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National Register of Citizens

Context: the recent chaos in the state of Assam over NRC.

It is the register containing names of Indian Citizens. It was prepared first in 1951 after the conduct of the Census of 1951.It is used to identify who is a bona fide Indian citizen and those who fail to enlist in the register will be deemed illegal migrants.

Why the National Register of Citizens (NRC) is being updated in Assam:

- The demands to update the NRC of 1951 were first raised by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and Assam GanaParishad more than three decades ago.
- Since 1950s, there is lot of controversy regarding migration and citizenship issues. Original inhabitants of Assam always fear that migrants from Bangladesh would compete them with jobs, land and eventually hamper their culture.
- Therefore, in 1970s, All Assam Students' Union spearheaded a massive drive, popularly known as the Assam Agitation calling for the detection, deletion and deportation of illegal Bangladeshi migrants.
- However, for a very long time, the provisions in the Assam accord were not implemented.
- In 2013, the Supreme Court finally ordered to complete the exercise by December 31, 2017, leading to the present updation of NRC in Assam.
- Over 40 lakh out of 3.29 crore applicants were left out of draft NRC in Assam
- The five year exercise was completed at a cost of Rs.1,220 crore.
- The draft NRC was released in Guwahati by Registrar General of India and NRC State Coordinator.
- The remaining 40,007,707 applicants, whose names didn't figure in the list will be given ample opportunity through a process of claims and objections till September 28, and their citizenship status will not be questioned till the final, error-free draft is prepared.

10th BRICS Summit: Johannesburg Declaration

Context: conclusion of the 10th BRICS Summit in South Africa. The summit saw the BRICS leaders discuss various international and regional issues of common concern and adopted the 'Johannesburg Declaration' by consensus.

Johannesburg Declaration:

The declaration reaffirms **principles of democracy**, **inclusiveness** and agrees to **fight unilateralism and protectionism**.

- 10th summit framed its deliberations against U.S. President Donald Trump's **unconventional approach on world affairs**, particularly the looming **trade wars**.
- Stressed for **rules-based, transparent, non-discriminatory, open and inclusive multilateral trading** based on the World Trade Organisation.
- Broader commitment to cooperate for **strengthening multilateralism**, the rule of law and an **equitable international order**.
- **To help nations to prepare for the Fourth Industrial Revolution**.
- Articulated the need for a **new strategy on employment, education and skill development** as the digital revolution unfolds.

- **BRICS Partnership on New Industrial Revolution (PartNIR)** to engage with the private sector and young innovators working at the cutting edge of technology today.
- **BRICS Business Council** to enhance trade and economic cooperation in diverse sectors ranging from manufacturing and energy to financial services and regional aviation.
- Commitment towards an **inclusive and "people-centred approach" on development**.
- Steady progress in interactions through sports, films, education, culture and tourism.

Africa and BRICS Plus:
- BRICS outreach to Africa began at the last summit hosted by South Africa, in 2013 and has picked up momentum now.
- African nations expect BRICS to play more crucial and broader role.
- African nations requested for big loans from the New Development Bank (NDB) for their infrastructure projects.
- So far, the NDB has dispersed loans totaling $5.1 billion — all to its members only.

China introduced "BRICS Plus" format last year by inviting a few countries from different regions – Argentina, Jamaica, Turkey, Indonesia and Egypt.

BRICS Plus has potential to evolve and an immediate benefit is the immense opportunities it provides for networking among leaders.
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Allied:

Cabinet approves Signing of Memorandum of Understanding amongst BRICS Nations: On the Regional Aviation Partnership Cooperation viz. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

Impact: Has the potential to spur greater trade, investment, tourism and cultural exchanges amongst the BRICS Nations.

Areas of Cooperation:
- Public Policies and best practices in regional services;
- Regional Airports;
- Airport infrastructure management and air navigation services;
- Technical cooperation between regulatory agencies;
- Innovation;
- Environment Sustainability; including deliberation of global initiatives;
- Qualification and Training

Redressing farmers' distress: Increasing MSPs (Price Policy) to Income Policy

Context: The present government has increased the MSPs of 14 kharif crops to at least 50 percent above paid out costs of farmers, including the imputed cost of family labour (Cost A2+FL).

The Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP), a professional advisory body has toed the government line. It has bypassed its own terms of reference (ToR) that require it to look at demand and supply, domestic and international prices, costs, inter-crop price parity, etc while recommending MSPs.States like Uttar Pradesh have announced a much higher state-advised price.

Issues:
- Whether these MSPs can be effectively implemented
- Market prices of most kharif crops are well below the announced MSPs.

- Ensuring that farmers really get these MSPs will require a major coordination between the Centre and states.
- Given a robust procurement system does not exist for other crops it will become difficult for the government to procure even 25 per cent of the production of various kharif crops, except in paddy and cotton.

Cost issues:
- In the case of paddy alone, the government will incur an extra food subsidy bill of Rs 12,000-15,000 crore due to increased procurement.
- The grain stocks are already brimming and the Food Corporation of India is saddled. 50-60 per cent higher than the current buffer stock norms.
- Higher MSPs are likely to make exports globally uncompetitive, leading to further accumulation of stocks at home, and greater economic inefficiency.

SC on appointment of Lokpal

Context: The Supreme Court of India has reprimanded the central government over the **delay in appointment of Lokpal**.SC has expressed dissatisfaction over the government's stand on completing the appointment of the Lokpal.

About Lokpal:
- Lokpal is the **central governing body** that has **jurisdiction over all members of parliament and central government employees** in case of corruption.
- Lokpal is an ombudsman to protect the common man from corruption in public service and power centres.

Additional information:
- Lokayukta is similar to the Lokpal, but functions on a state level.
- Government failed to appoint a Lokpal despite an April 2017 judgment by the Supreme Court.
- The Supreme Court has sent across a timely message that efforts to cleanse the economy must be matched by equally strong measures to cleanse public life too.

The main function of Lokpal and Lokayukta is:
- to address complaints of corruption,
- to make inquiries, investigations, and
- to conduct trials for the case on respective state and central government
- to help in curbing the corruption in the central and state government

Bhutan and India: Treaty of Friendship

Context: Bhutan and India have a unique relationship matched by no two other countries, thanks to the **Treaty of Friendship signed in Darjeeling in 1949**. From such a background it is important to see how both the countries had fostered their ties and how the relationship lays the foundation for their future development in the 21st century.

History:
- After India gained independence, Bhutan was one of the first countries to reach out to the new India.
- Formal bilateral relations between Bhutan and India were established in January 1968 with the appointment of a special officer of the Government of India to Bhutan.

- The basis for bilateral relations between India and Bhutan is formed by the Indo-Bhutan Treaty of 1949.
- On August 8, 1949 Bhutan and India signed the Treaty of Friendship, calling for peace between the two nations and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- However, Bhutan agreed to let India "guide" its foreign policy and decided that both nations would consult each other closely on foreign and defence affairs. The treaty also established free trade and extradition protocols.

The Treaty of 2007:
- The treaty of 1949 between India and Bhutan was updated in 2007. The most significant change was in Article 2.
- Article 2 was the most important provision in the treaty, according to which, "The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan.
- On its part, the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations.
- The point that had provoked some amount of criticism or controversy pertains to the second part of this Article since it tries to qualify Bhutan's external relations.

The new Article 2 is worded as follows:
"In keeping with the abiding ties of close friendship and cooperation between Bhutan and India, the Government of the Kingdom of Bhutan and the Government of the Republic of India shall cooperate closely with each other on issues relating to their national interests. Neither Government shall allow the use of its territory for activities harmful to the national security and interest of the other."

Growing engagements with Africa

Context: Ahead of the 10th BRICS Summit, Indian PM visited Rwanda and Uganda. Also with the 10th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South **Africa** – the bloc of emerging market economies will also be opening a new chapter in their all-round cooperation.

High-level visits:
- Recent PM visit to **Rwanda** is the first ever Prime Ministerial visit and India elevated its ties to that of a **strategic partnership** last year.
- PM Modi had earlier **visited Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya in 2016**.
- In the last four years, there have been 23 outgoing visits to Africa by the President, the Vice President and the Prime Minister.
- Indian engagement lays emphasis on the long term — enhancing Africa's productive capacities, diversifying skills and knowledge, and investing in small- and medium-sized enterprises.
- India-Africa trade: $62.66 billion (2017-2018)
- India's security and defence cooperation with Africa includes **maritime cooperation** in the form of anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia, **deployment of Indian forces to UN peacekeeping missions in Africa**, regular shipping visits, and **joint-naval patrolling** in the Western Indian Ocean Region.
- India is **laying emphasis on infrastructure and connectivity projects** in priority regions of the world as the next phase of economic globalisation.

- India's key focus areas – cross-border connectivity with Eastern African countries and Indian Ocean island countries.
- India desires to foster more robust people-to-people connections, increase investment-led trade and business opportunities, and strengthen bilateral partnerships.
- India is also seeking to reinvigorate its cultural links with East Africa under the rubric of **Project 'Mausam'**, an initiative of the Ministry of Culture.
- Africa exports to india includes raw materials and imports manufactured goods.
- For India, bolstering economic ties are of paramount importance.
- Africa's trading patterns with the Asian giants still remain rather traditional.

Concerns:
- The Indian private sector has yet to take full advantage of the investment climate in Africa.
- Growing influence of China in the region.
- Civil wars ,dictatprial regimes in the continents.
- Limited of investing capacity of India.
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India-Africa cross border connectivity programmes –
1. **Project 'Mausam'** which seeks to revive lost linkages with the Indian Ocean 'world' (East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia).
2. Maritime-port connectivity under the government's **Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)** and the **SagarMala initiative.**
3. Digital connectivity under the **Pan African e-Network project** on tele-education and tele-medicine (launched in 2004)
4. **Air connectivity** in the form of **direct flights** from Indian cities to African destinations.
5. **Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)** – a trilateral initiative (India, Japan and many African nations) – to develop 'industrial corridors', 'institutional networks' for the growth of Asia and Africa, and to promote development cooperation.

Sabarimala temple ban: because of celibate nature of the deity

Context: Women aged between 10 and 50 were banned from entering a temple because they are considered 'impure' (due to menstrual cycle).The above can be viewed as discriminatory practices and violation of the fundamental rights to equality and gender justice. — Article 15(1)
Issues:
- SC bench had also said that exclusion of women from entering a temple because they are considered 'impure' amounts to the practice of untouchability, a social evil abolished by law.
- It denotes a patriarchal and partisan approach.
- It curtails her religious freedom assured by Article 25(1).
- Prohibition of women's entry to the shrine solely on the basis of womanhood and the biological features associated with womanhood is derogatory to women, which Article 51A(e) aims to renounce.
- Article 25 (1) which mandates freedom of conscience and right to practise religion. "All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion…"

Issue of Lokpal appointment

Context: Supreme ourt has recently expressed its reservations regarding the consistent delays in the appointment of Lokpal in the country.

Background
- According to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, a five-member panel to select the anti-corruption ombudsman, comprising the Prime Minister, the LokSabha Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, the Chief Justice of India and an eminent jurist.
- The post **leader of opposition is not recognised**, as no party (other than ruling party) secured the 10% of total seats in Loksabha and it is the main reason behind delay in appointment.
- The only reason for the delay in the appointment of the Lokpal is that a minor amendment to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013, to **enable the leader of the largest party** in the opposition in the LokSabha to join the five-member selection committee, is yet to be passed.
- A parliamentary committee has endorsed the amendment, which is on the same lines as the mechanism for the selection panels for the Central Vigilance Commissioner and the Chief Information Commissioner.

A long-drawn debate

A short history of the Lokpal Bill from the 1960s to the present

1963: The idea of an Ombudsman first came up in Parliament during a discussion on budget allocation for the Law Ministry

1966: The First Administrative Reforms Commission recommended two independent authorities — one at the Centre and one at the

State level — to probe complaints against public functionaries, including MPs

1968: Lokpal Bill introduced in Parliament, but was not passed. Eight attempts were made till 2011 to pass the Bill, but all in vain

2002: The Constitution review commission headed by M.N. Venkatachaliah recommended appointment of the Lokpal and the Lokayuktas. It also recommended that the Prime Minister be kept out of the Lokpal's ambit

2005: The second ARC recommended that a Lokpal be established without delay

2013: Lokpal Act, 2013, passed in Parliament

2016: Lok Sabha agreed to amend the 2013 Act

2017: The SC on April 27 clarified that the Lokpal appointment process need not be stalled merely due to the absence of the Leader of the Opposition, who is a member of the Lokpal selection committee as per the 2013 Act

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The RTI (Amendment) Bill 2018

Context: civil society and intellectuals across the country have expressed their concerns about the recently proposed amendments in the right to information bill which proposed to do away with the parity given to the information commissions with the election commissions.

Issue:
In the statement of objects and reasons of the Bill, it has been brought out that 'functions carried out by the EC and ICs are completely different. Hence, their status and service conditions need to be rationalised accordingly.
- According to the proposed amendment, the salaries, allowances and other terms and conditions of service of the CIC and ICs 'shall be such as may be prescribed by the Central government'.

- The tenure of information commissioners at the centre and the states is proposed to be amended from 'a term of five years' to 'terms as may be prescribed by the central government'.
- The RTI Act 2005 recognises the authority of states to select their SICs, but the proposed Amendment Bill does not allow states to decide their term, status and salary as it proposes the Centre will prescribe it from time to time. Such a measure will compromise the autonomy in functioning.

Argument given by the government:
- The EC is a constitutional body established by Clause (1) of Article 324 of the Constitution, while the CIC and state information commissions are statutory bodies established under the provisions of the RTI Act, 2005.
- They both have differing mandates and hence their status and service conditions need to be rationalised accordingly.

Concerns:
The information commission functions as an adjudicator as well as regulator.
- If the commissions are to fulfill the objectives of the Act to empower the common man, the rule of law must prevail. The public must perceive the information commissioner as a public-friendly judge with high integrity, utmost degree of credibility, public trust, professional excellence and capacity, leadership qualities and dynamism.
- In its role of regulator, every commission is required to monitor the implementation of the Act by the government and its agencies. The commissions are to report to the legislature on how the Act has been implemented.
- In this regard, every commission has to keep its ears close to the ground, and remain receptive to the view of the public, the media and non-government organisations, all of whom have an important stake in information freedom.

Thus, an environment has to be created for the IC to function without any interference or pressure.

Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee on Data Protection

Context: government had constituted an expert committee headed by Justice B.N. Srikrishna to look into the novel issue of data protection. The panel submitted a draft personal data protection Bill, 2018

Recommendations:
- It recommended that critical personal data of Indian citizens be processed in centres located within the country.
- 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.

Look North East

Context: kneeling under the challenges of insurgencies, violence, political crisis and under-development, it is high-time that the government must redouble its efforts in the region to ensure peace and stability in the region which is also India's gateway to South East Asia.

Infrastructural Projects in North Eastern Region:
100% subsidy is being provided by Ministry of Shipping under Central Sector Scheme for development of IWT infrastructure in North Eastern States.

Comprehensive Telecom Development Plan for the North-Eastern Region (NER):
- Installation of 2817 mobile towers for providing mobile coverage in 4119 uncovered villages of Arunachal Pradesh and two districts of Assam
- Provision of mobile services on 2G+4G technology for installation of 2173 mobile towers in 2374 uncovered villages and along National Highways

BharatmalaPariyojana:
- Road stretches aggregating to about 5301 km in NER have been approved for improvement.
- Out of this, 3246 km road length has been approved for development of Economic Corridor in North East.
- To augment railway network, 7 railway projects consisting of 3 new lines and 4 doublings have been taken up during last three years and current year which are at various stages of execution.
- For providing cross-border rail linkage, foundation stone for Agartala-Akhaura Rail-Link was laid in July, 2016 which will connect the existing Agartala station in Tripura to Akhaura Station of Bangladesh Railways.

Other initiatives:
- 19 new waterways (11 in Assam, 5 in Meghalaya, 1 each in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram & Nagaland) have been declared as **National Waterways (NWs)**
- To augment tele-connectivity, **BharatNet** is being implemented to create network infrastructure for providing Broadband connectivity to all Gram Panchayats (GPs)

(approx. 2,50,000) in the country including Gram Panchayats (GPs) of North Eastern Region.

- **Regional Connectivity Scheme (RCS-UDAN)** has been launched to provide connectivity to unserved and under-served airports and promote regional connectivity by making the airfare affordable through Viability Gap Funding (VGF).

Traditional and Sustainable Farming in North Eastern Region:

Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER) which aims at

- Development of certified organic production in a value chain mode to link growers with consumers
- Support the development of entire value chain starting from inputs, seeds, certification and creation of facilities for collection, aggregation, processing, marketing and brand building initiative.

The assistance is provided for cluster development, on/off farm input production, supply of seeds/planting materials, setting up of functional infrastructure, establishment of integrated processing unit, refrigerated transportation, pre-cooling/ cold stores chamber, branding, labelling and packaging, hiring of space, hand holdings, organic certification through third party, mobilization of farmers/processors etc.

National Bamboo Mission (NBM):

Focused on development of Bamboo inter alia in the North Eastern States, which has nearly 60% of the country's Bamboo growing stock.

- Aims at holistic development of the Bamboo sector (including in NER) by incentivizing construction industry to give impetus to the use of Bamboo in construction
- Seeks to mandate eco-friendly Government constructions through use of Bamboo and Bamboo products to give a fillip to this eco-friendly industry.

Watershed development projects and PradhanMantriKrishiSinchaiYojana (PMKSY)

Context: According to a Parliamentary Standing Committee (PSC) report on Rural Development. Watershed development projects lagging behind badly (only 10% of projects complete). Watershed development is vital component of PradhanMantriKrishiSinchaiYojana (PMKSY)

Source: PMKSY, Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers'Welfare
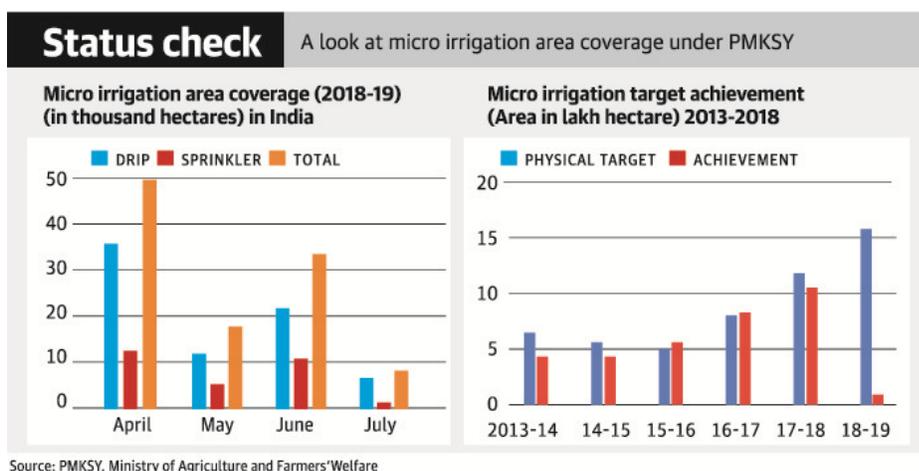
What is watershed management:
- A watershed is an area that separates water flowing into rivers or basins.
- Management of a watershed involves the rational utilisation of land and water resources, through preventing soil run-off, increasing the productivity of crops, rain water harvesting and recharging of ground water tables.

Important Value additions:
- PMKSY has been formulated with the vision of extending the coverage of irrigation **'HarKhetkopani'** and improving water use efficiency **'More crop per drop'** in a focused manner.

The major objective of PMKSY is to :
- achieve convergence of investments in irrigation at the field level,
- expand cultivable area under assured irrigation,
- improve on-farm water use efficiency to reduce wastage of water,
- enhance the adoption of precision-irrigation and other water saving technologies (More crop per drop),
- enhance recharge of aquifers and
- introduce sustainable water conservation practices

PENCIL: Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour

Context: An online portal to ensure effective enforcement of the provisions of the Child Labour Act and smooth implementation of the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme.
Details:
- Connects Central Government to State Government(s), District(s) and all District Project Societies
- Further the Ministry has instructed all the concerned States where NCLP Scheme is sanctioned, to form State Resource Centre (SRC) under the chairmanship of State Labour Secretary, which would monitor the enforcement of Child Labour Act, coordinate for the rescue of children and adolescents, child tracking system and supervise all the functions through PENCIL portal.
- SRC would also prepare and implement awareness generation plan to curb the menace of child labour in the State.

Second century BCE Buddhist site at Thotlakonda in Visakhapatnam

Context: Heritage conservationists and members of Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) has expressed concerns over proposed construction of amphitheatre, rest rooms and information centre at second century BCE Buddhist site, Thotlakonda in Visakhapatnam.

Issues:
- Buildings might mar the original heritage site and are against the norms laid down by the courts.
- Court had ordered – no construction or development activity of any sort shall be permitted within the boundaries of the ancient site
- Tourism should be developed but not at the cost of protected areas

Additional Information :
- Thotlakonda site was first discovered in 1976
- The excavations conducted by ASI revealed the ruins of a well-established **Theravada (Hinayana Buddhism)** monastery
- Under **Article 49 of the Constitution**, the State is under obligation to protect every monument, place or object of artistic or historic interest declared to be of national importance from spoilation, disfigurement, destruction, removal, disposal or export, as the case may be. (DPSP)
- Under **Article 51A(f) of the Constitution**, there is fundamental duty to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture. (Fundamental Duties)

Amendments to POCSO Act

Context: Women and Child Development (WCD) Ministry has proposed amendments to POCSO Act. Proposal to enhance punishment in cases of sexual assault of male children.

Background:
The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences **Act** (**POCSO Act**) 2012 was formulated in order to effectively address sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children. ... It defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography.

Purpose:
- The move is being seen as an effort to bring in a gender-neutral law while dealing with cases of sexual assaults.
- Boys who are sexually abused as children spend a lifetime in silence because of the stigma and shame attached to male survivors speaking out

Ministry is also working on the proposal to amend the Act to award death penalty to those convicted of raping children below 12 years.

Promoting women entrepreneurs in India

Context: Today's women have broken the glass ceiling and scaled new frontiers in business and industry, bringing fresh ideas into the commercial and tech landscape of India. These innovations are actively reshaping engineering, technology, design, handicrafts, weaving, shoe-making, agriculture, organic farming and other cultural and creative industries. The recent World Economic Forum meeting at Davos adds to this notion of the new age women entrepreneur, putting out a call to bring up an equal number of women, in the labour force. This equalisation can enhance the Gross Domestic Product of a developing country like India by over 27 per cent.

Indian context:
As professional entrepreneurs, women are truly living their dreams. India has developed a vibrant entrepreneurial landscape aided by several progressive initiatives and measures instituted by the government.
Today, with more than 20,000 start-ups, India has emerged as the second largest start-up ecosystem in the world and is expected to grow at 10-12 per cent year-on-year.

It is heartening to see that India jumped 50 places in the overall 'Ease of Doing Business' rankings and this is just another reason to keep ploughing ahead full steam towards ensuring a groundswell for women leadership in the country.

Women in India:
With women comprising over 48 per cent of the country's population, it is impossible to think of economic growth without women as the fundamental drivers of change. It is projected that by 2025, India's GDP will get an additional boost of 16 per cent, by integrating women into the workforce.

The theme of the 8th edition of Global Entrepreneurship Summit, 'Women first, Prosperity for all' highlighted that when women do better, countries do better.
- According to the Sixth Economic Census by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), only 14 per cent businesses in India are run by women.
- It is estimated that over 90 per cent of finance requirement for women entrepreneurs is met through informal channels since they are unable to source formal, collateral free and transparent financing for their enterprises.
- The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2018 (MIWE) has observed that cultural bias and a lack of access to financial services were amongst the major hindrances for women business owners in India.

Government initiatives:
Over the past few years, India has witnessed record growth in women entrepreneurship. The government initiatives includes-
- Stand-Up India- It has covered 12 villages in 4 months.
- MUDRA
- NITI Aayog's recent Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP)

Above are steps in the right direction.
Several women-led leadership and mentorship programs such as empoWer, SAHA Fund and Sonder Connect are also gaining traction in India
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2017-18 FDI inflows

Context: Foreign direct investment (FDI) is an investment in a business by an investor from another country for which the foreign investor has control over the company purchased. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) defines control as owning 10% or more of the business.

According to RBI:
- Karnataka registered the biggest increase in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) last year.
- Karnataka sees 300% jump in FDI inflows and Tamil Nadu FDI inflows increased.
- Gujarat, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh all saw a drop in FDI inflows

Determinates of FDI in Host Country:
Host Country Determinants:
- Policy framework for FDI
- Economic, political and social stability
- Rules regarding entry and operations.

- Standards of treatment of foreign affiliates.
- Policies on functioning and structure of markets (esp. competition and merger and acquisition [M&A] Policies
- International agreements on FDI
- Privatization Policy
- Trade policy (barriers-tariff and non-tariff) and coherence of FDI and trade policies

Additional information:
- India had jumped one spot to 8th rank in the 2017 Global FDI Confidence Index.
- Governance and regulatory issues made up 7 of the top-10 factors that investors consider when deciding on an investment destination according to the report.
- However, India in 2018 has fallen out of the top 10 destinations for FDI in terms of its attractiveness, according to an AT Kearney (Global FDI Confidence Index) report.
- Reasons – Challenges with implementation Article of GST and impact of demonetization.
- Notable reforms done – elimination of the Foreign Investment Promotion Board, a government agency responsible for reviewing all potential foreign investment, and the liberalisation of foreign investment thresholds for the retail, aviation, and biomedical industries

Supreme Court bench recently concluded its hearing on Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)

Context: Section 377 reads as follows: "Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to a fine."

Background:
- Section 377 of the IPC traces its history back nearly 500 years.
- Section 377 is modelled on Britain's Buggery Act of 1533.
- The prime architect of that Act was the (in) famous **Thomas Cromwell**. Cromwell's Act made it a capital offence.
- **Thomas Macaulay**, architect of India's IPC in 1860, was the one who added this law into the code at his discretion and without much debate.
- Thomas Macaulay is often credited with bringing English education to India.
- Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code came into force in 1862.

The terms "carnal intercourse" and "against the order of nature" are not defined precisely anywhere in the code.

It had led to – wide variety of definition and misinterpretations of the law – in most of the cases during British India and independent India.

Debate since 2009:
- In a landmark judgement in 2009, the Delhi high court found Section 377 to be **inconsistent with the fundamental rights under Article 13(1)** of the Constitution .
- Additionally, it was found to be in violation of the right to privacy and dignity (**Article 21**), freedom of expression and right to equality (**Article 19 (1) and Articles 14 and 15**).
- The judgement also stated that it would unfairly target the LBGTQ+ community because the acts that are criminalized are closely associated with homosexuality.

In summary, the Delhi high court found Section 377 to be unconstitutional.

- Four years later, a two-judge bench of the Supreme Court overruled the Delhi high court judgement on the grounds that it was legally unsustainable.
- The bench took a literal and technical view rather than the wider sweep that the Delhi high court had applied, putting legal technicality above judgement and wisdom.

One side (the literalists) holds that Parliament must enact laws that the judiciary should enforce, and, therefore, it is up to Parliament to change the law.

The other side (the pragmatists) has always maintained, as the incumbent government just stated, that the courts must opine if Parliament is unable or unwilling to modernize a 150-year-old law.

Though the 172nd report of the Law Commission of India recommended the deletion of Section 377, no action was taken.

Earlier this month, the Supreme Court began to hear a clutch of appeals challenging the constitutional validity of Section 377.

According to the new bench –

- "If Section 377 of the IPC goes away entirely, there will be anarchy. We are solely on consensual acts between man-man, man-woman. Consent is the fulcrum here. You cannot impose your sexual orientation on others without their consent."
- A section of people could not live in fear of the law which shrink their rights to choice, privacy and dignity.

India's new higher education commission bill

Context: Recently, The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) has put out the draft Higher Education Commission of India (Repeal of University Grants Commission) Act, 2018.

Background:

The Constitution of India mandates Central Government to take steps for coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions.

For promoting uniform development of quality of education in higher educational institutions, there is a need for creation of a Body that lays down uniform standards, and ensures maintenance of the same through systematic monitoring and promotion.

The existing regulatory structure as reflected by the mandate given to University Grants Commission required redefinition based on the changing priorities of higher education and allows its growth.

Hence this Act provides for establishing the Higher Education Commission of India repealing the University Grants Commission Act, 1956.

- The UGC, was formally established in November 1956 as a statutory body of the Government of India through an Act of Parliament for the coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of university education in India.
- The UGC has the unique distinction of being the only grant-giving agency in the country which has been vested with two responsibilities: that of providing funds and that of coordination, determination and maintenance of standards in institutions of higher education.

The UGC`s mandate includes:

- Promoting and coordinating university education.
- Determining and maintaining standards of teaching, examination and research in universities.

- Framing regulations on minimum standards of education.
- Monitoring developments in the field of collegiate and university education; disbursing grants to the universities and colleges.
- Serving as a vital link between the Union and state governments and institutions of higher learning.
- Advising the Central and State governments on the measures necessary for improvement of university education.

Punjab seeks special category status

Context: Punjab government asks Centre to grant it special category status under the **PradhanMantriRashtriyaSwasthyaSuraksha Mission**. Punjab is struggling to check the menace of drugs. Punjab government allege that – Punjab State is a victim of proxy war waged by Pakistan

Criteria:
- Jammu and Kashmir, hilly and Northeastern States are under special category status. They get a higher share of central grants due to their disturbed status, difficult terrain or due to sharing border with Pakistan.

About Special Category Status:
- The concept of a special category state was first introduced in 1969 when the 5th Finance Commission sought to provide certain disadvantaged states with preferential treatment in the form of central assistance and tax breaks.
- Initially three states Assam, Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir were granted special status but since then eight more have been included (Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Sikkim, Tripura and Uttarakhand).

The rationale for special status is that certain states, because of inherent features, have a low resource base and cannot mobilize resources for development. Some of the features required for special status are:
- hilly and difficult terrain;
- low population density or sizeable share of tribal population;
- strategic location along borders with neighbouring countries;
- economic and infrastructural backwardness; and
- non-viable nature of state finances.
.
About PradhanMantriSwasthyaSurakshaYojana (PMSSY):
- It aims at correcting the imbalances in the availability of affordable healthcare facilities in the different parts of the country in general, and augmenting facilities for quality medical education in the under-served States in particular.

PMSSY has two components:
1. Setting up of AIIMS like Institutions
2. Upgradation of Government Medical College Institutions.

Need for Smart Urbanisation

Context:
India is witnessing some strange trends, Villagers across the nation are protesting against their inclusion in the nearby city's urban area by the local urban development authority. (The fruits of urban development are seemingly rejected). Pollution in India's urban areas seems to have sparked off a reverse migration.

Key facts:
- Over 34% of India's current population lives in urban areas, rising by 3% since 2011.
- Population of fringe urban areas (smaller clusters with 10-50 lakh population) have increased significantly compared to existing large urban agglomerations (those with a population above 50 lakh) since 2005.
- India's urban population could increase to 814 million by 2050.

Status of Urban Cities in India:
- Urban cities look and feel downtrodden, driven with poverty and poor infrastructure.
- Poor urban planning.
- With an increase in urban population will come rising demands for basic services such as clean water, public transportation, sewage treatment and housing.
- Over 90 'Smart Cities' have identified 2,864 projects which India lags on implementation.
- Only about 148 projects are completed and over 70% still at various stages of preparation.
- There is still an outstanding shortage of over 10 million affordable houses (despite the government taking encouraging steps to incentivise their construction).

Big Concerns:
1. **Flawed definition**
   - One primary problem is that of the definition of what's urban.
   - Urban development comes under State governments and the Governor notifies an area as urban (based on parameters such as population, density, revenue generated for the local administration and percentage employed in non-agricultural activities).
   - This notification leads to the creation of an urban local government or municipality, classifying the area as a "statutory town".

With such a vague definition, discretionary decisions yield a wide variance in what is considered a town.

The Central government considers a settlement as urban if –
- it has a urban local government,
- a minimum population of 5,000;
- over 75% of its (male) population working in non-agricultural activities; and
- a population density of at least 400 per sq. km.

However, many States consider such "census towns" as rural, and establish governance through a rural local government or panchayat.

2. **Poor infrastructure and investment**
   - Another issue is the low level of urban infrastructure investment and capacity building.
   - India spends about $17 per capita annually on urban infrastructure projects, against a global benchmark of $100 and China's $116.
   - Governments have come and gone, announcing a variety of schemes, the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission included, but implementation has been mostly inadequate, with exploration of financing options limited as well.
   - For example, Jaipur and Bengaluru collect only 5-20% of their potential property tax.
   - Urban institutions also suffer from a shortage of skilled people.

3. **No effective policies to deal with Urban Migration**
   - Finally, there needs to be a systemic policy to deal with urban migration.

- Internal migration in India is very closely linked to urban transitions, with such migration helping reduce poverty or prevent households from slipping into it.
- Urban migration is not viewed positively in India, with **policies often bluntly seeking to reduce rural to urban migration**.
- It would be better to have policies and programmes to **facilitate the integration of migrants** into the local urban fabric, and building city plans with a regular migration forecast assumed.
- Lowering the cost of migration, along with eliminating discrimination against migrants, while protecting their rights will help raise development across the board.

For examples, consider Delhi. While historically, urban policy sought to limit urban migration, this is now changing with a focus on revitalising cities nearby such as Meerut, building transport links and connectivity.

4. **Poor and unplanned transition**
- Our urban policymakers also need to be cognisant of the historical context of our urban development. Our cities have been witness to multiple transitions over the last century (especially during colonial era), with barely any time to recover and adapt.
- Transforming them into neatly organised urban spaces will not be easy.

Towards a new model:
Perhaps we need a different model of urbanisation. The **announcement of a new urbanisation policy** that seeks to rebuild Indian cities around clusters of human capital, instead of considering them simply as an agglomeration of land use, is a welcome transition.

We need to empower our cities, with a focus on land policy reforms, granting urban local bodies the freedom to raise financing and enforce local land usage norms. For an India to shine, the transformation of its cities is necessary.

NALSA Scheme: Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault/Other Crimes-2018

Context: It is scheme, proposed by the National Legal Services Authority, for compensating victims of sexual assault and acid attack.Supreme Court recently said that the scheme should be modified to "some extent" to make it applicable to child victims of such assaults.

About the scheme:
- As per NALSA's scheme, victim of gangrape in any part of the country would now get a minimum compensation of Rs 5 lakh and up to a maximum of Rs 10 lakh.
- Similarly, in case of rape and unnatural sexual assault, the victim would get a minimum of Rs 4 lakh and maximum of Rs 7 lakh as compensation.
- The scheme also says that victim of acid attacks, in case of disfigurement of face, would get a minimum compensation of Rs 7 lakh, while the upper limit would be Rs 8 lakh.
- In acid attack cases, if the injury was more than 50 per cent, a minimum compensation of Rs 5 lakh would be given, while the maximum would be Rs 8 lakh.

Additiona information:
- Nirbhaya Fund was announced by the Centre in 2013 after the December 16, 2012 gangrape and murder case in Delhi to support the initiatives on women's safety across the country.

Bharat Vatwani and SonamWangchuk gets 2018 Ramon Magsaysay Awards

Context: Two Indians **Bharat Vatwani** and **SonamWangchuk** are among six who have been declared winners of 2018 Ramon Magsaysay Award, often referred to as Asian version of the Nobel Prize.
Details:

- SonamWangchuk, a 51-year-old educational reformer from Ladakh, widely regarded as the inspiration for Aamir Khan's character, PhunsukWangdu in the film '3 Idiots,' is one of two Indians named for the 2018 Ramon Magsaysay Awards.
- The other is Bharat Vatwani, a psychiatrist who works for mentally ill street people in Mumbai.

About the award:

- It is Asia's highest honour and is often regarded as the region's equivalent of the Nobel Prize. It was established in 1957 by trustees of the New York City based Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Philippine government in the memory of Philippines' third President Ramon Magsaysay who had died in air disaster in March 1957.
- It is awarded annually to individuals or organizations from Asia region for their altruistic and philanthropic service.
- It carries Medallion bearing the likeness of the late President Ramon Magsaysay, cash prize and a certificate.

Astronomers confirm key theory of relativity

Context: A consortium of astronomers confirmed the prediction of Einstein's key theory of relativity. Einstein had posited that large gravitational forces could stretch light, much like the compression and stretching of sound waves we perceive with the change of pitch of a passing train.
About the theory of general relativity:
- In 1915, Albert Einstein presented his theory of general relativity, which proposed that gravity itself was the result of a warping of space-time by massive objects like stars and planets.
- Einstein's theory of relativity indicates that all objects fall the same way regardless of mass or composition.
- Einstein in his theory of general relativity predicted that a black hole can bend passing light.
- Astronomers' consortium said that black holes are so dense that their gravitational pull can trap even light.

Things predicted by General relativity include:
- As light gets closer to the sun, it bends towards the sun twice as much as classical physics (the system used before general relativity) predicts.
- The perihelion or the planet Mercury rotates along its orbit more than is expected under Newtonian physics. General relativity accounts for the difference between what is seen and what is expected without it.

- Redshift from gravity: When light moves away from an object with gravity (moving away from the center of the valley), it is stretched into longer wavelengths. This was confirmed by the Pound-Rebka experiment.
- The Shapiro delay: Light appears to slow down when it passes close to a massive object. This was first seen in the 1960s by space probes headed towards the planet Venus.
- Gravitational waves: They were first observed on 14 September 2015.

AISHE – All India Survey on Higher Education report 2017-18

Context: The Human Resource Development ministry has recently launched the Sixth All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) in New Delhi. The survey revealed the fact that the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) has shown significant improvement from 19.4% in 2010-11 to 23.6% in 2014-15. The ministry expresses confidence that the target of 30% GER by 2020 as envisaged in 12th Plan would be achieved.

Details:

- The total number of teachers in higher educational institutions in India has come down by about 2.34-lakh in the last three years.
- Widespread concern over the continuing vacancies in universities
- The reason could be that professors who are retiring are not being replaced, and fresh vacancies at all levels are not being filled up.
- Critics argue that – 2017-18 figure may have gone down because only teachers who provided their Aadhar numbers were been shown as teachers from this year onward.

Cause for concern

The total number of teachers in higher educational institutions in India – inclusive of all posts from professor to temporary teacher – stood at 12.84 lakh in 2017-18. The figure for 2016-17 was 13.65-lakh and that for 2015-16 was 15.18 lakh, signalling a fall of about 2.34 lakh within three years

Number of teachers in higher educational institutions in lakhs

Year	Professors	Associate Profs.	Assistant Profs.
2015-16	1.46	1.74	10.09
2016-17	1.25	1.47	9.45
2017-18	1.14	1.39	8.88

'ISRO-like' ocean mission planned

Context: Centre draws up a five-year, ₹8,000 croreplan to explore the deep recesses of the ocean. The Union Earth Sciences Ministry unveiled a blueprint of the **'Deep Ocean Mission (DOM)'.**The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean, similar to the space exploration started by ISRO about 35 years ago.
Proposed key deliverables to achieve these goals:
- Establish an offshore desalination plant that will work with tidal energy
- Developing a submersible vehicle that can go to a depth of at least 6,000 metres
- The focus will be on technologies for deep-sea mining, underwater vehicles, underwater robotics and ocean climate change advisory services, among other aspects.

Additional information:
- India has been allotted a site of 1,50,000 sq. km in the **Central Indian Ocean Basin (CIOB)** by the **UN International Sea Bed Authority** for exploitation of polymetallic nodules (PMN).
- These are rocks scattered on the seabed containing iron, manganese, nickel and cobalt.
- It is envisaged that 10% of recovery of that large reserve can meet the energy requirement of India for the next 100 years.
- It has been estimated that 380 million metric tonnes of polymetallic nodules are available at the bottom of the seas in the Central Indian Ocean
- India's Exclusive Economic Zone spreads over 2.2 million sq. km and in the deep sea, lies "unexplored and unutilised."

Rajiv Gauba panel to check cases of mob lynching

Context: mob **l**ynching is a premeditated extrajudicial killing by a group. It is most often used to characterize informal public executions by a mob in order to punish an alleged transgressor, or to intimidate a group.

Details:
- High-level committee headed by Rajiv Gauba, had been constituted to check cases of "mob lynching".
- The government said a Group of Ministers (GoM), headed by Union Home Minister will consider the report of the committee and submit its recommendations to Prime Minister.
- As per the Constitution, 'Police' and 'Public Order' are State subjects and State governments are responsible for controlling crime, maintaining law and order and protecting the life and property of the citizens.
- Supreme Court condemned the recent spate of lynchings as "horrendous acts of mobocracy" and told Parliament to make lynching a separate offence.