

CURRENT AFFAIRS MONTHLY

FEBRUARY 2018

 www.smartabhyas.com

 Bengaluru

 smartabhyas@gmail.com



Smart Abhyas



Dear aspirants

A note from Smart Abhyas



Smart Abhyas

LIKE WHAT WE ARE DOING ?

We at Smart Abhyas started this initiative with the intention of providing quality content to every single CSE aspirant out there. If you think we are on the right track please let us know by mailing us at smartabhyas@gmail.com, your feedback would mean a lot to us.

WE ARE ALWAYS LOOKING TO IMPROVE

Any suggestions that would help us enhance the quality of our content, the presentation of our content or anything important for that matter can be brought to us by mailing us at smartabhyas@gmail.com.

TELL A FRIEND

It would mean the world to us if you think that the content we are providing is worthwhile and spread the word to fellow aspirants out there.

Index

Polity and Social Issues

1. Budget 2018-19: Education is a top priority.....	01
2. Budget in nutshell.....	01
3. India's fight against polio.....	04
4. Health Sub-centres to Health Wellness Centres.....	06
5. Supreme Court: No interference from anyone when two adults marry.....	07
6. Rail Development Authority (RDA) to be set up.....	07
7. Supreme Court: Establish children friendly courts to try children.....	08
8. NITI Aayog's 'Healthy States, Progressive India' report released.....	09
9. Election Commission asks Supreme Court for more power.....	10
10. National Productivity Council: All you need to know.....	12
11. LPG Panchayat held at Rashtrapati Bhavan.....	13
12. Draft bill of India's first anti-human trafficking law.....	14
13. Supreme Court: More water for Karnataka.....	16
14. 42 Indian languages face the threat of extinction.....	19

15. Newborn deaths: India needs to act now.....	22
16. Tribunal to be constituted for Mahanadi water disputes.....	23
17. India ranks 81st in Corruption perception index.....	24
18. Consumer Protection Bill 2018: All you need to know.....	26
19. A new Bill to regulate pesticides.....	27

Geography, Ecology & Biodiversity

1. National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC).....	29
2. All India Tiger Estimation 2018.....	30
3. Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.....	31
4. Bay of Bengal home to three new species of eel.....	31
5. Drying Himalayan springs a major worry.....	32
6. India State of Forest Report 2017.....	33
7. Olive ridley turtles begin mass nesting.....	35
8. Climate change has a significant bearing on the Himalayas.....	37
9. West Bengal home to new plant species.....	38

Economy

1. Budget 2018-19: Doubling farmers income.....	40
2. Budget 2018-19: Highest ever allocation to Railways.....	41
3. Budget 2018-19: MSMEs given a big boost.....	42
4. Budget 2018-19: 'Digital India' is here to stay.....	43
5. Budget 2018-19: Infrastructure given importance.....	43
6. Global Investor's Summit: Northeast in the limelight.....	44
7. Railways working on phasing out diesel locomotives by 2022.....	45
8. Budget 2018-19: Long Term Capital Gains.....	46
9. Indian Advance Pricing Agreement regime moves forward.....	48
10. Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Report.....	49
11. Base rate to be linked with MCLR.....	51
12. Future of 'Banks Board Bureau (BBB)' is uncertain.....	53
13. Bill to regulate deposit plans.....	54
14. New Bill to ban Unregulated Deposit Schemes and Chit Funds.....	55
15. Coal mining now opens for the private sector.....	58

16. A Bill to hold economic offenders who flee the country responsible.....	59
17. Government lists 'high-risk' NBFCs.....	59

Science and technology

1. Breakthrough in the study of viruses.....	61
2. Budget 2018-19: Space and Defence.....	61
3. ISRO says India too will have a 60 tonne launcher.....	62
4. H7N4 bird flu confirmed in China.....	64
5. Chandrayaan II is scheduled for an April launch.....	64
6. India's second Space Observatory in the making.....	65

Government Schemes and Initiatives

1. Budget 2018-19 : Ayushman Bharat programme.....	67
2. Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahaabhiyan (KUSUM).....	68
3. National Health Scheme (NHS).....	69
4. Launching Start Up India Ranking frame work.....	69
5. All Small Savings Schemes may be brought under one umbrella.....	71

International relations

1. India joins Ashgabat Agreement.....	73
2. Trouble in paradise: What you need to know about the Maldives situation.....	73

Copyright © by Smart Abhyas

All rights are reserved. No part of this document may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of Smart Abhyas.

3. Wakhan Corridor: Unknown to the world.....	75
4. India can now access a strategic port in Oman.....	75
5. Part of Chabahar port handed over to India.....	76
6. Myanmar's dam a threat to Manipur's life.....	78
7. Pakistan back on FATF's 'grey list'.....	79
8. TAPI pipeline back on track.....	80

Defence and Internal Security

1. INS Karanj: An impressive addition to the Navy's arsenal.....	82
2. Nuclear capable Prithvi II test fired.....	83
3. Rs.16, 000 crore worth of goodies for the Army, Navy and Air Force.....	84

ALL INDIA RADIO

1. A Discussion on Union Budget.....	86
2. A Discussion on Health Sector with respect to Union Budget 2018-19.....	87
3. A Discussion on Global Investors Summit.....	88
4. A Discussion on creating awareness about cancer.....	91
5. A Discussion on Ayushman Bharat health care scheme.....	92
6. A Discussion on political crisis in Maldives.....	94
7. A Discussion on RBI's monetary policy review.....	96
8. A Discussion on Prime Minister research fellows scheme.....	98
9. A Discussion on health index report.....	100
10. A Discussion on India – Palestine relationship.....	103
11. A Discussion on India – UAE bilateral relationships.....	105
12. A Discussion on the Prime Minister's visit to West Asia.....	106
13. A Discussion on Khelo – India games.....	108

14. A Discussion on government's proposal on public Provident Fund accounts.....	111
15. A Discussion on developmental projects in Arunachal Pradesh.....	113
16. A Discussion on World Sustainable Development Summit.....	115
17. A Discussion on India – Iran bilateral relationship.....	118
18. A Discussion on 'doubling farmer's income by 2022.....	120
19. A Discussion on Uttar Pradesh Investors Summit.....	122
20. A Discussion on opening of coal mines for private sector.....	124
21. A Discussion on Indo-Canada bilateral relationship.....	126
22. A Discussion on inauguration of development projects.....	128
23. A Discussion on GOBAR – Dhan Scheme.....	130
24. A Discussion on National Science Day.....	132

Point Blank (facts for prelims)

1. National Green Tribunal (NGT) cannot have single-judge bench: SC.....	135
2. 4 Rivers in Jammu and Kashmir declared 'National Waterways'.....	135
3. New tunnel planned in Arunachal Pradesh.....	135
4. India's 1st defence industrial corridor.....	135
5. India's First MSE Sentiment Index.....	135
6. India Ranks 44th in GIPI.....	136
7. ASH TRACK Mobile App.....	136
8. Government to change base year for GDP, IIP.....	136
9. India's first artificial intelligence centre.....	137

10. Exercise Garuda Shakti.....	137
11. Singapore to impose carbon tax from 2019.....	137
12. Committee to study Brahmaputra.....	137
13. Government Sets up The “NITI Forum For Northeast”.....	137
14. Prime Minister’s Research Fellows (PMRF) scheme.....	138

Smart Abhyas

Polity and Social Issues



Smart Abhyas

**FEBRUARY
2018**



1. Budget 2018-19: Education is a top priority

What is the issue?

Government has announced a number of initiatives in the Budget 2018-19 reiterating that a developing country like India can be propelled to greater heights by revitalizing the education sector.

Initiatives that have been proposed:

1. Revitalizing Infrastructure and Systems in Education (RISE)

- To step up investments in research and related infrastructure in premier educational institutions, including health institutions.
- Total investment of Rs.1, 00,000 crore in the next four years
- Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) would be suitably structured for funding this initiative.

2. Prime Minister's Research Fellowship scheme

- 1,000 best B.Tech students will be identified from premier institutions each year and facilities will be provided to them to undertake Ph.D in IITs and IISc with an attractive fellowship.

3. Ekalavya Residential School Scheme:

- By the year 2022, every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons, will have an Ekalavya Model Residential School
- Ekalavya schools will be treated at par with Navodaya Vidyalayas and will have special facilities for preserving local art and culture, besides providing training in sports and skill development.

2. Budget 2018-19 in a nutshell

- Budget guided by mission to strengthen agriculture, rural development, health, education, employment, MSME and infrastructure sectors
- Government says, a series of structural reforms will propel India among the fastest growing economies of the world. Country firmly on course to achieve

over 8 % growth as manufacturing, services and exports back on good growth path.

- MSP for all unannounced kharif crops will be one and half times of their production cost like majority of rabi crops: Institutional Farm Credit raised to 11 lakh crore in 2018-19 from 8.5 lakh crore in 2014-15.
- 22,000 rural haats to be developed and upgraded into Gramin Agricultural Markets to protect the interests of 86% small and marginal farmers.
- “Operation Greens” launched to address price fluctuations in potato, tomato and onion for benefit of farmers and consumers.
- Two New Funds of Rs10, 000 crore announced for Fisheries and Animal Husbandry sectors; Re-structured National Bamboo Mission gets Rs.1290 crore.
- Loans to Women Self Help Groups will increase to Rs.75, 000 crore in 2019 from 42,500 crore last year.
- Higher targets for Ujjwala, Saubhagya and Swachh Mission to cater to lower and middle class in providing free LPG connections, electricity and toilets.
- Outlay on health, education and social protection will be 1.38 lakh crore. Tribal students to get Ekalavya Residential School in each tribal block by 2022. Welfare fund for SCs gets a boost.
- World’s largest Health Protection Scheme covering over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families launched with a family limit upto 5 lakh rupees for secondary and tertiary treatment.
- Fiscal Deficit pegged at 3.5 %, projected at 3.3 % for 2018-19.
- Rs. 5.97 lakh crore allocation for infrastructure
- Ten prominent sites to be developed as Iconic tourist destinations
- NITI Aayog to initiate a national programme on Artificial Intelligence(AI)

- Centres of excellence to be set up on robotics, AI, Internet of things etc
- Disinvestment crossed target of Rs 72,500 crore to reach Rs 1,00,000 crore
- Comprehensive Gold Policy on the anvil to develop yellow metal as an asset class
- 100 percent deduction proposed to companies registered as Farmer Producer Companies with an annual turnover upto Rs. 100 crore on profit derived from such activities, for five years from 2018-19.
- Deduction of 30 percent on emoluments paid to new employees Under Section 80-JJAA to be relaxed to 150 days for footwear and leather industry, to create more employment.
- No adjustment in respect of transactions in immovable property where Circle Rate value does not exceed 5 percent of consideration.
- Proposal to extend reduced rate of 25 percent currently available for companies with turnover of less than 50 crore (in Financial Year 2015-16), to companies reporting turnover up to Rs. 250 crore in Financial Year 2016-17, to benefit micro, small and medium enterprises.
- Standard Deduction of Rs. 40,000 in place of present exemption for transport allowance and reimbursement of miscellaneous medical expenses. 2.5 crore salaried employees and pensioners to benefit.

Relief to Senior Citizens proposed:

- Exemption of interest income on deposits with banks and post offices to be increased from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 50,000.
- TDS not required to be deducted under section 194A. Benefit also available for interest from all fixed deposit schemes and recurring deposit schemes.
- Hike in deduction limit for health insurance premium and/ or medical expenditure from Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 50,000 under section 80D.

- Increase in deduction limit for medical expenditure for certain critical illness from Rs. 60,000 (in case of senior citizens) and from Rs. 80,000 (in case of very senior citizens) to Rs. 1 lakh for all senior citizens, under section 80DDB.
- Proposed to extend Pradhan Mantri Vaya Vandana Yojana up to March, 2020. Current investment limit proposed to be increased to Rs. 15 lakh from the existing limit of Rs. 7.5 lakh per senior citizen.
- More concessions for International Financial Services Centre (IFSC), to promote trade in stock exchanges located in IFSC.
- To control cash economy, payments exceeding Rs. 10,000 in cash made by trusts and institutions to be disallowed and would be subject to tax.
- Tax on Long Term Capital Gains exceeding Rs. 1 lakh at the rate of 10 percent, without allowing any indexation benefit. However, all gains up to 31st January, 2018 will be grandfathered.
- Proposal to introduce tax on distributed income by equity oriented mutual funds at the rate of 10 percent.
- Proposal to increase cess on personal income tax and corporation tax to 4 percent from present 3 percent.
- Proposal to roll out E-assessment across the country to almost eliminate person to person contact leading to greater efficiency and transparency in direct tax collection.
- Proposed changes in customs duty to promote creation of more jobs in the country and also to incentivize domestic value addition and Make in India in sectors such as food processing, electronics, auto components, footwear and furniture.

3. India's fight against polio

What is the status of polio in India?

- No existing cases of polio in India.
- India became polio free in 2014.

Why is India carrying out Pulse Polio Campaigns in spite of being polio free?

Polio can re-emerge at any point of time and the only way to keep it out is make sure that all the vulnerable population is immunized against it.

There are two ways in which India can be exposed to recurrence of polio:

- Polio virus can spread into India from across the borders through Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The second risk of resurgence comes, ironically, from OPV (Oral Polio Vaccine) itself.

How does polio spread from OPV?

- In rare cases, Oral Polio Vaccine, which contains weakened but live polio virus, can cause paralytic polio.
- Also, because the vaccine-virus is excreted by immunized children, it can move from one person to another.
- Vaccine derived poliovirus (VDPV) is mutant of the polio virus which sticks around after OPV is administered in certain cases. VDPV, like imported wild polio, can cause outbreaks in under-immunized population

What is the alternative to OPV?

- Inactivated Polio Vaccine (IPV), IPV does not cause VDPV but protects children equally well against polio.

Way forward for India:

- Out of the three wild types of poliovirus that cause the disease, the transmission of one, Wild Poliovirus 2 (WPV-2), was interrupted successfully more than a decade ago.
- The two remaining viruses that are circulating in Pakistan and Afghanistan are WPV-1 and WPV-3.
- Once we stop these two viruses in their tracks, OPV will be phased out and replaced globally with IPV.

4. Health Sub-centres to Health Wellness Centres

What is the issue?

- In the 2018-19 budgets, a Rs 1,200-crore package has been announced to convert health sub-centres into health and wellness centres as a part of the Ayushman Bharat initiative.

About the move:

- The Union Health Ministry plans to deliver 12 types of basic healthcare services at these sub-centres ranging from mother and child care to basic ophthalmic and ENT care as well as basic management of mental healthcare.
- For the manpower requirement, the ministry looks at Ayurveda graduates with 4.5 years of training or nursing practitioners. Another option is to recruit those who have completed a B.Sc in community medicine.
- All of them have to undergo a six-month bridge course, taught by the Indira Gandhi National Open University.
- Everyone above 30 will be screened for diabetes, hypertension and breast, oral and cervical cancer as the toll due to non-communicable diseases is on the rise.
- The scheme would require Rs 25,000 crore in the next five years as each of the 1.5 lakh centres needs nearly Rs 17 lakh for training and equipment purchase.

Impact of this scheme on society:

- The 1.5 lakh health and wellness centres would bring healthcare system closer to people's homes by providing comprehensive healthcare, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services.
- They will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic services.

1. National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC)

About the fund:

- The National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC) was established as Central Sector Scheme in August, 2015.
- To meet the cost of adaptation to climate change for the State and Union Territories of India those are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.
- The overall aim of NAFCC is to support concrete adaptation activities which mitigate the adverse effects of climate change.
- The activities under this scheme are implemented in a project mode.
- The projects related to adaptation in sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, water, forestry, tourism etc. are eligible for funding under NAFCC.

Implementing authority/organization

- National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) is the National Implementing Entity (NIE).

How are projects approved?

- The States/UTs are required to prepare the project proposal in consultation with NIE i.e. NABARD.
- The project proposals are required to be approved by the State Steering Committee on Climate Change to be eligible for consideration under NAFCC.
- It is the discretion of the State Government to engage any organization to assist in project preparation, as per their requirement

2. All India Tiger Estimation 2018

What is the issue?

- The 'All India Tiger Estimation 2018' is set to become the most accurate and precise estimation that has been carried thanks to modern technology and methods that have been adopted by the authorities.

Which organization/body is responsible for carrying the estimation process?

- Wildlife Institute of India (WII) is mandated with the task of developing and implementing the status assessment every four years under the direction of NTCA and in collaboration with State Forest Departments, civil society and NGOs.

M-STripES: The app for tiger estimation

- The phone application automatically records the track log of surveys and line transects, as well as authenticates the recorded data on signs and animal sightings with geo-tagged photographs.

About the 'All India Tiger Estimation':

- India conducts the All India Tiger Estimation every four years.
- Three cycles of the estimation have already been completed in 2006, 2010 and 2014. These estimates showed estimates of 1411, 1706 and 2226 tigers respectively.
- The national status assessment exercise provides details such as the size of tiger population, extent, covariates of prey, co-predators, habitat and human impact.
- It has been observed that tiger population in India has increased at an average rate of about 5.8 per cent since the year 2006.

3. Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury

What is the issue?

- Union Cabinet has approved the proposal for ratification of Minamata Convention on Mercury and depositing the instrument of ratification enabling India to become a Party of the Convention.

What does it mean for India?

- The approval entails Ratification of the Minamata Convention on Mercury along with flexibility for continued use of mercury-based products and processes involving mercury compound up to 2025.
- The Minamata Convention on Mercury will be implemented in the context of sustainable development with the objective to protect human health and environment from the anthropogenic emissions and releases of mercury and mercury compounds.

What is the Minamata Convention about?

- The Convention protects the most vulnerable from the harmful effects of mercury and also protects the developmental space of developing countries. Therefore, the interest of the poor and vulnerable groups will be protected.
- The Minamata Convention on Mercury will further urge enterprises to move to mercury-free alternatives in products and non-mercury technologies in manufacturing processes. This will drive research and development, and promote innovation.

4. Bay of Bengal home to three new species of eel

What is the issue?

- Three new species of eel have been discovered along the northern Bay of Bengal coast.

Where have they been discovered?

- One species at the Digha coast of the Bay of Bengal.
- Two other species at the Vishakhapatnam coast.

Species discovered (do not memorize):

1. *Gymnothorax pseudotile*
2. *Gymnothorax visakhaensis*
3. *Enchelycore propinqua*

About eels:

- India is home to about 125 species of eels of the 1000 plus species across the world.
- Bay of Bengal coast is now home to at least 5 new species of eel.

5. Drying Himalayan springs a major worry

What is the issue?

- A Department of Science and Technology report has found that nearly 60% of low water springs in the Himalayas have dried up.

What does this mean?

- Drying up of such springs translates to acute water shortage of drinking water to 50 million people across 12 states.

Significant take-aways from the report:

- The report said a major proportion of drinking water supply in the mountainous parts of Uttarakhand is spring-based, while in Meghalaya, all villages use springs for drinking and/or irrigation.
- The report highlighted a survey in Sikkim that found that water production has declined in half of all its springs, a dangerous sign that aquifers are depleting in a state which is almost entirely dependent on springs for drinking water.

1. Budget 2018-19: Doubling farmers income

What is the issue?

- The Budget 2018-19 looked on target to achieving the Prime Minister's vision of 'doubling farmer's income by 2022'.

Initiatives undertaken in this regard:

a. Minimum Support Price:

- Government has decided to keep Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all hitherto unannounced crops of Kharif at least at one and half times of their production cost.

b. Increase in credit for agriculture:

- Government announced raising institutional credit for agriculture sector to Rs.11 lakh crore for the year 2018-19 from Rs.10 lakh crore in 2017-18.

c. Operation Greens

- 'Operation Greens' was launched to address price volatility of perishable commodities like potatoes, tomatoes and onions, at an outlay of Rs. 500 crore.
- 'Operation Greens', on the lines of 'Operation Flood', shall promote Farmer Producers Organizations (FPOs), agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management in the sector.

d. Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs):

- Development and upgradation of existing 22,000 rural haats into Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs).
- Rs 2000 crore Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund for developing and upgrading agricultural marketing infrastructure to be setup.
- These GrAMs would be electronically linked to e-NAM and exempted from regulations of APMCs.
- This would provide farmers facility to make direct sale to consumers and bulk purchasers.

e. Fisheries and Animal husbandry given a boost

- To help small and marginal farmers in fisheries and animal husbandry sector to meet their working capital needs, government extended the facility of Kisan Credit Cards (KCC) to the sector.
- This would give benefit of crop loan and interest subvention, so far available to agriculture sector only under KCC, for rearing of cattle, buffalo, goat, sheep poultry and fisheries.
- Setting up of Fisheries and Aquaculture Infrastructure Development Fund (FAIDF) for fisheries sector and an Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) for financing infrastructure requirement of animal husbandry sector. Total Corpus of these two new Funds would be Rs.10, 000 crore.

f. National Bamboo Mission to be revamped

- Launch of the Rs.1290-crore Re-structured National Bamboo Mission, which is based on a cluster based approach to address the complete bamboo value chain and promote bamboo sector in a holistic manner.
- With a focus on linking bamboo growers with consumers; creation of facilities for collection, aggregation, processing, marketing, MSMEs, skill building and brand building, this announcement would contribute in generating additional income for farmers, employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled youth especially in rural areas.

2. Budget 2018-19: Highest ever allocation to Railways

What is the issue?

- A capital expenditure of Rs.1, 48,528 crore was allocated for the Railway Ministry for the year 2018--19.

Salient points regarding the railway budget:

- A large part of these funds will be utilized for capacity addition. The government has decided to double 18,000 km of tracks and to work on third and fourth lines on several sectors.

- Five thousand kilometers of gauge conversion would augment capacity and transform almost the entire network into broad gauge
- 4,000 km of the railway network would be commissioned for electrification during 2017--18.
- The Budget also made provision for acquisition of 12,000 wagons, 5,160 coaches and approximately 700 locomotives during 2018--19.

3. Budget 2018-19: MSMEs given a big boost

What is the issue?

- A provision of Rs. 3794 crore has been provided in the General Budget 2018-19 for the Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) to provide credit support, capital and interest subsidy and innovations to this sector.

Salient points regarding this development:

- Government will contribute 12% of the wages of the new employees in the Employee Provident Fund (EPF) for all the sectors for next three years
- In an effort to reduce tax burden on MSMEs and to create large-scale employment, measures to extend the benefit of reduced rate of 25% to companies who have reported turnover up to Rs.250 crore in the Financial Year 2016-17 were also announced.
- Amendments have been proposed to reduce women employees' contribution to 8% for first three years of their employment against existing rate of 12% or 10% with no change in employers' contribution in the Employees Provident Fund and Miscellaneous Provisions Act, 1952
- Proposition to onboard Public Sector Banks and corporates on Trade Electronic Receivable Discounting System (TReDS) platform and link it to GSTN. According to the RBI, the objective of the TReDS is to facilitate financing of invoices/bills of MSMEs drawn on corporate buyers by way of discounting by financiers.

4. Budget 2018-19: 'Digital India' is here to stay

What is the issue?

- Expenditure to be doubled by the government on its flagship Digital India programme to Rs.3, 073 crore for the next fiscal against Rs.1, 425.63 crore in 2017--18.

Salient points about the development:

- NITI Aayog would initiate a national programme to direct efforts in the area of artificial intelligence, including research and development of its applications
- Department of Science and Technology will launch a Mission on Cyber Physical Systems to support establishment of centres of excellence that will invest in research, training and skilling in robotics, artificial intelligence, digital manufacturing, big data analysis, quantum communication and internet of things.
- Rs.14, 500 crore allocated to strengthen telecom infrastructure projects, including BharatNet, during the upcoming fiscal.

5. Budget 2018-19: Infrastructure given importance

What is the issue?

- The Government has enhanced allocation for the Infrastructure Sector in the Union Budget 2018-19, recognizing its role as the growth driver of the economy.
- The budgetary and extra budgetary expenditure for the Sector has been increased from Rs.4.94 lakh crore in 2017-18 to Rs.5.97 lakh crore in 2018-19

Salient points in this regard:

- In the Urban Infrastructure Sector, the Government proposes to develop ten prominent tourist sites as Iconic Tourism destinations through holistic infrastructure and skill development.
- In addition, tourist amenities will be upgraded at 100 Adarsh monuments of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- India Infrastructure Finance Corporation Limited (IIFCL) to help finance infrastructure projects including investment in education and health infrastructure.
- In a boost to infrastructure development, the total outlay for the Urban Rejuvenation Mission, which includes projects under AMRUT and Smart Cities Mission, has been increased to Rs.12,169 crore.
- The Smart Cities Mission, which received Rs.4,000 crore budgetary allocation in 2017--2018 and Rs.4,412 crore the previous year, will get Rs.6,169 crore in 2018--19, including Rs.169 crore towards capacity building for urban development.
- Establishment of a dedicated Affordable Housing Fund (AHF) under the National Housing Bank, funded from priority sector lending shortfall and fully serviced bonds authorised by the Centre.

Civil Aviation gets a boost:

- In the Civil Aviation Sector, the Budget 2018-19 announced a new initiative NABH Nirman to expand airport capacity by more than five times to handle a billion trips in a year.
- The expansion will be funded by leveraging the balance sheet of Airports Authority of India.

1. Breakthrough in the study of viruses

What is the issue?

- The scientists at the National Institute of Virology have developed compounds that can render harmful viruses' inactive facilitating research.

How is this innovation beneficial?

- The method eliminates bio-risks involved in handling deadly viruses, making their testing possible even at common laboratories.
- Eventually, it eliminates the need to test such samples at highly secured bio-safety labs, eliminating huge expenses on logistics and delays in diagnosis.
- It can protect laboratory workers from viruses and ensure safe experimenting with highly infectious agents even at common laboratories

2. Budget 2018-19: Space and Defence

What is the issue?

- The allocation for defence in this year's Budget saw a hike of 7.81%, excluding pensions.
- At Rs.10,783 crore, the Department of Space (DoS) got its biggest outlay to date and also the best yearly increase in five years, of 18.6%.

Defence sector:

- Compared to 2017--18, this year's allocation represents a 7.81% increase over the Budget estimate of Rs.2.74 lakh crore and 5.91% increase over the revised estimate of Rs.2.79 lakh crore.
- In the capital allocation, a majority of it would go for committed liabilities, which are payments for contracts that have already been signed. This would leave very little for fresh procurements

Space sector:

- This segment includes money towards centres involved in satellites, launch vehicles, propulsion, launch, post launch satellite tracking; besides operational projects and those under development.

- Under Space Sciences, Rs 230 crore has been earmarked together for the proposed second Mars Orbiter Mission, a Venus mission plan, a space docking experiment, small satellites, Xray polarimeter satellite called XpoSat, climate programme and sponsored research.
- Space applications, which include payload development and remote sensing, also received a hike.

3. ISRO says India too will have a 60 tonne launcher

What is the issue?

- Speaking with reference to SpaceX's successful launch of Falcon Heavy (FH), ISRO Chairman reiterated that India would also develop such launchers in the future.

What is the Falcon Heavy (FH)?

- The privately- funded Falcon Heavy (FH) is the most powerful working booster on Earth and can lift 64 tonnes of cargo to near -Earth orbits.
- Developed by Space Exploration (SpaceX)

Where does ISRO stand at the moment?

- Indian Space Research Organization is currently perfecting a rocket that can lift four tonnes to higher orbits and about eight tonne loads to lower orbits, the GSLV Mark III.
- ISRO is presently working on semi-cryogenic fuel-based propulsion reusable systems to improve cost and fuel efficiency.

About GSLV Mk III: India's heavy lifter rocket

- The launch of GSLV Mk III is significant as ISRO traditional workhorse PSLV is unable to carry payloads greater than 2000 kg.
- Powered by a indigenously developed cryogenic engine weighing 25 tonnes.

Why should India be proud of this achievement?

- Apart from India only 5 countries have successfully developed and deployed cryogenic engines.

How do cryogenic engines operate?

- They use liquid oxygen and hydrogen as propellants
- A Cryogenic rocket stage is more efficient and provides more thrust for every kilogram of propellant it burns compared to solid and earth-storable liquid propellant rocket stages.

4. H7N4 bird flu confirmed in China

What you need to know about bird flu

What is it?

- H7N4 is a subtype of influenza A virus, which is commonly referred to as bird flu.
- It commonly causes influenza in birds and other mammals but is rare in humans.
- H5, H7 and H9 strains of the virus are most often found to affect humans.

What are H and N?

- The influenza viruses that affect human beings are categorised into three different types : Influenza A, B and C.
- The influenza type A and B viruses have two types of spikes on their surfaces
- Haemagglutinin denoted by H: helps in the virus to attach and infect the receptor
- Neuraminidase denoted by N: allows newly synthesized viruses to spread.

Symptoms:

- Severe respiratory problems and death if not dealt with in early stages.
- Symptoms are akin to common flu symptoms with the addition of respiratory tract problems and conjunctivitis.

1. Budget 2018-19: Ayushman Bharat programme

What is the issue?

- The Government announced two major initiatives in health sector, as part of Ayushman Bharat programme.

About the initiatives:

a. Health and Wellness Centre:

- The National Health Policy, 2017 has envisioned Health and Wellness Centres as the foundation of India's health system.
- Under this 1.5 lakh centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people.
- These centres will provide comprehensive health care, including for non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services.
- These centres will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic services.

b. National Health Protection Scheme:

- The second flagship programme under Ayushman Bharat is National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries).
- Aims at providing coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- This will be the world's largest government funded health care programme.

How will India benefit from these initiatives?

- The health sector initiatives under Ayushman Bharat Programme will build a New India 2022 and ensure enhanced productivity, well-being and avert wage loss and impoverishment.
- These Schemes will also generate lakhs of jobs, particularly for women.

2. Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahaabhiyan (KUSUM)

What is it?

- A scheme for promoting decentralized solar power production of up to 28,250 MW to help farmers.

Provisions:

- The scheme would provide extra income to farmers, by giving them an option to sell additional power to the grid through solar power projects set up on their barren lands.
- The components of the scheme include building 10,000 MW solar plants on barren lands and providing sops to DISCOMS to purchase the electricity produced.
- Also 'solarizing' existing pumps of 7250 MW as well as government tube wells with a capacity of 8250 MW and distributing 17.5 lakh solar pumps.
- The 60% subsidy on the solar pumps provided to farmers will be shared between the Centre and the States while 30% would be provided through bank loans. The balance cost has to be borne by the farmers.

How will the scheme benefit farmers?

- Promotion of decentralized solar power production.
- Reduction of transmission losses as well as providing support to the financial health of DISCOMs by reducing the subsidy burden to the agriculture sector.
- The scheme would also promote energy efficiency and water conservation and provide water security to farmers.

3. National Health Scheme (NHS)

What is the issue?

- The government's ambitious mega health care programme for 10 crore poor families will roll out by October 2.
- It is to be funded in a 60:40 proportion by the Centre and states, with the premium per family estimated at Rs 1,000-1,200.

Who will be covered under the scheme?

- A total 10 crore families or 50 crore beneficiaries, classified as 'deprived' in the socio-economic caste census of 2011, will be covered by the scheme.

How can the scheme be availed?

- It will be a cashless Aadhaar-linked facility with beneficiaries availing treatment anywhere in the country in empanelled private or public hospitals.

Implementation of the scheme?

There are two routes to implement the scheme

1. buying insurance from a private company
2. involving a government-supported trust to provide the insurance cover.

It would be left to the state governments to decide which model they would like to adopt.

What will the scheme cover?

- The scheme takes care of hospitalization, secondary and tertiary care.

1. India joins Ashgabat Agreement

What is the issue?

- India has been admitted to Agreement on the Establishment of an International Transport and Transit Corridor.

About the Ashgabat Agreement:

- Founding members of the agreement are Turkmenistan, Iran, Oman and Uzbekistan and these countries had signed the pact on April 25, 2011.
- Ashgabat Agreement envisages facilitation of transit and transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf.
- Accession to the Agreement would diversify India's connectivity options with Central Asia and have a positive influence on India's trade and commercial ties with the region.

2. Trouble in paradise: What you need to know about the Maldives situation

What is the issue?

- President Abdulla Yameen refused to abide by Supreme Court's orders to released jailed opposition leaders and reinstate expelled legislators in Parliament making way for a political crisis in the country.

Why not abide by the Supreme Court's orders?

- Reinstating the expelled legislators would give the opposition the number to potentially impeach Yameen.

What has the President done?

- Army was called into the Maldives Supreme Court and arrested the judges triggering a political crisis.

Where does India come into the picture?

- Exiled former President of Maldives Mohamed Nasheed has sought Indian military intervention in Maldives.

How has India reacted?

- 'Disturbed' by the development taking place in Maldives.
- Criticized the arrest of the Chief Justice and Former President Abdul Gayoom as 'reasons for concern'.
- Is carefully monitoring the situation.

What you need to know about Maldives:

- Strategic archipelago located in the Indian Ocean comprising 1200 coral islands.
- Has a population of 4, 27,000.
- Tourism accounts for more than half of its \$ 4.2 billion GDP.
- Has become a major geopolitical player in the Indian Ocean region amidst India and China's struggle for dominance.

India and Maldives: What's the equation?

- Maldives is a member of SAARC and it is important for India to have Maldives on board to maintain its leadership in the region.
- India and Maldives share ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and cultural links since quite some time.
- India was among the first to recognize Maldives after its independence in 1965.
- 25,000 Indian nationals in Maldives and Indian tourists also account for 6% of tourists Maldives receives every year.

3. Wakhan Corridor: Unknown to the world

Where is Wakhan Corridor situated?

It is a narrow strip of inhospitable and barely accessible land in Afghanistan bordered by the mountains of what is now Tajikistan and Pakistan, and extending all the way to China.

About the Wakhan Corridor:

- Created in the 19th century as a Great Game buffer zone between tsarist Russia and British India, the corridor has since remained untouched by any kind of government.
- Known to those who live there by its Persian name Bam-e-Dunya, or “roof of the world”.



Who lives there?

- The Wakhi form the bulk of the corridor’s population, the nomadic Kyrgyz tribe, which numbers just 1,100 people, live separately at its northern end.
- Their life, largely free from crime and violence, revolves around yaks and cattle, which they barter for food and clothes from the few traders who visit the remote region.

4. India can now access a strategic port in Oman

What is the issue?

- India has been granted access to Port of Duqm in Oman for military use and logistical support, which is seen as a positive development in India's stride to expand its presence in Indian Ocean Region.

What does this mean for India?

- Services of Duqm port and dry dock will be available for maintenance of Indian military vessels.
- Growing Chinese influence in the region will be under check thanks to India's proactive approach.

Strategic importance of the Duqm port:

- Situated on the southeastern seaboard of Oman overlooking Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean.
- Situated in close proximity to the Chabahar port in Iran
- Duqm port also houses a Special Economic Zone (SEZ).

1. INS Karanj: An impressive addition to the Navy's arsenal

What is the issue?

- Navy's third Scorpene class submarine INS Karanj joined the Indian Navy's fleet.

About the issue:

- Scorpene-class submarine Karanj is loaded with superior stealth features such as advanced acoustic silencing techniques, low radiated noise levels, hydro-dynamically optimized shape and the ability to launch a crippling attack on the enemy using precision guided weapons.
- The attack by INS Karanj can be launched with both torpedoes and tube launched anti-ship missiles, whilst underwater or on surface.
- The stealth of this potent platform is enhanced by the special attention given to various signatures. These stealth features give it invulnerability, unmatched by most submarines.
- Scorpene submarines can undertake a wide range of missions such as anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, intelligence gathering, mine-laying and area surveillance.
- The submarine INS Karanj has been designed by French naval defence company DCNS.
- Another three Scorpenes, being built under a Transfer-of-Technology contract, are in the pipeline.



- Apart from this, a sophisticated and state-of-the-art Shore Integration Facility has been developed at MDL for integration and simulation of various equipment of the Scorpene submarine combat system for which there was no facility available in the country.

About the Scorpene deal:

- The Scorpene deal was signed for India in October 2015 and the first submarine was due to be delivered by 2012.
- Last year, INS Kalvari, the first Scorpene class submarine was commissioned into the Indian Navy
- INS Khanderi, the second Scorpene class submarine was launched in January 2017, and is currently undergoing the rigorous phase of sea trials and is also scheduled to be delivered shortly.

2. Nuclear capable Prithvi II test fired

What is the issue?

- India today successfully test-fired its indigenously developed nuclear-capable Prithvi-II missile from a test range in Odisha as part of a user trial by the Army.
- The trial of the surface-to-surface missile, which has a strike range of 350 km, was carried out from a mobile launcher from launch complex-3 of the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur

About the missile:

- The Prithvi-II missile is capable of carrying a 500 kg to 1,000 kg warhead and is thrustured by liquid propulsion twin engines.
- Surface to Surface missile which is nuclear capable
- It uses advanced inertial guidance system with maneuvering trajectory to hit its target with precision and accuracy.
- Inducted into Indian armed forces in 2003, the nine-metre-tall and single-stage liquid-fuelled.

1. A Discussion on Union Budget

- The Budget 2018-19 has addressed the issue of inclusiveness which pertains to farmers, Micro Small Medium Enterprise sector and people in the unorganized sector.

Importance of farming:

- Farmers and Farmer Organizations were demanding a Minimum Support Price (MSP) based on cost + 50% margin which is also recommended by Prof. M.S.Swaminathan
- Government has decided to keep Minimum Support Price (MSP) for all hitherto unannounced crops of Kharif at least at one and half times of their production cost
- It also announced raising institutional credit for agriculture sector to Rs.11 lakh crore for the year 2018-19 from Rs.10 lakh crore in 2017-18.
- The condition of farmers was uncertain for the last few years for various reasons like droughts, floods, cyclones and price fluctuations. This farmer's distress has been addressed in this budget.
- The Budget 2018-19 looked on target to achieving the Prime Minister's vision of 'doubling farmer's income by 2022'.
- It is evident that increase in farmer's income leads to increase in purchasing power thereby creates a demand in production.
- To address price volatility 'Operation Greens' was launched for perishable commodities like potatoes, tomatoes and onions, at an outlay of Rs. 500 crore.
- 'Operation Greens', on the lines of 'Operation Flood', shall promote Farmer Producers Organizations (FPOs), agri-logistics, processing facilities and professional management in the sector.
- Government focuses on Development and up gradation of existing 22,000 rural haats into Gramin Agricultural Markets (GrAMs).

- Rs 2000 crore Agri-Market Infrastructure Fund was also allocated for developing and upgrading agricultural marketing infrastructure to be setup.
- These GrAMs would be electronically linked to e-NAM and exempted from regulations of APMCs.
- This would provide farmers facility to make direct sale to consumers and bulk purchasers.

MSME'S

- A provision of Rs. 3794 crore has been provided in the General Budget 2018-19 for the Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) to provide credit support, capital and interest subsidy and innovations to this sector.
- Government will contribute 12% of the wages of the new employees in the Employee Provident Fund (EPF) for all the sectors for next three years
- In an effort to reduce tax burden on MSMEs and to create large-scale employment, measures to extend the benefit of reduced rate of 25% to companies who have reported turnover up to Rs.250 crore in the Financial Year 2016-17 were also announced.

2. Discussion on Health Sector with respect to budget 2018-19

Health and Wellness centres:

- The focus on health not only improves the quality of life of common man but also improves the productivity.
- The allocations for health sector is 11.5% higher compared to last year
- The financial allocations for the health programs will be made gradually and not in a single go.
- The Government announced two major initiatives in health sector, as part of Ayushman Bharat programme.

- The National Health Policy, 2017 had envisioned Health and Wellness Centres as the foundation of India's health system. Under this 1.5 lakh centres will bring health care system closer to the homes of people.
- These centres will provide comprehensive health care, including mother and child care, non-communicable diseases and maternal and child health services.
- These centres will also provide free essential drugs and diagnostic services.
- These sub-centres will be managed by states with financial support and training from centre
- The government also provides nutritional support of 500/- for tuberculosis patients of any stage
- Through this government covers all the primary health care requirements which are neglected for long period in Independent India
- Government also intends to upgrade district hospitals to Medical colleges for increasing medical facilities. At this point of time 58 hospitals will be upgraded for Medical colleges. After that 3 lok sabha constituencies which do not have medical colleges will be covered under this scheme

National Health Protection Scheme:

- The second flagship programme under Ayushman Bharat is National Health Protection Scheme, which will cover over 10 crore poor and vulnerable families (approximately 50 crore beneficiaries).
- National Health Protection Scheme aims at providing coverage upto 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization.
- The scheme takes care of hospitalization, secondary and tertiary care health care.
- This will be the world's largest government funded health care programme.

1. National Green Tribunal (NGT) cannot have single-judge bench: SC

- The Supreme Court on ruled that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) cannot have benches comprising of a single judge.
- The court was hearing a petition against a government law that allows for single-judge benches.
- The NGT, which was set up for speedy and effective disposal of environment-related cases, currently has six judges against its capacity of 40.

2. 4 Rivers in Jammu and Kashmir declared 'National Waterways'

- The Union government has declared four rivers namely Chenab, Indus, Jhelum and Ravi as national waterways, which would be developed in a phased manner.

3. New tunnel planned in Arunachal Pradesh

- Finance Minister has proposed the construction of a new tunnel in Arunachal Pradesh.
- The tunnel is to be constructed under Sela Pass.

4. India's 1st defence industrial corridor

- The first of the two defense industrial production corridors, as announced in the Union Budget, will link Chennai and Bengaluru and will pass through Coimbatore and several other industrial clusters.
- The corridor shall provide impetus to the defence production industry in the country and in the region.