



**CENTRE FOR AMBITION**  
(An Institute for Civil Services)

# Current Affairs

# August-2018

# Vol.-I

## **Rajasthan first State to implement National Biofuel Policy**

**Context:** Rajasthan has become the first State in the country to implement the national policy on biofuels. National Policy on Biofuels was unveiled by the Centre in May 2018. Rajasthan to lay emphasis on increasing production of oilseeds and establish a Centre for Excellence in Udaipur to promote research in the fields of alternative fuels and energy resources.

### **Criteria :**

The Policy categorises biofuels as –

- “Basic Biofuels” viz. First Generation (1G) bioethanol & biodiesel and
- “Advanced Biofuels” – Second Generation (2G) ethanol, Municipal Solid Waste (MSW) to drop-in fuels, Third Generation (3G) biofuels, bio-CNG etc. to enable an extension of appropriate financial and fiscal incentives under each category.

### **features:**

- Seeks to promote biofuels in the country
- Seeks to help farmers dispose of their surplus stock in an economic manner
- Seeks to reduce the country’s oil import dependence
- Expanded the scope of raw material for ethanol production by allowing the use of sugarcane juice, sugar containing materials, starch containing materials and damaged foodgrains like wheat, broken rice and rotten potatoes for ethanol production.
- Encourage women’s self help groups to explore the scope for additional income through the supply of biodiesel.

### **Additional information:**

- A biofuel is a fuel that is produced through contemporary biological processes, such as agriculture and anaerobic digestion, rather than a fuel produced by geological processes such as those involved in the formation of fossil fuels, such as coal and petroleum, from prehistoric biological matter.
- Earlier Bio-fuel policy had proposed an indicative target of 20% blending of biofuels, both for bio-diesel and bio-ethanol, by 2017.

## **National breast feeding week**

**Context:** MAA (Mothers Absolute Affection) is a nationwide program to promote breastfeeding launched by Ministry of health and family welfare.

Government of India declared National breast feeding week 1<sup>st</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> August 2018

### **Significance of Breast Feeding:**

- It Promotes brain development
- Provides Optimal nutrition
- Boosts child immunity
- Protects child against pneumonia diarrhoea
- Better bonding between mother and baby
- Reduces risk of non-communicable diseases

## **Rohingya in India**

**Context:** Union Home Ministry has advised state governments to enumerate, observe and collect biometric data of Rohingya migrants living in India. The Ministry has received reports of their involvement in illegal activities. The government also made it clear that the Rohingya were “illegal migrants” and not “refugees.”

**Additional information:**

- India is not the signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, which help define the legal obligation of states to protect refugees.
- The Foreigners Act (1946) and the Registration of Foreigners Act (1939) currently govern the entry and exit of all refugees. Both these legislations treat refugees as foreigners without due consideration of their special circumstances.

**Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee recommendations**

**Context:** India is one of the few major democracies in the world without a national privacy and data protection framework. 2017 Supreme Court's 'Right to Privacy' judgment (K. Puttaswamy v Union of India case) clarified that we have a fundamental right to privacy, and also, that the state has an obligation to protect this right by enacting appropriate legislation. Union government tasked a committee headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna to formulate such a law.

**Recommendations:**

- Srikrishna panel submitted a draft "The Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018"
- It recommended that critical personal data of Indian citizens be processed in centres located within the country.
- The government should notify categories of personal data that will be considered critical.
- The draft bill also provides for penalties for the data processor as well as compensation to the data principal to be imposed for violations of the data protection law.

**Significance:**

- The report is just a small step and leaves too many exceptions.
- It has repeatedly focused on ensuring that the government prioritise the interests of the "digital economy" — and the wide loopholes that it leaves — is concerning.
- For example, the model for data protection that the committee has proposed leaves too many exceptions, especially when the government is the data collector and user.
- In doing the so, the report attempts to open the right to privacy to allow the state the most convenient means by which to realise its regulatory agenda.
- It proposes that the basic requirement of notice-and-consent could be lowered or waived altogether for "state functions" or social welfare purposes, among others.

**Areas requiring more focus:**

- One more important issue is about surveillance reform. Any data protection law will be incomplete without considering the vital question of surveillance which, at present, is conducted free of judicial oversight and at the near-arbitrary will of bureaucrats.
- In Puttaswamy ruling, the court cited the global legal standards on privacy, including the International "Necessary and Proportionate" Principles pertaining to communication surveillance, which requires the application of judicial pre-approval for surveilling our protected information.
- Consequently, there is also an urgent need for clear, effective institutions tasked with surveillance oversight.

## India and US: Defense and Strategic Relations

**Context:** India finally joins the elite group of allies of the US. Now it is set to get access to 90 per cent defence technology and equipment, all of them for dual use from the US. In other words, Indian defence industry can get licenses to import sensitive US dual-use items and technology

### **Background:**

- From the 1990s, with the fall of the Soviet Union and LPG reforms of the Indian economy, India started to develop closer ties with the US.
- After India's nuclear test in 1998, under George W. Bush India started to build nuclear relations with the US, which were further strengthened in 2008 by 123 Agreement under the Barak Obama administration.
- Taking Defense relations to further heights, in 2016 India-US signed Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which subsequently gave India status of Major Defense Partner to the United States.

### **Significance of US: Strategic Trade Authorization:**

- Countries come under Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) list when US is reasonably sure that technology will not endanger regional stability, does not pose a threat to US national security and has minimum to zero risk of proliferation.
- STA-1 list consists of 36 countries – either they are major US allies or NATO allies or members of all four multilateral export control regimes.
- India is neither ally of US nor of NATO and is a member of only three out of four multilateral export control regimes.
- India will be third Asian country after Japan and South Korea to avail exemptions under STA-1 list.
- So far India has been part of STA-2. This list has eight countries. China, Pakistan and Russia are not part of either of the lists.

### **Benefits for India:**

- Companies will be more ready to import and manufacture defence and dual-use tech without having to go through complex licencing procedures. Since 90% of the technology is going to be licence free.
- Trade and commerce in defence equipment is likely to go up. This progress will help in not only achieving objectives of Make in India in defence sector but also contribute in making India more self-reliant.
- India's part to this club is the reaffirmation of her impeccable record of being a responsible member of the concerned multilateral export control regimes.

## Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act

**Context:** The prosecution of accused persons (of almost 100 confirmed cases) under Benami Act stuck as special courts meant for the purpose have not yet been set up across the country. although, assets worth more than ₹ 5,000 crore have been attached by the Income-Tax Department under the law.

### **What is a 'benami' transaction:**

- When a transaction is done in name of a person other than the one who finances, is called benami transaction.

- If person A pays the money for Property X, but the property is transferred in name of person B, person B is benamdar and Property X is called benami property. Person A is the real owner

#### **Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act:**

- It is an Act to prohibit benami transactions and the right to recover properly held benami.
- It extends to the whole of India except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.
- The Act provides that the Central government, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the respective High Courts, will establish special courts.
- Special court is to conclude the trial within six months.

### **123rd Constitutional Amendment Bill**

**Context:** 123rd Constitutional Amendment Bill seeks to grant constitutional status to National Commission for Backward Classes. A constitutional amendment under Article 368 needs to be passed by both Houses separately with a special majority. The bill if passed will insert Article 338 B in the Constitution, which provides for a Commission for the socially and educationally backward classes with a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and three other members, all of whom shall be appointed by the President of India.

#### **About National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC):**

- NCBC was established in 1993 by an act of Parliament. It is a statutory body.
- It considers inclusions in and exclusions from the lists of castes notified as backward for the purpose of job reservation.
- It falls under Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment

### **The draft Personal Data Protection Bill, 2018**

**Context:** The Data Protection Act contains a set of principles that organisations, government and businesses have to adhere to in order to keep someone's **data** accurate, safe, secure and lawful.

#### **Proposed provisions of the bill:**

- It has provisions to protect personal data as an essential facet of information privacy.
- The **objective** of the Bill is to balance the growth of the digital economy and use of data as a means of communication.
- The **Bill applies to** the personal data which have been processed within India, by persons or agencies governed by Indian Law.
- The Bill also brings within its ambit the processing of personal data by data **fiduciaries or data processors located abroad** in connection with business or profiling of data principals within the territory of India.
- The proposed law **defines personal data as information relating to a natural person.**
- Breach of personal data involves unauthorised or accidental processing of personal data that compromises the confidentiality, integrity or availability of personal data to a data principal.
- Data fiduciaries should retain personal data “only as long as may be reasonably necessary to satisfy the purpose for which it is processed”.
- The Bill allows processing of personal data for “**prompt action**” only if it is necessary for any function of Parliament; or any State Legislature to render service or benefit to citizens; or in response to any medical emergency to the data principal; or in cases of epidemic, outbreak of disease, disaster or breakdown of public order.

- The Bill includes the ‘**right to be forgotten**’, which is the right of a data principal to restrict or prevent continuing disclosure of personal data by a data fiduciary.
- The Bill calls for a copy of user data to be **mandatorily localised** in India, it will “boost” law enforcement efforts to access data necessary for investigation and prosecution of crimes.

#### **Issues w.r.t. Data localization:**

- The Indian law enforcement relies on an out-dated Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty (MLAT) process to obtain data stored by U.S. This scenario will not change even after technology companies relocate Indian data to India.
- Localisation can provide data only for crimes that have been committed in India, where both the perpetrator and victim are situated in India.
- Transnational terrorism, cybercrimes and money laundering that the committee rightly highlights will often involve individuals and accounts that are not Indian, and therefore will not be stored in India.

**The data protection bill is an opportunity for India to be a partner under the CLOUD Act**

#### **Additional information (CLOUD Act):**

Clarifying Lawful Overseas Use of Data (CLOUD) Act, passed by the U.S. Congress seeks to de-monopolise control over data from U.S. authorities. The law will for the first time allow tech companies to share data directly with certain foreign governments having an executive agreement with the U.S. Such foreign country have to certify that the state has robust privacy protections, and respect for due process and the rule of law.

#### **Why do we need this:**

- The **Justice Srikrishna Committee** in its report accompanying the draft Personal Data Protection Bill released on July 27 notes that eight of the top 10 most accessed websites in India are owned by U.S. entities.
- The CLOUD Act creates a potential mechanism through which countries such as India can request data not just for crimes committed within their borders but also for transnational crimes involving their state interests.

#### **Draft National Policy on e-commerce**

**Context:** In India there is no single law or single regulator for multibillion dollar e-commerce business industry. Currently it is being regulated by various laws such as IT Act, 2000 and FEMA, etc.

#### **Need for a National Policy on E-commerce:**

- India’s e-tail business, estimated to be worth around \$25 billion. Over the coming decade, it is expected to swell to \$200 billion, fuelled by smartphones, cheaper data access and growing spends.
- First eight months of 2017-18, over 50,000 e-commerce grievances were made to the Consumer Affairs Ministry helpline.
- Traditional retailers seeking level playing field.

#### **Provisions under Draft National Policy on E-commerce:**

- The draft policy proposes the creation of a single **national regulator** to oversee the entire industry.

- It also provides for **consumer protection** norms to guard online shoppers from possible frauds.
- There is a **sunset clause on discounts** that can be offered by e-commerce firms and restrictions on sellers backed by marketplace operators.
- **Foreign direct investment restrictions** on players who can hold their own inventory are sought to be lifted, but there must be a majority Indian partner and all products have to be made in India.

**Issues:**

- Licensing and price controls can depress the sector. Government deciding on who can offer how much discount and for how long, instead of letting consumers exercise informed choices, would be a regressive step for the economy.
- The local procurement diktats that are not easy to meet or monitor, may cause rise in e-tailer costs.
- Stipulating payments via Rupay cards will raise questions from both consumers and firms.

**Quota in promotion for SCs/STs**

**Context:** The government wants larger Constitution Bench to re-examine and create possible situation for providing accelerated promotions with consequential seniority for the SCs/STs in government services.

Centre calls on Supreme Court to revisit 2006 Nagaraj ruling. If implemented it provides for “accelerated promotion with consequential seniority” for members of the Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes (SCs/STs) in public employment.

**M. Nagaraj judgment of the Supreme Court (2006):**

- Government cannot introduce a quota in promotion for its SC/ST employees unless they prove that the particular Dalit community is backward and inadequately represented, and such a reservation in promotion would not affect the overall efficiency of public administration.

**Mattala airport**

**Context:** part of India’s neighborhood first policy and soft power approach to counter rising Chinese influence in Sri Lanka.

**India building Mattala airport:**

- India had sought Sri Lanka’s cooperation in swift completion of joint ventures
- The two governments have agreed that India, with a 70% stake in the joint venture, will contribute \$225 million to revamp and run the airport, while the Sri Lankan side will invest the balance.
- India will operate the airport on a 40-year lease, as per the draft agreement

**Other India-assisted projects in Sri Lanka:**

- An LNG terminal near Colombo, and
- The joint development of the oil storage facility in the eastern port town of Trincomalee

### **Mob Lynching: massive indictment**

**Context:** India is witnessing increasing number of cases of lynching. What may have started out as isolated acts by fundamentalist right-wing groups has now become a widespread malaise.

#### **Tehseen S. Poonawalla v. Union of India (July 17, 2018) verdict:**

- The apex Court condemned the recent spate of lynchings as “horrendous acts of mobocracy” and told Parliament to make lynching a separate offence.
- It directed the Parliament to draft a new legislation to effectively deal with incidents of mob lynching.
- It also directed the police to register an FIR under Section 153A of the IPC and do everything in their power to ensure that social order was maintained.
- Taking law in own hands ushers in anarchy, chaos, disorder and, eventually, there is an emergence of a violent society.

#### **Rajiv Gauba Committee:**

- High-level committee headed by Rajiv Gauba, had been constituted to check cases of “mob lynching”.

#### **How to curb:**

- The preventive guidelines require every State to designate a senior police officer, not below the rank of Superintendent of Police, as the Nodal Officer in each district.
- A special task force should be constituted to collect intelligence on persons likely to commit such crimes.
- Nodal Officers should take step to prohibit instances of dissemination of offensive material through different social media platforms or any other means.
- Both the Central and State governments have been directed to broadcast public notifications on radio, television and other media platforms.
- Speedy trials and justice: investigation and prosecution of such cases is strictly carried out, the charge sheet filed within the prescribed time period, and the trial concluded through fast-track courts within six months.
- Strict punishment and various offences be awarded.
- Executive should immediately implement the directions of the Supreme Court. There is a need for an anti-lynching law.

### **GST Council: GST Reforms for MSME**

**Context:** Recently GST Council meeting was held on issues facing micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

#### **What are MSME?**

MSME are units producing goods and rendering services in terms of annual turnover as follows:

- A **micro enterprise** will be defined as a unit where the annual turnover does not exceed five crore rupees;
- A **small enterprise** will be defined as a unit where the annual turnover is more than five crore rupees but does not exceed Rs 75 crore;
- A **medium enterprise** will be defined as a unit where the annual turnover is more than seventy five crore rupees but does not exceed Rs 250 crore.

### **What is GST Council?**

- Goods & Services Tax Council is a **constitutional body** for making recommendations to the Union and State Government on issues related to Goods and Service Tax.
- The GST Council is chaired by the Union Finance Minister and other members are the Union State Minister of Revenue or Finance and Ministers in-charge of Finance or Taxation of all the States.

### **Recent decisions:**

- Firms with an annual turnover of less than Rs. 5 crore constitute 93% of the registered taxpayers under the GST. Such businesses need no longer file cumbersome returns every month, but only on a quarterly basis.
- GST Council returned to a consensual approach on decisions.
- There is a proposal to push digital payments by offering a cash-back to consumers using RuPay cards or the UPI platform, final decision will be taken after a detailed system-wide evaluation of such incentives.

### **Way Forward:**

Further easing of compliance for micro firms with turnover far below Rs. 5 crore is needed.

- There is a need to review the Rs. 50,000 threshold for mandatory use of e-way bills to track movement of taxable goods.

## **Dissent and Democracy**

**Context:**The Bangladesh government clamps down on dissent and democratic challenges. Dissent has been silenced in major democracies of the world including US and India.

### **What is happening in Dhaka**

- Some students died in a road accident, students started protesting for traffic safety.
- Protests in Bangladesh became a routine; over electricity supply in Kansat; over open-pit coal mining in Phulbari; against a coal plant at the rim of the Sundarbans; against stock market scandals that defrauded millions of small investors; and against quotas in government jobs for the descendants of ‘freedom fighters’ in the 1971 war.
- A journalist from Bangladesh went on Air with an international media house, and opened the Pandora box of other public grievances; the looting of banks, the gagging of the media, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, bribery, and corruption. He took on to the social media and exposed brutality of Police and Government. He got arrested under Information and Communication Technology Act for “spreading imaginary propaganda against the government.”
- Government is not willing to accept that there is a problem.
- UN, human rights groups and PEN international condemned the Bangladesh Government’s dealing in this regard.

### **Why it matters to India**

- India is facing similar but different situation.
- GauriLankesh and some other great journalists who expressed their concerns against either popular beliefs or against certain ideologies were brutally murdered.
- Lynching and Mobviolence became a new normal for petty things.
- Women are facing trolling and threats for expressing their views on social media platform.
- India is one of the largest democracies but freedom is under threat especially for vulnerable sections of the society.

## Fall Armyworm

**Context:** Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) has sounded the alarm after the invasive agricultural pest, Fall Armyworm (*Spodoptera frugiperda*), was discovered in Karnataka.

### About Fall Armyworm

- Fall Armyworm is a major maize pest in North America, arrived in Africa in 2016. Since then, it has threatened the continent's maize crop.
- The Karnataka finding is the first report of the pest in Asia.
- Scientists warn the insect could spread throughout Asia to become a major threat to global food security.
- The discovery is more worrisome because the pest feeds on around 100 different crops, such as vegetables, rice, and sugarcane.

**Unwelcome visitor**  
The Fall Armyworm (FAW) is native to the Americas



The pest munching on maize in Zimbabwe

- FAW arrived in Africa in 2016. Since then, it has spread to 44 African countries
- It prefers maize, but can feed on 80 species of plants, including rice, sorghum, millet, sugarcane and cotton
- India's tropical climate could allow the pest to thrive
- It can be controlled with insecticides, through natural enemies, or by inter-cropping

Source: FAO

## Reforming the Civil Services: lateral Entry Scheme

**Context:** A recent move by the Centre seeking applications from 'outstanding individuals' to fill in 10 posts of Joint Secretary, has caused anxiety amongst bureaucrats.

### Some issues about lateral entry:

- Many serving IAS officers think this move may cause **threat to their primacy**.
- This move **may end a "neutral and impartial" civil service** with the likely induction of loyalists and politically indoctrinated persons into the system.
- This may mark the **"privatisation of the IAS"**. Private business houses may "plant" their people in order to influence government policies.
- The political leadership, by creating a 'divide and rule' mechanism, would further **demoralise the 'steel frame of governance'**.

### Generalist v. specialist debate

#### Generalist view:

- The **best leadership** is provided by generalists who have a breadth of understanding and experience.

- **Specialists**, no matter how competent, tend to have a **narrow vision** and are not equipped to take a broader view.
- The domain knowledge has to feed into policy-making, but that can be accomplished by **domain experts advising the generalist leader** in decision-making.
- In this view, a good IAS officer can head the Department of Agriculture as competently as she would the Department of Shipping.

#### **Specialist view:**

- Specialists like engineers, doctors, agricultural scientists, etc. have always had a substantial say not only in the decision-making process also in its implementation.
- **Secretaries to the Departments** of Atomic Energy, Science & Technology, Scientific and Industrial Research, Health Research, and Agricultural Research have always been scientists of eminence.
- Similarly, in departments like the **Railways, Posts**, etc., all senior positions are manned by Indian Railway or Postal Service officers.
- Generalised bureaucracy is not equipped to **comprehend complex economic and technical issues** in order to properly aid and advise the Minister. For **increasingly complex matrix** of decision-making is, specialists are more efficient than generalists.

#### **Way forward**

- The government must ensure that only candidates, the likes of whom are not available in the existing system, are appointed.
- If they turn out to be truly outstanding, there should be provisions to induct them permanently in the government, with approval of the UPSC, and consider them for higher postings.
- Ideas have also been advanced for IAS and other officers to gain work experience, for a limited period, in the private sector.
- These fears can be reduced by letting the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) handle the recruitment process, after defining the job requirements more explicitly.

#### Draft on the 'National Health Stack' (NHS)

**Context:** The draft suggests that health data would be used for marketing. It defines the NHS as a national electronic registry usable by both the Centre and the States across public and private sectors.

#### **Key points**

- One of the components of the proposed project is to store every Indian's Personal Health Records (PHRs). This will involve medical history, medication and allergies, immunisation status, laboratory test results, radiology images, vital signs, personal stats such as age and weight, demographics, and billing information, and use of multiple health applications.
- Various layers of the National Health Stack will seamlessly link to support national health electronic registries, coverage and claims platform, a federated personal health records framework, a national health analytics platform, as well as other horizontal components.
- The stack will embrace health management systems of public health programmes and socio-demographic data systems.
- The population level base of such an IT system would be individual health records logged through the Health and Wellness Centres in rural areas, and corresponding primary health care in urban areas.

- The National Health Stack rests on the JAM trinity of Jan Dhan accounts, Aadhaar, and mobile numbers.

## **Article 35A**

**Context:** Constitutionality of Article 35A has been challenged in SC. Article 35A, when it was introduced in 1954, instead of giving the state a “special status”, its **purpose was to take autonomy away from Jammu and Kashmir.**

### **Instrument of Accession:**

- Instrument of Accession signed by Maharaja Hari Singh in 1947 which brought the State into the Union of India gave **New Delhi control only over Kashmir’s defence, foreign policy and communications.**
- On all other matters, the State government retained powers.
- India’s thin grasp over J&K was further complicated by New Delhi’s international commitment to hold a plebiscite in the State to decide its eventual fate.
- It is because of this weak India-Kashmir constitutional link that;
  - Sheikh Abdullah became **“Prime Minister” of Kashmir**
  - The State had its own **Constituent Assembly and flag**
  - The **Supreme Court did not have jurisdiction** over key issues in the State
  - Srinagar tried to send its **own trade commissioners** to foreign countries
  - Only in the areas of defence, foreign affairs and communications was Jammu and Kashmir put on the same footing as the rest of India.
  - **India’s fundamental rights and directive principles were not applicable** in Jammu and Kashmir at all.

### **The Delhi Agreement**

- In **1952** Jawaharlal Nehru invited Abdullah to discuss how India and Jammu and Kashmir could be **more closely integrated.**
- The result was the 1952 Delhi Agreement which, contrary to popular belief, still fell short of the 1954 Presidential Order.
- The **1952 agreement did not finalise financial integration** and required the fundamental rights and citizenship to be granted to the State’s residents via the State Legislature.
- Before the Delhi Agreement could be implemented, the **situation was altered** radically because of three factors.
  - **First**, any plans for an immediate Plebiscite were abandoned in 1954, which **strengthened New Delhi’s hand.**
  - **Second**, in 1953, Nehru faced a nationwide campaign from the **Hindu right-wing demanding greater integration of Kashmir.**
  - **Third**, in August 1953, **Abdullah was arrested** and replaced by Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, who was far more amenable to integration with India.

### **Presidential Order of 1954 and Birth of Article 35A:**

- 1954, New Delhi negotiated a new agreement with Bakshi, which was passed by the Kashmir Constituent Assembly also, and eventually introduced through Presidential Order in May.
- It still left the State with enormous autonomy. All **“residuary powers” rested with the State legislature.**
- The State government could detain people who did not enjoy the right to appeal to the Supreme Court.

- It also retained its **controversial land reforms** measures and the final authority over any **alteration of the State's boundaries**.
- **The Article 35A was introduced as part of a larger Presidential Order package**, which made several additions to the Constitution (not just Article 35A).
- The overall **gist of this Order** was to **give the Government of India enormously more powers** over the State than it had enjoyed before.
- First time, **India's fundamental rights and directive principles were applicable** to Jammu and Kashmir and the **State's finances were integrated** with India.
- The Order also **extended the Indian Supreme Court's jurisdiction** over certain aspects of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Just as crucially, the Order had come about only after **the Jammu and Kashmir government had agreed to it and passed** a similar legislation in its own Constituent Assembly, making it clear that rather **Jammu and Kashmir has given her powers to India**.
- At the time of its introduction, **the Order was celebrated in India** as a great step towards further integration of Jammu and Kashmir into the Union of India.
- Today the **only meaningful "special status" that J&K enjoys is Article 35A**.

#### **Way forward:**

- The whole project of federal nation-building requires constant negotiation between the nation state and its components.
- The debate over the Article should be seen as part of this larger decades-long process of the State's integration into India.
- Should Article 35A be removed, it must be removed as an expression of the will of the people, through a political process which includes the people of Jammu and Kashmir in the discussion.
- It has to be remembered that the Article is not some special concession to Jammu and Kashmir but the last fragment of a broken promise that India had made to it decades ago.

#### Ethanol blending in petrol: Saving forex

**Context:** Ethanol blending is the practice of blending petrol with ethanol. Many countries, including India, have adopted ethanol blending in petrol in order to reduce vehicle exhaust emissions and also to reduce the import burden on account of crude petroleum from which petrol is produced. It is estimated that a 5% blending (105 crorelitres) can result in replacement of around 1.8 million Barrels of crude oil .

#### **Key points**

- India expects to make foreign exchange savings of up to Rs. 12,000 crore every year after four years through the ethanol blending programme.
- India has set course to produce nearly 450 crorelitres of ethanol in the coming four years.
- Ethanol blending in petrol increased from 38 crorelitres in the ethanol supply year 2013-14, to an estimated 141 crorelitres in 2017-18.
- The government has also approved the National Policy on Biofuels in June.
- The Centre is pushing to bring more agricultural produce and waste to be converted to ethanol.

#### **Additional Information**

PM Modi has launched a web portal PARIVESH, a single window for environmental, wildlife, forest and Coastal Regulation Zone clearances.

### **Kerala Floods**

**Context:** Kerala is facing its worst flood in 100 years. 80 dams opened, 324 lives lost and 223139 people are in about 1500+ relief camps.

#### **Steps taken so far**

- Centre (Home Minister) conducts an aerial survey of flood-ravaged Kerala.
- Announces an immediate relief of Rs.100 crore
- Heavy rainfall due to low pressure area developed in the Bay of Bengal.
- Kerala has requested for Rs. 1,220 crore from the National Disaster Response Fund.
- National Disaster Response Force would be deployed in Kerala.

#### **Additional Information**

##### **National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)**

- NDRF is defined under the Disaster Management Act, 2005
- It is a fund managed by the Central Government for meeting the expenses for emergency response, relief and rehabilitation due to any threatening disaster situation or disaster.
- Sources of Financing NDRF – NDRF is financed through the levy of a cess on certain items, chargeable to excise and customs duty, and approved annually through the Finance Bill
- The requirement for funds beyond what is available under the NDRF is met through general budgetary resources.
- NDRF is located in the “Public Accounts” of Government of India under “Reserve Funds not

### **Death of Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul**

**Context:** Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul passed away. He was known for his literary works. He documented the migrations of peoples, the unraveling of the British Empire, the ironies of exile and the clash between belief and unbelief in more than a dozen unsparing novels and as many works of non-fiction.

**LIFE POINTS**

**1932:** Born in Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago, to family of migrants from India. He would later go on to call his country of birth "unimportant, uncreative, cynical... a dot on the map"

**1957:** First novel *The Mystic Masseur* published

**1961:** His most famous work, *A House for Mr. Biswas* is published

**1962:** Visits India, where he writes *An Area of Darkness*

**1966:** Receives an invitation from Little Brown and Company to write a book on Port-of-Spain. Comes up with *The Loss of El Dorado* (1969)

**1979:** *A Bend in the River*, set in

Central Africa, marks the beginning of his exploration of native traditions

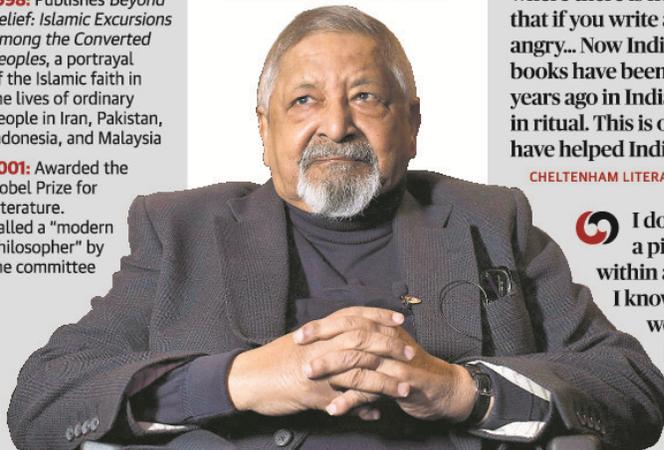
**1984:** Covers the Republican National Convention in Dallas and writes 'Among the Republicans' for *New York Review of Books*

**1998:** Publishes *Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, a portrayal of the Islamic faith in the lives of ordinary people in Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Malaysia

**2001:** Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Called a "modern philosopher" by the committee

**Remembering Sir Vidia**

Acclaimed as a great writer of English prose by most but also considered narcissistic and bigoted by many, V.S. Naipaul emerged as a writer in the early 1950s, producing a literary output of around 30 books



**COMMENTS AND CONTROVERSIES**

The Trinidadian-British writer had once said that "If a writer doesn't generate hostility, he is dead"

**Africa has no future**  
INTERVIEW WITH NEW YORK TIMES, 1979

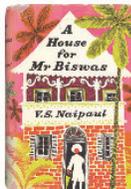
**The trouble with people like me writing about societies where there is no intellectual life is that if you write about it, people are angry... Now India has improved, the books have been accepted... Forty years ago in India people were living in ritual. This is one of the things I have helped India with**

CHELTHENHAM LITERATURE FESTIVAL, 2001

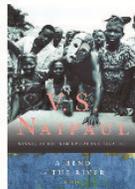
**I don't think so... I read a piece of writing and within a paragraph or two I know whether it is by a woman or not. I think [it is] unequal to me**

INTERVIEW TO ROYAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY, 2011, when asked if any woman writer was his literary match

**LITERARY OUTPUT: A TORRENT OF EDITIONS**



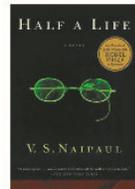
*A House for Mr. Biswas* – 238 editions published between 1961 and 2016 in five languages



*A Bend in the River* – 168 editions between 1979 and 2016 in eight languages



*India: A Wounded Civilization* – 106 editions in four languages between 1977 and 2013



*Half a Life* – 81 editions between 2001 and 2013 in six languages

*Guerillas* – 101 editions between 1975 and 2013 in six languages | *Magic Seeds* – 59 editions between 2004 and 2013 in six languages

SOURCE: WIKIPEDIA, NYT, WORLDCAT.ORG



**Anti-begging Act and Criminal Tribes act**

**Context:**The Delhi High Court has strike down as unconstitutional the provisions of the law which sanction punitive action against beggars, including imprisonment.

**Criminal Tribes Act:**

- The colonial regime believed that there are groups of communities which are criminal by birth, nature, and occupation.
- The Act unleashed a reign of terror, with its systems of surveillance, police reporting, the separation of families, detention camps, and forced labour.
- More than six decades after independent India repealed the Act and the “denotified tribes” still continue to suffer from stigma.
- It was one example of colonial laws that dehumanised communities and ways of life.
- Nomadic and itinerant communities were labelled Criminal Tribes because, due to their movements and lifestyle were difficult to track, surveil, control, and tax.
- Through such laws the regime attempted to destroy these patterns of life, and coerce communities into settlements and subjecting them to forced labour.

**Legacy in free India:**

- Despite the birth of a Constitution that promised liberty, equality, fraternity, and dignity to all, our lawmakers continued to replicate colonial logic in framing laws for the new republic.
- Individuals were treated as subjects to be controlled and administered, rather than rights-bearing citizens.
- Criminal Tribes Act was replaced by Habitual offenders Act 1952.
- The Begging Act was passed in 1959 by the State of Bombay, and has continued to exist in as many as 20 States and two Union Territories.

### **Begging Act**

- **Definition** of begging in this Act include “soliciting or receiving alms, in a public place whether or not under any pretence such as singing, dancing, fortune telling, performing or offering any article for sale” and “having no visible means of subsistence and wandering about in any public place in such condition or manner, as makes it likely that the person doing so exist soliciting or receiving alms.”
- It gives the police the power to **arrest individuals without a warrant** and to magistrates the power **to commit them to a “certified institution” for years.**
- It strips them of their **privacy and dignity** by compelling them to allow themselves to be fingerprinted.
- The Act also authorises **the detention of people “dependant” upon the “beggar”** (read: family), and the separation of children over the age of five.
- Certified institutions have absolute power over detainees, including the power of punishment, and the power to exact “manual work”.

### **Prejudice and Stigmatization:**

- It is clear that the purpose of the Act is not only to criminalise the act of begging, but to target those whose nomadic patterns of life do not fit within mainstream.
- It is based on philosophy of the poorhouses of 19th century Europe; first criminalise poverty, and then making it invisible by physically removing “offenders” from public spaces.
- It punishes people for the crime of looking poor. For these people, the constitutional guarantees of pluralism and inclusiveness do not exist.

### **Instances of using of the Begging Act as a weapon:**

- On the eve of Common Wealth Games 2010, Delhi government took beggars off the streets lest their presence embarrass the nation in the eyes of foreigners.
- Such operations are also a regular part of preparing for national events, such as Independence Day and Republic Day.
- Recently, a prominent institution put up spikes outside its Mumbai branch, to deter rough sleeping, though they were removed after public outrage.

### **The judicial view:**

- In its judgment (Harsh Mander v. Union of India and KarnikaSawhney v. Union of India), Delhi HC held that the Begging Act violated Article 14 (equality before law) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the Constitution.
- It also held that under Article 21 of the Constitution, it was the state’s responsibility to provide the basic necessities for survival to all its citizens.
- Poverty was the result of the state’s inability or unwillingness to discharge these obligations. Therefore, the state could not turn around and criminalise the most visible and public manifestation of its own failures.

### **Way Forward:**

- It is as significant and important as a judgment delivered by the same court more than nine years ago, when it decriminalised homosexuality (Naz Foundation v. NCT of Delhi).

- Both Naz Foundation and Harsh Mander recognise that our Constitution is a transformative Constitution, which seeks to undo legacies of injustice and lift up all individuals and communities to the plane of equal citizenship.
- Other High Courts should also question such colonial legacies. A court can strike down an unconstitutional law, but it cannot reform society.
- It is the task of the Legislative Assembly and the government to replace this punitive structure with a new set of measures to rehabilitate and integrate the most vulnerable and marginalised members of our society.

### **Refocusing on Africa: New strategy**

**Context:** Prime Minister recently returned from a tour of Rwanda, Uganda and South Africa that included the BRICS Summit in South Africa and outlining of 10 guiding principles for India's engagement in Africa.

#### **10 guiding principles for India's engagement in Africa**

1. Africa will be at the top of India's priorities.
2. India's development partnership will be guided by Africa's priorities.
3. India will keep her markets open and make it easier and more attractive to trade.
4. India's experience with the digital revolution to support Africa's development.
5. Agriculture; Africa has 60% of the world's arable land but only 10% of global output.
6. India Africa partnership will address the challenges of climate change.
7. Cooperation in combating terrorism and extremism; keeping our cyberspace safe and secure; and, supporting the UN in advancing and keeping peace.
8. Work with African nations to keep the oceans open and free for the benefit of all.
9. Make Africa a nursery for the aspirations of Africa's youth.
10. Work together for a just, representative and democratic global order that has a voice and a role for one-third of humanity that lives in Africa and India.

#### **India's refocused Africa strategy:**

- Refocused Africa strategy builds on India's soft power in historical, trade, and cultural links, particularly with the western edge of the Indo-Pacific.
- India aims to secure her foothold on the continent, secure access to resources, build markets for Indian goods and services, and support India's global ambitions.
- The new strategy is also focused on building alliances and differentiating India from China as a development partner, at a time when several countries in the Indo-Pacific have fallen into a debt trap with China.
- India has tried to differentiate itself by engaging with its diaspora and private sector links to build development partnerships, where India has a comparative advantage in English-language training and research.
- India has also initiated a series of India-Africa forums and is working with Japan on an Asia Africa Growth Corridor.
- India has committed about 150 credit lines worth \$10 billion as development fund but with lower disbursement rates than China.

#### **Issues and way forward:**

- India is putting Africa at the top of its priorities and is keen to build partnerships that will liberate its potential rather than constrain its future. Still the questions about the efficacy of tools for implementation remain.
- India's development partnerships are notorious for their low disbursement rates and slow delivery. Only 4% of Indian grants in 2017-18 were committed to Africa.

- Credit lines to Africa have a 40 per cent disbursement rate, and of the \$10 billion in credit promised between 2015-20, only \$1.5 billion have been committed through 2019 and an even smaller fraction disbursed.
- India's new concessional financing scheme, which subsidises private Indian companies bidding on African infrastructure projects, shows no signs of functioning a year after its announcement.
- As India seeks to implement its new strategic partnership with Africa and the is need to convince countries that it cannot only commit but also deliver.

### **Ease of Living Index**

**Context:**Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry released the results of its survey on the Ease of Living in cities across the country.

#### **Parameters considered**

- Institutional (governance)
- Social (identity, education, health, security)
- Economic ( economy, employment)
- Physical factors (waste water and solid waste management, pollution, housing/inclusiveness, mixed land use, power and water supply, transport, public open spaces)

The top three cities were all in Maharashtra; Pune is ranked the highest, followed by Navi Mumbai and Greater Mumbai. The cities which were ranked the poorest were Patna in Bihar, Kohima in Nagaland and Rampur in Uttar Pradesh.

### **The fall of rupee**

**Context:**The value of India's currency 'rupee' is continuously falling. Its value has declined by 8% between January – July 2018. Among the BRICS nations; after the Russian Ruble, the Indian rupee depreciated the most in this period. There has been a sharp depreciation in the rupee and it breached the 70 mark for the first time. (Rs.70= 1 dollar)

#### **Additional Information**

**Conversion rate-**The rate at which we can convert one currency into another currency is know as conversion rate between those two currencies.

#### **What is Rupee Appreciation and Rupee Depreciation?**

The value of Indian Rupee (or any other currency) is determined by the market. The demand and supply forces in the currency market. If the demand for Indian currency is high, Indian rupee will have high value, and if demand is low, it will depreciate.

So, if market forces determine the value of a currency, that type of system is called Floating Rate System. India has adopted floating rate system since 1975.

### **Difference between Devaluation and Depreciation**

The basic difference between the devaluation and depreciation is that, the devaluation is done by the government of the country deliberately while the depreciation take place because of market forces i.e. demand and supply.

### **Difference between Revaluation and Appreciation**

Revaluation is a term which is used when there is a rise of currency to the relation with a foreign currency in a fixed exchange rate. In floating exchange rate correct term would be appreciation.

### **Reasons behind the depreciation of the Indian rupee against the dollar currently**

1. Increase in the price of the crude oil
2. Tariff war scare (esp. between the USA and China)
3. Increasing trade deficit of India
4. Reduced capital flows to emerging economies
5. Political Uncertainty

### Chandrayaan-2

**Context:** Chandrayaan-2: India's second moon mission and ISRO's first time attempt to land a rover on moon's surface will be delayed till January 2019

### **Recent launches by ISRO**

- Earlier this year, the ISRO had launched **GSAT-6A**, a military communication satellite.
- Launch of **GSAT-11** from Kourou, French Guiana
- **PSLV- C39** mission, carrying the IRNSS-1H navigation satellite – failed after the heat shield refused to open and release the satellite.

### **Additional Information**

- GSAT-6A, the second predominantly S-band communications satellite, was launched.
- It will complement GSAT-6, which has been orbiting since August 2015 at 83 degrees East longitude.

### RBI raises repo rates

**Context:** RBI has cited inflation concerns and raised interest rates (has set repo rate at 6.5%). Increase in repo rate will push up the cost of loans for all borrowers, from consumers looking to finance their purchases of homes and cars to businesses looking to meet their capital needs.

### **Repo rate**

- Repo rate is the rate at which the central bank of a country (RBI in case of India) lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds. Repo rate is used by monetary authorities to control inflation.
- RBI increases the repo rate during inflation and decreases it during deflation.

### **Impacts**

#### **When RBI increases repo rate**

- In order to control excess money supply and inflation in the economy, central bank increases repo rate and lends to commercial banks at a higher rate.
- Now, because of increased repo rate, funds come to commercial banks at a higher cost, so in order to cover those increased costs of acquiring funds, commercial banks increase their lending rates for loans and advances.

- Since, lending rates are increased, people abstain from borrowing and postpone their purchases thereby decreasing demand for products and services, consequently it leads to decrease in money supply in economy and decrease in inflation rate.

#### **When RBI decreases repo rate:**

- In order to cure depression and lack of effective demand, central bank decreases repo rates and lends to commercial banks at a reduced rate.
- Because of reduced rates, commercial banks can acquire funds at a lower cost and in order to acquire new consumers and markets they pass their benefit of lower cost to consumers by decreasing their prime lending rates on loans and advances.
- Since, lending rates are reduced by banks, credit is cheap and this induces people to venture in new business activities and purchase of capital goods leading to increased demand for capital goods and increased employment rates.

#### **TRAI's nod for 5G Spectrum**

**Context:** Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) recommends the auction of spectrum for offering 5G services for the first time in the country.

#### **About 5G**

5G is a wireless communication technology. It is the next generation mobile networks technology after 4G LTE networks. The final standard for 5G will be set up by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU).

#### **Advantages of 5G**

- As per the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) Committee on Digital Economic Policy, 5G technologies rollout will help in increasing GDP, creating employment and digitizing the economy.
- The 5G technology will offer far greater upload and download speed available today.
- This will help cloud systems to stream software updates, music, and navigation data to driverless cars. In other words, it will help aid incorporate Artificial Intelligence in our lives.
- It will enable Smart devices to exchange data seamlessly providing the ecosystem for Internet of Things (IoT).
- 

#### **RTE (Amendment) Bill 2018**

**Context: Right to Education (Amendment) Bill 2018** is passed by Lok Sabha, and is now before Rajya Sabha for consideration.

#### **Key points**

- To do away with No-Detention Policy.
- States will have options to hold regular examinations either at the end of the Class V or Class VIII, or both.
- Students who fail this examination would be given a chance to re-appear after two months from the date of declaration of results. In case if they still cannot pass, States will have the option of detaining them.

#### **No detention policy**

According to RTE Act 2009, No student until the Class VIII should be detained in the same class on the basis of examination result. It practically ended the convention system of regular written examination system at elementary level.

### **Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE)**

- It is an **alternative to regular examination**, in which pupil will be comprehensively **evaluated on the basis of his/her curricular, co-/extra-curricular activities and his behavioral** But none of the students will be detained.
- This evaluation is based on grading system rather than Marks or percentage. This provision is **not being implemented**

### **Criticism:**

- This would push out those children who are not able to meet the standards due to poor quality of education provided to them.
- This may discourage students and would increase dropout rates.
- Scrapping the no-detention policy itself is not going to improve the learning ability of the students; rather quality of education provided should be focused on.

### **Why No-detention policy seems a practical failure**

It is the no-detention policy because of which we have **achieved near universalization of enrolment at elementary education level**. It is a successful policy in this sense. But for improved learning outcomes, this policy needs to be supplemented by other provisions of RTE Act, 2009, such as;

- Pupil teacher ratio (PTR)
- Infrastructure
- Separate Toilets for Girls and Boys

### **Funding in Education**

- It is another reason why RTE is not being implemented in true letter in spirit. Allocation of funds for **SarvaShikshaAbhiyan** always remained below the actual estimated requirements. Quality related intervention accounted only for 9% of the total approved budgets in FY 2016-17.
- States like **Kerala** spent nearly all their allocated budget for education on quality in 2016-17.

### **Way forward**

- There is a need to find long term solution to the issues plaguing the education system in India.
- RTE Act 2009, needs to be implemented in its true letter and spirit.
- New Education Policy is need of the hour.
- Keeping in view the targets under **SDG4: Quality Education**, there is need to increase budgetary allocation for Education.