

POLITY, GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY

IIM Bill, 2017

In News: The Rajya Sabha has recently passed the Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) Bill, 2017 which was earlier passed by the Lok Sabha.

Key Highlight of the Bill

- **Autonomy** - India has 20 Indian Institutes of Management in all, functioning as elite Business-schools.
- The legislation seeks to grant greater administrative, academic and financial autonomy to these IIMs.
- The institutes will be made free of government interference and will now be board-driven.
- Consequently, the power to appoint the chairperson as well as, the director will now lie with the board of the institutes.
- It means neither the HRD ministry nor the President of India will have any say in the selection of top executives and the faculty members.
- The government will also not have any say in the fees charged at these institutes.
- The Board will now reserve the power to review the performance of each IIM and will be the principal executive body.
- The bill also has provisions for the representation of SC, ST and women in the board of governors.
- **Degrees** - Until now, the IIMs have not been governed by an act of Parliament or overseen by the University Grants Commission (UGC).
- So they were awarding only postgraduate diplomas to its students.
- The legislation would make IIMs institute of national importance, granting them the power to award full-fledged degrees instead of diplomas.
- **Regulation** - The bill contains a provision for a "Coordination Forum of IIMs".
- But it will have limited power and will work as an advisory body.
- It will be a forum of 33 members, and its chairman will be selected by a search-cum-selection committee.
- The HRD minister will not head it.
- The central government may frame rules to give additional powers and duties to IIM boards.
- It will also decide on the terms and conditions of service of directors, although the appointments will be made by the boards.
- It will notify the IIM coordination forum to be headed by an eminent person.
- The accounts of the IIMs will now be audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India.

Shortfalls

- The bill is seen as a needed reform in the education sector.
- However, there is a concern that the government would control the IIMs via the coordination forum.
- Besides, the government fails to clearly spell out the process of appointing the board of governors that will control IIMs now.
- The bill is also silent on any reservations in the faculty recruitment.
- There is also a concern with IIMs being granted the complete control over the fee structure.
- There are now demands for similar independence from government control to the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and other top schools in the government and private sector.

Institute of National Importance (INI)

- INI is a status conferred to a premier public higher education institution in India by an Act of Parliament.
- It is conferred on an institution which "serves as a pivotal player in developing highly skilled personnel within the specified region of the country/state".
- INIs receive special recognition and funding.
- All IITs, NITs, AIIMS, School of Planning and Architecture and Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research are considered Institutes of National Importance.

Central Road Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2017

In News:

- The Lok Sabha has passed the Central Road Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2017. The Bill seeks to amend the Central Road Fund Act, 2000,
- Through this bill the cess levied and collected on high speed petrol and diesel is distributed for development of road infrastructure in various part.

Key Highlight of the Bill

- Bill provides that in addition to these the fund will also be used for the development and maintenance of national waterways.
- The Bill **defines national waterways** as those that have been declared as 'national waterways' under the National Waterways Act, 2016.
- Currently, there is 111 waterways are specified under the 2016 Act.
- **Utilisation of Fund:** Under the 2000 Act, the fund can be utilised for various road projects including:
 - National highways,
 - State roads including roads of inter-state and economic importance,
 - Rural roads.
- **Powers of central government:** Under the Act, the central government has the power to administer the fund.
- The central government will make decisions on the investments on national highways, expressways projects.
- Central government can raise and disburse funds for the development and maintenance of these roads.
- **Allocation of cess:** Under the Act, the cess on high speed diesel oil and petrol is allocated towards different types of roads.
- The Bill seeks to decrease the allocation of cess towards the development and maintenance of national highways from 41.5% to 39%.
- It allocates 2.5% of the cess towards the development and maintenance of national waterways.

About Central Road Fund

- The Central Road Fund was established for development and maintenance of National Highways, State Highways and Rural roads.
- In order to mobilise the fund, the Central Road Fund Act 2000 proposed to levy and collect by way of cess, a duty of excise and duty of customs on petrol and high speed diesel oil.

ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Increasing Import Duty

In News: Central Board of Excise and Customs, has recently notified a customs duty hike ranging 5 to 10% on a range of goods like mobiles, cameras, ovens etc.

Causes

- The government reasoned that this would help in boosting local production, reducing import bills and creating jobs in the country.
- Notably, India imported nearly \$42 billion worth of telecom instruments, computer hardware and other consumer electronics in 2016-17.
- The domestic industry sees this as a fillip to the government's "Make in India" initiative.
- Hiking of Customs duty will also boost tax collections at a time when there is uncertainty over revenue from the GST.

Boost for Manufacturing

- It is now recognized worldwide that raising import duties is effective only as an anti-dumping measure against another country.
- Imposition of such duties should be done rarely and it must ensure a balance between the interests of the consumers and that of the local manufacturers.
- For turning a country's domestic industry globally competitive, import duties aren't considered a desired tool due to its many drawbacks.
- Many companies do not want to manufacture in India as they still find it difficult to do business here - this should be addressed first.
- Rather than increasing duties, the government needs to sort out the problems companies face in terms of land acquisition, infrastructure, and labour laws.

Drawbacks

- Duty reduction in one sector will trigger hectic lobbying by manufacturers in other industry segments to push for similar protection from imports.
- **For Consumers** - Import tariffs would reduce competitiveness of the economy and might force the consumers to settle for inferior products.
- The protection provided by higher duties is also likely to reward continued inefficiency of local manufacturers, thereby making goods costlier.
- **For the Economy** - A protected environment would price out companies that spend on research and development and dis-incentivize innovation.
- This could potentially harm the entire ecosystem and also bring down the export potential of the country.

International Ramifications

- The increase in Customs duties has already been termed by competing countries as a violation of World Trade Organization (WTO) norms.
- While India has resorted to these hikes using emergency powers in its Customs laws, it will be difficult to convince players like Japan, EU & US on its veracity.
- Consequently, India's credibility as a trading partner might come under strain and thereby make external markets less friendly to Indian exports.

Survey on MGNREGA

In News: Institute of Economic Growth (IEG) survey has pointed few areas of failures in the MGNREGA.

- MGNREGA**
- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Generation Act is an Indian labor law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'right to work'.
 - It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.
 - Employment is to be provided based on demand and within 5 km of an applicant's residence, and minimum wages are to be paid.
 - If work is not provided within 15 days of applying, applicants are entitled to an unemployment allowance.
 - The budgetary allocation for the scheme is shared by the Centre and states on a 75:25 basis.
 - There is a steady annual increase in the budgetary allocations to MGNREGA, which touched a record Rs 48,000 crore in 2017-18.

Positive Findings

- In the past few years, many villages shifted their focus towards taking up soil and water conservation works under this scheme.
- As a result, there is an 11.5% increase in the productivity of cereals and a 32% rise in the case of vegetables in areas where water-conservation assets have been created.
- Rural income has risen by 11% in these areas.
- 160 crore man-days had been generated under the MGNREGA, in the 2017-18 fiscal.

Negative Findings

- Average wages earned by MGNREGA workers in many regions were lower than market rates.
- Migration from rural areas has continued in about 80% of the surveyed districts, in others it has dipped only marginally.
- Low wages and an inadequate number of days of assured employment are reasons for migration of rural population for jobs.
- There have been rampant malpractices, leakage of funds and diversion of resources to other sectors by state governments.
- Instances of huge use of fake job cards and fake entries in job sheets has been found, in many cases people had multiple cards to draw extra benefits.

Report on CBDT and Income tax

In News: Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has tabled its report on Central Board of Direct Taxes and the income tax department.

Key Findings

- CAG has find out that there has been persistent and pervasive irregularities in respect of corporation tax and income tax assessment cases over the years.

- The latest audit report takes note of 457 high-value cases of such irregularities.
- They include some the best-known entities in the public and the private sectors.
- The CAG has also detailed various ways in which tax officials have bungled in collecting these taxes.

Irregular Ways used by Tax Officials

- IT department had **raised exaggerated demands** to the tax payers to achieve its revenue collection target.
- Exaggerated demands are Quid pro quo deals between the assessing officer and the assessee in the understanding that it will be refunded to the latter a few months later with interest.
- This exaggerated demand usually happens to meet the stiff, and often unrealistic, targets set by the Government for tax collections.
- This is not only unwarranted but also a financial burden.
- This is because the taxpayers have to be paid refunds with interest by the department for the additional amount collected, which could have been avoided.
- One of the ways that these exaggerated demands are made is by not giving full credit for the taxes already paid.
- IT department did not adopt a uniform approach in dealing with cases of fictitious donations or fake purchases.
- The assessment officers did not take cognizance of reports filed by the investigation wing.
- They also failed to initiate necessary follow-up action regarding fictitious donations that has resulted in loss of revenue.

Implications of the Report

- Corporation tax and income tax together constitute 33% of the Union government's revenues.
- Wide-scale discrepancies in such taxes could upset the overall budgetary calculations and also affect trust among honest taxpayers.
- The CAG has stated that "recurrence of such irregularities, despite being pointed out repeatedly" in earlier audit reports points to structural weaknesses on the part of the tax administration.
- Lack of transparency in taxation is also a massive disincentive for business in the formal sector.

Measures Needs to be taken

- The tax department must ensure that taxpayers do not need to submit multiple returns and have quicker options of redress should a dispute arise.
- This is important as a huge amount of money is locked in litigation due to complicated tax rules and varying interpretations.
- Costly compliance and loopholes keep majority outside the income tax net, and this can be sorted out by implementing electronic assessments.

A new Income Tax Act

In News: The Indian government has constituted a task force for overhauling its existing 'Income Tax Act, 1961' to make it consonant with the present economic needs.

Mandates for the Task Force

- The country needs to widen its tax base, since the number of taxpayers is still low when compared to the overall population.
- Hence, the task force has been mandated to prepare a suitable 'draft direct tax legislation' and submit its report to the government within six months.
- It is expected to study direct tax systems prevalent in various countries, international best practices and the country's economic needs.
- The broad idea till now is to establish moderate tax rates and also reduce the number of tax exemptions that are presently available.
- The envisioned draft is also intended to ensure simplicity and clarity to reduce litigation and provide stability to local as well as global business.

Concerns

- The government has already taken several steps in line with Direct Tax Code, 2010 (DTC) under the Income Tax Act.
- Eliminating the Minimum Alternate Tax (MAT), which most countries have already done away with, is also being considered but there isn't consensus.
- The new law should be in sync with India's bilateral tax treaties and should be conducive for foreign investments.

- There are reservations against the 2017 update to the “OECD Model Tax Convention and Commentary” is not in line with international best practices.
- It would be challenging to draft an entirely new income tax law in such a short time of 6 months, as broad stakeholder consultations are required.

Way Forward

- The new committee should involve all stakeholders and should give the rationale of each provision clearly before finalizing its draft.
- As India wants to become a manufacturing hub, it important to critically analyse the effectiveness of corporate tax cuts on the fiscal and the economy.
- Also, to avoid long-drawn-out litigation, it should be ensured that the proposed law is legally compliant and its administration is smooth.

Decision on E-way bills

In News: Union government has decided to implement nationwide GST e-way bills from February 2018.

E-way Bill

- The e-way bill can be electronically generated on GSTN either by the supplier or recipient of the consignment, before the movement of goods.
- The transporter needs to carry an electronically generated way bill, with every consignment having value exceeding INR 50,000.
- This will be valid for varying durations depending on the distance travelled.
- Few States like Karnataka have already imposed their own requirements for such bills.
- It may possibly subject to few exemptions such as agricultural commodities
- There are indications that it could come into effect from October 1, 2017.
- Till then, the states have been allowed to follow their own way bill/road permit system, including the ones used prior to GST.

Complexities

- The e-way bill, once generated, is valid for one day for consignment up to 100 km and then one additional day for every 100 km thereafter.
- If e-way bill is generated, but the goods are not transported then it has to be cancelled electronically.
- If the transporter transfers goods from one vehicle to another in the course of transit, then he will be required to generate a new e-way bill, before commencement of the movement.
- Transporters may be required to obtain a unique Radio Frequency Identification Device (RFID) and get it imbedded on the vehicle and map the e-way bill to the RFID prior to the movement of goods.
- It is important to note that e-way bill is required even in case of intra-state movement (beyond 10 km), which was not the case earlier.
- Also, there were many states which did not have a system of way bill or a road permit in the erstwhile regime.

Issues with E-Way Bill

- The industry is skeptical that this could result in Inspector Raj and the associated corruption, which GST was otherwise supposed to eliminate.
- There is a fear that the e-way bill system could undo reduction in commodity prices
- The GST rates are uniform across states against this backdrop; e-way bill would serve limited purpose.
- The mechanism proposed requires a certain level of maturity in terms of technology, systems and processes.
- Large proportion of transport sector is still unorganized and may not be equipped to deal with technology-led compliances.
- It appears to be too stringent in terms of the reporting requirement.

Recent Decision on E-way Bill

- Starting February 1, all inter-State movement of goods worth over Rs. 50,000 will be tracked with the introduction of the e-way bill system under the GST regime.
- All consignments moving more than 10 km from their origin will require prior registration and generation of an e-way bill through the GST Network.
- Goods moved on non-motorized conveyance, such as carts, have been left out.

- New decision requires all States must implement the bill system for capturing intra-State trade.
- Therefore, a fully integrated tracking system for all taxable goods can be expected only then.

Practical Challenges

- Firms operating across States will now face differing compliance requirements for inter-State trade and intra-State trade, depending on when individual States launch their own e-way bill systems.
- Inter-State movement of goods was also tracked under the VAT (value-added tax) regime but intra-State transactions were not, this will add financial burdens to the traders.
- The major area of concern is there is only one-day validity for distances up to 100 Km, this will affect most business firms.
- Proper implementation of e-way bills requires robust connectivity and infrastructure, but India is yet to address such issues.

Taxing Petrol and Diesel

In News: Union government is planning to bring all petroleum products under the ambit of GST.

Petroleum Product under GST

- Kerosene, liquefied petroleum gas including domestic cooking gas, naphtha, and furnace oil are covered under the GST.
- Several other products such as crude oil, aviation turbine fuel, petrol, diesel, and natural gas continue to remain outside the purview of GST.
- According to official statements union government is half way to bring petrol and diesel products under GST.

Significance of New Plan

- Bringing petrol and diesel products under the GST poses no legislative hurdle as it just requires the GST Council's nod.
- It will address the problem of varying fuel prices and ensure similar petroleum across the nation.
- Customers can claim their Input tax credit for the petrol and diesel.
- It will reduce the cascading of taxes on intermediate products.
- Maintaining the GST value chain will also provide significant efficiency gains.

Challenges Involved

- Petroleum products account for over 63 per cent of the central excise collections and about 29 per cent of the sales tax and VAT collections by the states.
- A large portion of these tax collections comes from petrol and diesel.
- For instance, the central excise on petrol is as high as 65 per cent and the states' average VAT rate is 48 per cent.
- Similarly, diesel attracts a central levy amounting to 51 per cent, while the average state VAT is a little lower at 27.5 per cent.
- Reducing these rates to fit into the existing tax slabs under the GST could be a nightmare for the states and the Centre.
- Union government is already facing the pressure for reducing the number of tax slabs and addressing several other implementation challenges.
- In spite of this, the proposed GST regime for the petroleum sector will create more complications and confusion for trade and industry.

Financial Stability Report 2017

In News: Financial stability report (FSR) of the RBI has been recently released.

FSR

- Financial Stability Report (FSR) is a biannual publication which reflects the overall assessment on the stability of India's financial system.
- It will discuss India's resilience to risks emanating from global and domestic factors and issues relating to development and regulation of the financial sector.

Factors Making Indian Economy Unstable

- Public sector banks, which account for almost 70 per cent share in the country, even private banks are experiencing much turbulence on bad loans.
- Group of public sector banks are also highly vulnerable to further declines in asset quality and higher provisioning needs.

- Thus balance sheets of both public sector banks and quite a few large corporate houses are in terrible shape and were seen as a major obstacle to investment and reviving growth.

Recent Findings of the Report

- Government has taken steps to recapitalize public sector banks to enable them to lend afresh and institutionalize a system to reduce stressed loans through IBC.
- FSR has raised pertinent questions about such moves having a sustainable solution.
- Credit growth of scheduled commercial banks (SCBs) has improved but the banking stability indicator (BSI) suggests that the asset quality in the Indian banking sector is worsening.
- Report also points out there are a worrisome development in credit quality of large borrowers, who have aggregate exposure of Rs 5 crore or more.
- This essentially means that stressed companies are still not able to generate enough revenue to honors loan payments.
- FSR concludes that the gross non-performing assets GNPA ratio may increase to 10.8 per cent by March 2018 and further to 11.1 per cent by September 2018.

Banking Stability Indicator

- It is an asset quality indicator for banks.
- It is the expected number of banks that could become distressed given that at least one bank has become distressed.
- If BSI is higher more banks are expected to become distressed if one bank in the system is distressed.

Robustness of the Indian Patenting Framework

Context:

- Indian has evolved strong standards for patents.
- This has led to the promotion of real innovation and protection of the consumers, with lowest financial burden.

Section 3(d)

- In 2005, India made some remarkable amendments to the Indian Patents Act of 1970, to promote genuine innovation.
- It includes, Section 3(d), which is responsible for over 65% of all pharmaceutical patent rejections.
- This section provides for rejecting applications that are mere variants of known compounds and lack a demonstrable increase in therapeutic value.
- Basic patentability criteria are that the invention should be new, involve a significant inventive step, and should be capable of industrial application.
- Not meeting one of these was the most frequently used grounds for rejection.
- The section 3(d) was challenged in the Madras High Court and the Supreme Court on separate occasions, both of which decisively upheld its validity.

Making Indian Patents Structure Strong

- This means weeding out non-serious patent applications.
- In all, 1,723 pharmaceutical applications were rejected by the nodal agency, Indian Patent Office (IPO) between 2009 and 2016.
- Yet it still was in perfect compliance with the WTO norms.
- Such strong standards for patents resulted in effectively keeping medicines lowly priced and affordable in the country.
- This created significant opposition from global pharmaceutical majors and the countries of the developed world.
- e.g Novartis Case - patent for its anti-cancer drug Gleevec, rejected by invoking Section 3(d).
- Significantly, these countries continue to have weaker patent standards due to massive corporate lobbying.
- Hence they reject far lesser **bad patents** than India.

Section 3(d) Reduces Financial Burden

- In the last 10 years, Indian Patents Office (IPO) had rejected about 95% of all pharmaceutical related rejections on its own.
- Only 5% of the rejections were through the intervention of a third party, such as a pre-grant opponent.

- This is mainly because of Section 3(d), which provides the advantage of questioning an application at the IPO itself.
- Without the provision, the expensive and time consuming litigation will be the only alternate.
- In such cases, disputes are often settled before reaching a conclusion, in pay-for-delay settlements negotiated by patent owners.
- Patent claimers usually pay off generic manufacturers to stay off the market, which effectively increases the cost of medicines.
- Hence, without Section 3(d), Indian public would have to either bear the burden of invalidating a bad patent through litigation or the cost of expensive medicines.
- It would hence be wise for other countries to incorporate similar provisions in their patent laws to reduce the medical bills of its citizens and prevent undue profiteering by pharma companies.

Difficulties in Tacking Insider Leaks

In News:

- Loan default disclosure information has been leaked by insiders.
- SEBI faces many challenges to pin down the original company insiders responsible for these leaks.

SEBI's Loan Default Disclosure

- SEBI required listed firms to inform exchanges if they default on loan payments to banks and financial institutions.
- By new definition SEBI made it clear, even a delay of one day from the due payment of loans will be considered as default.
- The move came against the backdrop of the government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stepping up efforts to tackle the menace of bad loans amounting to over Rs. 8 lakh crore.

About Leak

- Many price sensitive information relating to defaults of major companies listed in Indian stock exchange were been circulated in WhatsApp groups.
- This leak was happened prior to the public announcement of quarterly results.
- According to Indian laws mere sharing of unpublished information is illegal and anyone possessing it is an 'insider'.
- Many insider analysts shared prescient tip-offs about upcoming results for top listed companies.
- On this regard SEBI has interrogated analysts, conducted raids on stock brokers and deployed search-and-seizure powers to confiscate laptops and mobile phones.

Way Forward

- In this case, the leaks were already a few months old, and the WhatsApp messages were encrypted, which is tedious for the regulator to track.
- In India, this means breaking the cosy nexus between managements of listed companies and analysts who track them.
- It is a common practice for companies to host exclusive analyst conference calls immediately after key actions, where the management shares a detailed break-down of numbers and fields one-to-one questions.
- Going strictly by insider trading laws, the transcripts of all such interactions should be placed immediately in the public domain.
- But in practice, companies inordinately delay or even skip the filing, resulting in significant information asymmetry between the selected analysts and other public investors.
- India's premier stock exchanges are yet to deploy their tech and data-mining capabilities to address such leaks.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Indo-Russian Defense Ties

In News: Amid increasing Indo-US cooperation across domains, there is a rising concerns that India's historic defense ties with the Russia may take a hit.

Recent Controversy

- A Russian "Akula-Class nuclear submarine" was leased to India in 2012 for period of 10 years.
- The lease restricted deploying the vessel for offensive operations and had multiple clauses for ensuring its operational and technical secrecy.
- Recently, a Russian news website accused the Indian Navy of having opened the vessel to a US technical team for inspection.
- While the report turned out to be false, the issue raised eyebrows in strategic circles and brought the critical Indo-Russian naval partnership into focus.

Historical Evolution

- USSR was India's strategic partner during the Cold War and also its primary military equipment supplier.
- Moscow started supplying naval equipment to India from 1964 and by 1987, these supplies made 70% of the Indian Navy's inventory.
- Subsequently, Moscow loaned the first nuclear submarine to India in 1988, which was commissioned in the Indian navy as INS Chakra.
- An understanding was also reached for accessing Soviet assistance to India's navy personals and assist the indigenous nuclear submarine programme.
- The soviet mandate spelt out in clear terms that no technical parameters were leaked during the period of the lease.
- In this regard, India established strict protocols for the Vishakapatnam dockyard and even closely monitored various security parameters.

Significance of Russia

- From being an exclusive preserve of the Russian defense industry, the Indian Navy is now increasingly looking forward to American hardware.
- India currently looks to the US for top-of-the-line defense equipment like attack helicopters, artillery guns, and advanced transport aircrafts
- Notably, Russian Tu-142 maritime reconnaissance aircrafts have been replaced by USA's P-8 I Poseidon aircrafts of the same type.
- India also intends to establish ties for commencing joint arms production with the US and jointly organizes the annual Indo-US-Japan Malabar exercises.
- But despite this growing Indo-US bonhomie, India continues to buy/lease Russia equipment on a considerable scale.
- Most importantly, Russia's technological assistance to India's indigenous nuclear submarine programme '**Arihant class**' has been immense.

Way Forward

- Given this history of cooperation and India's need for continued Russian assistance, it is not currently possible for India to abandon this ago old bond.
- Notably, the reluctance in signing the "Communication and Information Security Agreement" with the US emanates partly from such concerns.
- While some vouch for taking US technical assistance in naval nuclear propulsion, it won't be easy for India to extract such co-operation currently.
- Hence, Russian primacy in Indian Navy's scheme of thing for indispensable for the foreseeable future.

Regime Change in Chile

In News: Centre-right politician 'Sebastián Piñera' has been elected as Chile's President recently.

Significance

- Chile is undergoing rapid political transformation, due to the **recent introduction of proportional representation system.**
- This has effectively **ended the two-party** dominance characteristic of the past 3 decades and accelerated the assertive emergence of leftist politics.

- Notably, the left drives its support base from the new middle classes that shot to prominence during the South American commodities boom of past decade.
- The new government is expected to priorities the establishment a constituent assembly to draft a new Constitution as promised.
- Also, Mr. Piñera's victory raises expectations of the country's return to the robust economic performance, which currently below 2%.

Foremost Challenge

- Chile's mining lobby wants regulations on permits to be eased, in order to capitalize on global demand for copper – a major export commodity.
- Mr. Piñera also promised easing labour regulations and reducing corporate taxes in the run-up to the elections.
- While fulfilling these promises will be key to reviving growth, it won't be easy as the leftists hold a sizable strength in the congress.
- As the middle class have been vouching for further improvements in welfare programs, it would be difficult to curb spending in areas like education.
- Hence, Mr. Piñera will have to walk a tightrope between the competing demands of the businesses and the social welfare programs.

Emerging Trend in Latin America

- With Mauricio Macri as President in Argentina, Mr. Piñera's return signals a further consolidation of the centre-right in Latin America.
- This rightward political swing is expected to spread across the region, as governments scheduled to face the electorate are mired with problems.
- Economic consolidation is a critical priority in the region, as effects of the plummeting commodities markets in recent years is still being felt.

UN Resolution on Jerusalem

What is the issue?

A resolution was passed in the UN with the support of 128 nations opposing the USA's recent stand on the status of Jerusalem.

How did the situation evolve?

- While the entire territory of Jerusalem is currently under Israeli control, the UN has thus far been steadfast in stressing the disputed status of the city.
- Notably, due its historic and religious significance, Jerusalem is being claimed by both Israel and Palestine as their capital city.
- There are multiple proposals on how the status of the city can be resolved, one of which is declaring it an internationally administered territory.
- Recently, the US unilaterally recognized Jerusalem as the undisputed capital of Israel and also plans to shift its embassy there.
- As the move could potentially ruin any hope of a solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict, it received widespread international condemnation.

How did the resolution sail through?

- A resolution calling for compliance with the UN's long standing view on Jerusalem was mooted in the UN Security Council by Egypt.
- While all members expect US sported the resolution, US vetoed it and thereby obstructing its passing.
- Subsequently, Egypt swiftly piloted the same in the General Assembly, where it had to muster a two-third majority to get it passed.
- Despite the US openly threatening member countries against supporting the resolution, it sailed through with a comfortable 128 up-votes.
- Notably, all members of the EU, ASEAN and GCC supported the resolution and only six countries that included "Israel, Honduras, Guatemala, and three Pacific island nations" voted against it.
- Significantly, 35 others, including neighbours Canada and Mexico abstained from the vote, with Bhutan being the only abstainer from south Asia.
- While the resolution doesn't even mention US by name and is non-binding, it does have significant symbolic value and has made its point.

What are its implication for India?

- India too supported the resolution despite its domestic political compulsions and its growing closeness with Israel and US.

- Hence, the vote is a timely reassurance that India abides by its principled long-standing policy on Palestine.
- This is bound to resonate well with the members of ‘Gulf Cooperation Council’ with which it has crucial business ties.
- Also, Indo-Israeli ties won’t take a considerable beating, considering that India has largely de-hyphenated the Palestine question from its dealings with Israel.
- Notably, India imports almost a third of Israel’s defence produce and Israel would find it difficult to overlook India’s criticality for its economy.

Sharing Revenue with Online Content Developers

In News: EU is debating to evolve a revenue sharing model between conventional news agencies and online aggregator sites like Google and Facebook.

About Debate

- Sites like Google and Facebook aren’t involved in the difficult task of gathering, checking and serving news from around the world.
- However, these online giants do receive a lot of eyeballs and generate huge amounts of advertising revenue from providing links to such news stories.
- As this effectively means serving users the work done by others (news media in this case), this is touted to constitute a case of copyright infringement.
- The current discussion is hence, premised on giving news agencies leverage to negotiate with online news aggregators on revenue sharing models.
- If the negotiations succeed, then the big online platforms would be paying for the millions of news articles they feature on their sites.
- This could potentially change the current revenue model for news consumption and, perhaps, for other content as well.

Current Revenue Trends

- News articles are the second most popular category on social networks, exceeded in viewership only by posts related to friends and families.
- Under the current copyright laws, the online aggregators are not obliged to share this revenue with the content creators.
- Notably, revenues for conventional news media are dropping, thereby making the expensive task of investigative reporting increasingly unsustainable.
- On the contrast, Google and Facebook together hold 60-70% market share of online advertising across the world and their profits are increasing.
- In 2016, Facebook reportedly tripled its profits to \$10 billion and Google reported a 20% increase in profits that accounted to \$20 billion.
- This shift of revenues away from the content creator to the disseminator started with the very emergence of the “world wide web”
- This is a classic example of technological disruption altering the value chain and it has been accentuated with the rise of social media.

Binary in the Arguments

- Social media platforms can argue that they have invested significantly to build their platforms and deserve the right to monetize from it.
- On the other hand, news agencies do need revenues to produce high-quality reporting to facilitate continued online traffic on these sites.
- While there is logic on both sides, recognizing that there is also a symbiotic relationship is crucial.
- It is true that, if Google and Facebook stop linking to news then the revenue for news agencies will decrease even more than the present.
- But at the same time, Google and Facebook will also lose some revenues and suffer loss of credibility, as news agencies provide credible content.

Way Forward

- **Possible Solution** - Some have mooted to extend the concept of “neighboring rights”, which in the EU is currently available only to authors and not news agencies.
- This concept allows authors the right, with 20 years validity, to control the reproduction and publication of their content.
- If it is extended to publishers, the news agencies would get better control over the sharing of their content.

- **The Challenge** - While enhancing news monetization through deals with social media giants is a possibility, given their monopolistic nature, Facebook and Google would play tough.
- They could even consider selectively removing articles that demand payment or rather, fine-tune their algorithms to filter out anything that the surfer does not explicitly seek.
- **The Impact** – An enhanced copyright regime could, at the very least, give the news agencies some leverage to try and grab a slice of advertising revenue.
- More significantly, this would open the possibility for other content creators like bloggers, musicians and video makers to aspire for a similar deal.
- It is to be noted that, while now these people are already being remunerated by sites like YouTube, their share has largely been a pittance and completely according to the terms and conditions of the websites.

India China Border Talks

In News: The 20th round of the Special Representative (SR) talks between India and China on the border question was recently held.

Significance

- India was represented by National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and China was represented by State Councilor Yang Jiechi (member of the Politburo).
- Significantly, Politburo is the chief decision making body in China and this is first time that an official of such high-rank spearheaded the talks.
- This meet is also important as it comes after a long pause of 20 months after the previous round (usual gap is 1 year) and after the 70 day Doklam standoff.
- Above all, they were guided by the Modi-Xi agreements of 2017, including the ‘Astana consensus’ that “differences must not become disputes”.

Focus Areas

- Agreement on “Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question” formulated in 2005 is the key focus.
- The three major parameters of discussion were
- Defining the guidelines for the settlement of border disputes
- Formulating a framework agreement on its implementation
- Completing border demarcation
- Notably, the SRs were given an extended mandate this year, and thus went well beyond the remit of merely discussing the resolution of boundary issues.
- But despite all this bonhomie, there are multiple challenges that look difficult to resolve.

Challenges

- Despite the signing of the 2013 Border Defense Cooperation Agreement, there has been a steady decline in relations in all spheres.
- The border has seen more transgressions, people-to-people ties have suffered amid mutual suspicion.
- China’s forays in South Asia as well as India’s forays into South-East Asian sea lanes have increasingly become areas of contestation.
- India sees China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its other forays into the Indian neighborhood as an endeavor for total geo-political domination.
- Furthering its concern is the intrusive “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” that runs through the disputed PoK, and Chinese hurdles for India in the NSG and UN Security Council Resolutions on Terrorism.
- In turn, Beijing sees the U.S.-India defense agreements, the Quadrilateral engagement with Japan, Australia and the U.S., and Indian opposition to the BRI as India’s anti-China attitude.

Future Hold

- The stand-off at Doklam highlighted the importance of settling the border question at the earliest.
- The understanding reached earlier at Xiamen that India-China relations “are a factor of stability” in an increasingly unstable world needs to be strengthened.
- Even if a complete and permanent settlement is elusive on the outstanding issues, reaching a workable compromise immediately is important.

Decline of WTO

Context:

- Most of the developed countries are losing their interest on multilateralism in trade, which makes WTO weak.
- India should be more actively engaged to arrest the slide and then make the WTO a more equitable organization.

WTO Evolved into a Multilateral Trade Forum

- In the early 1990s, global trading powers U.S., EU, Japan and Canada pushed for a GATT (General Agreement on Tariff and Trade) agreement that would vastly increase access for their products in foreign markets.
- They succeeded with the 1994 Marrakesh agreement by which “farm subsidizers” of the U.S. and EU agreed to bring agriculture under GATT rules.
- In exchange, the developing countries had to pay up front by reducing import duties on manufacture, opening their markets to services, and agreeing to strict protection of intellectual property rights.
- The Marrakesh agreement also created the new Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to adjudicate on trade disputes.
- By which WTO was born in 1995, replacing the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

Developed Nations are Losing Interest on Wto

- WTO has been felled by the weight of the extraordinary ambitions, many developed countries made pressure to bring many more “new” non-trade issues under the WTO.
- As a consequence, since the late 2000s, the organization has been unable to carry out its basic task of overseeing a successful conduct of multilateral trade negotiations.
- The WTO seemed to be just the kind of “super” international organization that the major powers wanted.
- This over-reach of the organization at sometimes had the opposite of the intended outcomes of the developed nations.
- The entry of China into the WTO in 2001 also became a challenge for developed countries.
- China used its newly acquired ‘most favored nation’ status as its tool to expand exports by its export ambitions China hollowed out U.S. manufacturing.
- Due to the active presence of developing nations like India, Brazil etc. and majority of such memberships, Developed nations realized that no more they can influence WTO.

Recent Threats by Developed Nations

- The U.S. and EU have sought to formally scrap the DDA and try to make new laws which are favorable for them.
- In 2014, trade facilitation (covering customs rules and procedures) was taken out of the DDA and a stand-alone agreement was signed, because the U.S. and the EU were interested in it.
- This virtually destroyed the principle of reciprocity under which each country wanting to obtain gains in specific areas makes concessions in others.
- The U.S. has even begun to undermine the very elements of the WTO that it had pushed through in the early 1990s.
- It now refuses to implement some DSB decisions.
- Most recently, it has taken decisions on DSB appointments which will in effect bring adjudication to a halt.
- During 11th ministerial meeting at Buenos Aires, proposals were made for the WTO to take up “new issues” such as e-commerce, investment facilitation and trade and gender.
- But all these were outside the DDA and of interest only to a select membership.

Diplomacy Holds the Key North Korea

In News: Fresh sanctions are being imposed on North Korea.

Recent North Korean Aggressions

- Pyongyang launched its first intercontinental ballistic missile in November 2017.
- Ever since, North Korea claims to have acquired the potential to deliver a nuclear warhead to anywhere in North America.
- In September, North Korea detonated its sixth underground nuclear device, which it claimed was a hydrogen bomb.
- Though unverified, experts believe that the explosion was many times more powerful than previous detonations.

- These developments have increasingly narrowed the scope for military options available to the international community.
- Various governments also recently aired suspicion that the North Korean government orchestrated the world-wide 'WannaCry' cyber-attacks.
- This, coupled with the frustration over the continuing nuclear stand-off, led to fresh economic sanctions on North Korea.

About Sanctions

- They were imposed unanimously by the UN Security Council.
- The sanctions include an 89% curb on refined petroleum imports into North Korea, with stringent inspections of ships transferring fuel to the country.
- Also, to cut-off hard currency supply, there was a call for the expulsion of thousands of working North Koreans in other countries within 2 years.
- Despite supporting the sanctions, Beijing and Moscow did stress the potentially destabilising and counterproductive impact of these measures.

Way Forward

- The objective of the sanctions has been to force North Korea to halt its nuclear programme and start disarmament negotiations.
- But diplomacy remains the best option to bring it to disarmament talks.
- A revival of stalled peace negotiations between the P-5 nations and North Korea may be the only realistic alternative on the horizon.
- The fairly successful Iranian nuclear deal provided a constructive template to negotiate with North Korea.

World Inequality Report

In News: World Inequality Report 2018 has been recently released

World Inequality Report

- It measures income and wealth inequality in a systematic and transparent manner.
- This report is on a global scale which showcases the trend in inequality across the world, providing a comparative perspective across countries.
- It seeks to fill a democratic gap and to equip various actors of society with the necessary facts to engage in informed public debates on inequality.
- It is published by World Inequality Lab at the Paris School of Economics.

Highlight of Recent Report

- It has brought into focus of economic progress in India and there are reported growth in inequality here since the mid-1980s.
- The report had found that the top 1% of income earners received 6% of the total income in the early 1980s, close to 15% of it in 2000, and receives 22% today.
- It also explains combination of large privatizations and increasing income inequality has fuelled the rise of wealth inequality among individuals.
- The report also enables a comparison of economic progress made in India and China.

India vs. China

- Since 1980, while the Chinese economy has grown 800% and India's a far lower 200%.
- At the same time inequality in China today is considerably lower than in India.
- The share of the top 1% of the Chinese population is 14% as opposed to the 22% reported for India.
- Per capita income in China was five times that of India in 2016 while the percentage of the population living on less than \$1.90 a day was about 10 times less at the beginning of this decade.

Reasons Behind China's Growth

- Imaginative public policy and a steady governance was the ideology of china for which it had chosen Authoritative government.
- Leadership combined the drive for growth with the spreading of human capital.
- The spread of health and education in that country enabled the Chinese economy to grow faster than India by exporting manufactures to the rest of the world.
- Those goods may not have been good in quality but they were globally competitive, which made their domestic production viable.

- The resulting growth lifted vast multitudes out of poverty, which accounts for the relative equality of outcomes in China when compared to India.
- An ingredient of this is also the greater participation of women in the workforce of China, an outcome that eludes India.

Kimberley Process

Context: The KP Plenary Session is being held at Brisbane, Australia.

- In one of the landmark decisions favouring India's leading position in Diamonds globally.
- India was appointed as the Kimberley Process (KP) Vice Chair for 2018 and Chair for 2019 in the last plenary held in Dubai in November, 2016.
- The EU will be KP Chair for 2018.

About Kimberley Process

- The Kimberley Process is an international certification scheme that regulates trade in rough diamonds.
- It aims to prevent the flow of conflict diamonds, while helping to protect legitimate trade in rough diamonds.
- The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) outlines the rules that govern the trade in rough diamonds.
- The KPCS has developed a set of minimum requirements that each participant must meet.
- The KP is not, an international organisation: it has no permanent offices or permanent staff.
- It relies on the contributions – under the principle of 'burden-sharing' – of participants, supported by industry and civil society observers.
- Neither can the KP be considered as an international agreement from a legal perspective, as it is implemented through the national legislations of its participants.
- The Kimberley Process (KP) is open to all countries that are willing and able to implement its requirements.
- The KP has 54 participants, representing 81 countries, with the European Union and its Member States counting as a single participant.
- KP members account for approximately 99.8% of the global production of rough diamonds.
- In addition, the World Diamond Council and civil society organisations participate in the KP and have played a major role since its outset.

Conflict Diamonds

- Conflict Diamonds means rough diamonds used by rebel movements or their allies to finance conflict aimed at undermining legitimate governments.
- It is also described in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.

Functioning of Kimberley Process

- KPCS enable them to certify shipments of rough diamonds as 'conflict-free' and prevent conflict diamonds from entering the legitimate trade.
- Under the terms of the KPCS, participating states must meet 'minimum requirements' and must put in place national legislation and institutions.
- Participants can only legally trade with other participants who have also met the minimum requirements of the scheme.
- International shipments of rough diamonds must be accompanied by a KP certificate guaranteeing that they are conflict-free.

DEFENCE/SECURITY AFFAIRS

US Security Doctrine: Impact on India

In News

- India has welcomed Mr. Trump's recently announced 'National Security Strategy' (NSS), which has openly criticized many nations.
- But India needs to exercise caution to avoid becoming second fiddle to the US at international forums.

Implications for India

- NSS perceives India positively, affirms India's stature and acknowledges India's emergence as a leading global power.
- It supports Indian leadership in the region's development and outlines India's primacy for ensuring security in the Indian Ocean.

- It also sees China's aggression as an assault on the "sovereignty" of the neighbouring nations in the region.
- Pakistan's continued support to terror groups has also been noted.
- All of these are aligned with India's concerns, and indicate the growing convergence between US and India on strategic issues.

Implications for Other Nations

- NSS had singled out five countries (China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran and North Korea) for criticism which on expected lines have reacted negatively.
- Particularly, China and Russia have been accused of using their military might to deny the US, access to "critical commercial zones".
- In response, China had said that the US is struck in its Cold War mindset and Russia accused the US of practicing neo-imperialism.
- Iran and North Korea have been critiqued for their nuclear programs, and Pakistan for its faltering to honors its security commitments.

Caution is Needed

- US policy priorities and perceptions have swung wildly under the Trump administration, thereby making its commitments unreliable.
- Also, in many cases words haven't been backed up by actions.
- Notably, while the U.S. has talked of countering China's influence in South Asia, it has not backed this with actual financial assistance for projects.
- Also, while words on Pakistan are soft approach to terrorism has been sharp, the U.S. continues to support the Pakistani government through huge funds.

Way Forward

- Lately, there has been an American withdrawal from pacts ranging from the Trans-Pacific Partnership to the Paris agreement on climate change.
- Also, Mr. Trump is seen to be public at odds with many of his key advisors on many issues ranging from - Palestine, North Korea, Iran or Afghanistan.
- A watch-and-wait stance is still India's best option to preserve the autonomous and pluralistic nature of its engagement in world affairs.

ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Amendment of Indian Forest Act

In News: Lok Sabha amended Section 2(7) of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 which had led to bamboo being seen as timber.

Provisions of Earlier Forest Acts on Bamboo

- Bamboo is woody and can grow up to towering heights, but taxonomically, it's a grass.
- The law dating back to the colonial era classified the plant as a tree, but the colonial-era definition of bamboo had an economic logic.
- Forests had to be protected because they were repositories of timber, Bamboo was slotted as a "forest produce" and placed in the same category as palm and other trees.
- After Independence, bamboo being a tree was under the control of the forest department and it found its way to markets largely through auctions held by the department.

Significance

- In 1996, the Supreme Court ruled that "felled bamboo" was not timber and the Forests Rights Act (FRA), 2006 also classified bamboo as a "non-timber forest produce".
- But both the apex court and the FRA stopped short of aligning bamboo with its taxonomic classification.
- Section 2(7) of the 1927 Act was never amended and this created confusion in implementing the court ruling and the FRA.
- The recent amendment has removed bamboo from the category of "timber" under colonial-era law and it enlisted under the category of grass.
- It will remove the forest department's hold over the natural resource and will reduce dependence on bamboo imports.

Bamboo's Economically Important

- India has nearly 14 million hectares of bamboo forests, and it has 30 per cent of the world's bamboo resources.

- Bamboo can fully regenerate in three to five months, while other commercially-important woody plants take about five years to mature.
- Bamboo has a big role in the agarbatti industry; India produces 3,000 tonnes of them creating employment around north eastern states.
- New form of fiber is being derived from bamboo to weave clothes which provide employment to tribal population of Central India.

Viabale Solution for Stubble Burning

In News:

- Paddy stubble burning is found to be a major contributor to Delhi's air pollution.
- Bans and fines are unlikely to be effective.
- To devise a policy with a chance to succeed, one needs to understand the reasons why farmers prefer burning.

Cause of Stubble Burning

- It causes smoke and particulate pollution that can move over long distance.
- It also implies loss of nutrients in soil.
- One ton of straw when burnt releases 3 kg of particulate matter, 60 kg of carbon monoxide, 1,460 kg of carbon dioxide, 199 kg of ash and 2 kg of sulphur dioxide.
- In Punjab alone, 15 million tons of paddy straw is burnt every year, generating 45 million tons of particulates.
- Even after a stiff fine by Punjab and Haryana farmers still chose the option stubble burning.

Why stubble burning?

- When manually harvested, the crops can be cut at the bottom and the stalks could be sent for other uses such as paper mills, animal bedding, etc.
- But manual harvesting has become very expensive as labourers charge around Rs 4,000/acre and take three to four days.
- So at present, paddy harvesting is done by combine harvester machine, which finishes it in half an hour and charges Rs 1,200/acre.
- But it leaves two thirds of the stalks on the ground.
- So stubble burning is the cheapest and quickest way to get their fields ready in time for the sowing of next crop.
- It kills weeds including those resistant to herbicides.
- It also kills slugs and other pests.

Alternate Uses of Stubble

- Properly cut Stubble can be used to make bio-char or cellulosic ethanol, burn in a power plant or plant the next crop without tillage.
- Bio-char is a fine-grained, carbon-rich, porous product remaining after straw has been subjected to pyrolysis at low temperatures in an environment with little or no oxygen.
- Bio-char can improve water retention and increased soil surface area when used with other fertilizers.

Way Forward

- A farmer's economic compulsions dominate his decision to burn stubble.
- Incentives from power generators and ethanol manufactures to farmers bringing stubble will provide solution for this.
- Super SMS (straw management system) is an attachment that fits onto the combine harvesters for paddy, spreads residue evenly over the field.
- It should be deployed while cutting the stubbles.
- Initiatives should be taken to market biochar as a nutrient and private players should be involved for the infrastructures required.

Kapra Lake

- Kapra Lake is located in north east part of Greater Hyderabad.
- The lake is polluted, choked by water hyacinth and acts as a breeding ground for mosquitoes.
- The discharge of industrial waste and sewage into waterbodies leads to the growth of water hyacinth which affects the lake's ecosystem and causes groundwater contamination.
- The Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT) has come out with a plan that turns the water hyacinth into organic manure.

- Good quality organic fertilizer with adequate content of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium is produced through the process of **anaerobic composting** method.

Water Hyacinth

- Water hyacinth is a free-floating perennial plant, native to South America.
- It can grow to a height of 3 feet with dark green leaves with flowers above the water and heavily branched, dark fibrous root system underneath.
- It is a very aggressive invader forming thick mats which can cause oxygen depletion in the water bodies and kills the aquatic plants and fish.
- Submerged portion provide habitats for many micro and macro invertebrates.
- After aquatic plants die, their decomposition by bacteria and fungi provides food for many aquatic invertebrates.
- It has no known direct food value to wildlife and is considered a pest species.

LiDAR to Monitor Air Quality

- Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) is currently focussing on its surface-level monitoring of air quality of Delhi-NCR.
- However, in “later stages”, it is also planning to take up vertical monitoring by using advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) devices.
- LiDAR is a monitoring system for mapping and modelling in -micro-topography, forestry, agriculture, meteorology and environmental pollution-
- LiDAR projects laser beams towards the sky.
- Subsequently, the interplay of light with the objects falling on its path through absorption, reflection, scattering help determine the composition of suspended particulates.
- Elastic Backscatter LiDAR and Raman LiDAR are used in monitoring air pollutants vertically.
- The CPCB and IMD had used the Elastic Backscatter LiDAR during the 2010 Commonwealth Games and the data was utilised in 3D modelling and forecasting during the games.

BIO/ HEALTH ISSUES

Dual Nutrition Burden in India

Context: India is witnessing the emerging menace of over-nutrition along with the existing concern of high under-nutrition.

Under-Nutrition in India

- Global Nutrition Report ranks India low in stunting among children aged less than five and in under-5 wasting.
- **Micronutrient deficiency** - The burden of vitamin and mineral deficiencies, called ‘hidden hunger’, is also considerable.
- This is because a vast majority of Indians eat cereal-based food, mainly wheat and rice.
- There is an insufficient intake of food such as milk, pulses, and fruits and vegetables, which are rich sources of micronutrients.
- **Effects** - Women and children are the most vulnerable to micronutrient deficiencies and consequently have adverse health effects.
- Deficiency of iron in women causes reduced physical work capacity, fatigue, etc.
- Notably it could also lead to depression and post-partum maternal hemorrhage.
- In the case of children, the impact is felt with impairment in growth and cognitive development.
- **Response** - In the last few decades, India has made efforts at improving the food and nutrition security of its population.
- This was done with strides in technology, irrigation practices, extension services, and progressive agricultural policies.
- Also, in the 1990s, deficiencies of micronutrients such as zinc, folic acid, magnesium, selenium and vitamin D received more attention.
- However, despite an overall decrease in cases, the level of under-nutrition still remains high in comparison with world nations.

Emerging Concern

- The recent findings of the National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) bring out the emerging scenario of over-nutrition in India.
- With Body Mass Index (BMI) as the measure, the survey identifies-
 - Around 15% of urban women to be underweight and around 30% of to be overweight or obese
 - Around 15% of urban men in the underweight category and a 26% in the overweight and obese category

Benefits

- Lifestyle and dietary patterns have undergone dramatic changes, especially among urban sections, in the recent decades.
- This has contributed to reduction in physical activity and an increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases.
- Over-nutrition is traced to be the cause for these diseases due to the imbalance between intake and activity.
- Resultantly, over-nutrition is emerging as a concern among the urban affluent segments.

Way Forward

- India is evidently witnessing a dual nutrition burden.
- The burden of under-nutrition among the poorer sections and that of over-nutrition among the urban well-to-do sections.
- Promotion of appropriate lifestyles and dietary intakes for the prevention and management of over-nutrition and obesity is necessary.
- On the other hand, to ensure food and nutrition security, there is a growing need for a multi-sectorial approach.
- The policies and programmes of various ministries should be converged for better results in agricultural practices as well as in food styles.

TECHNOLOGICAL AFFAIRS

E-Cigarettes

Context:

- The government is examining the legal implications and health effects of e-cigarettes.
- The Health Ministry has constituted three groups to study the various aspects of e-cigarettes.
- One was to study the legal implications of this e-nicotine drug induce system, another was to go into the health effects and the other was to study advocacy.

E-cigarettes

- An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking.
- It works by heating up nicotine liquid, called "juice." Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavours and nicotine levels.
- E-liquid is composed of five ingredients:
 - Vegetable glycerine: a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste.
 - Propylene glycol: propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapour.
- Proponents of e-cigs argue that the practice is healthier than traditional cigarettes because users are only inhaling water vapour and nicotine.

Need for Regulation

- In India smoking devices are easily available through online shopping portals and with little information out in the public domain about the ill-effects of e-cigarettes.
- There is a misconception that it is less harmful than traditional cigarettes.
- Smart marketing and inadequate information on the nicotine content in e-cigarettes has created a false impression that these devices are not as harmful as regular cigarettes.
- In the absence of a regulation the use of e-cigarettes has grown; they are easily accessible to even the non-smokers.
- Along with the traditional cigarette manufacturing, there is a parallel industry of e-cigarette like devices growing in India, which is under-regulated.

Regulating Satellite TV

In News: Government is reviewing the process of granting permission to satellite television companies for up linking and downlinking channels.

Up-Linking and Downlinking

- In satellite telecommunication, a downlink is the link from a satellite down to one or more ground stations or receivers.
- An uplink is the link from a ground station up to a satellite.
- For creating such links different radioactive frequencies are used, the C band is the most frequently used.
- **TheKa and Ku bands are reserved exclusively for satellite communication.**
- These frequencies will be somewhere around 3700 MHz - 31 GHz.
- Some companies sell uplink and downlink services to television stations, corporations, and to other telecommunication carriers.

Plan on Satellite Television Communication

- Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has floated a consultation paper on issues related to up-linking and downlinking of TV channels in India.
- TRAI is reviewing provisions of the guidelines that came into effect six years ago in December 2011.
- One of the central questions being examined is whether satellite TV channels should be auctioned by the government.
- While auction of any natural resource, in this case, spectrum or airwaves used to broadcast satellite TV channels, holds merit for reasons of transparency as well as for higher revenues.

Challenges Involved

- The television Industry is very large as there are close to 900 permitted satellite TV channels, along with seven direct-to-home (DTH) operators, and a large number of cable TV operators.
- There are technical issues that need to be settled before the sector can undergo any radical change.
- Due to low entry barriers, non-serious players have been able to obtain TV broadcasting licences, such licenses are even traded or leased to different entities later.
- The government is also expecting higher revenues from a fast-growing TV satellite broadcasting sector, especially when the rules are much more stringent for DTH.
- Auctions could help right market price for a channel, but this is likely to happen at the risk of discouraging local and regional players.

Way Forward

- TRAI must examine the feasibility of one-time entry fee for all TV channels, apart from arriving at a revenue-sharing model with the government.
- That will check the entry of non-serious players into the broadcasting space while being a source of meaningful revenue for the government.
- Satellite TV channel should not be regulated in isolation but in sync with the overall technological and business models prevalent in the telecom and broadcasting space.

Sky Gazing for Aliens

In News:

- US government recently declassified information about “Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program” (AATI).
- This has revived long subdued interests in Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO) and Alien life-forms.

AATI Program

- Humanity has always been fascinated by the possibility of extraterrestrial life through unverified word-of-mouth spotting of aliens.
- Most governments have largely been diligent in suppressing all evidences that could possibly fuel such speculative thoughts.
- But the recent declassification of information about the AATI program and videos related to it has given good impetus for rejuvenated interest in aliens.
- AATI was an investigative program into UFOs that was operational between 2007 and 2012, which had documented various suspected alien movement.
- Notably, a retired military officer who headed AATI has also come on record, stressing the need to continue investigating UFOs.

Conspiracy Theories

- Unsubstantiated conspiracy theorists are currently aplenty and overwhelmingly support the existence of aliens and their visit to the Earth.
- UFOs got significant attention for the 1st time during the 2nd world war, when many military pilots reported sighting of saucer shaped objects.
- Subsequently, the number of such claims increased and came from all sorts of people – even alien abduction theories were flouted.
- Notably, “Area 51” - a remote part of the Nevada desert in the US, that houses an Air Force base, is a darling for conspiracy mongers due to its secretiveness.
- Most conspiracy theorists believe that the Air Base is actually a cover-up for a facility to research into aliens that have either – died on Earth, been captured alive, or have come as ambassadors.

Some Government Initiated Programs

- During the Cold War era, air forces worldwide were on an eternally alert mode for the fare of possible missile attacks.
- The alertness provided for ample sighting of flying objects, most of which were eventually identified but some does remain as yet unidentified.
- While the western governments were more worried about Russians than about alien life, they nevertheless initiated investigations on UFOs
- Notable, US Air Force initiated “Project Blue Book” which began UFO investigations in 1947 and reviewed over 12,000 sightings till 1969.
- While most sightings were concluded as stars, oddly-shaped clouds other terrestrial objects, about 701 of them remain unexplained.
- Similarly, Britain convened the “Flying Saucer Working Party”, which also investigated UFOs and arrived at conclusions akin to the US project.

Significant Scientific Works in this Field

- The famous astronomer Frank Drake through his “Drake Equation” guesses that there could be considerable number of alien civilizations.
- In 1961, he listed the variables for determining the number of alien civilizations capable of using radio signals in the Milky Way Galaxy.
- Drake estimated the:
 - rate of formation of suitable stars
 - number of such stars with planets in orbit
 - possible number of inhabitable planets
- He postulated that life might exist or emerge in future in a small fraction of such inhabitable planets.
- Further, he stressed that the possibility of emergence of intelligent civilizations capable of radio communication was an even smaller fraction of those plants.
- While his was essentially a guess work by extrapolation of data, advancements in telescopes has helped considerably to improvise space research.
- Notably, a large number of exo-planets perceivably conducive for life has been spotted to be orbiting star but we’re still guessing about the other variables.

Speculations

- Considering the vastness of the cosmos, alien life is indeed very much possible and it might even be humanoid and carbon-based.
- As thousands of exo-planets have already been identified by Kepler Space Observatory, Earth-like conditions may exist in some of these.
- Notably, comets have been found to possess amino acids that are key for the evolution carbon based life forms.
- However, people like Nobel winning physicist Enrico Fermi has been critical of such hypothesis, as there is no conclusive proof of their existence.
- While there is a possibility that aliens don’t exist, there is also a possibility that they’ve not developed intelligence or that they’re consciously lying low.
- Also, considering the interstellar distances, if a civilization 1000 light years away had discovered radio waves at the time we did, then their first signal would reach us around 3000 AD.

Kepler 90i

- NASA has recently announced that it found another solar system with 8 planets.
- The historic discovery was made by new scientific analysis of data obtained by the Kepler space telescope.
- Kepler 90 is the first star to host as many planets as our own solar system.
- The new planet “Kepler 90i” is a small rocky planet, but very close to the sun which is hotter than Earth
- It is located 2,500 light years from Earth and it orbits its home star every 14 days and is about 30% bigger than Earth.
- The planets in the Kepler 90 system orbit much closer to their host star than Earth is to the sun.
- It is similar to the seven planets in the TRAPPIST-1 system, previously thought to be the next biggest solar system.

National Programme on use of Space Technology for Agriculture (NPSTA)

- NPSTA is a proposed programme which envisages integrated use of Space and Geospatial Tools for Mapping, Monitoring and Management of Agriculture.
- The current running programmes will be subsumed under this. They are
 - Project FASAL (for crop forecasting),
 - Project NADAMS (for drought assessment),
 - Project CHAMAN (for horticultural assessment and development),
 - Project KISAN (for crop insurance) and Crop Intensification planning.
- The programme will have four sub-programmes
 - Crop Assessment & Monitoring;
 - Agricultural Resources Management;
 - Disaster Monitoring and Mitigation
 - Satellite Communication and Navigation Applications.
-

Memristors and AI

- Artificial neural networks (ANNs) are computing systems that can learn and progressively improve performance on tasks by considering examples.
- Researchers have recently developed a new type of neural network chip that can dramatically improve the efficiency of teaching machines to think like humans.
- It improves a typical neural network’s capacity and reduces the required training time.
- They have been created in the past with larger optical components.
- Now the researchers have created their system using memristors.
- Memristors are a special type of resistive device that can both perform logic and store data.
- This contrasts with typical computer systems, where processors perform logic separate from memory modules.
- Hence they require less space and can be integrated more easily into silicon-based electronics.

MISCELLANEOUS

IN-SHORT

SAKALA Scheme

- The scheme is being implemented in the **State of Karnataka** to curb corruption in public service delivery in key departments.
- More than 725 services are being provided under this mission.
- Now, the state government has proposed to launch the version 2 of SAKALA scheme with the existing SAKALA-1 fails to curb corruption.
- SAKALA -2 will address shortcomings in the existing Act by including a provision for imposing penalty of Rs. 250 per day for delay in addressing complaints.
- The proposed Bill includes mandatory display of citizens' charters and job charts in all government departments, social audits, public hearings and district & state level grievance redress processes.

'Naseem Al Bahr'

- 'Naseem Al Bahr' or 'Sea Breeze' is India's bilateral naval exercise with the Omani navy conducted since 1993.
- The 11th edition of the exercise was recently held off the coast of Oman.
- The Indian Navy deployed two naval ships - INS Trikand and INS Teg - for the exercise, an Indian Navy submarine and the versatile P8I long-range maritime aircraft.
- India has an ancient maritime tradition and maritime interaction with Oman dating back to more than 4,000 years.
- Archaeological research at sites in Mesopotamia, Bahrain, and Oman has led to the recovery of artefacts traceable to the Indus Valley civilization.
- Bilateral relations between Indian and Oman were formally established with the signing of the 1953 Indo-Oman Treaty of Friendship, Navigation and Commerce, a first between India and an Arab country.

P-8I

- It is a long-range, multimission maritime patrol aircraft manufactured by Boeing, for the Indian Navy.
- The aircraft was designed to protect the vast coastline and territorial waters of India.
- It can conduct anti-submarine warfare (ASW), anti-surface warfare (AsuW), intelligence, maritime patrol, and surveillance and reconnaissance missions.

National Rail and Transport University (NRTU)

- The Cabinet recently approved the setting up of India's first National Rail and Transport University (NRTU) in Vadodara in Gujarat.
- The university plans to use latest pedagogy and technology applications such as satellite based tracking, Radio Frequency Identification and Artificial Intelligence to improve on-the-job performance and productivity.
- It is expected to have 3,000 full-time students.
- A not-for-profit company would be created under Section 8 of the Companies Act, 2013.
- The company will be created by the ministry of railways and it would be the managing company of the proposed university.
- The company will provide financial and infrastructural support to the university.

Schaller's Wood Scorpion

- It is a new species recently identified from Tripura.
- They are found in low elevations in parts of Tripura, including Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary and Bison National Park.
- It is the 11th wood scorpion species from India.

- India is home to more than 125 species of scorpions. Nine of India's 11 wood scorpions are endemic to the country.
- Wood scorpions are also called dwarf scorpions as they are only about 3 cm long and live in small burrows on the ground, making them very difficult to spot.
- Scorpions belong to the class Arachnida (having 8 legs) and phylum Arthropoda (jointed legs).
- Trishna Wildlife Sanctuary and Bison National Park is well known for Indian Bison locally known as Gaur.
- It also supports of viable population of Holook Gibbon, Spectacled Langurs, slow loris, Pig Tailed Macaque.

STRIVE Project

- Skill Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE) is a central sector scheme, implemented by Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
- It aimed at improving the quality and the market relevance of vocational training provided in ITIs.
- The project will also strengthen the apprenticeship programme through industry-cluster approach.
- It helps in setting up Vocational Education and Training (VET).
- VET is a national body for vocational education which shall regulate accreditation and certification to bring uniformity in vocational training.
- It is supported by World Bank loan assistance.
- A financing agreement for the credit of USD 125 million for this project was recently signed by the Government of India with the World Bank.

Dramatic Performances Act, 1876

- The birth of professional Bengali theatre and plays like Nildarpan in 1872 brought anti-British subject matter to the general public.
- Subsequently the government passed the DPA in 1876 during the period of Lord Lytton to regulate theatre.
- It empowered the government 'to prohibit Native plays which are scandalous, defamatory, seditious or obscene'.
- The police could 'enter, arrest, and seize scenery, dresses, etc'.
- Also, public dramatic performances 'in specified localities' had to receive a license', and 'a copy of the piece, shall be previously furnished to the proper authorities'.
- Even after Independence, the DPA remained in effect, with most states introducing their own amended versions.

DARPAN

- Ministry of Communication launched "DARPAN - Digital Advancement of Rural Post Office for A New India".
- The project aimed at realizing financial inclusion of un-banked rural population.
- It is IT modernization project which intends to provide a low power technology solution to each branch postmaster to improve service delivery.
- DARPAN offers core banking services such as cash deposit and withdrawal in savings bank and recurring deposit, mini statement, Aadhaar seeding and daily transaction report.
- The application will also be used for the reimbursement of social security benefits such as MNREGS, old age pension and DBT.
- It is targeted to complete the project by March 2018.

SRISTI

- SRISTI - Sustainable Rooftop Implementation for Solar Transfiguration of India is a proposed scheme by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.
- The proposed scheme will incentivise the installation of roof top solar projects in India.
- It aims to achieve a national solar rooftop target of 40 GW by 2021-22.
- Under SRISTI, a central financial assistance will be provided only for installation of roof top solar plants in residential sectors.
- Once approved, the concept will acts as a basis for phase - II of solar rooftop power programme.

ICGS Sujay

- Samarth Class OPV is a series of six 105m offshore patrol vessel (OPV) being built by Goa Shipyard Limited for the Indian Coast Guard.
- Indian Coast Guard Ship Sujay is the sixth in the series of six OPV under Samarth class.
- The other ships are ICGS Samarth, Shoor, Sarathi, Shaunak, Shaurya.
- ICGS Sujay is based at Paradip, Odisha under the operational and administrative control of Commander Coast Guard Region (North-East).
- It will be deployed extensively for EEZ surveillance and will give a fillip to the maritime protection in the state of Odisha and West Bengal in particular.

Ro – Ro services in India

- In RO-RO service, vessels have either built-in or shore-based ramps that allow the cargo to be efficiently rolled on and off the vessel when in port.
- This is in opposite to the lift-on and lift-off (lo-lo) vessels, which use a crane to load and unload cargo.
- This service is currently in operational in two states – Gujarat and Assam.
- Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) rolled out a regular RO-RO between Assam-Meghalaya connecting Dhubri and Hatsingimari.
- Dhubri and Hatsingimari are located in the north bank and south bank of River Brahmaputra.
- Recently, India's first RO-RO passenger (RO Pax) service was inaugurated between Ghogha in Saurashtra and Dahej in south Gujarat in the Gulf of Khambhat region.

Mini-Earth like Planets

- The Alpha Centauri system is located 24.9 trillion miles from Earth, which is the closest star system to our planet.
- An Earth-like planet was discovered last year in the system.
- Scientists have recently detected data from the observatory located in Chile.
- The data shows that the planet orbiting around stars Alpha Centauri A and B would be almost small, rocky planets.
- This new information will help astronomers narrow down the search area and prioritize their efforts to detect additional planets in the system.

Mission Antyodaya

- Under the mission, Department of Rural Development in partnership with State Governments has involved in ranking 50,000 Gram Panchayats.
- The ranking is based on parameters of physical infrastructure, human development and economic activities.
- It facilitates identification of gaps in a quest for poverty free gram panchayats and drive economic activities.
- Public institutions like KrishiVigyanKendras, MSME Clusters will be involved for enhancing productive employment and economic activities.

PradhanMantriVayaVandanaYojana (PMVVY)

- PMVVY is a Pension Scheme under the Ministry of Finance, exclusively for the senior citizens aged 60 years and above.
- It provides social security to protect senior citizens against a future fall in their interest income due to uncertain market conditions.
- Life Insurance Corporation of India is the implementing agency.
- It enables assured pension/return linked to the subscription amount based on government guarantee to LIC.
- It provides an assured return of 8% p.a. payable monthly for 10 years and is exempted from Service Tax/ GST.
- The ceiling of maximum pension is for a family as a whole, the family will comprise of pensioner, his/her spouse and dependants.
- The shortfall owing to the difference between the interest guaranteed and the actual interest earned shall be subsidized by the Government of India and reimbursed to the Corporation.

IT Campus for Persons with Disabilities

- The Telangana government has announced that it will set up the world's first IT campus for Persons with Disabilities.
- It entered in to agreement with Vindhya E-Infomedia Private Limited which will provide employment opportunities to PWD.

Huntington's Disease

- Huntington's disease (HD) is a fatal genetic disorder that causes the progressive breakdown of nerve cells in the brain.
- It deteriorates a person's physical and mental abilities during their prime working years and has no cure.
- It is known as the quintessential family disease because every child of a parent with HD has a 50/50 chance of carrying the faulty gene.
- Researchers have recently reported that treatment with a compound called "CTEP" improved memory and also prevents harmful protein build ups in the brain.

Tadoba Tiger Reserve

- TadobaAndhari Tiger Reserve is located in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra.
- It is Maharashtra's oldest and largest National Park.
- It is one of India's 47 project tiger reserves existing in India.
- The word 'Tadoba' is derived from the name of God "Tadoba" or "Taru," which is praised by local tribal people of this region.
- "Andhari" is derived from the name of Andhari River that flows in this area.
- It is often referred to as "The Jewel of Vidarbha".

CRISPR

- CRISPR stands for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats.
- Researchers has recently used genome editing tool "CRISPR - Cas9" to partially treat the genetic deafness in mice.
- A single mistake in "Tmc1 gene" causes loss of inner ear hair cells leading to deafness.
- Scientists believe that the world could one day help treat certain forms of genetic hearing loss in humans.
- CRISPR - Cas9 is a most prominent genome editing technique by targeting specific stretches of genetic code to edit DNA at precise locations.
- The technique allows researchers to permanently modify genes in living cells and organisms and to correct mutations at precise locations in the human genome to treat genetic causes of disease.
- It can be used to target multiple genes simultaneously and can also activate gene expression instead of cutting the DNA.

Kaleswaram Project

- Central government has recently granted environmental clearance to the Kaleswaram Project.
- Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation Scheme was taken up in 2007 to utilise the water of Pranhita tributary of Godavari River.
- After the formation of Telangana, the project was redesigned into two sections.
- The original component serving the Adilabad area was called the Pranahitha project.
- The second part is called Kaleswaram Project serving the Karimnagar, Warangal, Nizamabad and Medak districts.
- Water from Godavari River after the confluence by the Pranahitha tributary is lifted to provide lift irrigation facility.
- Lift irrigation project - Pumps are used to lift the water from canals or rivers at lower level to the area at higher level for irrigation purpose.

Ganga Gram

- Ganga Gram is a project for sanitation based integrated development of all 4470 villages along the River Ganga.
- Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation is the nodal agency for implementation of the Ganga Gram Project.

PradhanMantriRojgarProtsahanYojana (PMRPY)

- PMRPY Scheme has been designed to incentivise employers for generation of new employment.
- Government of India will be paying the 8.33% EPS contribution of the employer for the new employment.
- This scheme has a dual benefit, where, on the one hand, the employer is incentivised for increasing the employment base of workers in the establishment.
- On the other hand, a large number of workers will find jobs in such establishments.
- A direct benefit is that these workers will have access to social security benefits of the organized sector.

India's First Social Audit Law

- Meghalaya has recently become India's first state to operationalize a law that makes social audit of government programmes a part of government practice.
- The legislation is applicable to 11 departments and 26 schemes in the north eastern state.
- A social audit facilitator will be appointed to conduct the audit directly with the people.
- So far, social audits of government programmes have been done at the initiative of civil society organisations.
- By this new law social audits will have an official sanction and becomes the mandate of the government.

Global Conference on Functional Materials

- Global conference on functional materials was recently held at Telangana, which was attended by delegates from 10 different countries.
- The conference was aimed to address the application aspect of the functional materials in areas of societal relevance.
- The term functional materials cover different material classes ranging from semiconductors over polymers and molecular crystals to nanoparticles.
- It is their special electrical, optical and magnetic properties which make functional materials so important.
- Technologies such as Computation, Communication, Sensors, storage and displaying of information uses the functional materials.

New Frog Species - OdorranaArunachalensis

- Scientists have discovered a new frog species in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The new species has been named Odorranaarunachalensis.
- It is a medium-sized green frog adapted for a life in torrential waters.
- The frog inhabits fern-covered rocky areas along hill streams in mixed wet tropical forests.
- The presence of a black band-like mark between the eyes is a distinguishing character that separates it from all the other frog species.

UN Ocean Conference

- The UN Ocean Conference was held at UN headquarters in New York.
- It is a high-level United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14.
- SDG 14 emphasises to conserve and sustainably use the oceans.
- Many voluntary commitments for concrete action to advance implementation were made by governments during the conference.
- To follow-up on the implementation of these voluntary commitments United Nations recently have launched nine thematic multi-stakeholder Communities of Ocean Action.

Anti- Smog Gun

- Delhi government to tackle its air pollution problem has tested an Anti-Smog gun in Northern areas of Delhi.
- It is simply a Water mist cannon, which is connected to a water tank and mounted on a flatbed truck.
- It sprays atomized water in which liquid is broken up into smaller droplets up to 230 feet into the air.

- The droplets merge with dust particles replicating the effect of rain, as rain lowers levels of air pollution by bringing particulates in pollution down to the ground.

E-HRMS

- Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions recently launched electronic-Human Resource Management System (e-HRMS).
- E-HRMS is an online platform for central government employees to apply for leave and access their service-related information.
- It will also help the employees to apply for different kind of claims/reimbursements, loan/advances etc on a single platform.
- The e-service book which is already in service for DoPT employees for accessing the service-related details of an employee will also be integrated in to the e-HRMS.

City Logo

- Bengaluru becomes the first Indian City to have a logo on its own.
- With this initiative of Karnataka Government, the city joins New York, Melbourne and Singapore.
- The logo, 'Be U', is a mix of typography in English and Kannada. The first part of the logo is in English and the rest in Kannada.

Ripple and Petro

- Ripple is a technology that acts as both a crypto currency and a digital payment network for financial transactions.
- It was released in 2012 and its coin is labeled as XRP.
- Ripple operates on an open source and peer-to-peer decentralized platform that allows for a seamless transfer of money in any form, whether USD, Yen, litecoin, or bitcoin.
- It is the fourth-largest crypto currency in the world by market capital, which now stands at around \$43 billion.
- **Petro** is a crypto currency launched by Venezuela backed by oil reserves.
- It is mainly to shore the collapsed oil economy.
- Venezuela's real currency "Bolivar" is in free-fall, and the country is sorely lacking in basic needs like food and medicine.

Design University

- India's first and only design university "World University of Design" was recently opened at Sonapat, Haryana.
- It is situated on NH1 in Rajiv Gandhi Education City (NCR) in Sonapat, the largest planned integrated city for education in India.
- The university has international collaborations with foreign universities like University of West Scotland, the Vancouver Film School, and the Italian University of Design.

The State of the World's Children 2017

- The report on "The State of the World's Children 2017" was recently released by UNICEF.
- It accesses the status of "Children in the Digital Economy".
- It has a tagline, "For every Child | a digital Bridge, for every Child | digital parity, for every children | digital safety and for every Child | digital care".
- It has highlighted that around 3 out of 5 youth in Africa are offline, compared to just 1 in 25 in Europe.
- It says that the online gender gap is growing. Globally there are 12 per cent more men than women online, and the gap is greatest in low-income countries.

World Migration Report 2018

- International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the UN migration agency has recently published "World Migration Report 2018" during IOM council, held at Geneva.
- This report is the ninth in IOM's World Migration Report (WMR) series and the first since IOM became the UN Migration Agency.
- IOM is an inter-governmental organization, established in 1951.
- It works in the field of migration with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners.
- The organisation has 166 member countries (including India) and 8 observer states.

- It aims to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people.
- IOM works to ensure the humane management of migration by providing services and advice to governments and migrants, and promote international cooperation on migration issues.

Champion State

- Union Government has recently recognized Odisha as a 'Champion State' for recording the highest growth in exports during 2016-17.
- Odisha's export volume has been increased from Rs 19, 082 crores in 2015-16 to Rs 40,872 crores in 2016-17.
- The growth of exports has a direct positive impact on the enhancement of employment and livelihood opportunity.

BND-4201

- Bharatiya Nirdeshak Dravya (BND-4201) is India's first home-grown high purity gold reference standard recently launched.
- It will be the reference material for gold of '9999' fineness i.e gold that is 99.99% pure.
- It will be beneficial to the consumers and public at large to ensure purity of gold.
- Once the BND's of other purity gold are made available in the market, jewellers will move towards more instrumental methods.
- The conventional fire assay methods for testing are not only time consuming but also not environment friendly as poisonous gases are released.
- This will also be useful for Collection and Purity Testing Centres to certify the purity of gold deposits under the gold monetisation scheme.

CAMPA Rules

- Compensatory and Afforestation Fund (CAF) Bill envisaged the creation of a permanent Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA).
- The Bill establishes the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund and a State Compensatory Afforestation Fund under each State.
- The Bill allows the States to access nearly Rs.42,000 crore, mostly collected from industrial projects as penalties, from CAMPA and channel it into afforestation projects.
- More than a year after the Union government brought in the law, it is yet to frame rules to get the money disbursed.
- While States are getting money, it continues to be under an "ad hoc" mechanism whereby the Centre disburses it on a needs-basis.
- Also a year after the law came into being, the disbursement this year has dropped to a three-year low.

\$318 Million Loan Agreement

- The Government of India, the Government of Tamil Nadu and the World Bank today signed a \$318 million loan agreement for the **Tamil Nadu Irrigated Agriculture Modernization Project**.
- The project is to promote climate resilient agriculture technologies, improve water management practices, and increase market opportunities for small and marginal farmers.
- More than 160,000 ha of currently partially irrigated lands will come into full irrigation under this project.
- The project will rehabilitate and modernize about 4,800 irrigation tanks and 477 check dams, spread across 66 sub-basins, in delivering bulk water to irrigation systems.
- Paddy is the dominant crop occupying 34% of total cropped areas, whereas fruits and vegetables are grown on 11% and pulses and oilseeds on 14% of total cropped areas.
- By helping farmers' access modern technologies, linking them to markets, and providing postharvest management support, the project will enable farmers to shift from a mono crop paddy system to mixed cropping.
- The project will support smallholder producers adopt new conservation technologies such as the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and Sustainable Sugar Initiative (SSI).
- They reduce average water usage by 35% and increase yields by 22% per ha.
- The loan has a 5-year grace period, and a maturity of 19 years.