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TARGETING UPSC CIVIL SERVICES PRELIMS & MAINS

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

ASSAM TO KICK OFF NRC VERIFICATION

The verification of citizenship documents of 29 lakh married women, mostly migrant Muslims, for the Supreme Court-monitored exercise to update the 1951 National Register of Citizens (NRC) has begun in Assam.

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The verification of family trees and the documents of married women has to be completed by May 31, the deadline set by the court.

**Significance of the move:**

- The publication of the updated NRC is indeed a positive step in so far as it puts to rest wild speculations about the extent of the illegal migrant population in Assam and the resulting polarisation that political parties have been exploiting to make electoral gains.

**What is National Register of Citizens (NRC)?**

- The NRC was introduced to identify illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and recognise the Indian citizens in Assam.

- It was first prepared in 1951 and Assam is the only state having this arrangement.

- Under NRC, immigrants who have documents proving that they entered Assam before 1971 will be considered Indian citizens and others have to show that they their ascendants have lived in Assam even before 1971.

**Background:**

- The Assam Accord signed between Central Government, State Government, All India Students’ Union (AASU) and All Assam Gan Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) in August 1985 following agitation (1979-85) against illegal foreigners had stipulated 24th March, 1971 as cut-off date for identification and deportation of illegal migrants from East Pakistan (Bangladesh).

- Accordingly, Citizenship Act, 1955 was amended by Parliament for inserting section 6A as special provisions for Assam.

- In tripartite meeting of Central Government, State Government and AASU chaired by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in May, 2005, it was agreed to update NRC, 1951. The modalities were approved by the Central Government in consultation with Assam Government.

- In pursuance of Supreme Court’s direction, the exercise of NRC update had commenced in December 2013 and was to be completed over 3 years period. The apex court is continuously monitoring progress of NRC update and has given various directions from time to time.

- The actual implementation of NRC is done by Statutory Authorities i.e. Local Registrars and District Magistrates appointed by State...
Government. A senior official of State Government functions as State Coordinator and coordinates with Registrar General of Citizen Registration (RGI) in regard to various activities.

[Ref: The Hindu]

FAST TRACK TASK FORCE

What is Fast track task force?

- Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) formed a Fast Track Task Force to re-establish growth in the country’s mobile handset and component manufacturing eco-system.

- It promotes large-scale manufacturing/assembling activity to achieve production of 500 million units by 2019. This can create additional employment opportunities for 1.5 million approximately.

- The task force has to create a roadmap to align technology, demand, standards and regulations for enhancing the competitiveness of domestic manufacturing across the supply chain for manufacturing mobile phone.

- It has members from industry and government.

Why in news?

- The fast track task Force has set target to achieve around 500 million mobile phone production in India by 2019, with value estimated to be around USD 46 billion.

[Ref: The Hindu]

CVC TO TAKE AADHAAR ROUTE TO DETECT BUREAUCRATIC CORRUPTION

The Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is planning to use Aadhaar to track the ill-gotten wealth of corrupt bureaucrats.

Why this move is significant?

- Aadhaar is being made mandatory for numerous financial transactions and property deals. Information made available through a person’s Permanent Account Number (PAN) and Aadhaar cards could help the CVC check if financial deals carried out by the cardholder were within his or her means.

About CVC:

Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) is an apex Indian governmental body created in 1964 to address governmental corruption.

- It has the status of an autonomous body, free of control from any executive authority.

- It is charged with monitoring all vigilance activity under the Central Government of India, advising various authorities in central Government organizations in planning, executing, reviewing and reforming their vigilance work.

- It was set up by the Government in February, 1964 on the recommendations of the Committee on Prevention of Corruption, headed by Shri K. Santhanam, to advise and guide Central Government agencies in the field of vigilance.

- It submits its report to the President of India.

- CVC is advisory body.

Members:

- The Commission shall consist of:
  1. A Central Vigilance Commissioner – Chairperson;
  2. Not more than two Vigilance Commissioners – Members;

Appointment:
• The Central Vigilance Commissioner and the Vigilance Commissioners shall be appointed by the President on recommendation of a Committee consisting of the Prime Minister (Chairperson), the Minister of Home Affairs (Member) and the Leader of the Opposition in the House of the People (Member).

• Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.

Removal:

• The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

GOVT. TIGHTENS ITS GRIP ON FAKE NEWS

Noticing the increasing instances of fake news in various mediums including print and electronic media, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting amended the guidelines for accreditation of journalists.

Highlights of the guidelines for accreditation of journalists:

• On receiving complaints of “fake news” will be referred to Press Council of India (PCI) if it pertains to print media & to News Broadcasters Association (NBA) if it relates to electronic media.

• Accreditation of a journalist (both television and print) can be cancelled/annulled if the new reported by them is found to be “fake”.

• Both the agencies will have to dispose off each complaint within 15-days. During the period of probe, the journalist’s accreditation will be suspended.

• The Accreditation Committee of the Press Information Bureau, which consists of representatives of both the Press Council of India and NBA, shall be invariably be reached out to for validating any accreditation request of any news media agency.

• If publishing or telecast of fake news is confirmed, the journalist’s accreditation shall be suspended for 6 months for first violation, one year for second violation and will be permanently cancelled if there is a third violation.

• Additionally, while examining the requests seeking accreditation, the regulatory agencies “will examine whether the ‘Norms of Journalistic Conduct’ and ‘Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards’ prescribed by the PCI and NBA respectively are adhered to by the journalists” and it would be “obligatory for journalists to abide by these guidelines”.

Background:

• Some incidents in the past few years have shown that society and its conflicts manifest themselves in what has come to be known as “fake news” — and the internet does aid its rapid distribution. That is not the malaise of the internet or social media platforms, however.

• It is the actors, very often, competing political and other special interests which are producers of such content. But, fake news is a huge problem and demands an urgent solution.

[Ref: PIB, The Hindu]

STATES ALLOWED TO SET UP CROP INSURANCE FIRMS TO EXECUTE PMFBY

The Centre has allowed states to set up their own insurance companies for implementing Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY).

• Presently, five public sector insurers and 13 private insurance companies are empanelled for implementation of the scheme.

Background:

• The move comes after several requests from states as well as observations made by Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) in its 2017 report that old crop insurance schemes which have now been
merged with PMFBY, were poorly implemented during 2011-2016.

About Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY):
The PMFBY, launched in April 2016, compensates farmers for any losses in crop yield. In the event of a crop loss, the farmer will be paid based on the difference between the threshold yield and actual yield.

- The scheme is compulsory for farmers who have availed of institutional loans.
- The threshold yield is calculated based on average yield for the last seven years and the extent of compensation is set according to the degree of risk for the notified crop.

Risks covered:
- The scheme insures farmers against a wide range of external risks — droughts, dry spells, floods, inundation, pests and diseases, landslides, natural fire and lightning, hailstorms, cyclones, typhoons, tempests, hurricanes and tornadoes. The scheme also covers post-harvest losses up to a period of 14 days.
- The Scheme covers all Food & Oilseeds crops and Annual Commercial/Horticultural Crops for which past yield data is available and for which requisite number of Crop Cutting Experiments (CCEs) are conducted being under General Crop Estimation Survey (GCES).

Implementation:
- The scheme is implemented by empanelled general insurance companies. Selection of Implementing Agency (IA) is done by the concerned State Government through bidding.
- The scheme is compulsory for loanee farmers availing Crop Loan /KCC account for notified crops and voluntary for other others.
- The scheme is being administered by Ministry of Agriculture.

[For more info on Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), read our Mind Map at here: https://www.iastoppers.com/pradhan-mantri-fasal-bima-yojana-pmfby-mind-map/]

SC/ST ACT: GOVERNMENT FILES REVIEW PETITION

The government has filed a petition seeking review of the Supreme Court order diluting the provisions of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, which protects marginalised communities against discrimination and atrocities.

What's the issue?
- Dalit organisations and some political parties fear the dilution of the provisions of the Act might lead to increase in violence against Dalits.
- On March 20, the Supreme Court banned automatic arrests and registration of criminal cases under the SC/ST Act, triggering widespread criticism and outcry from the dalit community.
- The apex court said public servants can’t be prosecuted without the approval of the appointing authority, and private citizens too should be arrested only after an inquiry under the law.
- It further ruled that preliminary inquiry in a case under the Act would be conducted by the Deputy Superintendent of Police to ensure the allegations are not frivolous.
- The amendment in the law was a bid to protect honest public servants discharging bona fide duties from being blackmailed with false cases under the Act.

About Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act:
The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act is popularly known as POA, the SC/ST Act, the Prevention of Atrocities Act, or simply the Atrocities Act.

- The SC/ST Act was enacted on September 9, 1989. The rules for the Act were notified on March 31, 1995.
- The prime objective of the SC/ST Act is to deliver justice to marginalised through proactive efforts, giving them a life of dignity, self-esteem and a life without fear, violence or suppression from the dominant castes.
- The SC/ST Act lists 22 offences relating to various patterns or behaviours inflicting criminal offences and breaking the self-respect and esteem of the
scheduled castes and tribes community. This includes denial of economic, democratic and social rights, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of the legal process.

• According to the SC/ST Act, the protection is provided from social disabilities such as denial of access to certain places and to use customary passage, personal atrocities like forcible drinking or eating of inedible food sexual exploitation, injury etc, atrocities affecting properties, malicious prosecution, political disabilities and economic exploitation.

• For speedy trial, Section 14 of the SC/ST Act provides for a Court of Session to be a Special Court to try offences under this Act in each district.

[Ref: The Hindu]

ELECTION COMMISSION AFFIDAVIT ON ‘ONE SEAT-ONE CANDIDATE’ TRIGGERS DEBATE

The Election Commission has told the Supreme Court that it supports the proposal to allow one candidate to contest from only one constituency in an election.

• The EC expressed this view in an affidavit it filed in the petition over the matter.

What’s the issue?

• Political parties across the country field senior leaders from more than one seat in a bid to ensure victory. If they win from multiple seats, these leader are then required to vacate other seats and continue to hold only one. This means a general election is usually followed closely by a bye-election to the seats that have been vacated.

• The Supreme Court had in December 2017 issued notices seeking replies from the Election Commission and the Centre on the issue. At the time, the Supreme Court had said the practice of one candidate contesting multiple seats was a drain on the exchequer since it necessitated bypolls.

• A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court challenging Section 33(7) of the Representation of the People Act of 1951 that allows a person to contest elections to Parliament and state assemblies from two constituencies and sought an end to the practice.

What is Section 33(7) of Representation of People’s Act (RPA)?

• Section 33(7) of the Representation of People’s Act permits a candidate to contest any election (Parliamentary, State Assembly, Biennial Council, or bye-elections) from up to two constituencies. The provision was introduced in 1996 prior to which there was no bar on the number of constituencies from which a candidate could contest.

‘One candidate, one seat’:

• One person, one vote & one candidate, one constituency is the dictum of democracy. However, as per the law, as it stands today, a person can contest the election for the same office from two constituencies simultaneously.

• When a candidate contests from two seats, it is imperative that he has to vacate one of the two seats if he wins both. This, apart from the consequent unavoidable financial burden on the public exchequer, government manpower and other resources for holding bye-election is also an injustice to the voters of the constituency which the candidate is quitting from.

Alternative suggested by the EC:

• The ECI has alternatively suggested that if existing provisions are retained then the candidate contesting from two seats should bear the cost of the bye-election to the seat that the contestant decides to vacate in the event of his/her winning both seats. The amount in such an event could be Rs 5 lakh for assembly election and Rs 10 lakh for parliament election.

[Ref: Indian Express]

CABINET APPROVES RIGHTSIZING THE COMPETITION COMMISSION OF INDIA

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for rightsizing the Competition Commission of India (CCI) from One Chairperson and Six Members (totalling seven) to One Chairperson and Three Members (totalling four).
Benefits of downsizing proposal of CCI:

- The downsizing proposal of CCI is expected to result in reduction of three Posts of members CCI in pursuance of Government’s objective of “Minimum Government – Maximum Governance”.
- In several major jurisdictions such as in Japan, US and United Kingdom Competition Authorities are of similar size.
- Moreover, it also pursuance of Government’s objective of easing mergers and amalgamation process in country.
- It will help in faster turnaround in hearings, resulting in speedier approvals that will help in stimulating business processes of corporates and result in greater employment opportunities in country.

About the Competition Commission of India:

Competition Commission of India is a body of the Government of India responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition in India.

- Section 8(1) of the Competition Act, 2002 (the Act) provides that the Commission shall consist of a Chairperson and not less than two and not more than six Members.
- CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
- It is the duty of the Commission to:
  1. Eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition,
  2. Promote and sustain competition,
  3. Protect the interests of consumers and
  4. Ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

About the Competition Act, 2002:

- The Competition Act, 2002, as amended by the Competition (Amendment) Act, 2007, follows the philosophy of modern competition laws.
- The Act prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and M&A), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

[Ref: PIB]

GOVERNMENT PLANS TO HAVE MORE NCLT BENCHES

The government is planning to have more benches of the National Company Law Tribunal on the basis of case load, amid rising number of insolvency cases coming up before the NCLT.

About the National Company Law Tribunal:

National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) is a quasi-judicial body that will govern the companies in India.

- It was established under the Companies Act, 2013 and is a successor body of the Company Law Board.
- The setting up of NCLT as a specialized institution for corporate justice is based on the recommendations of the Justice Eradi Committee on Law Relating to Insolvency and Winding up of Companies.
- NCLT will have the same powers as assigned to the erstwhile Company Law Board (which are mostly related to dealing with oppression and mismanagement), Board for Industrial and Financial...
Reconstruction (BIFR) (revival of sick companies) and powers related to winding up of companies (which was available only with the High Courts).

[Ref: The Hindu, Economic Times]

**PASWAN STRESSES ON EFFECTIVE ROLLOUT OF NEW BIS LAW**

A Parliamentary Consultative Committee recently reviewed the activities of Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) and laid emphasis on easy redressal mechanism of complaints, mandatory certification, enhancing consumer confidence through publicity and various other interactive measures.

- It also stressed on the effective implementation of the provisions of new BIS Act 2016.

**About Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016:**

Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 which was notified on 22nd March, 2016, came into force with effect from 12th October, 2017.

- Parliament had in March 2016 passed the law to replace the BIS Act of 1986.

**Highlights of the act:**

- The Act establishes the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) as the National Standards Body of India.

- The Act has enabling provisions for the Government to bring under compulsory certification regime any goods or article of any scheduled industry, process, system or service which it considers necessary in the public interest or for the protection of human, animal or plant health, safety of the environment, or prevention of unfair trade practices, or national security.

- Enabling provisions have also been made for making hallmarking of the precious metal articles mandatory.

- The new Act also allows multiple type of simplified conformity assessment schemes including self-declaration of conformity against a standard which will give simplified options to manufacturers to adhere to the standards and get certificate of conformity.

- The Act enables the Central Government to appoint any authority/agency, in addition to the BIS, to verify the conformity of products and services to a standard and issue certificate of conformity.

- There is also a provision for repair or recall, including product liability of the products bearing Standard Mark but not conforming to the relevant Indian Standard.

**About Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS):**

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is the national Standards Body of India working under the aegis of Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.

- It is established by the Bureau of Indian Standards Act, 1986.

- The Minister in charge of the Ministry or Department having administrative control of the BIS is the ex-officio President of the BIS.

- As a corporate body, it has 25 members drawn from Central or State Governments, industry, scientific and research institutions, and consumer organisations.

- It also works as WTO-TBT enquiry point for India.

[Ref: PIB]

**RIGHT TO CONVERT IS PART OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT OF CHOICE: SUPREME COURT**

The Supreme Court has held that a person’s right to choose a religion and marry is an intrinsic part of her meaningful existence.

- Neither the State nor “patriarchal supremacy” can interfere in her decision.

**Background:**

- The observations are part of the 61-page reasoned judgment published by the Supreme Court in the case of Hadiya, a 26-year-old Homeopathy student who converted to Islam and married a Muslim man. The case first gained attention as a case of forced conversion.

**Observations made by the SC:**
• Freedom of faith is essential to his/her autonomy; Choosing a faith is the substratum of individuality and sans it, the right of choice becomes a shadow.

• Matters of belief and faith, including whether to believe, are at the core of constitutional liberty. The Constitution exists for believers as well as for agnostics.

• Constitution protects the ability of each individual to pursue a way of life or faith to which she or he seeks to adhere. Matters of dress and of food, of ideas and ideologies, of love and partnership are within the central aspects of identity. Society has no role to play in determining choice of partners.

• The absolute right of an individual to choose a life partner is not in the least affected by matters of faith. The Constitution guarantees to each individual the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion. Choices of faith and belief as indeed choices in matters of marriage lie within an area where individual autonomy is supreme.

Article 25 and forced conversions:

• Article 25 states that subject to public order, morality and health, and to the other fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution, all persons are equally entitled to “freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practise and propagate religion.”

• The word “propagate” mean “to transmit or spread one’s religion by an exposition of its tenets,” but does not include the right to convert another person to one’s own religion.

• It has to be remembered that Article 25(1) guarantees ‘freedom of conscience’ to every citizen, and not merely to the followers of one particular religion and that, in turn, postulates that there is no fundamental right to convert another person to one’s own religion because if a person purposely undertakes the conversion of another person to his religion, as distinguished from his effort to transmit or spread the tenets of his religion, that would impinge on the ‘freedom of conscience’ guaranteed to all the citizens of the country alike.

[Ref: The Hindu]

HEALTH MINISTRY BANS OVER-THE-COUNTER SALE OF 14 STEROID CREAMS

The Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry has banned over-the-counter sale of 14 steroid creams to prevent indiscriminate sale of ointments containing steroids and antibiotics without prescription.

• These 14 preparations were included under Schedule H of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 to impose the ban.

Background:

• The move comes in the wake of dermatologists’ complaints that pharmaceutical companies were selling steroid-based creams and ointments without medical guidance.

• The decision was made following consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board which recommended a ban on the sale of such creams without prescription and had also submitted their recommendations to the Central Drugs Standards Control Organisation.

About Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO):

• The Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) under Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the National Regulatory Authority (NRA) of India.

• Under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, CDSCO is responsible for approval of New Drugs, Conduct of Clinical Trials, laying down the standards for Drugs, control over the quality of imported Drugs in the country and coordination of the activities of State Drug Control Organizations by providing expert advice with a view of bring about the uniformity in the enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

• Further CDSCO along with state regulators, is jointly responsible for grant of licenses of certain specialized categories of critical Drugs such as blood and blood products, I. V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.

About Drugs Technical Advisory Board (DTAB):
• The DTAB is the highest decision-making body under the Union health ministry on technical matters.

• Director General of Health Services (DGHS) is the ex-officio chairman of this statutory body which is constituted by the ministry under section 5 of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act.

What are Schedule H drugs?

• Schedule H is a class of prescription drugs listed under Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 which governs manufacture and sale of all drugs in India.

• These drugs cannot be purchased over counter without the prescription of a doctor.

[Ref: The Hindu, Economic Times]

NITI FORUM FOR NORTHEAST OUTLINES 5 DEVELOPMENT MISSIONS

The first meeting of the newly constituted NITI Forum for Northeast was held in Agartala, Tripura.

Key facts:

• It was organised by NITI Aayog and Ministry of Development of North East Region (DoNER) and North Eastern Council (NEC).

• It was co-chaired by NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajeev Kumar and Minister of State (Independent Charge), for DoNER, Jitendra Singh.

• Representatives of all eight member northeastern states Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura participated in it.

About NITI Forum for Northeast:

• ‘NITI Forum for North-East’ has been set up to identify constraints and recommend suitable interventions for speedy and sustainable growth in northeast region.

Composition of the Forum:


• Chief Secretaries of Northeastern states of Assam, Sikkim, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram will also be members of the Forum. Secretary, North East Council (NEC), Shillong will be Member Secretary. Joint Secretary (NE), MHA, besides a number of experts from various fields will also be members of the Forum.

• The forum will be co-chaired by the Vice-Chairman of NITI Aayog and Minister of State (I/C), Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region (DoNER).

Functions of the Forum:

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

• To recommend suitable interventions for addressing identified constraints.

• To review the development status in the NER.

The forum may also examine and address any other issues which are of importance but not specifically spelt out in its Terms of Reference. It may devise its own procedure to conduct its business, meetings, field visits or constitution of Sub-Groups etc.

[Ref: PIB]

NEW WEBSITE & MOBILE APP OF NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SAFAI KARAMCHARIS LAUNCHED

A new website a mobile app has been launched for the ‘National Commission for Safai Karamcharis’. The Mobile App will help the Commission in addressing the grievances/complaints of petitioners in an efficient manner.

About NCSK:

• National Commission for Safai Karamcharis (NCSK) was established in 1994 to deal with the grievances of persons engaged in manual scavenging.
It has a sanctioned strength of four members and a chairperson.

It is statutory body established under National Commission for Safai Karamcharis Act, 1993.

It aims to promote and safeguard the interests and rights of Safai Karamcharis.

Its mandate is to study, evaluate and monitor the implementation of various schemes for Safai Karamcharis as an autonomous organisation.

GOVERNMENT APPOINTS PANEL TO REVIEW CSR ENFORCEMENT UNDER COMPANIES ACT

The Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) has constituted 12-member committee to review enforcement of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) provisions under Companies Act, 2013.

- It will be headed by Regional Director (Western Region) Manmohan Juneja.
- Besides, there will be two sub-committees viz. legal and technical that will go into various aspects in relation to compliance with CSR provisions.

Terms of References of the Committee:

- The committee will review functioning of CSR enforcement and recommend uniform approach for its enforcement.
- It will revisit guidelines for enforcement of CSR provisions and basis, including structure of Centralised Scrutiny and Prosecution Mechanism (CSPM).
- It will also look at methodologies for monitoring of compliance by companies with CSR norms for having an effective CSPM.
- It will also revisit Schedule VII of Companies Act, 2013 pertaining to the board list of CSR activities that can be taken up under the Act on basis of references received from various stakeholders.

CJI FIRST AMONG EQUALS, POWER TO ALLOCATE WORK: SC

The Supreme Court has reiterated that Chief Justice of India (CJI) is first among equals and has exclusive prerogative to allocate cases and constitute benches.

- The ruling has dismissed PIL that sought directions to regulate CJI’s power to form benches and allocate cases.

What is the SC ruling?

- 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 fulfil and discharge constitutional obligations which govern and provide rationale for its existence.
- The entrustment of functions to CJI as head of institution, is with purpose of securing position of SC as independent safeguard for preservation of personal liberty.
- There cannot be a presumption of mistrust. The oath of office demands nothing less.

RBI TIGHTENS MONITORING OF OUTWARD REMITTANCES

The Reserve Bank has tightened reporting norms for the Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS). Now banks will be
required to upload daily transaction-wise information undertaken by them under LRS.

**Revised norms:**

- Currently, the LRS transactions are permitted by banks based on declaration made by remitter. The monitoring of adherence to limit is confined to obtaining such declaration without independent verification, in absence of reliable source of information.

- Now under tightened reporting norms, daily reporting system by Authorised Dealer (AD) banks of transactions undertaken by individuals under LRS has been placed, which will be accessible to all the other ADs. It will be mandatory for banks to upload daily transaction-wise information undertaken by them under LRS.

**What is Liberalised Remittance Scheme (LRS)?**

LRS is facility provided by RBI for all resident individuals including minors to freely remit upto certain amount in terms of US Dollar for current and capital account purposes or combination of both.

- The scheme was introduced in February 2004 and its regulations are provided under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999.

- Under LRS, individuals can make remittances for overseas education, travel, medical treatment, maintenance to relatives living abroad, gifting and donations. The remitted money can be used for purchase of shares and property as well.

- Individuals can also open, maintain and hold foreign currency accounts with overseas banks for carrying out transactions under it.

- After it was launched, the LRS limit was US $25,000, but it has been revised in stages consistent with prevailing macro and micro economic conditions.

- At present, LRS limit for all resident individuals, including minors, is US $2,50,000 (Rs. 1.5 crore) per financial year.

**Restrictions:**

- Under LRS, remittances cannot be used for trading on foreign exchange markets, purchase of Foreign Currency Convertible Bonds issued abroad by Indian companies and margin or margin calls to overseas exchanges and counterparties.

- Similarly, individuals are not allowed to send money to countries identified as ‘non cooperative jurisdictions’ by Financial Action Task Force (FAFT).

- It also prohibits remittances to entities identified as posing terrorist risks.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

**BHANU PRATAP SHARMA REPLACES VINOD RAI AS BANKS BOARD BUREAU CHAIRMAN**

The Union Finance Ministry has reconstituted Banks Board Bureau (BBB) and appointed former bureaucrat Bhanu Pratap Sharma as its chairman.

- The reconstituted BBB will have two-year tenure, same as its predecessor.

**About the Banks Board Bureau:**

- With a view to improve the Governance of Public Sector Banks (PSBs), the Government had decided to set up an autonomous Banks Board Bureau in August last year.

- The bureau was announced as part of the seven-point Indradhanush plan to revamp PSBs.

- BBB is an autonomous body.

- The bureau will have three ex-officio members and three expert members, in addition to the Chairman. All the Members and Chairman will be part time.

**Its functions:**

- The Bureau is mandated to play a critical role in reforming the troubled public sector banks by recommending appointments to leadership positions and boards in those banks and advise them on ways to raise funds and how to go ahead with mergers and acquisitions.

- It will constantly engage with the boards of all 22 public sector banks to formulate appropriate strategies for their growth and development.

- They will also constantly engage with the Board of Directors of all the public sector banks to formulate
appropriate strategies for their growth and development.

• The bureau will search and select heads of public sector banks and help them develop differentiated strategies of capital raising plans to innovative financial methods and instruments.

• It would also be responsible for selection of non-executive chairman and non-official directors on the boards.

[Ref: The Hindu]

NCERT PUBLISHES INFO ON CHILD HELPLINES IN TEXTBOOKS

To equip the children with the information regarding the possible modes of protection/complaints, the National Council Of Educational Research And Training (NCERT) has published the information regarding Childline (1098) 24×7 Helpline for children and POCSO e-box on the back side of the front cover of all course books from Class 6 to Class 12.

What is POCSO e-box?

Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO), e-box, is an online complaint management system for easy and direct reporting of sexual offences against children and timely action against the offenders under the POCSO Act, 2012.

Key features of the POCSO e-box:

• It is an initiative of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), for direct online reporting of Child Sexual Abuse.

• E-Box is very simple to operate and will help to maintain the confidentiality of the complaint.

• It is incorporated on the home page of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) website- www.ncpcr.gov.in.

How to register a complaint?

• To register complain, a complainant will have to push a button named POSCO e-Box, which will navigate him/her to a page where he/she will have to select at least one picture option (describing the category of harassment).

• Later, he/she will also have to fill a form with details such as mobile number, e-mail and description of the harassment followed by the ‘submit’ button, after which a unique auto-generated complaint number will be flashed.

Sexual offences against children in India:

• Sexual offences against children are rampant but only a small percentage gets reported.

• According to a study, about 53% of children surveyed, reported having faced one or the other form of sexual abuse in their lifetime.

• In most cases, the offender is a family member/near relative or an acquaintance. The child victim in such cases generally does not report these offences.

Effects of sexual abuse on children:

• Sexual abuse scars the psyche of the affected child for entire life.

• A child who is sexually abused has to face very serious consequences such as cognitive impairment, violent and risk behaviour including depression and anxiety.

• Feeling shame and guilt with poor interpersonal relationship & self-esteem are other consequences of sexually abused children.

About POSCO Act:

• Being concerned about such offences against children, the Government enacted POCSO Act, 20012 to protect them from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, while
safeguarding the interest of the child at every stage of the judicial process.

• This is achieved by incorporating child friendly mechanisms for reporting, recording of evidence, investigation and speedy trial of offences through designated Special Courts.

• It is important to note that any human being up to the age of 18 years is recognised as a child under the POCSO Act.

[Ref: PIB, ncpcr.gov.in]

PNGRB TO ACT AS MARKET REGULATOR FOR NATURAL GAS TRADING HUB

India’s downstream oil and gas regulator Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB) is set to take up the role of the market regulator for the natural gas sector, when the planned natural gas trading hub comes into being, much on the lines of the capital markets regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

Need for a natural gas trading platform:

• The plan to establishing a natural gas trading platform is part of a larger effort by the government to build a vibrant and transparent gas market in India.

• The idea is to create an ecosystem where the competing buyers would be able to buy gas from competing sellers and transport the same from gas source to the place of their requirement by getting a non-discriminatory access to the pipeline capacity.

• This end-to-end solution would reduce customer risk and enhance customer confidence on gas as an alternate fuel and feed.

Key facts:

• The world’s biggest natural gas hub is the Henry Hub in the US state of Louisiana. Gas delivered at this point is the basis of most US natural gas futures.

About Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board (PNGRB):

PNGRB was constituted under The Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board Act, 2006.

Composition of PNGRB

• The PNGRB consists of Chairperson, a Member (Legal) and three other members.

• It also has power of civil court and bench comprising member (legal) and one or more members nominated by chairperson which decides on disputes arising among downstream companies or with outsiders.

Mandate:

• The Act provide for the establishment of PNGRB to protect the interests of consumers and entities engaged in specified activities relating to petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas and to promote competitive markets and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto.

• Further as enshrined in the act, the board has also been mandated to regulate the refining, processing, storage, transportation, distribution, marketing and sale of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas excluding production of crude oil and natural gas so as and to ensure uninterrupted and adequate supply of petroleum, petroleum products and natural gas in all parts of the country.

[Ref: The Hindu]

7TH EDITION OF HOME EXPO INDIA 2018

7th edition of Home Expo India 2018 was recently organized by EPCH at India Expo Centre and Mart, Greater Noida. The fair is a three segmented categories show comprising Housewares, Textiles and Furniture under one roof at the same time making it a One-Stop Expo for every visitor.

About EPCH:
Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) under the aegis of Development Commissioner (Handicrafts), Ministry of Textiles, Government of India is a non-profit organization, established under the EXIM policy of Government of India in the year 1986-87.

The objective is to promote, support, protect, maintain and increase the export of handicrafts.

The Council is run and managed by team of professionals headed by Executive Director. The Committee of Administration consists of eminent exporters, professionals.

The Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts has a rarest distinction of being considered as MODEL COUNCIL that is self-sustaining and where all the promotional activities are self-financed.

Functions of the council:

It is an apex body of handicrafts exporters for promotion of exports of Handicrafts from country.

The Council has created necessary infrastructure as well as marketing and information facilities, which are availed both by the members exporters and importers.

The Council is engaged in promotion of handicrafts from India and project India’s image abroad as a reliable supplier of high quality handicrafts.

VRIKSH:

“VRIKSH” is a program by EPCH which is totally based on the timber legality assessment and verification standard for verification of legality and legal origin of wood and wooden products.

It is intended for entities who want to accurately track and make claims about the legal origin and transport of their products.

The VRIKSH standard conforms to all major compliance requirements including the new CITES notification.

To fulfil the obligation, the Vriksh shipment certificate, issued exclusively by EPCH is mandatory to go along with all shipments of two Dalbergia’s species (Rosewood and Sheesham) products.

[Ref: PIB]

LAW COMMISSION FAVOURS SIMULTANEOUS ELECTIONS

A draft white paper released by the Law Commission of India has recommended holding of simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the Assemblies, possibly in 2019.

It suggests amending the Constitution to realise this objective.

Law Commission’s recommendations:

Simultaneous elections can be held now in the nation by amending Constitution, Representation of the People (RPI) Act, 1951 and Rules of Procedure of Lok Sabha/State Legislative Assemblies. Moreover, definition of simultaneous elections should be added to Section 2 of RPI Act, 1951.

The statutory limit of six months for issuance of notification of general elections be appropriately extended by way of amendments to section 14 and 15 of RPI Act, 1951.

The parties which introduce no-confidence motion should simultaneously give a suggestion for an alternative government as no-confidence motion and premature dissolution of House is major roadblocks to simultaneous elections.
• The rigour of ‘Anti-defection Law’ laid down under paragraph 2(1) (b) of Tenth Schedule be removed as exception in order to prevent stalemate in the Lok Sabha/Assembly in case of Hung Parliament/Assembly.

• In case of mid-term elections, new Lok Sabha or Assembly will only serve the remainder of term of previous Lok Sabha/Assembly and not a fresh term of five years. For this Article 83 and 172 of the Constitution along with sections 14 and 15 of the 1951 Act should be amended to incorporate provision regarding remainder of the term.

• The prime minister/chief ministers should be elected to lead Lok Sabha/Assembly, by full house like electing speaker of Lok Sabha. This will potentially provide stability to government and in turn to Lok Sabha and state legislative assembly.

• Centre should get the Constitutional amendments, if agreed upon, to be ratified by all the States so as to avoid any challenge to them.

Background:

• Simultaneous elections were held in the country during the first two decades after Independence up to 1967. Dissolution of certain Assemblies in 1968 and 1969 followed by the dissolution of the Lok Sabha led to the “disruption of the conduct of simultaneous elections.

Why we need simultaneous elections?

• Elections are held all the time and continuous polls lead to a lot of expenditure. More than Rs1,100 crore was spent on the 2009 Lok Sabha polls and the expenditure had shot up to Rs4,000 crore in 2014.

• Also, over a crore government employees, including a large number of teachers, are involved in the electoral process. Thus, the continuous exercise causes maximum harm to the education sector.

• Security forces also have to be diverted for the electoral work even as the country’s enemy keeps plotting against the nation and terrorism remains a strong threat.

Is simultaneous elections a good idea?

• This will help save public money.

• It will be a big relief for political parties that are always in campaign mode.

• It will allow political parties to focus more on policy and governance.

About Law Commission of India:

Law Commission of India is an executive body established by an order of the Government of India. Its major function is to work for legal reform.

• Its membership primarily comprises legal experts, who are entrusted a mandate by the Government.

• The Commission is established for a fixed tenure and works as an advisory body to the Ministry of Law and Justice.

• The first Law Commission was established during the British Raj era in 1834 by the Charter Act of 1833.

• After that, three more Commissions were established in pre-independent India.

• The first Law Commission of independent India was established in 1955 for a three-year term.

[Ref: The Hindu, Indian Express]

**UIDAI LAUNCHES UPDATED QR CODE FOR OFFLINE AADHAAR VERIFICATION**

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has introduced updated ‘QR code’ for offline Aadhaar verification to strengthen its privacy measures during usage.

**Aim of the move:**

• The updated ‘QR code’ is aimed at adding an extra layer of privacy to Aadhaar after UIDAI introduced the concept of virtual identification.

**What is QR code?**

• QR code (Quick Response code) is two-dimensional (matrix) machine-readable bar code made up of black and white square. This code can be read by the camera of a smartphone.

• It is used for storing URLs or other information that link directly to text, emails websites phone numbers. It is capable of 360 degrees (omni-directional), high speed reading.
QR Code can store up to 7089 digits as compared to conventional bar codes which can store max 20 digits. It encodes same amount of data in one-tenth the space of a traditional bar code. It carries information both horizontally and vertically.

It has error correction capability and data stored in it can be restored even if it is partially damaged or dirty.

About the updated QR code:

- The updated ‘QR code’ will only reveal non-sensitive details such as name, address, photo, and date of birth. It can be used for offline user verification without disclosing 12-digit aadhar identification number.

- The new QR code comes with photo and can be used in offline mode to safeguard against any tampering of documents.

- Aadhaar card holders can download and print their biometric ID with QR code from UIDAI website or its mobile app. Users also can manually blacken aadhaar number and use printout with new QR code for establishing their identity, offline too.

[Ref: Times of India, Business Standard]

INTEGRATION OF E-SANAD PORTAL AND NAD – NATIONAL ACADEMIC DEPOSITORY

In a bid to make education system in India more transparent, the integration of e-SANAD portal and NAD – National Academic Depository has been launched by the Union HRD Ministry.

What is e-SANAD?

- e-Sanad is a project aimed at online submission/verification of documents with an ultimate object to extend contact less, cashless, faceless and paperless document attestation service for apostille and normal attestation to applicants in India (to be extended to Indians residing abroad as well in a phased manner).

- The project is being implemented by NIC in coordination with CBSE, States/UTs and the Ministry of External Affairs in a phased manner.

- National Academic Depository (NAD) is a 24X7 online store house of all academic awards viz. certificates, diplomas, degrees, mark-sheets etc. duly digitised and lodged by academic institutions / boards / eligibility assessment bodies.

- The UGC has signed a tripartite agreement with NSDL Database Management Limited (NDML) and CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL) for operationalising NAD.

- NAD not only ensures easy access to and retrieval of an academic award but also validates and guarantees its authenticity and safe storage.

- National Academic Depository comprises of two interoperable digital depositories viz. CDSL Ventures Limited (CVL) and NSDL Database Management Limited (NDML).

[Ref: PIB]

MAKE BCCI A PUBLIC BODY

The Law Commission has suggested to the government that it turn the Board of Control of Cricket in India into a government-controlled body.

- The Commission has asked the government to classify BCCI as a national sports federation and bring it under the ambit of the Right to Information Act (RTI).

Recommendations of LCI:

- BCCI’s monopolistic activities, directly and indirectly, affect the fundamental rights of citizens, players, and other functionaries. Private citizen should be able to move highest court against BCCI for any violation of his fundamental rights.

- BCCI has been flying under radar of public scrutiny and encouraged environment of opacity and non-accountability. It has created impression in minds of general public that corruption and other forms of
malpractices are adversely affecting one of most popular sports played in India.

- BCCI should be held accountable, under all circumstances, for any violations of basic human rights of stakeholders. BCCI exercises ‘state-like’ powers in the regulation of cricket, and thus, comes under the definition of ‘state’ under Article 12 of the Constitution.

- How can BCCI as an entity permitted as de facto by state to represent country at the international stage. BCCI virtually acts as National Sports Federation (NSF) and Sports Ministry website should explicitly mention BCCI in list of NSFs. This will automatically bring it within the purview of the RTI Act.

**Definition of a public authority:**

The RTI Act defines “public authorities” in Section 2(h): A “public authority” means any authority or body or institution of self-government established or constituted:

- By or under the Constitution.
- By any other law made by Parliament.
- By any other law made by State Legislature.
- By notification issued or order made by the appropriate Government, and includes any – Body owned, controlled or substantially financed and Non-Government organization substantially financed, directly or indirectly by funds provided by the appropriate Government.

[Ref: PIB, The Hindu]

**NCMEI CAN GRANT MINORITY TAG TO EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: SC**

The Supreme Court has ruled all questions relating to conferring minority status on educational institutions are to be decided by the National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI) and quashed the order of the Calcutta high court, which had said the body had no original jurisdiction on the issue.

**Court’s ruling:**

- NCMEI has the power to decide any question that might arise, which relate directly or indirectly, with respect to the status of an institution as a minority educational institution.
- As per Section 11 of the Act, NCMEI could declare an establishment as a minority educational institution “at all stages.”
- Only the Commission has the power to decide on granting a ‘no objection’ certificate to an institution that wanted to convert into a minority institution.

**Background:**

- The Calcutta HC had held that NCMEI had no original jurisdiction to declare the minority status.
- Other high courts had also taken contradictory stand on the power of the Commission in granting minority status to educational institutions.
- Besides Calcutta HC, Bombay HC and Punjab & Haryana HC have also taken the view that the Commission had no original power to decide on minority status.
- On the other hand, the Allahabad HC had held that Commission had jurisdiction to decide the issue.
- The NCMEI Act empowers the Commission “to decide all questions relating to the status of an institution as a minority educational institution and to declare its status as such.”

**Implications of this judgment:**

- The Constitution grants a fundamental right to all minorities, whether based on religion or language, to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.
- The wide power given to an independent forum like the NCMEI to declare an institution as a minority educational institution furthered the fundamental right guaranteed under Article 30.

**About National Commission for Minority Educational Institutions (NCMEI):**

- The NCMEI was set up in 2004. The Government brought out an Ordinance in November 2004 establishing the Commission. Later a Bill was introduced in the Parliament in December 2004 and both Houses passed the Bill.
• The Commission is mandated to look into specific complaints regarding deprivation or violation of rights of minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.

• The Commission is a quasi-judicial body and has been endowed with the powers of a Civil Court.

• It is to be headed by a Chairman who has been a Judge of the High Court and three members are to be nominated by Central Government.

**Main roles of NCMEI:**

The Commission has 3 roles namely adjudicatory function, advisory function and recommendatory powers.

1. So far as affiliation of a minority educational institution to a university is concerned, the decision of the Commission would be final.

2. The Commission has powers to advise the Central Government or any State Government on any question relating to the education of minorities that may be referred to it.

3. The Commission can make recommendations to the Central Government and the State Governments regarding any matter which directly or indirectly deprives the minority community of their educational rights enshrined in Article 30.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

**7-STAR RATING UNDER SWACHH BHARAT MISSION (URBAN)**

The Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched the first workshop on star rating of garbage-free cities under the Swachh Bharat Mission.

- The star rating of garbage-free cities would create healthy competition among cities across the country.

**About the star rating initiative:**

- The star-rating initiative, developed by the Swachh Bharat Mission – Urban will be rating cities on a 7-star rating system based on multiple cleanliness indicators for solid waste management.

- These include Door to Door Collection, bulk generator compliance, source segregation, sweeping, scientific processing of waste, scientific land filling, plastic waste management, construction and demolition management, dump remediation & citizen grievance redressal system etc.

**Vision of the initiative:**

Vision statement of the star-rating protocol states that

- “All cities achieve “Garbage Free” status wherein at any point of time in the day,

- No garbage or litter is found in any public, commercial or residential locations (including storm drains and water bodies) in the city (except in litter bins or transfer stations)

- 100% of waste generated is scientifically managed;

- All legacy waste has been remediated and city is scientifically managing its municipal solid waste, plastic waste and construction & demolition waste.

- Additionally, there must be a steady reduction in the waste generated by the city and visible beautification of the city to achieve a clean & aesthetically pleasing city”.

**Rating:**

- Cities can be rated as 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 star based on their compliance with the protocol conditions specified for each of the rating.

- Further city should be ODF (Open Defecation Free) before it could be given rating of 3 star or above.

- While cities may self-declare themselves as 1-star, 2-star or 4-star, MoHUA will carry out an additional verification through an independent third party to certify cities as 3-star, 5-star or 7-star.

- Cities will need to get recertified themselves every year to retain their star-status.

**Significance of the star rating initiative:**

- The most significant feature of the rating protocol is that it provides stakeholders with a single metric to rate a city’s cleanliness, rather than separately evaluating multiple factors which contribute to a city’s overall cleanliness and garbage free status.
• The distinctive feature of Star Rating System will be that many cities can have higher stars as compared to only one city can be “Cleanest city” under Swachh Survekshan.

**Background:**

• The Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban) focuses on two key objectives- eradication of open defecation and 100 per cent scientific solid waste management across all 4,041 statutory towns and cities.

[Ref: PIB]

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**PIL MISUSE IS POSING GRAVE DANGER: BENCH**

While rejecting a bath of PILs in a case, the Supreme Court has observed that Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have been brazenly misused by people with political agenda and they pose a grave danger to the entire judicial process.

**Court’s concerns:**

• It is a travesty of justice for the resources of the legal system to be consumed by an avalanche of misdirected petitions purportedly filed in public interest that are found to promote a personal, business or political agenda. This has spawned an industry of vested interests in litigation.

• Frivolous or motivated petitions, detract the time and attention that courts must devote to genuine causes. Besides, such petitions pose a grave danger to the credibility of the judicial process.

• Also, PILs have been used to seek publicity, instituted at the behest of business or political rivals to settle scores behind the facade of public interest.

What is PIL?

‘Public Interest Litigation’ denotes a legal action initiated in a court of law for the enforcement of public interest where the rights of an individual or a group have been affected.

• In Public Interest Litigation (PIL) vigilant citizens of the country can find an inexpensive legal remedy because there is only a nominal fixed court fee involved in this.

• Further, through the so-called PIL, the litigants can focus attention on and achieve results pertaining to larger public issues, especially in the fields of human rights, consumer welfare and environment.

**Abuse of PIL:**

• The genuine causes and cases of public interest have in fact receded to the background and irresponsible PIL activists all over the country have started to play a major but not a constructive role in the arena of litigation. Of late, many of the PIL activists in the country have found the PIL as a handy tool of harassment since frivolous cases could be filed without investment of heavy court fees as required in private civil litigation and deals could then be negotiated with the victims of stay orders obtained in the so-called PILs.

• The flexibility of procedure that is a character of PIL has given rise to another set of problems. It gives an opportunity to opposite parties to ascertain the precise allegation and respond specific issues.

• The credibility of PIL process is now adversely affected by the criticism that the judiciary is overstepping the boundaries of its jurisdiction and that it is unable to supervise the effective implementation of its orders.

• It has also been increasingly felt that PIL is being misused by the people agitating for private grievance in the grab of public interest and seeking publicity rather than espousing public cause.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**GOVERNMENT SETS UP DEFENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE**

The Union Government has formed Defence Planning Committee (DPC), a new integrated institutional mechanism that will drive country’s military and security strategy and guide defence equipment acquisitions.

• It will be under the chairmanship of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.

**About the Defence Planning Committee (DPC):**

The committee will be a permanent body and it will prepare draft national security strategy besides undertaking strategic defence review and formulating international defence engagement strategy.
• It will consist of Chairman Chiefs of the Staff Committee (COSC), service chiefs, Defence Secretary, Foreign Secretary and Secretary (expenditure) in the Finance Ministry.

• The committee will operate through four sub-committees: on Policy and Strategy, Defence Diplomacy, Plans and Capability Development and Defence Manufacturing Ecosystem.

• The membership and the terms of reference of the sub-committees will be finalized separately.

• Foreign Secretary and Expenditure Secretary being member of DPC will help to overcome problems of coordination between various ministries on matters of national security.

• It will submit all its reports to defence minister.

Functions:

• Prepare drafts of national security strategy and doctrines, international defence engagement strategy and roadmap to build defence manufacturing ecosystem.

• Work on strategy to boost defence exports, and prioritised capability development plans for the armed forces.

• Analyse and evaluate all relevant inputs relating to defence planning and foreign policy imperatives besides focusing on defence acquisition and infrastructure development plans including the 15-year-long integrated perspective plan.

• Work on development of Indian defence industry and technology advancements.

Significance:

• Because the Prime Minister’s Office, the defence ministry, the finance ministry and the three services are part of the same committee, decisions on military purchases could now happen much faster.

**Need for such committee:**

• Considering the complex security environment and volume of expenditure on national defence, it was imperative to have strong defence planning mechanism.

• The present system was found insufficient to provide rigour necessary for planning process. So it was mandated to create an institutional mechanism which can undertake comprehensive and integrated planning of higher defence matters.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**VEHICLES MADE ON OR AFTER JAN. 1 TO HAVE HIGH SECURITY REGISTRATION PLATES**

Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has published new draft rules to make mandatory for automobile manufacturers to provide high security registration plates (HSRP) to all new vehicles from January 1, 2019.

• The HSRP to be fitted in all classes of motor vehicles will have tamper-proof plates with host of in-built security features and is expected to offer increased protection against theft.

Background:

• HSRP was made mandatory in some States 2005 but failed to take off.

**What are High Security Registration Plates (HSRP)?**
HSRPs will have in-built security features, such as self-destructive sticker with engine and chassis numbers.

It will be fitted on front and rear of vehicles and windscreens will have number plate tag with hologram.

Chromium-based hologram will be applied by hot stamping on top left corner of plates both at front and back.

Permanent identification (id) number with minimum of 10 digits will be laser-branded into reflective sheeting on bottom left of registration plate.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**APRIL 21: CIVIL SERVICES DAY**

- The National Civil Services Day is celebrated every year on April 21, when civil servants rededicate themselves to the cause of the citizens and renew their commitment to public service.

- This day coincides with the date on which Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel had addressed the first batch of probationers at the All India Administrative Service Training School at Metcalfe House, New Delhi in 1947.

- On this day, the ‘Prime Minister Award for Excellence in Public Administration’ is presented in three categories. These awards were instituted in 2006.

**UNION CABINET APPROVES ORDINANCE FOR DEATH PENALTY FOR RAPE OF GIRLS UNDER 12 YEARS**

The Union Cabinet has approved promulgation of Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance to provide death penalty for rapists of girls below 12 years.

- The ordinance amends Indian Penal Code (IPC), Criminal Procedure Code, Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Indian Evidence Act.

**Key provisions of Ordinance:**

- It provides for stringent punishment of jail term of minimum 20 years or life imprisonment or death for rape of girl less than 12 years. It provides punishment with imprisonment for rest of life or death sentence in case of gang rape of girl below 12 years.

- It increases minimum punishment from 10 years to 20 years for crime of rape of girl under 16 years, which can be extended to imprisonment for rest of life. It increases minimum punishment for rape of women from rigorous imprisonment of 7 years to
10 years, which can be extended to life imprisonment.

- It provides for speedy investigation and trial, which must be completed in two months. It proposes 6 months’ time limit for disposal of appeals in rape cases. It provides dedicated manpower for investigation of rape cases in time bound manner.

- It provides no provision for anticipatory bail for person accused of rape or gang rape of girl under 16 years. It has also been provided that court has to give notice of 15 days to Public Prosecutor and representative of victim before deciding bail applications in case of rape of a girl under 16 years of age.

- It has provision for maintaining national database and profile of sexual offenders by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). This data will be regularly shared with States/UTs for monitoring, tracking and investigation including verification of antecedents by police.

[Ref: The Hindu, Economic Times]

**IMPEACHMENT NOTICE AGAINST CJI**

The Congress and six other opposition parties have moved a notice for the impeachment of Chief Justice of India (CJI) Dipak Misra, accusing him of “misbehaviour” and “misusing” authority.

- So far, no Chief Justice has ever been impeached in India.

**Procedure for removal of CJI:**

- Article 124(4) of the Constitution lays down the procedure for removal of a judge of the Supreme Court, including the CJI, who can be impeached on grounds of “misbehaviour or incapacity”.

**About the process:**

- Step 1: A removal motion signed by 100 members of Lok Sabha or 50 members of Rajya Sabha has to be submitted to the Speaker of the Lower House or Chairperson (ie Vice President) of the Upper House. This can be in either of the Houses of Parliament.

- Step 2: The Speaker/Chairperson can either accept or reject the motion.

**Step 3:** If the motion is admitted, then the Speaker/Chairperson forms a three-member committee comprising a senior judge of the Supreme Court, a judge of a high court and a distinguished jurist to investigate the charges leveled against the CJI.

**Step 4:** If the committee supports the motion, it can be taken up for discussion. It must be passed by a special two-third majority of MPs in both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha.

**Step 5:** After it is passed in both Houses, it is presented to the President, who can pass a Presidential Order for removal of the CJI.

**Can CJI continue to work during this period?**

- Both the Constitution and the Judges (Inquiry) Act of 1968 are silent on whether a judge facing impeachment motion should recuse from judicial and administrative work till he is cleared of the charges against him.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

**CENTRAL PROJECT MONITORING UNIT FOR E-VIDHAN PROJECT AT PARLIAMENT HOUSE ANNEXE**

The central government has launched Central Project Monitoring Unit for e-Vidhan project at Parliament House Annexe.

**About e-Vidhan project:**

- e-Vidhan is a mission mode project to digitize and make the functioning of State Legislatures in India paperless.

- It is a part of the broader Digital India Programme of the Government and is likely to contribute to the cleanliness & environment by reducing the use of papers to a great extent.

- The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs is the Nodal Ministry for the project.

- In 2014, Himachal Pradesh became the first state in the country to implement e-Vidhan as a pilot project.

[Ref: PIB]
MINORITIES’ COMMISSION TO SEEK CONSTITUTIONAL STATUS

The National Commission for Minorities (NCM) has decided to approach the government for granting it Constitutional status to protect the rights of minority communities more effectively.

Why NCM need a Constitutional status?

- In its present form, the NCM has powers to summon officials, including chief secretaries and director generals of police, but has to rely on departments concerned to take action against them. If granted constitutional status, the NCM will be able to act against errant officials who do not attend hearings, follow its order or are found guilty of dereliction of duty. Also, the NCM can penalise or suspend an officer for two days or send him/her to jail.

- The Standing Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment (2017-18), in its 53rd report had also noted that the NCM is “almost ineffective” in its current state to deal with cases of atrocities against minorities.

About National Commission for Minorities (NCM):

The NCM was set up under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 to look into complaints from members of five religious communities — Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis).

- Jain community was notified as a minority community in 2014.

- The NCM adheres to the United Nations Declaration of 18 December 1992 which states that “States shall protect the existence of the National or Ethnic, Cultural, Religious and Linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.”

State Minorities Commissions:

- Besides NCM, 15 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Assam, which are home to sizeable minority populace, have set up commissions at their respective levels.

- Aggrieved persons belonging to the communities may approach the state minorities commissions concerned for redressal of their grievances or send their representations to the NCM after exhausting all avenues of remedies available.

- The functions of the state commissions, inter-alia, are to safeguard and protect the interests of minorities provided in the Constitution and laws enacted by Parliament and state legislatures.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INTER-COUNTRY REMOVAL & RETENTION OF CHILDREN

Committee headed by Justice Rajesh Bindal has submitted its report on legal issues related to Inter-country removal & retention of children to the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

- The Committee has recommended that the Government may establish an ‘Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority’.

About the ‘Inter Country Parental Child Removal Disputes Resolution Authority’:

Composition:

- The Authority may be chaired by a retired High Court Judge, with Members from Legal and Social sector background along with representatives from key Ministries.

Functions:

- The authority has been envisaged to provide a one window solution in cases of inter country removal and retention of Children.

- The Authority may examine the inter country cases of removal and retention of children vis-a-vis the cultural context, merit of the case, and the best interest of the Child.
International Child Abduction Bill:

- The Protection of Children (Inter-Country Removal and Retention) Bill, 2016 seeks to address the issue.

- The Bill is in consonance with the principles of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, 1980, which seeks to protect a child from the harmful effect of wrongful removal and secure prompt return and reintegration of the child in an environment of his/her ‘habitual residence’.

- The Bill defines ‘wrongful removal or retention’ as an act in breach of custody to a person or an institution or any other body under the law of the country in which the child was habitually resident immediately before the removal or retention.

- The law will be applicable to those wrongfully removed or retained children in India who have not completed 16 years.

- The Bill recommends the setting up of a Central Authority tasked with discovering the whereabouts of the child.

- The Authority will further act to prevent harm to the child, secure the voluntary return of the child to his or her habitual residence, exchange information relating to the child with the appropriate authorities of the contracting state, institute judicial proceedings in the High Court concerned to secure the return of the child, provide free legal aid advice, and make administrative arrangements for the return of the child.

- The court can order the return of a child who has been wrongfully removed or retained in India and if a period of one year has not elapsed from the date of removal or retention. However, the one-year cap is not final.

- The court can order return if it is established that the child is not settled in his/her new environment. It can refuse to order return if returning would expose the child to harm or if the child, on attaining an age and level of maturity, refuses to go back, among other conditions.

[Ref: PIB]

APRIL 24: NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DIWAS

- National Panchayati Raj Day is the national day of India celebrated by Ministry of Panchayati Raj on 24 April annually.

- This date marks a defining moment in the history of decentralization of political power to the grassroots level.

- The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 that came into force with effect from 24th April, 1993 has institutionalized Panchayati Raj through the village, Intermediate and District level Panchayats.

- The first National Panchayati Raj Day was celebrated in 2010.

- Every year on this day Union Ministry of Panchayati Raj organises National Conference and awards best performing Gram Panchayats with ‘The Panchayat Shashakatikaran Puraskar/Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar’.

RAJNATH SINGH CHAIRS MEETING OF ISLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

The Union Home Minister, Shri Rajnath Singh, recently chaired the third meeting of the Island Development Agency (IDA).

- The Island Development Agency reviewed the progress made towards preparation of Development Plans for identified Islands.

What is the Island Development Agency (IDA)?
The IDA was set up on June 1 this year following Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s review meeting for the development of islands.

- The meetings of the agency are chaired by the Union Home Minister.
- Members of the IDA include cabinet secretary, home secretary, secretary (environment, forests and climate change), secretary (tourism) and secretary (tribal welfare).

[Ref: PIB]

**MOU SIGNED BETWEEN INDIAN CULINARY INSTITUTE AND IGNTU**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been signed between the Indian Culinary Institute (ICI) an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism, and Indira Gandhi National Tribal University (IGNTU), Amarkantak.

- The MOU was signed for imparting collaborative degree programmes including research in the field of culinary arts.

*About Indian Culinary Institute (ICI):*

ICI is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Tourism.

- The main objective of setting up of the ICI was to institutionalize a mechanism to support efforts intended to preserve, document, promote and disseminate Indian Cuisine, meet the sectoral requirement of specialists specific to Indian Cuisine, as also of promoting Cuisine as a Niche Tourism product.
- The ICIs will offer structured regular programmes of study specific to culinary arts and culinary management leading to graduate and post graduate level degrees, promote research and innovation, organize demand driven certificate and diploma courses, document and create data base specific to Indian cuisine and commission studies and survey on cuisine.
- The ICIs will also help the local youth to get trained in these streams as well as create entrepreneurs and make them self-sufficient.
- The hotel and tourism industry will also get benefitted by getting the trained and skilled manpower which in turn will enhance their business and thus generate gainful employment.

*About IGNTU:*

- Indira Gandhi National Tribal University is located in Amarkantak, Anuppur district, Madhya Pradesh.
- It was established through an Act of Parliament, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University Act, 2007.

[Ref: PIB]

**CABINET APPROVES DECLARATION OF SCHEDULED AREAS IN RESPECT OF RAJASTHAN**

The Union Cabinet has given approval to the declaration of Scheduled Areas in respect of Rajasthan under Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

- This will ensure that the Scheduled Tribes of Rajasthan will get benefits of protective measures available under the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

*What are scheduled areas?*

As per the Fifth Schedule (Article 244(1)) to the Constitution of India, the expression ‘Scheduled Areas’ means ‘such areas as the President may by order declare to be Scheduled Areas’.

- In accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6(2) of the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution, the President may at any time by order increase the area of any Scheduled Area in a State after consultation with the Governor of that State; rescind, in relation to any State or States, any order or orders made under this paragraph, and in consultation with the Governor of the State concerned, make fresh orders redefining the areas which are to be Scheduled Areas.
- The current fifth scheduled areas are in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.

*Administration:*

- The Executive power of the Union shall extend to giving directions to the respective States regarding the administration of the Scheduled Areas.
The Governors of the State in which there are “Scheduled areas” have to submit reports to the President regarding the administration of such Areas, annually or whenever required by the President.

Tribes Advisory Councils are to be constituted to give advice on such matters as welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes.

The Governor is authorised to direct that any particular Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State shall not apply to a Scheduled Area or shall apply, only subject to exceptions or modifications. The Governor is also authorised to make regulations to prohibit or restrict the transfer of land by, or among members of the Scheduled Tribes.

The Governor may make regulations for the peace and good government of any area in a State which is for the time being a Scheduled Area.

These provisions of the Constitution relating to the administration of the Scheduled Areas and Tribes may be altered by Parliament or by ordinary legislation.

The Constitution provides for the appointment of a Commission to report on the administration of the Scheduled Areas and the welfare of theScheduled Tribes in the States.

The President may appoint such Commission at any time, but the appointment of such Commission at the end of 10 years from the commencement of the Constitution was obligatory.

Background:

The Scheduled Areas were first notified in 1950. Subsequently, Constitution Orders (CO) specifying Scheduled Areas in Rajasthan were issued in 1981.

Due to reorganization and creation of new districts and changes in population of Scheduled Tribes as per 2011 Census, Rajasthan Government has requested for extension of Scheduled Areas in the state.

[Ref: PIB]
India has dropped from rank 136 last year to rank 138 this year. India fared poorly on indicators such as hate speeches, attacks on journalists on social media, trolling them and targeting their reputation.

Afghanistan (118), Bhutan (94), Nepal (106), the Maldives (120), and Sri Lanka (131), all performed better than India; with Pakistan (139) and Bangladesh (146) performing worse.

[Ref: The Hindu, Indian Express]

NSCI SAFETY AWARDS – 2017

NSCI Safety Awards for the year 2017 were recently awarded.

About the National Safety Awards:

- The NSCI Safety Awards are much coveted national level Awards in the field of occupational safety, health and environment and are given in recognition for effective Safety Management System and excellent safety & health performance by the organizations in Manufacturing, Construction and MSME Sectors during the relevant assessment periods.
- These Awards are adjudged and declared every year by the National Safety Council.

About the National Safety Council:

National Safety Council is a premier, non-profit, self-financing and tripartite apex body at the national level in India.

- It is an autonomous body, which was set up by the Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment in 1966 to generate, develop and sustain a voluntary movement on Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) at the national level.
- It was registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and subsequently, as a Public Trust under the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950.
- To fulfil its objective NSC carries out various activities. These include organising and conducting specialised training courses, conferences, seminars & workshops; conducting consultancy studies such as safety audits, hazard evaluation & risk assessment; designing and developing HSE promotional materials & publications.

[Ref: PIB]

GOVERNMENT SCHEMES & POLICIES

CABINET APPROVES THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (AMENDMENTS) BILL, 2018

The Union Cabinet has introduction of Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018 in Parliament for better protection and promotion of human rights in the country.

- The Bill will amend Protection of Human Rights, 1993 which was last amended in 2006.

Salient features of the Bill:

- The Protection of Human Rights (Amendments) Bill, 2018 proposes to include National Commission for Protection of Child Rights as deemed Member of National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). It:
  - Proposes to add woman member in composition of NHRC.
  - Proposes to enlarge scope of eligibility and scope of selection of Chairperson, NHRC as well as State Human Rights Commission (SHRCs).
  - Proposes to incorporate mechanism to look after cases of human rights violation in Union Territories.
  - Proposes to amend term of office of Chairperson and Members of NHRC and SHRCs to make it in consonance with terms of Chairperson and Members of other Commissions.

Benefits:

- The amendment will strengthen Human Rights Institutions of India further for effective discharge of their mandates, roles and responsibilities.
- Moreover, the amended act will be in perfect sync with agreed global standards and benchmarks towards ensuring rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of individual in the country.

Background:
• The amendment to the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 will make National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commission (SHRC) more compliant with the Paris Principle concerning its autonomy, independence, pluralism and wide-ranging functions in order to effectively protect and promote human rights.

[Ref: PIB]

POSHAN ABHIYAAN

The first meeting of National Council on India’s Nutrition Challenges under POSHAN Abhiyaan was held in New Delhi.

About National Council on India’s Nutritional Challenges:

• Its mandate is to provide policy directions to address countries nutritional challenges through coordinated inter-sectoral action.

• It is also mandated to coordinate and review convergence between Ministries and review programmes for nutrition on a quarterly basis.

• It will submit its report to the Prime Minister every 6 months.

About POSHAN Abhiyaan:

• POSHAN (Prime Minister’s Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition) Abhiyaan was launched on International Women’s day (March 8) in 2018 to boost nutrition among children and women.

• It aims to ensure holistic development and adequate nutrition for pregnant women, mothers and children.

• It targets to reduce level of under-nutrition and other related problems by ensuring convergence of various nutrition related schemes. It also targets stunting, under-nutrition, anaemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and low birth rate.

• It will monitor and review implementation of all such schemes and utilize existing structural arrangements of line ministries wherever available.

• The Abhiyaan targets to reduce stunting, under-nutrition, anemia (among young children, women and adolescent girls) and reduce low birth weight by 2%, 2%, 3% and 2% per annum respectively.

• The target of the mission is to bring down stunting among children in the age group 0-6 years from 38.4% to 25% by 2022.

ANNUAL TARGETS UNDER POSHAN ABHIYAAN:

The annual targets set under POSHAN Abhiyaan beginning 2017-18 are as under:

• Prevent and reduce stunting in children (0-6years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.

• Prevent and reduce under-nutrition (underweight prevalence) in children (0-6 years): By 6% @ 2% p.a.

• Reduce the prevalence of anemia among young Children (6-59 months): By 9% @ 3% p.a.

• Reduce the prevalence of anemia among Women and Adolescent Girls in the age group of 15-49 years: By 9% @ 3% p.a.

• Reduce Low Birth Weight (LBW): By 6% @ 2% p.a.

[Ref: PIB]

NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES ENROLLED UNDER PMMVY CROSSES 22 LAKHS

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has made total payment of Rs. 271.66 crores to beneficiaries under Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY).

• The payment has been made to 11,47,386 beneficiaries across the country.

About the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):

Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme.

• It is a maternity benefit program run by the government of India.

• PMMVY is implemented by the Ministry of Women & Child Development in collaboration with State Governments.
• It is a conditional cash transfer scheme for pregnant and lactating women of 19 years of age or above for first two live births.

• It provides a partial wage compensation to women for wage-loss during childbirth and childcare and to provide conditions for safe delivery and good nutrition and feeding practices.

• Under the scheme, the cost sharing ratio between the Centre and the States & UTs with Legislature is 60:40, for North-Eastern States & three Himalayan States, it is 90:10 and 100% Central assistance for Union Territories without Legislature.

• It was previously known as Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY).

• In 2013, the scheme was brought under the National Food Security Act, 2013 to implement the provision of cash maternity benefit of ₹6,000 stated in the Act.

[Ref: PIB]

559 SWADHAR GREH PRESENTLY FUNCTIONAL IN THE COUNTRY WITH 17231 BENEFICIARIES

Recently released government data shows that there are 559 Swadharm Grehs presently functional in the country with 17231 beneficiaries. Swadhar Greh is a DBT compliant scheme.

About Swadhar Greh Scheme:

The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.

Beneficiaries:

• The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.

Implementing agencies:

• The implementing agencies are mainly NGOs. An Evaluation Study conducted through Centre for Market Research and Social Development to assess the performance of the scheme observed that the scheme is successful for which it was formulated/implemented.

Criterion:
As per guidelines of the Swadhar Greh Scheme, to seek financial assistance the agency should meet following requirements:

- The agency should be either recognized by State/UT under existing law or should be well known with the experience or working in the field for at least 3 years and its work should be reported satisfactory by the State Govt./UT Administration concerned.

- It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women’s welfare/social welfare for a minimum period of two years.

- Its financial position should be sound.

- It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.

- It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.

- It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

[Ref: PIB]

**MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA SCHEME TO EMPOWER RURAL WOMEN THROUGH STATE AND DISTRICT CENTRES**

Government of India is implementing Mahila Shakti Kendra scheme to empower rural women through community participation.

- The scheme is envisaged to work at various levels, and at the National level (domain based knowledge support) and State level (State Resource Centre for Women) technical support to the respective governments on issues related to women is provided.

About Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra Scheme (PMMSK)

PMMSK scheme is part of Umbrella Scheme “Mission for Protection and Empowerment for Women” of the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development.

[Ref: PIB]

**MINISTRY OF TRIBAL AFFAIRS TO LAUNCH FIRST EVER “VAN DHAN VIKAS KENDRA”**

- The scheme is envisioned as one-stop convergence support service for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, digital literacy, health and nutrition and employment.

- It aims to improve declining child sex ratio (CSR), ensure survival and protection of the girl child, ensuring her education and empowering her to fulfil her potential.

- It will provide an interface for rural women to approach government for getting their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.

- At the national level, the Mahila Shakti Kendra will provide domain-based knowledge support.

- At the state level, it will cater to State Resource Centre for Women that will provide technical support on issues related to women at district and block level centres.

- It will provide support to the PMMSK and also give a foothold to Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao in 640 districts.

Significance of these Kendras:

- Setting up of institutions like Mahila Shakti Kendras will increase access of essential services for women.

- There is also an increase in employment opportunities for women with their participation increased from less than 48% to 55% in MGNREGA.

[Ref: PIB]
Ministry of Tribal Affairs is planning to launch first ever “Van Dhan Vikas Kendra” at Bijapur, Chhattisgarh for value addition of Forest Produce.

- Value addition assumes critical importance in ensuring remunerative prices to the tribals in this approach.

**About Van Dhan Scheme:**

The Van Dhan scheme aims at economic development of tribals involved in collection of Minor Food Produces (MFPs) by helping them in optimum utilization of natural resources and provide them sustainable livelihood.

- Under it, 10 Self Help Groups (SHGs) of 30 Tribal gatherers will be constituted.
- The SHGs will then be trained and provided with working capital to add value to products they collect from forest.
- They will be able to market their products, by working under leadership of collector, not only within states but also outside states.
- TRIFED will be provide all required training and technical support to SHGs. They will be trained on sustainable harvesting, collection, primary processing and value addition.
- They will be formed into clusters to aggregate their stock in tradable quantity and link them with facility of primary processing in Van Dhan Vikas Kendra.

**About Van Dhan Vikas Kendra:**

- Van Dhan Vikas Kendra will be established under the Van Dhan scheme will provide skill upgradation and capacity building training and setting up of primary processing and value addition facility.
- It will be used for training of beneficiaries by providing them equipment and tools for primary level processing and infrastructure and building for housing.
- The selection of the tribal beneficiaries and formation of the SHGs under this has been undertaken by TRIFED.

**Significance of Minor Forest Produce (MFP):**

- Minor Forest Produce (MFP) is a major source of livelihood for tribals living in forest areas. The importance of MFPs for this section of the society can be gauged from the fact that around 100 million forest dwellers depend on MFPs for food, shelter, medicines and cash income.
- It provides them critical subsistence during the lean seasons, particularly for primitive tribal groups such as hunter gatherers, and the landless. Tribals derive 20-40% of their annual income from MFP on which they spend major portion of their time.
- This activity has strong linkage to women’s financial empowerment as most of the MFPs are collected and used/sold by women. MFP sector has the potential to create about 10 million workdays annually in the country.

[Ref: PIB]

### PARAMPARAGAT KRISHI VIKAS YOJANA (PKVY)

According to revised guidelines of the centre’s flagship scheme to promote organic farming, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), farmers will be eligible for an assistance of Rs 48,700 per hectare for a three-year period for adopting these traditional methods of cultivation.

**As per revised guidelines, who is eligible?**

- According to the revised guidelines, farmers practising traditional methods of organic farming like yogik farming, gou mata kheti, Vedic farming, Vaishnav kheti, Ahinsa farming, Adhvoot Shivanand farming, and rishi krishi will be eligible for financial assistance, in addition to those adopting standard organic farming practices like zero-budget natural farming and permaculture.

**Key facts:**

- Yogik farming refers to a system where it is believed that farmers can channelize cosmic energy to their fields by performing yoga.
- Rishi krishi is based on pre-Vedic, Vedic and medieval texts like Vishvavallava, Kashyapiyakrishisukti, and Surapala’s Vrikshayurveda.
- Gou mata kheti is a system of farming which uses cow dung and urine from indigenous breeds of lactating cows.
About Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY):

Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana is an elaborated component of Soil Health Management (SHM) of major project National Mission of Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).

- Under PKVY Organic farming is promoted through the adoption of the organic village by cluster approach and PGS certification.
- Fifty or more farmers will form a cluster having 50-acre land to take up the organic farming under the scheme.
- The produce will be pesticide residue free and will contribute to improving the health of the consumer.

[Ref: The Hindu]

WHO DIRECTIVES CALL FOR SUPPORT FOR BREASTFEEDING

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) have issued a new 10-step guidance to increase support for breastfeeding in health facilities that provide maternity and newborn services.

- It will provide the immediate health system platform to help mothers initiate breastfeeding within the first hour and breastfeed exclusively for six months.

Guidelines:

- The guidelines describe how hospitals should have a written breastfeeding policy in place, required staff competencies, and antenatal and post-birth care, including breastfeeding support for mothers.
- It also recommends limited use of breast milk substitutes, rooming-in, responsive feeding, educating parents on the use of bottles and pacifiers, and support when mothers and babies are discharged from hospital.

[Ref: The Hindu]

About the MAA Programme:

MAA (Mothers’ Absolute Affection) is an intensified programme of the Union Health Ministry that aims to enhance optimal breastfeeding practices in the country.

SIDBI TO FOCUS ON 115 ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICTS, PROMOTE MICRO ENTERPRISES

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has charted a plan to promote micro enterprises in 115 aspirational districts across the country to contribute in their development. The bank has tied up with Common Service Centre (CSC) to meet this objective.

What is Transformation of Aspirational Districts Programme?
‘Transformation of Aspirational Districts’ was launched in January with an aim to quickly and effectively transform some of the most underdeveloped districts in the country.

**Implementation strategy:**

- 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.

- This will converge the central and state schemes, collaborate central, state and district collectors to strengthen these districts by identifying the low-hanging fruits for immediate improvement, measure progress and then rank the district by getting the data on a real-time basis.

**Significance of the scheme:**

- 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.

- Under the programme, identified districts are prodded and encouraged to first catch-up with the best district within their state, and subsequently aspire to become one of the best in the country, by competing with, and learning from others.

[Ref: PIB]

**GRAM SWARAJ ABHIYAN**

On the occasion of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Jayanti (14th April), the Union Government launched “Gram Swaraj Abhiyan- Special Interventions”, an high-intensity outreach programme to deliver welfare schemes to select villages which need particular attention.

**About Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:**

The Gram Swaraj Abhiyan was launched on the lines of rural development schemes like Antyodaya based on principle of convergence and saturation.

**Aim:**

- The initiative aims for 100% coverage of seven schemes launched by Central Government for eligible beneficiaries in three-week window from April 14 to May 5, 2018.

**Objective:**

- The objective of abhiyan is to promote social harmony, reach out to poor rural households, obtain feedback on ongoing programmes, enrol in new initiatives, focus on doubling farmers’ income, enhance livelihood opportunities and re-emphasise national priorities such as cleanliness and strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions.

**Schemes covered:**

- The seven schemes covered under it are Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Ujala scheme, Saubhagy, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Mission Indradhanush.

**Beneficiaries:**

- It will benefit 17,000 poor villages by providing them free LPG connections, electricity supply, Jan Dhan accounts, two PM Insurance schemes and immunisation of children will be available in 21 days.

**Background:**

- Government has appointed dozens of directors and deputy secretaries to push its flagship programmes to “100% saturation” in rural areas.

[Ref: PIB]

**GOVT LAUNCHES E-FRRO SCHEME TO PROVIDE HASSLE-FREE TRAVEL**

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has launched web-based application e-FRRO (e-Foreigners Regional Registration Office) to allow foreign tourists and travellers to avail of paperless and cashless visa-related services.

**About e-FRRO scheme:**

The e-FRRO scheme is aimed at building a centralized, transparent online platform for the foreigners to avail visa related services and to provide Faceless, Cashless and Paperless services to the foreigners with user friendly experience.
Features:

- Online FRRO Service delivery mechanism without requirement of visiting FRRO/FRO office barring exceptional cases.
- In this online system, foreigners can get as many as 27 visa and immigration-related services in India from comfort of their place of stay.
- Using e-FRRO application, foreigners can apply online on portal and obtain services through email and post without appearing in person at FRO/FRRO office.
- Using this application, foreigners are required to create their own User ID by registering themselves. Afterwards, they can apply online through registered user ID for various visa and immigration related services in India viz. registration, visa extension, visa conversion, exit permit etc.

Implementation:

- The e-FRRO scheme is being implemented on Immigration, Visa, Foreigners Registration and Tracking (IVFRT) with negligible extra expenditure, taking cue from already successfully running e-visa scheme that has earned revenue of more than Rs. 1400 crore since its launch in November 2014.

Significance of the scheme:

- In 2017, more than one crore foreigners visited India and out of them approximately 3.6 lakhs had to visit FRRO offices spread across the country for various visa-related services.
- e-FRRO eliminates need for any human interface and using it foreigners touring India will be no longer need to physically visit office of Foreigners Registration Office or Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRO/FRRO) for visa-related services including registration and visa extension.

[Ref: PIB]

GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES FIRST TRANCHE OF SOVEREIGN GOLD BONDS FOR FY19

The government of India has announced that the first tranche of Sovereign Gold Bond scheme for the current year 2018-19 will shortly be opened for subscription.
Bonds can be used as collateral for loans. The loan-to-value (LTV) ratio is to be set equal to ordinary gold loan mandated by the Reserve Bank from time to time.

[Ref: The Hindu, Indian Express]

**PRADHAN MANTRI UJJWALA YOJANA LAUNCHED IN TELANGANA**

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) was launched in the state of Telangana on the birth anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

**About Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana:**

Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana aims to provide five crore LPG connections to women in Below Poverty Line (BPL) households over the next three financial years, at a cost of Rs. 8,000 crore.

- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- It is first social welfare scheme implemented by Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas.
- The scheme will be partially funded from the savings accruing to the government from LPG users who gave up their subsidy as part of the Give It Up programme.
- The new users who receive LPG connections under the scheme will not have to pay the security deposit, while the Rs. 1,600 administrative costs, cost of pressure regulator booklet and safety hose will be borne by the government.
- The households will be selected using the socio-economic and caste census data. Consumers will have the option to purchase gas stove and refills on EMI.

**Some of the objectives of the scheme are:**

- Empowering women and protecting their health.
- Reducing the serious health hazards associated with cooking based on fossil fuel.
- Reducing the number of deaths in India due to unclean cooking fuel.
- Preventing young children from significant number of acute respiratory illnesses caused due to indoor air pollution by burning the fossil fuel.

**Why should we opt for LPG?**

- About 75 crore Indians, especially women and girls, are exposed to severe household air pollution (HAP) from the use of solid fuels such as biomass, dung cakes and coal for cooking.
- A report from the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare places HAP as the second leading risk factor contributing to India’s disease burden.
- According to the World Health Organization, solid fuel use is responsible for about 13% of all mortality and morbidity in India (measured as Disability-Adjusted Life Years), and causes about 40% of all pulmonary disorders, nearly 30% of cataract incidences, and over 20% each of ischemic heart disease, lung cancer and lower respiratory infection.

[Ref: PIB]
The government has decided to extend the Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of (Hybrid) and Electric Vehicles (FAME) scheme by six months until 30 September 2018, or till the time the second phase of the scheme is approved by it.

What is FAME India scheme?

With an aim to promote eco-friendly vehicles, the government had launched the FAME India scheme in 2015 offering incentives on electric and hybrid vehicles of up to Rs 29,000 for bikes and Rs 1.38 lakh for cars.

FAME India – Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric vehicles in India – is a part of the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan.

The scheme envisages Rs 795 crore support in the first two fiscals starting with the current year.

It is being administered by the Heavy Industries Ministry.

[Ref: The Hindu, Live Mint]

About the PMGSY:

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was launched in 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country.

- The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the plain areas and 250 persons and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas.

Aim of the PMGSY:

The aim was to provide roads to all villages

- With a population of 1000 persons and above by 2003
- With a population of 500 persons and above by 2007
- In hill states, tribal and desert area villages with a population of 500 persons and above by 2003
- In hill states, tribal and desert area villages with a population of 250 persons and above by 2007.

[Ref: PIB]

GAPS IN PMGSY EXECUTION: PANEL

A parliamentary panel has found discrepancies including diversion of funds, issuing tenders prior to technical sanctions, incomplete projects, preference to certain villages etc. in the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojna (PMGSY) — a flagship programme of the Central government to provide rural last mile connectivity.

The panel also found that some states had deviated from the prescribed procedures. Consequently, eligible habitations were either left out or wrongly shown as connected.

ATAL TINKERING LABS CELEBRATE ANNUAL COMMUNITY DAY

The ATL Community Day was held across India, over the course of April 13 – 16.

- The initiative is an effort to spread awareness as well as engage the local communities in the neighbourhood of an Atal Tinkering Lab, to come and experience the exciting new world of science and future technologies.
• AIM has selected more than 2400 schools in 2017 for establishing Atal Tinkering Labs.

**What are Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs)?**

• With a vision to ‘Cultivate one Million children in India as Neoteric Innovators’, Atal Innovation Mission is establishing Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) in schools across India.

• The objective of this scheme is to foster curiosity, creativity and imagination in young minds; and inculcate skills such as design mindset, computational thinking, adaptive learning, physical computing etc.

• AIM will provide grant-in-aid that includes a one-time establishment cost of Rs. 10 lakh and operational expenses of Rs. 10 lakh for a maximum period of 5 years to each ATL.

• Schools (minimum Grade VI – X) managed by Government, local body or private trusts/society can set up ATL.

**Significance of ATLs:**

• Atal Tinkering Labs have evolved as epicenters for imparting these ‘skills of the future’ through practical applications based onself-learning.

• Bridging a crucial social divide, Atal Tinkering Labs provide equal opportunity to all children across the spectrum by working at the grassroot level, introducing children to the world of innovation and tinkering.

**About Atal Innovation Mission:**

Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) endeavours to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

• Its objective is to serve as a platform for promotion of world-class Innovation Hubs, Grand Challenges, Start-up businesses and other self-employment activities, particularly in technology driven areas.

**Core functions:**

The Atal Innovation Mission shall have two core functions:

• Entrepreneurship promotion through Self-Employment and Talent Utilization, wherein innovators would be supported and mentored to become successful entrepreneurs.

• Innovation promotion: to provide a platform where innovative ideas are generated.

[Ref: PIB]

**GOVERNMENT LAUNCHES STUDY IN INDIA PROGRAMME TO ATTRACT FOREIGN STUDENTS**

With an aim to provide students across the world an opportunity to study in Indian educational institutions, the Union HRD Ministry has launched “Study in India” programme.

**About the “Study in India” programme:**

• The “Study in India’ is an innovative initiative to attract students from countries in South Asia, South-East Asia, Middle East and Africa to come and experience the very best of academic learning from the top institutions in India.

• Under the programme, meritorious students would also be provided with fee waiver and scholarship.

• The Institute concerned will bear the expenditure on the fee waiver based on cross-subsidisation or through its existing funding.

• One of the objectives for the programme is to improve global ranking for Indian educational institutes.

• This will be achieved through systematic brand-building, identifying quality institutions for receiving the students, creating suitable infrastructure and facilitation structures.

**Significance of the programme:**

• The programme will not only encourage more foreign students to choose India as a destination for higher education but will also double India’s market share of global education exports from less than 1% to 2%.

• The move is also aimed to improve global ranking of Indian educational institutes.

**Background:**

• The government, at present, permits provision of 10% to 15% supernumerary seats for foreign students in higher education. This provision...
remains largely underutilised across universities and colleges.

- Currently, India is home to about 45,000 international students, which accounts for just 1% of global student mobility. It was one the reason for Indian institutes lower global rankings.

- By launching Study in India programme, government hopes to attract 1.5 lakh to 2 lakh international students by 2022.

[Ref: PIB]

**DARPAN-PLI APPLICATION LAUNCHED**

The Union Ministry of Communications has launched DARPAN-PLI application for seamless collection of premium for Postal Life Insurance (PLI) and Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI) policies.

- The app launched under DARPAN Project will help in collection of premium of these two policies at branch post offices anywhere in India, with online updation of the policies.

**What is DARPAN Project?**

DARPAN is Information Technology (IT) modernisation project aimed at realising financial inclusion of un-banked rural population. It offers core banking services to the account holders.

**Aims and objectives of DARPAN Project:**

- The project intends to provide low power technology solution to each branch postmaster (BPM). This will enable each of approximately 1.29 lakhs branch post offices (BOs) to improve service delivery.

- It aims to increase rural reach of Department of Posts (DoP) and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance and Cash Certificates.

- It also aims to improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of accountable article.

**Significance of the project:**

The Project shall

- Increase the rural reach of the Department of Posts and enable BOs to increase traffic of all financial remittances, savings accounts, Rural Postal Life Insurance, and Cash Certificates;

- Improve mail operations processes by allowing for automated booking and delivery of accountable article;

- Increase revenue using retail post business;

- Provide third party applications; and

- Make disbursements for social security schemes such as MGNREGS.

**Background:**

- So far, 43,171 Branch Post Offices have migrated under the "DARPAN" project with the aim of financial inclusion to rural population and it is targeted to complete the project by March, 2018.

[Ref: PIB]

**GRAM SWARAJ ABHIYAN**

As part of the “Gram Swaraj Abhiyaan”, the “Swachh Bharat Parva” was recently organized all over the country.

**About Gram Swaraj Abhiyan:**

- “Gram Swaraj Abhiyan” is being organised between 14th April to 05th May, 2018.

- The campaign, undertaken under the name of “Sabka Sath, Sabka Gaon, Sabka Vikas”, is to promote social harmony, spread awareness about pro-poor initiatives of government, reach out to poor households to enroll them as also to obtain their feedback on various welfare programmes.

- As a special endeavour during the Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, saturation of eligible households/persons would be made under seven flagship pro-poor programmes in 21,058 identified villages.

- The programmes covered are Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Saubhagy, Ujala scheme, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana and Mission Indradhanush.
Background:

- Recently, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) chaired by PM Modi had approved restructured Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan (RGSA) to focus on training, building infrastructure, stepping up initiatives for e-governance under e-Panchayat Mission Mode Project (MMP) to deliver Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

[Ref: PIB]

SIGNING OF LEGAL AGREEMENTS BETWEEN INDIA AND WORLD BANK ON NATIONAL BIOPHARMA MISSION

The Union Government has entered into agreement with World Bank for flexible financing arrangement to accelerate research towards early development for biopharmaceuticals under National Biopharma Mission.

- The agreement was signed between the project implementing agency – BIRAC a PSU of DBT, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (on behalf of World Bank).

About National Biopharma Mission:

- The National Biopharma Mission is being implemented by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) – a Public Sector Undertaking of Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

- It aims to make India a hub for design and development of novel, affordable and effective biopharmaceutical products such as vaccines, biologics and medical devices for combating public health concerns.

- The programme will specifically focus on the development of new vaccines, bio-therapeutics, diagnostics and medical devices to better address the rising burden of diseases in the country.

- It will also bring isolated centres of excellence together, enhance regional capabilities and strengthen the current bio-clusters network in terms of capacities as well as quantity and quality of output.

- This would strengthen translational capability of academic researchers; empower bio-entrepreneurs and SMEs by decreasing the cost and risk during early stages of product development and also elevate the innovation quotient of the industry.

[Ref: PIB]

CCEA APPROVES RESTRUCTURED NATIONAL BAMBOO MISSION

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme under National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA) during remaining period of 14th Finance Commission (2018-20) with an outlay of Rs. 1290 crore.

- The restructured mission will ensure holistic development of bamboo sector by addressing complete value chain and establish effective linkage of producers (farmers) with industry.

Empowerment of Executive Committee

- CCEA has also approved Empowerment of Executive Committee for formulation of guidelines of NBM and make changes therein, including cost norms for various interventions from time-to-time as per needs felt and specific recommendations of states with approval of Minister for Agriculture & Farmers Welfare.

Objectives of restructured NBM

- Increase area under bamboo plantation in non-forest Government and private lands to supplement farm income and contribute towards resilience to climate change.

- Improve post-harvest management through establishment of innovative primary processing units, treatment and seasoning plants, primary treatment and seasoning plants, preservation technologies and market infrastructure.

- Promote product development at micro, small and medium levels and feed bigger industry. Rejuvenate the under developed bamboo industry in India.
• Promote skill development, capacity building, awareness generation for development of bamboo sector.

Beneficiaries:

• The restructured mission will benefit directly and indirectly farmers as well as local artisans and associated personnel engaged in bamboo sector including associated industries.

• It will directly benefit about one lakh farmers as it has proposed to bring about one lakh ha area under plantation.

• It is expected to establish about 4000 treatment and product development units and bring more than 100000 ha area under plantation.

States/districts to be covered:

• The restructured mission will focus on development of bamboo in limited states where it has social, commercial and economical advantage, particularly in North Eastern region and in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Bihar, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Impact:

• The bamboo plantation will contribute in optimizing farm productivity and income thereby enhancing livelihood opportunities of small and marginal farmers including landless and women as well as provide quality material to industry.

• The restructured mission will serve as potential instrument for enhancing income of farmers and also contribute towards climate resilience and environmental benefits.

• It will also help in creating employment generation directly or indirectly in both skilled and unskilled segments.

About National Bamboo Mission (NBM):

NBM, a Centrally Sponsored Scheme was started in 2006-07.

• It was subsumed under Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) during 2014-15 and continued till 2015-16.

• It aims to promote growth of bamboo sector through area based regionally differentiated strategy.

• The NBM mainly emphasized on propagation and cultivation of bamboo, with limited efforts on processing, product development and value addition. There is weak linkage between farmers (producers) and industry.

• The restructured mission addresses the complete value chain for growth of the bamboo sector.

Objectives:

• Increase coverage area under bamboo in potential areas, with improved varieties to enhance yields.

• Promote marketing of bamboo and bamboo based handicrafts.

• Establish convergence and synergy among stakeholders for the development of bamboo.

• Promote, develop and disseminate technologies through seamless blend of traditional wisdom and modern scientific knowledge.

• Generate employment opportunities for skilled and unskilled persons, especially unemployed youths.

[Ref: The Hindu]

HRD MINISTRY LAUNCHES UNNAT BHARAT ABHIYAN 2.0

Human Resource Development Ministry has launched Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0.

About Unnat Bharat Abhiyan:

▪ Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is a flagship programme of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, with the intention to enrich Rural India.

▪ It aims to leverage the knowledge base and resources of the Premier Institutions of the country to bring in transformational change in rural developmental process.

▪ It also aims to create a vibrant relationship between the society and the higher educational institutes, with the latter providing the knowledge and
technology support to improve the livelihoods in rural areas and to upgrade the capabilities of both the public and private organisations in the society.

About Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0:

- Under the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0, the institutions have been selected on a Challenge Mode and the scheme has been extended to 750 reputed Higher Educational Institutes (both public and private) of the country.
- Also, scope for providing Subject Expert Groups and Regional Coordinating Institutes to handhold and guide the participating institutions has been strengthened.
- IIT Delhi has been designated to function as the National Coordinating Institute for this programme and the Ministry intends to extend the coverage to all the reputed Higher Educational Institutes, in a phased manner. Each selected institute would adopt a cluster of villages / panchayats and gradually expand the outreach over a period of time.

[Ref: PIB]

LEISANG BECOMES LAST VILLAGE TO GET ELECTRICITY

Leisang in Manipur has become the last village to be added to the national power grid under the Rural Electrification Scheme.

Definition of electrified village:

- The government considers a village electrified if it has basic electrical infrastructure and 10% of its households and public places including schools, local administrative offices and health centres have power.

Background:

The government had allocated Rs75,893 crore for the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana with the aim of providing electricity access to all villages.

About Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY):

Government of India has launched the scheme “Deendayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana” for rural electrification.

www.iastoppers.com

- The erstwhile Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) scheme for village electrification and providing electricity distribution infrastructure in the rural areas has been subsumed in the DDUGJY scheme.
- Rural Electrification Corporation is the Nodal Agency for implementation of DDUGJY.

Components of DDUGJY:

The Yojana also includes the components:

1. To separate agriculture and non agriculture feeders facilitating judicious rostering of supply to agricultural and non-agricultural consumers in rural areas and
2. Strengthening and augmentation of sub transmission and distribution infrastructure in rural areas, including metering of distribution transformers/feeders/consumers.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

ISSUES RELATED TO HEALTH & EDUCATION

NIRF INDIA RANKINGS 2018

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) India Rankings 2018 have been announced. NIRF Indian Rankings 2018 was the third edition of the rankings that were introduced in the year 2016.

Highlights of the rankings:

Performance of various institutions:

- The Indian Institute of Science in Bengaluru and Delhi’s Miranda House are India’s best university and college this year.
- All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Delhi, Nalsar University of Law in Hyderabad and Indian Institute of Technology in Kharagpur ranked number 1 in their respective categories.
- Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras was declared the best engineering college.
- Delhi University’s Miranda House topped the college category this year as well.
Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad occupied the top position among management institutions this year also.

What is NIRF?

The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) is a methodology adopted by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to rank all institutions of higher education in India.

- It has been approved by the MHRD and was launched in September, 2015.
- This framework outlines a methodology to rank institutions across the country.
- The methodology draws from the overall recommendations and broad understanding arrived at by a Core Committee set up by MHRD, to identify the broad parameters for ranking various universities and institutions.
- The parameters broadly cover “Teaching, Learning and Resources”, “Research and Professional Practices”, “Graduation Outcomes”, “Outreach and Inclusivity” and “Perception”.
- NIRF has been given the responsibility of ranking institutions that have applied and submitted their data.
- The ranking of the Institutions will be done based on the parameters proposed by NIRF for different disciplines. It ranks nine categories of institutions including universities, engineering, management, pharmacy, architecture, Law, medical institutions and general degree colleges.
- Ranking promotes competition among the Universities and drive them to strive for excellence. The rankings assume significance as performance of institutions has been linked with “Institutions of Eminence” scheme.

About the scheme of Institutions of Eminence:

- The scheme of Institutions of Eminence was rolled out by University Grants Commission (UGC).
- It aims to help 20 higher education (10 public and 10 private) institutions from country break into top 500 global rankings in 10 years, and then eventually break into top 100 over time.

Facilities provided to these institutes:

- These selected institutions are proposed to have greater autonomy compared to other higher education institutions.
- They will be free to decide their fee for domestic and foreign students and have flexible course duration and structure.
- They will be exempted from approvals of government or UGC for academic collaborations with foreign institutions, except institutions in MEA and MHA’s list of negative countries.

Procedure of selection:

- Once identified, the target for Institutions of Eminence will be to break into top 100 bracket in one internationally reputed ranking framework in 10 years.
- The 10 government institutions selected will also get Rs 1,000 crore each from HRD Ministry to achieve world-class status. There will be no financial assistance to the private institutions.

Who can apply?

- Only higher education institutions, currently placed in the top 500 of global rankings or top 50 of National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), are eligible to apply for eminence tag.
- The private Institutions of Eminence can also come up as greenfield ventures provided sponsoring organisation submits convincing perspective plan for 15 years.

[Ref: The Hindu]
In order to address rising incidence of Vitamin ‘D’ Deficiencies (VDD), particularly amongst the young people, FSSAI has launched a unique initiative, ‘Project Dhoop’ in association with NCERT, NDMC and North MCD Schools.

**About Project Dhoop:**

- Project Dhoop urges schools to shift their morning assembly to noon time, mainly between 11am and 1pm to ensure maximum absorption of Vitamin D in students through natural sunlight.

- It has been launched by FSSAI along with National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) as well as North MCD Schools.

- The concept of noon school assembly under it is an innovative and effective concept to ensure that school students get adequate Vitamin D through sunlight, while also opting to choose food products like milk and edible oils that are fortified with Vitamins A and D.

**What are the concerns?**

- Most parts of India receive abundant sunshine all the year through. Yet shockingly, studies have found that more than 90% of boys and girls across various Indian cities are deficient in Vitamin D.

- In Delhi alone, 90-97% of school children (aged 6-17 years) have Vitamin ‘D’ Deficiencies (VDD) and around 10-11% of these children exhibit signs of VDD.

**How does Vitamin D deficiency occur?**

- Vitamin D deficiency occurs due to overuse of sunscreen, wearing clothes that cover most of the skin, working all day in an air-conditioned atmosphere, and other factors.

**How to prevent Vitamin D deficiency in school children?**

- The school uniforms needs to be designed in a way that at least face and arms are exposed to sunlight, which would be equivalent to 18 per cent of body surface, and the exposure has to be at least for 30-40 minutes.

- Additionally, opting for fortified foods (with +F symbol) is a simple and inexpensive way to address micronutrient deficiencies without any radical change in behaviour or eating patterns.

**Significance of micronutrients:**

- Micronutrients including vitamins are needed by people in only very small amounts, but these are the “magic wands” that enable the body to produce enzymes, hormones and other substances essential for proper growth and development.

- As tiny as the amounts are, the consequences of their absence are severe. Vitamin A, D, B12, Iron, Folic Acid and Iodine, are the most important; their lack represents a major threat to the health and development of populations the world over, particularly children and pregnant women in countries like India.

**About Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI):**

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is an agency of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India.

- The FSSAI has been established under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which is a consolidating statute related to food safety and regulation in India.

- The FSSAI is led by a non-executive Chairperson, appointed by the Central Government.

- The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.

- The agency also has 8 regional offices, 4 referral laboratories and 72 local laboratories located throughout India.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**INDIAN MOSQUITOES SUSCEPTIBLE TO ZIKA VIRUS, FINDS NEW NIV STUDY**
Recent National Institute of Virology (NIV) study has found that Indian Aedes aegypti mosquito that transmits dengue and chikungunya viruses is easily susceptible to zika virus.

- During the study it was found that Indian Aedes aegypti mosquito infected with African strain MR-766 of zika virus (ZIKV) can easily transmit infection.

Significance of this study:

- Zika virus is emerging threat unless contained especially in areas where vector Aedes aegypti mosquito is in large numbers, including India. So, there is need to explore possibilities for containing virus.
- This study will help to explore suitable model for understanding Zika virus’s natural transmission and disease progression.

About Zika virus:

- Zika virus had erupted on a large scale in mid-2015 in which more than 1.5 million people were infected, mostly in Brazil and other countries in South America.
- The virus is transmitted mainly by mosquitoes. It causes mild, flu-like symptoms in most people, pregnant women run the risk of giving birth to babies with severe brain damage.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) had declared a global health emergency in February 2016, and declared it over in November 2016.

Indian Absent from Malaria Summit in London

The Malaria Summit was held in London, United Kingdom organisations to make game-changing commitments towards beating malaria.

- It was organized by non-profit organisation Malaria No More in conjunction with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and supported by British Prime Minister Theresa May.
- Despite having the third largest malaria cases in the world after Congo and Nigeria, India is absent from Malaria Summit.

All about Malaria:

- Malaria is life-threatening mosquito-borne blood disease caused by Plasmodium parasite.
- It is transmitted to humans through bite of Anopheles mosquito.
- Once infected mosquito bites human, the parasites multiply in host’s liver before infecting and destroying red blood cells.
- Symptoms of mosquito resemble those of flu, but, without treatment, the effects can sometimes be long-term and fatal.
- It can be treated and controlled with early diagnosis.
- Currently, no vaccine is licensed for use in the United States or globally, although one is available in Europe.

[Read IASToppers’ Mains Article on Zika Virus
http://www.iastoppers.com/zika-virus/]

[Ref: Indian Express]
With viral hepatitis becoming as serious health problem as the “big three” communicable diseases — HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis — in the country, the Union Health Ministry is ready to roll out a Rs 500 crore-three-year comprehensive integrated national action plan to check morbidity and mortality due to the disease that inflicts the liver.

• The action plan has been developed with the key objective to provide an actionable framework of evidence based, priority interventions to support the national response for prevention, control and management of viral hepatitis in the country.

What is viral hepatitis?

• Inflammation of liver is usually referred as hepatitis.

• Viral hepatitis is a widespread infectious disease normally caused by the hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D and E.

• The condition can progress to liver fibrosis (scarring), cirrhosis or liver cancer.

• It can be caused by any of the known five hepatotropic viruses, namely — hepatitis A, B, C, D and E which are highly divergent in their structure, epidemiology, mode of transmission, incubation period, signs/symptoms, diagnosis, prevention and treatment options.

Viral hepatitis cases in India:

• The World Health Organisation (WHO) has already recognised viral hepatitis as a serious public health problem in India which is home to over 52 million people infected with chronic hepatitis. This is placing a huge disease, social and economic burden on the affected families as well as the health system.

• Latest assessment by WHO shows that in 2016, of the 400 million people infected by viral hepatitis globally, about 13% were Indians.

• A bigger concern is that most people infected with the virus are unaware and experts points out that with challenges such as awareness, accessibility, compliance and affordability, India can only eradicate hepatitis by 2080 (as against global goal of 2030) if they start acting now.

[Ref: Economic Times]

IIT ROORKEE DEVELOPS A POTENT MOLECULE TO TREAT CHIKUNGUNYA

Researchers from Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Roorkee have identified two small potent molecules Pep-I and Pep-II, for their inhibitory activity to treat Chikungunya disease.

• The antiviral activity of these molecules was so high that their small amount was able to achieve almost 99% reduction in virus.

• Currently, there are no drugs to treat chikungunya or any vaccine to prevent it.

About Chikungunya:

Chikungunya is transmitted through the bite of the Aedes Aegypti and the Aedes Albopictus Mosquito. The second is only found in Israel.

Symptoms

- Joint pain: Body aches, but more intense in joints and tendons; can become chronic and cause blindness
- Nausea

Aedes Aegypti

Aedes Albopictus

Prevention

- Do not store water in open containers so that they do not become breeding sites for mosquitoes
- Cover tanks or containers for water for domestic use; do not accumulate trash
- Dispose of trash in your yard
- Cut your grass regularly to destroy potential breeding or resting sites
- Use mesh or screens on your windows and doors
- Use mosquito repellent or long sleeves to avoid getting bitten
• Chikungunya is a **mosquito-born virus** that causes a disease characterised by fever and severe joint pain, often in hands and feet.

• Symptoms may include headache, muscle pain, joint swelling or rash.

• Some patients will feel better within a week but many develop longer-term joint pain that can last up to years. Death is rare but can occur.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**ECONOMY**

**SIDBI LAUNCHES SAMRIDHI - THE VIRTUAL ASSISTANT**

The Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) celebrated its Foundation day on April 2nd with launch of ‘Samridhi’ – the virtual assistant’.

• It will answer standard queries of aspirants 24*7.

**About SIDBI:**

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), is an independent financial institution aimed to aid the growth and development of micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSME) in India.

• Set up on April 2, 1990 through an act of parliament, it was incorporated initially as a wholly owned subsidiary of Industrial Development Bank of India (IDBI).

• Currently the ownership is held by 34 Government of India owned / controlled institutions.

• It is the Principal Financial Institution for the Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector and for Co-ordination of the functions of the institutions engaged in similar activities.

**MSME Sector in India:**

• MSME is second largest employment generating sector after agriculture sector.

• It provides 80% of jobs in industry with just 20% of investment.

• It contributes around 31% to nation’s GDP and 45% and 34% share of the overall exports and manufacturing output (2017 report).

[Ref: PIB]

**GOVT LEVIES 10% IMPORT DUTY ON KEY SMARTPHONE COMPONENTS**

The Central Bureau of Excise and Customs (CBEC) under Finance Ministry has imposed a 10% duty on imports of key smartphone components such as populated printed circuit boards (PCBs), camera modules and connectors.

• At present there is zero import duty imposed on the three components.

**Implications of the move:**

• This move will make imports of components expensive while giving stimulus to local manufacturing under Make in India program.

• Such input parts for making these components locally, will not attract any import duties. But it will lead to increase in prices of mobile phones for those companies that do not make or source these components locally.

**Background:**

• This decision follows the government’s announcement to impose 20% basic customs duty (BCD) on fully built mobile phones, which came into effect from February 1, 2018 as part of its phased manufacturing program (PMP).

**About Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP):**
• Government had PMP in May 2017 for promoting the growth of domestic manufacturing of Cellular mobile handsets.

• It is called phased manufacturing programme because it will give fiscal benefits to domestic manufacturing of various components of cellular handsets in different fiscals.

• Its overall aim is to impose duties (differential duty regime) and give tax reliefs and incentives on select products involved in domestic manufacturing of cellular handsets.

• This programme is under Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MieTY).

[Ref: Times of India, Live Mint]

SEBI EASES ALGO TRADE RULES IN COMMODITY EXCHANGES

The Securities Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has relaxed algorithm trading norms at commodity derivatives exchanges.

• The market regulator has raised limit of trading using algorithm trading process up to 100 orders per second by user from the existing limit of 20 orders per second.

What is Algorithmic trading?

• Algorithmic trading in financial markets refers to transaction orders generated by using advanced mathematical models that involves automated execution of trade.

• It uses mathematical models and software codes to make transaction decisions on exchanges and execute them at high speed.

• This technology-driven trading enables traders to take advantage of any profit making opportunities arising in the market much before a human trader can even spot them.

• At present, on the National Stock Exchange (NSE), algorithm trades accounts close to 16% of all trades. On the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), it was 8.56% in January 2017.

What is the difference between Algorithmic trading and High Frequency Trading (HFT)?

• Both are often used inter-changeably, but they are not really same. HFT refers to high-volume orders executed within split-seconds to make immediate gains from market opportunities.

• HFT trading are often backed by algo trading, which spot trading opportunity.

[Ref: Economic Times]

TRANSPORT MINISTRY, PETITIONERS ARGUE ON REQUIREMENT OF ENVIRONMENT CLEARANCE FOR CHAR DHAM PROJECT

Ministry of road, transport and highway (MORTH) has recently submitted an affidavit before the National Green Tribunal(NGT) in matter of Char Dham widening road in Uttarakhand.

• In their affidavit, MORTH has stated that in all the total 53 projects/stretches of Char Dham, none is above 100 km which is why no environmental clearance was obtained.

• Stretches upto 100 km are exempted from environmental clearance under Environmental Clearance Notification.

Background:

• A petition was filed which said that the entire project of 900 km was misleadingly fragmented into segments which are actually continuous stretches of five national highway to avoid environmental clearance.

• It stated that the criteria of Cumulative Impact Assessment and carrying capacity study must be followed for Himalayan terrain while considering any infrastructural projects.

About the Chardham Mahamarg Vikas Pariyojna:

In December 2016, PM Narendra Modi has laid the foundation stone for the Chardham highway development project in Uttarakhand’s Dehradun.
The project is an ambitious initiative to improve connectivity to the four main Himalayan pilgrimage centres in Uttarakhand, called Char Dham.

The project’s main objective is to develop around 900 km of national highways.

These highways will be built in Uttarakhand at an approximate cost of Rs 12,000 crore.

The roads will be widened from 12m to 24m and the project will involve construction of tunnels, bypasses, bridges, subways and viaducts.

The project will make travel to the Char Dham (Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath) safer and more convenient.

The project involves widening the existing, geometrically deficient highway that connects the four abodes.

Apart from widening, the road transport and highways ministry plans to improve the stretches to two-lane carriageway with paved shoulders, protect landslide hazard zones, construct bypasses, long bridges, tunnels and elevated corridors to ensure safety for the users.

It will have proper slope stabilisation to ensure protection against landslides.

The project is expected to be completed by 2018.

Significance of the project:

- The project will benefit people visiting holy shrines in Uttarakhand.
- It will generate additional employment for the local population and will change the economy of the State as it will give strong boost to connectivity and tourism.
- The roads leading to Gangotri and Badrinath are also equally important from a strategic point of view as these roads are used for supply and deployment to the defence establishments along the Indo-China border areas in Uttarakhand.

[Ref: Economic Times]

DIGITAL INITIATIVE FOR EASE OF EXPORT

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry have launched digital initiatives of Export Inspection Council (EIC) for ease of export to boost India’s potential for agricultural and food export.

- These initiatives were launched under flagship Digital India Initiative to keep pace with changing dynamics of the world.

About Export Inspection Council (EIC):

EIC is the official export certification body of Central Government.

- ECI was established by Central Government under Section 3 of Export (Quality Control and Inspection) Act, 1963.
- It was established to ensure sound development of export trade of India through Quality Control and Inspection and for matters connected thereof.
- EIC is advisory body to Central Government. It is empowered to notify commodities which will be subject to quality control and inspection prior to export.
- It establishes standards of quality for such notified commodities.
- It also specifies type of quality control and inspection to be applied to such commodities.
- EIC also exercises technical and administrative control over the five Export Inspection Agencies (EIAs), one each at Chennai, Delhi, Kochi, Kolkata and Mumbai established by Ministry of Commerce for purpose of implementing various measures and policies by it.
NIIF, EVERSTONE GROUP IN TALKS TO TIE UP FOR $500 MILLION FUND

The government’s National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) is in talks with private equity firm Everstone Group for a tie-up to manage its Green Growth Equity Fund (GGEF).

About GGEF:

- The Green Growth Equity Fund will be the second investment platform to be set up by NIIF.
- GGEF, which will invest in renewable energy assets, is a joint venture between NIIF and the UK government.
- GGEF would be managed by a third-party investment manager, selected by NIIF Limited and the UK government through an efficient and robust screening and selection process.

About National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF):

Proposed in Union Budget 2015, National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) has been set up in last month of 2015.

- The objective of NIIF is to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects, both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects, NIIF would solicit equity participation from strategic anchor partners.
- The Fund aims to attract investment from both domestic and international sources.
- The objective of NIIF is to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects, both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects, NIIF would solicit equity participation from strategic anchor partners.
- NIIF has been structured as a fund of funds and set up as Category II Alternate Investment Fund (AIF) under the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) Regulations.
- It is a Rs. 40000 crore fund to provide long term capital for infrastructure projects.
- The government’s contribution would be limited to 49% of the subscribed capital.
- The government will seek participation from strategic investors such as sovereign fund, quasi sovereign funds and multilateral or bilateral investors, which can help leverage this fund to many times.
- Cash-rich PSUs, pension funds, provident funds, National Small Saving Fund will be able to pick up stake in the fund.

[Ref: The Hindu, Live Mint]
The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has constituted an inter-departmental group to study and provide guidance on feasibility to introduce fiat digital currency backed by it. It will be submitted by end-June 2018.

What is Fiat currency?

- Fiat currency is currency that a government has declared to be legal tender. It is different from cryptocurrency or virtual currency like Bitcoin which is not legal tender and not backed by government.

What is Fiat Digital Currency?

- Fiat Digital Currency (or Central bank digital currency) is the digital form of fiat money which is currency established as money by government regulation or law. As opposed to private digital tokens, fiat digital currency will be issued by central bank.
- Fiat Digital Currency will constitute liability of central bank, and will be in circulation in addition to widely used paper and metallic currency. They will be based on blockchain technology which is backbone of unregulated virtual currencies like bitcoin.
- They will be legal tender as compared to virtual currencies that raise concerns of consumer protection, market integrity and money laundering, among others. Blockchain technology behind it has potential benefit for financial inclusion and enhancing efficiency of financial system.

RBI GIVES BANKS ONE MORE YEAR TO ADOPT IND AS

The Reserve Bank has deferred the implementation of the Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) by one year as many banks are not prepared to migrate to the new accounting system. The earlier deadline for banks to switch to the Ind AS was from April 1 2018.

What is it?

Ind AS or Indian Accounting Standards govern the accounting and recording of financial transactions as well as the presentation of statements such as profit and loss account and balance sheet of a company.

- Ind AS is global accounting practice that lender is mandated to adopt.
- Ind AS has been evolved as a compromise formula that tries to harmonise Indian accounting rules with the IFRS.
- The practice is on par with International Financial Reporting Standard (IFRS) 9.

Key facts:

- The implementation of IndAS for public sector banks requires an amendment to the Banking Regulation Act. The schedule in BR Act relating to financial statement disclosures needs to be changed to the IndAS format.
- Section 29 of the BR Act deals with the accounts and balance sheets of public sector banks. Private sector banks are covered by the Companies Act, which is based on the new accounting standards.

CHECKING NPAS: 11 PUBLIC SECTOR BANKS NOW ON RBI WATCHLIST

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has placed 11 public sector banks (PSBs) out of 21 State-owned banks under its Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework because of deteriorating performance.
This comes months after the central government had allocated capital of Rs 52,311 crore to 11 “weak banks” to maintain their minimum capital requirement.

Three-four more PSBs are expected to be brought under PCA framework.

**What is Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)?**

- PCA norms allow the regulator to place certain restrictions such as halting branch expansion and stopping dividend payment.
- It can even cap a bank’s lending limit to one entity or sector.
- Other corrective action that can be imposed on banks include special audit, restructuring operations and activation of recovery plan.
- Banks’ promoters can be asked to bring in new management, too.
- Under PCA, the RBI can also supersede the bank’s board.

**What are the types of sanctions?**

- There are two types of restrictions, mandatory and discretionary.
- Restrictions on dividend, branch expansion, directors compensation, are mandatory while discretionary restrictions could include curbs on lending and deposit.
- In the cases of two banks where PCA was invoked after the revised guidelines were issued — IDBI Bank and UCO Bank — only mandatory restrictions were imposed. Both the banks breached risk threshold 2.

**What will a bank do if PCA is triggered?**

- Banks are not allowed to renew or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their fee-based income.
- Banks will also have to launch a special drive to reduce the stock of NPAs and contain generation of fresh NPAs.
- They will also not be allowed to enter into new lines of business.
- RBI will also impose restrictions on the bank on borrowings from interbank market.

[Ref: The Hindu, Indian Express]

**SEBI AMENDS NORMS FOR REITS**
SEBI has amended REITs and InvITs regulations to facilitate the growth of such trusts.

- As per the amendments, REITs and InvITs will now have to provide a mechanism for resolution of disputes with their shareholders and partners in the holding firm.

What are REITs?

- REITs are similar to mutual funds. While mutual funds provide an opportunity to invest in equity stocks, REITs allow one to invest in income-generating real estate assets.

How does an REIT work?

- REITs raise funds from a large number of investors and directly invest that sum in income-generating real estate properties (which could be offices, residential apartments, shopping centres, hotels and warehouses).

- The trusts are listed in stock exchanges so that investors can buy units in the trust. REITs are structured as trusts. Thus, the assets of an REIT are held by an independent trustee on behalf of unit holders.

An REIT’s investment objective:

- The investment objective of REITs is to provide unit holders with dividends, usually generated from rental income and capital gains from the profitable sale of real estate assets.

- Typically, the trust distributes 90 per cent of its income among its investors by issuing dividends.

REITs in India?

REITs, as a concept, have been on the horizon for a while now.

- India’s regulations in 2014 for the sector have not been able to attract investor interest.

- REITs obtained exemption from dividend distribution tax in the Budget, a step towards making them attractive for the investors.

The current SEBI guidelines for REITs permit investments only in rent-yielding assets.

Why invest in REITs?

- For investors who are averse to investing in physical purchase of property due to the risks involved, REIT is an alternative.

- Investors purchase units of REITs which are traded on the stock exchange, as against physical purchase of property. Therefore, investors can buy and sell units of REIT on the stock exchange as and when required, making investment easier to liquidate compared to physical property transaction.

Potential investment risks:

- REITs units are listed on, and are subject to the vagaries of the stock exchanges, resulting in negative or lower returns than expected.

- As in mutual funds, retail investors in REITs have no control over investments and exits being made by the trust.

What is InvITs?

An Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvITs) is like a mutual fund, which enables direct investment of small amounts of money from possible individual/institutional investors in infrastructure to earn a small portion of the income as return.

- SEBI notified the SEBI (Infrastructure Investment Trusts) Regulations, 2014 on September 26, 2014, providing for registration and regulation of InvITs in India.

- The objective of InvITs is to facilitate investment in the infrastructure sector.

- InvITs are like mutual funds in structure. InvITs can be established as a trust and registered with SEBI. An InvIT consists of four elements:

  1. Trustee,
  2. Sponsor(s),
  3. Investment Manager and
  4. Project Manager.

- InvITs work like mutual funds or real estate investment trusts (REITs) in features.

- InvITs can be treated as the modified version of REITs designed to suit the specific circumstances of the infrastructure sector.
CABINET SIMPLIFIES CBM EXPLORATION FROM CIL BLOCKS

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has relaxed rules for state-owned Coal India Ltd (CIL) for extraction of Coal Bed Methane (CBM) lying below coal seams in its blocks in bid to quickly boost production.

- Till now, CIL had to apply to oil ministry for a licence to extract coal-bed methane (CBM) from its coal blocks.

Significance of the move:

- It will expedite the exploration and exploitation of CBM, enhance availability of natural gas and reduce gap in demand and supply of natural gas.
- The increased development activities for exploration and exploitation of CBM gas reserves will generate economic activities, thus create employment opportunities.

What is Coal Bed Methane?

- Coal Bed Methane is a form of natural gas extracted from coal beds.
- The term CBD refers to methane adsorbed into the solid matrix of the coal.
- It is an important source of energy in United States, Canada, Australia, and other countries.
- CBD is distinct from typical sandstone or other conventional gas reservoir, as the methane is stored within the coal by a process called adsorption.
- It contains very little heavier hydrocarbons such as propane or butane, and no natural-gas condensate.
- During the initial years of mining, CBM was vented out and wasted into the atmosphere as it was considered as serious safety hazard while conducting coal mining operations. However, later with advancement of technology it was possible to extract CBM, a precious energy resource and an unconventional form of natural gas.

Advantages of CBM as a fuel:

- It is environmentally safe and clean fuel which on combustion emits only carbon dioxide and water.
- It is not only considered as an efficient fuel but also reduces emission of greenhouse gas from coal mining.
- Its extraction prior to coal mining activities makes mining activities safer by degassing the coal seams.

INDIA RANKS 130 IN INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM; UP BY 13 SPOTS

India ranked 130th out of 186 economies in recently released Index of Economic Freedom 2018 that measures the degree of economic freedom in the countries of the world.

About the index:

- Index of Economic Freedom report is released by the Heritage Foundation. The Heritage Foundation is an American conservative public policy think-tank based in Washington.

Criterion:

Economic freedom is measured based on 12 quantitative and qualitative factors, grouped into four broad categories, or pillars, of economic freedom:

1. Rule of Law (property rights, government integrity, judicial effectiveness).
2. Government Size (government spending, tax burden, fiscal health).

3. Regulatory Efficiency (business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom).

4. Open Markets (trade freedom, investment freedom, financial freedom).

Each of the ten economic freedoms within these categories is graded on a scale of 0 to 100. A country’s overall score is derived by averaging these ten economic freedoms, with equal weight being given to each.

What is economic freedom?

- Economic freedom is the fundamental right of every human to control his or her own labor and property.

- In an economically free society, individuals are free to work, produce, consume, and invest in any way they please.

- In economically free societies, governments allow labor, capital, and goods to move freely, and refrain from coercion or constraint of liberty beyond the extent necessary to protect and maintain liberty itself.

Benefits of economic freedom:

- Economic freedom brings greater prosperity. The Index of Economic Freedom documents the positive relationship between economic freedom and a variety of positive social and economic goals.

- The ideals of economic freedom are strongly associated with healthier societies, cleaner environments, greater per capita wealth, human development, democracy, and poverty elimination.

Highlights of the report:

- Top 10 countries are Hong Kong, Singapore, New Zealand, Switzerland, Australia, Ireland, Estonia, United Kingdom, Canada and UAE.

- China is ranked 111 and Pakistan is now at 131 position.

India’s performance:

- India’s economic freedom score is 54.5, making its economy the 130th freest in the 2018 Index. In 2017, India with a score of 52.6 points was ranked at 143 among 180 countries.

  - India is ranked 30th among 43 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, and its overall score is below the regional and world averages.

  - India is developing into an open-market economy. However, traces of its past autocratic policies still remain.

  - Economic liberalisation measures, including industrial deregulation, privatisation of state-owned enterprises and reduced controls on foreign trade and investment, that began in the early 1990s, accelerated growth.

More recently, the government reformed one of its more opaque operational practices to make the auctioning of rights to exploit state-owned resources more transparent.

Challenges:

- Corruption, underdeveloped infrastructure, a restrictive and burdensome regulatory environment, and poor financial and budget management continue to undermine overall development.

- The judiciary is independent, but the Indian courts are understaffed and lack the technology necessary to clear an enormous backlog. Although officials are often caught accepting bribes, a great deal of corruption goes unnoticed and unpunished.

- Non-tariff barriers significantly impede trade. The government’s openness to foreign investment is below average. State-owned institutions dominate the financial sector, and foreign participation is limited. In public-sector banks, troubled assets account for about 10% of total assets.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INFLATION TARGETING HAS ZERO IMPACT ON PRICE SITUATION: BHALLA

What is inflation targeting?

- Inflation targeting is a monetary policy in which a central bank has an explicit target inflation rate for the medium term and announces this inflation
target to the public. It will have price stability as the main goal of monetary policy.

- Many central banks adopted inflation targeting as a pragmatic response to the failure of other monetary policy regimes, such as those that targeted the money supply or the value of the currency in relation to another, presumably stable, currency.

**Points in favour of inflation targeting:**

- It will lead to increased transparency and accountability.
- Policy will be linked to medium/long term goals, but with some short term flexibility.
- With inflation targeting in place, people will tend to have low inflation expectations. If there was no inflation target, people could have higher inflation expectations, encouraging workers to demand higher wages and firms to put up prices.
- It also helps in avoiding boom and bust cycles.
- If inflation creeps up, then it can cause various economic costs such as uncertainty leading to lower investment, loss of international competitiveness and reduced value of savings. This can also be avoided with targeting.

**Points against inflation targeting:**

- Inflation targeting puts too much weight on inflation relative to other goals. Central Banks Start to Ignore More Pressing Problems. Inflation target reduces “flexibility”.
- It has the potential to constrain policy in some circumstances in which it would not be desirable to do so.

Average inflation in 2017-18 was 3.5%. India’s real interest rate is higher by 2.5%, which is 3rd highest in the world.

**Way ahead:**

- Inflation targeting has been successfully practiced in a growing number of countries over the past 20 years, and many more countries are moving toward this framework.
- Over time, inflation targeting has proven to be a flexible framework that has been resilient in changing circumstances, including during the recent global financial crisis.
- Individual countries, however, must assess their economies to determine whether inflation targeting is appropriate for them or if it can be tailored to suit their needs. For example, in many open economies, the exchange rate plays a pivotal role in stabilizing output and inflation.
- In such countries, policymakers must debate the appropriate role of the exchange rate and whether it should be subordinated to the inflation objective.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

**WORLD BANK TO FUND COMMUNITY-LED LANDSCAPES MANAGEMENT IN MEGHALAYA**

The Union Government (Finance Ministry) has signed Loan Agreement with World Bank for IBRD loan of US $48 million for Meghalaya Community – Led Landscapes Management Project (MCLLMP)

- The project aims to strengthen community-led landscapes management in selected landscapes in Meghalaya by 2023.

**The project consists of three components:**

- Strengthening knowledge and capacity for natural resource management.
- Community-led landscape planning and implementation.
- Project management and governance.

**Significance of the Project:**

- The project will help manage these depleting resources, by strengthening communities and traditional institutions.
• The Restoration of degraded and highly degraded landscapes under the project will increase water for local communities and improve soil productivity which will in turn increase incomes and reduce poverty.

[Ref: Business Standard]

GOM ON TRANSPORT DELIBERATES UPON ONE NATION- ONE TAX AND ONE NATION

A group of ministers (GoM) on transport constituted by the roads ministry has recommended a uniform road tax structure for vehicles across states.

Background:

• The group was constituted to find a solution to the various problems plaguing the road sector in the country. It was also asked to suggest ways to improve road safety and facilitate ease of transport.

Recommendations of GoM

Uniform road tax for vehicles across states:

• It will allow transfer of vehicles from one state to another without levying road tax.

• It will put check on people registering their vehicles in low tax states and running them in other states.

• It will also bring necessary relief to genuine cases requiring transfer of vehicles.

Tax Structure:

• Centre has the powers to decide principles on which motor vehicles tax can be levied.

• The uniform tax should be based on invoice price of vehicles in three slabs.

• 8% tax on vehicles below 10 lakhs, 10% for vehicles costing between 10 - 20 lakh, and 12% for vehicles above 20 lakh. Diesel vehicles may have to pay 2% extra taxes, while electric vehicles will be given 2% discount.

National passenger vehicles permit for passenger cars:

• There should be national bus and taxi permit on lines of such permit for goods transport. It will give the much needed fillip to public transport and help reduce road congestion and its attendant problems.

Benefits of uniform road tax:

• It will end the practice of people registering their vehicles in low-tax states and using them in other states. The move will also bring relief to consumers moving across states.

• If the states agree to One Nation, One Permit, One Tax then the revenues of the states will increase. This will also reduce the chances of one operator taking a few permits and running a large number of buses.

• It will also go a long way in improving the interstate transfer of used cars making the lengthy and rather cumbersome process that exists today into a much more streamlined and less complicated one.

[Ref: PIB]

NOKIA TAX DISPUTE SETTLED UNDER INDIA-FINLAND MUTUAL AGREEMENT

Finland-headquartered Nokia has invoked the mutual agreement procedure (MAP) under the India-Finland Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement, to resolve the Rs 2,000-crore tax dispute with the Indian tax department.

• Now, the competent authorities of the two countries — India and Finland — will sit at the negotiating table and decide how the dispute should be resolved.

What's the issue?

• Indian income tax department had slapped a Rs 2,000-crore tax demand on Nokia India over alleged default on tax deduction at source (TDS) on software-related payments made to Nokia Finland for six years.

• The IT department had concluded that payments made by Nokia India to Nokia Finland for software downloads — which got embedded in the Nokia handsets manufactured in India — were taxable in India as royalty.

What is Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) system?
MAP is an alternative dispute settlement mechanism that allows multinational companies (MNCs) to settle transfer pricing disputes with tax authorities and eliminate double taxation.

- The need for such arrangements was surfaced after many MNCs with operations in India had transfer pricing disputes with local tax authorities.
- An agreement for avoidance of double taxation between countries would give authorisation for assistance of Competent Authorities (CAs) in the respective jurisdiction under MAP.
- The main benefit of pursuing MAP is the elimination of double taxation (either juridical or economic). The MAP resolution, once accepted, eliminates protracted litigation.
- MAP helps to increase comfort level of foreign investors over India’s tax laws.
- Moreover, speedy resolution of tax cases help in providing conducive atmosphere for investments and business to foreign companies in India.
- Under MAP, settling case with other government means closing all pending proceedings related to tax matter. It is increasingly seen as preferred mode for settling cross-border tax disputes.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**GOVERNMENT SIGNS LOAN AGREEMENT WITH WORLD BANK FOR INNOVATE IN INDIA FOR INCLUSIVENESS PROJECT**

The Union Government (Ministry of Finance) has signed a Loan Agreement with the World Bank for IBRD credit of US$ 125 (equivalent) for Innovate in India for Inclusiveness Project.

**Objective of project:**

- The objective of project is to nurture indigenous innovation, foster local product development and accelerate commercialization process in biopharmaceutical and medical devices industry in India.
- The projects seeks to achieve its objective by bridging critical skill and infrastructure gaps to promote affordable and innovative healthcare products generation for inclusive development and increasing competitiveness in India.
- The project will support consortia of public, private, and academic institutions to overcome key market failures currently holding back development of innovative biopharmaceutical and medical devices industry in India.
- The closing date of project is June 2023.

*The project consists of the following parts:*

- Strengthening of pilot-to-market innovation ecosystem.
- Acceleration of the pilot –to-market process for specific products.
- Project Management and monitoring & Evaluation.

[Ref: PIB]

**REVIEW UNDERWRITING RULE: SAT TO SEBI**

The Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) has asked the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to review the regulations for underwriting of a public issue, the model agreement for which was framed back in 1993 and has since been in operation.

**What is underwriting?**

- Underwriting is the mechanism by which a merchant banker gives an undertaking that in the event of an initial public offer (IPO) remaining undersubscribed, the banker would subscribe to unsold shares.
- The underwriting clause, mandatory in all SME IPOs, ensures the issue does not fail due to low demand from investors.

[Ref: The Hindu]
New Delhi has become the first city in India to deploy Bharat Stage 6 Fuel (for both petrol and diesel) two years ahead of the rest of the county.

- The idea behind this implementation two years ahead of the previously scheduled date of April 1, 2020, is to help battle Delhi’s long-standing terminal pollution problem.

Benefits of this upgradation:

- Upgrading to stricter fuel standards helps tackle air pollution.

- Global automakers are betting big on India as vehicle penetration is still low here, when compared to developed countries. At the same time, cities such as Delhi are already being listed among those with the poorest air quality in the world.

- The national capital’s recent odd-even car experiment and judicial activism against the registration of big diesel cars shows that governments can no longer afford to relax on this front.

- With other developing countries such as China having already upgraded to the equivalent of Euro V emission norms a while ago, India has been lagging behind. The experience of countries such as China and Malaysia show that poor air quality can be bad for business. Therefore, these reforms can put India ahead in the race for investments too.

Challenges in implementation:

- First, there are questions about the ability of oil marketing companies to quickly upgrade fuel quality from BS-III and BS-IV standards to BS-VI, which is likely to cost upwards of Rs 40,000 crore.

- Second, and more challenging, is the task of getting auto firms to make the leap. Automakers have clearly said that going to BS-VI directly would leave them with not enough time to design changes in their vehicles, considering that two critical components — diesel particulate filter and selective catalytic reduction module — would have to be adapted to India’s peculiar conditions, where running speeds are much lower than in Europe or the US.

What are BS norms?

- The BS — or Bharat Stage — emission standards are norms instituted by the government to regulate the output of air pollutants from internal combustion engine equipment, including motor vehicles. India has been following the European (Euro) emission norms, though with a time-lag of five years.

Difference between BS-IV and the new BS-VI:

- The major difference in standards between the existing BS-IV and the new BS-VI auto fuel norms is the presence of sulphur. The newly introduced fuel is estimated to reduce the amount of sulphur released by 80 per cent, from 50 parts per million to 10 ppm.

- As per the analysts, the emission of NOx (nitrogen oxides) from diesel cars is also expected to reduce by nearly 70 per cent and 25 per cent from cars with petrol engines.

- It will also bring down cancer causing particulate matter emissions from diesel engine cars by phenomenal 80%.

[Ref: The Hindu]

NEW PLANT SPECIES FIMBRISTYLIS AGASTHYAMALAENSIS DISCOVERED IN WESTERN GHATS

Researchers have discovered new grass-like plant species named Fimbristylis agasthyamalaensis in Ponmudi hills within the Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve in the Western Ghats biodiversity hotspot.
It has been classified as sedge, the grass-like plant and has been named after the locality from which it was found.

**Key facts:**

- The new species belongs to the Cyperaceae family. In India, the genus is represented by 122 species, of which 87 are reported from the Western Ghats.
- Many of the known Cyperaceae species are medicinal plants or used as fodder.
- Researchers have recommended preliminary conservation assessment of plant as ‘critically endangered,’ according to IUCN criteria.
- The report says the species is highly prone to wild grazing.
- It is also subject to anthropogenic pressures as its habitat falls within tourism spot and perimeter of place of worship that could lead to its extinction in absence of scientific conservation.

**About Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve (ABR):**

- Agasthyamala Biosphere Reserve is situated at the southern-most end of the Western Ghats and spread over two southern states Kerala and Tamil Nadu.
- It was established in 2001.
- It is named after Agastya Mala peak that rises up to almost 1868 metres above sea level, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.
- In March 2016, it was included in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves of UNESCO.
- ABR covers Peppara and Shendurney wildlife sanctuaries and parts of the Neyyar sanctuary in Kerala and the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve of Tamil Nadu.

**Flora and fauna:**

- Its flora mostly consists of tropical forests and is home to 2,254 species of higher plants including about 400 that are endemic.
- About 400 Red Listed Plants, 125 species of orchids and rare, endemic and threatened plants have been recorded from the reserve.
- It is also home to rare endemic animals include tiger, Asian Elephant, and Nilgiri Tahr.
- It is home to Kanikaran tribe, one of the oldest surviving ancient tribes in the world.

[Ref: The Hindu]

**CHANGING CLIMATE PUTS, AMONG OTHERS, INDIA AT RISK: GLOBAL STUDY**

India is among the countries which are at the greatest risk of food insecurity due to weather extremes caused by climate change, a global study suggests.

**Highlights of the study:**

- Climate change caused by 2 degrees Celsius global warming is expected to lead to more extremes of both heavy rainfall and drought, with different effects in different parts of world. Such weather extremes will increase vulnerability to food insecurity.
- The countries at greatest vulnerability to food insecurity due to climate change are Oman, India, Bangladesh, Saudi Arabia and Brazil.
- Global warming is expected to lead to wetter conditions on average causing floods and putting food production at risk. But agriculture may also get harmed by more frequent and prolonged droughts in some areas caused by climate change.
- Wetter conditions are expected to have biggest impact in South and East Asia, with most extreme projections suggesting flow of River Ganges could more than double at 2 degrees Celsius global warming. Some areas are projected to see increase in flood event lengths of 4 days or more, particularly India and Bangladesh, for which such increases are projected in all ensemble members to some extent.
- The areas worst affected by droughts are expected to be southern Africa and South America – where flows in Amazon River are projected to decline by up to 25%.
- Some climatic change is already unavoidable, but if global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius, this vulnerability is projected to remain smaller.
approximately 76% of developing countries than at 2 degrees Celsius.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INDIA INKS $420 M FARMER PROJECT WITH WORLD BANK

Central Government, Maharashtra Government have signed US $420 million loan agreement with World Bank for Project for Climate Resilient Agriculture to help small and marginal farmers in Marathwada and Vidarbha regions of Maharashtra.

The loan will be provided from World Bank’s International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

About Maharashtra Project for Climate Resilient Agriculture:

The project aims to help in increasing climate resilient practices in agriculture and ensuring that farming continues to remain a financially viable activity for them.

- It will be implemented in rural areas largely dependent upon rain fed agriculture.
- It will take up series of activities at farm and watershed level.
- It will help to scale up climate-resilient technologies such as micro irrigation systems, expand surface water storage and facilitate aquifer recharge, directly contributing to more efficient use of scarce water resources.
- It will help reduce risks of climate-related crop failure and enhance farmer’s income by adopting climate-resilient seed varieties that are drought, salt tolerant and heat resistant.
- It will help to mainstream climate resilient agriculture agenda in various local institutions that deliver agricultural services to farming community. It will also help to improve capacity of farmer producers organizations to operate as sustainable, market-oriented enterprises.

[Ref: The Hindu, Business Standard]

FOUR KINGFISHER SPECIES SIGHTED IN KRISHNA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Four kingfisher bird species thriving in Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh were recently sighted.

Identified species:

The species have been identified are

1. Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*),
2. White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*),
3. Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileate*) and
4. Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*).

About Kingfisher:

- Kingfisher belongs to family of small to medium-sized, brightly colored birds in order Coraciiformes. The family contains 114 species and is divided into three subfamilies and 19 genera.
- All kingfishers species have large heads, long, sharp, pointed bills, short legs, and stubby tails.
- Most kingfishers species have bright plumage with only small differences between sexes.
- In India, 12 species of kingfisher bird can be sighted.

About Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary:

- Located in Andhra Pradesh, it is wildlife sanctuary and estuary.
- It is one of rarest eco-regions of world because it harbour’s vast tracts of pristine mangrove forests.
- It is believed to be one of last remaining tracts of thick primary mangrove forests of South India.
- The estuary of Krishna River passes through it. It is believed that this region potentially holds one most significant populations of fishing cats in the world.
- It is spread across Krishna and Guntur districts of Andhra Pradesh.

[Ref: The Hindu]
Central Water Commission (CWC) recently appreciated the Telangana government for the speedy execution of work on the Kaleshwaram irrigation project aimed at creation of over 18 lakh acres of new irrigation potential and stabilising another 18 lakh acres of the existing command area.

About Kaleshwaram irrigation project:

The Kaleshwaram project is an offshoot of the original Pranahitha-Chevella Lift Irrigation Scheme taken up by the Congress government in 2007 when Andhra Pradesh was not divided.

- After the formation of Telangana in 2014, the TRS government redesigned the project on the ground that the original plan had too many environmental obstacles and had very low water storage provision — only about 16.5 tmc ft.
- After conducting a highly advanced Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) survey for a couple of months, the government separated the original component serving the Adilabad area as the Pranahitha project and renamed the rest as Kaleshwaram by redesigning the head works, storage capacity and the canal system based on the data of availability of water at different locations along the course of the Godavari and its tributaries.
- The Kaleshwaram project has provision for the storage of about 148 tmc ft with plans of utilising 180 tmc ft by lifting at least 2 tmc ft water every day for 90 flood days.

The project is designed to irrigate 7,38,851 hectares (over 18.47 lakh acres) uplands in the erstwhile districts of Karimnagar, Nizamabad, Warangal, Medak, Nalgonda and Ranga Reddy.

What’s unique?

- According to engineers, KLIP has many unique features, including the longest tunnel to carry water in Asia, running up to 81 km, between the Yellampally barrage and the Mallannasagar reservoir.
- The project would also utilise the highest capacity pumps, up to 139 MW, in the country to lift water.

[Ref: The Hindu]

The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has released draft of National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) proposing multiple strategies to reduce air pollution.

Key facts:

- It aims to tackle increasing air pollution problem across country in comprehensive manner.
- The goal of NCAP is to meet prescribed annual average ambient air quality standards at all locations in country in a stipulated time frame.
- However, it does not mention of any specific target and time frame. Under NCAP, the MoEFCC plans to take host of measures to bring down air pollution.

Objectives of the NCAP:

- Augment and evolve effective and proficient ambient air quality monitoring network across
country to ensure comprehensive and reliable database.

- To have efficient data dissemination and public outreach mechanism for timely measures for prevention and mitigation of air pollution.
- To have feasible management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.

**Measures proposed:**

Under the NCAP, the ministry plans to take a host of measures to bring down air pollution.

- These include augmenting the air quality monitoring network, identification of alternative technology for real-time monitoring, setting up of 10 city super network, indoor air pollution monitoring and management and air pollution health impact studies.
- Other measures include air quality forecasting system, issuance of notification on dust management, a three-tier mechanism for review, assessment and inspection for implementation and a national emission inventory.

**Background:**

- Earlier Union Minister Harsh Vardhan had said that MoEFCC hopes to bring down air pollution in around 100 non-attainment cities by 35% in three years and 50% in five years.
- Non-attainment cities are those considered to have air quality worse than National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). However, NCAP released by MoECC has no reference to the target it internally conceived and publicly announced.

[Ref: PIB]

**ENVIRONMENT MINISTRY FRAMES NEW DRAFT COASTAL REGULATION ZONE NOTIFICATION**

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) has framed a new draft Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) Notification, 2018.

**Salient features of the draft CRZ Notification, 2018:**

- CRZ limits on land along the tidal influenced water bodies has been proposed to be reduced from 100 meters or the width of the creek, whichever is less, to 50 meters or the width of the creek, whichever is less.
- A No Development Zone (NDZ) of 20 meters has been proposed to be stipulated for all Islands close to the main land coast and for all Backwater Islands in the main land.
- For CRZ-III areas, two separate categories have been proposed viz.: CRZ-III A – Densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas shall have an NDZ of 50 meters from the HTL as against 200 meters from the HTL stipulated in the CRZ Notification, 2011. CRZ-III B – Rural areas with population density of below 2161 per square kilometre as per 2011 Census. Such areas shall continue to have an NDZ of 200 meters from the HTL.
- Ease of procedures: Only such projects/activities, which are located in the CRZ-I & IV areas, shall be dealt with for CRZ clearance by the MoEF&CC. For all other project activities located in CRZ-II/III areas, CRZ clearance shall be considered at the level of the CZMA.
- FSI: As per CRZ, 2011 Notification, for CRZ-II areas, Floor Space Index (FSI) or the Floor Area Ratio (FAR) had been frozen at 1991 Development Control Regulation (DCR) levels. In the Draft CRZ, 2018 Notification, it has been proposed to de-freeze the same and permit FSI for construction projects.
- Mining: Regulated limestone mining is proposed to be permitted, subject to strict Environmental safeguards, in areas adequately above the height of HTL, based on recommendations of reputed National Institutes in the Mining field.
- Disposal of plastics and mangroves: The norms also prevent the disposal of plastic into the coastal waters and mandate the compensatory plantation of three times the mangrove area destroyed for development works. Mangroves in private land will not require a buffer zone.
- Eco-tourism activities such as mangrove walks, tree huts, nature trails, and so on will be allowed in these areas through the development of coastal
zone management plans (CZMPs) and public consultation.

About Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ):

- CRZ is the zone along the coastal stretches of seas, bays, estuaries, creeks, rivers and backwaters along the coastline specially demarcated for regulated development activity.

- The demarcated zone consists of coastal stretches influenced by tidal action (in the landward side) upto 500 metres from the High Tide Line (HTL) and the land between the Low Tide Line (LTL) and the HTL.

- The regulations in this zone are governed by the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ), 2011 issued under the under Section 3 of the Environment Protection Act, 1986.

- In this zone, Government imposes restrictions on setting up and expansion of industries or other projects. It is mandatory for getting clearances from ministry and local authorities to start any development project in CRZ.

According to Coastal Regulation Zone notifications, it is divided into 4 zones:

1. CRZ I – It refers to the ecologically sensitive areas, essential in maintaining ecosystem of the coast. These lie between the HTL and LTL. Only exploration of natural gas and extraction of salt is permitted.

2. CRZ II – These areas form up to the shoreline of the coast. Authorized structures are not allowed to be constructed in this zone.

3. CRZ III – This includes rural and urban localities. Only certain activities relating to agriculture and public utilities allowed here.

4. CRZ IV – This includes the aquatic area up to the territorial limit (12 nautical miles). Fishing and allied activities permitted in this zone. Solid waste can be let off in this zone.

[Ref: PIB]

RAMSAR TAG LIKELY FOR SUNDERBANS

The West Bengal government has given its approval to the State Forest Department to apply for recognition of Sunderban Reserve Forest under the Ramsar Convention.

Implications:

- Being conferred the status of a wetland of international importance will not only be a matter of pride for the Sunderbans but also bring a lot of international scientific attention and intervention to the area.

- Once conferred a Ramsar site status, it will be the largest protected wetland in the country. It will also help promote the Sunderbans as an eco-tourism hotspot.

About Sundarbans:

Sundarbans is vast contiguous mangrove forest ecosystem in the coastal region of Bay of Bengal spread across India and Bangladesh.

- It covers approximately 10,000 square kilometres of area of which 60% is in Bangladesh and remaining in India.

- It is located in delta region of Padma, Meghna and Brahmaputra river basins.

- It is the largest tidal halophytic mangrove forest in the world.

- It was recognized as UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987.

Fauna:

- Sundarban forests are known for its self- Royal Bengal Tiger and other numerous species of
animals, including Chital Deer, Crocodile and Snakes.

Threats:

- It is facing threat from climate change and rise in sea level.
- It also faces threat from widespread construction and clearing of mangrove forests for fisheries.

Significance of Sunderbans:

- Apart from being the world’s largest tiger habitat, the mangrove forest in the Sunderbans is remarkable for the protection it provides to nearly 4.5 million people on the Indian side and another 3.5 million on the Bangladesh portion from tidal surge generated by cyclonic depression in the Bay of Bengal.
- About one-third of the total area is used as protected area for the conservation of biological diversity. In addition, the abundant fish and biomass resources – timber, fuelwood, pulpwod, leaves, shells, crabs, honey and fish – are harvested by local communities.
- The Sunderbans is also a major pathway for nutrient recycling and pollution abatement. The biodiversity of the Sunderbans is also diverse. The delta has the distinction of encompassing the world’s largest mangrove forest belt with 84 identified flora species, of which 34 are true mangroves.

What is Ramsar Convention?

The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, is the intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

- The Convention was adopted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971 and came into force in 1975.
- Since then, almost 90% of UN member states, from all the world’s geographic regions, have acceded to become “Contracting Parties”.
- Every three years, representatives of the Contracting Parties meet as the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP), the policy-making organ of the Convention.

[Ref: The Hindu]

NEW SYSTEM TO MEASURE AIR QUALITY

The Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is tying up with US and Finland to develop new pollution-forecast system that will help anticipate particulate matter (PM) levels at least two days in advance and at greater resolution.

- The new system will jointly developed with expertise from Finnish Meteorological Institute and US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

About the new pollution-forecast system

- The new system will use a different modelling approach as well as computational techniques from that employed in the SAFAR model.
- SAFAR will continue to be the backbone for pollution forecast but this new system will use different method of analysis for better resolution and more accurate forecasts.

What is SAFAR?
SAFAR was introduced by Union Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) for greater metropolitan cities of India to provide location specific information on air quality in near real time.

It was developed by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), Pune along with India Meteorological Department (IMD) and National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasting (NCMRWF).

The main objective of SAFAR project is to increase awareness among general public regarding the air quality.

The purpose awareness for general public is to take appropriate mitigation measures and systematic action for betterment of air quality and related health issues.

[Ref: The Hindu]

NEW FROG SPECIES TAKES HISTORICAL NAME OF GOA

Scientists have identified a new species of frog called Fejervarya goemchi in the highland plateaus of the Western Ghats parts of Goa.

- The new species is named after the historical name of the state of Goa.

About Fejervarya goemchi:

- Fejervarya goemchi are large-sized terrestrial frogs.
- They sit next to water bodies making calls to attract females for mating and breeding.
- Though most of these frogs are terrestrial, they need water bodies to survive.
- The new species was found in high elevation areas of laterite plateaus, temporary water bodies and paddy fields of Goa.

[Ref: The Hindu]

AUSTRALIA PLEDGES HALF A BILLION TO RESTORE GREAT BARRIER REEF

Australia has pledged Aus $500 million ($379 million) in new funding to restore and protect the Great Barrier Reef.

- The reef is a critical national asset, contributing Aus$6.4 billion a year to the Australian economy.

Threats:

- It is reeling from significant bouts of coral bleaching due to warming sea temperatures linked to climate change.
- It is also under threat from the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish, which has proliferated due to pollution and agricultural run-off. The predator starfish feeds on corals by spreading its stomach over them and using digestive enzymes to liquefy tissue.
- With its heavy use of coal-fired power and relatively small population, Australia is considered one of the world’s worst per-capita greenhouse gas polluters.

About Great Barrier Reef:

- The Great Barrier Reef is the world’s largest coral reef system.
- It is composed of over 2900 individual reefs and 900 islands.
- The reef is located in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland, Australia.
- The reef is so vast that it can be seen from outer space.
• It is also the world's biggest single structure made by living organisms. This reef structure is composed of and built by billions of tiny organisms, known as coral polyps.

• In 1981, it was selected as a World Heritage Site.

• A large part of the reef is protected by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, which helps to limit the impact of human use.

[Ref: The Hindu]

BILATERAL & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
SECOND LEAD-UP CONFERENCE TO 3RD ANNUAL MEETING OF AIIB

Second lead-up Conference to 3rd Annual Meeting of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) on ‘Enhancing Port and Coastal Infrastructure’ is being held Visakhapatnam.

• The Regional Conference is being organized by the Ministry of Finance, Government of India in collaboration with AIIB, CII and Research and Infrastructure System (RIS) for Developing Countries.

• The panel discusses various issues relating to trade promotion through sea route, building-up robust port & coastal infrastructure and revising & relaxing maritime regulatory issues to promote blue economy in India.

About AIIB:
The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is an international financial institution that aims to support the building of infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region.

• It has 57 member states.

• It was proposed as an initiative as well as hosted by the government of China.

• It was founded in October, 2014, and will have its headquarters in Beijing.

• Its goals are also to boost economic development in the region, create wealth, prove infrastructure, and promote regional cooperation and partnership.

• China is the largest shareholder with 26.06% voting shares. India is the second largest shareholder with 7.5% voting shares followed by Russia (5.93%) and Germany (4.5%).

Funding:

• The value of AIIB’s authorized capital amounts to $100 billion, with almost $30 billion invested by China.

• The bank expects to lend $10 billion to $15 billion a year for the first five years of its operations, beginning in the second quarter of 2016.

Composition of AIIB:

Board of Governors:

• The Board of Governors consists of one Governor and one Alternate Governor appointed by each member country.

• Governors and Alternate Governors serve at the pleasure of the appointing member.

Board of Directors:

• Non-resident Board of Directors is responsible for the direction of the Bank’s general operations, exercising all powers delegated to it by the Board of Governors.

• This includes approving the Bank’s strategy, annual plan and budget; establishing policies; taking decisions concerning Bank operations; and supervising management and operation of the Bank and establishing an oversight mechanism.

International Advisory Panel:

• The Bank has established an International Advisory Panel (IAP) to support the President and Senior Management on the Bank’s strategies and policies as well as on general operational issues.

• The Panel meets in tandem with the Bank’s Annual Meeting, or as requested by the President.

• The President selects and appoints members of the IAP to two-year terms. Panelists receive a small honorarium and do not receive a salary.

• The Bank pays the costs associated with Panel meetings.

www.iastoppers.com
Background:

- The United Nations has addressed the launch of AIIB as having potential for “scaling up financing for sustainable development” for the concern of global economic governance.
- The capital of the bank is $100 billion, equivalent to 2/3 of the capital of the Asian Development Bank and about half that of the World Bank.

[Ref: PIB]

WORLD CHEMICAL WATCHDOG TO MEET OVER SPY NERVE AGENT CLAIMS

The world’s chemical watchdog is meeting after a British laboratory said it had not proved that Russia manufactured a deadly nerve agent used to poison a former Russian spy.

- The talks at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) have been requested by Moscow which said it wanted to “address the situation around the allegations in regards to the incident in Salisbury.”

About Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW):

- The OPCW is an independent, autonomous international organisation with a working relationship with the United Nations.
- The Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons is the implementing body of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997.
- As of today OPCW has 192 Member States, who are working together to achieve a world free of chemical weapons.
- The organisation was awarded the 2013 Nobel Peace Prize “for its extensive efforts to eliminate chemical weapons”.

The OPCW Member States share the collective goal of preventing chemistry from ever again being used for warfare, thereby strengthening international security.

To this end, the Convention contains four key provisions:

- Destroying all existing chemical weapons under international verification by the OPCW.
- Monitoring chemical industry to prevent new weapons from re-emerging.
- Providing assistance and protection to States Parties against chemical threats.
- Fostering international cooperation to strengthen implementation of the Convention and promote the peaceful use of chemistry.

About the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC):

- The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) is a multilateral treaty that bans chemical weapons and requires their destruction within a specified period of time.
- The CWC is implemented by the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), which is headquartered in The Hague.
- The OPCW receives states-parties’ declarations detailing chemical weapons-related activities or materials and relevant industrial activities. After receiving declarations, the OPCW inspects and monitors states-parties’ facilities and activities that are relevant to the convention, to ensure compliance.
- The CWC is open to all nations and currently has 192 states-parties.
Israel has signed but not ratified the agreement, while three other UN member states (Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan) have neither signed nor acceded to the treaty.

The Chemical Weapons Convention prohibits:

- Developing, producing, acquiring, stockpiling, or retaining chemical weapons.
- The direct or indirect transfer of chemical weapons.
- Chemical weapons use or military preparation for use.
- Assisting, encouraging, or inducing other states to engage in CWC-prohibited activity.
- The use of riot control agents “as a method of warfare.”

[Ref: Economic Times]

INDIA OPPOSES ‘WEAPONISATION’ OF OUTER SPACE IN UNITED NATIONS

India voiced its concerns related to “weaponization” of outer space in the recently held UN Disarmament Commission (UNDC) session.

- India has voiced opposition to the “weaponization” of outer space, saying it should not become an area of conflict while calling for collective efforts to strengthen safety and security of the space-based assets.

About United Nations Disarmament Commission (UNDC):

The UNDC is a deliberative body and a subsidiary organ of the UN General Assembly.

- It is mandated to consider and make recommendations on various disarmament related issues and to follow up the relevant decisions and recommendations of the special sessions devoted to disarmament held so far.
- The Disarmament Commission was re-established at the first Special Session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament in 1978 to succeed an earlier Disarmament Commission, which ceased to convene after 1965.

Activities:

- Since 1978, the Disarmament Commission has dealt with numerous disarmament related questions, both nuclear and conventional.
- It has also submitted guidelines and principles on various subject items, including guidelines for appropriate types of confidence-building measures, guidelines and recommendations for regional approaches to disarmament within the context of global security, and guidelines and recommendations for objective information on military matters.

Significance of UNDC:

- At a time of growing mistrust and rising international tensions as well as numerous challenges to both the disarmament agenda and the disarmament machinery, the role of the UNDC as a platform for dialogue and cooperation assumes a greater significance.

[Ref: The Hindu, Live Mint]

PAKISTAN APPROACHES WORLD BANK OVER INDIA’S COMPLETING OF KISHANGANGA HYDROPOWER PROJECT

Pakistan has informed the World Bank about India’s completing of the Kishanganga hydropower project during the bank’s “pause” period and has urged it to “recognise its responsibility” under the Indus Waters Treaty.

What’s the issue?

- Pakistan has approached the World Bank, the mediator between the two countries of the water distribution treaty, in the past and raised issues over Kishanganga and Ratle projects in Jammu and Kashmir.
- In December 2016, the world bank had announced that it had “paused” the process for either appointing a Court of Arbitration (COA) or a neutral expert and started mediation between the two countries on how to advance and develop consensus in the light of the treaty on the mechanism for resolution of faulty designs of the two projects. Since then, the bank has arranged two rounds of talks between the two sides.
• It has been flagging concern over designs of India’s five hydroelectricity projects – Pakal Dul (1000 MW), Ratle (850 MW), Kishanganga (330 MW), Miyar (120 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) – being built/planned in the Indus river basin, contending these violate the treaty.

About Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant:

• The Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant is an $864 million dam which is part of a run-of-the-river hydroelectric scheme that is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin.
• It is located 5 km north of Bandipore in Jammu and Kashmir, India and will have an installed capacity of 330 MW.
• Construction on the project began in 2007 and is expected to be complete in 2016.
• Construction on the dam was temporarily halted by the Hague’s Permanent Court of Arbitration in October 2011 due to Pakistan’s protest of its effect on the flow of the Kishanganga River (called the Neelum River in Pakistan).
• In February 2013, the Hague ruled that India could divert a minimum amount of water for power generation.

About Ratle Hydroelectric Plant:

• It is a run-of-the-river hydroelectric power station currently under construction on the Chenab River, downstream of the village of Ratle in Doda district of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir.
• The project includes a 133 m (436 ft) tall gravity dam and two power stations adjacent to one another.

[Ref: The Hindu, Indian Express]

EIGHTH REGIONAL 3R FORUM

The Eighth Regional 3R Forum in Asia and Pacific was held in Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

Organizers:

It was co-organized by Ministry of Housing and Affairs, Japan’s Environment Ministry, and United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD).
• The Indore Municipal Corporation, Government of Madhya Pradesh, and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) have been designated as the City Partner, Organizing State Partner and Industry Partner.

Theme:

• The theme of this edition of forum was “Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency– A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities”.

About 3R Forum in Asia and Pacific:

The Regional 3R Forum in Asia and Pacific was launched in 2009 in Tokyo, Japan with objective of integrating 3Rs—reduce, reuse and recycle in policy, planning and development.
• The forum provides strategic platform for sharing best practices in 3R areas, including new and emerging issues of concern in waste management.
• During the forum meetings, members hold discussions on policies, provided support for the implementation of 3R projects in member countries and share useful information and build networks for further promotion of 3R initiatives.
• Japan had hosted inaugural Regional 3R Forum in Tokyo in 2009.

Members:

• Its members include governments, aid agencies, international agencies, private sector entities, research bodies, NGOs and other relevant parties.

Ha Noi 3R Declaration:

• It is a legally non-binding and voluntary document which aims to provide a basic framework for Asia-Pacific countries to develop measures and programs to promote 3Rs including a set of 3R indicators for monitoring specific progress.
About United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD):

UNCRD was founded in 1971 as instrument to help achieve the strategy for Second United Nations Development Decade.

- It was created by agreement between Government of Japan and UN.
- Its operations are supported by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA).
- Its vision is to achieve sustainable living environment for all.
- Its mission is to assist developing countries in their efforts to achieve sustainable development.
- UNCRD's interventions in developing countries are clustered under three main thematic interrelated and complementary areas of work – (a) Integrated Regional Development Planning; (b) Sustainable Urban Management; and (c) Knowledge Management.

[Ref: PIB, The Hindu]

BAN KI-MOON NAMED BOAO FORUM CHAIR

Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon was elected as Chairman of Boao Forum for Asia replacing Japan’s Yasuo Fukuda.

- Former governor of People’s Bank of China Zhou Xiaochuan was appointed vice-chairman.
- Both the appointments took place during second session of annual Boao Forum, known as “Asian Davos” underway in China’s Hainan province.

About Boao Forum for Asia (BFA):

BFA is non-profit organisation that hosts high-level forums for leaders from government, business and academia in Asia and other continents to share their vision on most pressing issues in this dynamic region and world.

- The forum sometimes is known as the “Asian Davos”. It takes its name from town of Boao in China’s southern Hainan province, which has been permanent venue for its annual conference since 2002.
- It is modelled on annual World Economic Forum (WEF) held annually in Davos, Switzerland.
- The Forum is committed to promoting regional economic integration and bringing Asian countries even closer to their development goals.
- It was established in 2001. Its first meeting was held in April 2002 and since then it is held annually.
- Its fixed address is held annually in Bo’ao, Hainan province, China although Secretariat is based in Beijing.

[Ref: Indian Express, Business Standard]

MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF CERTIFICATES OF COMPETENCY OF SEAFARERS

India has signed an MoU with the Republic of Korea on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Competency of Seafarers.

Significance of the MoU:

- The MoU will pave way for recognition of maritime education and training, certificates of competency, endorsements, training documentary evidence and medical fitness certificates for seafarers issued by the Government of the other country in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 1/10 of the Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping (STCW) Convention, and cooperation between the two countries in training and management of seafarers.

What is STCW?

The International Convention on Standards of Training, Certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW), 1978 sets qualification standards for masters, officers and watch personnel on seagoing merchant ships.

- STCW was adopted in 1978 by conference at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) in London, and entered into force in 1984.
- The Convention was significantly amended in 1995.
• Previously the standards of training, certification and watchkeeping of officers and ratings were established by individual governments, usually without reference to practices in other countries.

• The 1978 STCW Convention was the first to establish basic requirements on training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers on an international level.

• The Convention prescribes minimum standards relating to training, certification and watchkeeping for seafarers which countries are obliged to meet or exceed.

• One important feature of the Convention is that it applies to ships of non-party States when visiting ports of States which are Parties to the Convention.

• The Manila amendments to the STCW Convention and Code were adopted on 25 June 2010, marking a major revision of the STCW Convention and Code.

[Ref: PIB]

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**PMNCH DELEGATION CALLS ON THE PRIME MINISTER**

Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) Delegation recently called on the Prime Minister and presented the logo for the 2018 Partners’ Forum.

**About PMNCH Delegation:**

• The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn & Child Health (The Partnership, PMNCH) is an alliance of more than 1000 organizations in 77 countries from the sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health communities, as well as health influencing sectors.

• The Partnership is governed by a Board, and administered by a Secretariat hosted at the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.

• The Partnership provides a platform for organizations to align objectives, strategies and resources, and agree on interventions to improve maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health.

• The Partnership’s role complements the work and accountability processes of its individual members, enabling them to deliver more collectively than they would alone.

• This Partner-centric approach mobilizes, engages and empowers different implementing partners. It allows them to coordinate their actions and activities, and encourages and promotes mutual accountability.

[Ref: PIB]

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**INDIA HOSTS 16TH INTERNATIONAL ENERGY FORUM (IEF) MINISTERIAL MEETING**


**Key facts:**

• This is second time India hosting IEF Ministerial meeting. It had earlier hosted 5th IEF Ministerial in 1996 at Goa.

• The theme of 2018 IEF Ministerial Meeting was “The Future of Global Energy Security: Transition, Technology, Trade and Investment”.

• It was attended by Petroleum Ministers from 42 countries and was co-hosted by China and South Korea.

**About International Energy Forum (IEF):**

The International Energy Forum (IEF) is the world’s largest recurring gathering of energy ministers.

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**INTERNATIONAL ENERGY FORUM**

• It is unique in that participants not only include IEA and OPEC countries, but also key international actors such as Brazil, China, India, Mexico, Russia, and South Africa. 18 of the G20 countries are members of IEF.
• It serves as a neutral facilitator of informal, open, informed and continuing global energy dialogue among its members comprising of energy producing and energy consuming states, including transit countries.

• There are 72 member countries of IEF, including India, covering all six continents, which are signatories to the Charter of the IEF.

• The IEF countries account for more than 90 percent of global oil and gas supply and demand.

• The IEF is promoted by a permanent Secretariat based in the Diplomatic Quarter of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

• The Forum’s biennial Ministerial Meetings are the world’s largest gathering of Energy Ministers.

• This is the only organization where there are no entry barriers for any country to join.

IEF’s Executive Board (EB):

• IEF’s Executive Board (EB) was set up in 2002 and comprises of 31 designated representatives of Ministers of the member states. It meets twice a year.

• International Energy Agency (IEA) and Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are non-voting members of the Executive Board.

• The EB is chaired by the Host State of the next biennial Ministerial Meeting. **India is currently Chair of IEF’s Executive Board.**

• By virtue of being among the top 11 largest consumers of oil and gas (India is presently 4th), India has been the Permanent Member of the Executive Board since its set-up in 2002.

• India had earlier hosted the 5th IEF Ministerial in 1996 at Goa.

[Ref: PIB]

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**NHAI SIGNS AGREEMENT FOR ITS FIRST INTERNATIONAL PROJECT**

Work on the 1,000 km-long India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway officially started with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) signing an agreement with a joint-venture (JV) between Punj Lloyd and Varaha Infra to upgrade the Yagyi-Kalewa section of the India-Myanmar Friendship Road in Myanmar.

• This is NHAI’s first international project agreement.

• The project has been funded by Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India and would be executed on EPC mode at a cost of Rs.1177 crores.

**About IMT highway:**

• The India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway is a highway under construction under India’s Look East policy that will connect Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar.

• The road is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN–India Free Trade Area, as well as with the rest of Southeast Asia.

• Once completed, greater flows of trade and investment will take place along the route, stimulating the movement of goods and people, creating jobs, promoting tourism as well as raising the livelihoods of the peoples in the region.

**Significance of this highway for India:**

• It will help improve connectivity between India’s remote Northeastern part and Southeast Asia. For long, the lack of physical connectivity with Southeast Asia has been an Achilles’ heel in India’s “Act-East Policy.” The trilateral highway will improve India’s connectivity with Myanmar and Thailand, and in the future there are plans to connect it with pre-existing roads and take it all the way to Vietnam.
• With the construction of this road, which started as the India-Myanmar friendship road way back in 2001, the recent non-attendance by India at China’s Belt and Road Forum in Beijing seems to have injected a new measure of earnestness among Indian policy planners when it comes to executing such road projects.

• Northeast India has been lagging behind other parts of the country when it comes to infrastructure. When completed, the IMT highway will also give easy access to the Northeastern states to the sea (via Myanmar).

About NHAI:

• The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is an autonomous agency of the Government of India.

• It is responsible for management of a network of over 70,000 km of National Highways in India.

• It is a nodal agency of the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

• The NHAI was created through the promulgation of the National Highways Authority of India Act, 1988. In February 1995, the Authority was formally made an autonomous body.

• It is responsible for the development, maintenance, management and operation of National Highways.

Why India?

• For India, GSP country eligibility review is based on concerns related to its compliance with GSP market access criterion and two petitions related to same criterion. The petitions were filed by US dairy industry and US medical device industry requested review of India’s GSP benefits, given Indian trade barriers affecting US exports in those sectors.

What is Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)?

GSP is largest and oldest US trade preference programme introduced in 1976.

• It is designed to promote economic development by allowing duty-free entry for thousands of products from designated beneficiary countries both developing and developed countries.

• Under it, a wide range of industrial and agricultural products originating from certain developing countries are given preferential access to US markets.

• India’s case, GSP enables duty-free entry of 3,500 product lines in US markets, which benefits exporters of textiles, engineering, gems and jewellery and chemical products.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INDIA WILL WORK WITH CHINA ON OPECS "ASIAN PREMIUM" ISSUE

India is planning to coordinate with China and other Asian countries to voice against the “Asian Premium” being charged by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

• Soon, the countries will chalk out the strategy that would result in getting better price from OPEC countries.

What is Asian premium?

Asian Premium is the extra charge being collected by OPEC countries from Asian countries when selling oil.

• The premium is determined in large part by the official selling prices (OSPs) set by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, and Kuwait, which supply about 15 percent of the world’s crude among them.
They set differential prices against benchmarks on a monthly basis, adjusting them to account for regional variations.

**Why countries are against Asian premium?**

- India, which sources 85% of its crude oil supplies from OPEC member countries, wants producers to offer discounts rather than charge a premium, as today it has become buyer’s market.
- The direction of crude flow from West Asia has now shifted to Asia. Besides, with OPEC deciding not to reduce production, there is a tilt in the demand-supply balance.
- Earlier, crude flow was from West Asia to North America and the pricing also depended on the market. Now, with the shale revolution, the flow has shifted to Asia.

**Implications:**

- If crude is received at a fair price without paying Asian Premium, gross refining margins will improve and it will result in competitively priced petroleum products.
- The removal of discriminatory Asian Premium will allow poor Asian countries including India to provide energy to people who have been deprived of energy so far.

**India’s concerns:**

- India has emphasized implementation of ‘Responsible and Reasonable Pricing’ by oil producing countries, giving importance of Asian markets for OPEC, particularly fast growing energy markets in the region as they are reliable and continued customer.

**About OPEC:**

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is a group of oil-producing nations that was first established in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1961.

- OPEC is one of the most powerful international organizations in the world and was a major player in the shift towards state control over natural resources. It has a massive impact on oil production and price around the world.
- Before OPEC was formed, the oil market was dominated by a group of multinational companies. The formation of OPEC was a major act of sovereignty by the founding nations, and it helped ensure that private companies could not unilaterally cut prices throughout the world.

**Members:**

- Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela are the founding Members of the Organization.
- Today, OPEC is comprised of 13 members. They are:
  1. Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (six in the Middle East)
  2. Algeria, Angola, Gabon, Libya, Nigeria (five in Africa)
  3. Ecuador and Venezuela (two in South America)

[Ref: The Hindu]

**UNITED NATIONS LAUNCHES UN ROAD SAFETY TRUST FUND**

United Nations has launched UN Road Safety Trust Fund to improve road safety worldwide to save lives and prevent the loss of opportunity associated with road accidents.

- UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is secretariat for the trust fund.
About United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund:

The fund aims to accelerate progress in improving global road safety by bridging gaps in mobilization of resources for effective action at all levels.

- It will mobilize resources from governments, intergovernmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private sector, philanthropic organizations and individuals.

- It will support efforts along five pillars of Global Plan for Decade of Action for Road Safety (2011-20), which include improved safety of road infrastructure and broader transport networks; strengthened road safety management capacities; enhanced safety of vehicles; improved behaviour of road users and improved post-crash care.

- The fund will serve as catalyst for much-needed progress towards road safety targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

- SDG targets 3.6 and 11.2 aim to halve number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents and provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems as well as improve road safety for all.

Significance:

- The fund has potential to galvanise global efforts to address road safety situation, building on progress made and experience gained over Decade of Action for Road Safety 2011-2020.

- It is estimated that every $1,500 contributed to the Fund could save one life, prevent 10 serious injuries and leverage $51,000 towards investments in road safety.

About Resolution on road safety:

- The UN General Assembly (UNGA) also adopted resolution on road safety, sponsored by Russia.

- It calls for host of measures to prevent road accidents and to minimising resulting damage.

- It has urged adoption of policies and measures to implement vehicle safety regulations to ensure that all new motor vehicles meet applicable minimum regulations for protection of occupants and other road users, with seat belts, airbags and active safety systems fitted as standard equipment.

SDG goal related to road safety:

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by United Nations Member States in 2015, contains targets on road safety in two of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals:

- Sustainable Development Goal 3: “Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”.

- Target 3.6: By 2020, halve the number of global deaths from road traffic accidents.

- Sustainable Development Goal 11: “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.

[Ref: The Hindu]

US ADDS INDIA IN CURRENCY MONITORING LIST ALONG WITH CHINA

The US Department of Treasury has included India in the monitoring list of its major trading partners that merit close attention to their currency practices and macroeconomic policies.

- The list was part of semi-annual report on Macroeconomic and Foreign Exchange Policies of Major Trading Partners of the United States.

Why is India included in the list?

- According to USDTR, India increased its purchase of forex over first three quarters of 2017. Despite sharp drop-off in purchase in fourth quarter, net annual purchase of forex reached US $56 billion in 2017, equivalent to 2.2% of the GDP.

- The pick-up in purchases came amidst relatively strong foreign inflows, both of foreign direct investment (FDI) and portfolio investment (FPI).

- Notwithstanding increase in intervention, the rupee appreciated by more than 6% against the dollar and by more than 3% on a real effective basis in 2017.

Key facts:
IASToppers’ Current Affairs Analysis April 2018

- The US Treasury Department report is required by Congress to identify countries that are trying to artificially manage value of their currency to gain trade advantage, for example by keeping exchange rate low to promote cheaper exports.
- Once country is listed, it remains on it for at least two consecutive report cycles which is submitted to US Congress to help ensure that any improvement in performance versus criteria is durable and is not due to temporary factors.
- India is sixth addition to the watch list which comprises China, Japan, South Korea, Germany and Switzerland.
- US Treasury Department has asked these countries to implement economic reforms to manage their respective surpluses.

[Ref: Economic Times]

INDIA-WIESBADEN CONFERENCE 2018

Wiesbaden Conference 2018 was recently held in India.

Key facts:

- The conference provides an opportunity to participants to share experiences on their export control systems and to identify legal and technical assistance, action plans and challenges in the national implementation of UNSC 1540.
- The title of the Conference is ‘Securing Global Supply Chains through Government-Industry Partnerships towards Effective Implementation of UNSC Resolution 1540’.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in cooperation with Germany and the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) hosted the conference.
- Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) was the industry partner for the event.
- Representatives from the 39 countries, as well as experts from the UNSC 1540 Committee and UN Office for Disarmament Affairs in New York, participated in the conference.

About Weisbaden process:

The Wiesbaden Process was initiated by the Government of Germany in 2012 to strengthen the implementation of UNSC 1540 through Government-Industry partnerships.

UN Security Council Resolution 1540:

- The UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (2004) establishes legally binding obligations on all States to adopt and enforce appropriate and effective measures to prevent the proliferation to non-State actors of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their delivery systems.
- It requires, therefore that States implement appropriate and effective measures to prevent non-state actors such as terrorists, from obtaining access to weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- UNSCR 1540 requires all states to adopt and enforce laws that will ensure implementation of the obligations laid down in the WMD treaties, especially with a view to prevent proliferation to non-state actors.
- It does not create very specific legal obligations for those states that are not party to existing WMD treaties, because it only requires them to take ‘measures’ against proliferation of WMDs and their means of delivery.

THE RESOLUTION INCLUDES THREE PRIMARY OBLIGATIONS:

1. All States are prohibited from providing any form of support to non-state actors seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction, related materials, or their means of delivery.
2. All States must adopt and enforce laws criminalizing the possession and acquisition of such items by non-state actors, as well as efforts to assist or finance their acquisition.
3. All States must adopt and enforce domestic controls over nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, their means of delivery, and related materials, in order to prevent their proliferation.

Location of Wiesbaden:
• Wiesbaden is the city, capital of state Hesse in central Germany.
• It is situated on the right bank of Rhine River and on the foot of Taunus Mountains.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INDIA RANKS 10TH ON NEW COMMONWEALTH INNOVATION INDEX

A new Commonwealth Innovation Index has been launched as part of a new Commonwealth Innovation Hub on the sidelines of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) being held in London.

About the Commonwealth Innovation Index:

• The index has been created in partnership with the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and its annual Global Innovation Index (GII).

• It is aimed at providing a tool that allows member states, organisations and citizens to benchmark themselves against 53 countries of the Commonwealth, with the new innovation hub offering a dedicated online space for Commonwealth countries to showcase what they have to offer and share with other members.

About Global Innovation Index (GII):

• The Global Innovation Index (GII), co-published by World-Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), Cornell University and INSEAD with CII as a Knowledge Partner since inception, has been ranking world economies including India since 2007 according to their innovation capabilities and outcomes using 82 indicators among a host of other important parameters.

Highlights of the index:

• The index is topped by the UK, Singapore and Canada.

• India is ranked 10th. Bangladesh has been ranked 24th.

[Ref: Economic Times]

18TH APRIL: WORLD HERITAGE DAY

World Heritage Day is celebrated on 18th of April every year. It’s been chosen to tie in with the UN’s International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development.

• Theme of the World Heritage Day 2018 is ‘Heritage for Generations’.

Origin of the day:

• ICOMOS (International Council for Monuments and Sites) organised a symposium in Tunisia on 18 April 1982 and it was suggested that a special day is to be celebrated all through the world in the name of “International Day for Monuments and Sites” on the same day every year. The idea was also approved in UNESCO’s General Conference in November 1983.

• “International Monuments and Sites Day” has been traditionally called the World Heritage Day.

• It is celebrated to raise awareness of the importance of protecting and preserving various World Heritage sites around the world that have achieved World heritage status.

What is a World Heritage site?

• A World Heritage site is classified as a natural or man-made area or a structure that is of international importance, and a space which requires special protection.

• These sites are officially recognised by the UN and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, also known as UNESCO.

• UNESCO believes that the sites classified as World Heritage are important for humanity, and they hold cultural and physical significance.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INDIA WINS ELECTIONS TO KEY UNITED NATIONS SUBSIDIARY BODIES

India has won six elections to United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) bodies, five of them unanimously.
• In these polls, India won places on executive boards of four UN bodies, three commissions and committee.

**NGO Committee**

• India faced an election within the Asia-Pacific group only for Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Committee.

• India polled highest number of votes, receiving 46 votes, followed by Pakistan with 43, China received 39.

• The NGO committee of UN is considered influential because it scrutinises NGOs applying for consultative status with UNECOSOC and can recommend or block them. India will serve four-year term on panel starting January 2019.

**Executive Boards**

• India won elections to Executive Boards of UN Development Programme (UNDP), UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS).

• India will serve three-year terms from January 2019 on those executive boards.

**Executive Board of UN-Women**

• India was also elected separately on this executive board for three-year term starting January 2019. UN-Women work for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

**Commissions**

• India was elected on UN Commission on Population and Development and it will have term till September 2021.

• India was also elected on the UN Commission for Social Development and shall have four-year term starting immediately.

• It was also elected UN Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice and will serve three-year term starting January 2019.

**UN Commission on Population and Development:**

• It assists UNECOSOC by arranging for studies and advising it on population issues and trends, integrating population and development strategies and population and related development policies and programmes.

**Commission for Social Development:**

• Its purpose is advice UNECOSOC on social policies of general character and in particular on all matters in social field not covered by specialised inter-governmental agencies.

**Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice:**

• It acts as principal policymaking body of UN in field of crime prevention and criminal justice.

• Its mandate includes improving international action to combat national and transnational crime and efficiency and fairness of criminal justice administration systems.

**About UNECOSOC**

• The Economic and Social Council is UN’s central platform for reflection, debate, and innovative thinking on sustainable development.

• It is one of six main UN organs which were established by UN Charter.

• EcoSoc is principal body for coordination, policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on economic, social and environmental issues as well as for implementation of internationally agreed development goals.

• It supervises subsidiary and expert bodies in the economic, social and environmental fields.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

**COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING (CHOGM)**

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018 (CHOGM 2018) was held in London, United Kingdom.

**Key facts:**

• It was overall 25th meeting of the heads of government of the Commonwealth of Nations.

• It was also first CHOGM held following United Kingdom’s decision to withdraw from European
Union. This decision has resulted for Britain to strengthen its economic ties with and play greater role in Commonwealth.

- India was represented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The theme CHOGM 2018 was “Towards a Common Future”.

About Commonwealth of Nations:

- It is an international intergovernmental organisation of countries that were mostly former territories of the British Empire and dependencies.
- It was established by the London Declaration in 1949. Many countries from Africa, Asia, Americas, Europe and the Pacific have joined the Commonwealth.
- Queen Elizabeth II is the Head of the Commonwealth. She is also the monarch of 16 members of the Commonwealth, known as Commonwealth realms.
- Membership is based on free and equal voluntary co-operation.
- Current membership includes 52 counties (including India).

[Ref: The Hindu]

**INDIA, PAKISTAN FOR FIRST TIME TO PARTICIPATE TOGETHER IN SCO COUNTER-TERROR EXERCISE**

For first time, arch rivals India and Pakistan are taking part in Peace Mission, a multi-nation counter-terror exercise in Russia to be held in September 2018.

**Peace Mission:**

- Peace Mission counter-terror military exercise will be held in the Ural mountains of Russia and almost all SCO member countries are taking part in it.
- Its main aim is to enhance counter-terror cooperation among the eight SCO member countries.
- It will be for first time since Independence that India and Pakistan will both be part of military exercise, though armies of two arch rival neighbouring countries have worked together in UN peacekeeping missions.

**About Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):**

Seen as a counter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), SCO is a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

- These countries, except for Uzbekistan, had been members of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1996; after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the members renamed the organisation.
- Its headquarters is located in Beijing, China.
- India, which has had an observer status for the past 10 years, was accepted along with Pakistan as full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in July 2015.
- It has now eight members: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, India and Pakistan.
- SCO has Afghanistan, Iran, Mongolia and Belarus as observers.
- The SCO has established relations with the United Nations, where it is an observer in the General Assembly, the European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

[Ref: The Hindu, Economic Times]
PUNE HOSTED THE 12TH EDITION OF SOUTH ASIAN CLIMATE OUTLOOK FORUM (SASCOF)

Pune hosted the 12th edition of the South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) meeting.

- This was the sixth SASCOF meeting hosted by India.
- The Forum was attended by meteorologists from Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka.

About South Asian Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF):

- South Asian nations, supported by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), have been conducting the South Asian Seasonal Climate Outlook Forum (SASCOF) since 2010.
- SASCOF was established as a platform where meteorologists from South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) member countries along with Myanmar, could discuss some of the common weather and climate-related matters.
- All these South Asian countries — except for Afghanistan, which is located in extreme northwest — experience common weather and climatological characteristics, like Southwest monsoon.
- SASCOFs prepare consensus seasonal climate information on a regional scale that provide a consistent basis for preparing national level outlooks. Such forums also serve to interface with user sectors to understand and enhance the use of climate information as orchestrated and supported by the Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS).

[Ref: PIB]

MEETING OF THE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE (DC) AND IMFC OF THE WORLD BANK GROUP AND THE IMF

Meeting of the Development Committee (DC) of the World Bank Group and the IMF and the Restricted Session of the International Monetary and Finance Committee (IMFC) were recently held in Washington D.C.

About Ministerial Committees:

The IMF Board of Governors is advised by two ministerial committees:

1. The International Monetary and Financial Committee (IMFC)
   - The IMFC has 24 members, drawn from the pool of 187 governors. Its structure mirrors that of the Executive Board and its 24 constituencies. As such, the IMFC represents all the member countries of the Fund.
   - The IMFC meets twice a year, during the Spring and Annual Meetings. The Committee discusses matters of common concern affecting the global economy and also advises the IMF on the direction its work.
   - At the end of the Meetings, the Committee issues a joint communiqué summarizing its views. These communiqués provide guidance for the IMF’s work program during the six months leading up to the next Spring or Annual Meetings.
   - There is no formal voting at the IMFC, which operates by consensus.

2. The Development Committee:
   - The Development Committee is a joint committee, tasked with advising the Boards of Governors of the IMF and the World Bank on issues related to economic development in emerging and developing countries.
   - The committee has 24 members (usually ministers of finance or development).
   - It represents the full membership of the IMF and the World Bank and mainly serves as a forum for building intergovernmental consensus on critical development issues.

[Ref: PIB]

CABINET APPROVES MOU BETWEEN INDIA AND SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE ON COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF MEDICINAL PLANTS

The Union Cabinet has approved Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Sao Tome and Principe for Cooperation in field of Traditional Systems of Medicine and Homoeopathy.
• The MoU will enhance bilateral cooperation between two countries in areas of Traditional Systems of Medicine. This will be of immense importance to both countries considering their shared cultural heritage.

**Location of Sao Tome and Principe:**

- Sao Tome and Principe is an island nation in the Gulf of Guinea, off the western equatorial coast of Central Africa.
- It consists of two archipelagos around the two main islands: Sao Tome and Principe off the northwestern coast of Gabon.
- It is the second-smallest African country after Seychelles.

[Ref: PIB]

**ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL WORKSHOP OF UNCCD**

A four-day Asia Pacific Regional Workshop of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), jointly hosted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and UNCCD Secretariat, to build the capacity of the Asia-Pacific Region to monitor and report on land degradation, was recently held in New Delhi.

**About the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification:**

- The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is a Convention to combat desertification and mitigate the effects of drought through national action programs that incorporate long-term strategies supported by international cooperation and partnership arrangements.

- The Convention, the only convention stemming from a direct recommendation of the Rio Conference’s Agenda 21, was adopted in Paris, France in 1994 and entered into force in 1996.
- It is the only internationally legally binding framework set up to address the problem of desertification.
- The Convention is based on the principles of participation, partnership and decentralization—the backbone of Good Governance and Sustainable Development.
- It has 195 parties, making it near universal in reach. In 2013, Canada became the first country to withdraw from the convention.
- To help publicise the Convention, 2006 was declared “International Year of Deserts and Desertification”.

The definition of desertification implies it is degradation that cannot be reversed in a lifetime (around 60 years).

[Ref: PIB, The Hindu, Wiki]

**U.S. TRADE REPRESENTATIVE AGAIN PLACES INDIA ON ‘WATCH LIST’**

The Office of United States (US) Trade Representative (USTR) has once again placed India on ‘Priority Watch List’ in its annual Special 301 Report on the state of intellectual property protection.

**What is Special 301 Report?**

- Special 301 Report identifies US trading partners that do not adequately or effectively protect and enforce IP rights or deny market access to its innovators and creators that rely on protection of their IP rights.
- In 2018 Special 301 Report, the USTR has placed 12 countries on its Priority Watch List.

**Highlights of the report:**

- India continues to remain on the priority watch list for longstanding challenges in its intellectual property framework and lack of sufficient measurable progress. As per the report, the country
is also one of the world’s most challenging major economies in the area.

• Other countries on the list are Algeria, Argentina, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Indonesia, Kuwait, Russia, Ukraine, and Venezuela.

Why India continues to remain on the priority watch list?

• India remains on the priority watch list this year for longstanding challenges in its IP framework and lack of sufficient measurable improvements, particularly with respect to patents, copyrights, trade secrets, and enforcement, as well as for new issues that have negatively affected US right holders over the past year.

• The longstanding IP challenges facing US businesses in India include those which make it difficult for innovators to receive and maintain patents in India, particularly for pharmaceuticals.

• Among other issues include India’s enforcement action and policies that are insufficient to curb the problem, copyright policies that do not properly incentivise the creation and commercialisation of content, and an outdated and insufficient trade secrets legal framework.

• New and growing concerns, including with respect to reductions in transparency by India’s pharmaceutical regulator through the removal of a requirement that applicants submit information about a product’s patent status, continue to generate skepticism about whether India is serious about pursuing pro-innovation and pro-creativity growth policies.

[Ref: The Hindu]

About the report:

• The report was published by security solutions provider Symantec.

• The global threat ranking of countries was based on 8 metrics viz. malware, spam, bots, phishing, network attacks, web attacks, ransomware and cryptominers.

Highlights of the report:

• The US was most vulnerable to attacks at 26.61% followed by China at 10.95%.

• India is the third-most vulnerable country in terms of cyber threat risks including malware, spam, ransomware and one of the most recent and difficult-to-detect ones – cryptominers.

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

• In terms of cryptominining activities, India has ranked second in Asia-Pacific and Japan region (APJ), and ninth globally.

Concerns raised in the report:

• With the threat landscape becoming more diverse, attackers are working harder to discover new avenues of attack and cover their tracks.

• From the sudden spread of WannaCry and Petya/NotPetya, to the swift growth in coinminers, 2017 that digital security threats can come from new and unexpected sources.

• Cryptojacking has captured the top slot at the attacker toolkit, which signals a massive threat to

DEFENCE & SECURITY ISSUES

INDIA THIRD MOST VULNERABLE COUNTRY TO CYBER THREATS: INTERNET SECURITY THREAT REPORT

According to recently published Internet Security Threat Report, India emerged as third most vulnerable country in terms of risk of cyber threats, such as malware, spam and ransomware in 2017.

www.iastoppers.com
cyber and personal security. Cryptojacking is defined as the secret use of a computing device to mine cryptocurrency.

- There is also a 200% increase in attackers injecting malware implants into the software supply chain in 2017. Threats in the mobile space continue to grow year-over-year, including the number of new mobile malware variants rising 54%.

[Ref: The Hindu]

Prevention of Money Laundering Act Will Need More Changes

India will have to make money laundering an explicitly standalone offence to upgrade its compliance ahead of the on-site mutual evaluation by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), which is due in November-December 2020.

What’s the issue?

- As per FATF recommendations, money laundering should be made a standalone offence. However, despite several amendments, the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) remains a predicate-offence-oriented law. This means a case under the Act depends on the fate of cases pursued by primary agencies such as the CBI, the Income Tax Department or the police.

Background:

- FATF had undertaken mutual evaluation of India in 2010 when the body expressed satisfaction with the measures taken by the country.
- However, in its report, the FATF highlighted a number of lacunae in the then extant legislation, for which it suggested changes.

About Financial Action Task Force (FATF):

- FATF is an inter-governmental policy making body with ministerial mandate to establish international standards for combating money laundering and terrorist financing.
- The FATF was created in 1989 at the behest of the G7, and is headquartered in Paris.

Objectives:

- Its objectives are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to integrity of international financial system.

Functions:

- The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally.
- In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

Participants:

- A large number of international organizations participate in the FATF as observers, each of which has some involvement in anti-money laundering activities.
- Organizations such as Interpol, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and World Bank are observers.

Key facts:

- Initially it was only dealing with developing policies to combat money laundering. But in 2001 its purpose was expanded to act against terrorism financing.
- Currently, it comprises two regional organisations (the EU and the Gulf Co-operation Council) and 35 member jurisdictions, including India, UK, US, China and the European Commission.

[Ref: The Hindu]
CYBERSECURITY TECH ACCORD

Dozens of major technology companies including Microsoft, Facebook, Cisco, and SAP have signed onto a pledge, known as Cybersecurity Tech Accord, to protect their users around the globe against cybersecurity threats and to abstain from helping any government launch a cyber attack.

- This is hailed as a “watershed agreement” among companies representing every layer of internet communication.

Key features of Accord:

- Under this accord, signatory companies aim to take collective action to establish formal and informal partnerships with industry, civil society and security researchers, to improve collaboration for disclosure of vulnerabilities and other threats. The goal is to minimize potential for introduction of malicious code.

- The four principles of Cybersecurity Tech Accord aimed at advancing online security and resiliency across globe.

- Signatory companies agreed to mount stronger defence against cyberattacks, regardless of motivation underlying them. They pledged not to help governments launch cyberattacks against innocent citizens or enterprises.

- They will protect their products and services from any tampering or exploitation that could enable their use in cyberattacks.

- They will empower developers, as well as people who use technology products to improve their capacity to defend against cyberattacks. It includes joint work on developing stronger security practices.

Four principles of Cybersecurity Tech Accord:

- Protect users and customers everywhere
- Oppose cyberattacks on innocent citizens and enterprises
- Empower users, customers and developers to strengthen cybersecurity
- Partner with each other and like-minded groups to enhance cybersecurity

[Ref: Economic Times, Business Standard]

INDIAN HISTORY

“SATYAGRAHA SE SWACHHAGRAHA” CAMPAIGN

To commemorate the launch of Champaran Satyagraha over a century ago on 10th April, 1917, Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, in coordination with the Government of Bihar, is working to spread the message of Swachhata across the country by initiating the “Satyagraha se Swachhagraha” campaign.

About the campaign:

- Under the campaign, Swachhagrahis from different parts of the country were invited to Bihar, where they worked with 10,000 Swachhagrahis from Bihar to “trigger” behaviour change throughout the 38 districts of the State and build momentum of the jan andolan further.

Significance of the campaign:

- Mahatma Gandhi launched the Champaran Satyagraha over a century ago, on 10th April, 1917, to give the country freedom from foreign rule.

- April 10th, 2018 marks the end of the centenary year celebrations of the Champaran Satyagraha, and is going to be celebrated through the “Satyagraha se Swachhagraha” campaign, which is aimed at achieving freedom from filth.

About the Champaran Satyagraha:

- Champaran Satyagraha was undertaken in the erstwhile undivided Champaran district in northern Bihar.
• Mahatma Gandhi went there in April, 1917 on learning about the abuses suffered by the cultivators of the district, forced into growing indigo by British planters/estate owners.

• Even Gandhi was reluctant to commit himself to task in the beginning. But he was so thoroughly persuaded by Rajkumar Shukla, an indigo cultivator from Champaran that he decided to investigate into the matter.

• Gandhi’s method of inquiry at Champaran was based on surveys by the volunteers. The respondents who willingly gave statements should sign the papers or give thumb impressions.

• For those unwilling to participate, the reasons must be recorded by the volunteers. The principal volunteers in this survey were mostly lawyers like Babu Rajendra Prasad, Dharnidhar Prasad, Gorakh Prasad, Ramnawami Prasad, Sambhusaran and Anugraha Narain Sinha.

Outcomes of the Champaran Satyagraha:

• In June 1917, the British administration declared the formation of a formal inquiry committee with Gandhi aboard.

• The Government accepted almost all its recommendations. The principal recommendation accepted was complete abolition of Tinkathia system.

• It was a major blow to the British planters who became resentful. But they could not prevent the passage of Champaran Agrarian Act in Bihar & Orissa Legislative Council on March 4, 1918.

[Ref: PIB]

APT & CULTURE

KALAMKARI ART MUSEUM COMES UP AT PEDANA

About Kalamkari art:

• Kalamkari is an ancient style of hand painting done on cotton or silk fabric with a tamarind pen, using natural dyes.

• The word Kalamkari is derived from a Persian word where ‘kalam’ means pen and ‘kari’ refers to craftsmanship.

Styles of Kalamkari art:

There are two identifiable styles of Kalamkari art in India – Srikalahasti style and Machilipatnam style.

1. In the Machilipatnam style of Kalamkari, motifs are essentially printed with hand-carved traditional blocks with intricate detailing painted by hands.

2. On the other hand, Srikalahasti style of painting draws inspiration from the Hindu mythology describing scenes from the epics and folklore. This style holds a strong religious connect because of its origin in the temples.

Why in news?

• Recently, a ‘Kalamkari art museum’ has been opened at Pedana in Andhra Pradesh.

• The museum traces the history of the art and displays the process of extraction of natural colours from various sources.

[Ref: The Hindu]

INTERPRETATION CENTRE INAUGURATED AT KONARK TEMPLE IN ODISHA

Union Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan inaugurated a state-of-the-art interpretation and tourist facilitation centre at the Sun Temple at Konark to coincide with the Utkal Divas celebrations in Odisha.

• The centre at the Unesco World Heritage site costing Rs 45 crore showcases the unique architectural features of the temple.

About Konark Sun Temple:

Built in the 13th century, the Konark temple was conceived as a gigantic chariot of the Sun God, with 12 pairs of exquisitely ornamented wheels pulled by seven horses.

• It was built by King Narasimhadeva I, the great ruler of Ganga dynasty. The temple is perfect blend of Kalinga architecture, heritage, exotic beach and salient natural beauty.
• This temple was also known as ‘BLACK PAGODA’ due to its dark color and used as a navigational landmark by ancient sailors to Odisha. Similarly, the Jagannath Temple in Puri was called the “White Pagoda”.

• It remains a major pilgrimage site for Hindus, who gather here every year for the Chandrabhaga Mela around the month of February.

• It is protected under the National Framework of India by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act (1958) and its Rules (1959).

• The temple is included in UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1984 for its architectural greatness and also for the sophistication and abundance of sculptural work.

• The Konark is the third link of Odisha’s Golden Triangle. The first link is Jagannath Puri and the second link is Bhubaneswar (Capital city of Odisha).

[Ref: PIB, The Hindu]

34 PROJECTS SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENTED UNDER NATIONAL CULTURE FUND SCHEME TILL DATE

As per latest data released by the government, 34 projects have been successfully implemented under National Culture Fund Scheme till date, thus, promoting, protecting and preserving India’s cultural heritage.

What is National Culture Fund?

• National Culture Fund (NCF) was set up as a Trust under the Charitable Endowment Act, 1890 in November 1996 by the Government, with a view to mobilize extra resources through Public Private Partnerships.

• The Fund aims at inviting the participation of the corporate sector, non-government organizations, private/public sector as well as individuals in the task of promoting, protecting and preserving India’s cultural heritage.

Managed by:

• The National Culture Fund is managed and administered by a council headed by Hon’ble Culture Minister to decide the policies and an Executive Committee headed by Secretary, Culture to actualize those policies.

• All the projects undertaken by the NCF are completed within a specified period, in accordance with an MoU signed by NCF with the concerned donor organization.

[Ref: PIB]

SIX MONUMENTS / HISTORICAL SITES IN NORTH EASTERN STATES IDENTIFIED FOR LISTING UNDER WORLD HERITAGE SITE

As many as 6 monuments/historical sites in the North Eastern states have been identified tentatively for listing under World Heritage Site.

Identified sites:

Monuments/sites identified/placed under tentative list for listing under world heritage in the north eastern states are:

1. Apatani Cultural Landscape, Arunachal Pradesh.
2. Iconic Saree Weaving Clusters of India.
5. River Island of Majuli in midstream of Brahmaputra River in Assam.
6. Thembang Fortified Village, Arunachal Pradesh.

About the UNESCO World Heritage Site:

• A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.

• The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.

• Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and...
UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.

- UNESCO designation as a World Heritage Site provides prima facie evidence that such culturally sensitive sites are legally protected pursuant to the Law of War, under the Geneva Convention, its articles, protocols and customs, together with other treaties including the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and international law.

- As of July 2017, 1,073 sites are listed: 832 cultural, 206 natural, and 35 mixed properties, in 167 states. Italy is the home for the largest number of sites with 53.

**Selection criterion:**

- To be selected, a World Heritage Site must be an already classified landmark, unique in some respect as a geographically and historically identifiable place having special cultural or physical significance (such as an ancient ruin or historical structure, building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, mountain, or wilderness area).

- It may signify a remarkable accomplishment of humanity, and serve as evidence of our intellectual history on the planet.

**What is the World Heritage In Danger List?**

- The List of World Heritage in Danger is compiled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) through the World Heritage Committee according to Article 11.4 of the World Heritage Convention, which was established in 1972 to designate and manage World Heritage Sites.

- Entries in the list are threatened World Heritage Sites for the conservation of which major operations are required and for which “assistance has been requested”.

- The list is intended to increase international awareness of the threats and to encourage counteractive measures.

- Threats to a site can be either proven imminent threats or potential dangers that could have adverse effects on a site.

- The convention defines the kinds of natural or cultural sites that can be included on the World Heritage List.

- The 191 nations that have signed the convention have pledged to conserve their World Heritage Sites.

- The majority of the endangered natural sites (11) are located in Africa.

- As of 2017, there are 54 entries (17 natural, 37 cultural) on the List of World Heritage in Danger.

- According to Wikipedia sources, only two sites are recognized as World Heritage In Danger List in India i.e. Group of Monuments at Hampi and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary.

[Ref: PIB]

**TAJ MAHAL UP FOR ‘ADOPTION’, GMR AND ITC IN THE RACE**

Infrastructure conglomerate GMR and tobacco company ITC Ltd are currently bidding to adopt the Taj Mahal under the ‘Adopt a Heritage’ project.

**Background:**

- The iconic tomb in Agra was not initially on the list of monuments to be adopted under the Adopt a Heritage scheme, because of its importance.
However, it was added to the list in February and a seven-member Oversight and Vision Committee will now decide whom to hand over the bid to.

- In 2007, the government of Maharashtra had announced its own adopt-a-monument scheme, inviting private and public sector companies to adopt heritage sites for a period of five years. This was extended to 10 years in 2014 because of the poor response from companies. So far, the only site to be adopted by a private company under this scheme is Osmanabad district’s Naldurg fort, where tourism amenities are now being managed by Unity Multicons.

**Adopt a Heritage Scheme (Apni Dharohar Apni Pehchan Project):**

The scheme was launched by Union Ministry of Tourism on World Tourism Day (27th September).

- This scheme was **launched by Tourism Ministry in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).**

- Under it, Private, Public Sector Companies and Corporate individuals were invited to adopt heritage sites and to take up responsibility for making them and promote sustainable tourism through conservation and development under their CSR activities.

- It envisages at developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India and making them tourist friendly and enhance their tourism potential and cultural importance in planned and phased manner.

**Monument Mitras:**

- Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage sites / monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras.

- The basic and advanced amenities of the tourist destinations would be provided by them.

- They would also look after the operations and the maintenance of the amenities.

- The ‘Monument Mitras’ would associate pride with their CSR activities.

**ASSAM SPRING FESTIVAL**

Assam Spring Festival was held at Manas National Park.

**Key facts:**

- It was organised by Indian Weavers’ Association and Swankar Mithinga Onsai Afat, an association of reformed poachers in Manas who are now engaged in wildlife conservation and preservation.

- The aim of the festival was to promote local food and culture of fringe villagers.

- It also attempted to create model of alternative livelihood through food, handloom and culture.

**About Manas National Park:**

- Manas National Park is a national park, UNESCO Natural World Heritage site, a Project Tiger reserve, an elephant reserve and a biosphere reserve in Assam, India.

- Located in the Himalayan foothills, it is contiguous with the Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan.

- The Manas river flows thorough the west of the park and is the main river within it. It is a major tributary of Brahmaputra river and splits into two separate rivers, the Beki and Bholkaduba as it reaches the plains.

- The Manas river also serves as an international border dividing India and Bhutan.

- The bedrock of the savanna area in the north of the park is made up of limestone and sandstone, whereas the grasslands in the south of the park stand on deep deposits of fine alluvium.

- The combination of Sub-Himalayan Bhabar Terai formation along with the riverine succession continuing up to Sub-Himalayan mountain forest make it one of the richest areas of biodiversity in the world.

- The park is well known for species of rare and endangered wildlife that are not found anywhere else in the world like the Assam roofed turtle, hispid hare, golden langur and pygmy hog.

[Ref: The Hindu]

[Ref: PIB]
ABOUT MITHILA PAINTING

- Mithila painting is folk painting practiced in Mithila region of India (especially Bihar) and Nepal.
- It is also known as Madhubani paintings which mean ‘forest of honey’. It has been mentioned in ancient Indian texts like Ramayana.
- The central themes of Mithila paintings are based on Hindu Gods and Goddesses. Its main theme is supported by traditional geometric patterns.
- Initially, women from village drew paintings on freshly plastered mud walls of their home as illustration of their thoughts, hopes and dreams using fingers and twigs forming two dimensional imagery using paste of powdered rice.
- With time, it became part of festivities and special events like marriage. It was made from paste of powdered rice. It also used colours derived from vegetables and plants.
- Now they are also painted on cloth, handmade paper and canvas.
- Some of main attributes of these paintings are double line border, abstract-like figures of deities, ornate floral patterns, bold use of colours and bulging eyes and jolting nose of faces of figures.
- The various styles of Mithila painting include Bharni, Tantrik, Katchni, Godna, and Kohbar, which were historically painted only by women from the upper strata in caste system, who used to make them on mud walls on special occasions.
- Mithila painting has been accorded the coveted GI (geographical Indication) status as it has remained confined to compact geographical area and skills have been passed on through centuries, but content and the style have largely remained same.

[Ref: Indian Express, Business Standard]

WALMIKI AND MALHAR, 2 LANGUAGES UNKNOWN TO LINGUISTS, DISCOVERED

Linguist from University of Hyderabad have discovered two endangered languages Walmiki and Malhar predominantly spoken in remote regions of Odisha.

- These languages are categorised ‘endangered’ as the number of people speaking is small.
- These languages are spoken in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.
- Only a few people living in the forest and hilly areas speak these languages.

About Walmiki:

- Walmiki is spoken in Koraput of Odisha and on the bordering districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- Walmiki is an isolate language i.e. it does not belong to a family of languages.
- The name of the language is also interesting and indicative because the speech community claims descent from the great Indian saint-poet Valmiki.

About Malhar:

- Malhar is spoken in a remote and isolated hamlet which is almost 165 km from Bhubaneswar.
- The community consists of about 75 speakers including children.
- It belongs to the North Dravidian subgroup of the Dravidian family of languages and has close affinities with the other North Dravidian languages like Malto and Kurux spoken in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar.

Background

- India has been termed sociolinguistic giant and linguists paradise by various scholars across the world. Though Central government has made effort to document endangered tribal and minor languages, there are many languages which are unknown to world and are waiting to be discovered and documented.

[Ref: The Hindu]
A rare dance panel of Nayak period and an inscribed pillar of Chola period have been found on an abandoned brick mound at Pathalapettai near Kiliyur in Tiruchi.

- Silappathikaram has references to such ritualistic performances by rural folks.

About Silappathikaram:

- It is one of the Five Great Epics of Tamil Literature according to later Tamil literary tradition. A poet-prince from Kodungallur near Kochi, referred to by the pseudonym Ilango Adigal, is credited with this work.
- The epic revolves around Kannagi, who having lost her husband to a miscarriage of justice at the court of the Pandyan Dynasty, wreaks her revenge on his kingdom.

About the dance panel:

- The dance panel is depicted on a stone slab that measures 1.21 metres in length and 33 centimetres in height.
- Four pairs of well-dressed male and female dancers, holding some object in one of their hands, are seen engaged in a ritualistic dance in the panel. Three pairs are shown hugging each other while the last pair is dancing keeping a distance between.
- All of them are decked with ornaments and different head gears. The female deity with a flower in the right hand seen between the first two pairs and the pot depicted between the last two pairs denote the ritualistic nature of the dance.

About the pillar:

- The pillar found at the spot has an inscribed base. The base has a Tamil inscription of Chola paleography with a few Grantha letters used in between. Though seven lines are visible, the last two are not readable.
- The inscription records that a certain Rejaladeviyar Sativinjey, queen of Iladevayan, had gifted that pillar.
- A sketchy figure of a Mugalinga is seen sculpted on the first half of the pillar, suggesting its conversion into a Linga.

11TH WORLD HINDI CONFERENCE

The 11th World Hindi Conference (WHC) is being organized in August 2018 in Mauritius by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India in association with the Government of Mauritius.

About the 11th World Hindi Conference:

- The event, held once in three years, is dedicated to Hindi language.
- The conference provides common platform to several Hindi scholars, writers and laureates from different parts of the world to contribute the language.
- The theme of the Conference is “Vaishvik Hindi Aur Bharatiy Sanskriti”.

About the World Hindi Conference:

- The decision to organize the 11th edition of the Conference in Mauritius was taken at the 10th World Hindi Conference held in Bhopal, India in September 2015.
- The first World Hindi Conference was held in 1975 in Nagpur, India. Since then, ten such Conferences have been held in different parts of the world.
- The MEA has also set up the World Hindi Secretariat in Mauritius. The main objective of the WHS is to promote Hindi as an international language and further its cause for recognition at the United Nations as an Official Language.

FESTIVAL OF BAISAKHI

Festival of Baisakhi is usually celebrated on April 13, but once in every 36 years the festival is celebrated on April 14.

- This year the occasion will be commemorated on April 14.
- It marks the advent of Baisakhi, which is an auspicious day primarily for the Sikh community, and is also known as Vaisakhi, Khalsa Sirjana Diwas, or the birth of Khalsa.
About Baisakhi:

- The word is derived from ‘Baisakh’, which is the second month of the Sikh calendar (Nanakshahi calendar). It signifies a new year of harvest for the community.

- The festival is primarily a thanksgiving day when farmers pay tribute to their deity for the harvest and pray for prosperity in future.

- Sikhs follow a tradition named Aawat Pauni on Vaisakhi. People gather to harvest wheat that grew in the winter. Drums are played and people recite Punjabi doha (couplet) to the tune while harvesting on Baisakhi day.

- Baisakhi also marks the birth of Khalsa, the collective body of all initiated Sikhs, also called the “Guru Panth” – the embodiment of the Guru. On March 30 in 1699, Guru Gobind Singh gathered his followers at his home in Anandpur Sahib, a city which is now home to several Gurdwaras. At this gathering, Khalsa was inaugurated.

- The festival of Baisakhi is celebrated amongst farmers as the festival of harvest. The month of April is considered as the harvesting time for the Rabi Crops, the crops which are sown during winter seasons.

- Since the photoperiod becomes larger, the short day plants start to flower and give fruits and grains, which are now ready to be harvested. Therefore, the farmers gear up in their fields and start harvesting the crops.

[Ref: The Hindu]

IIT-MADRAS TO MAP GOLCONDA’S BAGH-E-NAYA QILA

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) will be using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) to map the contours of the area around the Bagh-e-Naya Qila excavated garden inside the Golconda Fort.

- It has roped in the Indian Institute of Technology-Madras (IIT-M) to carry out the mapping.

What is Ground penetrating radar (GPR) technology?

- Ground-penetrating radar (GPR) is a geophysical method that uses radar pulses to image the subsurface.

- This non-destructive method uses electromagnetic radiation in the microwave band (UHF/VHF frequencies) of the radio spectrum, and detects the reflected signals from subsurface structures.

Mechanism:

- Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) uses a high frequency radio signal that is transmitted into the ground and reflected signals are returned to the receiver and stored on digital media. The computer measures the time taken for a pulse to travel to and from the target which indicates its depth and location.

- The reflected signals are interpreted by the system and displayed on the unit’s LCD panel.

Potential Applications:

- GPR can have applications in a variety of media, including rock, soil, ice, fresh water, pavements and structures.

- In the right conditions, practitioners can use GPR to detect subsurface objects, changes in material properties, and voids and cracks.

Limitations:

- The most significant performance limitation of GPR is in high-conductivity materials such as clay soils and soils that are salt contaminated.

- Performance is also limited by signal scattering in heterogeneous conditions (e.g. rocky soils).

About Bagh-e-Naya Qila:

- The Naya Qila garden inside Golconda Fort was built by successive rulers of the Deccan and is one of the few symmetrical gardens extant.

- There are strange figures and animals worked out of stone and stucco on the walls of the outer fort facing the Naya Qila.

- In 2014, when the ASI excavated the area after diverting the water flow, it discovered water channels, settlement tanks, walkways, fountains, gravity pumps, and a host of other garden relics.

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ADILABAD DOKRA AND WARANGAL DURRIES GET GI TAG

Two craft forms that are unique to Telangana were recently granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag by the GI registry in Chennai.

Adilabad Dokra:
- It is an ancient metal craft that is popular in the state’s tribal regions.
- The uniqueness of this art form is that no two sculptures are the same, as they are not made out of a pre-designed cast.
- The craftsmen of this art form belong to the Woj community, commonly referred to as Wojaris or Ohjas in the rural areas of Telangana.
- They use brass as their main material and an ancient casting technique called ‘cire perdue’. As part of this technique, the craftsmen use clay and design a model of the sculpture that they want to create. They wrap the clay with wax threads before baking the mould, so that the wax melts away and the molten metal is poured into the mould.
- The common items made by the craftsmen include small idols and statues of tribal deities, jewellery, bells, small-scale animal sculptures and others.

Warangal durries:
- In this style of durries, weavers create beautiful patterns and dye them using vegetable colours, which are washed in flowing water after the printing process.
- Warangal district became a renowned hub for weaving these rugs due to the availability of cotton, which is grown by farmers in the area.
- Currently, there are more than 2000 weaving community members present in Kothawada, Warangal in spinning Dhurrie.
- The products are exported mainly to UK, Germany along with few other European and African countries.

PHDCCI, INDIAN YOGA ASSN SIGN MOU TO PROMOTE TOURISM IN KRISHNA CIRCUIT

The PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) and the Indian Yoga Association (IYA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to facilitate interaction and cooperation between the two organisations to promote wellness, spiritual and cultural tourism in the Krishna Circuit.

About Krishna Circuit:
- Krishna Circuit is among the thirteen thematic circuits identified for development under Swadesh Darshan Scheme.
- Twelve destinations have been identified for development under Krishna circuit namely Dwarka (Gujarat), Nathdwara, Jaipur & Sikar (Rajasthan), Kurukshetra (Haryana), Mathura, Vrindavan, Nandgaon, Gokul, Barsana, & Govardhan (Uttar Pradesh) and Puri (Odisha).

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:
The Ministry of Tourism has launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme in 2014-15.
• Aim of the scheme is to develop theme based tourist circuits in the country on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner by synergizing efforts to focus on needs and concerns of all stakeholders to enrich tourist experience and enhance employment opportunities.

• Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, thirteen thematic circuits have been identified, for development namely:

1. North-East India Circuit,
2. Buddhist Circuit,
3. Himalayan Circuit,
4. Coastal Circuit,
5. Krishna Circuit,
6. Desert Circuit,
7. Tribal Circuit,
8. Eco Circuit,
9. Wildlife Circuit,
10. Rural Circuit,
11. Spiritual Circuit,
12. Ramayana Circuit and
13. Heritage Circuit.

Key features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

• The scheme is 100% centrally funded for the project components undertaken for public funding.

• To leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.

• Funding of individual project will vary from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant).

• A National Steering Committee (NSC) will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.

• A Mission Directorate headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/ UTs governments and other stake holders.

• PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

Objective of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

• Integrated development of Infrastructure in identified theme based circuits.

• Provide complete tourism experience with varied thematic circuits.

• Follow community-based development and pro-poor tourism approach.

• Creating awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increase in sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area.

• Promote local arts, culture, handicrafts, cuisine, etc to generate livelihoods in the identified regions.

• Harness tourism potential for its direct and multiplier effects in employment generation and economic development.

What is a Tourist Circuit?

• A Tourist Circuit is defined as a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of these are in the same town, village or city. At the same time, it would be ensured that they are not separated by a long distance. It should have well defined entry and exit points. A tourist who enters should get motivated to visit all the places identified in the circuit.

[Ref: The Hindu, Business Standard]
Scientists were initially planning to push the China’s Tiangong-1 satellite to Point Nemo. However, they could not do so as they lost control of it.

- China’s defunct Tiangong-1 space lab mostly broke up on re-entering the Earth’s atmosphere above the South Pacific.

About China’s Tiangong 1:

- The Tiangong 1 module is China’s first spacecraft designed for orbital docking tests and space research.
- Its name translates to “Heavenly Palace” in English.
- The Tiangong 1 space lab intended to serve as a space station module prototype for China, which is the third country (after Russia and the United States) to develop the capability to launch astronauts into space and return them safely to Earth.
- Tiangong-1 was originally planned to be decommissioned in 2013 but its mission was repeatedly extended. It reportedly stopped functioning in 2016 and wasn’t responding to commands from ground control, leading some experts to suggest the space laboratory was out of control.
- China has launched a second lab, Tiangong-2 in 2017 which continues to be operational.

- It is used as a graveyard for controlled re-entries and a place where space junk can be dropped safely.
- Point Nemo, named after the submarine captain in Jules Verne’s classic science fiction novel 20,000 Leagues Under The Sea, is about 2,688 kilometers from the nearest land – Pitcairn Islands – which lies to the north of this point. Also, Motu Nui — one of the Easter Islands — lies to the northeast and Maher Island, part of Antarctica, to the south.

Why this place?

- The region is safe to land all kinds of waste because there is also not much life in the water here. Coincidentally, it is also biologically not very diverse. So it gets used as a dumping ground — ‘space graveyard’ would be a more polite term — mainly for cargo spacecraft.

[Ref: Economic Times]

REMOVEDEBRIS SYSTEM: SPACE JUNK DEMO MISSION LAUNCHES

RemoveDebris system, a UK-led experiment to tackle space junk is set to head into orbit.
• The system is going to the International Space Station where astronauts are expected to set the experiment running in late May.

About RemoveDebris mission:

• RemoveDEBRIS is aimed at performing key Active Debris Removal (ADR) technology demonstrations (e.g. capture, deorbiting) representative of an operational scenario during a low-cost mission using novel key technologies for ADR.

• The project is co-ordinated by the Surrey Space Centre at the University of Surrey, UK, and involves the collaboration of a number of mission partners.

• The mission will comprise of a main satellite platform that once in orbit will deploy two CubeSats as artificial debris targets to demonstrate some of the technologies (net capture, harpoon capture, vision-based navigation, dragsail de-orbitation).

Growing problem of space debris:

• Scientists have warned that the growing problem of space debris is putting spacecraft and astronauts at risk.

• The latest data from the European Space Agency suggest some 7,500 tonnes of space debris now orbits Earth. It ranges from defunct satellites and rocket parts to nuts, bolts, shards of metal and even flecks of paint.

• Any collisions can cause a great deal of damage and generate even more pieces of debris.

• International space guidelines suggest that satellites should de-orbit themselves after 25 years – but it is difficult to ensure everyone plays by the rules.

[Ref: The Hindu]
The Mars 2020 rover mission is part of NASA’s Mars Exploration Program, a long-term effort of robotic exploration of the Red Planet.

The mission will seek signs of ancient Martian life by deploying rover for investigating evidence in place and by caching drilled samples of Martian rocks for potential future return to Earth.

It will carry out search by conducting drills for core samples that may contain proof of microbial life from the past.

The rover will also examine different methods to create oxygen from Mars’s atmosphere.

The mission is timed for a launch opportunity in July/August 2020 when Earth and Mars are in good positions relative to each other for landing on Mars.

[Ref: The Hindu]

NASA’S HUBBLE TELESCOPE CAPTURES IMAGE OF ICARUS, FARTHEST STAR EVER SEEN

NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope has discovered the farthest individual star ever seen — an enormous blue stellar body nicknamed Icarus located over halfway across the universe.

About the discovery:

- The star, harboured in a very distant spiral galaxy, is so far away that its light has taken nine billion years to reach Earth. It appears to us as it did when the universe was about 30% of its current age.

- The star, located in a distant spiral galaxy, is at least 100 times further away than any other star previously observed, with the exception of things like the huge supernova explosions that mark the death of certain stars.

What is Gravitational lensing?

The scientists took advantage of a phenomenon called “gravitational lensing” to spot the star.

- It involves the bending of light by massive galaxy clusters in the line of sight, which magnifies more distant celestial objects. This makes dim, faraway objects that otherwise would be undetectable, like an individual star, visible.

Significance of this discovery:

- These observations by astronomers from NASA provide a rare and detailed look at how stars evolve, especially the most luminous stars.

- Detecting the amplification of a single and pinpoint background star has provided a unique opportunity to test the nature of dark matter in the cluster.

About the Hubble Space Telescope:

- The Hubble Space Telescope is a space telescope that was launched into low Earth orbit in 1990 and remains in operation.

- It was built by the United States space agency NASA, with contributions from the European Space Agency.

- It is one of the largest and most versatile space telescopes, and is well known as both a vital research tool and a public relations boon for astronomy.

- Hubble is the only telescope designed to be serviced in space by astronauts.

- Expanding the frontiers of the visible Universe, the Hubble Space Telescope looks deep into space with cameras that can see across the entire optical spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet.

[Ref: The Hindu]

GOVT. BANS IMPORTS OF HORMONE OXYTOCIN

The Union government has banned imports of the hormone oxytocin to stop its misuse in the livestock industry, where activists say it causes hormonal imbalances and shortens the lives of milch animals.

- The government has also asked customs officials to step up vigilance against those likely to try and smuggle oxytocin into India.
The government has decided to rely on domestic production to satisfy requirements of the hormone.

**What is Oxytocin?**

- Oxytocin has also been dubbed the hug hormone, cuddle chemical, moral molecule, and the bliss hormone due to its effects on behavior, including its role in love and in female reproductive biological functions in reproduction.
- Oxytocin is a hormone that is made in the brain, in the hypothalamus. It is transported to, and secreted by, the pituitary gland, which is located at the base of the brain.
- It acts both as a hormone and as a brain neurotransmitter.
- The release of oxytocin by the pituitary gland acts to regulate two female reproductive functions: Childbirth and Breast-feeding.

**What are the concerns?**

- The drug’s abuse in animals shortens their lives and makes them barren sooner.
- Implications to human health are humongous, from reproductive complications to hormonal imbalances.
- Even its misuse is reported among trafficked children, injected to accelerate puberty among girls. It is also being misused to speed up deliveries for pregnant women in overcrowded government hospitals.

**Background:**

- A panel of top drug experts had recommended an import ban in February. It also recommended that sale be limited to registered government hospitals and clinics, a bar code system used on all forms of the drug to ensure tracking and prevent abuse.

[Ref: The Hindu]

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**NEW TYPE OF ANTIBIOTICS TO FIGHT DRUG RESISTANCE**

Researchers have discovered a new class of antibiotics—Odilorhabdins.

**Key facts:**

- Called odilorhabdins, or ODLs, the antibiotics are produced by symbiotic bacteria found in soil-dwelling nematode worms that colonise insects for food.
- The bacteria help to kill the insect, and secrete the antibiotic to keep competing bacteria away.

**How they function?**

- ODL like many clinically useful antibiotics, work by targeting ribosome. But ODL is unique because it binds to place on ribosome that has never been used by other known antibiotics. ODL after binding to ribosome disrupts ability of ribosome of bacterial cells to interpret and translate genetic code.
- ODL impact reading ability of ribosome and cause ribosome to make mistakes when it creates new protein. This miscoding corrupts cell with flawed proteins and causes bacterial cell to die.
Significance of the discovery:

- Many antibiotics slow bacterial growth, but antibiotics that actually kill bacteria such as ODLs called bactericidal antibiotics are rare. Odilorhabdins is unique and promising on two fronts: its unconventional source and its distinct way of killing bacteria, both of which suggest the compound may be effective at treating drug-resistant or hard-to-treat infections.

[Ref: The Hindu]

WORLD’S FIRST MICROFACTORY TO HELP TACKLE E-WASTE HAZARD

An Indian-origin scientist in Australia has launched the world’s first microfactory that can transform the components from electronic waste items such as smartphones and laptops into valuable materials for re-use.

What is a microfactory?

- A microfactory is one or a series of small machines and devices that uses patented technology to perform one or more functions in the reforming of waste products into new and usable resources.
- The e-waste microfactory that reforms discarded computers, mobile phones and printers has a number of small modules for this process and fits into a small site.

Use of e-waste:

- These transformed materials from the microfactory includes metal alloys and range of micromaterials.
- These can be used in industrial-grade ceramics and specific quality plastics from computers, printers and other discarded sources can be used to produce filaments suitable for 3D-printing applications.
- The metal alloys can be used as metal components for new or existing manufacturing processes.

Significance:

- The e-waste microfactory has the potential to reduce the rapidly growing problem of vast amounts of electronic waste causing environmental harm and going into landfill.
- It can also turn many types of consumer waste such as glass, plastic and timber into commercial materials and products.

[Ref: The Hindu]

IIT-DELHI LAUNCHES FIRST 5G RADIO LAB

In an effort to establish India as a key global player in the standardisation, research and development and manufacturing of 5G equipment, a Massive MIMO radio laboratory has been set up at IIT Delhi.

- It will be the first of its kind 5G lab in the country and has been set-up at Bharti School of Telecommunication Technology and Management.

What is MIMO Technology?

- Multiple-input multiple-output, or MIMO, is a radio communications technology or RF technology that is being mentioned and used in many new technologies these days.
- Wi-Fi, LTE; Long Term Evolution, and many other radio, wireless and RF technologies are using the new MIMO wireless technology to provide increased link capacity and spectral efficiency combined with improved link reliability using what were previously seen as interference paths.
- MIMO technology uses a natural radio-wave phenomenon called multipath. With multipath, transmitted information bounces off walls, ceilings, and other objects, reaching the receiving antenna multiple times at different angles and slightly different times.
- In the past, multipath caused interference and slowed down wireless signals. With multipath, MIMO technology uses multiple, smart transmitters and receivers with an added spatial dimension, increasing performance and range.

Significance of MIMO technology:

- In Massive MIMO technology, several antennas are deployed at the base station as compared to only a few antennas in 3G/4G. This large antenna array at the base station allows the network to communicate reliably with a very large number of
mobile terminals simultaneously at the same time and on the same frequency channel.

- It will help curb the emittance of radiation harmful to our health and also will allow less radio interference for better communication.

**What is 5G?**

- 5G is wireless communication technology based on third-generation partnership project (3GPP).
- It is next generation mobile networks technology after 4G LTE networks.
- It is expected to offer enhanced mobile broadband (eMBB) through R15 repeaters that can cater to coverage requirements.
- The 5G wireless technology will offer far greater upload and download speed i.e. 100 times faster internet data speed than current 4G networks.
- It has potential to demonstrate spectral efficiency and potential for diversified services such as Internet of Things (IoT) and augmented reality (AR)/virtual reality (VR).

[Ref: The Hindu]

**PSLV-C41 SUCCESSFULLY Launches IRNSS-1I Navigation Satellite**

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has launched the IRNSS-1I satellite through its PSLV-C41.

- It was the 20th flight of PSLV-XL version.
- This satellite will transmit signals for the accurate determination of position, navigation and time.
- Like all other IRNSS satellites, IRNSS-1I will also carry two payloads – navigation payload and ranging payload – the former to transmit signals for determining position, velocity and time and the latter for determining the frequency range of the satellite.

**Background:**

- Navigation satellite IRNSS-1I has been launched to replace India’s first navigation satellite IRNSS-1A, whose three Rubidium atomic clocks had stopped working two years ago.
- The malfunctioning of the Europe-imported atomic clocks in IRNSS-1A made it difficult to measure precise locational data from the satellite. When the time signal is missing, getting true positional accuracy becomes a problem. Therefore, Isro felt a need to replace faulty satellite IRNSS-1A.

**About IRNSS:**

- The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) is an independent satellite-based regional system developed indigenously by India on par with US-based GPS, Russia’s Glonass and Galileo developed by Europe. It was renamed “Navic” (Navigation with Indian Constellation).
- The NAVIC system is constellation of seven satellites, (namely IRNSS-1I, 1B, 1C, 1D, 1E, 1F and 1G) of which three are geostationary and four are non-geostationary. It provides location tracking within 20 meters of actual positions, especially in 1,500 km area around the country’s borders. The indigenous satellite-based navigation system under one’s control and command is considered a deep strategic asset.
- The NAVIC navigation system has both civilian and military uses. Moreover, it helps not just in land navigation but also in marine and aerial navigation. It offers wide services like terrestrial and marine navigation, disaster management, vehicle tracking and fleet management visual and voice navigation for drivers.

www.iastoppers.com
Background:

- The need for indigenous navigation system on par with GPS was felt soon after Kargil conflict (1999), when India desperately needed services of satellite-based navigation system, but did not have one of its own. The US system was not available at the time.

- Only US (named GPS) and Russia (Glosnass) currently have fully operational GPS systems at present. China (Beidou) and Europe (Galileo) are still in process of deploying their full systems. Japan is also planning a similar project with three of its own satellites. Japan’s system will be called the QZSS.

**TASK FORCE FOR FAST-TRACKING UNMANNED AERIAL VEHICLE (UAV) TECHNOLOGY**

The Union Government has constituted 13-member task force to prepare road map and fast-track implementation of unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology or drones in the country.

- It will be headed by Minister of State (MoS) for Civil Aviation Jayant Sinha and will have representatives from government, PSUs, industry and sectoral experts.

- The task force will prepare roadmap, including outcomes, timelines, implementation and review mechanism and measurable metrics for implementation of UAV technology.

**Draft Regulation on Civil Use of Drones:**

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation, in November 2017, announced draft regulations on civil use of Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, commonly known as Drones.

- As per the draft, all commercial categories of drones except those in the Nano category and those operated by government security agencies, will have to be registered by DGCA in the form of Unique Identification Number (UIN).

- The Mini and above categories will require Unmanned Aircraft Operator Permit (UAOP), but the model aircraft up to maximum take-off weight of 2 Kgs flown below 200 feet inside educational institution premises will not require UIN/UAOP.

- The draft regulation also mandates remote pilots to undergo requisite training, except for Nano and micro categories. As per the draft regulation, the Micro and above category drones will have to be equipped with RFID/SIM, return to home option and anti-collision lights.

- The draft regulation also specifies certain restricted areas for operations of drones. Drones cannot be operated within an area of 5km from airport, within permanent or temporary Prohibited, Restricted and Danger Areas as notified by AAI in AIP and without prior approval over densely populated areas or over or near an area affecting public safety or where emergency operations are underway and within 50 km from international border and beyond 500 m (horizontal) into sea along the coastline.

[Ref: PIB]

**NASA TO STUDY HOW TINY SEA CREATURES AFFECT EARTH’S CLIMATE**

In a first, NASA is conducting a study of the world’s largest phytoplankton bloom in the North Atlantic, named the North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) mission, to see how the tiny sea critters influence the climate in every season.

- It is the first research mission to conduct an integrated study of all four distinct phases of the world’s largest phytoplankton bloom.

**About NAAMES Mission:**

- The North Atlantic Aerosols and Marine Ecosystems Study (NAAMES) is an interdisciplinary investigation resolving key processes controlling marine ecosystems and aerosols that are essential to our understanding of Earth system function and future change.

- NAAMES is funded by the NASA Earth Venture Suborbital Program and is the first EV-S mission focused on studying the coupled ocean ecosystem and atmosphere.

- NAAMES consists of four, combined ship and aircraft field campaigns that are each aligned to a specific event in the annual plankton lifecycle.
• NAAMES studies the world’s largest plankton bloom and how it gives rise to small organic particles that leave the ocean and end up in the atmosphere, ultimately influencing clouds and climate.

Significance of the mission:

• NAAMES is a five year investigation to resolve key processes controlling ocean system function, their influences on atmospheric aerosols and clouds and their implications for climate. Observations obtained during four, targeted ship and aircraft measurement campaigns, combined with the continuous satellite and in situ ocean sensor records, will enable improved predictive capabilities of Earth system processes and will inform ocean management and assessment of ecosystem change.

North Atlantic plankton bloom:

• The North Atlantic plankton bloom is among the most conspicuous biological events annually recorded by satellite ocean color measurements, yet even fundamental controls on the bloom’s magnitude and interannual variability are controversial.

• The bloom climax is one event within an annual plankton cycle that essentially oscillates between a decreasing-biomass phase beginning in the summer and an increasing-biomass phase beginning in Winter-Spring and ending with the bloom climax in Spring.

[Ref: The Hindu]

WORLD’S FIRST CONTACT LENS THAT AUTOMATICALLY DARKENS WHEN EXPOSED TO BRIGHT LIGHT

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved use of Acuvue Oasys Contact Lenses with Transitions Light Intelligent Technology, world’s first contact lens that automatically darkens when exposed to bright light.

• It is first of its kind contact lens to incorporate same technology that is used in eyeglasses that automatically darken in the sun.

• They can be used by people with certain degrees of astigmatism, an abnormal curvature of the eye.

About the technology:

• These contact lenses contain photochromic additive that adapts amount of visible light filtered to eye based on amount of ultra-violet (UV) light to which they are exposed. This additive slightly darkens lenses in bright sunlight that automatically return to regular tint when exposed to normal or dark lighting conditions.

[Ref: Times of India]

SPACEX ROCKET SUCCESSFULLY LAUNCHES NASA’S TESS INTO SPACE

TESS, NASA’s planet-hunting satellite was recently launched on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral, Florida.

About TESS mission:

The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is an upcoming NASA mission that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth’s sky.

• TESS is designed to carry out first spaceborne all-sky transiting exoplanet survey.

• It is equipped with four wide-angle telescopes and associated charge-coupled device (CCD) detectors.

• The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets.

• TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure
 Scientists have proposed Earth BioGenome project, a massive project to sequence, catalog and analyze the genomes of all eukaryotic species on the planet.

What are Eukaryotes?

- Eukaryotes include all organisms except bacteria and archaea.
- It includes plants, animals, fungi and other organisms whose cells have a nucleus that houses their chromosomal DNA.
- There are an estimated 10-15 million eukaryotic species on Earth.

About the Earth BioGenome Project:

The central goal of the Earth BioGenome Project (EBP) is to understand the evolution and organization of life on our planet by sequencing and functionally annotating the genomes of 1.5 million known species of eukaryotes.

- The project also seeks to reveal some of the estimated 10 to 15 million unknown species of eukaryotes, most of which are single cell organisms, insects and small animals in the oceans.
- The Project also plans to capitalize on the “citizen scientist” movement to collect specimens.
- The initiative is led by a coordinating council with members from the United States, the European Union, China, Brazil, Canada, Australia and some African countries.
- This will take 10 years, cost $4.7 billion and require more than 200 petabytes of digital storage capacity.

Benefits of the project:

- The benefits of the project promise to be a complete transformation of the scientific understanding of life on Earth and a vital new resource for global innovations in medicine, agriculture, conservation, technology and genomics.
- The project is also being seen essential for developing new drugs for infectious and inherited diseases as well as creating new biological synthetic fuels, biomaterials, and food sources for growing human population.
The project will likely enable the development of new technologies, such as portable genetic sequencers and instrumented drones that can go out, identify samples in the field, and bring those samples back to the laboratory.

[Ref: The Hindu]

NITI AAYOG ANNOUNCES THE LAUNCH OF ATAL NEW INDIA CHALLENGES

The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) under the NITI Aayog has launched the Atal New India Challenge.

About the Atal New India Challenge:


- Under the Atal New India Challenge, AIM will invite prospective innovators/MSMEs/start-ups to design market-ready products, using cutting edge technologies or prototypes across 17 identified focus areas such as Climate Smart Agriculture, Smart Mobility, Predictive Maintenance of Rolling Stock, Waste Management etc.

- Applicants showing capability, intent and potential to productize technologies will be awarded grants up to Rs. One crore. This grant will be further supplemented by mentoring, handholding, incubating and other support as needed at various stages of commercialisation, while generating wider deployment for the product.

About Atal Innovation Mission (AIM):

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is Government of India’s flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.

Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) create innovators, Atal Incubation Centre and support to Established Incubation Centre will take the innovations to the market and a network of Incubators shall help create enterprises around these innovations.

[Ref: PIB]

BHABHA KAVACH: BARC OFFERS FIRST INDIGENOUS BULLETPROOF VEST

It is an armour panel developed by BARC which gives personal protection against bullets of different threat levels.

Key features:

- Bhabha Kavach made up of BARC Nano-Sheets are lighter in weight with reduced trauma level with respect to the existing jackets.

- The jacket is made using extremely hard boron carbide ceramics that is hot-pressed with carbon nano-tubes and composite polymer.

About Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC):

- The BARC is India’s premier nuclear research facility based in Mumbai, Maharashtra.

- It is multi-disciplinary research center with extensive infrastructure for advanced research and development.

- Its R&D covers entire spectrum of nuclear science, engineering and related areas.

- BARC’s core mandate is to sustain peaceful applications of nuclear energy, primarily for power generation.

[Ref: PIB]

INDIAN NATIONAL CENTRE FOR OCEAN INFORMATION SERVICE (INCOIS)

In Kerala, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) is planning to provide real-time information on the market price of fishes and allied news through the GPS-enabled GEO Augmented Navigation (GAGAN).
About GAGAN:

GAGAN was developed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) at a cost of Rs. 774 crore, over 15 years.

- GAGAN will provide augmentation service for the GPS over the country, the Bay of Bengal, South East Asia and Middle East and up to Africa.
- Some of its benefits are improved efficiency, direct routes, increased fuel savings, approach with vertical guidance at runways, significant cost savings because of the withdrawal of ground aids and reduced workload of flight crew and air traffic controllers.
- Gagan works by augmenting and relaying data from GPS satellites with the help of two augmentation satellites and 15 earth-based reference stations.
- The system utilises the satellite-based wide area augmentation system (SBAS) technology which has been developed by Raytheon.

Significance of the system:

India is the fourth country to offer space-based satellite navigation services to the aviation sector.

- The system bridges the gap in the coverage areas of the European Union’s European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) and Japan’s Multi-functional Satellite Augmentation System (MSAS).
- The system would be available for the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).
- It is intended to serve as a low-cost substitute for instrument landing system (ILS) and provide very accurate route guidance for the aircraft to save time and fuel.
- The guided approach landing with the help of GAGAN would immediately benefit nearly 50 airports in India.

About Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS)

INCOIS is an autonomous organization of the Union Government, under the Ministry of Earth Sciences is a unit of the Earth System Science Organization (ESSO).

- It was established in 1999 and is headquartered in Pragathi Nagar, Hyderabad.
- Its mandated is to provide the best possible ocean information and advisory services to government agencies, society, industry and the scientific community through sustained ocean observations and constant improvements through systematic and focussed research.

[Ref: The Hindu]

GAIA CREATES RICHEST STAR MAP OF OUR GALAXY – AND BEYOND

ESA’s Gaia mission has produced the richest star catalogue to date, including high-precision measurements of nearly 1.7 billion stars and revealing previously unseen details of our home Galaxy.

- Preliminary analysis of this phenomenal data reveals fine details about the make-up of the Milky Way’s stellar population and about how stars move, essential information for investigating the formation and evolution of our Galaxy.

About GAIA:

Gaia is an ambitious mission to chart a three-dimensional map of our Galaxy, the Milky Way, in the process revealing the composition, formation and evolution of the Galaxy.

- The mission relies on a huge human collaboration to make sense of a large volume of highly complex data.
- It demonstrates the need for long-term projects to guarantee progress in space science and technology and to implement even more daring scientific missions of the coming decades.
Launched on December 19, 2013, the Gaia satellite both rotates and orbits around the Earth, while surveying the sky with its two telescopes.

Gaia will provide unprecedented positional and radial velocity measurements with the accuracies needed to produce a stereoscopic and kinematic census of about one billion stars in our Galaxy and throughout the Local Group. This amounts to about 1 per cent of the Galactic stellar population.

[Ref: Economic Times]

NASA'S HUBBLE CAPTURED FIRST IMAGE OF SURVIVING COMPANION TO SUPERNOVA

NASA's Hubble Space Telescope has captured the first image of a surviving companion to a supernova, a compelling evidence that some supernovas originate in double-star systems.

Background:

- Seventeen years ago, astronomers had witnessed a supernova go off 40 million light-years away in the galaxy called NGC 7424, located in the southern constellation Grus, the Crane.

- The image of the companion star was seen in the fading afterglow of that supernova, called SN 2001ig.

- SN 2001ig is categorised as a Type IIb stripped-envelope supernova. This type of supernova is unusual because most, but not all, of the hydrogen is gone prior to the explosion.

About the Hubble Space Telescope:

- The Hubble Space Telescope is a large telescope in space. NASA launched Hubble in 1990.

- It was built by the United States space agency NASA, with contributions from the European Space Agency.

- Hubble is the only telescope designed to be serviced in space by astronauts.

- Expanding the frontiers of the visible Universe, the Hubble Space Telescope looks deep into space with cameras that can see across the entire optical spectrum from infrared to ultraviolet.

[Ref: Economic Times]

NASA SCRAPS A LUNAR SURFACE MISSION

NASA has cancelled Resource Prospector Mission, a mission to assay the resources that may be available to humans on the moon.

About the Resource Prospector Mission:

- The Resource Prospector mission would have sent a rover to the moon's polar regions to learn about water and other deposits on and just beneath the lunar surface.

- The Resource Prospector mission consisted of a lander and a solar-powered rover equipped with a drill. The rover would have scouted the lunar surface, digging up soil for analysis.

Significance of the mission:

- Scientists know that water ice exists on the moon, but the Resource Prospector would have provided scientists with a more complete understanding of these deposits.

- Such knowledge is crucial in expanding a human presence on the moon. Lunar ice can potentially be melted and split into oxygen and hydrogen, providing a local source of water, oxygen and rocket propellant.

- Not only would this help make human activities more self-sustaining, but it would also dramatically reduce launch costs, because much of these vital resources could be produced on site.

[Ref: Economic Times]

KEY FACTS FOR PRELIMS

“THANK YOU INDIA” CAMPAIGN 2018

- To mark the 60th year of the arrival of the spiritual leader Dalai Lama to India, the exiled government of Tibet has launched a year-long "Thank you India" campaign.

- Apart from the exhibitions, film screening and performances by the Tibetan Institute of
Performing Arts, the festival would also see panel discussion on "India and Tibet: Ancient Ties, Current Bonds".

**WALONG TRI-JUNCTION: WHY IN NEWS?**

- Indian troops have increased their patrolling at a tri-junction of India, China and Myanmar to prevent a repeat of a Doklam-like standoff.
- The tri-junction is located around 50 km from Walong, India’s easternmost town in Arunachal Pradesh, near the Tibet region.
- It is situated on the bank of Lohit river.

**“ACCESSIBLE TOURISM”**

- Nepal has launched its first accessible trekking trail for differently abled and elders in Pokhara city.
- Accessible tourism or inclusive tourism refers to an emerging concept referring to travel that is accessible to all people, with disabilities or not, including those with mobility, hearing, sight, cognitive, or intellectual and psychosocial disabilities, older persons and those with temporary disabilities.

**RUPASHREE SCHEME**

- West Bengal government has launched a scheme called “Rupashree” to ensure safe future for young women.
- Under this scheme government provides one-time financial support for marriage of poor girls. Before marriage an amount of Rs 25,000 will be credited to girl’s bank account.
- While previous Kanyashree scheme promotes education among women, Rupashree scheme complements it with marriage assistance.

**MALAYSIA APPROVES LAW AGAINST FAKE NEWS**

- Malaysia has approved a law banning fake news ahead of elections.
- The law covers all media and extends even to foreigners outside Malaysia.
- The law makes “fake news” punishable with a maximum six-year jail term.

**MULTI MODAL LOGISTIC PARK AT BALLI INAUGURATED**

- Multi Modal Logistics Park at Balli Station near Madgaon in Goa was recently inaugurated.
- The part is located on Konkan Railway route.
- It will benefit trade and industry from economic transport solutions and state of art facilities.
- It will generate additional source of revenue for Konkan Railway.

**STARTUPBLINK REPORT**

- According to report released by global startup ecosystem map Startupblink, India was ranked 37th out of 125 countries in global startup ecosystem in 2017.
- Startupblink is a global startup ecosystem map with tens of thousands of registered startups, coworking spaces, and accelerators.
- Its report prepared in association with ANSYS Startup Program measures startup ecosystem strength and activity.
- India ranked below Latin American countries Mexico and Chile which stood at 30 and 33 respectively.
- Bengaluru, New Delhi, and Mumbai featured in the list top cities in the global ranking.

**MOUS ON DEFENCE SALARY PACKAGE**
Indian Army has signed Memorandum of Undertaking (MoU) with HDFC Bank on the Defence Salary Package.

This MoU will benefit large number of serving and retired Indian Army personnel providing them an opportunity to access modern banking facilities.

Currently Indian Army has MoUs on Defence Salary Package with 11 public and private sector banks.

**PURCHASING MANAGERS’ INDEX (PMI)**

- PMI is an indicator of business activity-both in the manufacturing and services sectors.
- It is a survey-based measure that asks respondents about changes in their perception of some key business variables from month before.
- PMI is usually released at start of month, much before most of official data on industrial output, manufacturing and GDP growth is made available. It is, therefore, considered a good leading indicator of economic activity.
- Manufacturing growth measured by PMI is considered good indicator of industrial output.
- It is calculated separately for manufacturing and services sectors and then composite index is constructed.

**9TH INDIA, JAPAN, US TRILATERAL MEETING**

- The 9th India-Japan-US trilateral meeting was held in New Delhi and was represented by senior diplomats by three countries.
- It held consultations on regional and global issues of mutual interest and focussed on connectivity, counter-terrorism and other regional and global issues of common concern.

**INDIA BECOMES SECOND LARGEST MANUFACTURER OF CRUDE STEEL**

- According to Steel Users Federation of India (SUFI), India has overtaken Japan to become world’s second largest producer of crude steel in February 2018.
- China is the largest producer of crude steel in the world, accounting for more than 50% of the production.
- Earlier in 2015, India had overtaken US to become third largest producer of crude steel.

**CABINET APPROVES CLOSURE OF BURN STANDARD COMPANY LIMITED**

- The Union Cabinet has approved closure of Central Public Sector Enterprise (CPSE) Burn Standard Company Ltd (BSCL) under Ministry of Railways.
- This decision was taken in view of continuous poor physical and financial performance of company for more than decade despite financial assistance and other support from government and low probability of its revival in future.
- The company was engaged in manufacturing and repair of wagons and production of steel.

**INDIA-UAE MOU ON TECHNICAL COOPERATION IN RAIL SECTOR**

- The Union Cabinet has approved Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between India and United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Technical Cooperation in Rail Sector.

**Location of UAE:**

- The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federal absolute monarchy sovereign state in Western Asia at the southeast end of the Arabian Peninsula on the Persian Gulf, bordering Oman to the east and Saudi Arabia to the south, as well as sharing maritime borders with Qatar to the west and Iran to the north.
SAMTA DIWAS

- Samta Diwas is the celebration of birth anniversary of nationalist politician Babu Jagjivan Ram.
- It is celebrated on April 5, 2018 marks his 111th birth anniversary.
- The day emphasizes on bringing about equality among all spheres of the society.

ABOUT BABU JAGJIVAN RAM:

- He took part in India’s independence struggle and was founder member of the All India Depressed Classes League, an organisation dedicated to attaining equality for untouchables. He had also led the rural labour movement.
- He focused on the harsh rules of the society and pressed for the abolition of this society. His 50 years as a MP is a world record.
- His beliefs were of great significance in the past era as there was predominance of multi layered society.

UTTAM APP FOR COAL QUALITY MONITORING

- The Ministry of Coal has launched UTTAM (Unlocking Transparency by Third Party Assessment of Mined Coal) Application for coal quality monitoring.
- The app aims to ensure transparency and efficiency in coal quality monitoring process and bring coal governance closer to people.
- The Ministry of Coal and Coal India Limited (CIL) has developed the App.
- UTTAM App ensures accountability, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency in coal ecosystem. It provides a platform for monitoring of sampling and coal dispatches.

5 APRIL: NATIONAL MARITIME DAY:

- The National Maritime Day (NMD) is observed every year on 5 April to commemorate the maiden voyage of the first Indian owned ship “SS Loyalty” (the first ship of the Scindia Steam Navigation Company Ltd) sailed from Bombay to London on 5th April 1919.
- It was crucial step for India shipping history when sea routes were controlled by the British. It marked red letter day in maritime history of India, a country known for its seafaring abilities since ancient days.
- This year is it is 55th edition of NMD and theme is “Indian Ocean-An Ocean of opportunity”.
- The NMD is being observed annually since 1964. It provides opportunity to spread awareness in supporting safe and environmentally sound commerce between continents across the world.
- It should be noted that World Maritime Day (WMD) is observed on September 29 to highlight the importance of shipping safety, maritime security and the marine environment.
- An award called Varuna is conferred to those who have made an outstanding contribution to the Indian maritime sector on this day.

GOVERNMENT CONSTITUTES COMMITTEE TO REGULATE NEWS PORTALS

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B) has constituted 10-member committee to regulate online portals, including news websites, entertainment sites and media aggregators.
- The committee will include secretaries of departments of Home, Electronics and Information and Technology, Legal Affairs and Industrial Policy and Promotion.

Recently, Pathankot gets Operationalized as the 21st airport under UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) – RCS (Regional Connectivity Scheme).
• The CEO of MyGov and representative each of Press Council of India (PCI) and National Broadcasters’ Association (NBA) will also be part of committee.

EXERCISE GAGANSHAKTI 2018

• Indian Air Force (IAF) is going to conduct Exercise Gaganshakti 2018, biggest air combat exercise along Pakistan, China borders.

• The aim of this exercise is real time coordination, deployment and employment of air power in short and intense battle scenario. Though it is IAF centric exercise, it will also be executed keeping in mind “Joint Operational Doctrine” so that requirements of other services are also met.

CHAKRAVAT HADR EXERCISE

• Kochi along with Indian Navy is hosting multi-agency rescue exercise- Chakravat.

• It is for the first time that the yearly exercise is being conducted in Kochi.

• It is a multi-agency humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) exercise to review the response mechanism in the event of a cyclonic storm.

• Chakravat meaning ‘cyclone’ will see participation by the three Services, the Coast Guard, State administration, State Disaster Management Authority, National Disaster Response Force, Fisheries Department, Coastal Police, and members of the fishing community.

SAHYOG-HYEOBLYEOG 2018

• Recently, India, South Korea joint anti-piracy, search and rescue exercise ‘Sahyog-Hyeoblyeog 2018’ was conducted in Bay of Bengal off the Chennai coast in Tamil Nadu.

• The joint exercise is part of a proposed establishment of a MoU between the two Coast Guards to improve maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

• The recently held exercise included scenarios of the hijacking of a merchant vessel and its subsequent rescue, interdiction of a pirate vessel, cross boarding, external fire fighting and the SAR (search and rescue) demonstration.

GLOBAL LOGISTICS SUMMIT 2018

• The Global Logistics Summit (GLS-2018) was held in New Delhi to improve logistics and connectivity which are vital for increasing intra-state and international trade flows.

• The summit was organised by Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry along with Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) and World Bank Group.

• It provided platform to hold discussions for global experts, academics, government officials and private sector and industry representatives.

7 APRIL: WORLD HEALTH DAY:

• The World Health Day (WHD) is observed every year on 7 April to mark anniversary of founding of World Health Organization (WHO) on this day in 1948.

• The theme for year 2018 is “Universal Health Coverage: Health For All”.

• On this day in 1948, the first World Health Assembly was held Geneva, Switzerland. The World Health Assembly decided to celebrate 7 April of each year with effect from 1950 as the World Health Day.


09-3X- DYNAMIC TAMPING EXPRESS
• It is latest high output integrated tamping machine having multiple functions, so far being carried out by different machines.

• It can measure pre and post track geometry, correct track to required geometry tamp three sleepers simultaneously, stabilize and measure post tamping track parameters under load to ensure quality of work done.

• This eliminates need for separate stabilisation machine which reduces operating costs and track possession time.

• This machine can also vibrate and compact loose stone ballast after tamping for safe movements of trains.

Why in news?

• The Indian Railways has inducted three O9-3x Dynamic Tamping Express machines for improved mechanised Track Maintenance. This advanced technology simulator is presently only available in five countries including India.

ICICI BANK BECOMES FIRST TO ENABLE SWIFT’S CROSS-BORDER PAYMENT

• India’s largest private sector lender ICICI Bank became first Indian bank to go live on SWIFT’s (Society for World Interbank Financial Telecommunication System) Global Payment Innovation (GPI), an improved cross-border payments service.

• It improves customer experience by increasing speed, transparency and automatically provides status updates to all GPI banks involved in any GPI payment chain.

• SWFIT GPI was launched in May 2017 to help banks to track their global transactions at all times, keeping full vigil on payments activity.

• It covers all payment instructions sent across network, enabling GPI banks to track all their SWIFT payment instructions at all times, and giving them full visibility over all their payments activity.

RH300 SOUNDING ROCKET

• The RH-300 MKII sounding rocket developed by IRSO’s Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) was successfully launched from Thumba Equatorial Rocket Launching Station in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala.

• The rocket was launched by VSSC under Sounding Rocket Experiment (SOUrex) programme for atmospheric studies.

• It utilizes this rocket to study Equatorial E and lower ionosphere regions of atmosphere.

• The study will enrich available atmospheric data and refine models used for tropical weather prediction.

• The objective of experiment is to measure neutral wind in dynamo region (80-120 km) of equatorial ionosphere using indigenously developed Electron Density and Neutral Wind Probe (ENWi).

• It will also perform cross-validation using an independent Tri Methyl Aluminium (TMA) release technique.

GOBARDHAN YOJNA

• The Union Government will launch GOBARdhana (Galvanising Organic Bio Agro Resources) Yojana, a central government scheme nationally from Karnal district of Haryana by end of April 2018.

• The scheme was announced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his 2018 budget speech.

• The scheme focuses on managing and converting cattle dung and solid waste from farms and fields to useful compost, biogas and bio-CNG.

• It will also help in keeping villages clean and generate energy while increasing income of farmers and cattle herders.

• The central and state governments will provide funds in the ratio of 60:40, which will depend upon the number of households in villages. They will also provide assistance of experts for setting up the plants.

• Gram panchayats will play key role in implementation of this scheme under which bio-gas
plants from cattle dung will be set up at individual or community level and also at level of Self Help Groups (SHGs) and NGOs like Gaushalas.

**RAILWAY LINK BETWEEN INDIA AND NEPAL**

- India will build a strategic railway link between Raxaul in Bihar and Kathmandu in Nepal to facilitate people-to-people contact and bulk movement of goods.
- The proposal to link Raxaul to Kathmandu gains significance as it comes nearly two years after China, in March 2016, agreed to construct a strategic railway link with Nepal through Tibet with an apparent aim of reducing Kathmandu’s dependence on India.
- It also comes in the backdrop of recent Chinese linkages with Nepal as it took on building three highways to be completed by 2020.

**DESERT TIGER 5**

- It is a joint military exercise between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Malaysia.
- It is aimed at sharing expertise and enhancing joint military actions.
- The drill was also aimed at raising the level of performance and combat efficiency and working together based on a strategy to improve the overall ability and combat readiness of the ground forces.

**SOFT DRINKS SUGAR TAX**

- The Soft Drinks Industry Levy also known as soft drinks sugar tax or sin tax or sugar tax came into force in United Kingdom as part of government’s plan to combat obesity and sugar related disease.
- With introduction of sugar levy, UK joins few countries, including Mexico, France and Norway that have introduced similar fat taxes.
- The move aims to help tackle childhood obesity. Sugar-sweetened soft drinks are now the single biggest source of dietary sugar for children and teenagers.
- The levy will be applied to manufacturers in Britain and whether they pass it on to consumers or not will be up to them.
- It will be not applicable to fruit juices as they don’t contain added sugar and neither to drinks that have high milk content.

**INDIA SLAPS ANTI-DUMPING DUTY ON IMPORT OF PHOSPHORUS PENTOXIDE**

- The government has imposed anti-dumping duty on import of Phosphorus pentoxide from China to protect the domestic manufacturers from cheap shipments.
- Phosphorus Pentoxide is used as a powerful desiccant and dehydrating agent and is a useful building block and reagent in the chemical industry.
- Phosphorus pentoxide is not flammable.
- It reacts vigorously with water and water-containing substances like wood or cotton, liberates much heat and may even cause fire. It is corrosive to metal.

**UZHAVAN APP**

- Tamil Nadu Government launched bi-lingual ‘Uzhavan’ (farmer) mobile application in a bid to use technology for benefit of farmers.
- The app will allow ryots to have access to nine types of services, including details about their crop insurance.
- It can be used by farmers to get information on farm subsidies, book farm equipment and related infrastructure.
- It will also help them to get details on their crop insurance, besides receiving weather forecast for next four days.
- It will also provide information on available stocks of seeds and fertilisers in local government and private stores.
AMMA BIO-FERTILISER SCHEME

- Tamil Nadu Government launched 'Amma Bio-Fertiliser' scheme named after late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa.
- It is aimed at better management of nature farming and help boost and maintain soil fertility.

RBI SWITCHES BACK TO GDP SCALE TO MEASURE ECONOMY

The Reserve Bank of India switched back to gross domestic product (GDP) model from the gross value added (GVA) methodology to provide its estimate of economic activity in the country.

- The switch to GDP is mainly to conform to international standards and global best practices.

GVA vs. GDP model:

- The GVA methodology gives picture of state of economic activity from producers’ side or supply side whereas the GDP model gives picture from consumers’ side or demand perspective.
- Globally, performance of most economies is gauged in terms of GDP model. This is also approach followed by multilateral institutions, international analysts and investors because it facilitates easy cross-country comparisons.

Background:

- Government had started analysing growth estimates using GVA methodology from January 2015 and had also changed the base year to 2018 from January 2018.
- Even the Central Statistical Office (CSO) has started using GDP model as supply-side measure of economic activity as main measure of economic activities since January 15, 2018.

[Ref: The Hindu, Times of India]

GANGA HARITEEMA YOJANA

- Uttar Pradesh Government has launched Ganga Hariteema Yojana (also known as Ganga Greenery scheme) in 27 districts of the state located on the bank of river Ganga.
- The scheme aims at enhancing green cover in catchment areas of river Ganga and control land erosion.
- Under it tree plantation will be carried out in 1 Km areas from banks of river.
- General people will also be encouraged for tree plantation on their private lands under ‘One Person One Tree’ slogan.
- Department of Forest has been nominated as nodal department for the scheme.
- High power committee under chairmanship of Chief Minister will monitor implementation of scheme.
- The scheme will be carried out by September 16, 2018 which is observed as Ozone Day.

UTTARAKHAND’S SECOND MEGA FOOD PARK

- Uttarakhand’s second mega food park has been set up at Udham Singh Nagar.
- The park- M/s Himalayan Mega Food Park Private Ltd has been set up at a cost of Rs 99.96 crore and will benefit around 25,000 farmers in this as well as neighbouring districts.
- The first Mega Food Park in the state located at Haridwar has already become operational.

DELHI’S IGI AIRPORT AMONG THE TOP 20 BUSIEST AIRPORTS:

- As per Airports Council International’s (ACI) World Airport Traffic Forecasts, the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport, operated by the Delhi International Airport Ltd, has emerged as one of the busiest airports in the world and is in fact among the top 20.
- Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL) was ranked the busiest airport in the world.
- As per the latest statistics of Airports Council International, IGI Airport jumped six notches to be...
in the top 20 busiest airports in the world for 2017 in terms of traffic volume. It jumped from 22nd rank in 2016 to 16th.

- Delhi has also been ranked first in airport service quality for airports above 40 million passengers per annum along with the Mumbai airport.

LOCATION OF EQUATORIAL GUINEA

- Equatorial Guinea is a small country on the west coast of Africa.
- Equatorial Guinea is the only sovereign African state in which Spanish is an official language.
- It is made up of a mainland territory called Rio Muni, and five islands including Bioko, where the capital Malabo is located.

Why in news?

- President of India is visiting Equatorial Guinea.
- This is the first time ever that a head of state from India is visiting Equatorial Guinea.

LOCATION OF SWAZILAND:

- Swaziland is a landlocked sovereign state in Southern Africa. It is bordered by Mozambique to its northeast and by South Africa to its north, west and south.

LABOUR SECRETARY M SATHIYAVATHY APPOINTED UPSC MEMBER

Labour Secretary M Sathiyavathy took charge as member of Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

- She was administered oath of office and secrecy as member by Vinay Mittal, Chairman, UPSC.

About UPSC:

- UPSC is a constitutional body that conducts the prestigious civil services examination.
- It has been established under Article 315 of the Constitution of India and consists of a Chairman and ten Members, who are appointed and removed by President.
- Article 316 of Constitution deals with appointment and term of office of members.
- The chairman and members of the Commission hold office for a term of six years or until they attain the age of 65 years, whichever is earlier.

INDIA DONATES USD 1 MLN FOR SWAZILAND’S NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AGENCY

- India donated US $1 million to support Swaziland’s National Disaster Management Agency as well as food grains.
- India also expressed commitment to developmental partnership to create local capacities Swaziland and across Africa.

Indian President Kovind visited Swaziland on the second leg of his three-African nation tour which also included Equatorial Guinea and Zambia.

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CENTRAL INDUSTRIAL SECURITY FORCE (CISF)

The CISF (established in its present form in 1983) is a Central Armed Police Force in India.

- It is directly under the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and its headquarters are at New Delhi.
- The CISF provides security cover to 300 industrial units, government infrastructure projects and facilities and establishments located all over India.
- CISF is just a unique organisation in paramilitary forces for India, which works for sea ways, airways and some of the major installations in India.
- In CISF there are some reserved battalions which works with the state police to protect law and orders.
- CISF plays a major role in Disaster Management, for Disaster Management course the personnel are trained from NISA, Hyderabad.
- Another unique thing which the CISF has is a Fire Wing which helps during fire accidents in Industries where CISF is on guard.
- Its current active strength is 142,526 personnel. In April 2017, the government raised the sanctioned strength from 145,000 to 180,000 personnel.

APRIL 10: WORLD HOMOEOPATHY DAY

- The World Homoeopathy Day is observed every year on April 10.
- It commemorates the 263rd birth anniversary of the founder of Homoeopathy, Dr. Christian Friedrich Samuel Hahnemann, a German physician.
- On this occasion, AYUSH Ministry, had organised International Convention on World Homoeopathy Day with theme “Enhancing Quality Research in Homoeopathy through scientific evidence and rich clinical experiences”.
- Observance of the day seeks to spread more knowledge about this form of medicine in the mainstream public health.

NEW SOURCE OF GLOBAL NITROGEN DISCOVERED

- According to recently published study, over quarter of nitrogen on Earth comes from weathering of planet’s bedrock.
- For centuries, prevailing science indicated that all of nitrogen on Earth available to plants comes from atmosphere.
- The study has found that up to 26% of nitrogen in natural ecosystems is sourced from weathering of rocks, with remaining fraction from atmosphere. But input of this nitrogen source in global land system is unknown.
This study could greatly improve climate change projections.

**HAPPY CITIES SUMMIT**

- The 2018 Happy Cities Summit is being held in Andhra Pradesh.
- The first ‘Happy Cities Summit: Amaravati 2018’ is a unique event bringing the best of minds in urban innovation across the world.
- While the Government of Andhra Pradesh is hosting it, the event partners are Dalberg, Confederation of Indian Industries, and Centre for Liveable Cities (Singapore).
- Objective of the summit is to evolve a framework for thinking about and measuring ‘city happiness’ as well as a declaration and set of principles for guiding policy and action in the development of ‘happy cities’, especially relevant for cities in the developing world.
- Thinkers, designers, architects, planners, city leaders, and entrepreneurs will discuss and share best practices, innovations and ideas for enhancing societal happiness in the cities of the 21st century.

**APRIL 11: NATIONAL SAFE MOTHERHOOD DAY**

- The National Safe Motherhood Day (NSMD) is celebrated every year on April 11 to create awareness on proper healthcare and maternity facilities to pregnant and lactating women.
- It also seeks to create awareness about the institutional delivery, reducing anemia among women and better pre and post natal health care are necessary for mothers.
- The theme of 2018 NSMD was ‘Respectful Maternity Care’.

- The NSMD is an initiative of White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood, India (WRAI) to ensure that every women has access to during pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal services.
- At request of WRAI, the Central Government in 2003 had instituted this day on the occasion of birth anniversary of Kasturba Gandhi, wife of MK Gandhi, father of nation.
- India is first country in the world to celebrate National Safe Motherhood Day.

**INDIA’S FIRST HIGH-SPEED ELECTRIC LOCOMOTIVE LAUNCHED**

- India’s first high-speed electric locomotive with 12000 horsepower (HP) engine has been flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Madhepura Electric Locomotive Factory in Bihar.
- With the launch, India will join an elite list countries, including Russia, China, Germany and Sweden, that have 12,000 HP and above capacity electric locomotives. Till now, the most powerful electric engine in Indian Railways was of 6,000 HP.
- The high horsepower electric locos are equipped with IGBT (IGBT based propulsion technology) based propulsion technology. It gives combined advantages of high efficiency and fast switching.
- They will have the ability to endure the tough Indian climate and will be pressed into service as freight trains.

**INDIAN CONSORTIUM AND SAUDI ARAMCO SIGN MOU FOR RATNAGIRI MEGA REFINERY**

- An Indian Consortium consisting of IOCL, BPCL and HPCL and Saudi Aramco signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to jointly develop and build an integrated refinery and petrochemicals complex, Ratnagiri Refinery & Petrochemicals Ltd. (RRPCL) in the State of Maharashtra.
- The strategic partnership brings together crude supply, resources, technologies, experience and expertise of these multiple oil companies with an
established commercial presence around the world.

EXERCISE GAGANSHAKTI-2018

- It is an all-encompassing coordinated and composite exercise which is being conducted by the IAF.
- The aim of this exercise is real time coordination, deployment and employment of Air Power in a short & intense battle scenario.
- This exercise will hone the war fighting skills of the air warriors in a real time scenario thus affirming the IAF’s role as the cutting edge of our nation’s military capability.

INDIA’S FIRST DEDICATED DEFENCE AND AEROSPACE SME FUND

- Department of Defence Production has announced the creation of a dedicated defence and aerospace small and medium enterprises (SME) fund.
- The fund will be registered with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), where a minority stake could be taken by investors.
- This fund would help channelise investments into the two defence corridors announced by the Government in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

HEADQUARTERS AGREEMENT BETWEEN INDIA AND THE INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

- The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for entering into Headquarters (Host country) Agreement between India and the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and authorizing the Ministry of External Affairs for signing the Headquarter Agreement.
- The Headquarters Agreement will institutionalize the functional arrangements between India and ISA.
- It will help in smooth transition of ISA as international inter-governmental organization.
- Creation of ISA will lead to accelerated solar technology development and deployment in ISA member countries including India.

INDIA BENEFITS FROM AIIB LOANS

- India has emerged as the biggest beneficiary of the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, soaking up a quarter of all its investment commitments to date, despite continuing diplomatic tension between New Delhi and Beijing.
- In the first two years of its existence, the AIIB — conceived by China as an alternative to the World Bank — approved $43bn worth of funding for infrastructure projects around Asia, over $1bn worth of which is due to go to schemes in India.

2ND INDIA MOBILE CONGRESS

- The second edition of India Mobile Congress (IMC-2018) will be held in New Delhi on October 25-27, 2018.
- It will be organised by Department of Telecommunications (DoT) and Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI).
- The theme of second edition of IMC is NEW DIGITAL HORIZONS Connect, Create, innovate.
- IMC was launched in 2017 to provide platform for policy makers, industry and regulators to engage in meaningful deliberations to drive the future direction of telecom sector.
- The first IMC held in September 2017 was attended by around 2,000 delegates, 32,000 visitors, 152 speakers, 100 exhibitors and 100 start-ups.

ENSO (EL NINO SOUTHERN OSCILLATION)

- ENSO refers to anomalies in SSTs in Pacific Ocean off coast of South America which has sometimes been observed to have near-decisive impact on monsoon rainfall.
- In El Nino, a warmer than usual SST is observed in Pacific Ocean off coast of South America.
This condition is associated with suppressed monsoon rainfall in India.

- La Nina is opposite ENSO and is more favourable for monsoon. It is known to help monsoon rainfall in India.
- When anomalies (deviations from usual SST in the Pacific Ocean) are too small or absent, monsoon rainfall over India is normal.

**DADASAHEB PHALKE AWARD**

- The Dadasaheb Phalke Award is conferred by Union Government for outstanding contribution to growth and development of Indian Cinema.
- It is highest official recognition (award) in Indian cinema.
- It was established in 1969 to commemorate the birth centenary year of father of Indian cinema, Dadasaheb Phalke.
- It is given on basis of recommendations of a committee of eminent personalities set up by the government.
- The award consists of a Swarn Kamal (Golden Lotus), a cash prize of Rs. 10 lakhs and a shawl.

**BABUR CRUISE MISSILE**

- Pakistan has successfully test fired an enhanced version of Indigenously-built Babur cruise missile.
- ‘Babur Weapon System-1 (B)’ is a low-flying, terrain-hugging missile, which carries certain stealth features and is capable of carrying various types of warheads. It can deliver conventional and non-conventional weapons with a range of 700 kilometres.
- It incorporates advanced aerodynamics and avionics that can strike targets both at land and sea with high accuracy.
- It is equipped with the Terrain Contour Matching (TERCOM) and all time Digital Scene Matching and Area Co-relation (DSMAC) technologies, which enable it to engage in various types of targets with pinpoint accuracy even in the absence of GPS navigation.

**WHAT IS CRUISE MISSILE?**

- It is an unmanned self-propelled (till the time of impact) guided missile.
- It flies within the earth’s atmosphere and use jet engine technology to propel itself and fly during its major portion of its flight path at approximately constant speed.
- It is designed to deliver a large warhead over long distances with high precision.
- Modern cruise missiles are self-navigating and are capable of travelling at supersonic or high subsonic speeds and are able to fly on non-ballistic, extremely low-altitude trajectory.

**FIRST REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF EASTERN STATES ON WATER RESOURCES**

- The first regional conference of eastern states on Water Resources was held in Kolkata, West Bengal in bid to address outstanding water resources issues.
- It was conveyed by Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation.
- The conference was aimed at addressing outstanding water resources issues, inter-state issues, intra and inter-basin issues among five eastern states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal.

**FIEO GLOBALLINKER**

- Ministry of Commerce and Industry has launched FIEO GlobalLinker, a digital platform for MSME exporters to digitise their businesses and join global community of growing businesses.
- It has been developed by Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO).
- FIEO GlobalLinker aims to make the business growth of SMEs simpler, more profitable and enjoyable.

*About Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO):*
• It is apex trade promotion organisation in India.
• It was jointly established in 1965 by Ministry of Commerce and private trade and industry.
• It is responsible for representing and assisting Indian entrepreneurs and exporters in foreign markets.

**PULITZER PRIZE**

• The Pulitzer Prize is an annual award for achievements in newspaper, magazine and online journalism, literature, and musical composition in United States.
• It was established in 1917 by provisions in will of American-Hungarian newspaper publisher and master of yellow journalism Joseph Pulitzer.
• The award is administered by Columbia University in New York City.
• Prizes are awarded yearly in 21 categories. In 20 of the categories, each winner receives certificate and US$15,000 cash award. The winner in the public service category of the journalism is awarded a gold medal.

*Pulitzer Prize 2018*

• The New York Times and The New Yorker have jointly won the Pulitzer Prize, in the Public Service category for long-running Harvey Weinstein saga of sexual harassment and abuse in Hollywood.

**APRIL 19: WORLD LIVER DAY**

• The World Liver Day (WLD) is observed every year on April 19 to build awareness and understanding importance of liver in human body and how liver ailments can be treated.
• The 2018 theme for WLD is ‘Riding New Waves in Liver Diagnosis, Staging & Treatment’.
• As per World Health Organisation (WHO), liver diseases are 10th most common cause of death in India.

**UK-INDIA TECH ALLIANCE**

• The NASSCOM (National Association of Software & Services Companies) and TechUK launched new UK-India Tech Alliance.
• The leading technology trade bodies of India and UK inked memorandum of understanding (MoU) in this regard during Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to the UK.
• The alliance is aimed at increasing collaboration on skills and new technologies, assisting policy development and encouraging innovation and lay groundwork for roadmap which will be jointly presented in June 2018.

**WHAT IS EXCHANGE TRADED FUND (ETF)?**

• ETF is index funds that offer security of fund and liquidity of stock listed and traded on exchanges. Much like index funds they mirror index, commodity, bonds or basket of assets.
• The ETFs trading value is based on the net asset value of the underlying stocks that it represents. Their price changes daily as they are traded throughout the day.
• They are similar to mutual funds in certain manner but are more liquid as they can be sold quickly on stock exchanges like shares.
• ETF route is considered as safer mode of disinvestment as it shields investors against stock market volatility.

**‘MOST FILM-FRIENDLY STATE’ AWARD**

• Madhya Pradesh was conferred the award for the Most Film Friendly State for its efforts towards easing filming in the State by creating a well-structured web site, film friendly infrastructure, offering incentives, among others.
• State of Uttarakhand is given a Special Mention Certificate to recognize the efforts made by the State of Uttarakhand towards creating a film friendly environment.
• The jury for selecting the Most Film Friendly State Award 2017 was chaired by acclaimed filmmaker Shri Ramesh Sippy and comprised of renowned filmmakers.

KAYAKALP AWARDS

• Kayakalp awards were recently given to felicitate Public Health Facilities for maintaining high standards of sanitation and hygiene.

• Kayakalp – Award to Public Health Facilities” was instituted as part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan on 15th May 2015 as a National Initiative to give Awards to those public health facilities that demonstrate high levels of cleanliness, hygiene and infection control focuses on promoting cleanliness in public spaces.

INDIA IS NOW WORLD’S SIXTH LARGEST ECONOMY

• According to International Monetary Fund’s (IMF) World Economic Outlook (WEO) for April 2018, India is now the world’s sixth largest economy at $2.6 trillion (in terms of GDP), displacing France.

• The five economies ahead are United States, China, Japan, Germany and United Kingdom.

FIRST INTERNATIONAL SME CONVENTION 2018

• The first International SME (Small, Medium Enterprises) convention will be held in New Delhi from 22nd to 24th April, 2018.

• It has been organised by Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises.

• It aims to provide platform to allow Entrepreneur to Entrepreneur (E2E) exchange of ideas, free and fair business discussions, mutual sizing of opportunities and ways to address them.

COMMONWEALTH CYBER DECLARATION

• The Commonwealth countries at the end of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London have adopted Commonwealth Cyber Declaration to take action on cybersecurity by 2020.

• The declaration is considered as world’s largest and most geographically diverse inter-governmental commitment on cybersecurity cooperation.

APRIL 22: EARTH DAY

• Earth Day was celebrated on April 22nd across the globe. It is considered to be the largest secular world event.

• Theme of Earth Day 2018 is ‘End Plastic Pollution’.

• This day was first celebrated on April 22, 1970 and has ever since been an annual event. The person credited for organising the event 48 years ago is US Senator Gaylord Nelson.

• Earth Day celebrations are coordinated globally by the Earth Day Network.

• The concept of observing Earth Day was formally proposed by John McConnell at a UNESCO conference on Environment in 1969.

• Later in 1971, a proclamation was signed to observe international Earth Day annually on the Vernal Equinox by UN Secretary-General U Thant.

• On Earth Day 2016, historic Paris Agreement on Climate Change was signed. The agreement is legally binding on signatory countries to limit global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius.
INDIA’S 1ST $100 BILLION COMPANY

- Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), the country’s largest IT outsourcing company created history by becoming the first Indian company to reach $100 billion market capitalisation (m-cap) milestone.

- Market capitalisation is value of company that is traded on stock market, calculated by multiplying total number of shares by present share price.

E-COURT FEE SYSTEM INTRODUCED BY MADRAS HIGH COURT

- The Madras High Court has become the first court in south India and eighth in the country to introduce e-court fee payment facility.

- The new system will enable litigants who file cases in High Court to pay judicial stamp duty to government through e-stamps, which can be purchased both online and offline.

- It will pave way for easier and secured way of paying stamp duty. It will also help to tackle sale of counterfeit judicial stamps.

- So far only the Supreme Court and the High Courts in Delhi, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh had introduced the e-court fee payment facility.

G7 FOREIGN MINISTERS’ SUMMIT

- G7 foreign ministers’ summit is being held in Toronto. Participants discussed tensions with Moscow, Iran and North Korea.

G7:

- The Group of 7 (G7) is a group consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The European Union is also represented within the G7.

- These countries are the seven major advanced economies as reported by the International Monetary Fund: the G7 countries represent more than 64% of the net global wealth ($263 trillion).

- A very high net national wealth and a very high Human Development Index are the main requirements to be a member of this group.

BACTERIA HELP REMOVE SULPHUR FROM FOSSIL FUELS

- Scientists from CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology (CSIR-IMMT) have found four bacterial strains that remove sulphur from fossil fuels such as petroleum and coal.

- Sulphur is one of the major pollutants emitted during the combustion of fossil fuels.

- The four bacterial strains are Rhodococcus rhodochrous, Arthrobacter sulfureou, Gordonia rubropertinita and Rhodococcus erythropolis.

- They use dibenzothiophene, an organic sulphur compound which is major contaminant of fossil fuel as energy source thereby getting rid of sulphur.

DIU SMART CITY: FIRST TO RUN ON 100% RENEWABLE ENERGY DURING DAYTIME

- Diu Smart City has become first city in India to run on 100% renewable energy during daytime. With this, it has set new benchmark for other cities to become clean and green.

- Diu was importing 73% of its power from Gujarat until last year. But now it has adopted two-pronged approach to reduce dependence on Gujarat for power requirements through renewable energy.

INDIA HIGHEST RECIPIENT OF REMITTANCES

- As per the World Bank’s latest Migration and Development Brief, India has retained the top
position as a recipient of remittances with its diaspora sending about $69 billion back home last year.

- India is followed by China ($64 billion), the Philippines ($33 billion), Mexico ($31 billion), Nigeria ($22 billion) and Egypt ($20 billion).

**BENGALURU SMART CITY TESTS ITMS PROTOTYPE**

- Bengaluru Smart City is testing prototype of an intelligent traffic management solution in collaboration with the Electronics City Township Authority (ELCITA) to improve traffic management in the city.

- It aims to provide traffic information that is currently unavailable and help improve management of commuter traffic.

**What is Intelligent Traffic Management Solution?**

- It involves capturing video streams from several cameras and processing them using artificial intelligence.

- This will help in automation of traffic management tasks such as vehicle detection, traffic density estimation and control of traffic lights for real-time performance.

**WORLD PRESS FREEDOM PRIZE**

- The United Nations’ cultural agency has awarded the World Press Freedom prize to an imprisoned Egyptian photographer- Mahmoud Abu Zeid, known as Shawkan.

**UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize:**

- Created in 1997, the annual UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize honours a person, organization or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence and, or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, and especially when this has been achieved in the face of danger.

- The Prize was established on the initiative of UNESCO’s Executive Board and is formally conferred by the Director-General of the Organization, on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day, on 3 May.

- It is named in honour of Guillermo Cano Isaza, a Colombian journalist who was assassinated in front of the offices of his newspaper El Espectador in Bogotá, Colombia on 17 December 1986.

**SAGAR KAVACH**

- Coastal security exercise “Sagar Kavach” was recently held in Goa.

- The exercise is conducted half yearly with an objective to check coastal security mechanism and validate standard operating procedures.

- The organisations participating in the exercise are Indian Navy, Indian Coast Guard, Coastal Police, Police Special Branch, Intelligence Bureau, Customs, Department of Port, Department of Fisheries, Director General of Lighthouses and light ships and Fishing Community.

**WORLD’S SMALLEST LAND FERN DISCOVERED IN WESTERN GHATS**

- Researchers have discovered the world’s smallest land fern in the Ahwa forests of the Western Ghats in Gujarat’s Dang district.

- The size of the new Malvi’s adder’s-tongue fern Ophioglossum malvae is just one centimetre.

- The fingernail-sized fern belongs to a group known as the adder’s-tongue ferns, named after their resemblance to a snake’s tongue.

- The ferns are seasonal and grow with the first monsoon rains. They last only for a few months and new plants are born through their spores next year.

**25 APRIL: WORLD MALARIA DAY**

- The World Malaria Day (WMD) is being observed every year on 25 April across the world to recognise the global efforts to control preventable vector borne disease malaria.
• The theme of 2018 WMD is “Ready to beat malaria”.

• The World Malaria Day (WMD) was established by the 60th session of World Health Assembly, a decision-making body of World Health Organization (WHO) in May 2007.

• It was established to provide understanding and education of malaria and also spread information on year-long intensified implementation of national malaria-control strategies.

• It is one of eight official global public health campaigns currently marked by the WHO.

GIANT MOSQUITO WITH 11.15CM WINGSPAN FOUND IN CHINA

• Scientists have discovered a giant mosquito with a wingspan of 11.15 centimetres in China’s Sichuan province.

• The mosquito belongs to the world’s largest mosquito species Holorusia mikado.

• This species mosquito was first found in Japan and normally have wing span of about eight centimetres.

HARIMAU SHAKTI 2018

As part of ongoing Indo-Malaysian defence cooperation, a joint training exercise HARIMAU SHAKTI is being conducted in Malaysia.

The exercise is aimed at bolstering cooperation & coordination between armed forces of both the nations and to share the expertise of both the contingents in conduct of counter insurgency operations in jungle terrain.

TIME STAMPING AND TIME SYNCHRONIZATION NETWORK (TSTSN)

• National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL) and Department of Telecommunications (DoT) have signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on technical knowledge sharing for establishing nationwide Time Stamping and Time Synchronization network (TSTSN) and traceability of Time signal to UTC NPL Time.

• The nationwide TSTSN consisting of 22 numbers of Time Synchronization Centers (TSC’s) will be set up by DoT with technical assistance from CSIR-NPL.

• This network will provide synchronizing pulse in Indian Standard Time (IST) to all Telecom & Internet Service providers (ISPs) in all 22 LSA (Licensed Service Areas) in the country.

• The primary purpose of synchronizing telecom network with IST time stamp is to enable security agencies to overcome difficulty in analyzing and correlating cyber events in this era of advancement of telecom technology.

• It will also improve telecom network efficiency by reducing packet loss due to reduced slips in better synchronized digital network.

GLOBAL VACCINE ACTION PLAN (GVAP)

• The Global Vaccine Action Plan (GVAP) – endorsed by 194 Member States of the World Health Assembly in May 2012 – aims to prevent millions of deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases by 2020 through universal access to immunization.

• Despite improvements in individual countries and a strong global rate of new vaccine introduction, all of the GVAP targets for disease elimination—including measles, rubella, and maternal and neonatal tetanus—are behind schedule.

WORLD IMMUNIZATION WEEK

• World Immunization Week is celebrated from 24th-30th of April by the World Health Organization (WHO) in order to increase awareness about vaccination.

• Theme: “Protected together, #VaccinesWork”.

• It aims to highlight the collective action needed to ensure that every person is protected from vaccine-preventable diseases.
BIS GRANTS FIRST LICENSE FOR LIQUID CHLORINE ON ALL INDIA BASIS

- Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) granted First Licence to M/s Gujarat Alkalies and Chemicals Ltd for Liquid Chlorine on All India basis.
- This is the First Licence granted on All India basis.
- License for Liquid Chlorine will facilitate industry to get a quality product with Standard Mark under BIS Certification Marks scheme.

About Liquid Chlorine:

- The product is in liquid form and stored in metal containers.
- It is usually used as a gas obtained by evaporating the liquid from the metal container.
- It is used mainly in paper, pulp, textile bleaching, water sterilization and manufacture of chemicals.

SEED IMPORT-EXPORT PORTAL

- The Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare has launched seed import-export portal to facilitate export-import of seeds and planting material.
- It has been developed for making trade process easy.
- The ministry has removed all prohibitions imposed on export of seeds of different varieties to encourage export of seeds.
- It also has made import export policy flexible and transparent for ascertaining availability of high quality seeds to farmers found out everywhere in world.
- The import export of seeds and planting material is controlled under Import Export Policy 2002-2007.

CSIR WINS NATIONAL INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (IP) AWARD 2018

- The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was awarded National Intellectual Property (IP) Award 2018 in category “Top R&D Institution/Organization for Patents and Commercialization”.
- The National IP Award is awarded annually by Indian Intellectual Property Office (under Ministry of Commerce and Industry) in various categories on outstanding innovators, organizations and companies in fields of patents, designs, trademarks and geographical indications on the occasion of World IP Day (26 April).

FIRST WOMAN LAWYER TO SWORN IN AS SUPREME COURT JUDGE

- Senior lawyer Indu Malhotra will be the first woman lawyer to be directly appointed as a Supreme Court judge.
- Of the top court’s 24 judges, only one is a woman, Justice R Banumathi. She was elevated to the top court in August 2014.
- Justice Banumathi was the sixth woman to become a Supreme Court judge.
- Justice Fathima Beevi was the first in 1989.

CABINET APPROVES LONG TERM AGREEMENTS FOR SUPPLY OF IRON ORE

- Union Cabinet has approved renewal of long-term agreements (LTAs) for export of iron ore of grade +64% Fe content to Japan and South Korea for another five years (2018 to 2023) through state-owned trading firm MMTC.
- India has been exporting iron ore to Japan for almost past six decades and it has been consistent component of India’s bilateral relations with Japan.

WHAT IS SOVEREIGN CREDIT RATING?

- A sovereign credit rating is credit rating of country or sovereign entity.
- It gives investors insight into level of risk associated with investing in particular country, including its political risk.
• At request of country, credit rating agency evaluates country’s economic and political environment to determine representative credit rating.

• Obtaining good sovereign credit rating is usually essential for developing countries in order to access funding in international bond markets.

• Fitch Ratings, Moody’s Investors Service and Standard & Poor’s (S&P) are big three international credit rating agencies controlling approximately 95% of global ratings business.

### DAC APPROVES PROCUREMENT OF NAG MISSILE SYSTEM

• In a boost to indigenisation and in realisation of India’s growing technological prowess, the DAC has approved procurement of Defence Research and Development Organisation’s (DRDO’s) designed and developed NAG Missile System (NAMIS) at the cost of Rs 524 crore.

• The NAG missile is a third generation anti-tank guided missile, which has top attack capabilities that can effectively engage and destroy all known enemy tanks during day and night.

• The system includes a third generation Anti-Tank Guided Missile, the NAG, along with the Missile Carrier Vehicle (NAMICA).

### 2017 SARASWATI SAMMAN

• Gujarati poet, playwright and academic Sitanshu Yashaschandra has been selected for the 2017 Saraswati Samman for his collection of verses titled Vakhar.

About the Saraswati Samman award:

• Saraswati Samman is the annual award given to an outstanding literary work in any Indian language mentioned in Schedule VIII of the Constitution and published in 10 years preceding the specified award year.

### 360° VIRTUAL REALITY (VR) VIDEO ON INCREDIBLE INDIA

• Google Arts & Culture in partnership with Ministry of Tourism has unveiled 360-degree virtual reality (VR) video for global ‘Incredible India’ tourism campaign.

• As part of it, Google Arts & Culture will provide users with immersive 360-degree view of India’s heritage, festivity, spirituality and adventure.

### MARCO

• The rocket that will loft NASA’s InSight beyond Earth will also launch a separate NASA technology experiment: two mini-spacecraft called Mars Cube One, or MarCO.

• These briefcase-sized CubeSats will fly on their own path to Mars behind InSight.

• Their goal is to test new miniaturized deep space communication equipment. This will be a first test of miniaturized CubeSat technology at another planet, which researchers hope can offer new capabilities to future missions.

• If successful, the MarCOs could represent a new kind of communication capability to Earth. InSight’s success is independent of its CubeSat tag-alongs.

### WHAT ARE EXTERNAL COMMERCIAL BORROWINGS (ECBS)?
ECBs are commercial loans borrowed from foreign sources for financing the commercial activities in India.

It may be bank loans, securitised instruments, buyers’ credit, suppliers’ credit, foreign currency convertible bonds, etc.

It should be noted that ECBs are not FDI. In case of FDI, foreign money is used only to finance the equity capital. But in case ECBs, foreign money is used to finance any kind of funding other than equity.

INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST CONFERENCE

As part of 2562nd Buddha Jayanti celebrations, International Buddhist Conference was held in Lumbini, the birthplace of Gautama Buddha.

The basic objective of the conference was to disseminate teachings of Gautam Buddha and spread the messages of nonviolence, brotherhood, co-existence, love and peace to the international community.

Lumbini is the birthplace of Gautama Buddha, founder of Buddhist religion. Lord Buddha was born in sacred garden of Lumbini during 6th century BC and had attained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya, (now in Bihar, India) and gave his first sermon in Sarnath and died in Kushinagar.

WORLD’S OLDEST-KNOWN SPIDER DIES IN AUSTRALIA

It is the world’s oldest known spider which died recently at the ripe old age of 43 after being monitored for years during a long-term population study in Australia.

The trapdoor matriarch comfortably outlived the previous record holder, a 28-year-old tarantula found in Mexico.

DERBY BVR MISSILE

Derby is short to medium range BVR Air-to-Air missile. It is a dual-use missile (air-to-air and surface-to-air).

It is developed jointly by Israeli armament development agency Rafael and Israel Aircraft Industries MBT.

It has maximum effective range of about 50 km.

PEACE MISSION 2018

It is a multi-nation counter-terror exercise that will take place under the framework of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The main aim of the exercise will be to enhance counter-terror cooperation among the eight SCO member countries.

Peace Mission exercises are held once in two years. This year’s exercises will be the 10th edition. The last time, it was held in 2016 in Kyrgyzstan.

The 2018 edition will be held in the Ural mountains of Russia.