A normal monsoon

India is likely to get ‘normal’ monsoon rains, according to the first official forecast of the season by the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Key Facts on Monsoon Forecast

- Rains are likely to be 96% of the 50-year average of 89cm for the monsoon season of June to September.
- The Indian weather office has clarified that even if El Niño emerges in September, if other parameters remain as they are now, the country may get a normal monsoon.
- They are expected to fan out favourably and help agriculture.
- Every number forecast by the IMD has a built-in 5% error margin.

Concern over forecast

1. There’s the looming threat of El Nino.
2. According to Australia’s Bureau of Meteorology, prospects of El Niño forming this year have increased to 50%.
3. The IMD has adopted a new weather model this year, and it is still a work-in-progress.
4. India saw drought years in 2014 and 2015.
5. As for 2016, it received 3% less than the 89 cm average, despite an IMD forecast of above normal rains.

Effect of poor monsoon over India

- Anything less than 90% of the average rainfall in a region is regarded as deficient rainfall.
- Effect on Farmers: The most obvious victims of deficient rainfall are the farmers. Without proper rainfall they are left with absolutely no hope. Proper rainfall can help
food production reach unprecedented levels, deficient rainfall can lead to paucity in the total agricultural production.

- **Effect on Growth**: Growth in agricultural sector would reduce. This will also percentage points from the overall GDP growth of India. This will also have a detrimental effect on demand in the non-agricultural sector.

- **Effect on Power Sector**: Water levels will be lower than normal in several hydroelectric dams, there will be lesser electricity

- **Effect on Goods**: The demand goes down this happens predominantly in the rural areas and input costs increase to a significant extent. As a result, their financial condition including share prices is highly affected.

- **Effect on Export/Import**: Agricultural exports will be lesser and imports will be higher due reduced production. Fiscal deficit will increase. A number of drought-relief measures will be taken and ferrying food stocks from one place to another will become costlier.

Source: *The Hindu*

**GS I : Indian Geography**

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**Disabled people need not stand for national anthem, says Supreme Court**

The Supreme Court today exempted disabled persons from standing during playing of the national anthem before screening of a film.

**Background**

The apex court had made it mandatory to play national anthem in movie halls before every screening with the image of the national flag displayed on the screen. Delivering the order, the SC had observed that standing up for the national anthem in movie halls will instill a sense of committed patriotism and nationalism in people’s minds.
**Details**

| In November the apex court had made playing national anthem mandatory in movie halls |
| SC rules no need to stand for national anthem if it is part of film |
| There were cases of disabled people being attacked by fellow moviegoers |

- The disabled category includes people suffering from cerebral palsy, Parkinson disease, muscular dystrophy and other categories of disability.
- The verdict had however resulted in cases of disabled people being attacked by fellow moviegoers for not standing up for the national anthem.
- In a number of cases, people with disabilities and those with small children and elderly people also faced the wrath of the people trying to enforce patriotism.
- The SC also issued a notice to the Centre over a plea that sought to make the singing of 'Vande Mataram' essential in all educational institutions.
- The court has asked the Central government to respond to the plea within four weeks.

Source: *The Hindu*

**GS II**: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary; Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity
Common duct policy

The with a new policy under which a common duct will be laid across a city and service providers such as telcos and digital TV players can lease these ducts to pass their fibre through it to offer services to consumers.

About the policy

- The common duct policy for which Telecom Regulatory Authority of India is carrying out pilots in Deoghar in Jharkhand.
- This could reduce operational cost of firms, remove right of way challenges, while eliminating the need for frequent digging up of roads.
- This will also result in additional revenue for the municipalities and remove issues related to right of way.
- A common duct will be created for about 20 years.
- Once the duct is made, no service provider will be allowed to dig the road.
- By May end, would put the entire program under close observation for six months.
- Based on the learning from the pilot success would recommend the government a similar initiative to replicate in tier-II and tier-III cities.

Advantage of policy

- Policy will allow the telecom service providers to share infrastructure.
- Could reduce telcos operational cost and mitigate RoW (right of way) challenges.
- The initiative, according to the regulator, will allow infrastructure providers to deploy a common terminal or box for optic fibre and digital TV cable with an objective to mitigate RoW issues.
- This will avoid great inconvenience to the people of the city as Telecom and TV companies have to dig up the road every time a fibre is laid.

Source: The Hindu

GS III: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc
US visa H1B Visa Issue

The number of Indians in the US searching for jobs in India has surged 10-fold since December as Donald Trump moved to tighten US visa policy. More Indians living in the US want a job back home after H1B Visa norms change.

Details of the report

- According to an analysis by consulting firm Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Pvt. Ltd Indians in the US searching for jobs in India has gone up.
- There were approximately 600 US-based Indians seeking jobs in India in December 2016 and by the end of March 2017, the number had gone up to approximately 7,000, Deloitte analysis.
- This crackdown due to the change in job visas for skilled workers, including software engineers from India.
- According to US Citizenship and Immigration Services, employers seeking H-1B work visas a non-immigrant visa allowing American firms to employ foreign workers for 2018 declined for the first time in five years.
- The surge in the number of applicants has been triggered by vows to protect jobs for locals.
- The H-1B work visa programme channels thousands of foreign workers to the US technology industry.

About H1b Visa

- H1B visa is issued for a specialty occupation, requires theoretical and practical application of a body of specialized knowledge and requires the visa holder to have at least a Bachelors degree or its equivalent.
- It allows U.S. employers to temporarily employ foreign workers in specialty occupations.
- The duration of stay is three years, extendable to six years.
- The maximum duration of the H-1B visa is ten years for exceptional United States Department of Defense project related work.
- If a foreign worker in H-1B status quits or is dismissed from the sponsoring employer, the worker must either apply for and be granted a change of status to another non-immigrant status, find another employer or leave the United States.
Australia scraps 457 visa

Australia will abolish a popular work visa used by over 95,000 foreign workers, a majority of them Indians.

What is 457 visa?

- The 457-visa is a temporary work visa given to skilled foreign workers to allow them to work in the country.
- The professionals who qualified for work under the 457 visa scheme includes architects, engineers, media professionals, and whole host of medical professionals including doctors, dentists, surgeons and homeopaths.

Why the move?

- To tackle the growing unemployment in the country and replace it with a new programme requiring higher English-language proficiency and job skills.
- 457 visa allows businesses to employ foreign workers for a period of up to four years in skilled jobs where there is a shortage of Australian workers.
- The majority of the visa holders under this category were from India, accounting for almost a quarter of the intake, followed by the UK and China.
- The programme will be replaced by another visa programme, with new restrictions.
- The new visa will include mandatory criminal checks and tighter English language requirements
GS II : Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India’s interests, Indian diaspora