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INDEX

1. JOB CREATION AT THE FARMER'S DOORSTEP (GS 3)
2. CUTTING THROUGH THE SMOG (GS 3)
3. SHORT ON NUANCE (GS 3)
4. RETHINKING THE GULF (GS 2)
5. STILL ON THE LAST CHANCE SALOON (GS 3)
6. AN INVITATION TO CORRUPTION? (GS 3)
7. A SHOT IN THE ARM (GS 2)
8. DEATH IN THE AIR (GS 3)
9. QUICK FIX FOR THE FARMER (GS 3)
10. ANCHORED IN HUMAN RIGHTS (GS 2)
11. IS IT TIME TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY? (GS 2)
12. FARMING IN A WARMING WORLD (GS 3)
13. THE SPECTRE OF DEPORTATION (GS 2)
14. MAKING EVERY CITIZEN AN AUDITOR (GS 2)
15. RESTORING THE BALANCE (GS 2)
16. RBI'S INDEPENDENCE (GS 3)
17. TOWARDS A GENETIC PANOPTICON (GS 3)
18. ISLAND HOPPING (GS 2)
19. IF YOU WANT TO HELP FARMERS (GS 3)
20. BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOUR (GS 2)
21. STRANGE DEAL (GS 3)
22. PLAN BEFORE MAKING A BID (GS 2)
23. LIFELINES BEYOND FARM LOAN WAIVERS (GS 3)

JOB CREATION AT THE FARMER'S DOORSTEP

Indian express, GS 3

900 words reduced to 250

- The Telangana government's Rythu Bandhu scheme has spotlighted the policy of utilising cash transfer to assist land-owning farmers with a non-agricultural income.
- The average monthly income of rural households is Rs 8,000, with agricultural households deriving only 43% of their income from agriculture.
- The government has sought to double farmer income by raising minimum support prices, but such initiatives would apply directly only to 48% of rural India, with non-agricultural households being left behind.
- How to increase farmers' income?
 - embrace non-farm diversification
 - breeding policy needs to be revamped
 - a national breeding policy is needed
 - Buffalo breeding ought to be given more attention
 - Development of indigenous breeds of livestock
 - Feed supply needs to be mitigated through greater imports
 - Private investment must be encouraged
 - Animal health care should become a priority
 - create better incentive structures for investment in livestock
 - State governments should sponsor research
 - focus on developing markets, infrastructure and institutions
- How to improve conditions of migrant workers?
 - Enable migrant workers to get deserved access to various government schemes.
 - Access to Anganwadi facilities should be provided
 - Compliance of multiple laws exist for the welfare of construction workers should be ensured
 - Registration of workers with the Welfare Board should be made mandatory.
 - to improve the condition of women, strict anti-harassment laws should be implemented.
 - Creche facilities at construction sites should be provided
 - Workers should also be provided with training and skilling in their areas of interest
- While India's post-Independence rural policy has primarily been about driving people away from agriculture and towards cities, we must now incentivise job creation at their doorstep.

CUTTING THROUGH THE SMOG

The Hindu, GS 3

900 words reduced to 150

- Air pollution in north India has largely been attributed to stubble burning.
- Farmers are held responsible for the crisis but policies of the Central and State governments are at fault.
- **How to tackle stubble burning?**
 - crop diversification towards less water-intensive crops
 - strengthen the production and marketing of alternative crops
 - providing farmers an investment support and withdraw price-based support
 - an app-based support system, to rent out tractors and farm implements
 - effective use of paddy straw
 - farmers should be given options such as biomass generation
 - use of geospatial techniques to identify areas where stubble burning is severe
 - encourage installation of biomass plants in areas of high stubble burning
 - Incentivize farmers to sell the residual for additional income
- Incidents of stubble burning can be averted by long-term vision and strategic policy interventions.

SHORT ON NUANCE

Indian Express, GS 3

1000 words reduced to 250

- B N Srikrishna committee has prepared a draft data protection bill.
- **Pros of the committee**
 - inclusive functioning style
 - recommendations such as setting up of an independent data protection authority
 - suggestion that the Aadhaar Act requires several modifications
 - recognition given to data portability.
- **Cons of the committee**
 - Suggestion that the UIDAI be both the data fiduciary and the regulator for Aadhaar.
 - suggestion that even though personal data can be transferred outside India, data fiduciaries will be required to store a local copy.
 - cliched vocabulary and superficial treatment of several important issues, for example, data quality and data storage limitation
 - failure to define clear-cut guidelines for the safe use of artificial intelligence and big-data analytics
 - has not carefully evaluated the data processing requirements of the diverse private sector
- **Way forward**
 - investigation of the nuances of digital identity and guidelines
 - analysis of the extent to which personal information needs to be revealed
 - understanding of the possible pathways of information leaks
 - analysis of the possibilities of privacy preserving tools, techniques and protocols from computer science
 - improved data processing methods for tax compliance, corruption control, etc.
 - digitisation, surveillance and processing of large-scale personal transactional data
 - analyses of how such surveillance can be achieved without enabling undesirable mass surveillance
 - balancing the conflicting requirements of individual privacy and the benefits of large-scale data processing
 - defining the requirements and standards of access control, and protection against both external and insider attacks
 - availing the benefits from computer science
 - participation of civil society

RETHINKING THE GULF

Indian Express, GS 2

900 words reduced to 200

- **India's relations with Gulf countries have considerably improved:**
 - growing volumes of energy imports
 - substantive investments from the Gulf
 - there are 7 million Indian migrant workers in the region
 - Gulf is among India's top trading partners.
 - high-level engagement between has blossomed
 - growing security cooperation, especially on counter-terrorism
 - Increasing defence cooperation.
- **The roadblocks:**
 - India's too strong focus on the bilateral relations
 - Delhi is paying too little attention to the growing weight of the Gulf in regional affairs
- **Significance of Gulf nations**
 - Saudi Arabia has played a critical role in shaping the world energy markets
 - The UAE has become a small but important cosmopolitan centre.
 - construction of a moderate Arab centre envisaged by UAE is very much in India's interest
 - growing impact of the Gulf countries in the Indian Ocean region.
 - recent success of the UAE and Saudi Arabia in brokering peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea
 - shaping the geopolitics of their neighbouring regions.
 - eager to collaborate with India on development and strategic infrastructure
 - taking greater responsibility for managing the regional order
- India needs an integrated regional strategy to secure its ever-rising stakes in the Middle East and the Western Indian Ocean.

STILL ON THE LAST CHANCE SALOON

The Hindu, GS 3

1200 words reduced to 200

- Average global temperatures have crossed a degree Celsius above preindustrial levels.
- Purpose of the COP 24 is to agree on a rulebook to implement pledges made by the Paris Agreement.
- In the NDCs each country described the actions it would for mitigation and adaptation and the financial and technological support it needed.
- Article 9 of the Paris Agreement calls for financial support from developed countries and article 9.5 requires them to communicate their levels of support.
- **The Hurdles**
 - Estimate of adaptation is complicated and has not yet developed.
 - Little progress on finance, technology transfer and capacity development.
 - Multilateral funds pledged until 2017 are less than \$30 billion,.
 - Double counting and counting of development aid.
 - Inability to have any agreement between developing and rich countries.
 - occupation of atmospheric carbon space by rich countries, leaving little room for poor nations.
 - the Kyoto Protocol has not been ratified yet
 - developed countries are not doing their duties much better
 - Developed nations are still reliant on oil and coal.
- **Way forward**
 - Reliable climate flows required from developed countries.
 - Rich countries must alter their lifestyles considerably
 - support to poor countries experiencing losses from climate change events.
- Earth is heading to be 3-4° C warmer by the end of the century. Drastic steps are needed to prevent the destruction of ecosystems and the mass extinction of species.

AN INVITATION TO CORRUPTION?

The Hindu, GS 2

1300 words reduced to 125

- The government recently introduced an Electoral Bond Scheme to cleanse the mechanism of funding to political parties.
- **Problems with the scheme:**
 - There is no ceiling on party expenditure and the EC cannot monitor it
 - The scheme permits “every artificial juridical person,” to purchase bonds
 - The scheme allows for complete anonymity of the donor
 - Now, even loss-making entities can make unlimited contributions
 - Now, even shell companies can donate
- **Violation of the constitution**
 - The legislation was passed as a money bill under Article 110, which it does not seem to be.
 - The scheme subverts the fundamental rights since due to anonymity of the donor, a citizen cannot meaningfully participate in politics.
- The electoral bonds scheme may damage India’s democratic edifice.

A SHOT IN THE ARM

Indian Express, GS 2

850 words reduced to 250

- The under-five mortality rates in India have declined considerably from 126 in 1990 to 39 in 2017.
- The journey of Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP) has been further bolstered by Mission Indradhanush.
- **The importance of vaccines in India**
 - Around 27 million children are born every year in India.
 - India also has the largest burden of under-five mortality.
 - 0.1 million children die due to rotavirus-induced diarrhoea.
 - Unimmunised and partially-immunised children are most vulnerable to diseases and disability.
- **Challenges to vaccination programme**
 - Low full immunisation coverage (65 per cent),
 - limited basket of vaccines and,
 - quality and logistics of vaccine management
- **Mission Indradhanush**
 - To hasten the coverage to at least 90 per cent till 2020, the Mission Indradhanush was launched in 2014.
 - seven vaccines would be given to all children and pregnant women who have missed out.
 - It would cover all far-flung areas.
 - To focus onto the least vaccinated areas, MI has been transformed into “Intensified Mission Indradhanush” (IMI)
 - There is a sharper focus on surveillance activities
 - It has led to increase to 7 per cent in full immunisation coverage in one year from 1 per cent in the past.
 - aims to achieve 90 per cent immunisation by December 2018.
 - aims to achieve SDG-3 by 2030
- An immunisation programme is the most cost-effective public health intervention.

DEATH IN THE AIR

The Hindu, GS 3

500 words reduced to 150

- Air pollution has killed an estimated 1.24 million people in India in 2017.
- **Extent of air pollution**
 - Millions face premature death
 - PM2.5 is at 40 micrograms per cubic metre
- Paying greater attention to air quality can increase life expectancy by approx. 2 years in worst affected areas.
- **Way forward**
 - Sustainable solutions for stubble-burning and use of solid fuels in households
 - Ensure that the machinery to handle agricultural waste is in place and working in Punjab and Haryana
 - A mechanism for rapid collection of farm residues has to be instituted.
 - New approaches to recover value from biomass should be explored.
 - The potential of domestic biogas units, solar cookers and improved biomass cookstoves has to be explored.
 - India's commitments under the Paris Agreement need to be modified.
 - real-time measurement of pollution should be ensured.
- Rapid progress on clean air now depends on citizens making it a front-line political issue.

QUICK FIX FOR THE FARMER

Indian Express, GS 3

1000 words reduced to 150

- Recently, thousands of farmers held protest in Delhi.
- **Demands of farmers:**
 - debate in Parliament on farm distress;
 - one-time loan waiver; and
 - raising MSPs and making them legally binding on private traders
- **Rationality of these demands:**
 - debate would help understand and address farm distress better
 - loan waivers will largely help the well-off farmers, and will also hit public investments in agriculture adversely
 - an MSP formula based on just cost and ignoring demand would be inefficient
 - making MSP legally binding will turn out to be anti-farmer as it will discourage private traders
- **Way forward**
 - need of reforms in agri-markets
 - encouraging contract farming, futures trading, etc.
 - investments to improve the functioning of markets
 - thinking of a sustained income support for farmers.
 - financial inclusion of small and marginal farmers
 - implementation of PM's AASHA by state govts.
- Quick fix of loan waivers is not a solution of farm distress .

ANCHORED IN HUMAN RIGHTS

The Hindu, GS 2

900 words reduced to significant 100

- TB has become one of the leading cause of adult deaths although it is curable and preventable.
- **Signs of change**
 - Use of microchips to track patients
 - short course (DOTS) strategy, which requires reporting every day to a health authority
 - use of tablets, phones and drones for surveillance of TB patients.
- **Way forward**
 - availability of affordable generics of bedaquiline and delamanid.
 - Deployment of trained community health-care workers in sufficient numbers
 - Community-based structures to ensure accountability and foster partnership
 - Participation of grassroots civil society
- We can only beat TB using a human rights approach which does not control people with TB, rather treat them as partners.

IS IT TIME TO ABOLISH THE DEATH PENALTY?

The Hindu, GS 2

1800 words reduced to 180

- This year India introduced the death penalty for those who rape minors.
- **Arguments for abolition:**
 - Most of the civilized world has abolished it.
 - It does not deter murder more than life imprisonment.
 - The death penalty is error-ridden.
 - It unfairly targets the poor and marginalized.
 - Punishment should not imitate crime; we do not rape rapists.
 - Administering the death penalty is traumatic.
 - UN resolution calls for a moratorium on the death penalty.
- **Arguments against abolition:**
 - Proportionately punishment is just.
 - It has been upheld in liberal democracies.
 - India's neighborhood is not peaceful.
 - A punishment cannot be judged by its impact on criminals.
 - This punishment is a reflection of societal mores.
 - The punishment is not arbitrary as courts exercise caution.
 - It is given only in rarest of rare cases.
 - In the last 13 years, only four people have been executed.
- **Way forward**
 - Death must only be imposed when no alternative is left.
 - Both severity and swiftness of punishment should coexist.

FARMING IN A WARMING WORLD

The Hindu, GS 3

850 words reduced to 150

- The world has become 1°C warmer because of human activities.
- **Indian agriculture amid increasing warming**
 - high monsoon dependence and 85% small and marginal landholdings make it highly sensitive
 - less than normal rainfall during the last four years
 - 2014 and 2015 were drought years
 - escalation in heat waves is affecting crops, aquatic systems and livestock.
 - farm income losses could rise to 20%-25% for unirrigated areas
- **Steps needed to build climate resilient agriculture**
 - reshaping both the micro- and macro-level decision-making.
 - Corroborating traditional wisdom with climate assessments
 - promoting climate resilient technologies
 - practices such as inter cropping , crop-rotation; shift to non-farm activities; insurance covers
 - educating farmers by reorienting Krishi Vigyan Kendras and other grass-root organisations
 - mainstreaming climate adaptations in the developmental framework
 - improving irrigation efficiency, satellite-enabled agriculture risk management, providing customised real time data, etc.
 - interventions such as the PMKSY, PMFBY, Soil Health Card, PKVY, e-NAM
 - *greater expertise and consultations*
- *Efforts to make agriculture climate-resilient must be scaled up and consolidated.*

THE SPECTRE OF DEPORTATION

The Hindi, GS 2

800 words reduced to 150

- The outcome of the NRC exercise has implications for India's ties with Bangladesh.
- **Threat for India:**
 - Many Indians are working in Bangladesh.
 - Bangladesh is a high source of remittances.
- Bangladesh is not in a position to accept people deported due to NRC exercise because it is already under burden of hosting Rohingya refugees.
- **'Neighbourhood first' policy not being implemented:**
 - Nepal has tilted towards China due to 2015 Nepal blockade
 - India-Bhutan relationship has also been strained ever since India's withdrawal of subsidies in 2013.
 - Sri Lanka and the Maldives have also made a shift towards China.
- **Bangladesh: India's most trusted neighbour:**
 - It has cooperated in India's crackdown on insurgents.
 - It is India's biggest trading partner in South Asia.
 - Bangladesh has facilitated connectivity with the Northeast
- The NRC issue threatens to disturb the equilibrium in India-Bangladesh ties.

MAKING EVERY CITIZEN AN AUDITOR

The Hindu, GS 2

700 words reduced to 200

- Social audits lead to better outcomes of public programmes.
- **Origin and evolution of social audits**
 - Social audits were first mandated by law in 2005 under MGNREGA.
 - Subsequently, social audits were mandated in other areas as well.
 - Social audit units (SAUs) have been established in 26 States .
 - More than 5,000 full-time staff have been appointed and more than 4,000 people have been trained.
- **Shortcoming in the social audits programme:**
 - Social audit units (SAUs) are not independent.
 - States have not appointment of SAU's director properly.
 - Some States have conducted very few or no audit.
 - Several states do not have adequate staff.
 - States have responded to the social audit findings poorly.
 - Adequate disciplinary action are not being taken.
- **The way forward**
 - Funds to facilitate social audits of the NFSA.
 - Independent governing body and adequate staff of SAUs.
 - Prompt action on the social audit findings.
 - A real time management information system for tracking.
 - Mentoring and support
 - Partnership of CAG with local citizens and audit societies
- As social audits are to extend to new areas, they must be implemented well.

RESTORING THE BALANCE

The Hindu, GS 2

900 words reduced to 200

- A tumultuous phase in India-Maldives ties has come to an end.
- **Recent India-Maldives relation**
 - Maldives called India its “closest friend”.
 - India announced a financial assistance package of \$1.4 billion .
 - Both agreed to keep other’s security interests in mind in IOR.
 - They agreed to strengthen maritime security cooperation in IOR.
 - Increased opportunities for Indian investment in Maldives.
 - Areas such fisheries, tourism, health, education etc. earmarked for enhancing bilateral cooperation.
- **The China factor**
 - Under Mr. Yameen, Maldives had become close to China.
 - China’s role in the Maldivian economy is under scanner today amid growing concerns about Chinese loans.
 - Faced with the loan crisis, Maldives is looking to India for more budgetary support.
 - China will continue to play an important role in Maldives economy.
 - However, geography will make India’s role critical in Maldives.
- **Mature handling of the Maldives crisis**
 - India’s patiently handled the Maldives crisis.
 - It coordinated its response with other like-minded players.
- **India’s significance for Maldives**

Maldives will need support of India because:

 - Maldives challenges remain acute.
 - The institutional fabric has been battered under Mr. Yameen.
 - Islamist extremism has grown in potency.
 - Governance will continue to be challenging .
- Instead of viewing from a China perspective, India must think of the long term.

RBI's INDEPENDENCE

The Economic Times, GS 3

900 words reduced to 150

- A pushback is underway, globally, against central bank independence.
- Though independent central banks are better at controlling inflation., economies with independent central banks don't always do better in financial crises.
- There is a dilemma on how much to leave to experts as compared to popularly elected governments.
- **The recent global trends**
 - During the global economic crisis of 2008, the US Federal Reserve was accused of causing the crisis.
 - In 2013 the Bank of Japan agreed to coordinate policy with the government.
 - In recent years India's RBI has been accused of starving a growing economy of much needed liquidity.
- The assumption that former bureaucrats are sure to be pliant RBI governors is misplaced.
- RBI governor needs to find a balance between taking tough, unpopular decisions and urgent economic imperatives.

TOWARDS A GENETIC PANOPTICON

The Hindu, GS 3

1300 words reduced to 150

- The DNA Bill, 2018 is to be considered by the Rajya Sabha.
- **Problems with the draft Bill:**
 - disregards ethical dilemmas
 - treats DNA as infallible
 - infringement of civil liberties is seen as legitimate trade-off
 - proposed law is vague
 - allows DNA collection in civil cases as well
 - failure to place sufficient checks on the misuse of DNA evidence
 - a range of privacy protections are absent in the Bill
 - enhances the State's coercive powers
- **Why do we need a DNA law?**
 - Genes encoded in DNA are important tool in forensic science
 - DNA profile helps in establishing the identity of a suspect.
 - only a small amount of genetic material is needed to create DNA profile.
 - DNA evidence used across the world in complex investigations.
- We should not the government untrammelled access to deeply personal material.

ISLAND HOPPING

The Hindu, GS 2

850 words reduced to 250

- Recently, the President of the Maldives, visited India.
- Under Yameen a serious deterioration in ties with India occurred.
- **Maldives under Solih**
 - Solih has assured a 'India First' policy.
 - India enjoys a special place in his worldview of good governance.
 - He called India Maldives' "closest neighbour".
 - Solih's visit reflects a fine balance between the interests of both countries.
- **India's - Maldives deals during Solih's visit**
 - India has worked out a \$1.4 billion assistance package.
 - India has offered visa facilitation.
 - India has offered support to the Maldives to rejoin IORA.
 - Four agreements relating to IT, culture, agri, and visa have been signed.
 - Maldives has assured to be fully sensitive to India's security and strategic concerns.
 - Both nations have agreed to be mindful of each other's concerns
 - They plan to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.
- **What India hopes to gain from the 'new' Maldives?**
 - Indian Navy and Coast Guard will now be able to secure better cooperation from the Maldives
 - Intelligence agencies hope to nurture better collaboration in combating terrorism
 - India Inc. hopes to increase its presence in the Maldivian market.
- **The China factor**
 - China's footprint in South Asia has increased in recent years.
 - It is not feasible for India to supplant China in neighbouring countries.
 - But India has its own advantages which it should leverage fully.
- A new grouping of India, the Maldives, Sri Lanka, Mauritius and the Seychelles looks attainable.
- After repairing ties with the Maldives, New Delhi should strengthen its Indian Ocean outreach.

IF YOU WANT TO HELP FARMERS

Indian Express, GS 3

1000 words reduced to 150

- Several state governments have recently announced loan waivers to farmers.
- The loan waivers will cost around Rs 4-5 lakh crore to state exchequer.
- **Will loan waiver help needy farmers?**
 - Institutional credit comprises about only 64 per cent of total farm credit.
 - It is the large farmers who take about 80 % of the total institutional credit.
 - The marginal farmers constitute 68.5 per cent of the peasantry, and take more than half of their loans from non-institutional sources.
- **Way forward**
 - Structured and stable income/investment support policy is needed.
 - Telangana's Rythu Bandhu scheme could serve as a model.
 - Farms can be geo-tagged.
 - Land records will have to be upgraded to include tenants.
 - Govt should also include fertiliser and power subsidy into loan .
- Striking the right balance between consumers and farmers is the need of the hour.

BEING A GOOD NEIGHBOUR

The Hindu, GS 2

1200 words reduced to 250

- India must work towards South Asian integration.
- South Asia is one of the world's least integrated regions.
- **Problems:**
 - India has ideational disinclination towards its neighborhood.
 - Neighborhood has not been seen as an opportunity by India.
 - There has been a steady decline in India's influence and goodwill in the region.
 - Persistent absence of a coherent and well-planned regional policy
- **Present scenario**
 - Recently India made grand foreign policy commitments to neighboring countries.
 - However, it tried to interfere in the internal affairs of Nepal and Sri Lanka.
 - India seemed clueless on dealing with political crisis in the Maldives.
 - India's refugee policy on Rohingyas went against its own traditional practices.
 - Arrival of an India-friendly Ibrahim Mohamed Solih regime in Male.
 - Return of India friendly Wickremesinghe as Sri Lankan Prime Minister
 - Nepal has reached out to India to put an end to the acrimony.
 - Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh are also positively disposed towards India.
 - Relationship with Pakistan continues to be testy and directionless.
- **What should India do?**
 - India must shed its aggression and deal with diplomatic finesse.
 - It must not meddle in the domestic politics of neighbour countries.
 - India must follow up on its promises to its neighbours.
 - India must invest where China falls short.
 - India must invest a great deal more in soft power promotion.
 - It must also look for convergence of interests with China.
 - There needs to be better regional trading arrangements.
 - India should construct border infrastructure and ease restrictions on border trade.
 - There should be attempts at forging multilateral arrangements.
- India has a real opportunity today to recalibrate its neighbourhood relations.

STRANGE DEAL

The Hindu, GS 3

460 words reduced to 160

- In order to quell the disquiet among offline retailers, government has formulated a new e-commerce policy.
- **The NEW policy:**
 - The new rules bar sales for over 25% of sales in a marketplace by any entities where the e-com firm has an equity stake.
 - Any specialised back-end support for some sellers must now be extended to all vendors.
 - An e-commerce marketplace entity will not mandate any seller to offer a product exclusively on its platform rules.
- **Problems with the NEW policy**
 - FDI in e-commerce could decrease
 - There may be loss of jobs
 - Create perception of India being unpredictable in terms of policies.
 - Restricts freedom of a seller to sell exclusively on one e-com portal
 - It goes against the fairness and level playing field
- **Way forward :** Globally, India has been taking on protectionism, the same non-protectionist tenets must be applied for internal trade.
- India's retail FDI policy remains muddled with the new e-commerce policy.

PLAN BEFORE MAKING A BID

Relevance: GS 2

500 words reduced to 100

- India has expressed interest to host the 2032 Summer Olympic Games.
- India must consider several issues if it wishes to host the Games:
 - India must leave a mark at the 2020 Olympic Games.
 - India should host multisport events to prove its prowess.
 - It should ensure high investment from the private sector.
 - India should ensure clean and safe facilities for the athletes.
 - India should identify locations for hosting the games early on.
- It is only when we view the Games as a long-term development enabler that it can be made a sustainable proposition.

LIFELINES BEYOND FARM LOAN WAIVERS

The Hindu, GS 3

900 words reduced to 200

- There have been continuous farmer agitations recently which display the rural agrarian distress.
- A farm loan waiver was among the first steps taken by the three new State governments. Since 2014, many states have taken similar moves.
- **The need of loan waivers**
 - The mounting debt burden is pushing farmers to despair and suicides.
 - More than 50% of farming households are indebted, with rates as high as 89-92% in some States.
- **Major reasons for farm debt**
 - lack of compensation during drought and disasters
 - failures of the crop insurance scheme
 - deficit due to prices falling below the MSP
- **Questions that loan waivers raise**
 - Will its benefit reaches small and marginal cultivators?
 - Will the same situation not replayed again?
- Repeated loan waivers are not in the interest of farmers. Immediate relief should be accompanied by a long-term systemic solution to indebtedness.
- **Long term solutions**
 - Institutional credit system which is accessible to all cultivators..
 - Registration of all cultivators and providing them Kisan credit cards.
 - Need of protection from debt trap in bad years.
 - Establishment of farmers' distress and disaster relief commissions.
 - limited liability and bankruptcy protection for farming sector.
 - Agriculture should be made profitable.
- The farming community is not likely to relent if governments adopt a business-as-usual approach.