of adverse effect on the learning levels of children due to the No-Detention Policy.
- Under the RTE Act, 2009, Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) is the evaluation mechanism for elementary education. Inadequate implementation of CCE has contributed to poor learning outcomes. CCE should be implemented properly for providing quality education at the elementary level.

## **Financial Resolution and Deposit Insurance Bill, 2017**

- The FRDI Bill establishes a Resolution Corporation to monitor financial firms, anticipate risk of failure, take corrective action, and resolve them in case of such failure. The Corporation will also provide deposit insurance up to a certain limit, in case of bank failure.
- The Resolution Corporation or the appropriate financial sector regulator may classify financial firms under five categories, based on their risk of failure. These categories in the order of increasing risk are: (i) low, (ii) moderate, (iii) material, (iv) imminent, and (v) critical.
- The Resolution Corporation will take over the management of a financial firm once it is classified as ‘critical’. It will resolve the firm within one year (may be extended by another year).
- Resolution may be undertaken using methods including: (i) merger or acquisition, (ii) transferring the assets, liabilities and management to a temporary firm, or (iii) liquidation. If resolution is not completed within a maximum period of two years, the firm will be liquidated. The Bill also specifies the order of distributing liquidation proceeds.
- In India, deposits in banks are insured for a maximum of ₹1 lakh by the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation, which is now an arm of the RBI. There are concerns that the Bill may not clearly lay down the quantum of protection for deposits, or classify deposits separately.
- The Bill is part of the G20 FSB (Financial Stability Board) requirement. India is a member of FSB and G20.
- Today if a bank fails, the depositor will get only the insured amount and all others would lose their money. Until now it was not happening because the bank is rescued with taxpayers’ money. Globally this is unacceptable if losses are big and systemic in nature. How long can tax payers bail out banks? With the FRDI Bill, if a bank fails everyone will have to sacrifice, including depositors and the part of the money which is not insured.
- The Bill was withdrawn from the Lok Sabha on 7 August 2018 as it has been criticized for some of its controversial provisions, including the “bail-in” clause, which suggests that depositor money could be used by failing financial institutions to stay afloat.

## **Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018**

- The Lok Sabha on 26 July 2018 passed the Trafficking of Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill, 2018.
- The Bill provides for the prevention, rescue, and rehabilitation of trafficked persons and seeks to establish National Anti-Trafficking Bureau (NATB) to investigate trafficking cases.
- The NATB may take over the investigation of any offence under the Bill that has been referred to it by two or more states.
- Key functions of the Bureau include: (i) coordinating and monitoring surveillance along known routes, (ii) facilitating surveillance, enforcement and preventive steps at source, transit and destination points, (iii) maintaining coordination between law enforcement agencies and non-governmental organizations and other stakeholders,

and (iv) increasing international cooperation with authorities abroad for intelligence sharing, and mutual legal assistance.

- Under the Bill, the state government will appoint a State Nodal Officer. He will be responsible for: (i) follow up action under the Bill, as per the instructions of the State Anti-Trafficking Committee, and (ii) providing relief and rehabilitation services. The state government will also appoint a Police Nodal Officer at the state and district levels.
- The Bill also provides for the setting up of Anti-Trafficking Units (ATUs) at the district level. ATUs will deal with the prevention, rescue, and protection of victims and witnesses, and for the investigation and prosecution of trafficking offences. In districts where an ATU is not functional, this responsibility will be taken up by the local police station.
- The Bill provides for the establishment of Anti-Trafficking Relief and Rehabilitation Committees (ATCs) at the national, state, and district levels. These Committees will be responsible for: (i) providing compensation to victims, (ii) repatriation of victims, and (iii) re-integration of victims in society, among others.
- Search & Rescue, Protection & Rehabilitation are also provided in the Bill.

### **The Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill, 2018**

- Passed by Lok Sabha on 30 July 2018.
- The Bill amends the IPC, 1860 to increase the minimum punishment for rape of women from seven years to ten years.
- Rape and gang rape of girls below the age of 12 years will carry minimum imprisonment of twenty years and is extendable to life imprisonment or death.
- Rape of girls below the age of 16 years is punishable with imprisonment of twenty years or life imprisonment.
- The Bill seeks to replace the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2018.
- Rape of women and minor children is an offence under the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012. In 2016, 21% of the total 39,068 cases of rape were against minor girls below the age of 16 years. Over the last year, several states have introduced or passed Bills to allow death penalty for rape of girls below the age of 12 years.
- While examining punishment for the offence of rape, the Justice Verma Committee (2013) deliberated on whether death penalty should be awarded. The Committee acknowledged that though rape was a violent crime, the punishment should be proportionate, as it was possible to rehabilitate the survivor. The Committee supported enhanced punishment extending up to life imprisonment for rape, but not death penalty. The Law Commission (2015) observed that in cases related to rape and murder of minor boys and girls, courts have differed in awarding death sentence. In March 2013, Parliament passed the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 to amend the IPC to allow death penalty only in rape cases where the accompanying brutality leads to death or leaves the victim in a persistent vegetative state, and in cases of repeat offenders.
- On the other hand, it has been argued that imposing death penalty for rape crimes could deter individuals from committing the offence and therefore help reduce its incidence. Further, awarding death penalty allows for retributive justice for the victims.

## **The Constitution (123<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Bill, 2017**

- Passed by the Parliament on 31 July 2018.
- It seeks to grant the National Commission on Backward Classes (NCBC) constitutional status, at par with the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.
- Currently, under the Constitution the NCSC has the power to look into complaints and welfare measures with regard to Scheduled Castes, backward classes and Anglo-Indians. The Bill seeks to remove the power of the NCSC to examine matters related to backward classes.
- The NCBC is a body set up under the National Commission for Backward Classes Act, 1993. It has the power to examine complaints regarding inclusion or exclusion of groups within the list of backward classes, and advise the central government in this regard. The Bill seeks to establish the NCBC under the Constitution, and provide it the authority to examine complaints and welfare measures regarding socially and educationally backward classes.
- Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the duties of the NCBC will include: (i) investigating and monitoring how safeguards provided to the backward classes under the Constitution and other laws are being implemented, (ii) inquiring into specific complaints regarding violation of rights, and (iii) advising and making recommendations on socio-economic development of such classes. The central and state governments will be required to consult with the NCBC on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.

## **The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Bill, 2018**

- Passed by the Parliament on 9 August 2018.
- The Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Amendment Bill, 2018 seeks to amend the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. The Act prohibits the commission of offences against members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and establishes special courts for the trial of such offences and the rehabilitation of victims.
- On 20 March 2018, the Supreme Court stated that for persons accused of committing an offence under the Act, approval of the Senior Superintendent of Police will be required before an arrest is made. Further, the Deputy Superintendent of Police may conduct a preliminary enquiry to find out whether there is a prima facie case under the Act. The Court also ruled that there shall be no absolute bar against the grant of anticipatory bail in case of an offence under the Atrocities Act, where no prima facie case is made out or if the complaint is found to be mala fide.
- The Bill states that the investigating officer will not require the approval of any authority for the arrest of an accused. Further, it provides that a preliminary enquiry will not be required for the registration of a First Information Report against a person accused under the Act.
- The Bill states that persons accused of committing an offence under the Act cannot apply for anticipatory bail. The Bill seeks to clarify that this provision will apply despite any judgments or orders of a court that provide otherwise.

## Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018

- Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission Act) Bill 2018 which seeks to repeal UGC Act and provides for setting up of Higher Education Commission of India has been prepared by the Ministry of HRD and placed in public domain for comments and suggestions. The focus of Higher Education Commission of India will be on improving academic standards and the quality of Higher Education.
- The transformation of the regulatory set up is guided by the following principles:
  - Less Government and more Governance: Downsizing the scope of the Regulator. No more interference in the management issues of the educational institutions.
  - Separation of grant functions: The grant functions would be carried out by the HRD Ministry, and the HECI would focus only on academic matters.
  - End of Inspection Raj: Regulation is done through transparent public disclosures, merit-based decision making on matters regarding standards and quality in higher education.
  - Focus on academic quality: HECI is tasked with the mandate of improving academic standards with specific focus on learning outcomes, evaluation of academic performance by institutions, mentoring of institutions, training of teachers, promote use of educational technology etc. It will develop norms for setting standards for opening and closure of institutions, provide for greater flexibility and autonomy to institutions, lay standards for appointments to critical leadership positions at the institutional level irrespective of University started under any Law (including State Law).
  - Powers to enforce: The Regulator will have powers to enforce compliance to the academic quality standards and will have the power to order closure of sub-standard and bogus institutions. Non-compliance could result in fines or jail sentence.
- The constitution of the Commission is strengthened by the cooption of Chairpersons of regulatory bodies in higher education, namely the AICTE and the NCTE. Moreover the Chairpersons/Vice-Chairpersons and members will be scholars of eminence and standing in the field of academics and research, possessing leadership qualities, proven capacities for institution building and deep understanding of issues of higher education policy and practice.
- The Commission will also specify norms and processes for fixing of fee chargeable by higher education institutions and advice the Central Government or the State Governments, as the case may be, regarding steps to be taken for making education affordable to all.
- The Commission will monitor, through a national data base, all matters covering the development of emerging fields of knowledge and balanced growth of higher education institutions in all spheres and specially in promotion of academic quality in higher education.
- The UGC, it is argued, is preoccupied with disbursing funds and is unable to concentrate on mentoring higher education institutes, focus on research, and implement other quality measures required in the education sector.

- The apprehensions include curtailment of the powers of states, restrictions on the autonomy of universities and concentration of power in the Ministry.

### **The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017**

- The Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, 2017 was passed by the Lok Sabha on 9 August 2018. The Bill seeks to amend the Representation of People Act, 1950 and the Representation of People Act, 1951 to allow for proxy voting and to make certain provisions of the Acts gender-neutral.
- The 1950 Act permits the registration of persons in electoral rolls who are ordinarily resident in a constituency. These persons include: (i) persons holding a service qualification (such as member of armed forces, member of armed police force of a state, serving outside the state, or central government employees posted outside India); and (ii) persons holding certain offices in India declared by the President in consultation with Election Commission. Under the Act, the wives of such persons are also deemed to be ordinarily residing in India. The Bill replaces the term 'wife' with 'spouse'.
- The 1951 Act permits an overseas voter to vote only in person. An overseas voter is a citizen of India who is absent from his place of ordinary residence in India. The Bill seeks to amend the 1951 Act to permit an overseas voter to cast their vote in person or by proxy in the constituency where the poll is taken.
- The 1951 Act provides for the wife of a person holding a service qualification to vote. The Bill replaces the term 'wife' with 'spouse'.

### **Draft Personal Data Protection Bill 2018**

- The Committee of Experts on a Data Protection Framework for India (Chair: Justice B. N. Srikrishna) submitted its report and draft Bill to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology on July 27, 2018.
- The Committee observed that the regulatory framework has to balance the interests of the individual with regard to his personal data and the interests of the entity such as a service provider who has access to this data. It noted that the relationship between the individual and the service provider must be viewed as a fiduciary relationship. This is due to the dependence of the individual on the service provider to obtain a service. Therefore, the service provider processing the data is under an obligation to deal fairly with the individual's personal data, and use it for the authorised purposes only.
- To prevent abuse of power by service providers, the law should establish their basic obligations, including: (i) the obligation to process data fairly and reasonably, and (ii) the obligation to give notice to the individual at the time of collecting data to various points in the interim.
- The Committee defined personal data to include data from which an individual may be identified or identifiable, either directly or indirectly. The Committee sought to distinguish personal data protection from the protection of sensitive personal data, since its processing could result in greater harm to the individual. Sensitive data is related to intimate matters where there is a higher expectation of privacy (e.g., caste, religion, and sexual orientation of the individual).
- As a rule, consent must be treated as a pre-condition for processing personal data.

- The Committee identified four bases for non-consensual processing: (i) where processing is relevant for the state to discharge its welfare functions, (ii) to comply with the law or with court orders in India, (iii) when necessitated by the requirement to act promptly (to save a life, for instance), and (iv) in employment contracts, in limited situations (such, as where giving the consent requires an unreasonable effort for the employer).
- The Committee also recommended setting up a regulator to enforce the regulatory framework.

## **Landmark Judgments**

### **National Anthem not mandatory in cinema halls**

- The Supreme Court on 9 January 2018 ruled that playing national anthem before screening movies in cinema halls is optional and not mandatory.
- It left the choice of whether to play the anthem or not to the discretion of individual cinema hall owners. However, if the anthem is played, patrons in the hall are bound to show respect by standing up. The court clarified that the exception granted to disabled persons from standing up during the anthem “shall remain in force on all occasions”.
- The court pointed out its judgment in the famed Bijoe Emmanuel versus State of Kerala case, which dealt with three children belonging to the Jehovah Witnesses sect refusing to sing the anthem in the school assembly though they stood up in respect, to drive in the point that standing up is indeed a sign of “proper respect” to the anthem.
- The modification will be in place till the Union government takes a final decision on the recommendations of a 12-member high-profile inter-ministerial committee regarding the occasions, circumstances and events for the solemn rendering of the anthem. The ministerial panel will examine whether any amendments are necessary to the Prevention of Insult to National Honour Act of 1971 to expand or specify the meaning of “respect” to the national anthem.
- The 1971 Act states: “Whoever intentionally prevents the singing of the Jana Gana Mana or causes disturbances to any assembly engaged in such singing shall be punished with imprisonment for a term, which may extend to three years, or with fine, or with both.”

### **CCI holds Google guilty of Search Bias**

- The Competition Commission of India on 8 February 2018 found search giant Google guilty of abusing its dominant position in India and imposed a penalty of ₹ 136 crore. The penalty amounts to 5 per cent of Google’s average total revenue from India operations in the last three years.
- The case against Google dates back to 2012 when matrimony.com and Consumer Unity & Trust Society had complained to the competition regulator about Google’s anti-competitive behaviour. The internet giant provides online search services and online advertising business, namely AdWords and AdSense.
- According to the judgment, Google through its search design has not only placed its commercial flight unit at a prominent position on Search Engine Result Page, it has also allocated disproportionate real estate thereof to such units to the disadvantage of verticals trying to gain market access.
- Google has provided a further link in such commercial units which leads users to its specialised search result page, resulting in unfair imposition upon the users of general search services as well.
- Prohibitions imposed under the negotiated search intermediation agreements upon the publishers have been held to be unfair as they restricted the choice of these partners and prevented them from using the search services provided by competing search engines.

- Google was leveraging its dominance in the market for online general web search, to strengthen its position in the market for online syndicate search services. The competitors were denied access to the online search syndication services market due to such a conduct.
- On 27 April 2018, the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) stayed the order of the Competition Commission.

### **Supreme Court allows Passive Euthanasia, ‘Living Will’**

- A five-judge Constitution bench presided over by Chief Justice Dipak Misra on 9 March 2018 allowed passive euthanasia, but made sure to set out strict guidelines that will govern when it is permitted.
- The apex court also allowed an individual to draft a living will specifying that they not be put on life support if they slip into an incurable coma in the future. In a ‘living will’, a person can make a statement in advance that his/her life should not be prolonged by putting them on a ventilator or an artificial support system.
- Though the judges gave four separate opinions, all of them were unanimous that a ‘living will’ should be allowed, because an individual should not be allowed to continue suffering in a vegetative state when they don’t wish to continue living.
- The court also set in place strict guidelines for carrying out the mandate of a ‘living will’. The court did this by specifying who is authorised to give effect to it. The court also talked of involving a medical board to determine whether the patient in a vegetative state could be revived or not.
- The Bench also held that the right to live with dignity also includes the smoothening of the process of dying in case of a terminally ill patient or a person in persistent vegetative state with no hope of recovery.
- The judgment is still fraught with several issues that need to be addressed. Firstly, the Supreme Court has laid down a procedure that is arguably even more cumbersome than the one currently in force. After the Aruna Shanbaug judgment, every time passive euthanasia was to be given effect to, permission of the High Court was required. Consequently, passive euthanasia was invoked in only one case. With the latest judgment, passive euthanasia is even more difficult to give effect to, as the procedure prescribed involves execution of the directive in presence of two witnesses, authentication by a Judicial Magistrate, permission from two Medical Boards and a jurisdictional collector. (See also ‘Living Will’ under ‘Current Issues’)

### **SC Issues Directions to Prevent Misuse of SC/ST Act**

- Supreme Court of India on 20 March 2018 issued directions to prevent the misuse of provisions of Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989.
- No arrest may be effected, if an accused person is a public servant, without written permission of the appointing authority and if such a person is not a public servant, without written permission of the Senior Superintendent of Police of the District, which may be granted in appropriate cases if considered necessary for reasons recorded.
- As and when a person arrested is produced before the Magistrate, the Magistrate must apply his mind to the reasons recorded and further detention should be allowed only if the reasons recorded are found to be valid.

- To avoid false implication, before FIR is registered, preliminary enquiry may be made whether the case falls in the parameters of the Atrocities Act and is not frivolous or motivated.
- There is no absolute bar against grant of anticipatory bail in cases under the Atrocities Act if no prima facie case is made out or where on judicial scrutiny the complaint is found to be prima facie mala fide.
- The Supreme Court on 3 April 2018 said its March 20 judgment, banning immediate arrest of a person accused of insulting or injuring a SC/ST member, is meant to protect innocents from arbitrary arrest and not an affront to dalit rights.

### **SC/ST Reservation in Promotions**

- The Supreme Court on 5 June 2018 allowed the Union of India to proceed with the reservation in favour of SC/ST employees “as per the law” in matters of promotion, until the final disposal of the controversy by the constitution bench.
- A vacation bench of Justice Adarsh Kumar Goel and Justice Ashok Bhushan was hearing an SLP preferred by the Centre against the August 2017 judgment of the Delhi High Court quashing the DoPT Office Memorandum (OM) dated August 13, 1997, which provided for the continuation of reservation in promotions indefinitely. The high court had passed the verdict in the light of the apex court constitution bench judgment in M Nagaraj (2006).
- On May 17, 2018, a bench of Justice Kurian Joseph and Justice Mohan M Shantanagoudar, hearing an SLP against the 2011 judgment of the Punjab & Haryana High Court quashing a similar OM in pursuance of M Nagaraj, had directed “that the pendency of this Special Leave Petition shall not stand in the way of Union of India taking steps for the purpose of promotion from ‘reserved to reserved’ and ‘unreserved to unreserved’ and also in the matter of promotion on merits”.
- In the Nagaraj case the court upheld the constitutional validity of the 77<sup>th</sup>, 81<sup>st</sup>, 82<sup>nd</sup>, and 85<sup>th</sup> Amendments. It, however, ruled that if the state “wish(ed) to exercise their discretion and make (a) provision (for reservation in promotions for SCs/STs), the State has to collect quantifiable data showing backwardness of the class and inadequacy of representation of that class in public employment in addition to compliance of Article 335”. Also, “even if the State has compelling reasons... (it) will have to see that its reservation provision does not... breach the ceiling-limit of 50% or obliterate the creamy layer or extend the reservation indefinitely”.
- A 5-Member Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court on 26 September 2018 said the “creamy layer test” would apply if reservations in promotion are given to the SCs and STs. It said this was needed to prevent the creamy layer among SCs and STs from bagging all the coveted jobs in the public sector.

### **Special Status of Delhi**

- In a landmark judgment pronounced by Five Judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on 4 July 2018, the Court has ruled that the NCT of Delhi is not a State and occupies a special status under the Constitution.
- The Apex Court also deliberated on the powers of the Lieutenant Governor (LG) and the extent of power that can be exercised by the LG in matters to be decided by the Delhi Government. The Supreme Court inter alia made the following key observations:

- The Parliament has power to make laws for NCTD in respect of any of the matters enumerated in the State List and Concurrent List. The Legislative Assembly of NCTD has also the legislative power with respect to matters enumerated in the State List (except excepted entries) and in the Concurrent List.
- The “aid and advice” given by Council of Ministers as referred to in sub-clause (4) of Article 239AA is binding on the LG unless he decides to exercise his power given in proviso to sub clause (2) of Article 239AA.
- The power given in proviso to sub-clause (4) to LG to be exercised in a routine manner rather it is to be exercised by the LG on valid reasons after due consideration, when it becomes necessary to safeguard the interest of the Union Territory.
- The word ‘State’ as occurring in proviso to Article 73 after the 7<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment cannot be read as including Union Territory. Reading the word ‘Union Territory’ within the word ‘State’ in proviso to Article 73 shall not be in consonance with the Scheme of Part VIII (Union Territories) of the Constitution.

### **Parliament must make laws to keep criminals away from politics**

- The Supreme Court on 25 September 2018 refused to bar candidates facing criminal charges from contesting elections, leaving the matter in the hands of Parliament, political parties and politicians.
- The court also laid guidelines to curb corruption in politics and ensure that voters are able to make informed choices. It directed candidates to provide details about all criminal cases pending against them. Political parties were asked to publish the criminal antecedents of candidates of their parties on their websites and widely circulate this information on other fora.

### **Aadhaar not Unconstitutional**

- Four of the five judges on a Constitution Bench, presided over by Chief Justice Dipak Misra, on 26 September 2018 ruled that the law enabling the implementation of the programme does not violate the right to privacy of citizens; instead, the project empowers marginalised sections and procures dignity for them along with services, benefits and subsidies by leveraging the power of technology.
- In upholding the constitutional validity of Aadhaar and clarifying areas in which it cannot be made mandatory, the Supreme Court has restored the original intent of the programme: to plug leakages in subsidy schemes and to have better targeting of welfare benefits.
- The majority opinion has sought to limit the import of the scheme to aspects directly related to welfare benefits, subsidies and money spent from the Consolidated Fund of India. Thus, controversial circulars and rules making it mandatory to link mobile phone numbers and bank accounts to Aadhaar numbers have been declared unconstitutional.
- Section 57 of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016, has been struck down to the extent that it authorised body corporates and individuals to use the Aadhaar number to establish someone’s identity.
- Schools have been barred from making the submission of the Aadhaar number mandatory to enrol children.

- Regarding the issue that the Act was passed as a money bill, the Court accepted the government's argument that Section 7, which enables the use of Aadhaar to avail of any government subsidy, benefit or service for which expenditure is incurred out of the Consolidated Fund of India, is the core provision in the law, and that this makes it a 'money bill'.
- The Court noted that the decision of the Speaker to classify a bill as money bill is amenable to judicial review.
- In his dissent, Justice D.Y. Chandrachud argued that the Rajya Sabha's authority has been superseded and that this "constitutes a fraud on the Constitution". As a result of this "debasement of a democratic institution", he held the Aadhaar Act unconstitutional. He highlighted the biometric authentication failures that have led to denial of rights and legal entitlements, and located the reason for such failures in the project's inability to account for and remedy flaws in its network and design. He ruled that denial of benefits arising out of any social security rights is "violative of human dignity and impermissible under our constitutional scheme".

### **Courts to go live**

- A 3-member bench of the Supreme Court on 26 September 2018 gave its nod to live-streaming of court proceedings, saying this will bring more accountability and enhance the rule of law.
- "By providing 'virtual' access of live court proceedings to one and all, it will effectuate the right of access to justice or right to open justice and public trial, right to know the developments of law and including the right of justice at the doorstep of the litigants."
- As a pilot project, only cases of constitutional and national importance being argued for final hearing before the Constitution Bench will be live-streamed initially. For this, permission of the court concerned will have to be sought in writing in advance.
- Consent of parties to the proceedings must be insisted upon, and if there is no unanimity between them, the court concerned can take the appropriate decision in the matter.
- "There must be a reasonable time-delay (say 10 minutes) between the live court proceedings and the broadcast, in order to ensure that any information which ought not to be shown, as directed by the court, can be edited from being broadcast."

### **Adultery no longer a crime**

- Describing the law criminalising adultery as arbitrary, which treats the wife as chattel and deprives women of her sexual autonomy and dignity, a 5-Member Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court on 27 September 2018 struck down as "unconstitutional" Indian Penal Code Section 497, which makes adultery a punishable offence only for men. Adultery will, however, continue to be a ground for any civil wrong, including a ground for divorce.
- The provision violated Articles 14 (right to equality); 15(1) (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth); and, 21 (protection of life and personal liberty).
- The bench also held as unconstitutional Section 198 of the Code of Criminal Procedure which provides for prosecution for offences against marriage.

## **Sabarimala Temple: Supreme Court allows entry of women of all ages**

- The Supreme Court of India on September 28, 2018 allowed the entry of women into the Sabarimala Ayyappa temple in Kerala. The apex court held that women, irrespective of their age, have the right to enter the temple.
- The five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court struck down Rule 3(b) of the Kerala Hindu Places of Public Worship (Authorisation of Entry) Rules, 1965 by a 4:1 majority as it is a clear violation of the right of Hindu women to practice religion under Article 25. It was on the basis of this rule that the entry of women aged between 10 and 50 years was barred in the Sabarimala temple.
- Devotees of Ayyappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination.
- Biological or physiological reasons cannot be accepted in freedom for faith.
- The bar on entry of women between age of 10 and 50 years is not an essential part of the religion.
- In her dissenting judgement, Justice Indu Malhotra held that issues of deep religious sentiments should not ordinarily be interfered by the Court.

## **Ayodhya Dispute not referred to Constitutional Bench**

- The Supreme Court on 27 September 2018 put an end to a critical debate that had cropped up in the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid title dispute case. By a 2-1 majority judgment, the court ruled that it won't be reviewing its 1994 observation that a mosque is not integral to Islam. However, it also said that that observation won't be a guiding principle to decide the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid land dispute, the hearing for which was to commence from October 29 in front of a three-judge bench, but adjourned to January, 2019.
- The approach of the apex court is in the direction of treating it purely as a land dispute, which means that the case should be settled according to existing property laws and legal arguments, not suppositions, sentiments or intentions.
- The Hindus are represented in the case by the Nirmohi Akhara and Ram Lala, the deity itself, while the Muslims are led by the Sunni Central Wakf Board.

## **Long Cohabitation is presumed marriage**

- The Supreme Court on 9 November 2018 upheld the "presumption" that a couple who live together as husband and wife are legally married and the woman can claim maintenance under Section 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.
- A Bench of Justices R. Banumathi and Indira Banerjee observed that it is "fairly well settled that the law presumes in favour of marriage and against concubinage when a man and woman have cohabited continuously for a number of years".
- The judgment was based on an appeal filed by a woman against a Karnataka High Court decision of June 2009. The High Court set aside a family court order, directing the man she lived with since 1998, and had two children by, to pay maintenance. Their relationship had been solemnised in a temple. He had later abandoned the family.

## Current Issues

### India and the Rohingya Refugees

- The number of Rohingyas in India was 10,500 in 2015 and increased four times to 40,000 in the following two years.
- While answering a question in Parliament on 9 August 2017, India's Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijiju said the government was planning to deport Rohingyas from India because they are "illegal immigrants." The minister later clarified that the deportation plan was "not yet firmed up."
- On 14 September 2017, India launched "Operation Insaniyat" to provide relief assistance for the refugee camps in Bangladesh. Delhi's decision to extend help fits into its desire to de-incentivise Rohingya refugees entering into India.
- On 20 December 2017, Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankhar visited Myanmar and signed a MoU on Rakhine State Development Programme with Myanmar's Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement aimed at "socio-economic development and livelihood initiatives in Rakhine State" that included "a project to build prefabricated housing in Rakhine State to meet the immediate needs of returning people."
- At the invitation of the Myanmar government, India joined the UNSC delegation that visited Myanmar in early May 2018 along with three other neighbours—China, Laos, and Thailand. During Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's visit to Myanmar on 10-11 May 2018, she stressed the importance of "safe, speedy and sustainable return of displaced persons to Rakhine State."
- The lack of a national policy framework on refugees has complicated India's handling of the Rohingya crisis.
- The UN says the Indian government has an international legal obligation to acknowledge the institutionalised discrimination, persecution, hate and human rights violations the Rohingyas face in their country of origin, and to provide them with necessary protection.
- India has conventionally "created disincentives" for refugees to "stay on in India permanently", citing the case of refugees from Bangladesh (East Pakistan then) during the 1971 war. India helped Bangladesh but did not regard those fleeing the country as refugees and that "ensured their return" to Bangladesh after the war.
- Another school of thought argues that the framing of the Rohingya crisis through the security argument is short-sighted as it could create more security challenges for India, including "greater radicalisation" of a repressed community that could have serious "spill over" effects on India. According to this line of reasoning, the government's Rohingya approach has put at stake the lives of thousands of Indian diaspora communities in different countries including Myanmar. It asserts that the government's silence has allowed "ceding space for other countries to take the lead" in the Rohingya crisis. Further, the approach has undermined India's long traditional heritage as an "open" and "democratic" society that has always kept its doors open for refugees.

### Judiciary in Turmoil

- Four senior judges of the Supreme Court on 12 January 2018 mounted a virtual revolt against the chief justice, listing a litany of problems that they said are

afflicting the country's highest court and warned they could destroy Indian democracy. The unprecedented move at a joint news conference by the four judges, Justice J Chelameswar, the second senior judge after the Chief Justice of India, Justices Ranjan Gogoi, M.B Lokur and Kurian Joseph left the judiciary and observers stunned, leaving uncertain how this open dissension in the hallowed institution would be resolved.

- The main issue raised by the judges was regarding allocation of cases by CJI. The judges alleged that there have been instances where cases having far reaching consequences for the nation and the institution have been assigned by the chief justices of this court selectively to the benches 'of their preference' without any rational basis for such assignment.
- "The administration of the SC is not in order and many things which are less than desirable have happened in last few months", said Justice Chelameswar.
- The press conference has exposed an unprecedented level of dissension in the top echelons of the judiciary and points to a serious crisis of legitimacy.
- Logically, this should be an internal matter of the judiciary, one that is best settled through deliberations in a full court meeting of all the Supreme Court judges themselves.
- In the controversial Prasad Education Trust case, the petitioners had alleged that some individuals were plotting to influence the Supreme Court. In an unusual order, a Division Bench headed by Justice Chelameswar went ahead to delineate the composition of the Bench to hear the case, in which charges of judicial corruption were made, coupled with hints that there would be a conflict of interest if Justice Misra were to hear it. Eventually, a five-judge Bench headed by Justice Misra overturned the order and asserted that the CJI was indeed the master of the roster and that he alone could assign cases and decide on the composition of benches.
- The four judges also seem to have had an issue over the petition that sought an inquiry into the death of special CBI judge B.H. Loya in 2014 being posted before a particular Bench.
- The Bar Council of India condemned the development. "The judiciary of the land is by far the holiest and the most powerful institution and in which even today, each citizen of the country has full and unflinching faith. Any and every judge should first do a self introspection and look at himself/ herself, their actions, deeds before making or issuing any statements against the judiciary and they should make concerted efforts to safeguard and maintain the dignity and decorum of the institution."

### **Should lawmakers be banned from practising law?**

- Supreme Court on 16 February 2018 sought attorney general K.K. Venugopal's assistance to decide whether to entertain a PIL which seeks to bar MPs and MLAs from practising law in courts.
- The PIL by Delhi BJP leader and advocate Ashwini Upadhyay claims that Bar Council of India (BCI) rules bar legislators from practicing as advocates on ground of "conflict of interest". According to BCI Rule 49: "An advocate shall not be a full-time salaried employee of any person, government, firm, corporation or concern, so long as he continues to practise and shall, on taking any such employment, intimate the fact to the BCI and shall cease to practise as an advocate, so long he is in such employment."

- Upadhyay also says that it amounts to “professional misconduct” when MLAs and MPs, who get salary and other benefits from the public fund appear against the government.
- The injury caused to the public because a salaried person and particularly a public servant cannot practice as an Advocate but Legislators are practicing which is violation of Article 14 of the Constitution. Legislators take fee from litigant and salary from the public exchequer, which is professional misconduct, Upadhyay contended.
- The AG opposed the petition stating that the Parliament doesn’t function continuously for the whole year. It sits only for a certain number of days in a year.
- An expert committee of the BCI had in February 2018 recommended that MPs, MLAs and MLCs be allowed to pursue legal practice despite being elected as legislators.

### **Office of Profit**

- On January 19, 2018, the Election Commission recommended the disqualification 20 Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLAs from Delhi, citing that they held offices of profit. In 2016, the EC had issued show cause notices to 27 AAP MLAs who held offices as parliamentary secretaries, after a petition was filed seeking their disqualification.
- Articles 102(1)(a) of the Constitution says: “A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being, a member of either House of Parliament, (a) if he holds any office of profit under the Government of India or the Government of any State, other than an office declared by Parliament by law not to disqualify its holder”.
- Article 191(1)(a) says: “A person shall be disqualified for being chosen as, and for being, a member of the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council of a State, (a) if he holds any office of profit under the Government of India or the Government of any State specified in the First Schedule, other than an office declared by the Legislature of the State by law not to disqualify its holder”.
- Under the Representation of People Act too, holding an office of profit is grounds for disqualification.
- The Supreme Court, while upholding the disqualification of Jaya Bachchan from Rajya Sabha in 2006, had said, “For deciding the question as to whether one is holding an office of profit or not, what is relevant is whether the office is capable of yielding a profit or pecuniary gain and not whether the person actually obtained a monetary gain... If the office carries with it, or entitles the holder to, any pecuniary gain other than reimbursement of out of pocket/actual expenses, then the office will be an office of profit for the purpose of Article 102 (1)(a)...”
- On 23 March 2018, the Delhi high court restored membership of the 20 disqualified MLAs and referred the case back to the Election Commission, as there was a violation of natural justice and no oral hearing was given to the AAP MLAs before disqualifying them as legislators.

### **Sub-categorization of OBCs**

- The President on 2 October 2017 appointed a five-member Commission headed by Delhi High Court’s former Chief Justice G Rohini to examine sub categorization of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) under Article 340 of the Constitution.
- The terms of reference of the Commission are as under:

- (i) to examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of OBCs with reference to such classes included in the Central List;
  - (ii) to work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such OBCs; and
  - (iii) to take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of OBCs and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.
- The Supreme Court in its order dated 16.11.1992 in Indra Sawhney and others vs. Union of India observed that there is no Constitutional or legal bar to a State categorizing backward classes as backward or more backward and had further observed that if a State chooses to do it (sub-categorization), it is not impermissible in law.
  - Nine States of the country viz., Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Puducherry, Karnataka, Haryana, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have already carried out sub-categorization of Other Backward Classes.
  - The introduction of the concept of ‘creamy layer’ to isolate the well-off among those eligible for reservation was initially perceived as an attempt to prevent large sections of the creamy layer from taking advantage of the quota system to the detriment of the poorer sections among their own caste groups.
  - There is tremendous internal competition within groups. If we want reservations to make a significant difference in the lives of the marginalised groups, there are only two options. Either the government must drastically increase availability of government jobs and college seats or it must reduce the size of the population eligible for these benefits, possibly along the lines of sub-categorisation proposed by the government.
  - The Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC) of 2011 was supposed to provide up-to-date comprehensive data, but the credibility of the data is questionable.
  - The India Human Development Survey of 2011-12 found that among families where no adult has completed more than Class X, 59% children from the forward castes are able to read a simple paragraph while the proportion is only 48% for OBCs, 41% for Dalits and 35% for Adivasis. We know little about what goes on in schools to create these disadvantages but improving quality of education for all, including those from marginalised groups, must be a first step in addressing caste-based inequalities.
  - A second approach would be that the use of the OBC quota must be limited to once in a person’s lifetime. Linking the Aadhaar card to use of benefits makes it possible that individuals use their caste certificates only once, spreading the benefits of reservations over a wider population.

### **Minority Status for Hindus?**

- The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has set up a three-member committee chaired by Vice Chairman George Kurien to study the matter to give minority status to Hindus in 7 states and 1 union territory where their population is less than 50 per cent.
- It is argued that in absence of “minority” status to Hindus in these states, benefits meant for minority communities were being given away to majority community in an illegal and arbitrary manner.

- The states are Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, J & K, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Punjab. Lakshadweep has 2.5% Hindus.

## Triple Talaq

- On 22 August 2017 a five-judge Constitution bench, hearing the case on a batch of petitions that challenged the constitutional validity of triple talaq, delivered the verdict by a 3:2 majority wherein all agreed on its undesirability but differed on the validity of triple talaq. The majority judgment declared talaq-e-biddat (instant divorce) a “manifestly arbitrary” practice, which is not protected by Article 25 of the Constitution.
- The All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) had argued that personal laws of a community cannot be rewritten in the name of social reforms and opposed pleas on issues such as the gender discrimination faced by Muslim women in divorce cases.
- The AIMPLB had said the contentious issue relating to Muslim practices of polygamy, triple talaq and nikah halala are matters of “legislative policy” and cannot be interfered with. The Board also said that practices provided by the Muslim personal law on the issues of marriage, divorce and maintenance were based on the holy scripture Quran and “courts cannot supplant its own interpretations over the text of scriptures”.
- Regarding polygamy, the Board’s affidavit said though Islam permitted it, it does not encourage the practice and referred to various reports, including World Development Report 1991, which said that polygamy percentage among tribals, Buddhists and Hindus were 15, 8 and 5.80 per cent respectively compared with 5.73 per cent among Muslims.
- Sharia has granted the triple talaq mode of oral divorce to husbands because men are better at controlling emotions and, therefore, unlikely to take impulsive decisions, AIMPLB said.
- The board said the practice provided an easy mode to end marriages that had irretrievably broken down. It said keeping the husband and wife together when the husband did not want the woman made the husband and his family inflict mental and physical torture on the woman.
- The Board also said it is a very private method of divorce without going to court and making public the differences between the couple and then awaiting a long process for the outcome. Court proceedings and trading of charges by the couple harmed the reputation of the woman more than that of the man, it said.
- The government in its affidavit maintained that triple talaq and polygamy impacted a woman’s status and her right to live with confidence and dignity, and added that they were not protected under Article 25 of the Constitution, which guaranteed immunity to practices essential or integral to the religion. It gave a list of 10 Muslim countries which have codified polygamy and talaq.
- On 15 December 2017 the Union Cabinet cleared the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017, to make the practice of “instant” triple talaq a cognisable and non-bailable offence that would attract a jail term of three years.
- The Bill was passed by Lok Sabha but it could not be passed in the Rajya Sabha. On 20 September 2018 the Government promulgated an ordinance giving effect to the Bill.

## Living Wills

- A document that sets out how you should be cared for in an emergency or if you are otherwise incapacitated. Your living will sets forth your wishes on topics such as resuscitation, desired quality of life and end of life treatments including treatments you don't want to receive. This document is primarily between you and your doctor, and it advises them how to approach your treatment.
- Living wills allow people to declare in advance that their life must not be prolonged by life support systems if they slide into a vegetative state or go into irreversible coma.
- On October 11, 2017, the Centre informed the Supreme Court that it is vetting a draft law to permit "passive euthanasia"– The Medical Treatment of Terminally Ill Patients (Protection of Patients and Medical Practitioners) Bill – but that it is against letting people make "Living Wills", as it can make the elderly vulnerable to greedy relatives who have an eye on their wealth. The draft Bill was released by the Health Ministry in 2016, based on the Law Commission of India's Report No. 241.
- On March 9, 2018, the Supreme Court held that a person in persistent vegetative state can opt for passive euthanasia, and that a person can execute a living will to refuse medical treatment in case of a terminal illness.

## Citizenship Issue in Assam

- The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is a list of Indian citizens of Assam. The NRC was first compiled after independent India's first Census of 1951 to address concerns that Pakistan was trying to effect a demographic change in Assam through infiltration.
- The Bangladeshi liberation movement of 1971 sent lakhs of Muslims and Hindus from East Pakistan to Assam and West Bengal. After the 1971 war, efforts were made to send the refugees back, but did not succeed.
- The Supreme Court on 21 August 2014 gave the Centre and the Assam government three years to complete the entire process to update the NRC, which will help weed out illegal migrants from the state.
- The NRC Update of 2014–2016 across Assam includes the names of those people (or of their descendants) who appear in the NRC 1951, or in any of the Electoral Rolls up to the midnight of 24 March 1971 or in any one of the other admissible documents issued up to the midnight of 24 March 1971, which would prove their presence in Assam on or before 24 March 1971. The NRC (1951) and the Electoral Rolls up to the midnight of 24 March 1971 together are collectively called Legacy Data.
- On 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2018, the final draft of NRC was released. Names of 40 lakh people, out of 3.29 crore who applied, were left out in the final draft.
- As per Section 6A of the Citizenship Act, 1955 those who came from Bangladesh between 1966 and 1971 will have to register themselves with the Foreigners Regional Registration Officer, and will be included in the NRC, but will not have voting rights for 10 years from the date of registration. Section 6A is presently under challenge in the Supreme Court on the ground that a different cut-off date for a single state is discriminatory.
- The NRC is only a draft and those who are left out of the list can still apply and produce documents to prove their eligibility.

## **Mob Violence and Lynching**

- The Supreme Court on 17 July 2018 recommended that the Parliament may create a special law against lynching, asserting that “fear of law and veneration for the command of law constitute the foundation of a civilised society”.
- Lynching may be treated as a separate offence and adequate punishment for the same is to be provided.
- A special law in this field would instil a sense of fear for law amongst the people who involve themselves in such kinds of activities.
- There can be no shadow of doubt that the authorities which are conferred with the responsibility to maintain law and order in the States have the principal obligation to see that vigilantism, be it cow vigilantism or any other vigilantism of any perception, does not take place.
- The Court made some stern observations on the growing mob vigilantism and asserted that such extrajudicial attempts under the guise of protection of the law have to be nipped in the bud.
- It must be emphatically stated that a dynamic contemporary constitutional democracy imbibes the essential feature of accommodating pluralism in thought and approach so as to preserve cohesiveness and unity.
- Intolerance arising out of a dogmatic mindset sows the seeds of upheaval and has a chilling effect on freedom of thought and expression. Hence, tolerance has to be fostered and practised and not allowed to be diluted in any manner.
- The State Governments shall designate, a senior police officer, not below the rank of Superintendent of Police, as Nodal Officer in each district.
- A special task force shall be constituted so as to procure intelligence reports about the people who are likely to commit such crimes or who are involved in spreading hate speeches, provocative statements and fake news.
- The State Governments shall forthwith identify Districts, Sub-Divisions and/or Villages where instances of lynching and mob violence have been reported in the recent past, say, in the last five years.
- The Director General of Police/the Secretary, Home Department of the concerned States shall take regular review meetings (at least once a quarter) with all the Nodal Officers and State Police Intelligence heads.
- It shall be the duty of every police officer to cause a mob to disperse, by exercising his power under Section 129 of CrPC, which, in his opinion, has a tendency to cause violence or wreak the havoc of lynching in the disguise of vigilantism or otherwise.
- The police shall cause to register FIR under Section 153A of IPC and/or other relevant provisions of law against persons who disseminate irresponsible and explosive messages and videos having content which is likely to incite mob violence and lynching of any kind.
- Speaking in the Rajya Sabha the following day, Minister of State for Home Affairs Hansraj Ahir said state governments could deal with such offences under existing laws. His ministry has also issued advisories to all states and Union Territories, he added, to “maintain law and order and ensure any person who takes law into his or her own hand is punished promptly as per law”.
- Current laws against murder and unlawful assembly are adequate enough to investigate, prosecute and punish those who lynch. It is an unlawful assembly that attempts to murder. The law recognises common intention, common object,

abetment, incitement of offence and intentionally provoking a riot. The problem is not the absence of the law but how the law is employed.

- The Union government on 23 July 2018 informed Lok Sabha that it had created a Group of Ministers under Union Home Minister and a high-level committee under Union Home Secretary to “deliberate” and “make recommendations” for a separate penal provision on incidents of mob violence.
- The common definition of lynching by the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in the US is that:
  - (i) there must be evidence that a person was killed;
  - (ii) the person must have met death illegally;
  - (iii) a group of three or more persons must have participated in the killings; and
  - (iv) the killing is carried out in public.

### **Independent Debt Management Office**

- NITI Aayog made a strong case for setting up an independent debt management office, saying better servicing of loans could lead to substantial reduction in India’s interest payments.
- At present, the government debt is managed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). The time has come to seriously consider better management of India’s debt servicing obligations.
- Interest payment is such a large part of the revenue expenditure that better management of debt servicing could substantially reduce interest payment.
- India’s external debt is only 18% of total GDP.
- In his February 2015 Budget speech, Finance Minister Arun Jaitley had proposed to set up a Public Debt Management Agency (PDMA) within the finance ministry.
- The idea behind setting up of PDMA was to resolve issues relating to conflict of interest as the RBI decides on the key interest rates as well as undertakes buying and selling of government bonds.

### **Legalizing Gambling and Betting in Sports**

- The Law Commission in its submitted to the Government in July 2018 advocated that gambling and betting on sports including cricket should be legalised, and pitched for stronger laws to curb match fixing and incidents of cheating.
- Conceding that a complete ban on activities like betting is not working, the panel has called for overturning India’s historically stringent laws that heavily restrict such activities with narrow exceptions. The Law Commission says gambling and betting should be made taxable under the direct and indirect tax regimes and could be used to attract foreign direct investment or FDI.
- Parliament can enact a model law to allow highly-regulated versions of gambling that could be adopted by state government.
- Precautions such as ban on cash transactions, Aadhaar linking, cap on number of transactions, regulation of websites advertising gambling, etc. could be introduced.
- The commission has also recommended amending the laws regulating foreign exchange and India’s FDI policy to allow investments in the casino and online gaming industry.

### **The Rafale Controversy**

- The Opposition parties have alleged that the NDA government bought 36 Rafale fighter aircraft, built by Dassault Aviation of France, under a direct government-to-government agreement at a much higher price than the one that was being negotiated for 126 aircraft by the previous UPA government under an open tender.
- India's intention to buy the 36 aircraft in "fly-away" condition was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to France in April 2015. The deal for the 36 aircraft was signed by the then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar and his French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian on September 23, 2016.
- The Opposition has also alleged that the deal for the 36 aircraft does not include transfer of technology, whereas, in the older proposal, 108 of the 126 fighters were to be assembled by the Bengaluru-based Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL). The current deal, however, has a 50% offset component — Dassault has agreed to manufacture items worth 50% of the deal in India. But the Opposition alleges that the discharge of offsets has been done to favour a particular private Indian defence company.
- In February 2018, Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman declined to share the cost of the Rafale fighters under the new deal with Rajya Sabha. "As per Article 10 of the Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) between the Government of India and the Government of France on purchase of Rafale aircraft, the protection of the classified information and material exchanged under IGA is governed by the provisions of the Security Agreement signed between the two nations in 2008."
- Immediately after the signing in September 2016, top Defence Ministry officials had given a break-up of the € 7.878 billion (approximately ₹59,000 cr) deal: the basic cost of the 36 aircraft was € 3.402 billion (approximately ₹670 crore per aircraft), the weaponry was for € 710 million, spare parts for € 1,800 million, weather and terrain compatibility fits for € 1,700 million, and performance based logistics support for € 353 million.
- There is no possibility of comparison with previously negotiated rates, as the price for 126 aircraft that was quoted nearly a decade ago, was never finalised, and no contract was signed or executed. No details of what was included in the per-aircraft price quoted in the aborted deal are known.
- Contract price is always very different from unit price. Unit price is constant barring inflation or disruption of the supply chain. Contract prices on the other hand vary considerably, based on what is included. Weapons, training, spares, and maintenance infrastructure (all no one can do without) add considerably to any package given that engines account for 25% of an aircraft's value.
- The Centre on 12 November 2018 submitted price details of the Rafale fighter jets in a sealed envelope to the Supreme Court. This was in response to the Supreme Court's direction that the Central government must disclose details of the controversial deal before it. On October 31, the Supreme asked the Centre to provide information on the pricing of Rafale fighter aircraft. The court had asked the government to give details on the "core information" regarding the procurement process to the petitioners.
- However, the Centre had argued that some details about the Rafale deal may be sensitive and protected against being made public under the Official Secrets Act. To this, the court said that "details that could legitimately come in [the] public domain" will have to be shared with the petitioners, while the "confidential information" regarding the pricing and the selection of the Indian offset partner will have to be "placed before the court," in a sealed cover.

- In its submission before the Supreme Court on Monday, the Government said that delay by the UPA government in finalising the Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) process led to adversaries inducting 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> generation jets and there was an urgent need to “arrest the decline” in the number of IAF fighter squadrons.
- “In the case for procurement of 36 Rafale aircrafts, all the requisite steps i.e. preparation of Services Qualitative Requirements (SQR), Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) by Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), Technical Evaluation and acceptance of technically qualified platform, commercial negotiations by Contract Negotiation Committee (CNC) and approval of Competent Financial Authority (CFA) as per requirement of Defence Procurement Procedure 2013 have been followed,” the document said.

## **The PNB Fraud**

- Punjab National Bank (PNB), the second-biggest public sector bank, stunned the country’s financial sector in February 2018 when it announced this week it had discovered fraudulent transactions worth ₹11,400 crore at a single branch in Mumbai.
- On 29 January 2018, a PNB official from Mumbai filed a criminal complaint with CBI against three companies and four people, including billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi, the managing director of Gitanjali Gems Ltd, saying they had defrauded the bank and caused a loss of ₹280 crore.
- On 16 January the accused firms presented a set of import documents to the Mumbai branch and requested buyers’ credit to pay overseas suppliers. Since they had no pre-arranged credit limit, the branch official asked the companies to put down the full amount as collateral so the bank could issue LoUs to authorize the credit.
- It then found that two junior employees had issued LoUs on the SWIFT interbank messaging system without entering the transactions on the bank’s own system. Such transactions went on for years without detection.
- Between 2011 and January 2017, PNB employee Gokulnath Shetty issued several fake PNB letters of undertaking— without any collateral—for Modi. The bank claims they then bypassed the lender’s internal messaging system in order to avoid detection, and placed instructions via the SWIFT global payment system asking overseas branches of Indian banks to fork out the cash as loans.
- In some banks including PNB, the SWIFT system, which is used for international transactions, and the core banking system work independently of each other. Outstanding LoUs were thus not available on its core banking system.
- The Enforcement Directorate also started a parallel investigation.

## **Lateral Entry into Civil Services**

- In an apparent bid to bring in expertise from the private sector individuals and infuse talent into the country’s bureaucracy, the government on 10 June 2018 invited applications from “outstanding individuals” of corporate sector and academia to join the government at the joint secretary level.
- Bypassing the UPSC exam, it will select ten ‘outstanding’ individuals for the post of Joint Secretary across the following departments—Revenue, Financial Services, Economic Affairs, Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers’ Welfare, Road Transport &

Highways, Shipping, Environment, Forests and Climate Change, New & Renewable Energy, Civil Aviation and Commerce.

- The lack of specialisation across the top tier of Indian bureaucracy is a concern that has remained unaddressed until now.
- IAS officers get recruited at a very early age via the UPSC exams. It is difficult to gauge their administrative judgement and capabilities then.
- Bringing in experts from the professional sphere is expected to shake the IAS out of their comfort zone.
- In the past also the government has brought in professionals from the private sector or academia into the top tier of government.
- It has now become more critical for the government to ascertain the impact its policy decisions have on various stakeholders such as the private sector, non-profits, and general public, i.e. those who have experienced government from the outside.
- Differences in work culture, turf wars and systemic inertia often can come in the way of performance of new entrants.
- Candidates coming from the outside may not know the nuances of the system which can be exploited by others in any number of ways.
- One of the distinguishing aspects that the current crop of IAS officers can hold up is their experience in the field, serving some of the poorest districts in our hinterlands. Those entering from privileged backgrounds and the private sector may not have this advantage.
- There are also question marks about the transparency of the selection system.

### **Issue of Oil Prices**

- Low international crude prices for much of the present government's tenure helped keep India's external current account deficit (CAD) in check, brought down the fiscal deficit by allowing excise duties on transport fuels to be raised, and boosted private consumption.
- Since November, 2017, Brent crude has crossed \$60 a barrel, while breaching the \$70 level towards end-March 2018 and touching \$80 in May 2018.
- The Current Account Deficit, which plunged from \$88.16 billion in 2012-13 to \$15.30 billion in 2016-17, is likely to have trebled to \$45-50 billion during the fiscal just ended and projected to hit \$75 billion in 2018-19.
- When the global crude oil prices fell from \$105 per barrel in 2013–14 to \$46 per barrel in 2015–16, the new government took advantage of the lower prices and raised duties to earn higher revenues instead of passing on the benefits to consumers.
- Retail consumers paid as much for petrol and diesel as they did when the import prices were over \$100 per barrel.
- Dynamic fuel pricing was introduced in 2017 to ensure that the benefit of even the smallest change in international oil prices can be passed down the line to the dealers and the consumers.
- A major share of petrol and diesel prices are made up of taxes – excise duty collected by the Centre and Value Added Tax (VAT) excise duty collected by the states. 48.2 per cent of the price of petrol is tax, while the share is 38.9 per cent in the case of diesel.
- Most states that impose the highest tax rates on petrol and diesel are struggling with high gross fiscal deficit as a percentage of their GDP and are hence hesitant to reduce VAT.

- The tax enhancement was to relieve the government's massive burden to subsidize fuel. Subsidies had ballooned to \$9.6 billion in the year ended March 31, 2014. This prompted the government to stop further subsidizing diesel.
- The lag in payment of subsidies by the government messed up the finances of state fuel retailers Indian Oil Corp., Bharat Petroleum Corp. and Hindustan Petroleum Corp., which were forced to borrow heavily to bridge the gap between the selling price and their cost.

### **Should Petroleum Products be brought under GST?**

- When India moved to the GST regime in July, 2017, petroleum products were excluded, along with alcohol, real estate and power. In the current structure, both the central and state governments levy a tax on petrol, diesel, crude, and natural gas. The Centre charges excise duty, while each state has its own Value Added Tax (VAT).
- The GST law does contain a provision for inclusion of petroleum products — petroleum crude, high speed diesel, motor spirit (commonly known as petrol), natural gas and aviation turbine fuel — under GST from such date as may be notified by the government on the recommendations of the Council.
- With the prices of automobile fuels surging, there is demand from various quarters to bring petroleum products under GST. The Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas said that bringing petroleum products under the ambit of the GST was being considered by the government as part of a “holistic strategy” to address the issue.
- Bringing petroleum products under GST would mean a single rate — 18% or 28% — in place of excise duty and state VAT, and lower pump prices. It will take the political heat off the government, and is likely to lead to lower transport costs for industry, with benefits in terms of boosting production and competitiveness. It will also be in keeping with the idea of a ‘single nation, single tax’, which is aimed at improving production and employment while taxing consumption.
- Because these products are excluded from GST, many firms are at a disadvantage: they cannot set off inputs costs like transport, logistics, services, spares, or claim input tax credit. They miss out on productivity gains as well.
- For both the federal and state governments, petroleum products, like alcohol, are huge revenue earners. The Centre mopped up ₹1.60 lakh crore in excise duty from petroleum products in 2017-18, and ₹2.42 lakh crore in 2016-17, even as global oil prices fell from 2014-15 through 2016-17. Similarly, states earned ₹1.66 lakh crore in VAT on these products in 2017-18.
- Even if they agree to having petrol, diesel and other products under GST, the states will still have the autonomy to levy an additional or top-up tax, which can vary across states. This surcharge can be in the nature of a “sin tax” — a way for states to discourage consumption of certain products like liquor or tobacco — and to reduce vehicular pollution.
- The Centre is committed to compensating states for any shortfall in revenues for five years.

### **Minimum Support Price for Agricultural Produce**

- Union Budget 2018-19 proposed to give farmers a minimum support price (MSP) 1.5 times of the production cost. The agriculture sector provides food security to 1.3 billion people, absorbs 54% of the workforce and touches the lives of two-thirds of

the rural population. Yet it is lagging, resulting in widening disparity between the farm-dependant population and those working in the other sectors.

- Dr. M.S. Swaminathan, in his report submitted to the Central government in 2006, recommended that MSP be based on production cost (C 2 cost) plus a 50% margin. The government had submitted a written reply in the Supreme Court against this formula. However, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in his budget speech, announced the MSP fixation on the basis of production cost plus a 50% margin. Production cost means all paid-out costs, including the rent paid for leased-in land and the imputed value of family labour.
- The Ramesh Chand Committee, constituted to examine the methodological issues in fixing MSP, suggested that for calculating production cost, family labour head should be considered a skilled worker. Further, it said the interest on working capital should be given for the whole season against the existing half season, and the actual rental value prevailing in the village should be considered without a ceiling on the rent. Moreover, post-harvest costs, including cleaning, grading, drying, packaging, marketing and transportation, should be included. The committee recommended that the cost C 2 should be raised by 10% to account for the risk premium and managerial charges. Many experts believe that to address the current agrarian crisis, MSP should be fixed on the basis of the Ramesh Chand Committee's report.

## **Farmers' Agitations**

- Farmers in seven states went on a 10-day protest, starting 1 June 2018, demanding that the government should pay them the promised minimum support price (MSP) at the earliest.
- The protests were held under the banner of Rashtriya Kisan Mahasangh (RKM), a federation of 130 farmers' organisation. The farmers suspended supplies of vegetables and dairy produce to nearby cities and staged roadside dharnas along 30 major highways in the country.
- Besides payment of MSP, farmers also demanded loan waiver for all farmers across the country and an assurance of permanent minimum income from the country.
- Earlier, in March 2018, protesting Maharashtra farmers, after covering 180km on foot over five days, reached Mumbai and held a peaceful meeting, without disturbing normal life in the city. This won the hearts of the people of Mumbai.
- The demands made by the Kisan Sabha included implementation of recommendations made by the M.S. Swaminathan Commission in 2006, a complete farm loan waiver and electricity bill waiver without conditions, legal provision guaranteeing minimum support price (MSP) that is 1.5 times the cost of production of farm produce, effective implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights ) Act, 2006, and provision of pension to farmers and farm labourers.
- The farmers withdrew the agitation with the Maharashtra government agreeing to most of the farmers' demands and giving an assurance in writing that the demand for ownership rights to forest patches would be addressed within six months. These forest patches are mostly cultivated by tribals.
- For crops other than paddy and wheat, government support via MSP is plagued by negligible procurement due to a weak implementation set-up. Despite increased procurement of pulses in 2017-18, it mopped up only 18% of production, leading many farmers to sell below the MSP.

- Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), launched in February 2016, is a comprehensive crop insurance scheme that provides coverage to crops from pre-sowing to post harvest against non-preventable natural hazards. The premium for insurance coverage has been kept at 2 per cent for Kharif and 1.5 per cent for Rabi crops.
- There are serious accusations that the scheme has benefitted the insurance companies, not the farmers. According to agriculture ministry's figures, insurance companies received a gross premium of ₹22,180 crore in 2016-17 – ₹4,383 crore from farmers and ₹17,796 crore from Centre and state governments as subsidy. Out of the gross premium, the insurance companies paid out ₹12,949 crore as claims to 1.2 crore farmers.

## **Maratha Agitation**

- The bandh called by Maratha Kranti Morcha, the umbrella body spearheading the community's demand for reservations, was called off on 25 July 2018 after it turned violent in many parts of Maharashtra. The protests across the state this time were small compared to the mobilisations two years ago.
- But they sent out the message that the community's demand for quotas in jobs and educational institutions continues to be a live issue.
- The Maharashtra State Backward Class Commission, is preparing a report on the socio-economic conditions of the community. The government is expected to return to the Bombay High Court with the Commission's report and reiterate its intent to introduce quotas for the Marathas.
- The court has twice in the past stuck down the state government's proposal for a 16 per cent quota for Marathas in education and employment.
- In 2016, the government filed an affidavit that argued that extraordinary circumstances — including displacement, high illiteracy, destruction of environment resources due to climate change, and consequent suicides by farmers — justified reservations beyond the 50% ceiling (set by the Supreme Court in Indra Sawhney vs Union of India, 1992). Referring to a study of farmers' suicides in 2014-16, the affidavit said nearly 78% of suicides had taken place in Marathwada and Vidarbha, and "most" of the victims were Marathas.
- The Marathas' case for reservation is not centred on claims of social discrimination or historical inequalities but on grievances of backwardness and exclusion arising out of changes in the economy.
- Traditionally a landowning caste, Marathas have spoken of a slow impoverishment amid rising uncertainty in farming and the prices of agricultural produce. Besides, like peasant communities elsewhere, like the Patels in Gujarat and Jats in Haryana, the Marathas too have found themselves short of the skills necessary for non-farm jobs.
- Data for Maharashtra reveals that OBCs and Dalits in rural areas, aided by reservations, seem to fare a little better than the Marathas in getting jobs that ensure stable incomes. The rising costs of education and healthcare as against fluctuating returns from agriculture have intensified the faultlines in rural areas.

## **Mahadayi Water Dispute**

- Mahadayi water sharing is a boiling issue in over 30 constituencies in North Karnataka. Farmers in Hubballi, Dharwad, Gadag and Belagavi were on protest for almost all of 2016 demanding the implementation of the Kalasa-Banduri water project to divert Mahadayi's water for drinking purposes. But while there is no denying the water crisis in North Karnataka, the diversion of the Mahadayi poses a threat to Goa's ecology.
- After originating in Karnataka's Belagavi district, the river spends more than two-thirds of its journey in Goa, giving life to the state's mangroves and providing people their staple, fish. So, when in the early 1990s, Karnataka designed a chain of dams and canals to channel the Mahadayi's water to the Malaprabha, a tributary of the Krishna, Goa protested, claiming that the upper riparian state's moves would result in an ingress of saltwater in the river. Ecologists said the dams would disturb Goa's ecological balance.
- The matter went to the Supreme Court in 2006 when all attempts at a negotiated settlement between the two states failed. The Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal was set up in 2010.

### **Women in the Armed Forces**

- In his Independence Day speech on 15 August 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that women officers commissioned in short service would be eligible for permanent commission through a transparent selection process like their male counterparts.
- Before 1992 Indian armed forces employed women only in the medical and nursing services.
- In 1992, an important landmark in the history of Indian Army was the induction of women into the officer cadre in non-medical cadres, and the onerous task of training them was undertaken by the Officers Training Academy.
- In 2015 India opened new combat air force roles for women as fighter pilots, adding to their role as helicopter pilots in the Indian Air Force.
- All the three services have opened permanent commission (PC) of women in education, legal, signals, engineering and several other streams.
- Females are not allowed to serve in combat units like the Infantry, the Armoured Corps and Mechanised Infantry.

### **Social Media Communication Hub**

- In January 2018, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry initiated the process of setting up a social media communication (SMC) hub in each district across the country, to keep the government in the loop for hyperlocal issues and trends.
- Broadcast Engineering Consultants India Limited (BECIL), a PSU under the I&B ministry, floated a tender asking software companies to come and help in setting up of these hubs. The response was inadequate.
- The Trinamool Congress filed a plea in the SC, questioning the SMC policy, saying this would be a gross violation of people's privacy. The plea said by monitoring citizens' social media content, the government was endangering people's Right to Life.
- With help from this analytical tool, the Centre wished to track social media movements in every district of the country to predict a global public perception. This

could help mould perception into something positive and neutralise negative feelings, if any. An intended use of these hubs would also be to inculcate nationalistic feelings.

- This tool could help give social media discussion a positive slant since social platforms today leave plenty of room for communal hatred and misinformation to seep in. It could also help in tackling fake news. The Centre could gauge people's reactions to their schemes and strategies.
- On 13 July 2018, the Supreme Court sent notice to the government and observed that “we will be moving to a surveillance state” if every tweet and WhatsApp message is monitored.
- On 3 August 2018 the government told the Supreme Court that the proposal had been withdrawn.

## Digital Colonialism

- Beyond tensions of privacy and security, we are witnessing a real confrontation between control and freedom, not only of the individual, but of entire populations and regions, enhanced by technologies and massive collection and analysis of data. From predicting to influencing behaviours, from automation of public services to fully control and the ability to disrupt those, even remotely. From gaining access to a global communications platform to losing the ability to protect the rights of those who are interconnected in such platforms. We are witnessing a different form of global domination and control.
- The world's major societies are now wrestling with the enormous social power wielded by the internet's “platform companies”. In Europe they speak of “GAFA”: Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon. Twitter, Uber and other aspirant companies hover just out of the main ring.
- Billions of people provide data about their personal lives and business activities to these companies, which are using that data as leverage to change human behaviour to their economic advantage. Governments everywhere see them as rivals to their power and also invaluable allies.
- The US government sees them as pillars of post-industrial American power, and as an immense national security intelligence resource. It is therefore their strategic ally. Russia and China have chosen to build national search engines and social media structures, favouring domestic private market entrants and by exercising control over national telecommunications networks to block the US companies. The European Union has attempted to control the companies' behaviour by regulation and litigation.
- India has a golden opportunity to find a fourth way. The market in internet services – that is, information technology for use by people in their daily lives – is now dominated by companies that provide “free” services in return for massive privacy invasion. This model, in which the consumer is the product, is doing enormous harm to the human race and destroying our privacy environment completely, in order to provide people supposedly “free” email and other forms of social communication, calendaring and similar services “in the cloud”.
- India can invent competition that challenges not just the platform companies but their basic, anti-environmental business model. Indian internet companies can provide global digital service platforms that protect, rather than destroy, privacy. Indian internet industries can provide reasonably priced, universally available, privacy respecting services that compete directly with services provided by the US

data miners, priced reasonably in local terms in all the developed and developing societies.

- Indian industries, providing state-of-the-art cloud services – social networking, email, travel, calendaring, on-line retailing everywhere, etc – could very profitably, given Indian cost structures, compete to provide those services to everyone in the world who has seen the error of “free” services based on privacy invasion, and wants an alternative she can pay for, with confidence in the privacy technology that is all open source, and works in their interest rather than someone else’s.

## **Data Breach on Social Media**

- On September 16, 2018, Facebook noticed an unusual spike in the number of times the platform’s ‘View As’ feature was being used. The feature allows users to see how their Facebook page will appear to another user. On September 25, Facebook announced that it had identified this as a malicious activity in which the access tokens of 50 million users were appropriated by unknown hackers, and certain personal details possibly accessed.
- An access token is a digital key that allows users to stay logged into Facebook on a device or browser without having to sign in repeatedly using their password. It extends its reach to other apps or services that users sign into using their Facebook account. If hackers have the access tokens, they do not require passwords to get into Facebook accounts or apps like Instagram that utilise the Facebook login.
- Facebook had to force the affected 50 million users, and an additional 40 million users who had used the ‘View As’ feature since last July to log in again so that their access tokens changed. Facebook has since said it has resolved the bugs that caused what is said to be the largest breach in the history of the platform.
- Earlier this year the Cambridge Analytica scandal had exposed the vulnerability of Facebook, revealing that data of up to 87 million users were harvested and used for political campaigning.
- On 8 October 2018 Google said that it was shutting down Google+, the social network it had launched in 2011 in an unsuccessful bid to rival Facebook. Google acknowledged it had failed to disclose a massive data leak that had potentially compromised nearly 500,000 accounts.
- A review of Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) associated with Google+ by an internal security team called Project Strobe revealed serious security flaws, and one bug in particular that granted app developers access to user profile fields, which were not marked as public. So, data that was supposed to be limited to friends and circles, was available to some app developers.

## **Iran Nuclear Deal**

- U.S. President Donald Trump refused to certify the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA) which was due on 15 October 2017 and put the two-year-old pact on dangerous footing. Under American law, the administration has to certify that Iran is technically in compliance with the deal that was struck between Iran and six other world powers, including the U.S., every 90 days. All other signatories, as well as the UN, insist that Iran is fully complying. The deal, however, has not been scrapped.
- This is a boon for hardliners in Iran, who have suffered a political setback in recent years. The deal became possible only because the reformists and moderates rallied

behind President Hassan Rouhani's agenda, despite strong opposition from the Iranian deep state.

- Even if Trump decertified the agreement, he would “hold off on recommending that Congress reimpose sanctions.” This caveat suggests that decertification might not immediately lead to the reinstatement of U.S. nuclear sanctions against Iran. Additional measures, either congressional or executive, would be necessary to actually reimpose sanctions.
- The Iran nuclear deal, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was concluded between Iran and the members of the P5+1, as well as the E.U., in July 2015. Iran agreed to concessions regarding its nuclear program in return for extensive sanctions relief. The agreement was endorsed by U.N. Security Council Resolution 2231. Subsequently, on JCPOA “implementation day” on January 16, 2016, the United States and the EU lifted most of their respective sanctions imposed in connection with Iran's nuclear program, after the International Atomic Energy Agency verified that Iran has implemented its nuclear-related obligations under the JCPOA. Previous Security Council resolutions regarding Iran's nuclear program have been terminated.
- The Obama administration maintained that the JCPOA was not legally binding and, therefore, did not require Senate approval. The U.S. could stop implementing it at any time without violating its obligations under international law.
- The Obama administration's stance that congressional approval was not necessary for concluding the Iran deal drew the ire of legislators and led to the enactment of INARA, an amendment to the Atomic Energy Act of 1954. The Act required the president to submit any nuclear agreement with Iran for congressional review, and imposed additional reporting and certification requirements to allow congressional oversight of the implementation of such an agreement. For current purposes, the key provisions are those regarding certification of compliance. INARA requires the president to certify every 90 days that Iran is in compliance with the JCPOA and that it remains in U.S. interest to suspend sanctions as part of the implementation of any agreement.

## **Quantum Computing**

- Classical computers encode information in bits. Each bit can take the value of 1 or 0. These 1s and 0s act as on/off switches that ultimately drive computer functions. Quantum computers, on the other hand, are based on qubits, which operate according to two key principles of quantum physics: superposition and entanglement. Superposition means that each qubit can represent both a 1 and a 0 at the same time. Entanglement means that qubits in a superposition can be correlated with each other; that is, the state of one (whether it is a 1 or a 0) can depend on the state of another. Using these two principles, qubits can act as more sophisticated switches, enabling quantum computers to function in ways that allow them to solve difficult problems that are intractable using today's computers.
- Quantum systems may untangle the complexity of molecular and chemical interactions leading to the discovery of new medicines and materials. They may enable ultra-efficient logistics and supply chains, such as optimizing fleet operations for deliveries during the holiday season. They may help us find new ways to model financial data and isolate key global risk factors to make better investments. And they may make facets of artificial intelligence such as machine learning much more powerful.

## Initial Coin Offerings

- A new method of capital raising called the initial coin offering has exploded in 2017. It is a process where tech startups, mainly from inside the digital-currency sector, create a new virtual coin or token and offer it for public sale. It lies somewhere between a traditional initial public stock offering and a crowdfunding. Firms raised a record \$1.32 billion this way in the third quarter alone.
- In ICO, the company creates digital tokens, which are in cryptocurrencies. The tokens are issued based on the amount that the company wants to raise. These tokens have a predetermined value. It then sells these cryptocurrencies in an initial offer.
- The tokens are on a blockchain and derive their value based on demand. The concept works on the theory that on blockchain you can transact without the need of a central authority such as a central bank. Anyone can invest in an ICO. You can buy it online on cryptocurrency exchanges that support it. The newly created tokens can then be exchanged with existing popular cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and ethereum or even with a fiat currency like dollar or rupee. They can also be traded on cryptocurrency exchanges.
- ICOs are not regulated. Thus, the companies issuing it do not need to inform an exchange, or adhere to any formalised rules as they have to for an IPO.
- ICOs are very risky. Before investing, you need to know whether the issuing company's business plan is worth the investment. There have been instances of scams and frauds.
- Currently, there isn't much regulatory clarity globally regarding ICOs. China has recently banned all ICOs in order to check the disruption of economic and financial order in the Chinese market.
- In order to streamline and regulate ICOs in India, there are legal and regulatory challenges that need to be addressed. First, based on their nature, crypto-tokens/cryptocurrencies could be classified as securities or currency or a payment system or intangible property. This classification shall be crucial in determining the regulatory framework governing their issuance even otherwise and through the ICO route. The nature of classification will also ascertain the incidence and rate of taxation. Additionally, the hybrid nature of crypto-tokens might require coordination among the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and other sectoral regulators for effective regulatory oversight.
- RBI is of the view that these instruments are securities and so SEBI should be the regulating body. But these crypto-currencies are neither 'commodities derivatives' nor 'securities' under Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956.
- In the budget speech on 1 February 2018, the Finance Minister stated that the "Government does not consider crypto-currencies legal tender or coin and will take all measures to eliminate use of these cryptoassets in financing illegitimate activities or as part of the payment system."

## Fiat Digital Currency

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has clamped down on virtual currencies, including Bitcoin, directing all entities regulated by the central bank — mainly banks, finance companies and wallets — not to deal with or provide services to any individual or business entities dealing with or settling virtual currencies, joining the global crackdown on trading of virtual coins.

- Simultaneously, the RBI has constituted an inter-departmental group to study and provide guidance on the feasibility to introduce a central bank digital currency.
- “Rapid changes in the landscape of the payments industry along with factors such as emergence of private digital tokens and the rising costs of managing fiat paper/metallic money have led central banks around the world to explore the option of introducing ‘fiat’ digital currencies,” the RBI said.
- Fiat currency is currency that a government has declared to be legal tender. Cryptocurrency, or virtual currency like Bitcoin, is not legal tender and not backed by a government.
- Blockchain technology that lies beneath the virtual currencies has a potential benefit for financial inclusion and enhancing the efficiency of the financial system.

### **Fall in the Value of the Rupee**

- The rupee started the year at a two-and-half year high of Rs. 63.28 versus the dollar, but thereon it traded with a mild negative bias. However, the trend had turned strongly bearish since March as US and China started imposing tariffs on each other.
- Most of the world’s currencies are bought and sold based on flexible exchange rates, meaning their prices fluctuate based on the supply and demand in the foreign exchange market. A high demand for a currency or a shortage in its supply will cause an increase in price. A currency’s supply and demand are tied to a number of intertwined factors, including the country’s monetary policy, the rate of inflation, and political and economic conditions.
- One of the primary reasons linked to the fall is the U.S. Federal Reserve being expected to tighten its monetary policy stance further in the coming months by taking steps towards slowing down the growth in U.S. money supply. A slowdown in U.S. money supply growth affects the value of rupee in two ways. Firstly, interest rates in the U.S. will begin to rise as the Fed’s demand for various assets begins to drop. This causes a rush among investors to sell their assets in other parts of the world and invest the money in the U.S., where they could earn higher returns.
- The consequent flow of capital from the emerging markets to the U.S. increases selling pressure on emerging market currencies and buying pressure on the dollar. Secondly, as the Fed begins to tighten money supply, the availability of dollars in the global market is likely to turn scarce, compared to other currencies. Both these factors affect the price at which traders, who try to speculate on future retail demand, are willing to buy the dollar using other currencies.
- The weakening rupee will make crude oil, fertilisers, medicines and iron ore, which India imports in large quantities, costlier.
- FMCG, or fast moving consumer goods, such as soaps, detergents, deodorants and shampoos, of which crude oil is an input, are likely to become more expensive.
- Students who have taken loans to fund their foreign degrees will also bear the brunt. Education loans are usually in rupees, but as students pay their expenses in a foreign currency, the cost of education and stay will increase.

### **Widening Current Account Deficit**

- India’s current account deficit (CAD) is pegged at \$13 billion or 1.9% of the GDP in Q4 of 2017-18, which increased from \$2.6 billion or 0.4% of the GDP in Q4 of

2016-17. However, the CAD moderated marginally from \$13.7 billion (2.1% of GDP) in the preceding quarter.

- CAD had touched a high of 4.8% of the GDP in 2012-13 on rising gold and oil imports, which also impacted the rupee that depreciated rapidly. High current account deficit forced the government to impose import restrictions on non-essential items like gold.
- However, the situation today is quite different from 2012 and 2013 when CAD was over 4% of the gross domestic product (GDP), inflation was kissing 10%, and fiscal deficit was over 4.5% of GDP.
- While the present depreciation is mainly due to external factors with the dollar strengthening against all emerging market currencies, the rising trade deficit is adding to the worry about the currency.
- The rupee is the worst performing currency among the emerging market economies in Asia, and depreciated over 14% against the dollar in the current financial year.
- The economy is reeling under a triple whammy—first, rising global oil prices; second, rising interest rates in the US (the 10-year government bond yields have risen to over 3%) and the quantitative tightening underway (the Fed balance sheet is shrinking by \$50 billion per month); and third, increased trade protectionism around the world.
- Allowing the rupee to fall (and thereby reducing imports) and passing on the global crude price increases to the consumer are two steps taken by the Government to check the widening CAD and fiscal deficit. More steps may be required.

### **Arrest of Human Rights Activists**

- The Maharashtra police conducted simultaneous raids in several cities and arrested five human rights activists – Sudha Bharadwaj, Gautam Navlakha, Arun Ferreira, Vernon Gonsalves, and P Varavara Rao – on 28 August 2018 for allegedly inciting violence in the Bhima Koregaon violence in January.
- On 29 August the Supreme Court observed that “dissent is the safety valve of democracy” and directed that those in its custody be kept under house arrest.
- The apex court also issued notice to the Maharashtra government and the state police on the plea by five leading intellectuals, including historian Romila Thapar and economists Prabhat Patnaik and Devaki Jain, against the arrests in connection with the case.
- Defending the action against five activists in the Bhima Koregaon case, the Maharashtra government on 5 September told the Supreme Court the arrests were made because there was “cogent evidence” linking the activists with the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist) and not because of their dissenting views.

### **Should the convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case be released?**

- The Supreme Court on 6 September 2018 asked the Tamil Nadu Governor to consider the mercy petition of A.G. Perarivalan, a convict in the 1991 Rajiv Gandhi assassination case.
- On August 10, the Centre told the apex court that it did not concur with the Tamil Nadu government’s proposal to release the seven convicts in the case, saying remission of their sentence will set a “dangerous precedent” and have “international ramifications”. It said the case involved the assassination of a former Prime Minister

in a brutal manner in pursuance of a “diabolical” plot carefully conceived and executed by a foreign terrorist organisation.

- Perarivalan had said he had suffered more than 24 years of solitary/single confinement. “As per jail rules, life imprisonment at ground level is only for a maximum of 20 years and thereafter the prisoner is considered for release. Now I have already undergone more than life imprisonment,” his letter to the Governor said.
- The death sentence of Nalini was commuted by Tamil Nadu Governor in April 2000 and those of the remaining three convicts including Perarivalan were commuted in February 2014 by the apex court on the ground of inordinate delay of 11 years in deciding the mercy petitions.
- Under the theory of reformatory justice, a crime is committed on account of a set of peculiar circumstances, and it is highly probable that these circumstances may never repeat again. Therefore, the focus of our prison system should be in bringing about reform in the moral character of each prisoner and enabling him to restart his life outside the jail complex after serving his sentence.
- Pardon is not a right. Pardon is an act of discretion exercised in specific circumstances where an individual deserving of clemency is examined in the context of his family background.
- They were awarded death sentence which was commuted to life imprisonment, which itself is an act of clemency.
- The Supreme Court, in *Gopal Vinayak Godse v. the State of Maharashtra* (1961), ruled that a sentence of imprisonment for life means imprisonment for the rest of one’s natural life. However, there is always the power of executive remission, under which the appropriate government reduces part of the sentence for the convict’s good behaviour.
- This case involves not only the assassination of a former Prime Minister, but also the deaths of several others in the incident, including policemen and bystanders.

## **CBI vs. CBI**

- The crisis within the CBI started building up in October 2017 when the director, Alok Verma, opposed the appointment of Rakesh Asthana as special director in the CBI on the ground that he did not have a clean image. The CVC, however, supported Asthana with the result that he was elevated to the rank of special director, CBI.
- On October 23, 2018, the CVC wrote to the government that allegations against the director were serious and that he should be divested of all powers. On October 24, the government intervened and, in the “interest of equality, fair play and principles of natural justice”, decided to send both the director and the special director on forced leave, and appointed Joint Director Nageshwar Rao as the interim director.
- The fight between CBI Director Alok Verma and Special Director Rakesh Asthana spilled into the public domain when the CBI registered an FIR against Asthana and others, on charges of accepting bribe from a person related to the meat exporter, Moin Qureshi, whose case Asthana was probing. Asthana got a temporary stay from the Delhi High Court.
- Asthana had earlier accused Verma of “interference” in an IRCTC corruption case involving Rashtriya Janata Dal president Lalu Prasad Yadav. As per his allegation, Verma had tried to stall raids against Yadav last year. Asthana gave a formal complaint in this regard to the Cabinet Secretary, who, in turn, sent the complaint to

the CVC, which has supervisory powers over the CBI. The CVC took cognisance of the matter and began a probe.

- The Supreme Court asked the CVC to complete inquiry into the allegations against Director, CBI within a period of two weeks. The Court also ordered a retired apex court judge to supervise the inquiry. The Court directed the interim director by laying down that he shall attend only to routine matters and not take any policy decisions.
- In the Jain Hawala case, the Supreme Court had said that the CBI Director has a fixed tenure of two years. The government stand is that the Director has been neither removed nor transferred; he has only been sent on leave in the interest of fair play following the principle of natural justice.

## **RBI Relations with the Government**

- Difference of opinion and clashes between the Union Government and RBI is not a new phenomenon in India or elsewhere. There have been several instances in the past too. The present standoff is mainly on account of the following issues.
- The Government was eager to see the interest rates cut to facilitate investment, but RBI did not want any interference in the Monetary Policy.
- The Government had budgeted a dividend payment of Rs. 66,000 crores, but RBI transferred only Rs. 30,000 crores.
- RBI banned all loan restructuring schemes and asked banks to set aside funds for potential losses (called provisioning) even in case of a single day default. Banks and the Government did not consider this feasible.
- Government wanted RBI to lift the Prompt Corrective Action (q.v.) in the wake of the liquidity crisis.
- With nominal repo rate at 6.2% and inflation at 3.9%, the real repo rate (nominal rate minus inflation) remained at 2.3%, much higher than the 1.25% targeted by the Monetary Policy Committee.
- The regulator may also have to be regulated within the framework of the RBI Act.
- The Government used Section 7 of the RBI Act, which lays down that “the central government may from time to time give such directions to the bank as it may, after consultation with the governor of the bank, consider necessary in the public interest”, to end the resistance of the central bank’s top brass on certain issues.
- Section 7 also lays down that “Subject to any such directions, the general superintendence and direction of the affairs and business of the bank shall be entrusted to a central board of directors which may exercise all powers and do all acts and things which may be exercised or done by the bank.”
- Two directions were issued under this provision. One is on opening a special liquidity window for NBFCs and the other is to relax the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) norms for at least three banks of the 11 in the PCA list.
- Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) and housing finance companies (HFCs) are finding it tough to raise funds from banks following the liquidity crisis amid a series of debt repayment defaults by Infrastructure Leasing & Financial Services Ltd (IL&FS).
- Several corporates, mutual funds and insurance companies had invested in short-term instruments such as commercial papers (CPs) and non-convertible debentures (NCDs) of the IL&FS group that has been defaulting on payments since August. This has stoked fears that many of them could have funds stuck in IL&FS debt

instruments which, in turn could lead to a liquidity crunch in their own backyard. Liquidity conditions had tightened, with a deficit of Rs. 1.37 lakh crore on October 22, 2018, though this has declined since. There are rising fears that the funding cost for NBFCs will zoom and result in a sharp decline in their margins.

- There was a complaint from some quarters that the RBI was slow in stepping in and injecting funds. On October 26, the RBI said it will inject Rs. 40,000 crore into the system in November through purchase of government securities to meet the festive season demand for funds. This is on top of the Rs. 36,000 crore it injected through open market operations in October. The government and industry pushed for a special window to meet the fund requirements of the NBFC sector. The RBI refused, on the ground that once a special window or dispensation to provide liquidity is opened, the RBI will have to provide liquidity to all companies approaching it for funds. The rationale is that there is adequate liquidity available for the sector through normal channels, and the RBI won't be able to assess the asset quality of NBFCs to distinguish between those that deserve funds and those that do not. It also expressed concerns that this could lead to similar demands from other sectors, too, creating new problems for the regulator.

## **Renaming of Places**

- The Uttar Pradesh cabinet on 16 October 2018 approved a proposal to rename the historic city of Allahabad as Prayagraj, drawing a strong criticism from opposition parties.
- On 13 November the UP Cabinet decided to rename Faizabad as Ayodhya.
- After independence more than 100 cities and towns have already been renamed. Prominent ones include Madras to Chennai, Bombay to Mumbai, Calcutta to Kolkata, Bangalore to Bengaluru, Trivandrum to Thiruvananthapuram, Gurgaon to Gurugram, Pondicherry to Puducherry, Benares to Varanasi and Baroda to Vadodara.
- On August 29, 2016, the West Bengal Assembly had passed a resolution changing the name of West Bengal to Bengal in English, Bangla in Bengali and Bangal in Hindi.
- On 16 July 2018, the West Bengal assembly passed a resolution to change the name of the State, the state assembly today passed a bill to change the state's name from West Bengal to 'Bangla' in all three different languages, after the centre's rejection of its earlier proposals of having three names in three different languages.
- The states which changed their names include Tamil Nadu (Madras), Karnataka (Mysore), Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal) and Odisha (Orissa).
- While name changes may have political implications, the underlying message seems to be one of restoring national pride and erasing the memories of conquests and a colonial past.

## Newsmakers

### India

‘**Exam Warriors**’ a book for students authored by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was launched by Union Ministers Sushma Swaraj and Prakash Javadekar on 3 February 2018. Written in a fun and interactive style, with illustration, activities and yoga exercises, the book will be a friend not only in acing exam but also in facing life. The book has been translated into Hindi and several regional languages.

**Flying Officer Avani Chaturvedi** from Madhya Pradesh created history by becoming the first Indian woman fighter pilot to fly solo. On 19 February 2018 Chaturvedi flew a MiG-21 Bison in her first training solo sortie, in Jamnagar, Gujarat. She is one of the three in the first batch of female pilots inducted in the IAF in 2016.

**Pawan Kumar Chamling**, Chief Minister of Sikkim, on May 1, 2018 became the longest serving Chief Minister for any Indian State, when he completed 23 years, four months and 17 days of uninterrupted service in office and surpassed the record of Jyoti Basu of West Bengal.

**Chanda Kochhar**, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of ICICI Bank was at the centre of a scandal when it was alleged that a company related to Videocon Group chairman Venugopal Dhoot invested Rs. 64 crore in NuPower Renewables — a company promoted by her husband Deepak Kochhar in 2010 and later the proprietorship of the company was transferred to a trust owned by Deepak Kochhar for Rs. 9 lakh after Videocon Group received a loan of Rs. 3,250 crore from ICICI Bank in 2012. The government forced the board to appoint a panel headed by retired Supreme Court Judge B.N. Srikrishna to probe the allegations. Ms. Kochhar decided to go on leave till the probe was completed and the board decided to appoint Sandeep Bakhshi as the Chief Operating Officer to run the show. On 4 October 2018 she resigned her post.

**Commander Abhilash Tomy**, the first Indian to Circumnavigate the Earth under sails – solo, nonstop and unassisted, in 2012. Abhilash Tomy, started on Golden Globe Race, a nonstop, 30,000-mile solo yachting competition that bars the use of modern technology, on July 1, 2018 from Les Sables-d’Olonne. He was one of the 18 sailors participating in the 2018 Golden Globe Race. On Sept 21, 2018, his yacht ‘Thuriya’ dismasted in a mishap in the Indian Ocean, injuring him. He was stranded 3,200 km off the coast of Western Australia. In a rescue operation, lead by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center in Canberra, Australia, with help from Australian, French and Indian naval vessels and other yachts from the competition, Abhilash was rescued on 24<sup>th</sup> September by the French fishing vessel, Osiris.

**Ranjan Gogoi** assumed office of Chief Justice of India on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2018 after the retirement of Justice Dipak Misra. He will have tenure of about 13 months, from October 3, 2018 till his retirement on November 17, 2019.

**Rahul Dravid**, former Indian cricket captain, became the fifth Indian to be inducted in the ICC Hall of Fame on 1 November 2018. The others are Bishen Singh Bedi, Sunil Gavaskar, Kapil Dev and Anil Kumble. Sachin Tendulkar is not in the list as only those players who

haven't played any international game of cricket in five years prior to the nomination can be included in the elite list. Sachin retired on 16 November 2013.

## World

**Roger Federer** of Switzerland became the first man to win 20 tennis Grand Slam singles titles when he won the Australian Open 2018.

**Meng Hongwei**, Chinese politician who was the president of Interpol from 2016 to 2018. Meng resigned in October 2018 after he was detained and accused of taking bribes by Chinese anti-corruption authorities. He also served as vice-minister of Public Security in China from 2004 to 2018. His arrest and detention and the apparent lack of due process raised questions about the Chinese government's law enforcement tactics.

**Nimrata 'Nikki' Haley**, American politician of Indian origin on 9 October 2018 announced that she was resigning her position as US Ambassador to the United Nations with effect from end 2018. Many consider her a potential successor to Donald Trump as the next Republican candidate for presidency.

**Anna Burns** in October 2018 became the first Northern Irish author to win the Man Booker prize, Britain's most prestigious literary award. Her winning novel, "The Milkman", is set in an environment that resembles the Troubles, when sectarian violence flared between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. But the novel touches on something universal: what violence, unpredictable and persistent, does to a person's mind.

## Deaths

**Kunwar Bai Yadav** on 23 February 2018. 106-year-old Kunwar Bai lived in a village in Dhamtari district in Chhattisgarh. Inspired by the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, she sold seven of her goats to raise the money to build a toilet at her house. In 2016, the district was declared the first in the state to be free of open defecation, and she was declared a mascot of the campaign and visited by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

**Sridevi**, acclaimed as the first female superstar of India, on 24 February 2018.

**Somnath Chatterjee**, former Lok Sabha Speaker on 13 August 2018.

**Atal Bihari Vajpayee** on 16 August 2018. He served three terms as the Prime Minister of India: first for a term of 13 days in 1996, then for a period of 13 months from 1998 to 1999, and finally, for a full term from 1999 to 2004.

**Kuldip Nayar**, journalist, syndicated columnist, human rights activist, author and former High Commissioner of India to the United Kingdom, on 23 August 2018.

**Narayan Dutt Tiwari**, former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and of Uttarakhand, on 18 October 2018.

**Ananth Kumar**, Union Minister of Chemicals and Fertilizers and Parliamentary Affairs, on 12 November 2018.

**Kofi Annan** on 18 August 2018. He was a Ghanaian diplomat who served as the seventh Secretary General of the United Nations, from January 1997 to December 2006. Annan and the UN were the co-recipients of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize.

### **Jamal Khashoggi**

- On 2 October, 2018, Jamal Khashoggi, a well-known journalist and critic of the Saudi government, walked into the country's consulate in Istanbul. He has not been seen since.
- Turkish officials believe he was murdered by a team of Saudi agents inside the building and say they have evidence, including gruesome audio recordings, to back this up.
- After initial denials and claims that he had left the consulate shortly after arriving, Saudi Arabia has now admitted the journalist is dead.
- The kingdom says Khashoggi was killed in a "rogue operation" that the leadership had not been aware of.
- For decades, he was close to the Saudi royal family and also served as an adviser to the government. But he fell out of favour and went into self-imposed exile in the US last year. From there, he wrote a monthly column in the Washington Post in which he criticised the policies of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.
- Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan says there is evidence that the "savage" killing was planned days in advance. He says three teams of 15 Saudi nationals arrived in Istanbul before the murder and that the group had removed the security cameras and surveillance footage from the consulate building prior to Khashoggi's arrival. On 31 October, Turkey gave its first official statement on how it believes Khashoggi was killed, saying he was immediately strangled and his body was dismembered.

\*\*\*