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Development of North East

1. North Eastern Council

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) for the nomination of the Union Home Minister as ex-officio Chairman of North Eastern Council (NEC) - a statutory body with Governors and Chief Ministers of all the eight North Eastern States as its Member.

The Cabinet also approved that Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of DoNER would serve as Vice Chairman of the Council.

Now, NEC is mandated to function as a Regional Planning Body for the North Eastern Region. NEC can now also perform the tasks undertaken by the various Zonal Councils to discuss such inter-State issues as drug trafficking, smuggling of arms and ammunition, boundary disputes etc.

2. Indian Science Congress

Prime Minister inaugurated 105th session of Indian Science Congress (ISC) at Manipur Central University in Imphal.

The focal theme of 5-day ISC is "Reaching the Unreached Through Science & Technology".

This is 2nd time the Science Congress is being held in the north east.

The annual ISC is organised by the Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA), a premier scientific organisation of India.

ISCA was started in the year 1914 at its headquarters in Kolkata.

The first meeting of the ISCC was held in January 1914 in the Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

3. India's first-ever "Air Dispensary" – Connectivity

Northeast is all set to get India's first-ever "Air Dispensary" based in a helicopter.

Union Ministry of Development of Northeast (DONER) has already contributed Rs. 25 crore as part of the initial funding for this initiative.

DoNER Ministry had been exploring the idea of introducing a helicopter based Dispensary/OPD service in far flung and remote areas, where no doctor or medical facility was available.

The proposal put forward by the Ministry has been accepted and is in the final stages of process in the Union Ministry of Civil Aviation.

4. Medicinal and Aromatic Plants – IMC

An Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAPs) has been set up for the North Eastern Region (NER).

This was decided after a meeting between Secretaries of DoNER and AYUSH.

The IMC is to create synergy in various programmes of the Union Government to enable medicinal and aromatic plants sector become vibrant and develop the resources to its potential.

The IMC will identify gaps in the existing mechanism or institutional arrangements, suggest a policy intervention for optimally harnessing the MAPs resources of NER and accelerating the development of MAPs sector, suggest a Plan of Action for dovetailing of the schemes and programmes of concerned Ministries and Departments.

The IMC will also suggest actionable measures for enhancing the livelihood and economic transformation based on cultivation and sustainable management of MAPs resource in North East Region.

5. NITI Forum for Northeast

The Union Government has issued order setting up the 'Niti Forum for North-East'.

The forum will be co-chaired by the Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Minister of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER).

The forum will have its Secretariat in the Ministry of DoNER.

The NITI Forum for Northeast is tasked to identify various constraints on the way of accelerated, inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the North East Region of the country and to recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints.

It will also review the development status in the NER.

The Forum may examine and address any other issues which are of importance but not specifically spelt out in its Terms of Reference.

6. Start-Ups to Northeast

Ministry of Development of Northeast will provide "Venture Fund" to any youngster who wishes to set up an entrepreneurship in the region.

This provision will be in addition to the provisions already available in "Start-up India, Stand-up India" programme, which includes provision of tax holiday as well as 3-month exit period.

7. 'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programmes

'Transformation of Aspirational Districts' programme aims to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts of the country.

The NITI Aayog launched the baseline ranking for the Aspirational Districts based on published data of 49 indicators across five developmental areas of Health and Nutrition, Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure. The CEO also announced that the 'Champions of Change' Dashboard for real-time data collection and monitoring.

The broad contours of the programme are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level 'Prabhari' Officers & District Collectors), and Competition among districts driven by a Mass Movement or a Jan Andolan. With States as the main drivers, this program will focus on the strength of each district, identify low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts.

The Aspirational Districts programme, through real-time monitoring and proactive course corrections, reinforces the mechanisms of cooperative & competitive federalism between the Centre and the States, down to the Districts.

8. North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme

The Government has approved a scheme named North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NESIDS) for development of North-Eastern region to be implemented by the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER).

It is a 100% Central Sector Scheme to be implemented till March 2020.

A sum of Rs.1600 crore has been allocated for funding physical infrastructure relating to connectivity, power, water supply enhancing tourism and social Infrastructure relating to education and health sectors in North Eastern States.

The projects related to the above mentioned sectors proposed by the State Governments in North East are being considered, in consultation with the respective line Ministries.

9. North East Road Sector Development Scheme

The Government has also approved schemes of North Eastern Council (NEC) and North East Road Sector Development Scheme (NERSDS) for 3 years i.e. 2017-18 to 2019-20.

NERSDS was launched for rehabilitation/up-gradation of important but neglected inter-State roads of the region to be implemented by National Highways Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL). The scheme was transferred to North Eastern Council in 2016.

10. 'Bamboo Mission'

The restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) has been launched in 2018 under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) for implementation with the objectives inter alia:

i) To increase the area under bamboo plantation in non forest Government and private lands to supplement farm income and contribute towards resilience to climate change as well as availability of quality raw material requirement of industries. The bamboo plantations will be promoted predominantly in farmers' fields, homesteads, community lands, arable wastelands, and along irrigation canals, water bodies etc.

- ii) To improve post-harvest management through establishment of innovative primary processing units near the source of production, primary treatment and seasoning plants, preservation technologies and market infrastructure.
- iii) To promote product development keeping in view market demand, by assisting R&D, entrepreneurship & business models at micro, small and medium levels and feed bigger industry.
- iv) To rejuvenate the under developed bamboo industry in India.
- v) To promote skill development, capacity building, awareness generation for development of bamboo sector from production to market demand.

11. Act East Policy and NER

Myanmar is one of the key pillars of India's "Act East" policy, since through the land borders it connects India via the North Eastern States with the South East Asian countries. A significant fact to note is that many North Eastern States share a common border with Myanmar.

To "Act East" effectively beyond the eastern borders, it is essential to first act east effectively proximal to the borders by promoting the potential of the region on this side of the border, for example, Myanmar is not only geographically a proximate country with strong historical and economic linkages, but, in addition, the people on two sides of the border share common lifestyle, common food habits and common cultural traits.

Therefore, any meaningful trade or business engagement with Myanmar can be done primarily through the products and goods inherent to the North Eastern States bordering this country.

12. Assam Floods

Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER) has, on its own initiative, helped in setting up "Brahmaputra Study Centre" at Gauhati University, Assam. The Centre has also started functioning and the first major research study deals with the ways and means to control and prevent the occurrence of floods.

A number of options have been suggested in the past for prevention of flood-like situation. These include embankments along river Brahmaputra, dredging for de-siltation in large rivers, construction of a high gravity concrete Dam, etc.

13. Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region

Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has launched a Central Sector Scheme named "Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region" (MOVCDNER) for

implementation in the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura during 2015-16 to 2017-18.

The scheme aims at development of certified organic production in a value chain mode to link growers with consumers and to 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.

14. Mizoram Chakma Autonomous Council

Under Border Area Development Programme (BADP), the Chakma Council demands that it should be involved in the planning and implementation of various schemes under BADP of the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Chakma Autonomous Development Council is situated on the International Border with Bangladesh in the West and Myanmar in the South, which makes it strategically important area, calling for special attention.

The Chakma Autonomous District Council is an autonomous council for ethnic Chakma people, formed under the sixth schedule to the Constitution of India on April 29, 1972. The Council exercises legislative, executive and judiciary powers over allotted departments within the territory of CADC.

The Chakmas and Hajongs are ethnic people who lived in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, most of which are located in Bangladesh.

Chakmas are predominantly Buddhists, while Hajongs are Hindus. They are found in northeast India, West Bengal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

Chakmas citizenship issue

In 2015, the Supreme Court directed the Centre to grant citizenship to Chakma and Hajongs who had migrated from Bangladesh in 1964-69. The order was passed while hearing a plea by the Committee for Citizenship Rights of the Chakmas. Following this, the Centre introduced amendments to the Citizenship Act, 1955. The Bill is yet to be passed, as the opposition says the Bill makes illegal migrants eligible for citizenship on the basis of religion, which is a violation of Article 14 of the Constitution.

The Union government is keen in implementing the Supreme Court directive now since the BJP is the ruling party in both the Centre and Arunachal Pradesh.

The Union Home Ministry on Wednesday cleared the citizenship for over one lakh Chakma-Hajongs. However, they will not have any land ownership rights in Arunachal Pradesh and will have to apply for Inner Line Permits to reside in the State.

15. Garo Hills

A delegation from Garo Hills representing various tribal organizations from Meghalaya called on the Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and discussed issues concerning them.

They also presented a memorandum listing their demands. The organizations represented in the delegation included the Hajongs, Rabhas, Koches, Boro-Kacharies and Manns tribes.

The main demand taken up by the delegation pertained to the reservation of 10 seats for these tribes in Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), Tura, Meghalaya and nomination of some members to the Council.

The other main demands put forward included job reservation in the GHADC for other tribes and implementation of para 1 (2) of the 6th Schedule for creation of an "Autonomous District Council" for indigenous tribes like Hajongs, Rabhas, Koches, Boro-Kacharies and Manns.

16. Gorkha Movement

The Gorkhaland movement is a long-standing quest for a separate State of Gorkhaland within India for Nepali-speaking Indian citizens (often known as 'Gorkhas').

With roots dating back over a century, Gorkhaland is a classic subnationalist movement, not unlike those that have produced other States, most recently Telangana, Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh.

Beyond all else, Gorkhaland is a desire for the recognition, respect, and integration of Gorkha peoples in the Indian nation-state.

Contra popular misunderstanding, the movement is neither separatist nor anti-nationalist; it is about inclusion and belonging in India.

Gorkha National Liberation Front was founded by Subash Ghisingh.

In many ways, the Gorkhas of Darjeeling have yet to taste the liberation of India's Independence.

The local economy illustrates the continuities between the colonial and postcolonial eras: Gorkhas remain pegged to the lowest levels of employment, while outsiders own the tea industry, meaning its profits flow out of the hills.

Causes

For Gorkhas, the troubling realities of colonial and present-day Darjeeling are eerily similar: linguistic chauvinism, ethnic and racial discrimination, resource extraction, unilateral

territorial claims, the denial of self-governance, political suppression; and ultimately, an unwillingness to respect the 'native point of view'.

This double bind of colonial nostalgia and neo-colonial regional domination produces a sense of constant *déjà vu*, leading to the desperate feeling that genuine progress is out of reach.

Reasons for resurgence

Since 1947, the Darjeeling-Kalimpong region has remained under the thumb of West Bengal, despite no substantive pre-Partition evidence to support West Bengal's territorial claims to this region.

Conciliatory set-ups like the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council (1988-2012) and the GTA (2012-present) have failed to provide meaningful autonomy.

These problems don't emanate solely from the hands of Bengalis, yet much of the marginalisation coalesces under the shadow of West Bengal's domination.

Instances like the attempted imposition of compulsory Bengali are not read as one-off events or mere slights in Darjeeling.

They are seen as extensions of precisely the histories of domination that the Gorkhas are trying to escape.

West Bengal's recent creation of the Kalimpong district (2017) and the State's doling out of Tribal Development Boards to ethnicities within the Gorkha conglomerate (Tamang, Sherpa, etc.) might appear well-intended gestures but in paving the way for the electoral gains, they appear to many as clear examples of 'divide and rule' — causing splits in the Gorkha electorate and undermining the already-limited authority of the GTA.

Indeed, the GJM's instigation of the current agitation was at least partly in response to TMC encroachment.

GTA elections were imminent, but the GJM's popularity was waning in the face of considerable rewards flowing from West Bengal's coffers.

By summoning thousands to the streets, the GJM demonstrated its ability to evoke the emotional force of Gorkhaland. But then violence took hold, and the Gorkhaland movement once again became something else — something bigger than any one party.

17. Sikkim's first-ever airport

The airport, which is located at Pakyong, is a Greenfield airport which will circumvent the need for a five-hour journey through mountainous roads and bring citizens of Sikkim closer to the state capital.

SpiceJet will operate 78-seater Bombardier Q400 flights to and fro Delhi, Kolkata and Guwahati every day under the Civil Aviation Ministry's Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) scheme.

The airport is spread over 201 acres and is located on top of a hill about two km above Pakyong village, 4,500 feet above sea level. The airport was constructed by the Airports Authority of India. Earlier, the nearest airport from Sikkim was located 124 km away at Bagdogra in West Bengal.

The Indian Air Force (IAF) will also find this airport convenient for landing and taking off. The IAF would be able to land various types of aircraft on the airport's runway with the construction of another 75-metre stretch adjacent to the main runway in the coming days.

The Sikkim Police has been entrusted with the security of the Pakyong airport.

18. Hill Area Development Programme for NER

MoDONER has launched Hill Area Development Programme (HADP) for Northeast. The Programme is aimed at giving a focused attention to the lesser developed hilly areas and will be initiated on a pilot basis in the hilly districts of Manipur.

the hilly areas of Manipur, Tripura and Assam have a distinct geo-physical entity and are lagging in socio-economic development. As a result of peculiar topography, he said, there is a wide gap between the hill and valley districts in terms of infrastructure, quality of roads, health and education etc.

19. North East India: Organic Production Hub

Conference titled “North East India: Organic Production Hub; Opportunities Unexplored” was organized during the prestigious World Food India 2017, in November in New Delhi. NE region has about 50 species of bamboo, about 14 varieties of banana and 17 varieties of citrus fruits. The NE region also has huge production of fruits such as pineapple and oranges. There are 3 Mega Food Parks in North East, in the states of Assam, Tripura and Mizoram. The state of Sikkim has been declared the first Organic State of India.

20. “Toka Paisa” e-wallet

“Toka Paisa” e-wallet was launched for initiative towards cashless economy. It was launched on the occasion of Digidhan Mela inauguration for northeast.

Polity and Governance

1. Sabarimala Temple Entry (Indian Young Lawyers Association Vs State of Kerala)

A five-judge Constitutional bench has ruled in favour of allowing women of all ages to enter Kerala's most famous Sabarimala temple.

CJI said devotion cannot be subjected to discrimination. "Patriarchal rules have to change. Patriarchy in religion cannot be allowed to trump right to pray and practise religion"

Justice Nariman: "To exclude women of the age group 10-50 from the temple is to deny dignity to women. To treat women as children of lesser god is to blink at the Constitution"

Justice Chandrachud: "Religion cannot be used as cover to deny rights of worship to women and it is also against human dignity." "Prohibition on women is due to non-religious reasons and it is a grim shadow of discrimination going on for centuries."

All judges ruled that devotees of Lord Ayyappa do not constitute a separate religious denomination.

Justice Indu Malhotra, who wrote the dissenting judgment in the Sabarimala case, said that the notions of rationality cannot be brought into matters of religion. She added that the shrine and deity are protected under Article 25 of the Constitution and that it was not upto the court to decide which religious practices should be struck down, except in issues of social evil like 'Sati'.

2. Adultery – Sec 497 (Joseph Shine Vs UoI)

Section 497 is based on the Doctrine of Coverture. This doctrine, not recognised by the Constitution, holds that a woman loses her identity and legal right with marriage, is violative of her fundamental rights.

A five-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India declared that adultery no longer be considered an offence, and remain only a ground for divorce.

They have removed provisions related to adultery in the Indian Penal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

SC observed that Section 497 of the IPC unconstitutional violated Articles 14 (right to equality); 15(1) (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth); and, 21 (protection of life and personal liberty).

According to Section 497 of the IPC, which now stands struck down, a man had the right to initiate criminal proceedings against his wife's lover. In treating women as their husband's property, as individuals bereft of agency, the law was blatantly gender-discriminatory; aptly, the Court also struck down Section 198(2) of the CrPC under which the husband alone could complain against adultery.

Till now, only an adulterous woman's husband could prosecute her lover, though she could not be punished; an adulterous man's wife had no such right. In a further comment on her lack of sexual freedom and her commodification under the 158-year-old law, her affair with another would not amount to adultery if it had the consent of her husband.

But the challenge before the court was not to equalise the right to file a criminal complaint, by allowing a woman to act against her husband's lover.

It was, instead, to give the IPC and the CrPC a good dusting, to rid it of Victorian-era morality.

It is only in a progressive legal landscape that individual rights flourish — and with the decriminalisation of adultery India has taken another step towards rights-based social relations, instead of a state-imposed moral order.

3. LGBTQ Rights - Sec 377: Naz Foundation Vs UoI

2001: Naz Foundation files petition

Naz Foundation, an NGO that work on HIV/AIDS and sexual health issues, files a petition in the Delhi high court against Section 377.

2009: Delhi High Court on Section 377

In 2009, the Delhi High Court described Section 377 as a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution. Religious groups, however, had appealed against the decision in the Supreme Court.

2013: Supreme Court Re-criminalises Gay Sex

That Delhi High Court judgement was overturned by the Supreme Court in December 2013. It said that amending or repealing Section 377 should be a matter left to Parliament, not the judiciary.

2016: Curative petition by Naz Foundation, activists heard

In February 2016, the three-member bench headed by then the Chief Justice of India TS Thakur said that all the curative plea of NGO Naz Foundation and some gay rights activists will be reviewed afresh by a five-member constitutional bench.

2017: Supreme Court Upholds Right to Privacy

In August 2017, the Supreme Court held Right to Privacy as a fundamental right. Sexual orientation, the court said, is an "essential component of identity" and the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population are "real rights founded on sound constitutional doctrine".

2018: Supreme Court Hears Petitions on Section 377

In July, the Supreme Court reconsiders its 2013 decision and begins hearing petitions challenging Section 377.

The court has overruled Koushal and upheld homosexuals' right to have intimate relations with people of their choice, their inherent right to privacy and dignity and the freedom to

live without fear. The outcome was not unexpected. When the courts considered Section 377 earlier, the litigation was initiated by voluntary organisations.

In particular, SC invoked the Doctrine of Non-Retrogression, which means that once a right is recognised, it cannot be reversed.

4. Data protection – Srikrishna Committee

Justice BN Srikrishna committee has submitted its report on data protection titled, “A Free and Fair Digital Economy – Protecting Privacy, Empowering Indians” to Ministry of IT.

- Restrictions on Processing and Collection of Personal Data
- Processing of Personal Data for “Functions of the State”
- Right to be Forgotten
- Data Localisation
- Processing of Sensitive Personal Data to Require Explicit Consent
- Data Protection Authority
- Aadhaar Act Amendments - ensure autonomy of the UIDAI
- RTI Act Amendments

5. Aadhaar Verdict (K.S Puttaswamy Vs UoI)

Retired High Court judge K.S. Puttaswamy, the original petitioner whose plea on Aadhaar led to the setting up of the Constitution bench in the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court's constitution bench upheld the constitutional validity of Aadhaar but restricted the government's push to make it mandatory for services.

Supreme Court verdict on Aadhaar biometric system has struck a balance between the need for a foundational identity and measures to limit its use, but stressed that the government now urgently needs to pass a legislation on data sharing and privacy.

The Aadhaar project was launched by the previous UPA government, primarily to plug loopholes in delivering benefits of social welfare schemes to intended beneficiaries. The current NDA government expanded the ambit of the biometric project.

- Aadhaar is compulsory to avail government subsidies
- Aadhaar is compulsory for PAN and income tax purposes
- Mobile and bank account linking is unconstitutional
- Time limits on storing authentication records: Authentication records may only be stored for a period of six months. The court found unconstitutional the part of the Aadhaar Act that allowed the storage of records for up to five years.
- Aadhaar for children: The court held that parental consent/guardian consent was mandatory to enrol children under the Aadhaar Act.

- Section 33 (1), which allowed the disclosure of Aadhaar information on the orders of a District Judge. This cannot be done now without giving the person concerned an opportunity to be heard.
- Section 33(2) that allows UIDAI to share data with specially authorised officers in the interest of national security, was also struck down.
- Section 47, which allows only the UIDAI to file criminal complaints of Aadhaar data breach was struck down.
- Section 57 of the Aadhaar Act, which allows private entities to use Aadhaar for verification purposes was struck down.

6. Art 370 - Jammu and Kashmir

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution is a 'temporary provision' which grants special autonomous status to Jammu & Kashmir. Under Part XXI of the Constitution of India, which deals with "Temporary, Transitional and Special provisions", the state of Jammu & Kashmir has been accorded special status under Article 370. All the provisions of the Constitution which are applicable to other states are not applicable to J&K.

For example, till 1965, J&K had a Sadr-e-Riyasat for Governor and Prime Minister in place of Chief Minister.

The provision was drafted in 1947 by Sheikh Abdullah, who had by then been appointed prime minister of Jammu & Kashmir by Maharaja Hari Singh and Jawahar Lal Nehru. Sheikh Abdullah had argued that Article 370 should not be placed under temporary provisions of the Constitution. He wanted 'iron clad autonomy' for the state, which Centre didn't comply with.

According to this article, except for defence, foreign affairs, finance and communications, Parliament needs the state government's concurrence for applying all other laws.

Thus the state's residents live under a separate set of laws, including those related to citizenship, ownership of property, and fundamental rights, as compared to other Indians.

As a result of this provision, Indian citizens from other states cannot purchase land or property in Jammu & Kashmir.

Under Article 370, the Centre has no power to declare financial emergency under Article 360 in the state.

It can declare emergency in the state only in case of war or external aggression.

The Union government can therefore not declare emergency on grounds of internal disturbance or imminent danger unless it is made at the request or with the concurrence of the state government.

7. National Registry for Citizen

The final draft of the National Register of Citizenship (NRC) was released. The panel rejected the claim of 40 lakh applicants.

The NRC has details including names, addresses and photographs of all Indian citizens, as identified by the Supreme Court mandated panel. The cut-off date for the citizenship claim March 24, 1971.

Assam is the only state in the country that has an NRC. The first NRC was prepared in 1951 following the first wave of immigrants from the then East Pakistan.

The NRC was prepared under the purview of the Foreigners Act of 1946. The NRC of 1951 was challenged in the Guwahati High Court, which in 1970 ruled that it was not admissible as evidence of citizenship.

Prafulla Mahanta of All Assam Students Union (AASU) stormed to power highlighting the issue. Assam Accord was signed between the Centre and the AASU in 1985 that promised identification and deportation of illegal immigrants.

Finally, in 2005, the Manmohan Singh government announced that the NRC would be updated. Over the next ten years, the Congress government of Assam under Tarun Gogoi practically sat over the matter.

Meanwhile, ethnic clashes broke out between Bodos and Bengali Muslims in Bodoland Territorial Area Districts in 2012.

In 2015, the Supreme Court directed the government to update the NRC in a time-bound manner under the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules 2003.

8. Uniform Civil Code

Article 44 of the Directive Principles in the Constitution says the “State shall endeavour to provide for its citizens a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) throughout the territory of India.” The objective of this endeavour should be to address the discrimination against vulnerable groups and harmonise diverse cultural practices.

The debate on the UCC is centred on the argument to replace individual personal customs and practices of marriage, divorce, adoption and successions with a common code.

Codification of various practices and customs would make them ‘law’ under Article 13 of the Constitution. Any ‘law’ that comes under Article 13 should be consistent with the fundamental rights.

9. Electoral Reforms

Some proposed reforms in the debate are

- Term of tenure for Legislators
- Retirement age for Legislators
- Strengthening NOTA
- Simultaneous Elections
- Decriminalisation of politics
- Issue of Paid news and Fake news

10. Criminalisation of politics

Criminalization of Politics means that the criminals entering the politics and contesting elections and even getting elected to the Parliament and state legislature.

It takes place primarily because of the nexus between the criminals and some of the politicians.

Criminalisation of politics was never an unknown phenomenon in the Indian political system, but its presence was seemingly felt in its strongest form during the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts which was the result of a collaboration of a diffused network of criminal gangs, police and customs officials and their political patrons

The report of the NN Vohra Committee, 1993 set up to study the problem of criminalisation of politics, had referred to several observations made by official agencies, including the CBI, IB and RAW, which unanimously expressed the opinion that criminal network was virtually running a parallel government.

11. Simultaneous elections

Merits

- Reducing governance gap
- Reducing cost of elections
- Effective Model Code of Conduct
- Five years of stable government at all levels
- Curb corruption
- Control of muscle power

Demerits

- Burden on election machinery
- Distorted priorities of elections
- Anti-incumbency neutralised
- Against federalism
- Penalises States
- Security issue
- Length of the election

12. AFSPA, Inner Line Permit

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) is revoked from Meghalaya.

AFSPA gives armed forces the power to maintain public order in “disturbed areas”. They have the authority to prohibit a gathering of five or more persons in an area, can use force or even open fire after giving due warning if they feel a person is in contravention of the

law. If reasonable suspicion exists, the army can also arrest a person without a warrant; enter or search a premises without a warrant; and ban the possession of firearms.

Any person arrested or taken into custody may be handed over to the officer in charge of the nearest police station along with a report detailing the circumstances that led to the arrest.

A disturbed area is one which is declared by notification under Section 3 of the AFSPA. An area can be disturbed due to differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities. The Central Government, or the Governor of the State or administrator of the Union Territory can declare the whole or part of the State or Union Territory as a disturbed area. A suitable notification would have to be made in the Official Gazette. As per Section 3, it can be invoked in places where “the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary”.

The Ministry of Home Affairs would usually enforce this Act where necessary, but there have been exceptions where the Centre decided to forego its power and leave the decision to the State governments.

It is effective in the whole of Nagaland, Assam, Manipur (excluding seven assembly constituencies of Imphal) and parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Centre revoked it in Meghalaya on April 1, 2018. Earlier, the AFSPA was effective in a 20 km area along the Assam-Meghalaya border. In Arunachal Pradesh, the impact of AFSPA was reduced to eight police stations instead of 16 police stations and in Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts bordering Assam.

Tripura withdrew the AFSPA in 2015. Jammu and Kashmir too has a similar Act.

13. CJI and position

CJI also heads their administrative functions. As head of the Supreme Court, the chief justice is responsible for the allocation of cases and appointment of constitutional benches which deal with important matters of law.

The CJI in his capacity as judge is *primus inter pares*, first among equals. In discharge of his other functions, CJI occupies position which is *sui generis*, in class by itself. Article 146 reaffirms position CJI as head of institution.

From institutional perspective, CJI is placed at helm of SC. In the allocation of cases and constitution of benches, CJI has exclusive prerogative. CJI is institution in himself as he is repository of constitutional trust.

The authority which is conferred upon CJI is vested in high constitutional functionary necessary for efficient transaction of administrative and judicial work of SC.

The ultimate purpose behind entrustment of authority to CJI is to ensure that SC is able to full and discharge constitutional obligations which govern and provide rationale for its existence.

14. Citizenship Bill

The tenure of the Joint Parliamentary Committee examining the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016 has been extended till the last week of the winter session of Parliament, when it is expected to submit its report.

The Bill proposes citizenship to six persecuted minorities — Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Parsis, Christians and Buddhists — who came to India from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh before December 31, 2014.

There is stiff opposition to the Bill in Assam as it also seeks to grant citizenship to Hindus from Bangladesh.

Through an executive order in 2015, the Home Ministry relaxed the provisions for persecuted religious minorities from the three neighbouring countries in respect of their entry and stay in India without proper documents or after their expiry. There has been no exact numbers of such minority refugees but officials estimate that around two lakh Hindu and Sikh refugees from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan are living in India. There are 400 Pakistani Hindu refugee settlements in cities such as Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jaipur.

15. SC/ST quota in promotion

The apex court turned down the Centre's plea that overall population of SC/ST be considered for granting quota for them.

The unanimous judgement was pronounced by a five-judge constitution bench.

The bench said that the States need not collect quantifiable data on backwardness of SC/ST for giving quota in job promotion to SC/ST employees.

The bench did not comment on two other conditions given in the 2006 verdict which dealt with adequacy of representation of SC/ST in promotion and not to disturb administrative efficiency.

A five-judge constitution bench, in its 2006 verdict in the M Nagaraj case, had said the states are bound to provide quantifiable data on the backwardness of Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), the facts about their inadequate representation in government jobs and the overall administrative efficiency, before providing quota in promotions to members of these communities.

The Centre and various state governments have also sought reconsideration of this verdict on various grounds, including that the members of the SC and ST communities are presumed to be backward and considering their stigma of caste, they should be given reservation even in job promotions.

The Centre has alleged that the verdict in the M Nagraj case had put unnecessary conditions in granting quota benefits to the SC and ST employees and sought its reconsideration by a larger bench.

Attorney General appearing for the Centre, had strongly argued in favour of granting quota to SC and ST employees, saying there was a presumption of backwardness in their favour.

SC and ST communities have been facing caste-based discrimination for long and the stigma of caste is attached to them despite the fact that some of them have come up.

Article 16(4)(a) which deals with reservation and enables the state to make provision for reservation in promotions for SC/STs, was a call to affirmative action.

16. Fake news and Paid news

Fake news is a type of yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate disinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional print and broadcast news media or online social media.

The rise of digital and social media as powerful platforms has only magnified the effect of fake and false news.

Both Google and Facebook, as the largest platforms for content distribution, are said to be creating systems that will filter fake news.

The lack of uniform guidelines, regulation and policy regarding such fabricated content needs to be addressed urgently.

Paid news is a phenomenon in Indian media that refers to the systematic engagement of mainstream media outlets in publishing favorable articles in exchange for payment.

17. Social Media

Social media are interactive computer-mediated technologies that facilitate the creation and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.

Types

- Social networking (Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+).
- Microblogging (Twitter, Tumblr).
- Photo sharing (Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest).
- Video sharing (YouTube, Facebook Live, Periscope, Vimeo).

18. Triple Talaq: Judgement and Ordinance

Supreme Court of India has declared the practice of Triple Talaq as unconstitutional. In view of the position expressed above, SC exercised its discretion to issue appropriate directions under Article 142 of the Constitution. The Court therefore hereby direct, the Union of India to consider appropriate legislation, particularly with reference to 'talaq-e-biddat'.

President promulgated Ordinance in that regard in 2018. The triple talaq or instant divorce law, officially called Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill 2017, dilutes three contentious provisions.

As per the ordinance, "triple talaq" -- the practice of Muslim men uttering "talaq" thrice to get a divorce -- will be punishable with a jail term of up to three years and a fine. The woman will be entitled to maintenance.

- A complaint can be filed only by the woman or her family.
- A woman can drop charges if her husband is open to a compromise.
- The crime remains non-bailable, as a deterrent, the government says. But while the police can't grant bail, a judge can - after hearing the woman.

The proposed law also addresses "nikah halala", which requires the divorced woman to marry someone else and consummate the marriage if she wants to remarry her husband.

19. River dispute

The Inter-State River Water Disputes are one of the most contiguous issues in the Indian federalism. The recent cases of the Cauvery Water Dispute and the Satluj Yamuna Link Canal case are examples.

Water is a State subject as per entry 17 of State List and thus states are empowered to enact legislation on water.

Entry 17 of State List deals with water i.e. water supply, irrigation, canal, drainage, embankments, water storage and water power.

Entry 56 of Union List gives power to the Union Government for the regulation and development of interstate rivers and river valleys to the extent declared by Parliament to be expedient in the public interest.

Art 262: Parliament may by law provide for the adjudication of any dispute or complaint with respect to the use, distribution or control of the waters of, or in, any inter-State river or river valley.

Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, Parliament may, by law provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute or complaint.

River Board Act, 1956

The purpose of this Act was to enable the Union Government to create Boards for Interstate Rivers and river valleys in consultation with State Governments. The objective of Boards is to advise on the inter-state basin to prepare development scheme and to prevent the emergence of conflicts.

20. Rohingya crisis

Rohingya refugee crisis refers to the mass migration of people from Myanmar in 2015. The Rohingya people are a Muslim minority group residing in the western state of Rakhine, Myanmar, formerly known as Arakan. Nearly all who fled travelled to Southeast Asian countries including Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand by rickety boats via the waters of the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea.

India refused to let them enter their country because it posed national security threats. However, it was found that around 40,000 Rohingya's immigrants have taken shelter in Assam, West Bengal and Jammu & Kashmir. The presence of Rohingya Muslims in Jammu is thus considered as a sensitive issue for Indian security. The Indian security establishments opined that "Some Rohingyas sympathizing with many militant group's ideologies may be active in Jammu, Delhi, Hyderabad, and Mewat and can be a potential threat to internal security."

21. Nagaland Accord

The Nagas broadly refer to a cluster of tribes that live in Nagaland and a few other northeastern states. The Naga identity only began to take shape after the advent of British occupation of the Naga Hills district in 1881. The origins of these tribes are still under dispute in the absence of early documentation and due to a variety of oral histories that contradict each other.

Officially, the state recognises 16 tribes as Nagas. However, the idea of 'Greater Nagalim', the Naga-inhabiting areas — takes into account more than 30 tribes and spread across Nagaland, Manipur, parts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh besides some areas in Myanmar. Angami Zapu Phizo, regarded as the father of the Naga separatist movement, set up the first civil society groups and was instrumental in drawing up a 'constitution' for the Naga government and the guerilla army by 1956. After a ceasefire agreement in 1964 for a peace mission undertaken by the Indian side, Thinoselie Keyho and Thuingaleng Muivah made a trek to the Chinese border.

Indian government had exploited the situation and an agreement was eventually signed in what is known as the Shillong Accord in 1975.

After purging the old leaders for betraying the cause, Isak Chishi, who served as the foreign secretary of the Nagaland government, and Muivah broke away and founded what came to be known as NSCN(I-M).

There are at least three factions of NSCN today, out of which only the I-M faction has been in a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India since 1997.

In 2015, it signed the historic 'Framework Agreement' for the Naga Peace Accord with the Central government, to bring a final solution to the Naga issue. This issue is not so much

about independence anymore but shared sovereignty with a separate constitution for the Nagas, who already enjoy a special status of Article 371A in the Indian Constitution.

22. Bru Tribe Issue

The communal tension between the Bru and the majority Mizo community, which triggered the exodus in 1996, has been long drawn, leading to the birth of the armed group Bru National Liberation Front (BNLF), and the political wing Bru National Union (BNU), which demanded an autonomous district akin to the Chakmas in the state.

The battle lines were firmly drawn in 1995 when the powerful Young Mizo Association and Mizo Students Association opposed the presence of Brus in the state's electoral rolls claiming that they are not indigenous to the state.

Things took an ugly turn on October 21, 1996, when the BNLF shot dead a Mizo official, triggering communal riots in which many Bru villages were burnt down, pushing them to flee to neighbouring North Tripura.

Though a set of refugees comprising 1,622 Bru families with 8,573 members were resettled in Mizoram in 2010 with the Centre allocating Rs 68.90 crore to the state government for the purpose, it has not been able to complete the repatriation process due to massive opposition by Mizo organisations and fresh demands from the Mizoram Bru Displaced People's Forum (MBDPF), the community's representative outfit. Many have also expressed fear of being attacked again if they return home.

The fresh round of talks that led to the July 4 agreement of the Central and state government with MBDPF has come after three years of negotiations, including a lingering process of the Mizoram government identifying them as its residents based on the 1996 electoral rolls. Though MBDPF had demanded more political rights from the Centre as a condition for repatriation, the Centre didn't agree to it and even threatened to dry up the financial allocation given to the Tripura government for their relief.

As per the July 4 repatriation pact, the Bru or Reang refugees comprising 5,407 families would be settled back in their villages in Kolasib and Mamit districts of the state.

23. Good Samaritan Law

Good Samaritan laws offer legal protection to people who give reasonable assistance to those who are, or who they believe to be, injured, ill, in peril, or otherwise incapacitated.

President of India has given his assent to the Karnataka Good Samaritan and Medical Professional (Protection and Regulation during Emergency Situations) Bill, 2016.

The President gave assent last week. The legislation aims to give protection to Good Samaritans, ensure immediate medical assistance for road accident victims within the

'golden hour', and encourage people to offer first aid to victims without the fear of legal wrangles.

In medical terms, the 'golden hour' is the first hour after a traumatic injury when emergency treatment is very crucial. Karnataka is one of the top States that recorded deaths in road accidents. Legislative Assembly Speaker K.R. Ramesh Kumar, who was Health and Family Welfare Minister, piloted the Bill. Under the new law, the government will provide financial help to Good Samaritans who help victims. They will be exempted from repeated attendance in courts and police stations, and in case attendance is mandatory, expenses of such "running around to courts and police stations" will be taken care through the proposed Good Samaritan Fund.

24. HIV/AIDS Act, 2017

India has the third-largest HIV-infected population, with an estimated 2 million people. The Human Immunodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017, came into force in September 2018.

It aims to prevent and control the spread of HIV and AIDS in the country and provides for penalties for discrimination against those affected by the virus.

The Act prohibits discrimination or unfair treatment of HIV-infected people on any grounds. It prohibits denial or discontinuation of healthcare services, right of movement, right to reside, purchase, rent or occupy property and hold public or private office etc.

It prohibits isolation or segregation of an HIV-positive person. Every HIV-positive person has the right to reside in a shared household and use facilities in a non-discriminatory manner.

Under the law, no HIV-affected person can be subject to medical treatment, medical interventions or research without informed consent. Further, no HIV positive woman, who is pregnant, can be subjected to sterilisation or abortion without her consent.

No person is compelled to disclose his HIV status except by an order of the court. A breach of violation attracts a jail sentence of up to two years or a fine of up to Rs 1 lakh, or both.

Every establishment is obligated to keep HIV-related information protected. Every HIV-positive person is compelled to take reasonable precautions to prevent the transmission of HIV to other persons.

The state and Centre must make diagnostic facilities, anti-retroviral therapy and opportunistic infection management available to all HIV-infected people, and ensure wide dissemination of the same.

Every state has to appoint one or more Ombudsmen to inquire into violations of the provisions of the Act. Within 30 days of receiving a complaint, the Ombudsman is required to pass an order as he deems fit. Failing to comply with the orders of the Ombudsman attracts a penalty of up to Rs 10,000.

25. Lateral Entry in bureaucracy

The Central Government had invited applications for appointments to 10 joint secretary-level posts from “outstanding individuals”, including from the private sector, with expertise in the areas of revenue, financial services, economic affairs, agriculture, cooperation and farmers’ welfare, road transport and highways, shipping, environment, forests and climate change, new and renewable energy, civil aviation, and commerce.

Now, with the introduction of lateral entry to a JS position for a fixed period of three years, several mid- and senior-level serving and retired bureaucrats said these measures, unless implemented with complete transparency, will increase the uncertainty in the system and demoralise civil servants.

In 2015, the NDA government introduced the 360-degree evaluation of senior officers due for promotion as additional secretary and secretary – this required feedback from not only their superiors but peers and juniors.

Government-appointed committees have recommended civil service reforms. The Surinder Nath committee on Performance Appraisal, Promotion, Empanelment and Placement for the All India Services and other Group ‘A’ Services had way back in 2003 recommended a 360-degree assessment to evaluate the reputation of civil servants who are due for promotion among their peers and subordinates.

Economy

1. Demonetisation

There seem to be three objectives behind the Centre’s move to demonetise ₹1,000 and ₹500 currency notes, reminiscent of the Morarji Desai government’s initiative in 1978: stopping the counterfeiting of these notes, allegedly being instigated by Pakistan to support terror activities here; mopping up black money; and nudging a shift towards cashless transactions.

This demonetisation, however, differs sharply from the earlier one; the withdrawal of high-denomination notes in 1978 affected only a very small segment of the population, whereas this time, great swathes of the working class and the poor too have been impacted.

2. NPA

A non-performing asset (NPA) is referred to a loan amount for which the principal/ interest payment remained overdue for a time span of 90 days. But in case, a borrower fails to repay the loan (interest/principal/both) that loan becomes an NPA for the bank.

Banks classify NPAs into three categories, which are Substandard assets, Doubtful assets and Loss assets.

Substandard assets are the ones which remained NPA for 12 months or less than that. If the asset crosses the 12-month time frame, it comes under the category of doubtful asset. And the loss assets are the ones that had become of less value with the minimum recovery rate. Only two banks, Indian Bank and Vijaya Bank, posted profits during 2017-18. Indian Bank posted the highest profit of Rs 1,258.99 crore and Vijaya Bank's profit was Rs 727.02 crore in the fiscal.

There are 21 state-owned banks, including State Bank of India and their combined losses crossed a whopping Rs 87,300 crore in 2017-18 fiscal, topped by scam-tainted Punjab National Bank which took a hit of nearly Rs 12,283 crore.

3. Trade war

This refers to an economic situation where countries raise protectionist barriers against each other to protect local industries from foreign competition and also to promote exports over imports. It may take the form of imposing tariffs and quotas on foreign trade as well as currency manipulation to favour local industries.

The decades between the two World Wars is often noted as a period when major world economies were engaged in a trade war by devaluing their currencies in a competitive fashion. It was carried out under the belief that a cheaper currency would encourage more demand for a country's exports, thus boosting the domestic economy.

Donald Trump's 25 per cent tariffs on \$34bn worth of Chinese imports have come into effect. These include jet engines, robotics, cars and machinery.

China has accused the US president of launching the "largest trade war in economic history" and has retaliated by imposing levies on imports from America of a similar value. China has slapped import levies on US-grown soybeans, medical equipment and crude oil.

4. Rafale Issue

Rafales are twin-engine Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) manufactured by Dassault Aviation, a French firm. Rafale fighter jets are positioned as 'omnirole' aircrafts that capable to perform a wide-range of combat roles such as >air supremacy, >interdiction, >aerial reconnaissance, >ground support, in-depth strike, anti-ship strike and nuclear deterrence.

What is the Rafale deal?

In September 2016, India and France signed a €7.87 billion Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) for 36 Rafale multi-role fighter jets in fly-away condition. Among other things, the deal also has a 50% offset clause to be executed by Dassault Aviation and its partners in partnership with Indian companies.

5. Oil prices

Brent, the international benchmark for oil prices, crossed \$80 a barrel this week, touching the highest level since November 2014. The current price is almost three times the cost in early 2016 when it was \$29 a barrel. The trend may continue in the coming weeks and months, according to most reporting on oil. Rising oil prices could cause significant inflation, dampen economic growth and alter geopolitics in multiple ways this year.

The major trigger that sent crude prices north was U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw the country from the Iran nuclear deal on May 8.

A second factor that is setting crude prices on fire is political and economic instability in Venezuela, another major petroleum exporting country.

Oil prices are also driven up by coordinated action by Russia and Saudi Arabia to keep supply on a tight leash. But the curbs on production by these countries had not anticipated the dramatic fall in production in Venezuela. The heightened instability in West Asia in the form of Saudi Arabia-Iran rivalry and the looming possibility of new military conflicts add to this.

The full impact of re-imposition of sanctions on Iran will take effect only in six months. The Trump administration has provided a six-month wind-down period for energy-related sanctions against Iran. Sectors such as financial and banking, underwriting services, insurance, shipping and shipbuilding and port operation had got relief from the sanctions under the Iran nuclear deal in 2016, all of which influence oil trade.

6. MCI scrapped

The Union Cabinet has cleared the National Medical Commission Bill, which does away with the Medical Council of India (MCI) and replaces it with a regulator that will do away with "heavy handed regulatory control" over medical institutions and will also bring in a national licentiate examination, according to sources privy to the passage of the Bill.

Among its key provisions is to ease the processes for colleges to manage undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Earlier, the MCI approval was needed for establishing, renewing, recognising and increasing seats in a UG course. Under the new proposal, permissions need only be sought for establishment and recognition.

The Bill proposes a government-nominated chairman and members, who will be selected by a committee under the Cabinet Secretary. The 25-member NMC will have 12 ex-officio members, including four presidents of boards from leading medical institutions such as AIIMS and the ICMR; 11 part-time members and, a chairman and member-secretary.

The NMC also aims to be less draconian. Deterrence for non-compliance with maintenance of standards is in terms of monetary penalty — ranging up to 10 times the annual tuition fee — rather than the existing system of not renewing permissions in case of serious infractions.

The new commission will also have the power to frame guidelines for fees for up to 40% seats in private colleges and deemed universities.

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has strongly opposed the Union government's move to scrap the Medical Council of India (MCI) to bring in the proposed National Medical Commission.

7. Sports University

The National Sports University Bill, 2018, was passed in Lok Sabha. The University will comprise four schools — sports science & sports medicine, sports management & sports technology, sports education & coaching and inter-disciplinary studies. Sports medicine is a much-neglected area and there is a shortage of expertise on the subject in India. The university will also focus on teaching preventive and rehab science.

The course, a four-year degree programme, will include disability and adventure sport.

The Manipur Government handed over 337 acres to the Union Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports for setting up of the national sports university.

8. Indian Rupee depreciation

The rupee set a new all-time low record today, staying above the psychologically-important 70 mark against the US dollar.

- Widening trade deficit: The combination of rising import bills and slow export growth has led to a worsening of India's current account deficit (CAD).
- Global trade tensions = stronger dollar
- The Trump administration's move to impose import tariffs against China, Europe, Mexico, Canada and now Turkey is expected to stoke US inflation, which could accelerate the pace of Fed rate hikes and, in the bargain, strengthen the dollar further.
- The Turkish crisis
- Yo-Yoing foreign capital flows

9. Bank mergers

The announcement by the finance minister that Bank of Baroda (BoB), Vijaya Bank and Dena Bank will be merged to form the third biggest bank in the country once again exposes the government's temptation to take major decisions without adequate study of its implications on the financial system and making it vulnerable to greater risks.

Ever since the Narasimhan Committee I (1991), the issue of consolidation of public sector banks (PSBs) has been a subject of intense debate.

In the post-nationalisation era, the first merger of PSBs was that of New Bank of India (NBI) with Punjab National Bank (PNB) in September 1993.

Similarly, the merger of privately owned Global Trust Bank, then a new star of financial liberalisation, with state owned Oriental Bank of Commerce in 2004, seriously affected the earnings of OBC.

In the first round of its restructuring, two associates of State Bank of India – State Bank of Saurashtra and State Bank of Indore – were merged with SBI in 2008 and 2009 respectively. In the latest round completed in March 2017, the remaining five associate banks were merged with the mega SBI.

10. One world, one sun, one grid

Stressing that India would generate 40 per cent of power from non-fossil fuels by 2030, Prime Minister of India called for connecting solar energy supply across borders giving the mantra of 'One World One Sun One Grid'.

Pm envisioned 121- potential country International Solar Alliance as the future OPEC for meeting energy needs of the world.

11. Payment banks

The main objective of the payment bank is providing small savings accounts and payments or remittance services to low income households, small businesses, other unorganized sector entities and other users.

- i. These banks can able to operate current accounts and saving accounts. They can issue ATM or Debit cards, Net Banking and Mobile Banking facilities to their customers.
- ii. The payment banks can take restricted deposits which is currently limited to ₹1 lakh per customer.
- iii. They can distribute the non-risk financial products such as mutual funds and insurance.

Airtel Payments Bank Limited is the first payment bank in India. IndiaPost entered into payment bank recently.

12. GST

GST is a comprehensive indirect tax levy on manufacture, sale and consumption of goods as well as services at the national level. It will replace all indirect taxes levied on goods and services by states and Central.

GST is being introduced in the country after a 13 year long journey since it was first discussed in the report of the Kelkar Task Force on indirect taxes.

It was introduced through the amendment in Constitution of India (101 Amendment Act 2016)

13. Ban on pharma drugs

The Indian government has banned 328 combination drugs in a blow to both domestic and foreign pharmaceutical firms, but the ban has been cheered by health activists worried about growing antibiotic resistance due to the misuse of medicines.

The Indian government had in 2016 banned about 350 such drugs, referred to as fixed-dose combinations (FDCs), but the industry mounted various legal challenges that prompted the Supreme Court to call for a review by an advisory board.

An FDC is a cocktail of two or more therapeutic drugs packed in a single dose. Several cough syrups, painkillers and dermatological drugs in India are FDCs.

The report, prepared by a sub-committee of the Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB), recommended that 343 FDCs be "prohibited" and six others be either restricted or regulated for specific indications or quantities, according to people close to the development.

14. Fugitive Offender

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Finance to introduce the Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2018 in Parliament.

The Bill would help in laying down measures to deter economic offenders from evading the process of Indian law by remaining outside the jurisdiction of Indian courts.

The cases where the total value involved in such offences is Rs.100 crore or more, will come under the purview of this Bill.

The Bill is expected to re-establish the rule of law with respect to the fugitive economic offenders as they would be forced to return to India to face trial for scheduled offences. This would also help the banks and other financial institutions to achieve higher recovery from financial defaults committed by such fugitive economic offenders, improving the financial health of such institutions.

15. Schemes – Saubhagya

Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana, or Saubhagya scheme was launched to provide electricity connections to over 40 million families in rural and urban areas by December 2018.

The scheme funds the cost of last-mile connectivity to willing households to help achieve the goal of lighting every household by 31 December 2018.

Despite the government's village electrification programme, the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Gram Jyoti Yojana launched in July 2015, under which 78% of 18,000 villages have been electrified, it was realised that the problem of electricity 'access' wasn't resolved. A village is declared to be electrified if 10% of the households are given electricity along with public places such as schools, panchayat office, health centres, dispensaries and community

centres. With a large number of household still remaining without access to electricity, the scheme aims at ensuring the coverage of households as opposed to only villages.

16. Pradhan Mantri Jan Ayogya Yojana

It is deemed the largest in the world, to provide free health insurance to India's poor and marginalised families.

Ayushman Bharat is a health insurance scheme under which 10.74 crore poor households across India will be eligible for reimbursement of up to ₹5 lakh per year towards hospitalisation expenses of their family members.

The government has drawn up a list of families to be covered based on the Socio-Economic Caste Census conducted in 2011. In rural areas, households living in one room kuccha homes, those with no adult members, those headed by women, those belonging to SC/ST, the homeless and landless are some of the beneficiaries. In the cities, beneficiaries include rag pickers, street vendors, domestic help, sanitation workers, shop workers and so on.

Under the scheme, patients are entitled to get cashless treatment from empanelled government and private hospitals. Insurance payouts will be based on the package rates prescribed by the government for 1,354 ailments. But for anyone to avail of the scheme, his or her name must feature in the SECC database and he/she must furnish proof of identity (not necessarily Aadhaar) to enrol.

17. Farmer protest, MSP issue

The Kisan Kranti Yatra, is a rally where hundreds of North Indian farmers marched from Haridwar in Uttarakhand to Delhi.

- Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops
- GST cut on farm implements
- NGT ban on old diesel vehicles (tractors)
- Sugarcane Prices: more price for sugarcane, and its timely payment
- Implement M S Swaminathan in the Farmers Commission report
- Minimum Income Support
- Jobs for dependents of farmers who committed suicide
- Farmers wanted the government to keep agriculture out of World Trade Negotiations
- The farmers want land acquisition powers to remain with the Central Government

18. Smart cities

What is a 'smart city?' The answer is, there is no universally accepted definition of a Smart City. It means different things to different people. The conceptualisation of Smart City, therefore, varies from city to city and country to country, depending on the level of

development, willingness to change and reform, resources and aspirations of the city residents.

The core infrastructure elements in a Smart City would include: i. adequate water supply, ii. assured electricity supply, iii. sanitation, including solid waste management iv. efficient urban mobility and public transport, v. affordable housing, especially for the poor, vi. robust IT connectivity and digitalization, vii. good governance, especially e-Governance and citizen participation, viii. sustainable environment, ix. safety and security of citizens, particularly women, children and the elderly, and x. health and education.

19. NBFC crisis - ILFS

IL&FS defaulted on a few payments and failed to service its commercial papers (CP) on due date—which means the company has run out of cash or it is facing a liquidity crunch.

The company piled up too much debt to be paid back in the short-term while revenues from its assets are skewed towards the longer term.

IL&FS first shocked markets when it postponed a \$350 million bonds issuance in March due to demand for a higher yield from investors.

The recent slowdown in infrastructure projects and disputes over contracts locking about Rs 90 billion of payments due from the government have further worsened the condition.

What are the effects?

The company's default spells trouble for its investors, which include banks, insurance companies, and mutual funds. Investors and traders have been worried over the cascading effects of IL&FS's defaults.

IL&FS sits atop a web of 169 subsidiaries, associates, and joint-venture companies, which makes the default even more worrisome.

IL&FS has revealed a series of delays and defaults on its debt obligations and inter-corporate deposits.

IL&FS said it was unable to service its obligation towards a letter of credit to IDBI Bank Ltd. This has raised concerns about the possibility of a contagion or spillover, with further defaults hitting mutual funds with exposure to IL&FS and its group companies.

However, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), which has the largest shareholding in IL&FS, said that it would not allow the debt-ridden IL&FS to collapse and would explore options to revive it.

20. Monetary Policy Committee

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a committee of the central bank — Reserve Bank of India, headed by its Governor. It was set up by amending the RBI Act after the government and RBI agreed to task RBI with the responsibility for price stability and

inflation targeting. The RBI and the government signed the Monetary Policy Framework Agreement on February 20, 2015.

The MPC is entrusted with the task of fixing the benchmark policy interest rate (repo rate) to contain inflation within the target level. The government may, if it considers necessary, convey its views, in writing, to the MPC from time to time. RBI is mandated to furnish necessary information to the MPC to facilitate their decision making.

MPC will have six members. Three each will be nominated by the government and the RBI and each member will have one vote. While the majority voice of the committee will be final in deciding the interest rates and the RBI will have to accept the verdict, the governor gets a casting vote in case of tie.

Environment & Geography

1. Forest fires in Uttarakhand

While allegations are being levelled against the timber smugglers and they are being accused of setting the forests on fire, there are some natural reasons for the forest to catch fire.

Dry weather, very high temperatures, and windy conditions are certainly fanning the fire and helping it to spread. The government has decided to study the reasons behind major fires, especially in summer, and prepare an action plan accordingly.

The Central Government has earmarked Rs. 5 crore for the fire-fighting operations. Both the Prime Minister's Office and the Home Ministry are closely monitoring the situation.

2. Dam safety

The Union Cabinet approved the proposal for introduction of Dam Safety Bill, 2018 in the Parliament. The objective of this Bill is to help develop uniform, countrywide procedures for ensuring the safety of dams.

The provisions of the Dam Safety Bill 2018 will empower the dam safety institutional set-ups in both the Centre and States and will also help in standardizing and improving dam safety practices across the country. The Dam Safety Bill, 2018 addresses all issues concerning dam safety including regular inspection of dams, Emergency Action Plan, comprehensive dam safety review, adequate repair and maintenance funds for dam safety, Instrumentation and Safety Manuals. It lays the onus of dam safety on the dam owner and provides for penal provisions for commission and omission of certain acts.

- National Committee on Dam Safety (NCDS)
- National Dam Safety Authority (NDSA)
- State Committee on Dam Safety (SCDS)
- State Dam Safety Organization (SDSO)

The Bill lays down that all specified dams will fall under jurisdiction of the SDSO of the State in which the dam is situated; For specified dams owned by CPSUs or where a dam is extended in two or more states or where a dam owned by one state is situated in other state, NDSA shall be construed as SDSO.

3. Jhum cultivation in Agriculture

A recent NITI Aayog publication on shifting cultivation which is particularly practised in the northeastern States, has recommended that the Ministry of Agriculture should take up a “mission on shifting cultivation” to ensure inter-ministerial convergence.

Central as well as State government departments of forests and environment, agriculture and allied departments often have divergent approaches towards shifting cultivation. This creates confusion among grass-roots level workers and jhum farmers.

The Wastelands Atlas Map shows a reduction in shifting cultivation in north-eastern States from 16,435.18 sq km to 8,771.62 sq km in two years.

The MGNREGA has also had an impact on reducing dependency of people on shifting cultivation.

4. Invasive species

An alien plant also referred to as exotic, introduced, foreign, non-indigenous or non-native, is one that has been introduced by humans intentionally or otherwise through human agency or accidentally from one region to another. An alien plant that has escaped from its original ecosystem and is reproducing on its own in the regional flora is considered a naturalized species. Those naturalized aliens that become so successful as to spread in the flora and displace native biota or threatens valued environmental, agricultural or personal resources by the damage it causes are considered invasive.

Invasive species possess characteristic features like “pioneer species” in varied landscapes, tolerant of a wide range of soil and weather conditions, generalist in distribution, produces copious amounts of seed that disperse easily, grows aggressive root systems, short generation time, high dispersal rates, long flowering and fruiting periods, broad native range, abundant in native range.

Preliminary data from one interesting study shows that invasive species are likely to have relatively small amounts of DNA in their cell nuclei.

Apparently, the cells in these plants are able to divide and multiply more quickly and consequently the entire plant can grow more rapidly than species with higher cellular DNA content. This gives them a leg up in disturbed sites.

5. Tsunami

A tsunami is a series of ocean waves that sends surges of water, sometimes reaching heights of over 100 feet (30.5 meters), onto land. These walls of water can cause widespread destruction when they crash ashore.

These awe-inspiring waves are typically caused by large, undersea earthquakes at tectonic plate boundaries. When the ocean floor at a plate boundary rises or falls suddenly, it displaces the water above it and launches the rolling waves that will become a tsunami.

Most tsunamis—about 80 percent—happen within the Pacific Ocean’s “Ring of Fire,” a geologically active area where tectonic shifts make volcanoes and earthquakes common.

6. Tea plantation issue

Bureaucracy, micromanagement, corruption and archaic laws spell doom for the industry. India is the highest-cost producer among all tea-producing nations, while the price realisation has remained stagnant.

The root of the problem lies in a gross policy failure or oversights that led to an over-supply of cheap tea; this has hit domestic prices.

History of growth in Tea industry

Taking advantage of the rupee-rouble trade and captive market in the erstwhile COMECON or the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, Russian buyers offered unviably high prices for Indian tea. The industry minted money, a good part of which was diverted to property and lifestyle.

The traction ended with the collapse of the USSR in 1991. That year, India exported 27 per cent of its 754-million kg production.

Ideally, it should have discouraged further growth in production, but the Tea Board (under the commerce ministry) did just the opposite. It set a goal of 1,000 million kg production by the millennium, promising huge market opportunities both in India and abroad.

Solution

Removing the Tea Board is not the only solution. A planter has no right to decide how many labourers he needs. He cannot explore if the land can be used more profitably through any crop other than tea. States and trade unions are overloading planters with social obligations taking advantage of an archaic Plantation Labour Act. This must stop. Planters should pay wages only in cash and take care of PF, ESI, etc, as in other industries. It is the State’s responsibility to build hospitals, houses and schools.

Governments can ensure that planters pay basic minimum wages for agriculture. But, forcing planters to commit fancy bonuses and wages will not do any good. Micromanagement is paving the way for more corruption and less transparency.

7. North East drought

Rain deficiency in eastern and western Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Gangetic West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya is 20-46 per cent less than normal as of July 17.

Also, being a water-sufficient area, the amount of rain in eastern India and the North-East is higher than in other parts, and so is the daily normal. Hence moderate deficiency in rain won't affect cultivation much, but a shortfall of more than 40 per cent is cause for concern.

Groundwater depletion in these states is also much lower than in northern and central parts of the country, and with the monsoon being good in the hills, most of the rivers are sufficiently fed with water, which might negate the impact of rain shortage.

8. Decline of forest cover in NER

The forest cover in the northeastern states has decreased since 2015. The India State of Forest Report 2017, released by Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, notes a decrease in forest cover in five northeastern states—Mizoram (531sqkm), Nagaland (459sqkm) Arunachal Pradesh (190sqkm) Tripura (164 sqkm) and Meghalaya (116sqkm).

The report mentions the reasons for this decline as shifting cultivation, biotic pressure, rotational felling, diversion of forest land for development activities, submergence of forest cover, agriculture expansion and natural disasters.

9. Ban on plastic

Environment Ministry used World Environment Day to announce that India will, by 2022, “eliminate all single use plastics from our beautiful country.”

The announcement builds on state-specific bans on the manufacture, supply, storage and use of plastics that are already in place in at least 25 of the country's 29 states.

Most recently, Mumbai became the country's largest city to implement a complete ban on single-use plastics, from plastic bags to bottles and cutlery, as part of a statewide ban in Maharashtra. The ban allows exemptions for retail packaging, trash can liners and takeaway packaging, and further concessions were made to the ban on Saturday, reportedly in response to pressure from businesses.

10. Flooding in Kerala, Nagaland

According to the India Meteorological Department, from June 1 to August 16, Kerala has received cumulative rainfall of 2227.26 mm, projecting an excess of 37.49% rainfall this monsoon.

A total of 37 out of the states 42 dams and reservoirs have been opened to drain out excess water from the catchment areas.

A combination of heavy, persistent rainfall, particularly over last week, and the release of thousands of cumec of water into rivers like the Periyar and Chalakudy River from dams and reservoirs are responsible for the flooding of low-lying areas.

More than 13% of the Nagaland population, comprising over 48,000 families in 532 villages, is affected by one of the worst monsoon seasons Nagaland has had. Besides floods, the state has witnessed many landslides.

The situation in Nagaland was worsened by poor management of its dams. The water-level at the Doyang hydro electric project, a reservoir on a tributary of Brahmaputra, had started above the normal level

Society

1. Witch Hunting

Assam's new anti witch-hunting law finally gets the President's nod — but it will take grassroots awareness to make a difference and a coalition of womens' self help groups, tribal organisations, local council members backed by the Assam Police are all set to do just that.

Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill 2015, was tabled in the state Assembly in 2015. In June 2018, the Bill finally got President Ram Nath Kovind's assent making witch-hunting a "cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable" offence under the law.

States like Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Maharashtra and Rajasthan have already criminalised the practice.

Arguably the earliest concerted move to fight the practice was Project Prahari (Prahari means sentinel in Assamese) launched by police officer Kuladhar Saikia, the current DGP of Assam. It acted as a model of community development that brought together various sections of the rural society to combat witch-hunting by focusing on alternative livelihood skills.

2. Sanitation and Manual scavenging

Magsaysay Award-winning Bezwada Wilson's Safai Karamchari Andolan had organised a protest demanding justice for the septic tank victims.

The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, disallows the employment of manual scavengers, terming it a non-bailable offence. Under this legislation, offenders can be imprisoned for up to five years.

The fresh survey to be conducted with assistance from the government think tank NITI Aayog, is expected to clear the haze over the exact numbers. It will register those who continue to be in the profession after the practice was outlawed in 2013.

3. Euthanasia

Passive euthanasia is now legal in India. Supreme Court has provided guidelines for 'living will'. It defined passive euthanasia as, "a decision to withdraw life-saving treatment by a patient who is competent to take decision as well as with regard to a patient who is not competent to take decision can be termed as passive euthanasia, which is lawful and legally permissible in this country."

"Living will": It is where an adult in his conscious mind, is permitted to refuse medical treatment or voluntarily decide not to take medical treatment to embrace death in a natural way.

The court stated the rights of a patient would not fall out of the purview of Article 21 (right to life and liberty) of the Indian Constitution.

It must be voluntarily executed and without any coercion or inducement or compulsion and after having full knowledge or information.

The written document should clearly indicate the decision relating to the circumstances in which withholding or withdrawal of medical treatment can be resorted to.

The guidelines further direct to record and preserve the document. Signed by the executor in the presence of two attesting witnesses and countersigned by the jurisdictional Judicial Magistrate of First Class (JMFC) appointed by the District judge.

4. Adoption vs surrogacy

Parliamentary panel says surrogacy and adoption have to be an equal choice and in name of adoption, govt can't take away reproductive rights of couples to have a biologically related child through surrogacy.

In the past, couples unable to conceive were expected to turn to adoption to achieve their parenthood dreams. Nowadays there are many options for infertile couples, as well as singles and homosexuals who want their biological children out of any dispute.

With the advent of technology the urge of parenthood leads them to seek alternative solutions including Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART), In-Vitro Fertilisation (IVF) and Intra Uterine Injections (IUI).

The government needs to pool in extra efforts to promote adoption as act of adoption is not just having a baby but it also contributes to societal development. We don't see any government campaign to promote adoption as we see for family planning.

Adoption process will have to be simplified because a lengthy and irritating process is a deterrent for many parents.

Surrogacy is not an alternative to adoption and adoption is not an alternative to surrogacy. These two are different things. Those who want to go for their own biological child should

be allowed to pursue surrogacy, while those who want to adopt a child and improve a life, an easy and hassle-free adoption process should be facilitated.

5. Mob behaviour

Lynching is killing someone without a trial. Herd mentality is dangerous for the society, where everyone has one view. The singularity of views is really dangerous for society and the mentality not to question anything is likely to lead to the destruction of any culture or society.

It is obvious that in a majoritarian state, mob mentality can prove to be a two-pronged sword. However, mere acceptance of this fact, and inaction would mark a new low for India as a democracy.

The most pertinent question then becomes how ordinary citizens of a country are driven to cause such destruction to life and property. For such lynchings and violence to become normalised in India, a major chunk of the population should have a unified sentiment of strong hatred, that drives them to be okay with the probability of being criminals. It is only if such widespread dissatisfaction exists that a force can tap in, to cause havoc across the entire nation.

A chronological analysis of communal violence since India's independence reveals a poor result on justice.

In most cases, minorities are the ones that become the targets of such attacks. It is imperative that the government take note of such grievances and problems, and ensure that proper justice is provided to those who suffer at the hands of the vicious mob mentality, since letting such crimes go unnoticed or unpunished goes against the principles of democracy that our country so proudly upholds. As a nation, we must protect the rights of the minorities. Not doing so would send an extremely dangerous message of autocracy, and nationalism.

Security

1. Cyber security

India emerged as the third most vulnerable country in terms of risk of cyber threats in 2017, moving up one place over previous year.

The global threat ranking is based on eight metrics — malware, spam, phishing, bots, network attacks, web attacks, ransomware and cryptominers.

India continues to be second most impacted by spam and bots, third most impacted by network attacks, and fourth most impacted by ransomware.

Cryptojacking is a rising threat to cyber and personal security. The massive profit incentive puts people, devices and organisations at risk of unauthorised coinminers siphoning resources from their systems, further motivating criminals to infiltrate everything from home PCs to giant data centers.

2. Nepal and BIMSTEC

The Nepal Army will not participate in the first ever joint military exercise of BIMSTEC nations in India. The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is a regional grouping comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

Days after pulling out of the BIMSTEC joint military exercise in India, the Nepal Army began its second wargame with the Chinese military at Chengdu.

The “Sagarmatha Friendship-2” military exercise in China’s Sichuan province fielded a platoon for the drill that will focus on counter-terrorism and disaster management.

3. Doklam Issue

Doklam, or Donglang in Chinese, is an area spread over less than a 100 sq km comprising a plateau and a valley at the trijunction between India, Bhutan and China. It is surrounded by the Chumbi Valley of Tibet, Bhutan’s Ha Valley and Sikkim.

It flared up in 2017 when the Chinese were trying to construct a road in the area, and Indian troops, in aid of their Bhutanese counterparts, objected to it, resulting in the stand-off. Doklam is strategically located close to the Siliguri Corridor, which connects mainland India with its north-eastern region. The corridor, also called Chicken’s Neck, is a vulnerable point for India.

While India-Tibet trade flourished along the Siliguri corridor and Chumbi Valley, Doklam had very little significance.

In recent years however, China has been beefing up its military presence in the Chumbi Valley, where the Chinese are at a great disadvantage militarily. Both Indian and Bhutanese troops are on a higher ground around the Valley.

This is also the reason, the Indian security establishment suspect, why the Chinese have a deep interest in Doklam, which would give them a commanding view of and an easy access to both the Chumbi Valley and the Siliguri Corridor. The desolate Doklam region grabbed global attention after the stand-off.

4. Drug addiction

Every third person in the NER is or has been a drug addict at some point in his or her life. No doubt the influence of the substance-use takes a person to a different world, completely disconnected from the reality; especially when the reality is also not so rosy as the North Eastern part of India is one of the least developed region with very few infrastructural, educational and employment opportunities. The unemployment rate of 59.3% is very high compared to the nation-wide rate of 19.7%.

The worst hit states are Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya and some parts of Assam. The main cause is the easy availability of drugs by illegal drug trafficking and the close proximity of these states to the Golden Triangle, the second largest site of opium production.

Alcoholism is another threat but it is far less prominent than drug addiction. The situation has reached terrifying dimensions because of strong links between drug addiction and HIV transmission. The other major cause of HIV apart from unsafe sex is the high incidence of IDU (Intravenous Drug Use), especially rampant in the North East. The addicts use the same contaminated needle many times and share it among many groups.

There are some organizations like NACO, UNODC, Azad Foundation, among others, who have been very active in taking initiatives in this regard like increasing the availability of clean syringes and drugs like buprenorphine (a semi-synthetic opioid that is used to treat opioid addiction). Several rehabilitation centers have also been set up but all these measures would not be sufficient if the root causes are not addressed and eradicated.

5. Insurgency in NER and Urban Naxals

The reasons for these are similar and have been enumerated below:

- The roots of insurgency in the area go back to pre-independence days. The tribes were not brought under a strict political control and rigid regulations. The British tribal policy and Christian education are believed to have queered the pitch for Independent India.
- Setting up of reserved forests by British led to the loss of tribal control over natural resources.
- Migration of people from the plains posing economic, cultural and political threat to the tribals.
- Lack of good governance and transparency
- Faulty nation-building strategies (economic deprivation)
- Inappropriate development. Large-scale unemployment.

- Hostile neighbours extending moral and material support.
- Lack of good leadership and popular support.
- Not anti-India but anti-establishment.
- Money for development never reached the target but was diverted to insurgents by politicians to buy security

Who were the original Naxals?

The first Naxal group sprang off as an offshoot of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). A small group of the party decided to break away to launch an armed struggle against big landowners and establishment.

Their objective was to capture additional lands of big zamindars and distribute the same among the tilling farmers and landless labourers. The leadership was provided by Charu Majumdar, Kanu Sanyal and Jangal Santhal. They became the first Naxals or the original Naxals.

Urban Naxalism

A 2004 Communist Party of India (Maoist) document titled “Urban Perspective” elaborates on this strategy with one of the most important focus areas being on gaining leadership from urban areas.

It explains that the focus has to be on organising the working class, which is “the leadership of our revolution”. “It is the task of the party in the urban areas to mobilise and organise the proletariat in performing its crucial leadership role,” as the document reads.

6. Smart Fencing

India's first 'smart fence' pilot project, which entails deploying laser-activated fences and technology-enabled barriers to plug vulnerable gaps along frontiers, was launched by Ministry of Home Affairs.

The technology is being implemented by the Border Security Force.

Smart fencing uses a number of devices for surveillance, communication and data storage. Sensors like thermal imager, underground sensors, fiber optical sensors, radar and sonar will be mounted on different platforms like aerostat, tower and poles as part of the smart fence. The new system provides for round-the-clock surveillance on the border and in different weather conditions be it dust storm, fog or rain.

7. LEMOA, COMCASA

LEMOA

LEMOA stands for Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), a tweaked India-specific version of the Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), which the U.S. has with several countries it has close military to military cooperation. It is also one of the three foundational agreements — as referred to by the U.S.

The three agreements — Logistics Support Agreement (LSA), Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) and Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA) are referred to as the foundational agreements which the U.S. signs with countries with which it has close military ties.

They are meant to build basic ground work and promote interoperability between militaries by creating common standards and systems. They also guide sale and transfer of high-end technologies.

LEMOA gives access, to both countries, to designated military facilities on either side for the purpose of refuelling and replenishment. India and the U.S. already hold large number of joint exercises during which payments are done each time, which is a long and tedious process.

Under the new agreement, a mechanism will be instituted for book-keeping and payments and officials, who will act as nodal points of contact, will be designated on both sides.

The agreement will primarily cover four areas — port calls, joint exercises, training and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief. Any other requirement has to be agreed upon by both sides on a case-by-case basis.

There will be no basing of the U.S. troops or assets on Indian soil. This is purely a logistical agreement. India can access the string of U.S. facilities across the globe for logistical support and the U.S., which operates in a big way in Asia-Pacific, will benefit from Indian facilities.

COMCASA

COMCASA stands for Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and is one of the four foundational agreements that the U.S. signs with allies and close partners to facilitate interoperability between militaries and sale of high end technology.

COMCASA is an India-specific version of the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). It comes into force immediately, and is valid for a period 10 years.

COMCASA allows India to procure transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for US origin military platforms like the C-17, C-130 and P-8Is. Currently, these platforms use commercially available communication systems.

The joint statement issued after the 2+2 dialogue said that it would facilitate access to advanced defence systems and enable India to optimally utilize its existing U.S.-origin platforms.

Specific additional provisions have been incorporated in the text to safeguard our security and national interests.

This will also enable greater communications interoperability between the militaries of India and the US. Data acquired through such systems cannot be disclosed or transferred to any person or entity without India's consent.

Both countries will implement this agreement in a manner that is consistent with the national security interests of the other.

India had signed the General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002 and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016. The last one remaining is the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).

8. India Russia S-400 missile deal

The S-400 can take down enemies' aircraft in the sky from the surface itself. The S-400 is known as Russia's most advanced long-range surface-to-air missile defence system, capable of destroying hostile strategic bombers, jets, missiles and drones at a range of 380-km.

The S-400 is an upgraded version of the S-300 systems. The missile system, manufactured by Almaz-Antey, has been in service in Russia since 2007.

The deal will be seen as a confirmation of India's strategic autonomy. An increasingly-assertive US has been punishing countries doing 'significant' deals with Iran or Russia with sanctions. Going ahead with the 'significant' defence deals will also be a message about India's 'strategic autonomy' despite its dependence on both US and Russia.

The US administration is required under a domestic law, Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act or CAATSA to impose sanctions on any country that has "significant transactions" with Iran, North Korea or Russia.

The Act primarily deals with sanctions on Russian interests such as its oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions, in the backdrop of its military intervention in Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US Presidential elections.

In September, a senior administration official told reporters that purchase of major military system like multi-billion S-400 missile defense system would be considered as a "significant transaction and thus has a potential" for CAATSA sanctions.

9. Surgical Strike

A surgical strike is a military attack which results in, was intended to result in, or is claimed to have resulted in only damage to the intended legitimate military target, and no or minimal collateral damage to surrounding structures, vehicles, buildings, or the general public infrastructure and utilities.

The offensives were launched by India after the Uri attack. The operation was unofficially called Operation X.

10. Wahabism, Fundamentalism

India has become a proxy religious battlefield between Iran, which has made overtures to its Shia community for years, and Saudi Arabia, which then decided to pump in billions to promote Wahhabism, an alien and intolerant form of Islam.

Wahhabism, Salafism and Deobandism, extremist and literalist schools of Islam on the march in India, consider it contaminated by folk practices alien to their purist interpretation of Islam.

Wahhabism and, in essence, Deobandism, aimed to bring back the Islam which prevailed in seventh-century Arabia during the time of Prophet Mohammed and the reign of the first four caliphs, often referred to as the Golden Age of Islam.

Their own roots in India are both indigenous and foreign. The Deobandi school was founded in a madrasa in the small town of Deoband in North India in 1867, but it was based on an older 18th century tradition and now constitutes 20% of India's Sunni Muslims.

According to the Deobandi worldview, Muslim societies have deteriorated under the influence of amoral Western values; it is hostile to the concept that nation-states, rather than Islam, should be a source of loyalty for Muslims. Deobandi cadres in India are strictly opposed to the local custom of worshipping pirs (saints) and their tombs as objects of pilgrimage.

S & T

1. ISRO Missions: Gaganyaan, Chandrayaan 2, SA Sat

Gaganyaan

Gaganyaan is the human space flight Programme

Most of the critical technologies and hardware required for the project are ready or have been demonstrated by its centres.

ISRO would now stitch them up into a complete project and present a comprehensive project report to get a formal approval of the government

- It would raise scientific and technological temper across the country and inspire youngsters.
- When it achieves the mission, India would be the fourth nation to circle Earth after the Soviets, the Americans and the Chinese.
- In 1984, India's first astronaut Wing Commander (retd.) Rakesh Sharma orbited Earth as part of a Soviet mission.
- ISRO revealed the first germ of an HSP in November 2004 and got incremental funds for supporting projects over the next few years.

- It could not go ahead mainly because the GSLV MarkIII vehicle was not ready until last year.
- GSLV Mk III is a three-stage heavy lift launch vehicle developed by ISRO. The vehicle has two solid strap-ons, a core liquid booster and a cryogenic upper stage.
- GSLV Mk III is designed to carry 4 ton class of satellites into Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO) or about 10 tons to Low Earth Orbit (LEO), which is about twice the capability of GSLV Mk II.

Chandrayaan 2

- Chandrayaan-2, India's second mission to the Moon is a totally indigenous mission comprising of an Orbiter, Lander and Rover.
- After reaching the 100 km lunar orbit, the Lander housing the Rover will separate from the Orbiter.
- After a controlled descent, the Lander will soft land on the lunar surface at a specified site and deploy a Rover.
- The mission will carry a six-wheeled Rover which will move around the landing site in semi-autonomous mode as decided by the ground commands.
- The instruments on the rover will observe the lunar surface and send back data, which will be useful for analysis of the lunar soil.
- The Chandrayaan-2 weighing around 3290 kg and would orbit around the moon and perform the objectives of remote sensing the moon.
- The payloads will collect scientific information on
 - lunar topography,
 - mineralogy,
 - elemental abundance,
 - lunar exosphere and
 - signatures of hydroxyl and water-ice.
- **South Asia Satellite**
- India's Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-F09) successfully launched the 2230 kg South Asia Satellite (GSAT-9) into its planned Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit (GTO).
- The satellite orbit will be raised from its present GTO to the final circular Geostationary Orbit (GSO) by firing the satellite's Liquid Apogee Motor (LAM) in stages
- South Asia Satellite is a communication satellite built by ISRO to provide a variety of communication services over the South Asian region.
 - For this, it is equipped with **Ku-band transponders**.

- The South Asia Satellite **will be commissioned into service after the completion of orbit raising operations** and the satellite's positioning in its designated slot in the GSO following in-orbit testing of its payloads.
- It will support communication, broadcasting and Internet services, disaster management, tele-medicine, tele-education, weather forecasting in a region that is geographically challenging, economically lagging with limited technological resources.
- With this launch India has started a journey to build the most advanced frontier of partnership.
- This symbol of South Asian cooperation would meet the aspirations of economic progress of more than 1.5 billion people in our region and extend our close links into outer space
- Importance:
 - India has gained goodwill across the subcontinent through the gesture
 - The message is equally strong to South Asia's other benefactor, China, at a time when it is preparing to demonstrate its global clout at the Belt and Road Forum.
 - The Belt and Road Initiative is an infrastructure network that every SAARC nation other than India has signed on to.
 - China has pledged billions of dollars in projects to each of the countries in the region; that, India is obviously not in a position to match.
 - Where India does excel is in its space programme, as it is the only country in South Asia that has independently launched satellites on indigenously developed launch vehicles.

2. Artificial Intelligence

AI is a constellation of technologies that enable machines to act with higher levels of intelligence and emulate the human capabilities of sense, comprehend and act.

Thus, computer vision and audio processing can actively perceive the world around them by acquiring and processing images, sound and speech.

The natural language processing and inference engines can enable AI systems to analyse and understand the information collected.

An AI system can also take action through technologies such as expert systems and inference engines or undertake actions in the physical world.

These human capabilities are augmented by the ability to learn from experience and keep adapting over time.

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to provide large incremental value to a wide range of sectors globally, and is expected to be the key source of competitive advantage for firms.

- a) Healthcare: address issues of high barriers to access to healthcare facilities, particularly in rural areas that suffer from poor connectivity and limited supply of healthcare professionals. This can be achieved through implementation of use cases such as AI driven diagnostics, personalised treatment, early identification of potential pandemics, and imaging diagnostics, among others.
- b) Agriculture: addresses food revolution and meeting the increased demand for food address challenges such as inadequate demand prediction, lack of assured irrigation, and overuse / misuse of pesticides and fertilisers. improvement in crop yield through real time advisory, advanced detection of pest attacks, and prediction of crop prices to inform sowing practices.
- c) Smart Mobility, including Transports and Logistics
- d) Retail: improving user experience by providing personalised suggestions, preference-based browsing and image-based product search.
- e) Manufacturing: enabling 'Factory of the Future' through flexible and adaptable technical systems to automate processes and machinery to respond to unfamiliar or unexpected situations by making smart decisions.
- f) Energy: Potential use cases in the energy sector include energy system modelling and forecasting to decrease unpredictability and increase efficiency in power balancing and usage.
- g) Smart Cities: meet the demands of a rapidly urbanising population and providing them with enhanced quality of life; traffic control to reduce congestion and enhanced security through improved crowd management.
- h) Education and Skilling: personalised learning, automating and expediting administrative tasks, and predicting the need for student intervention to reduce dropouts or recommend vocational training.

3. Renewable energy, Alternative fuels

- National Biogas and Manure Management Programme (NBMMP).
- Under National Solar Mission, the target for setting up solar capacity increased from 20 GW to 100 GW by 2021-22. Target of 10,000 MW, set for 2017-18 which will take the cumulative capacity over 20GW till 31st March 2018.
- Kurnool Solar Park has emerged as the World's Largest Solar Park.
- Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is implementing Grid Connected Rooftop and Small Solar Power Plants Programme which provides for installation of 2100 MW capacity through CFA/ incentive in the residential, social, Government/PSU and Institutional sectors.
- Suryamitra programme has been launched for creation of a qualified technical workforce and over 11 thousand persons have been trained under the programme.

- Wind Forecasting: Based on wind forecasting experience of Tamil Nadu with NIWE, MoUs for forecasting done with Gujarat and Rajasthan.
- Biomass power includes installations from biomass combustion, biomass gasification and bagasse co-generation.

4. ISA

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) was unveiled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then French President Francois Hollande at the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Paris on November 30, 2015. The idea was to form a coalition of solar resource-rich countries to collaborate on addressing the identified gaps in their energy requirements through a common approach.

The ISA is open to 121 prospective member countries, most of them located between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn as this is the region worldwide with a surplus of bright sunlight for most of the year.

Apart from being a founding-member, India plays a significant role in the alliance in terms of being a host as well as a major contributor to the achievement of the target.

The ISA is the first international body that will have a secretariat in India. India, with a target to produce 100 GW of solar energy by 2022, would account for a tenth of ISA's goal.

International Solar Alliance (ISA) is conceived as a coalition of solar resource rich countries to address their special energy needs and will provide a platform to collaborate on addressing the identified gaps through a common, agreed approach.

It will not duplicate or replicate the efforts that others (like International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership(REEEP), International Energy Agency (IEA), Renewable Energy Policy Network for the 21st Century (REN21), United Nations bodies, bilateral organizations etc.) are currently engaged in, but will establish networks and develop synergies with them and supplement their efforts in a sustainable and focused manner.

The EU is also supporting ISA through the European Investment Bank which is also the largest climate financier in the world. In March 2018, EIB, the EU Bank announced its partnership with the International Solar Alliance to support the expansion of solar energy in India and beyond

5. Crypto currency

A cryptocurrency (or crypto currency) is a digital asset designed to work as a medium of exchange that uses strong cryptography to secure financial transactions, control the creation of additional units, and verify the transfer of assets.

After months of uncertainty, there are indications that India may not, after all, opt for a blanket ban on virtual currencies. A finance ministry panel set up to study them may even suggest that they be treated as commodities.

The committee's most important concern is keeping track of investors and funds to curb money laundering and illegitimate financing.

The first panel set up by the central government in April 2017 to understand the expanding virtual currency ecosystem recommended slowly choking it. Not surprisingly, the second panel's likely stance will come as a relief to cryptocurrency exchanges.

6. Optic Fibre grid

BharatNet is planned to connect all the 2,50,000 Gram Panchayats in the country for providing broadband connectivity in the Gram Panchayats. Non-discriminatory access to the network will be provided to all the telecom service providers. These access providers like mobile operators, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), Cable TV operators, content providers can launch various services in rural areas. Various applications for e-health, e-education, e-governance etc. will be provided

7. Gene editing

Genome editing (also called gene editing) is a group of technologies that give scientists the ability to change an organism's DNA. These technologies allow genetic material to be added, removed, or altered at particular locations in the genome.

Crispr, an acronym for Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats, harnesses the natural defence mechanisms of bacteria to alter an organism's genetic code.

It's likened to a pair of molecular scissors, a cut-and-paste technology, that can snip the two DNA strands at a specific location and modify gene function.

The cutting is done by enzymes like Cas9, guided by pre-designed RNA sequences, which ensure that the targeted section of the genome is edited out.

8. Noble prize in science

Medicine

Two immunologists, James Allison of the U.S. and Tasuku Honjo of Japan, won the 2018 Nobel Medicine Prize for research into how the body's natural defences can fight cancer.

Unlike more traditional forms of cancer treatment that directly target cancer cells, Dr. Allison and Dr. Honjo figured out how to help the patient's own immune system tackle the cancer more quickly.

Around the same time, Dr. Honjo discovered a protein on immune cells, the ligand PD-1, and eventually realised that it also worked as a brake, but acted in a different way.

Tools made using light



This year, the Nobel Prize in Physics was awarded to three scientists for groundbreaking inventions in the field of laser physics



Arthur Ashkin
for "optical tweezers that grab particles, atoms and molecules with their laser beam fingers"



Gérard Mourou
for "paving the way towards the shortest and most intense laser pulses created by mankind which led to broad industrial and medical applications, including eye operations"



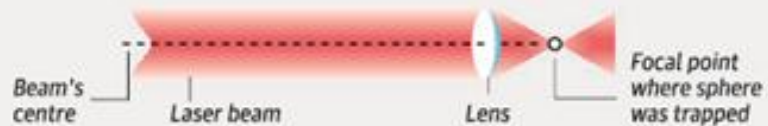
Donna Strickland

The light trap

Ashkin realised that a laser beam can **move small particles**. He illuminated a sphere using laser and got it to move. He observed that the sphere moved towards the **beam's centre** where intensity is maximum.

- When he focused the laser beam with a **lens**, the sphere got trapped in the **focal point** of the lens

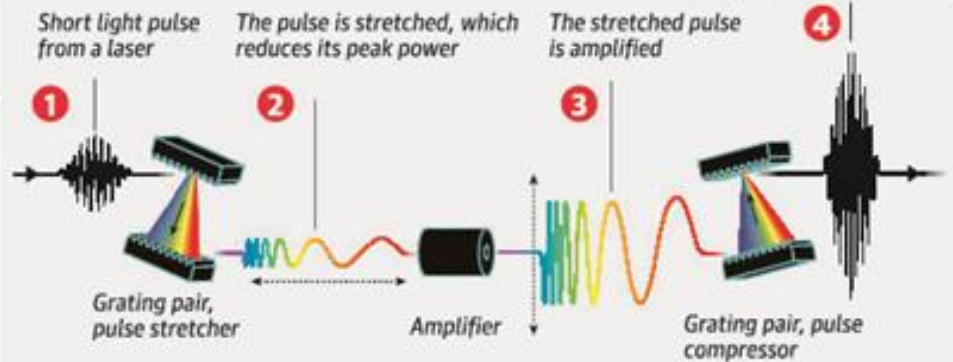
- This method can be used to **trap small particles** such as bacteria. They became known as **optical tweezers**



Uses : Studying biological processes, such as individual proteins, molecular motors, DNA or the inner life of cells. To observe, turn, cut, push and pull small particles - without touching them

Short and intense

Laser light can be emitted in short pulses. But, they can't be amplified beyond a point without destroying the material. Strickland and Mourou's new technique, known as **chirped pulse amplification (CPA)**, helped solve this conundrum.



- In CPA, the short pulse from the laser was **stretched in time** and then amplified. When a pulse is stretched in time, its **peak power is much lower** so the material is not destroyed

- The amplified pulse is then **squeezed again**. In the end, as more light is packed together within a tiny area, the **intensity of the pulse increases dramatically**

Uses : Possible to see events that previously appeared to be instantaneous. Ultra-sharp laser make it possible to cut or drill extremely precise holes in materials - even in living matter

Source, images: Nobel Media

Compiled by Vignesh Radhakrishnan, L. Balamurugan

Chemical (r)evolution

The Nobel Prize in Chemistry has been awarded for using the concept of evolution to develop proteins and solve chemical problems



Frances H. Arnold
California Institute of Technology, U.S.

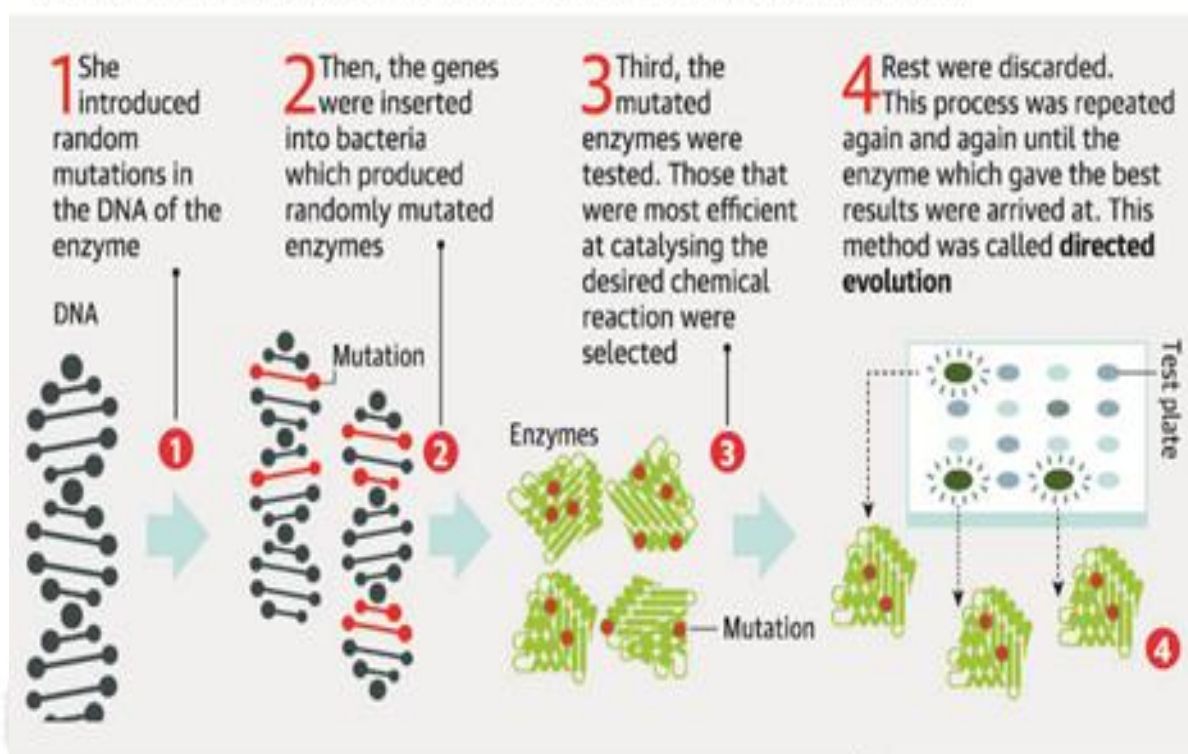


George P. Smith
University of Missouri, U.S.



Sir Gregory P. Winter
MRC Lab of Molecular Biology, U.K.

Mimicking evolution: Evolution has solved complex chemical problems – for example, fish can swim in polar oceans as they have developed anti-freeze proteins. Arnold used this concept to build **better enzymes**. Enzymes are catalysts which **speed up chemical processes** such as digestion, clotting of blood. More effective the enzymes, quicker the process. Flow chart shows how she achieved it



Target and deliver: Smith and Winter applied this technique to create **better antibodies**. Antibodies are proteins that function like targeted missiles; they can precisely identify and **bind to the viruses or bacteria that infect us**. When an antibody attaches to them, it sends a signal to aggressive immune cells to destroy the invaders. This is how our body fights off infections. The stronger the antibodies that get attached to the target, the more effective the cure will be. Winter used Arnold's directed evolution technique to **develop better drugs** to treat autoimmune diseases and even to cure metastatic cancer

Uses: Tailored enzymes are now being internationally developed to promote a greener chemicals industry, produce new materials, manufacture sustainable biofuels, mitigate disease and save lives

Source, images: Nobel Media

Compiled by Vignesh Radhakrishnan

9. Digital India in NER

Digital North East by 2022

As part of the Digital India programme of the Government of India, specific initiatives towards providing access to digital infrastructure to all citizens, digital services and digital inclusion have been undertaken across the country, including in the NRR.

The initiatives undertaken in the NER includes, inter-alia, State Portal, State Wide Area Network (SWAN), Common Services Centres, National Knowledge Network (NKN), and e-Districts.

Several Cloud enabled applications like eCourts, eVahan, eSarathi, eHospital, Tele-health, tele-education and SMS based agricultural services etc., are also functional.

However, in order to realise the intended benefits to the citizens in the NER, the digital initiatives require further integration and replication.

Some digital initiatives require process reengineering and others may require significant investments.

Moreover, coverage of certain nationwide digital initiatives, such as, Hospital, eEducation, digital payments, GIS based applications, use of emerging technologies, namely, big data analytics, predictive analytics and artificial intelligence require a major boost in the NER.

10. Remote sensing

It is now commonly used to describe the science—and art—of identifying, observing, and measuring an object without coming into direct contact with it.

This process involves the detection and measurement of radiation of different wavelengths reflected or emitted from distant objects or materials, by which they may be identified and categorized by class/type, substance, and spatial distribution.

National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) at Hyderabad is responsible for remote sensing satellite data acquisition and processing, data dissemination, aerial remote sensing and decision support for disaster management. NRSC has a data reception station at Shadnagar near Hyderabad for acquiring data from Indian remote sensing satellites as well as others.