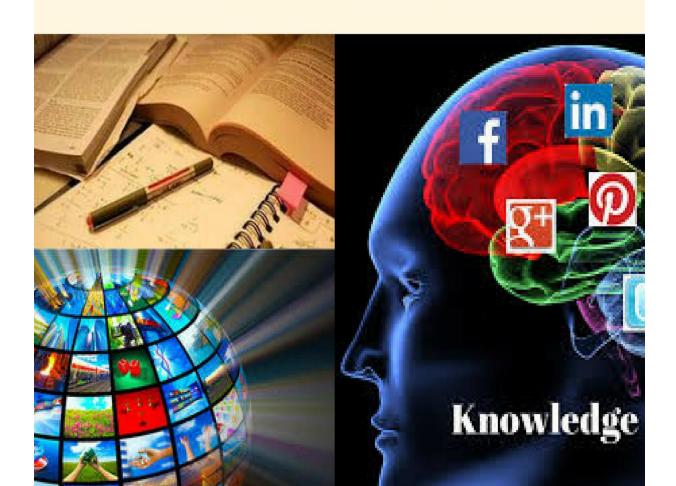
CURRENT AFFAIRS FORUM SYNOPSIS 2017

IASUPSC FORUM

JANUARY 2018



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ARUNACHAL DECLARED OPEN DEFECATION-FREE STATE

1ST JANUARY

CONTEXT

Arunachal Pradesh has emerged as the second State in the Northeast, after Sikkim, to be declared Open Defecation Free. Arunachal has 21 districts and the State attained the feat much before the national deadline of October 2, 2019.

BACKGROUND:

- ☐ Arunachal Pradesh has managed to do this before the deadline of October 2, 2019.
- ☐ The state government had cut short the national ODF target by one year and ten months ahead of the national target and set 31 December, 2017, as the final target to achieve ODF status in Arunachal Pradesh.

ABOUT SWACHH BHARAT MISSION SBM:

- Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) aims to eliminate open defecation by 2019.
- The goal also includes conversion of insanitary toilets to pour flush toilets, eradicating of manual scavenging and Municipal Solid Waste Management (MSWM).

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MISSION:

- Poor sanitation spreads infectious diseases that kill hundreds of thousands of children each year, and stunt the physical and cognitive development of those who survive.
- Announcing a goal of accelerating the reduction in open defecation was a great idea, articulating a worthy goal for serious public policy efforts.

Do you know?

The Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on 2nd October, 2014. The Mission Coordinator shall be Secretary, **Ministry of Drinking Water and** Sanitation (MDWS) with two Sub-Missions – the Swachh **Bharat Mission (Gramin) and the** Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban). The Mission aims to achieve a Swachh Bharat by 2019, as a fitting tribute to Mahatma Gandhi on his 150th birth anniversary.

Source: thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-otherstates/arunachal-declared-opendefecation-free-state/article22340774.ece

NATIONAL REGISTER OF CITIZENS

1ST JANUARY

CONTEXT

The much-awaited first draft of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was published with the names of 1.9 crore people out of the 3.29 crore total applicants in Assam recognizing them as legal citizens of India. The NRC is being compiled following a Supreme Court directive to identify illegal immigrants in Assam.

WHAT IS NRC?

- ☐ The National Register of Citizens (NRC) contains names of Indian citizens.
- ☐ The NRC was prepared in 1951, after the Census of 1951.
- ☐ It was prepared by recording particulars of all the persons enumerated during that Census.

BACKGROUND:

- ❖ Assam, which faced influx from Bangladesh since the early 20th century, is the only state having an NRC, first prepared in 1951.
- ❖ The Supreme Court, which is monitoring the entire process, had ordered that the first draft of the NRC be published by December 31 after completing the scrutiny of over two crore claims along with that of around 38 lakh people whose documents were suspect.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

- The NRC was last updated in Assam way back in 1951. Then, it had recorded 80 lakh citizens in the State.
- Since then, the process of identification of illegal immigrants in Assam has been debated and become a contentious issue in the State's politics.

- A six-year agitation demanding identification and deportation of illegal immigrants was launched by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) in 1979.
- It culminated with the signing of the Assam Accord on August 15, 1985.

Source: thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/first-draft-of-assams-nrc-recognises-19-crore-people-as-citizens/article22342194.ece

OCI AND PIO CARDS

1ST JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Govt has stopped the scheme of free conversion of PIO cards to OCI. The scheme of converting the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) cards to OCI cards free of cost comes to an end as a decision has been taken not to give any more extension beyond December 31. However, the change of PIO cards to OCI cards would continue on payment of fees.

WHO ARE NRIS, PIO AND OCI?

- □ Non-Resident Indians (NRI), Person of Indian Origin (PIO) and Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) are the three major categories in which the people from India go and live abroad can be categorized.
- ☐ While NRIs is essentially a term used for Indians that live in another country, PIOs and OCIs are people who want to stay connected and involved with India more closely.

NEED FOR CONVERSION:

- Simultaneous existence of PIO and OCI cards led to confusion among People of Indian Origin residing abroad.
- ❖ Thus, merging PIO and OCI will lead to simplification of the rules under a single umbrella.
- ❖ It would facilitate visa-free travel to India, rights of residency and participation in business and educational activities in the country.
- This is aimed at simplifying the visa-free entry for people of Indian origin into India.

- The merger of the two cards could make PIO cardholders eligible for benefits already enjoyed by OCI cardholders.
- Merging of the two cards will also facilitate travel of Indians staying abroad and their participation in various activities in India.

BENEFITS OF A PIO CARD:

A PIO card holder doesn't need a visa to visit India.
The holder also doesn't require a student or employment visa to acquire employment or
academic opportunities in India.
The holder is also exempted from registering at the foreigner regional registration office
(FRRO) during the duration of stay in India.
The holder also enjoys parity with NRIs in concern to economic, financial and educational
matters. These may include matters related to property transfer or acquisition, holding,
disposal, investment, admission of children in educational institutions under general
category quota for NRIs.
Separate immigration counters are provided at all International airports in India for PIO card
holders.

DRAWBACKS OF PIO CARD:

- It does not provide voting rights to the holder.
- ♣ Prior permission is needed to undertake mountaineering expeditions or any such related research work in protected areas.

THE BENEFITS OF OCI CARDS ARE SUBSTANTIAL:

J	OCI is essentially a lifetime visa status offered by India to an Indian person who has given up
	his citizenship. OCI cards give lifetime multiple entry visa to India.
J	If one remains an OCI for 5 years, he/she can attain Indian citizenship and then live in India
	for a period of one year including short breaks.
J	Special immigration counters are provided at all international airports in India for OCI card
	holders.
J	An OCI cards holder can open special bank accounts in India just like NRIs and make
	investments. OCI holders can also buy non-farm property and exercise ownership rights.
	OCI cards allow to apply for a driver's license, PAN card or open a bank account in India.
	They get same economic, financial and educational benefits like NRIs and can also adopt
	children.

RESTRICTIONS FOR OCI CARD HOLDERS:

- ♣ An OCI card holder cannot vote, hold a government job or purchase agricultural or farm land.
- ♣ The person can also not run for public office or travel to restricted areas without permission.

INDIA AND PAKISTAN EXCHANGE LIST OF NUCLEAR SITES FOR 27TH CONSECUTIVE YEAR

1ST JANUARY

CONTEXT

India and Pakistan have exchanged list of their nuclear installations and facilities with each other under the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack gainst Nuclear installations. This is the 27th consecutive exchange of such list between two countries after first list was exchanged on 1 January 1992.

AGREEMENT SIGNED BETWEEN:

India and Pakistan

AGREEMENT ON THE PROHIBITION OF ATTACK AGAINST NUCLEAR INSTALLATIONS

it is a bilateral agreement signed between india and Pakistan that bars them from Carryin
out any surprise attack (or to assist foreign power to attack) on each other's nuclear
installations and facilities.
It was signed on 31st December 1988 and entered into force on 27 January 1991.
It was signed by then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his Pakistani counterpart
Benazir Bhutto.
Under it, both countries inform each other about their nuclear installations and facilities
that need to be covered under the Agreement on 1 January every year

GAIL COMMISSIONS INDIA'S SECOND LARGEST ROOFTOP SOLAR PLANT IN UP

1ST JANUARY

CONTEXT

State-owned gas utility GAIL India Ltd has commissioned India's second largest rooftop solar power plant in Uttar Pradesh. It is 5.76 MWp (Mega Watt Watt peak) solar plant installed at GAIL's petrochemical complex at Pata in UP. The plant has over roofs of warehouses covers a total area of 65,000 square meters.

BY:

GAIL India Ltd

LOCATION:

GAIL's petrochemical complex at Pata, Uttar Pradesh

LARGEST ROOFTOP SOLAR PLANT IN INDIA

- ☐ India's largest rooftop solar plant was commissioned in December 2015 by Tata Power Solar in Amritsar, Punjab.
- ☐ It is 12 MWp solar rooftop projects, which produces more than 150 lakh units of power annually.
- ☐ It offsets over 19,000 tonne of carbon emission every year.

GAIL (INDIA) LIMITED

- GAIL is the largest state-owned natural gas processing and distribution company in India.
- It is headquartered in New Delhi.

AGENCY OVERVIEW

Type: **State-owned enterprise**

DO YOU KNOW?

GAIL was conferred with the Maharatna status on 1 Feb 2013, by the Government of India. Only six other Public Sector Enterprises (PSEs) enjoy this coveted status amongst all central CPSEs. GAIL was listed in the 131st position among India's most trusted brands according to the Brand Trust Report 2014, a study conducted by the Trust Research Advisory.

Traded as: BSE: 532155, NSE: GAIL, LSE: GAID BSE SENSEX Constituent

Industry: Energy Founded: August 1984

Headquarters: New Delhi India

B. C. Tripathi (Chairman & MD) Key people:

Decrease₹50,059.26 crore (US\$7.9 billion) (2017) **Revenue: Operating income:** Increase ₹5,410.82 crore (US\$850 million) (2017)

Net income: ₹3,502.91 crore (US\$550 million) (2017) **Total assets** ₹56,269.99 crore (US\$8.8 billion) (2017)

Government of India Owner:

Number of employees: 4,355 (2017)

Website: www.gailonline.com

BUSINESS SEGMENTS OF GAIL:

- natural gas,
- liquefied petroleum gas transmission,
- liquid hydrocarbon,
- city gas distribution,
- petrochemical,
- exploration and production,
- GAILTEL
- electricity generation



2nd JANUARY

PORTAL

CONTEXT

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development (WCD) has launched online portal NARI (nari.nic.in) for the empowerment of women. It has been developed by the Ministry to provide easy access to information on government schemes and initiatives for women.

NARI PORTAL

The NARI por	tal will	provide	information	to women o	on issues	affecting	their live	S

- ☐ The portal summarise over 350 government schemes and other important information.
- ☐ The schemes are divided into 7 different categories health, education, housing and shelter, employment, addressing violence, decision making and social support.

E-SAMVAD PORTAL

- ♣ The MWCD also launched the portal to provide platform for NGOs and Civil Societies to interact with the ministry.
- Through it, NGOs and civil society can provide their feedback, suggestions, put up grievances, share best practices etc.

SCHISTURA LARKETENSIS: NEW SPECIES OF BLIND FISH DISCOVERED INSIDE MEGHALAYA CAVE

2nd JANUARY

CONTEXT

Scientists have discovered a new species of blind fish named Schistura larketensis inside a cave in East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya. The fish has been named after Larket village, where the cave has been found to encourage local people to take up biodiversity conservation.

LOCATION: Cave in East Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya, India

ABOUT THE NEW SPECIES

- ☐ Schistura larketensis has lost its sight during its living evolution in perpetual darkness inside the cave. It has also lost its pigments too while adapting to its habitat in the dark waters.
- ☐ The orbital diameter of fish decreases gradually as its matures with eyes completely absent in older individuals.

BACKGROUND

- Researchers had discovered the new blind fish in cave during an expedition several years ago.
- ❖ The cave is about 880 meters above sea level and over 7 km in length.
- ❖ The new fish sample was collected from small stagnant pools which are of few square meters in area and about 1-2 meters in depth.
- These pools are about 1600 feet high from main entrance of cave. The pool bed is mostly sandy with pebbles.

SIGNIFICANCE

Though there are about 200 known species of similar kind of fish inhabiting streams and rivers throughout Indochina and Southeast Asia, this is first such discovery of blind fish.

RETROTRANSPOSONS: ANCIENT JUMPING GENES MAY GIVE CORALS NEW LEASE OF LIFE

2nd JANUARY

FORUM

CONTEXT

Scientists have identified a gene that improves the heat tolerance of the algae that live symbiotically with coral species, and could potentially help the corals adapt to some warming. They are the recently identified special genes which could help Symbiodinium adapt more rapidly to heat stress.

WHAT ARE RETROTRANSPOSONS?

☐ Retrotransposons also called transposons via RNA intermediate are genetic elements that can amplify themselves in a genome and are ubiquitous components of the DNA of many eukaryotic organisms.

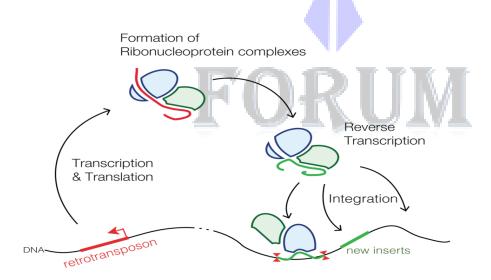
These DNA sequences use a "copy-and-paste" mechanism, whereby they are first
$transcribed\ into\ RNA,\ then\ converted\ back\ into\ identical\ DNA\ sequences\ using\ reverse$
transcription, and these sequences are then inserted into the genome at target sites.
Retrotransposons form one of the two subclasses of transposons, where the others are
DNA transposons, which does not involve an RNA intermediate.
$Retrotransposons \ are \ particularly \ abundant \ in \ plants, \ where \ they \ are \ often \ a \ principal$
component of nuclear DNA. In maize, 49–78% of the genome is made up of
retrotransposons.
In wheat, about 90% of the genome consists of repeated sequences and 68% of
transposable elements.

☐ In mammals, almost half the genome (45% to 48%) is transposons or remnants of

transposons. Around 42% of the human genome is made up of retrotransposons, while

ABOUT SYMBIODINIUM:

Symbiodinium is a unicellular algae that provides its coral host with photosynthetic products in return for nutrients and shelter.



DNA transposons account for about 2–3%.

RELATION WITH CORAL BLEACH:

High sea temperatures can cause the breakdown of the symbiotic relationship between the algae and corals and lead to the widespread expulsion of Symbiodinium from host tissues, an event known as coral beaching. If bleached corals do not recover, they starve to death, leaving only their white, calcium-carbonate exoskeleton.

WHAT IS CORAL BLEACHING?

Bleaching occurs when abnormal environmental conditions, such as warmer sea temperatures, cause corals to expel tiny photosynthetic algae, draining them of their color. Corals can recover if the water temperature drops and the algae are able to recolonize them.

'PERIHELION': EARTH CLOSEST TO SUN

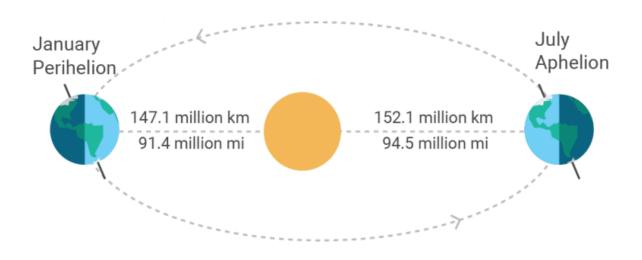
3rd JANUARY

CONTEXT

On January 3, the Earth will be at closest to the sun in a phenomenon called 'Perihelion'. The event, however, cannot be observed. At 11.05 am on January 3rd, the earth will be at the closest point to the sun in its annual elliptical orbit, at a distance of 14, 70, 97,237 km approximately.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW?

Perihelion is an important event for research and educational purposes although the public
cannot observe it.
Commonly it is believed that the distance of the earth from the sun decides the season or
temperature on the earth. But this is not true.
The axial tilt (approx. 23.5 degrees) of the earth on its axis while revolving around the Sun
regulates seasons on the earth with one of the hemispheres facing away or towards the
Sun.
So, while the earth is closest to Sun this time in January, it is winter in India and countries in
Northern Hemisphere, it is summer in the Southern Hemisphere.
On July 6, the earth will be at 'Aphelion' at 15, 20, 95, 571 km from the sun, i.e. it will be at
the farthest point from the sup



Earth is farthest from the Sun on its orbit when it is summer in the Northern Hemisphere



CHANGING ELLIPTICAL ORBIT

Earth orbits the Sun in an elliptical path, which means that there is 1 point of the path when the Sun is at its closest to the Earth and 1 point when it is furthest away.

ORBIT CHANGES SHAPE

The shape of this path varies due to gravitational influences of other planetary objects, particularly the Moon.

Approximately every 100,000 years, Earth's orbital path changes from being nearly circular to elliptical. The difference of the Earth's orbital shape from a perfect circle is known as its eccentricity. An eccentricity value of 0 is a circular orbit, while values between 0 and 1 describe an elliptical orbit.

TRAI ISSUES INTERCONNECT RULES

3rd JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) has issued the Telecommunication Interconnection Regulations, 2018, that are effective from February 1. It lay down the ground rules for telcos to enter into initial interconnect pacts, provision points of interconnection (POIs) needed to complete calls, undertake augmentation of such points and the associated charges. It has termed interconnection the "lifeline of telecommunication services".

NEW REGULATIONS:

- ☐ Phone companies have to ink interconnect pacts on a non-discriminatory basis within 30 days of receiving a request from any licensed carrier. Also, a telco receiving an interconnection request has to offer a draft interconnect pact within five days to the requestor, who, in turn, can submit suggestions/objections in the next five days. Currently, there is no explicit timeline for inking of interconnect agreements.
- ☐ Telcos flouting Trai's interconnection regulations would "be liable to pay an amount, by way of financial disincentive", capped at "Rs 1 lakh per day per licensed service area. A telco seeking POIs will be liable to furnish a six-month bank guarantee from the date of initial interconnection for the total number of ports sought, if such a demand is made by the telco offering interconnection.
- ☐ However, interconnection levies such as set-up charges and infrastructure charges "may be mutually negotiated" between service providers as long as they are "reasonable, transparent and non-discriminatory". But Trai has mandated a detailed process for disconnection of POIs, directing a telco to initially issue a show cause notice of 15 working days citing reasons for the same.

What is TRAI?

It is the independent regulator of the telecommunications business in India. It was established in 1997 by an Act of Parliament to regulate telecom services and tariffs in India.

WHAT WAS IT FOR?

The TDSAT was set up to resolve any dispute between a licencor and a licensee, between two or more service providers, between a service provider and a group of consumers. In addition, any direction, TRAI orders or decisions can be challenged by appealing to TDSAT.

DISPUTES SETTLEMENT:

In January 2000, TRAI act was amended to establish the Telecom Disputes Settlement Appellate Tribunal (TDSAT) to take over the adjudicatory functions of the TRAI.

NATIONAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK (NKN)

3rd JANUARY

CONTEXT

India has kicked off the process of appointing a telecom company that will connect and extend its state-of-the art National Knowledge Network (NKN) to research and education networks in six South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation member states — Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Pakistan is the only Saarc nation that has been left out of this initiative.

IN ASIAN ASSOCIATION OF REGIONAL COOPERATION MEMBER STATES:

Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka

BACKGROUND:

India has for long suspended official talks with Pakistan due to continuing terrorist attacks launched by groups from across the border and chill in the relations is now evident in sphere of research cooperation too.

WHAT IS NKN?

NKN is a multi-gigabit pan-India network which facilitates the development of India's communications infrastructure, stimulates research and creates next generation applications and services.

AIM:

With its multi-gigabit capability, NKN aims to connect all universities, research institutions, libraries, laboratories, healthcare and agricultural institutions across the country to address such paradigm shift.

WHAT IT DOES?

- It enables collaboration among researchers from different educational networks such as TEIN4, GARUDA, CERN and Internet2.
- ↓ It also enables sharing of scientific databases and remote access to advanced research facilities. The leading mission oriented agencies in the fields of nuclear, space and defence research are also part of NKN.

INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY:

India has now decided to extend the NKN to the global research and education networks in
Saarc nations.
NKN will be connected from Afghanistan to Delhi or Mumbai, from Bangladesh to Kolkata or
Delhi, from Bhutan to Kolkata or Delhi, from Nepa <mark>l to Kolka</mark> ta or Delhi, from Maldives to Chennai
or Mumbai and from Sri Lanka to Chennai or Mu <mark>mbai.</mark>
A state-of-the-art management centre and Network Operations Centre will also be set up to run
the NKN network.
The connection from Afghanistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka to India would be through a
submarine cable for international connectivity.

PARLIAMENT PASSES NABARD (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017

3rd JANUARY

CONTEXT

Parliament has passed the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Amendment) Bill, 2017 with the approval of Rajya Sabha. Lok Sabha already had passed the bill in August 2017. The Bill seeks to amend National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Act, 1981. The Act establishes NABARD for providing and regulating facilities like credit for agricultural and industrial development in the rural areas.

PASSED BILL IN:

August 2017

AMENDED ACT:

National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Act, 1981

KEY FEATURES OF THE BILL

The Bill allows Union Government to increase capital of NABARD from Rs. 5000 crore to
Rs 30,000 crore. Further, it allows Union Government to increase the capital more than
Rs 30,000 crore in consultation with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), if necessary.
The Bill provides that Union Government alone must hold at least 51% capital share of
NABARD. Further, it transfers share capital held by RBI valued at Rs. 20 crore to Union
Government.
Currently RBI holds 0.4% of paid-up capital of NABARD and remaining 99.6% is held by
Union government and this causes conflict in RBI's role as banking regulator and
shareholder in NABARD.
The Bill replaces terms 'small-scale industry' and 'industry in tiny and decentralised
sector' with terms 'micro enterprise', 'small enterprise' and 'medium enterprise' as
defined in MSME Development Act, 2006.
Further, it allows NABARD to provide financial assistance to banks if they provide
financial assistance to hanks if they provide loans to the MSMEs

NABARD Bill

3rd JANUARY

CONTEXT

The National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Amendment) Bill, 2017, was recently passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha. The bill was passed by the Lok Sabha in August, 2017.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE BILL:

NABARD:

	It is an apex development and specialized bank established on 12 July 1982 by an act by the parliament of India. Its main focus is to uplift rural India by increasing the credit flow
	for elevation of agriculture & rural non-farm sector.
	It was established based on the recommendations of the Committee set up by the
	Reserve Bank of India (RBI) under the chairmanship of Shri B. shivaraman. It replaced
	the Agricultural Credit Department (ACD) and Rural Planning and Credit Cell (RPCC) of
	Reserve Bank of India, and Agricultural Refinance and Development Corporation (ARDC).
	It has been accredited with "matters concerning policy, planning and operations in the
J	field of credit for agriculture and other economic activities in rural areas in India".
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The "bomb cyclone" that hit the Northeast Source: NOAA

- ☐ This is a predominantly maritime, winter event, but also occurs in continental settings.
- ☐ This process is the extratropical equivalent of the tropical rapid deepening.

HOW IT WORKS?

- Deep drops in barometric pressure occur when a region of warm air meets one of cold air.
- ❖ The air starts to move and the rotation of the earth creates a cyclonic effect.
- The direction is counterclockwise in the Northern hemisphere leading to winds that come out of the northeast.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HURRICANES, CYCLONES AND **TYPHOONS**

- Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are all tropical storms.
- They are all the same thing but are given different names depending on where they appear.
- When they reach populated areas they usually bring very strong wind and rain which can cause a lot of damage.



- Hurricanes are tropical storms that form over the North Atlantic Ocean and Northeast Pacific.
- Cyclones are formed over the South Pacific and Indian Ocean.

Typhoons are formed over the Northwest Pacific Ocean.

SWINE FLU

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Rajasthan government has sounded an alert in the State after more than 400 people were diagnosed positive for the swine flu virus. Nearly 11,721 people were tested for swine flu between January 1, 2017 to December 19, 2017, of which 3,214 were confirmed positive.

SWINE FLU:

Swine Influenza (swine flu) is a respiratory disease of pigs caused by type A influenza viruses that causes regular outbreaks in pigs. H1N1 is a flu virus. When it was first detected in 2009, it was called "swine flu" because the virus was similar to those found in pigs.

TRANSMISSION FROM PIGS TO HUMANS:

The H1N1 virus is currently a seasonal flu virus found in humans. Although it also circulates in pigs, one cannot get it by eating properly handled and cooked pork or pork products.

PANDEMIC:

In 2009, H1N1 was spreading fast around the world, so the World Health Organization called it a pandemic.

SPREAD:

Swine flu is contagious, and it spreads in the same way as the seasonal flu.
When people who have it cough or sneeze, they spray tiny drops of the virus into the air.
If a person comes in contact with these drops or touch a surface that an infected person has
recently touched, the person can catch H1N1 swipe flu

Pregnant women who contract the H1N1 infection are at a greater risk of developing complications because of hormonal changes, physical changes and changes to their immune system to accommodate the growing foetus.

SWINE FLU SYMPTOMS

- Cough
- Fever
- Sore throat
- Stuffy or runny nose
- Body aches
- Headache
- Chills
- Fatigue

DIAGNOSIS

- Swine flu is mostly diagnosed through noting the symptoms.
- There is also a quick test called the rapid influenza diagnostic test that can help identify swine flu. However, these vary in effectiveness and may show a negative result even though influenza is present. More accurate tests are available in more specialized laboratories.
- However, in a similar way to seasonal flu, symptoms are often mild and self-resolve. Most people do not receive a test for swine flu as treatment would be the same, regardless of the outcome.
- > If symptoms are mild, it is extremely unlikely that any connection to swine influenza is found, even if the virus is there.

VACCINE

- o A vaccine has been produced to protect humans against the H1N1 strain of swine flu. This was introduced following a pandemic of swine flu in 2009 and 2010.
- o The status of swine flu has changed from a pandemic to a seasonal type of human influenza. The specialized vaccine has now been replaced by more general seasonal flu shots.

FAST FACTS ON SWINE FLU:

lacktriangle Swine flu was normally of the H1N1 influenza subtype. However, since 2017, the H3N2 subtype has become the dominant strain.

- The most common way for a human to catch swine flu is through contact with a pig.
- There is currently a vaccine for swine flu that is included with the standard seasonal flu shots.
- Symptoms of swine flu include coughs, chills, and aches, similar to seasonal flu.

TYPBAR TCV

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

WHAT IS IT?

It is a Typhoid conjugate vaccine developed by Bharat Biotech Ltd (BBL).

WHY IN NEWS?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has pre-qualified its typhoid conjugate vaccine. The new vaccine was found to have given a longer immunity from typhoid than older vaccines and it required fewer doses for childhood immunisation.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The pre-qualification by WHO allows for the sale of the vaccines to UN agencies such as UNICEF and GAVI.

ABOUT THE VACCINE:

Typbar TCV is reportedly the world's first typhoid vaccine clinically proven for use on recipients who can be as young as six months. A single dose offers 87% protective efficacy against typhoid.

ABOUT TYPHOID:

☐ Typhoid fever is caused by food and water contaminated by Salmonella Typhi (S. Typhi) bacteria.

The symptoms of the disease include fever, headache, nausea, loss of appetite,
constipation and sometimes diarrhoea.
According to the World Health Organisation, typhoid affects about 21 million people pe
vear and kills around 222.000.

GAVI

- Created in 2000, Gavi is an international organisation a global Vaccine Alliance, bringing together public and private sectors with the shared goal of creating equal access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries.
- Gavi brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health
 Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry in both industrialised and
 developing countries, research and technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates
 Foundation and other private philanthropists.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE UN

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

India is pushing forward its proposal to include Hindi as one of the official languages of the United Nations. The ministry of external affairs [MEA] is currently reviewing a draft advocacy paper to present the Indian case with regard to introducing Hindi in the UN.

PROCEDURE FOR LANGUAGE TO BE RECOGNISED AS AN OFFICIAL ONE OF UN:

The procedure for getting any language recognized as one of the Official Languages of the
UN involves obtaining approval of the General Assembly. Such a proposal has to be

approved by more than half of the members of the General Assembly where every member-State has a vote.

In addition, recognizing any language as the official language of the UN entails a substantial increase in the expenditure of the UN necessitating an enhanced contribution by every member country, which is why most of the members remain reluctant to support such a proposal.

NEED FOR RECOGNITION:

- According to the estimates around 340 million to 500 million speak, and as many as 800 million people understand Hindi language.
- Outside India there are countries like Nepal South Africa, Mauritius, the United Kingdom, the United States, Yemen, and Uganda where a significant number people speak Hindi.
- Also, the government believes that at a time when Indian economy is shining and the country is emerging as next global power it is the best time for the country to promote its national language and get it recognised as an official language of United Nations.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES OF THE UN:

- There are six official languages of the UN. These are Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish.
- ❖ These languages are used at meetings of various UN organs, particularly the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Security Council.
- Each representative of a country may speak in any one of these six languages, or may speak in any language and provide interpretation into one of the six official languages.
- The UN provides simultaneous interpretation from the official language into the other five official languages, via the United Nations Interpretation Service.
- ❖ The six official languages are also used for the dissemination of official documents. Until a document is available in all six official languages, it is not published. Generally, the texts in each of the six languages are equally authoritative.
- ❖ The six official languages spoken at the UN are the first or second language of 2.8 billion people on the planet, less than half of the world population. The six languages are official languages in more than half the nations in the world.

MULTILINGUALISM AND THE UN:

Multilingualism enables communication between the UN's linguistically and culturally diverse Member States within the meeting rooms and halls of the UN. By promoting tolerance, multilingualism also ensures increased participation of all Member States in the Organization's work, as well as greater effectiveness, better outcomes and more involvement.

WHAT'S INDIA DOING IN THIS REGARD?

- India has already started diplomatic efforts to promote Hindi at international level and to gain the support of other countries.
- The MEA has set up the World Hindi Secretariat in Mauritius along with the ministry of external affairs has prepared Hindi-Chinese, Hindi-Arabic, Hindi-French, and Hindi-Spanish dictionaries to promote Hindi.
- A consolidated Hindi-based dictionary of UN languages is also under compilation.

ZOJILA PASS TUNNEL

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Union Cabinet has approved the construction of Asia's longest bi-directional Zojila Pass tunnel at an estimated cost of Rs 6,089 crore.

APPROVED BY: Union Cabinet

LOCATION: New Delhi, India

COMPLETION OF THE PROJECT:

in Seven Years

IMPLEMENTATION:

By the ministry of road transport and highways (MORT&H) through the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL)

MAIN OBJECTIVE

To provide all whether connectivity to strategically important Leh region in Jammu and Kashmir

ABOUT THE ZOJILA PASS TUNNEL:

- ☐ It is a 14.2-km long tunnel project in Jammu and Kashmir to provide all-weather
 - connectivity between Srinagar, Kargil and Leh, which remains cut-off from the rest of India during winters due to heavy snowfall.
- "Zojila tunnel will be the longest bi-directional tunnel in Asia.

BENEFITS OF THE TUNNEL:

- The project would enhance the safety of travellers crossing Zojila Pass and reduce the travel time from 3.5 hours to 15 minutes.
- This pass is most strategic for the entire Kargil sector which has seen intrusion and war in the past.
- It will further increase the employment potential for the local labourers for the project activities.

Zojila pass is situated at an altitude of 11,578 feet on Srinagar-Kargil-Leh National **Highway which remains** closed during winters (December to April) due to heavy snowfall and avalanches cutting off Leh-Ladakh region from Kashmir.

CCEA APPROVES IMPLEMENTATION OF JAL MARG VIKAS PROJECT ON NW-1

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has approved implementation of Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) for capacity augmentation of navigation on 1,380-km Haldia-Varanasi stretch of National Waterway-1 (NW1) on Ganga River.

JAL MARG VIKAS PROJECT (JMVP)

☐ The move is part of a bid to eradicate the gender pay gap by 2022 in the Nordic nation

where 38% of parliamentarians are female – above the global average – including Prime

☐ Those that fail to prove pay parity will face fines.

Minister Katrin Jakobsdottir.

BACKGROUND:

Iceland, an island country in the North Atlantic Ocean that is home to approximately 323,000 people, has a strong economy, based on tourism and fisheries. For the past nine years, it has been ranked by the World Economic Forum (WEF) as the world's most gender-equal country.

SOME MORE FACTS:

- The WEF Global Gender Gap Report uses markers such as economic opportunity, political empowerment, and health and survival to gauge the state of gender equality in a country.
- ❖ According to the latest WEF report, the top five best performers in the global gender gap are Iceland, Norway, Finland, Rwanda and Sweden. Yemen, on the other hand, is currently the lowest-ranked of the 144 countries measured in the report. India is ranked 108.
- Fifty-two countries fell below the global average in 2017, including China, Liberia and the United Arab Emirates, while 60 saw their overall gender gap decrease.
- Hungary was the only European country to be ranked lower than the global average, having scored poorly on political empowerment.

COUNCIL FOR TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION

5th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Shri Suresh Prabhu, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry recently chaired the 3rd meeting of the Council for Trade Development and Promotion.

THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION:

The Council for Trade Development and Promotion was constituted in July 2015 under the chairpersonship of the Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, in pursuance to the provisions of Foreign Trade Policy statement 2015-20.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective was to ensure a continuous dialogue with the governments of states and Union Territories on measures for providing an international trade enabling environment in the states and to create a framework for making the states active partners in boosting India's exports.

COMPOSITION:

The State Ministers of Commerce and Industry, Secretaries of concerned central departments/Ministries and heads of other export related organizations/trade bodies are Members of the Council.

H5 AVIAN INFLUENZA

5th JANUARY

CONTEXT

An outbreak of H5 Avian Influenza has been reported from Dasarahalli village from Bengaluru Urban District in Karnataka. On the directions of the Centre, the Karnataka Government has notified the outbreak and initiated the control and containment operations. A central team of Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying & Fisheries comprising of two experts has been deputed to Bengaluru for overseeing the operation and to assist the State Government.

LOCATION: from Dasarahalli village from Bengaluru Urban District in Karnataka

AVIAN INFLUENZA OR BIRD FLU:

- Avian influenza, commonly called bird flu, is an infectious viral disease of birds with a tendency of causing large-scale outbreaks of serious disease.
- ☐ Although most influenza viruses do not infect humans, A (H5N1) and A(H7N9) have caused serious infections in people.

SYMPTOMS:

Fever, cough, sore throat, muscle, body aches, nausea can lead to severe breathing problems, pneumonia, and acute respiratory distress syndrome.

TREATMENT:

Human infections with bird flu viruses usually can be treated with the same prescription drugs that are used to treat human seasonal flu viruses.

RISK FACTORS INVOLVED:

- According to WHO, a few A(H5N1) human cases have been linked to consumption of dishes made of raw, contaminated poultry blood.
- However, slaughter, handling carcasses of the infected poultry, and preparing poultry for daily consumption in households are likely to be risk factors.

ASEAN INDIA PRAVASI BHARATIYA

5th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The annual ASEAN India Pravasi Bharatiya Divas is being celebrated at Singapore. The conference, which will be attended by top leaders and businessmen from Singapore and India, will discuss the contribution of the Indian diaspora community in Southeast Asia.

AIM OF THE EVENT:

To highlight the "ancient human, maritime, cultural, commercial and religious links between India and Southeast Asia" and to promote greater economic, cultural and diplomatic cooperation between the two regions

THEME:

"Ancient Route, New Journey: Diaspora in the Dynamic Asean-India Partnership."

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENT:

The event coincides with the 25th anniversary of India-Asean dialogue partnership, which will be marked by a summit on Jan. 25 in New Delhi. Asean leaders have been invited by India to be chief guests at the Republic Day parade in New Delhi on Jan. 26.

PRAVASI BHARATIYA DIVAS:

January 9 was chosen as the day to celebrate this occasion since it was on this day in 1915 that Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest Pravasi, returned to India from South Africa, led India's freedom struggle and changed the lives of Indians forever.

☐ These conventions provide a platform to the overseas Indian community to engage with the government and Indian communities in India for mutually beneficial activities.

☐ These conventions are also very useful in networking among the overseas Indian community residing in various parts of the world and enable them to share their experiences in various fields.

ETHEREUM

5th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Ethereum has hit \$1,000 for the first time, while investors eye at alternative currencies such as ripple, ethereum and litecoin besides bitcoin. Earlier Ethereum was the second-most valued currency after bitcoin, but now ripple has outpaced it lately. The market capitalization of ripple is \$121 billion while ethereum's market cap is little less than \$100 billion on Saturday. Bitcoin, the big daddy of cryptocurrency, still rules the world of digital currencies with a whopping market cap of \$280 billion.

WHAT IS ETHEREUM?

- It's like most cryptocurrencies, shares the same basic traits as bitcoin.
- It has underlying blockchain technology with a tethered token, which in this case is known as "Ether."
- Ether is the token investors are purchasing.

HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM OTHER CRYPTOCURRENCIES?

Unlike most blockchains, Ethereum's has an added component that's particularly attractive to enterprise clients smart contracts. These protocols help to verify, facilitate, or enforce the negotiation of a contract in an efficient and secure manner.

ABOUT BLOCKCHAIN TECHNOLOGY:

Blockchain is the digital and decentralized ledger that records transactions without the need for a
financial intermediary, which in most cases is a bank.

- ☐ The advantages of blockchain technology are aplenty. First, is the potential for smaller transaction fees as a result of having no third-party involved.
- ☐ Secondly, the decentralization of blockchain ensures that there's no central hub cybercriminals could attack.

MEDARAM'S JATARA

8th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Central government is likely to declare Medaram's Sammakka-Sarakka/Saralamma Jatara a national festival this year. Once declared a national festival, Jatara can be considered for 'intangible cultural heritage of humanity' tag of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

WHAT IS IT?

Sammakka-Sarakka Jatara held by forest dwelling Koya tribe of Telangana and surrounding States, is the biggest Tribal festival in Asia which is attended by one crore people on an average.

WHY IS IT HELD?

- ☐ The event is held bi-annually to honour the twin goddesses Sammakka and her daughter Sarakka.
- Several communities in Telangana society support Jatara as it is also a mythical narrative of two tribal women leaders who fought against the Kakatiya rulers who tried to annex their land and
- According to the myth it was Sammakka's curse which caused gradual decline and death of Kakatiya rule.

WHERE IS MEDARAM LOCATED?

Medaram is a remote place in the Eturnagaram Wildlife Sanctuary, a part of Dandakaranya, the largest surviving forest belt in the Deccan.

OZONE LAYER HOLE

8th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The hole in ozone layer has shrunk thanks to the ban of CFCs, Nasa has confirmed, after finding that chlorine levels are rapidly declining in the Earth's stratosphere.

BACKGROUND:

Last year, satellite images sho	wed th	e hole	had beg	un to clos	e and could be	completely
healed by 2060.	1/11	MI	1////	_d\-		

- ☐ But it was not clear whether the closure was a direct result of the Montreal Protocol, which was signed by all countries of the world in 1985, phasing out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).
- ☐ Now long-term satellite observations by Nasa have shown a 20% decrease in levels of chlorine in the Earth's atmosphere since 2005, proving for the first time that the worldwide action is having a dramatic impact on the planet.

WHAT IS OZONE LAYER?

- ❖ A layer of ozone envelops the Earth and keeps damaging ultraviolet, or UV, radiation from reaching living things on the planet's surface.
- The ozone layer exists mainly in the stratosphere, a layer of the atmosphere that reaches from 10 to 50 kilometers (about 6 to 30 miles) above the Earth's surface.

WHAT IS OZONE HOLE?

The ozone hole is a region of depleted layers of ozone above the Antarctic region, whose creation is linked to increased cases of skin cancer.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEPLETION OF OZONE:

Depletion of ozone is due to many factors, the most dominant of which is the release of chlorine from CFCs (Chlorofluorocarbons) which destroys the ozone. CFCs are released by products such as hairsprays, old refrigerators etc.

WHAT ARE CFCS?

- Chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, are compounds made up of combinations of the elements chlorine, fluorine and carbon; aerosols, refrigerants and foams contain CFCs.
- When these CFCs enter the air, they rise up into the atmosphere to meet up with and destroy ozone molecules.
- First used in 1928, CFCs have since become more common as various other CFC compounds were created.
- Some of the better-known CFCs are the Freon compounds, which were used as cooling ingredients in refrigerators and air conditioners. CFCs have lifetimes from 50 to 100 years.

HOW CFCS DESTROY THE OZONE?

Once in the atmosphere, CFCs drift slowly upward to the stratosphere, where they are broken up by ultraviolet radiation, releasing the chlorine that catalytically destroys ozone. The process is as follows:

- UV radiation breaks off a chlorine atom from a CFC molecule.
- The chlorine atom attacks an ozone molecule (O3), breaking it apart and destroying the
- The result is an ordinary oxygen molecule (O2) and a chlorine monoxide molecule (CIO).
- The chlorine monoxide molecule (CIO) is attacked by a free oxygen atom releasing the chlorine atom and forming an ordinary oxygen molecule (O2).
- The chlorine atom is now free to attack and destroy another ozone molecule (O3). One chlorine atom can repeat this destructive cycle thousands of times.

APPLICATIONS OF CFCS:

- CFCs have some interesting properties which can be fully exploited; therefore there are plenty of uses for these molecules.
- CFCs are not flammable; therefore they were used as propellants that would push other molecules out of the aerosol sprays.
- For the same reason CFCs were used to form foamed plastics.
- Also low flammability enabled people to use these molecules to dry clean hot electronic components of devices such as air conditioning.

MANKIDIA DENIED HABITAT IN SIMLIPAL

8th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Mankidia, one of the 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in Odisha, have been denied habitat rights inside the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) under the historic Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, as the State Forest Department has objected on grounds that tribals could be attacked by wild animals, especially tigers.

DEFINITION OF HABITAT:

"'Habitat' as defined under Section 2(h) of the FRA (Forest Rights Act) includes the area comprising the customary habitat and such other habitats in reserved forests and protected forests of primitive tribal groups and pre-agricultural communities and other forest dwelling Scheduled Tribes

ABOUT MANKIDIA TRIBE:

Mankidia is a marginalised group that critically depends on making rope with siali fibre that's richly available in Similipal.

ABOUT 'PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS (PVTGS)':

PVTGs are more vulnerable among the tribal groups.
In 1975, the Government of India initiated to identify the most vulnerable tribal groups as a
separate category called PVTGs and declared 52 such groups.
While in 1993 an additional 23 groups were added to the category, making it a total of 75
PVTGs out of 705 Scheduled Tribes, spread over 17 states and one Union Territory (UT), in
the country (2011 census).
Among the 75 listed PVTG's the highest number are found in Odisha (13), followed by
Andhra Pradesh (12).

ABOUT SIMLIPAL NATIONAL PARK:

It is located in Mayurbhanj district in Odisha.

- It is part of the Similipal-Kuldiha-Hadgarh Elephant Reserve popularly known as Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve, which includes three protected areas: Similipal Tiger Reserve, Hadgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and Kuldiha Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Simlipal National Park derives its name from the abundance of semul (red silk cotton trees) that bloom here.

ALL INDIA WHIPS' CONFERENCE

9th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The 18th All India Whips' Conference was recently inaugurated at Udaipur, Rajasthan. The conference is hosting around 90 Delegates belonging to 19 States and Centre.

LOCATION: Udaipur, Rajasthan

PURPOSE:

To strengthen the parliamentary democracy, its institutions and ultimately serve the people at large

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFERENCE:

The conference provides a platform to Whips of various political parties ruling as well as opposition at the Centre as well as the States to exchange their views and experiences and discuss the challenges facing them in discharge of their Parliamentary duties and evolve norms for efficient working of parliamentary machinery.

WHO IS A WHIP?

☐ A whip is an important member of a political party's parliamentary body, having a central role in 'Floor

DO YOU KNOW?

First All India Whips Conference was organized at Indore in 1952, in the very first year of general elections to the First Lok Sabha.

Organizing the All India Whips Conference is one of the functions assigned to the Ministry of Parliamentary affairs, under Government of India (Allocation of Business) Rules, 1961 made under article 77(3) of the Constitution.

Their main job is ensuring that their members in Parliament and legislature vote in line with the party's official policy on important issues and make sure that the members turn out for important votes.

IMPORTANCE OF WHIPS IN OUR POLITICAL SYSTEM:

- ❖ In the parliamentary form of Government, Whips of various political parties are the vital links of the internal organization of parties, inside the legislatures.
- ❖ The efficient and smooth functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures depends, to a considerable extent, upon the office of the Whip.
- ❖ The Whips can be rightly said to be the managers of the parties within the legislatures.

Source: pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=175483

E-SANSAD AND E-VIDHAN

9th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Government has rolled out e-Sansad and e-Vidhan in Parliament and State Legislatures to digitize and make their functioning paperless.

IMPLEMENTED BY:

MOPA, Govt. Of India

AIM:

To digitize and make their functioning paperless

WHAT ARE THEY?

Government.

E-Sansad and E-Vidhan are mission mode projects of Government of India under Digital India, to make the functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures paperless. MoPA is the Nodal Ministry for implementation of both the projects.

MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT

These projects would make the functioning of Parliament and State Legislatures
participative, responsive, transparent, productive and more accountable to the public and
make the entire Legislative process more efficient.
Further, this environment friendly initiative is in line with the 'Go Green' initiative of the

INDIA UNVEILS PRATYUSH, ITS FASTEST SUPERCOMPUTER YET

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

India has unveiled Pratyush, an array of computers that can deliver a peak power of 6.8 petaflops. One petaflop is a million billion floating point operations per second and is a reflection of the computing capacity of a system.

WILL BE INSTALLED AT:

Two government institutes:

- 1. 4.0 petaflops HPC facility at IITM, Pune;
- 2. 2.8 petaflops facility at the National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecast.

MORE FACTS

	With this, India will now occupy the fourth position, next only to United Kingdom, Japan and
	USA in terms of dedicated capacity for HPC resources for weather and climate proposes.
_	

The UK leads with a capacity of 20.4 Petaflop, followed by Japan with 20 Petaflop and USA
with 10.7 Petaflop.

It will also move an Indian supercomputer from the 300s to the 30s in the Top500 list, a
respected international tracker of the world's fastest supercomputers.
India had till now occupied the eighth position with a capacity of 1 Petaflop.
With the new system, it has now jumped over Korea (4.8 Petaflop), France (4.4 Petaflop)
and China (2.6 Petaflop).

APPLICATIONS OF PRATYUSH:

- ❖ The Pratyush HPC will improve weather forecasts and extended range forecasts.
- ❖ It will also predict cyclones and tsunami accurately, with more lead time.
- It will also help those dependent on agriculture, hydrology and power sectors.

INDIAN RAILWAYS CONCEIVES TO DEPLOY "DRONE" CAMERAS

4th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Indian Railways has decided to deploy "Drone" cameras (UAV/NETRA) for various railway activities especially project monitoring and maintenance of tracks and other railway infrastructure. In this regard, directions have been given to Zonal Railways to procure such cameras. This is in-line with Railways' desire to use technology to enhance safety and efficiency in train operations.

MAJOR OBJECTIVE:

To enhance safety and efficiency in train operations

BENEFITS:

- ☐ Drone" cameras will help in monitoring activities of relief and rescue operation, project monitoring, progress of important works, conditions of track and inspection related activities.
- ☐ It shall also be used to assess preparedness of Non-Interlocking (NI) works, crowd management during fairs and melas, to identify scrap and also for aerial survey of station yards.
- Drones are also going to be instrumental in providing real time inputs related to safety and maintenance of tracks and other railway infrastructure.

DO YOU KNOW?

Under this initiative, West Central Railways with headquarter at Jabalpur (M.P) has become the first Zonal Railway to procure "Drone" cameras in Indian Railways.

BACKGROUND:

- Safety has been one of the biggest concerns in the Indian Railways system.
- ❖ While the number of accidents have gone down over the last few years, the number still remains over 100 accidents a year.
- Railway accidents happen due to several reasons.
- ❖ An incorrect signal, a mistake or an act of negligence by one of its staff directly associated with the running of trains, deficiency in tracks, a rash act by one of the millions of road users, an irresponsible act by a passenger who carries inflammable goods.
- ❖ Added to these are the acts of sabotage.

SUGGESTIONS BY THE WORLD BANK

The World Bank has prepared a report titled 'Strengthening Safety on Indian Railways'. Suggestions include:

- As a measure to avert accidents, the trains are to be equipped with 'ditch lights' and painted bright yellow that will enable more visibility even during twilight hours.
- The rail employees should be garbed in "high-visibility" clothes that can be worn round the year. A special heed is to be taken to ensure they wear it on duty at all times. The footwear and helmets are to be chosen by the employees that stay well within the allowance's range and serve the purpose.
- Every train must be equipped with fire extinguishers and the staff must be well guided on various fire prevention measures.
- The level crossings and paths are to be painted with a crosshatched pattern that can alert and highlight the dangers for people to be in the area.

- The authorities have been suggested to review timetables such that a maintenance block of four hours is provided weekly on all main lines as well as review safety performance in terminal operations with the intent of recognising prevailing risks.
- An independent rail safety regulator is to be created by the railways to strengthen the powers of commissioner of railway safety and form a safety management system under the Chairman, Railway Board.
- To address derailments, fires, or any other possible mishap, an emergency response plan is to be constituted.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WELFARE OF LABORATORY ANIMALS BY CPCSEA

10th JANUARY

CONTEXT

A one-day National Conference on Welfare of Laboratory Animals was recently organised by CPCSEA, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, with the theme of "Implementation of 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement) while using animals in academic research and regulatory testing in India.

ORGANIZED BY:

The Committee For The Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

THEME:

Implementation of 3Rs (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement)

FOCUS OF THE DISCUSSION:

J	The conference laid emphasis on the issue of ethical use of animals in academic	s and	
	regulatory testing in India.		

The discussions were focussed on evaluating the possibilities of exemption of animal experiments in academics and regulatory testing.
CPCSEA:
The Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals(CPCSEA) is a statutory Committee, which is established under Section 15(1) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960.
The Central Government has constituted a Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA) which is duty bound to take all such measures as may be necessary to ensure that animals are not subjected to unnecessary pain.
All establishments engaged in research and education involving animals, are required to

BACKGROUND:

- ❖ India is one of the pioneering countries to institute Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act in 1960 whereas such Act was instituted in France in 1963 and in USA in 1966.
- The detailed rules for experimentation on animals were first enacted by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1968 and were implemented by CPCSEA.

comply with the various guidelines, norms and stipulations set out by CPCSEA.

❖ Formed in 1964, it was revived in 1998, under the committed chairpersonship of Maneka Gandhi.

THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF CPCSEA:

- Registration of establishments conducting animal experimentation or breeding of animals for this purpose.
- Selection and appointment of nominees in the Institutional Animal Ethics Committees of registered establishments.
- Approval of Animal House Facilities on the basis of reports of inspections conducted by CPCSEA.
- Permission for conducting experiments involving use of animals.
- Recommendation for import of animals for use in experiments.

NO VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO HANGING, CENTRE TELLS COURT

10th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Considering the "dynamic progress" made in modern science to adopt painless methods of causing death, the court had asked the government to explore viable methods other than hanging to execute condemned prisoners.

CENTRE'S RESPONSE:

The centre has said that there is no viable method at present other than hanging to execute condemned prisoners.

NEED FOR REVIEW:

The court has favored a re-look at the practice of hanging to death as "the Constitution of
India is an organic and compassionate document which recognizes the sanctity of flexibility
of law as situations change with the flux of time".
The court notes that a condemned convict should die in peace and not in pain.
A human being is entitled to dignity even in death.

☐ Also, execution was not only "barbaric, inhuman and cruel", but also against the resolutions adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

BACKGROUND:

- ❖ The court is hearing a writ petition which has sought the court's intervention to reduce the suffering of condemned prisoners at the time of death.
- The petitioner notes that a convict should not be compelled to suffer at the time of termination of his or her life.
- ❖ When a man is hanged to death, his dignity is destroyed, the petition says.
- ❖ The petitioner has also referred to Article 21 (Right to Life) of the Constitution and said it also included the right of a condemned prisoner to have a dignified mode of execution so that death becomes less painful.

CONSTITUTIONALITY OF DEATH PENALTY:

- Constitutionality of death penalty has been well-settled by the apex court, including in Deena versus Union of India and earlier in the Bachan Singh case reported in 1980.
- Section 354 (5), which mandates death by hanging, of the Code of Criminal Procedure has already been upheld.

LAW COMMISSION'S OBSERVATIONS:

- The Law Commission in its 187th Report had noted that there was a significant increase in the number of countries where hanging has been abolished and substituted by electrocution, shooting or lethal injection as the method of execution.
- It had categorically opined that hanging is undoubtedly accompanied by intense physical torture and pain.

ALTERNATIVES:

- ♣ The present procedure can be replaced with intravenous lethal injection, shooting, electrocution or gas chamber in which death is just a matter of minutes.
- → While in hanging, the entire execution process takes over 40 minutes to declare prisoner to be dead, the shooting process involves not more than few minutes. In case of intravenous lethal injection, it is all over in 5 minutes.

NATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL

11th JANUARY

CONTEXT

National Youth Festival is being celebrated on 12th January, that is, on the occasion of birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, the youth icon of India.

LOCATION: Gautam Buddha University,

DURATION OF THE FEST: 5 days

ORGANISED BY:

Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports in collaboration with State Govt. of Uttar Pradesh

THEME:

The Theme of the Festival is 'Sankalp Se Siddhi', to capitalize on the demographic dividend of young India, to capture the vibrancy and fresh perspective of youth and to pledge to accomplish the Goal of New India.

DO YOU KNOW?

The 1st National Youth Festival was held in 1995 in Bhopal.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of organizing NYF is to provide a platform to bring the youth of the country together in an attempt to provide them opportunity to showcase their talents in various activities.

THE NATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL:

National Youth Festival (NYF) is the biggest Youth Festival of its kind in the Country
This is the 22nd National Youth Festival.
This is the first time that the National Youth Festival is being organized in NCR.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FESTIVAL:

- The Festival also provides an arena, by creating a Mini-India, where youth interact in formal and informal settings and exchange their social and cultural uniqueness.
- This blend of diverse socio-cultural milieu creates 'Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat'.
- The entire programme is designed to enhance the awareness about government initiatives and exhorting the youth to express their perceptions and concepts of how to make their initiatives more effective.

Source: pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=175517

CABINET APPROVES FIXED TERM FOR NATIONAL TRUST CHAIRPERSON

11th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Union Cabinet has approved the proposal to amend Section 4(1) and Section 5(1) of the National Trust for the Welfare of Person with Autism, Cerebral Plasy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Act, 1999 to fix the term of the Chairperson and Members of the Board of National Trust for three years.

APPROVED BY: Union Cabinet

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS AIM:

Eliminating any chance of prolonged continuation in the same post by any incumbent

WHAT NECESSITATED THIS MOVE?

Section 4(1) of the National Trust Act, 1999 provides that the Chairperson or a Member of
the Board of National Trust would continue in office beyond the prescribed term of three
years until his successor shall have been duly appointed.

In case of resignation of the Chairperson, section 5(1) of the Act provides for him to
continue in office until his successor is duly appointed by the Government.

The wording of the above provisions of the Act in its present form has resulted in
continuation of a Chairman for an indefinite period as no suitable successor could be found
eligible for appointment.

NATIONAL TRUST:

- The National Trust is a statutory body of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India, set up under the "National Trust for the Welfare of Persons with Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities" Act (Act 44 of 1999).
- The National Trust was envisaged with a core mission of providing opportunities for capacity development of Persons with Disabilities and their families, fulfilling their rights, facilitating and promoting the creation of an enabling environment and an inclusive society.

VISION OF THE NATIONAL TRUST

- An inclusive society which values human diversity and enables and empowers full participation of Persons with Disability to live independently with dignity, equal rights and opportunities.
- The National Trust's vision statement reflects a very changed India for all Indians and is based on a human rights, i.e. UNCRPD, approach.
- The vision statement focuses NT as being a leader in the disability sector in India.
- As laws focusing on Persons with Disability are changing, focused leadership needs to be established.
- Working through local and regional registered organizations and local level committees, the National Trust must make its vision and focus clear throughout the country.

MISSION OF THE NATIONAL TRUST

- The National Trust works towards providing opportunities for capacity development of Persons with Disability and their families, fulfilling their rights, facilitating and promoting the creation of an enabling environment and an inclusive society.
- The National Trust's mission, or fundamental purpose, is to create an enabling environment, i.e. providing opportunities for Persons with Disabilities through comprehensive support systems which can also be done by collaborating with other Ministries, etc., which will lead towards development of an inclusive society.

OBJECTIVES

- > to enable and empower persons with disability to live as independently and as fully as possible within and as close to their community as possible;
- > to facilitate the realisation of equal opportunities, protection of rights and full participation of persons with disability;
- > to extend support to its registered organisations to provide need based services; and
- > to evolve procedures for appointments of guardians and trustees for persons with disabilities.

FUNCTIONS:

- ✓ The National Trust has been set up to discharge two basic duties legal and welfare.
- ✓ Legal duties are discharged through Local Level Committee (LLC) set up at district level under the chairmanship of the District Collector / District Magistrate and providing legal guardianship.
- ✓ Welfare duty is discharged through the schemes and activities.
- ✓ The schemes and activities of the National Trust inter-alia include training, awareness and capacity building programmes and shelter, care giving and empowerment.

THE BOARD SHALL CONSIST OF:

- A Chairperson to be appointed by the Central Government from amongst the persons having expertise and experience in the field of autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and multiple disability.
- Nine persons to be appointed in accordance with such procedure as may be prescribed from amongst the registered organisations out of which three members each shall be from voluntary organisations, associations of parents of persons with autism, cerebral palsy, mental retardation and multiple disability and from associations of persons with disability, members; Provided that initial appointment under this clause/shall be made by the Central Government by nomination.
- Eight persons not below the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India nominated by the Government to represent the Ministries or Departments of Social Justice and Empowerment, Women and Child Development, Health and Family Welfare, Finance, Labour, Education, Urban Affairs and Employment and Rural Employment and Poverty Alleviation, Members, ex officio.
- Three Persons to be nominated by the Board representing the associations of trade, commerce and industry engaged in philanthropic activities, members.

The Chief Executive Officer, who, shall be of the rank of Joint Secretary to the Government of India, Member-Secretary, ex officio.

SOME SCHEMES AT A GLANCE BY NATIONAL TRUST

- ١. DISHA (Early Intervention and School Readiness Scheme)
- II. VIKAAS (Day Care)
- III. SAMARTH (Respite Care)
- IV. GHARAUNDA (Group Home for Adults)
- ٧. NIRAMAYA (Health Insurance Scheme)
- VI. SAHYOGI (Caregiver training scheme)
- VII. **GYAN PRABHA (Educational support)**
- VIII. PRERNA (Marketing Assistance)
 - IX. SAMBHAV (Aids and Assisted Devices)
 - X. BADHTE KADAM (Awareness and Community Interaction)

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT LOCAL AREA DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

11th JANUARY



CONTEXT

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval to continuation of Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) till the term of the 14th Finance Commission i.e. 31.03.2020.

APPROVED BY:

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, Govt. Of India

ABOUT MPLAD SCHEME:

It was launched in December, 1993, to provide a mechanism for the Members of Parliament to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provision of basic facilities including community infrastructure, based on locally felt needs.

WORKS UNDER THE SCHEME:

- ☐ Works, developmental in nature, based on locally felt needs and always available for the use of the public at large, are eligible under the scheme.
- Preference under the scheme is given to works relating to national priorities, such as provision of drinking water, public health, education, sanitation, roads, etc.

FUNDS:

- Funds are released in the form of grants in-aid directly to the district authorities.
- The funds released under the scheme are non-lapsablee.
- The liability of funds not released in a particular year is carried forward to the subsequent years, subject to eligibility.

EXECUTION OF WORKS:

- The MPs have a recommendatory role under the scheme.
- They recommend their choice of works to the concerned district authorities who implement these works by following the established procedures of the concerned state government.
- The district authority is empowered to examine the eligibility of works sanction funds and select the implementing agencies, prioritise works, supervise overall execution, and monitor the scheme at the ground level.

RECOMMENDATION OF WORKS:

- The Lok Sabha Members can recommend works in their respective constituencies.
- The elected members of the Rajya Sabha can recommend works anywhere in the state from which they are elected.
- Nominated members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha may select works for implementation anywhere in the country.

FDI POLICY FURTHER LIBERALIZED IN KEY SECTORS

11th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Union Cabinet has given its approval to a number of amendments in the FDI Policy. These are intended to liberalise and simplify the FDI policy so as to provide ease of doing business in the country. In turn, it will lead to larger FDI inflows contributing to growth of investment, income and employment.

APPROVED BY:

Union Cabinet

CHANGES INCLUDE:

- 100% FDI under automatic route for Single Brand Retail Trading.
- 100% FDI under automatic route in Construction Development.
- Foreign airlines allowed to invest up to 49% under approval route in Air India.
- FIIs/FPIs allowed to invest in Power Exchanges through primary market.
- Definition of 'medical devices' amended in the FDI Policy.

BACKGROUND:

- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a major driver of economic growth and a source of nondebt finance for the economic development of the country.
- Government has put in place an investor friendly policy on FDI, under which FDI up to 100%, is permitted on the automatic route in most sectors/ activities.
- ❖ In the recent past, the Government has brought FDI policy reforms in a number of sectors viz. Defence, Construction Development, Insurance, Pension, Other Financial Services, Asset reconstruction Companies, Broadcasting, Civil Aviation, Pharmaceuticals, Trading etc. Measures undertaken by the Government have resulted in increased FDI inflows in to the country.

LOGISTICS EASE ACROSS DIFFERENT STATES (LEADS) INDEX

11th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) index, a perception-based index of mobility of goods and efficiency of logistics chain, has been released.

WHAT IS LEADS INDEX?

- The Logistics Ease Across Different States (LEADS) index is a composite indicator to assess international trade logistics across states and Union territories.
- It is based on a stakeholders' survey conducted by Deloitte for the ministry of commerce and industry.
- LEADS is loosely based on the World Bank's biannual Logistics Performance Index (LPI), on which India was ranked 35 among 160 countries in 2016, up from 54 in 2014.

PARAMETERS:

LEADS is based on eight parameters such as infrastructure, services, timeliness, track and trace, competitiveness of pricing, safety of cargo, operating environment and regulatory process.

PERFORMANCE OF STATES:

While Gujarat topped the first-of-its-kind index, Punjab and Andhra Pradesh took the second and third positions, respectively.

CHALLENGES:

The study found that supply chain efficiencies and economies of scale are yet to be unlocked, mostly due to suboptimal investment in building scale in infrastructure, automation, human capital and technology.

It also underlined issues specific to certain states.

PUSH BY THE GOVERNMENT:

- In a major push to developing an integrated logistics framework in the country, including industrial parks, cold chains and warehousing facilities, the government in November granted infrastructure status to the logistics sector, enabling the industry to access cheaper finances.
- The government also created the position of a special secretary in the commerce ministry to exclusively handle logistics.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- ✓ The report has identified focus areas where action can help improve.
- ✓ Regulation through cumbersome rules, rigid slabs for rail cargo, poor customs facilities and frequent stoppages have been flagged as challenges.
- ✓ Similarly, it has suggested that digitisation and last mile connectivity, specially road links to ports and airports, or inadequate capacity at ports in addition to lack of grievance mechanism, need to be addressed.

INTERNATIONAL DHARMA-DHAMMA CONFERENCE

11th JANUARY

CONTEXT

4th International Dharma-Dhamma Conference on "State and Social Order in Dharma-Dhamma Traditions" was recently inaugurated at Rajgir in Nalanda district. The event is being organised as part of the commemorative events to celebrate the Silver Jubilee year of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership.

INAUGURATED AT:

Rajgir in Nalanda district, Patna, Bihar

INAUGURATED BY: Ram Nath Kovind, President of India

ORGANIZERS:

Nalanda University, in collaboration with the Centre for Study of Religion and Society, India Foundation, Ministry of External Affairs and the Vietnam Buddhist University,

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CONFERENCE:

- The central theme of the conference is the ideal state and just social order based on dharmic principles.
- Through this conference it is aimed to facilitate crosspollination of ideas and foster harmony at the global level.
- ❖ In the present era of globalization it is all the more needed to integrate the world through the common bond of Dharma-Dhamma which provides strong thread of interconnectedness.
- The event is being organised as part of the commemorative events to celebrate the Silver Jubilee year of ASEAN-India Dialogue Partnership, with support of the Union Ministry of External Affairs.
- Thus, the conference seeks to explore the shared values of the dharmic traditions, which may provide the guiding light to the troubled world today.



SFOORTI APPLICATION

12th JANUARY

CONTEXT

To help plan the traffic flows and optimize freight operations, Ministry of Railways have launched Smart Freight Operation Optimisation & Real Time Information (SFOORTI) App for Freight Managers which provides features for monitoring and managing freight business using Geographic Information System (GIS) Views and Dashboard.

LAUNCHED BY:

Ministry of Railways

AIM:

To help plan the traffic flows and optimize freight operations

SALIENT FEATURES OF SFOORTI APPLICATION ARE AS BELOW:

With this application, movement of freight trains on Geographic Information System (GIS)
view can be tracked.
Both passenger and freight trains can be tracked over Zones/Divisions/ Sections in single GIS
View.
Freight business can be monitored.
Comparative Analysis of Zonal/Divisional Traffic.
Analysis of new traffic captured and traffic lost.
This app provides a Bird's eye view of all Freight As <mark>set</mark> s in a single window.
Provides end to end Rake movement on Geospatial view
Expected Traffic at Interchange points to evaluate daily performance can be viewed.
Performance of each zone and divisions with respect to loading and utilization of freight
assets can be viewed.
Sectional performance monitoring for sections, divisions and zones shall help in traffic
routing.
Freight terminal and sidings can be better monitored to ensure better turnaround of rakes.

IMPORTANCE OF FREIGHT TRAFFIC:

- Freight traffic is the major source of revenue for Indian Railways.
- Only one-third of the 13000 trains running daily on IR are freight trains, but it accounts 65% of total revenue of IR.
- A Railway Freight traffic is vital for economic and industrial progress of the country.

ISRO LAUNCHES ITS 100TH SATELLITE

12th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Space agency ISRO has successfully sent up a rocket carrying India's 100th satellite along with 30 others, four months after failed launch. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle or PSLV lifted off from Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

LAUNCHED FROM:

Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh, India

BENEFITS:

The images will be useful for cartographic applications, urban and rural applications, coastal land use and regulation, road network monitoring, water distribution, creation of land use maps and change detection to bring out geographical Land Information Systems and Geographical Information System applications.

POLAR SATELLITE LAUNCH VEHICLE (PSLV

- ☐ The PSLV-C40 placed 31 satellites, originating from seven countries.
- ☐ This is the 42nd flight of the PSLV.
- ☐ The 30 other satellites onboard include two other satellites from India and 28 satellites from six countries-Canada, Finland, France, Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States.

ABOUT THE SATELLITE

- The Cartosat-2 satellite, the third in the series, was deployed to relay high resolution scene specific spot imageries.
- The mission is a unique one, since the satellites were launched in two orbits. Thirty of the satellites were launched in an orbit 550 km about, and one 359-km above the Earth.
- ❖ This was done through what scientists call the "multiple burn technology" under which the rocket's engine is switched off and then switched on to control its height.
- This is ISRO's first launch in 2018 and it is also the first after the unsuccessful mission of IRNSS-1H in August last year.

BEIDOU

12th JANUARY

CONTEXT

China has sent twin satellites into space on a single carrier rocket, as part of efforts to enable its BeiDou system to provide navigation and positioning services to countries along the Belt and Road by the end of 2018.

SENT BY: China

AIM:

To provide navigation and positioning services to countries

BACKGROUND:

This is the first launch of the BeiDou satellites in 2018.
The twin satellites are coded the 26th and 27th satellites in the BeiDou Navigation Satellite
System (BDS).
The BeiDou Navigation Satellite System is a Chinese satellite navigation system.
BeiDou has been described as a potential navigation satellite system to overtake GPS in
global usage, and is expected to be more accurate than the GPS once it is fully completed.
The current third generation of BeiDou claims to reach millimeter-level accuracy (with post-
processing), which is ten times more accurate than the finest level of GPS.

LIST OF GLOBAL NAVIGATION SATELLITE SYSTEMS:

- GPS of the United States of America.
- GLONASS or Global Navigation Sputnik System of Russia.
- Galileo of the European Union.
- IRNSS or NAVIC of India.
- Quasi-Zenith Satellite System (QZSS) of Japan.

SPARCS

12th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Scientists are planning to launch a small telescope into the Earth's orbit that will monitor the flares and sunspots of small stars to assess how habitable the environment is for planets orbiting them. The spacecraft is known as the Star-Planet Activity Research CubeSat, or SPARCS.

WHAT IS SPARCS?

- ☐ SPARCS is a new NASA-funded space telescope and will be launched in 2021.
- ☐ The stars that SPARCS will focus on are small, dim, and cool by comparison to the Sun. Having less than half the Sun's size and temperature, they shine with barely one per cent its brightness.
- ☐ The heart of the SPARCS spacecraft will be a telescope with a diameter of nine centimetres plus a camera with two ultraviolet-sensitive detectors to be developed by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory.
- ☐ Both the telescope and camera will be optimised for observations using ultraviolet light, which strongly affects the planet's atmosphere and its potential to harbour life on the surface.

MISSION:

The mission, including spacecraft design, integration and resulting science, is led by Arizona State University's School of Earth and Space Exploration (SESE).

BACKGROUND:

- Astronomers have discovered that essentially every M dwarf star has at least one planet orbiting it, and about one system in four has a rocky planet located in the star's habitable zone.
- This is the potentially life-friendly region where temperatures are neither too hot nor too cold for life as we know it, and liquid water could exist on the planet's surface.
- Since M dwarfs are so plentiful, astronomers estimate that our galaxy alone contains roughly 40 billion rocky planets in habitable zones around their stars.
- This means that most of the habitable-zone planets in our galaxy orbit M dwarfs.

CHIRU GOAT

12th JANUARY

CONTEXT

India's environment ministry has ruled out the possibility of conservation breeding of the Chiru goat, a 'near threatened' species whose underfur is used for making the famous Shahtoosh shawls.

FOUND IN:

China, Tibet, Nepal and Ladakh in India

WHAT'S THE CONCERN?

Chiru goat, which is also known as the Tibetan antelope, has long been hunted for its underfur (Shahtoosh), which is renowned for its quality and has traditionally been transported to Srinagar, where it is woven into an extremely fine fabric used to make shawls.

BACKGROUND:

Last year, the parliamentary standing committee on science & technology, environment & forests had recommended to the ministry of environment, forest and climate change

- (MoEFCC) to conserve and breed the Chiru goat, which can then be given to the shawl makers.
- The panel said this would provide a sustainable livelihood opportunity to the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

WHY THE GOVERNMENT IS NOT IN FAVOUR OF CONSERVATION **BREEDING OF CHIRU GOAT?**

In 2017, the Chiru goat species was assessed as 'near threatened' by the International
Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) because their current population can only be
maintained with continued high levels of protection in its natural range and strict controls
on trade of the shawls made from its underfur.
The government believes that any relaxation in the protection regime of the animal would
lead to a rapid population decline due to commer <mark>cial poa</mark> ching.
Also, Chiru inhabits the high-altitude Tibetan plateau and requires large an expanse of land
for its movement and ranging patterns to fulfil its feeding and breeding requirements.
Rearing the goat in captivity is extremely difficult. Besides, any attempt to do conservation
breeding of Chiru at very high altitude regions of Ladakh (more than 3,800m) may neither
be economical nor feasible as humans cannot be posted there continuously for more than
2-3 months.

SOME MORE FACTS:

- Chiru, or Tibetan antelope, is assessed as 'Near Threatened' by the International Union for Conservation of Nature 2017.
- The Tibetan antelope is the sole species in the genus Pantholops.
- Endemic to the Tibetan Plateau, the Tibetan antelope inhabits open alpine and cold steppe environments between 3,250 and 5,500 m (10,660 and 18,040 ft) elevation.

URBAN HEAT ISLAND

13th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Every winter, the whole of north India is covered by dense fog. But a phenomenon called urban heat island is burning holes in this grey shroud over New Delhi and other cities on the Indo-Gangetic Plain, says a new study.

IMPACTS:

- ☐ The urban heat island effect is so strong in Delhi, the largest city in the region, that it saw 50% less fog than surrounding areas.
- In Delhi, the heat island effect also appears to be suppressing the very formation of fog.
- ☐ Scientists found that while areas outside Delhi have seen a 20 per cent increase in fog in the period 2012-2016 compared with 2000-2004, Delhi itself did not see an increase.

- ♣ The analysis found a correlation between the size of the urban population and that of the fog hole.
- Population size has been shown to be related to the intensity of urban heat islands since they are an indicator of urban growth.

WAY AHEAD:

- The findings from the study are important since dense and polluted winter fog envelopes north India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh every year from December to January severely affecting air quality and disrupting air, rail and road traffic.
- The study will be very useful in understanding the process of why fog occurs and ultimately to predict its occurrence.

WHAT IS URBAN HEAT ISLAND EFFECT?

The urban heat island is a phenomenon when the heat gets trapped near the earth's surface as a result of a decline in green cover, rapid urbanisation, energy-intensive activities, and concrete structures.

CONCERNS:

- Urban heat islands can have worse air and water quality than their rural neighbours.
- UHIs often have lower air quality because there are more pollutants (waste products from vehicles, industry, and people) being pumped into the air.
- These pollutants are blocked from scattering and becoming less toxic by the urban landscape: buildings, roads, sidewalks, and parking lots.
- Water quality also suffers.
- ❖ When warm water from the UHI ends up flowing into local streams, it stresses the native species that have adapted to life in a cooler aquatic environment.

Source: thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/the-urban-heat-islandeffect/article21908732.ece

MODEL CODE

13th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Election Commission (EC) has set up a 14-member committee to suggest changes to Section 126 of the Representation of the People (RP) Act, which prohibits poll campaign in the last 48 hours leading to voting, in the wake of media expansion. The committee, chaired by Deputy Election Commissioner Umesh Sinha, will submit its report within three months.

TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Apart from suggesting modifications to the election law, the committee will also study the impact of new media and social media during the "silence period" and its

implication in view of Section 126 and suggest changes to the model code of conduct (MCC) accordingly.

It has also been tasked to examine the difficulties faced in regulating media platforms during the prohibitory 48 hours in a multi-phase election.

NEED FOR REVIEW:

Election Commission is of the considered view that due to multifold expansion of digital and electronic media, the extant Model Code of Conduct, Section 126 of the RP Act, 1951, and other related provisions require revisiting to cater to the requirement and challenges of the present and emerging situations.

WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT MCC?

These are the guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for conduct of political parties and candidates during elections mainly with respect to speeches, polling day, polling booths, election manifestos, processions and general conduct.

AIM:

To ensure free and fair elections

WHEN IT COMES INTO FORCE?

The Model Code of Conduct comes into force immediately on announcement of the election schedule by the commission. The Code remains in force till the end of the electoral process.

STATUS:

- ❖ The need for such code is in the interest of free and fair elections.
- However, the code does not have any specific statutory basis.
- It has only a persuasive effect.
- It contains what is known as "rules of electoral morality".
- ❖ But this lack of statutory backing does not prevent the Commission from enforcing it.

EVOLUTION:

- The Commission issued the code for the first time in 1971 (5th Election) and revised it from time to time.
- This set of norms has been evolved with the consensus of political parties who have consented to abide by the principles embodied in the said code and also binds them to respect and observe it in its letter and spirit.

WHAT IT CONTAINS?

The salient features of the Model Code of Conduct lay down how political parties, contesting candidates and party(s) in power should conduct themselves during the process of elections i.e. on their general conduct during electioneering, holding meetings and processions, poll day activities and functioning of the party in power etc.

RASHTRIYA SANSKRITI MAHOTSAV-2018

15th JANUARY

CONTEXT

To celebrate the idea of unity in diversity, the Ministry of Culture had organized the 7th edition of the Rashtriya Sanskriti Mahotsav.

ORGANIZED BY:

Ministry of Culture under the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat matrix

HELD IN

Karnataka (The State paired with Karnataka is Uttarakhand)

ABOUT THE MAHOTSAV

- ☐ The Mahotsav will cover a profusion of art forms from classical and folk, music and dance, theatre to literature and the visual arts and would offer the chance to experience the best in established and emerging virtuosity.
- ☐ A handloom and handicrafts-utsav is part of the proposed event.
- ☐ The gastronomic culture of several partnering states will be showcased through a food festival.

The Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat programme was launched by the Prime Minister on 31st October, 2016 to promote engagement amongst the people of different states/UTs so as to enhance mutual understanding and bonding between people of diverse cultures, thereby securing stronger unity and integrity of India.

Source: pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=175601

HAVRE

15th JANUARY

CONTEXT

It is the world's largest deep ocean volcanic eruption happened in New Zealand. It was recently confirmed by the researchers.

LOCATION: New Zealand

ABOUT HAVRE:

- ☐ A solidified volcanic rock known as pumice raft-400 square kilometres in size-found floating in the ocean near New Zealand in 2012 showed that underwater eruption had occurred.
- ☐ The eruption involved 14 aligned vents causing a "massive rupture".

MAHADAYI ROW

15th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The row between Goa, Karnataka and Maharashtra over the sharing of the Mahadayi (Mandovi) river has escalated. With Karnataka headed for elections and the Mahadayi Water Disputes Tribunal setting a February date for the final hearing, political parties in both States have upped the ante.

WHAT IS THE MAHADAYI ROW?

- ☐ Karnataka seeks to divert water from tributaries of the river through the Kalasa-Bhanduri Nala project towards the parched Malaprabha river basin (a tributary of River Krishna), which is being strongly opposed by Goa.
- ☐ This has led to a long-drawn farmers' agitation in Karnataka, which has been revitalised as the State goes to the polls later this year.
- ☐ Goa's main contention is that Karnataka cannot divert water from an already-deficit Mahadayi basin to the
 - Malaprabha river basin: 115 tmcft was available in the basin, while the requirement for the three States is 145 tmcft.
- ☐ It has said that any attempt to divert water from one river basin to the other will cause irreparable environmental damage.
- ☐ Karnataka claims 199.6 tmcft is available and the river is water-surplus. Of this, Karnataka wants 24.15 tmcft.

Do you know?

Mahadayi: The 80-km-long river rises from the forests of the Western Ghats at Devgaon in northern Karnataka. It enters Goa where it is a lifeline, both for the people and the rich flora and fauna of its forests.

Source: thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/mahadayi-row-objection-only-totransfer-from-deficit-basin-says-parrikar/article22364951.ece

SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)

15th JANUARY

CONTEXT

According to a recent study, in India, more than 10 million people suffer from a selfdiagnosable ailment called Seasonal affective disorder (SAD). Its milder version usually resolves itself within months.

WHAT IS SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER (SAD)?

- ☐ SAD occurs in climates where there is less sunlight at certain times of the year.
- ☐ Sometimes, it is mistaken to be a "lighter" version of depression, which is untrue.
- ☐ It is a different version of the same illness and people with SAD are just as ill as people with major depression, according to psychiatrists.

SYMPTOMS:



Symptoms include fatigue, depression, a feeling of hopelessness and social withdrawal.

VULNERABLE GROUP:

- ❖ Women are overwhelmingly more susceptible to SAD than men.
- Statistics released by the Indian Medical Association (IMA) show that SAD occurs four times more often in women than in men.
- ❖ The age of onset is estimated to be between 18 and 30 years but can affect anyone irrespective of age.
- ❖ SAD generally starts in late fall and early winter and goes away during spring and summer.
- Depressive episodes linked to summer can occur, but are much rarer than winter episodes.

PREVENTION:

- 4 A few ways in which people can prevent winter depression include ensuring a healthy and balanced diet.
- Staying well hydrated is key during the winter months since it gives you more energy, mental clarity and an enhanced digestive function.
- Getting enough sunlight and engaging in regular outdoor physical exercise are also important.

TREATMENT:

- Treatment for SAD involves enough light exposure, artificial light exposure, sun therapy and drugs, if needed.
- Artificial light exposure is effective but may take four to six weeks to see a response, although some patients improve within days.
- Therapy is continued until sufficient and daily natural sunlight exposure is available.

MONUMENTS BILL

15th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Some historians and archaeologists have expressed concern over amendments proposed to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958). The Lok Sabha passed the amendments to the Act on January 3. But the Bill is yet to be cleared by the Rajya Sabha.

AMENDMENT BILL 2017:

Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958)

WHAT ARE THE CONCERNS?

The Act, which originally instituted conservation measures and banned construction activities near protected monuments, is now sought to be amended so that public works could be allowed within the 100 m prohibited zone.

CONSTRUCTION IN 'PROHIBITED AREAS'

The Act defines a 'prohibited area' as an area of 100 meters around a protected monument
or area.
The central government can extend the prohibited area beyond 100 meters.
The Act does not permit construction in such prohi <mark>bit</mark> ed areas, except under certain
conditions.
The Act also prohibits construction in 'prohibited areas' even if it is for public purposes.
The Bill amends this provision to permit construction of public works in 'prohibited areas'
for public purposes.
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DEFINITION OF 'PUBLIC WORKS':

- The Bill introduces a definition for 'public works', which includes the construction of any infrastructure that is financed and carried out by the central government for public purposes.
- This infrastructure must be necessary for public safety and security and must be based on a specific instance of danger to public safety.
- ❖ Also, there should be no reasonable alternative to carrying out construction in the prohibited area.

PROCEDURE FOR SEEKING PERMISSION FOR PUBLIC WORKS:

- As per the Bill, the relevant central government department, that seeks to carry out construction for public purposes in a prohibited area, should make an application to the competent authority.
- If there is any question related to whether a construction project qualifies as 'public works', it will be referred to the National Monuments Authority.

- This Authority, will make its recommendations, with written reasons, to the central government.
- The decision of the central government will be final.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED PUBLIC WORKS:

- ♣ The Bill empowers the National Monuments Authority to consider an impact assessment of the proposed public works in a prohibited area, including its
 - (i) archaeological impact;
 - (ii) visual impact;
 - (iii) heritage impact.
- The Authority will make a recommendation, for construction of public works to the central government, only if it is satisfied that there is no reasonable possibility of moving the construction outside the prohibited area.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM MANUFACTURING INDEX

15th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The World Economic Forum (WEF) has released its Global Manufacturing Index. This is WEF's first 'Readiness for the future of production report'. The report has been developed in collaboration with A T Kearney and calls for new and innovative approaches to public-private collaboration are needed to accelerate transformation.

DEVELOPED IN:

Collaboration with A T Kearney

ABOUT THE REPORT

The report has categorised 100 countries in four major groups for its ranking:

- I. Leading (strong current base, high level of readiness for future).
- II. High Potential (limited current base, high potential for future).
- III. Legacy (strong current base, at risk for future).
- IV. Nascent (limited current base, low level of readiness for future).

PERFORMANCE OF VARIOUS COUNTRIES:

Japan has topped the list. Japan is followed by South Korea, Germany, Switzerland, China,
Czech Republic, the US, Sweden, Austria and Ireland in the top 10.
Among BRICS nations, Russia is ranked 35th, Brazil 41st and South Africa at 45th place.
China figures among the WEF's "leading countries". "Legacy" group includes Hungary,
Mexico, Philippines, Russia, Thailand and Turkey, among others, and Brazil as well as South
Africa are among the "nascent" ones.

PERFORMANCE OF INDIA:

- India is at the 30th position, five places below China, but higher than the other BRICS members Brazil, Russia and South Africa. India has been placed in the "Legacy" group.
- ❖ In terms of scale of production, India has been ranked 9th, while for complexity it is at 48th place. For market size, India is ranked 3rd, while areas where the country is ranked poorly (90th or even lower) include female participation in labour force, trade tariffs, regulatory efficiency and sustainable resources.
- Overall, India is ranked better than its neighbours Sri Lanka (66th), Pakistan (74th) and Bangladesh (80th). Other countries ranked below India include Turkey, Canada, Indonesia, New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, Mauritius and the UAE.
- ❖ India's manufacturing sector has grown by over 7% per annum on average in the past three decades and accounts for 16-20% of India's GDP. Home to the second-largest population in the world and one of the fastest growing economies, the demand for Indian manufactured products is rising.

WAY AHEAD FOR INDIA:

• India has room for improvement across the drivers of production, except for demand environment where it ranks in the top 5.

- This entails upgrading education curricula, revamping vocational training programmes and improving digital skills.
- India should also continue to diversify its energy sources and reduce emissions as its manufacturing sector continues to expand.

INTACH TO DOCUMENT HERITAGE SITES ALONG MAHANADI RIVER

16th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) today launched a programme for documentation of the tangible and intangible heritage sites along both sides of Mahanadi River. It will be a road map for the conservation workers, historians, students and researchers. Seven teams of culture enthusiasts will cover nearly 1000 kilometres on both side of the river Mahanadi under the project.

LAUNCHED BY:

Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH)

COVER AREA:

Nearly 1000 kilometers on both side of the river Mahanadi under the project

BACKGROUND:

Civilisation has grown on the banks of the river and there are numerous tangible heritages like

temples, palaces, forts dot it. Moreover, intangible heritage like folklore, songs and dances, tribal art and craft have also thrived along the river.

INTACH:

- INTACH is an autonomous non-governmental Indian nonprofit society that seeks to preserve Indian culture and heritage.
- It was founded in 1984.

DO YOU KNOW?

Near the city of Sambalpur, it is dammed by the largest earthen dam in the world, the Hirakud Dam.

MAHANADI RIVER:

- ❖ The 850km length of the Mahanadi River is divided almost equally between Chhattisgarh, where it is born, and downstream Odisha.
- ❖ Mahanadi rises from Raipur district of Chhatisgarh and flows for about 851 km before its outfall into the Bay of Bengal. Its main tributaries are the Seonath, the Jonk, the Hasdeo, the Mand, the ib, the Ong and the Tel.

CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD OF EDUCATION (CABE)

16th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The 65th Meeting of the Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) was recently held under the Chairmanship of Union Human Resource Development Minister Shri Prakash Javadekar. A number of decisions were taken at the meeting, in part flowing from the agenda, and in part stemming from concerns raised by the State Governments.

HELD UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF:

Union Human Resource Development Minister Shri Prakash Javadekar

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSION:

	The board has decided to launch 'Operation Digital Board' in
	all schools in five years.
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- ☐ This will be undertaken jointly by Centre, State, CSR, and community.
- ☐ This will improve the quality of education.
- ☐ Students will be empowered with 360 degree information with interesting learning experience and teacher accountability will also increase.

THE CENTRAL ADVISORY BOARD OF EDUCATION (CABE):

- The Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) is the highest advisory body to advise the Central and State Governments in the field of education.
- 👢 The Central Advisory Board of Education, the oldest and the most important advisory body of the Government of India in education was first established in 1920 and dissolved in 1923 as a measure of economy.
- It was revived in 1935 and has been in existence ever since.

THE FUNCTIONS OF CABE:

- ❖ To review the progress of education from time to time.
- To appraise the extent and manner in which the education policy has been implemented by the Central and State Governments, and other concerned agencies, and to give appropriate advice in the matter.
- To advice regarding coordination between the Central and State Governments/UT Administrations, State Governments and non-governmental agencies for educational development in accordance with the education policy.
- To advise, suo motu, or on a reference made to it by the Central Government or any State Government or a Union Territory Administration or any educational question.

DO YOU KNOW?

The idea that there should be a central **Advisory Board of Education was first** put forward by the Calcutta University Commission (1917-19).

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD:

- Chairman of the board shall be Union Minister of Human Resource Development.
- Minister of State for Human Resource Development shall be the Vice- Chairman.
- The tenure of office of members of the Board, other than the ex-officio members, shall be three years.

BBIN MOTOR VEHICLES AGREEMENT

16th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Bangladesh, India and Nepal have agreed on the text of the operating procedures for passenger vehicle movement in the sub-region under the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) signed in June 2015, and will soon complete the internal approval processes for signing of the passenger protocol. The participating countries have also agreed to conduct more trial runs for cargo vehicles under the agreement.

SIGNED IN: June 2015:

SIGNED BETWEEN:

Bangladesh, India and Nepal

SIGNED BY:

Transport Ministers of the BBIN countries in Thimphu, Bhutan

BACKGROUND:

☐ However, Bhutan has given its consent for the BBIN MVA to enter into force amongst the other 3 countries i.e. Bangladesh, India and Nepal, who have already ratified it.

ABOUT BBIN MVA:

- The landmark MVA was signed by Transport Ministers of the BBIN countries in Thimphu, Bhutan on 15 June 2015.
- As per the agreement, member countries would allow vehicles registered in the other countries to enter their territory under certain terms and conditions. C
- ustoms and tariffs will be decided by the respective countries and these would be finalised at bilateral and trilateral forums.

OBJECTIVE:

The main objective of the agreement is to provide seamless people-to-people contact and enhance economic interaction by facilitating cross border movement of people and goods.

BENEFITS:



- It would permit unhindered movement of passenger and cargo vehicles among the four countries.
- Cargo vehicles do not have to be changed at the border, a practice that has prevailed until now.
- The BBIN agreement will promote safe, economical efficient and environmentally sound road transport in the sub-region and will further help each country in creating an institutional mechanism for regional integration.

ASSISTANCE FROM ADB:

♣ The Asian Development Bank(ADB) has been providing technical, advisory, and financial support to the BBIN MVA initiative as part of its assistance to the South Asia Subregional

Economic Cooperation (SASEC) program, a projects-based economic cooperation initiative that brings together the BBIN countries, Maldives, Sri Lanka and more recently, Myanmar.

ADB is the secretariat of SASEC.

Source: livemint.com/Politics/kVaw1u3uvAq3SVugqTGkCI/BBIN-pact-India-Bangladesh-Nepal-okay-vehicle-movement-pr.html

HAJ SUBSIDY

17th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The government has abolished the subsidy being given to Haj pilgrims every year. The government said it will use the subsidy funds to empower the minorities.

BACKGROUND:

The policy to support Muslims in making the pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia, can be
traced back to 1932, when the British enacted the Port Haj Committees Act.
In the ensuing decades, the Act has undergone numerous changes. And in recent years it
has called for significant criticism from various parties.
In 2012, a Supreme Court order directed the Haj subsidy to be gradually phased out in the
coming ten years.

☐ In 2017, a Central Haj Committee meeting decided to do away with the subsidy by the following year.

WHAT IS THE HAJ SUBSIDY?

- The Haj subsidy refers to discounted airfares given by the government-owned airlines, Air India.
- ❖ It also includes assistance to Muslim pilgrims for domestic travel to reach specially designed Haj departure airport terminals, lodging, medical care and meal.
- Originally, the subsidy was given on air fares of flights between Bombay and Jeddah.
- ❖ Later, additional flight legs were added to the subsidy list.
- Since 1984, all the traffic for Haj from India to Saudi Arabia has been shared between Air India and Saudi, both of which are the government funded carriers of their respective countries.
- ❖ After the 2012 Supreme Court order to phase out the subsidy in the next ten years, the government had been steadily declining the amount of subsidy offered to Haj pilgrims each year.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICISMS AGAINST THE HAJ SUBSIDY?

- ♣ The Haj subsidy has come under heavy criticism, particularly because of the monopoly formed by Air India in carrying out the pilgrimage.
- Allegedly, the government subsidies have resulted in major profits for Air India, benefiting the airlines far more than the pilgrims.
- ♣ According to several critics of the subsidy, if booked months in advance, it is possible to buy cheaper air tickets, thereby doing away with the need for subsidy.
- ♣ Some of the political parties have also called the subsidy as minority appeasement.

OTHER RELIGIOUS PILGRIMAGES OFFERED GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY IN **INDIA**

- The Haj is not the only religious pilgrimage being funded by the State.
- A number of other religious tours are supported by the government.
- For instance, the state and central governments spend considerable amounts on the pilgrim facilities at the four Kumbh melas in Haridwar, Ujjain, Nashik and Allahabad.
- The Kailash Manasarovar yatra from North India to the mountains of Tibet is yet another pilgrimage which is organised by the government with arrangements being made for security and health facilities.

Source: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/cpm-owaisi-slam-govt-for-end-to-hajsubsidy/articleshow/62546721.cms

DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

17th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) has simplified 'Make II' procedure, which prescribes guidelines to be followed to develop and manufacture defence equipment through Indian Industry.

CHANGES INTRODUCED:

Since no government funding is involved in 'Make II' project, the DAC felt it necessary to
simplify the procedure to make it industry friendly, with minimal government control.
The salient aspects of the revised procedure will now allow Ministry of Defence to accept
suo-motu proposals from the industry and also allows start-ups to develop equipment for
Indian Armed Forces.
The minimum qualification criteria to participate in 'Make II' projects has also been relaxed
by removing conditions related to credit rating and reducing financial net worth criteria.
As per the earlier 'Make II' procedure, only two vendors were shortlisted to develop
prototype equipment.
Now, all vendors meeting the relaxed eligibility criteria will be allowed to participate in the
prototype development process.
The vendor will not be required to submit Detailed Project Report.
After accord of approval of the 'Make II' project by the council, all clearances will be
accorded at Service HQ (SHQ) level.

DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL (DAC)

To counter corruption and speed up decision- making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC. It is headed by the Defence Minister.

OBJECTIVE:

The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.

FUNCTIONS:

- The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans.
- It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.

GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON ACADEMIC NETWORK (GIAN) **PROGRAM**

17th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The First Global Initiative on Academic Network GIAN course on Sustainable Urban planning using remote sensing and Geographic Information System, GIS has been launched at Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur's outreach center in NOIDA

LAUNCHED AT:

Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur's outreach center in NOIDA

COURSE ON:

Sustainable Urban planning using remote sensing and Geographic Information System, GIS

KEY FACTS:

This course is being conducted under the Global Initiative on Academic Network (GIAN)
Program of the Ministry of Human Resource Development and actively supported by NITI
Aayog and Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs.
This course aims to give participants state-of-the-art remote sensing and GIS skills which will
allow them to rise to the challenge of managing the rapidly changing urban environment of
Indian cities.

☐ Focus will be on issues such as water resource management, water pollution and strategic emplacements for water treatment facilities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE COUR

This course is expected to contribute significantly to build trained manpower for the Smart Cities Mission launched by the Government on 25th June 2015 with an objective to promote sustainable and inclusive cities that provide core infrastructure and give a decent quality of life to its citizens, a clean and sustainable environment and application of 'Smart' Solutions.

ABOUT GLOBAL INITIATIVE OF ACADEMIC NETWORKS (GIAN):

- Global Initiative of Academic Networks (GIAN) in Higher Education was launched in 2015.
- GIAN aims at tapping the talent pool of scientists and entrepreneurs to engage with the institutes of higher education in India to augment the country's existing academic resources, accelerate the pace of quality reforms, and further strengthen India's scientific and technological capabilities.

OBJECTIVES:

 \downarrow To increase the footfalls of reputed international faculty in the Indian academic institutes.

- ♣ To provide opportunity to our students to seek knowledge and experience from reputed International faculty.
- ♣ To create avenue for possible collaborative research with the international faculty
- ♣ To increase participation and presence of international students in the academic Institutes.
- Opportunity for the students of different Institutes/Universities to interact and learn subjects in niche areas through collaborative learning process.
- ♣ Provide opportunity for the technical persons from Indian Industry to improve understandings and update their knowledge in relevant areas.
- Motivate the best international experts in the world to work on problems related to India.
- ♣ Develop high quality course material in niche areas, both through video and print that can be used by a larger body of students and teachers.
- To document and develop new pedagogic methods in emerging topics of national and international interest.

RAISINA DIALOGUE 2018

17th JANUARY

CONTEXT

HELD IN: New Delhi

THEME: 'Managing Disruptive Transitions: Ideas, Institutions & Idioms'

ORGANISED BY: the Ministry of External Affairs and Observer Research Foundation (ORF)

ABOUT THE RAISINA DIALOGUE:

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	This is an annual	COO NOLITICO	OVONT
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☐ It is designed to explore prospects and opportunities for Asian integration as well as Asia's integration with the larger world.

☐ It is predicated on India's vital role in the Indian Ocean Region and how India along with its partners can build a stable regional and world order.

PARTICIPANTS:

The conference is a multistakeholder, cross-sectoral meeting involving policy and decisionmakers, including but not limited to Foreign, Defence and Finance Ministers of different countries, high-level government officials and policy practitioners, leading personalities from business and industry, and members of the strategic community, media and academia.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EVENT:



- ❖ The Raisina Dialogue was born two years ago, in 2016, in the belief that the Asian century that the world was talking about was not about any exclusive geographical region.
- ❖ It was rather about the engagement of global actors with Asia and of Asia with the world.
- So this dialogue took birth as a platform, where the old and the new could work together, to discover their connections, their inter-dependence.
- It has today become a crucible for conversations and ideas that while located in India can be owned by the world.



NATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL PRICING AUTHORITY (NPPA

18th JANUARY

CONTEXT

NPPA has fixed/revised ceiling prices/retail prices of 33 formulations under Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013.

BACKGROUND:

NPPA fixes ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control)
Order (DPCO) 2013.
In respect of medicines that are not under price control, manufacturers are allowed to
increase the maximum retail price by 10% annually.
The calculation for essential drugs is based on the simple average of all medicines in a
particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1%.

NATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL PRICING AUTHORITY (NPPA):

- NPPA is an organization of the Government of India which was established, inter alia, to fix/ revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995.
- ❖ The organization is also entrusted with the task of recovering amounts overcharged by manufacturers for the controlled drugs from the consumers.
- It also monitors the prices of decontrolled drugs in order to keep them at reasonable levels.

FUNCTIONS OF NATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL PRICING AUTHORITY:

- To implement and enforce the provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order in accordance with the powers delegated to it.
- To deal with all legal matters arising out of the decisions of the Authority.
- To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps.
- To collect/ maintain data on production, exports and imports, market share of individual companies, profitability of companies etc, for bulk drugs and formulations.
- To undertake and/ or sponsor relevant studies in respect of pricing of drugs/ pharmaceuticals.
- To recruit/appoint the officers and other staff members of the Authority, as per rules and procedures laid down by the Government.
- To render advice to the Central Government on changes/revisions in the drug policy.
- To render assistance to the Central Government in the parliamentary matters relating to the drug pricing.

10TH GLOBAL FORUM FOR FOOD & AGRICULTURE

18th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The 10th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) on the subject "Shaping the Future of Livestock-sustainably, responsibly, efficiently" is being held in Berlin.

THE CONFERENCE HELD IN:

Berlin

HELD ON:

During the International Green Week (IGW)

THEME OF THE EVENT:

"Shaping the future of livestock-sustainably, responsibly, efficiently"

WHAT IS GFFA?



	rocuses on central questions concerning the future of the global ugil food maustry.
	focuses on central questions concerning the future of the global agri-food industry.
U	The Global Forum for Food and Agriculture (GFFA) is an international conference that

- ☐ It gives representatives from the worlds of politics, business, science and civil society an opportunity to share ideas and enhance understanding on a selected topic of current agricultural policy.
- ☐ This is 10th such conference

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FORUM:

During the GFFA there will be a Cooperation Market where associations, companies, universities and the BMEL will showcase their activities in the agri-food sector.

This along with the Business Lounge provides all the GFFA participants with an opportunity to withdraw from the bustle and conduct bilateral talks in a more relaxed atmosphere.

BUDAPEST CONVENTION ON CYBER SECURITY

18th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Making a strong pitch to sign the Budapest Convention on Cyber Crime, the Ministry of Home Affairs recently flagged the need for international cooperation to check Cyber Crime, radicalization and boost data security.

BY:

The Ministry of Home Affairs

AIM:

To check Cyber Crime, radicalization and boost data security

BACKGROUND:

- India was reconsidering its position on becoming a member of the Budapest Convention because of the surge in cyber crime, especially after a push for digital India.
- ☐ The move, however, is being opposed by the Intelligence Bureau (IB) on the grounds that sharing data with foreign law enforcement agencies infringes on national sovereignty and may jeopardise the rights of individuals.

DO YOU KNOW?

It is the first international treaty seeking to address Internet and computer crime by harmonizing national laws, improving investigative techniques, and increasing cooperation among nations.

WHAT IS BUDAPEST CONVENTION?

- ❖ The Convention on Cybercrime, also known as the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime or the Budapest Convention.
- ❖ It was drawn up by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, France, with the active participation of the Council of Europe's observer states Canada, Japan, South Africa and the United States.
- The Convention has 56 members, including the US and the UK.

FUNCTIONS

The Budapest Convention provides for the criminalization of conduct, ranging from illegal access, data and systems interference to computer-related fraud and child pornography, procedural law tools to make investigation of cybercrime and securing of e-evidence in relation to any crime more effective, and international police and judicial cooperation on cybercrime and e-evidence.

PRADHAN MANTRI SURAKSHIT MATRITVA ABHIYAN (PMSMA)

19th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) has crossed one crore mark in antenatal check-ups.

HAS BEEN LAUNCHED BY:

The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare (MOHFW), Government of India.

ABOUT THE PROGRAMME

	The programme has been successful in reaching out to the difficult and remote areas of
	India, since out of the 1 crore checkups across the country.
П	More than 25 lakh check-ups were conducted in high priority districts identified by the

More than 25 lakh check-ups were conducted in high priority districts identified by the Health Ministry for focussed attention.

☐ While all States/ UTs have made significant efforts to reach out to pregnant women, Maharashtra has reported the largest number of check-ups among the Non-Empowered Action Group (EAG) States and Rajasthan has reported the largest number of check-ups among the Empowered Action Group States.

AIMS

- To provide assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care, free of cost, universally to all pregnant women on the 9thof every month.
- PMSMA guarantees a minimum package of antenatal care services to women in their 2nd/3rd trimesters of pregnancy at designated government health facilities.

STRATEGIES

The programme follows a systematic approach for engagement with private sector which includes motivating private practitioners to volunteer for the campaign; developing strategies for generating awareness and appealing to the private sector to participate in the Abhiyan at government health facilities.

BACKGROUND:

- Data indicates that Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) in India was very high in the year 1990 with 556 women dying during child birth per hundred thousand live births as compared to the global MMR of 385/lakh live births. As per RGI- SRS (2011-13), MMR of India has now declined to 167/lakh live births against a global MMR of 216/lakh live births (2015).
- India has registered an overall decline in MMR of 70% between 1990 and 2015 in comparison to a global decline of 44%.

- While India has made considerable progress in the reduction of maternal and infant mortality, every year approximately 44000 women still die due to pregnancy-related causes and approximately 6.6 lakh infants die within the first 28 days of life.
- Many of these deaths are preventable and many lives can be saved if quality care is provided to pregnant women during their antenatal period and high risk factors such as severe anemia, pregnancy-induced hypertension etc are detected on time and managed well.

INSV TARINI

19th JANUARY

CONTEXT

An all-woman Indian Navy team on Indian Naval Sailing Vessel (INSV) Tarini has successfully crossed the notoriously rough Drake Passage, as they rounded Cape Horn off the Southern tip of South America, sometimes called the Mount Everest of sailing.



INSV TARINI:

	INSV	Tar	rini is	a 56 f	foot :	sailing	vessel	built in	India	by	M/s /	Aquar	ius S	hipyard	l Pvt	Ltd,	Goa.
_																	

- ☐ It was inducted into the Indian Navy recently in February 2017.
- It has Raymarine navigation suite and an array of satellite communication systems for perfect navigation anywhere in the world.
- ☐ It showcases the 'Make in India' initiative on the International forum.

NAVIKA SAGAR PARIKRAMA:

❖ The voyage of Navika Sagar Parikrama began from Goa coast in September 2017 and will be finishing around March 2018.

- The expedition will be covered in five legs, with stop-overs at 4 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), and Cape Town (South Africa).
- The project is considered essential towards promoting Ocean Sailing activities in the Indian Navy along with showcasing the Government's support for empowering women.

AIM:

- It also aims to showcase 'Nari Shakti' on the world platform and help revolutionise societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.
- The voyage aims to show case the 'Make in India' initiative by sailing onboard the indigenously built INSV Tarini.
- The crew would monitor and report marine pollution on the high seas.

DRAKE PASSAGE

- The Drake Passage is the body of water between South America's Cape Horn and the South Shetland Islands of Antarctica.
- It connects the southwestern part of the Atlantic Ocean (Scotia Sea) with the southeastern part of the Pacific Ocean and extends into the Southern Ocean.
- The passage between Cape Horn and Livingston Island is the shortest crossing from Antarctica to any other landmass.
- ♣ There is no significant land anywhere around the world at the latitudes of Drake Passage, which is important to the unimpeded flow of the Antarctic Circumpolar Current which carries a huge volume of water through the Passage and around Antarctica.

INTERNATIONAL SOLAR ALLIANCE

19th JANUARY

CONTEXT

In one of its first outreach programmes post-ratification, the International Solar Alliance (ISA) is hosting an event 'International Solar Alliance Forum' at the Future World Energy Summit (WFES) 2018.

THEME:

The Future World Energy Summit (WFES) 2018

ABOUT ISA:

	The Paris Declaration establishes ISA as an alliance dedicated to the promotion of solar
	energy among its member countries.
	When the ISA Framework Agreement entered into force on December 6th, 2017, ISA
	formally became a de-jure treaty based International Intergovernmental Organization,
	headquartered at Gurugram, India.
П	As of now the ISA Framework Agreement has been signed by 48 countries, with 19 of them

also depositing the instruments of ratification with the Ministry of External Affairs,

OBJECTIVES

Government of India.

- The ISA's major objectives include global deployment of over 1,000GW of solar generation capacity and mobilisation of investment of over US\$ 1000 billion into solar energy by 2030.
- As an action-oriented organisation, the ISA brings together countries with rich solar potential to aggregate global demand, thereby reducing prices through bulk purchase, facilitating the deployment of existing solar technologies at scale, and promoting collaborative solar R&D and capacity building.

iCreate

19th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Prime Minister Modi and his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu recently dedicated to the nation the iCreate facility located on the outskirts of Ahmedabad.

LOCATION:

Ahmedabad

ABOUT iCreate

iCreate is an independent centre created with the objective of facilitating entrepreneurship through a blend of creativity, innovation, engineering, product design and leveraging emerging technologies to deal with major issues such as food security, water, connectivity, cybersecurity, IT and electronics, energy, bio-medical equipment and devices etc.

AIM:

iCreate aims to develop an ecosystem in India to generate quality entrepreneurs

FINANCIAL SECTOR ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

20th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The two main Reports of the 2017 India Financial Sector Assessment Programme (FSAP) – the Financial System Stability Assessment (FSSA) and Financial Sector Assessment (FSA), were recently released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The Report providing 'Detailed Assessment of Observance-Basel Core Principles for Effective Banking Supervision' has been released by the IMF and the World Bank and the Report providing 'Detailed Assessment of Observance of Clearing Corporation of India Limited (CCIL) Central Counter Party (CCP) and Trade Repository (TR)', was released by the World Bank.

BY:

International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank

REPORTS OF THE 2017 INDIA FINANCIAL SECTOR **ASSESSMENT PROGRAMME (FSAP):**

Financial System Stability Assessment (FSSA) and Financial Sector Assessment (FSA)

DO YOU KNOW?

Last FSAP for India was conducted in 2011-12.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE REPORT:

The FSAP report acknowledges many efforts by Indian authorities like tackling Non-
Performing Assets (NPAs), recent recapitalization measures for banks and introduction of
special resolution regime, formalization of National Pension System (NPS) and making the
pension sector regulator statutory, passing of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code and setting
up of Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI), to name a few.

- ☐ It appreciates initiatives such as 'no frills' account (under Jan Dhan Yojana), promoting digitization, introduction of unique biometric identification number (AADHAR), currency exchange initiative etc.
- ☐ It also recognizes the improved inter-agency co-operation since the establishment of Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC), supported by its Sub-Committee and four technical groups and progress in setting up of Financial Data Management Centre (FDMC).

ABOUT FINANCIAL SECTOR ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (FSAP):

- ❖ The Financial Sector Assessment Program (FSAP), established in 1999, is a comprehensive and in-depth assessment of a country's financial sector.
- ❖ It is a joint program of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- ❖ FSAPs analyze the resilience of the financial sector, the quality of the regulatory and supervisory framework, and the capacity to manage and resolve financial crises.
- ❖ Based on its findings, FSAPs produce recommendations of a micro- and macro-prudential nature, tailored to country-specific circumstances.

APPROACHES

The FSAP follows a three-pronged approach when looking at the country's financial sector:

- The soundness of a financial system versus its vulnerabilities and risks that increase the likelihood or potential severity of financial sector crises.
- A country's developmental needs in terms of infrastructure, institutions and markets.
- A country's compliance with the observance of selected financial sector standards and codes.

KILOPOWER

20th JANUARY

CONTEXT

NASA has announced new tests are underway for the Kilopower project, a program designed to create small nuclear power sources to fuel further space exploration. A prototype, which was created by NASA and the Department of Energy, has completed non-nuclear tests and is now running with a real reactor core at a facility in Nevada.

ABOUT KILOPOWER

The Kilopower project is a near-term technology effort to develop preliminary concepts and technologies that could be used for an affordable fission nuclear power system to enable longduration stays on planetary surfaces.

GOAL:

The principal goal of the project is to sufficiently develop and test nuclear power system technologies by 2018 so fission power can be a viable option for NASA decision makers to consider when making their informed selection of exploration surface systems.

SIGNIFICANCE:

Kilopower tackles a few different problems in spacecraft design: existing nuclear power systems rely on a fuel we've essentially run out of, solar power becomes increasingly feeble the further from the sun the spacecraft goes, and more complicated space activities-like those involving humans-would require significantly stronger power supplies than current projects.

BENEFITS:

The technology could power habitats and life-support systems, enable astronauts to mine resources, recharge rovers and run processing equipment to transform resources such as ice on the planet into oxygen, water and fuel. It could also potentially augment electrically powered spacecraft propulsion systems on missions to the outer planets.

NATIONAL DISASTER RESPONSE FORCE (NDRF)

20th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) celebrated its 13th Raising Day on January 19th, 2018.

ABOUT THE MoU

	A MoU was	also signe	ed in bet	ween NDRF	and NSDC.
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- ☐ Besides, a co-operation with Facebook took place during the programme.
- The highlights of the co-operation with Facebook include targeted geographical messaging, disaster information volunteers and community capacity building.

ABOUT NDRF:

The Disaster Management Act has made the statutory provisions for constitution of National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for the purpose of specialized response to natural and manmade disasters.

BACKGROUND:

- ❖ Two national calamities in quick succession in the form of Orissa Super Cyclone (1999) and Gujarat Earthquake (2001) brought about the realization of the need of having a specialist response mechanism at National Level to effectively respond to disasters.
- ❖ This realization led to the enactment of the DM Act on 26 Dec 2005.

ROLE AND MANDATE OF NDRF:

- Specialized response during disasters.
- Proactive deployment during impending disaster situations.
- Acquire and continually upgrade its own training and skills.
- Liaison, Reconnaissance, Rehearsals and Mock Drills.
- Impart basic and operational level training to State Response Forces (Police, Civil Defence and Home Guards).
- Community Capacity Building Programme.
- Organize Public Awareness Campaigns.

Source: pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=175752



GOVERNMENT NAMES NINE NEW SMART CITIES

22th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Government has named nine new smart cities. The number of cities picked under the project now stands at 99.

NINE NEW SMART CITIES

The nine cities chosen in the fourth round are-

- 1. Bareilly,
- 2. Moradabad
- 3. Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh,
- 4. Erode in Tamil Nadu,
- 5. Bihar Sharif in Bihar,
- 6. Silvasa in Dadra Nagar Haveli,
- 7. Diu in Daman and Diu,
- 8. Kavarati in Lakshadweep
- 9. Itanagar in Arunachal Pradesh

DO YOU KNOW?

Silvasa topped the list of winners in this round.

ABOUT SMART CITY MISSION-

Under the scheme that was launched in 2014, around 100 cities in the country will be developed.

SELECTION OF CITIES:

- ☐ The selection is based on the scores cities get for carrying out urban reforms in areas including sanitation and governance.
- ☐ Cities that score the highest will be picked for the project, to be implemented over a 10year period.

DEVELOPMENT:

- These cities will be developed to have basic infrastructure through assured water and power supply, sanitation and solid waste management, efficient urban mobility and public transport, IT connectivity, e-governance and citizen participation.
- ♣ Bottom-up approach has been the key planning principle under Smart City Mission.

FUNDING:

- Under the scheme, each city will get Rs 500 crore from the Centre for implementing various
- An equal amount, on matching basis, will have to be contributed by the state or urban local bodies.

The mission will provide central funding of Rs 48,000 crore to the selected cities.

IMPLEMENTATION:

- The implementation of the Mission at the City level will be done by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) created for the purpose.
- The SPV will plan, appraise, approve, release funds, implement, manage, operate, monitor and evaluate the Smart City development projects.
- Each smart city will have a SPV which will be headed by a full time CEO and have nominees
 of Central Government, State Government and ULB on its Board.

SMART STAR-RATING FOR GARBAGE FREE CITIES

22th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs has launched the 'Protocol for Star Rating of Garbage-Free Cities' in Goa.

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.

INDICATORS:

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:

- ☐ 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 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.

NUNA

23th JANUARY

CONTEXT

A recent study suggests new information regarding Australia's history, indicating that a small area of the country was once part of Canada- forming a supercontinent named Nuna.

ABOUT THE NEW STUDY

- ☐ Research shows that about 1.7 billion years ago, Georgetown rocks were deposited into a shallow sea when the region was part of North America.
- Georgetown then broke away from North America and collided with the Mount Isa region of northern Australia around 100 million years later.
- ☐ This was a critical part of global continental reorganisation when almost all continents on Earth assembled to form the supercontinent called Nuna.

NUNA:

- Nuna, also known as Columbia, was estimated to be around 12900 km from North to South at the widest part, reports Space Daily.
- Nuna was made up of more than just Canada and parts of Australia, however, with the eastern coast of India attached to western North America as well.
- At this point in our planet's history, South America was rotated in such a way that the western edge of Brazil ended up lined up with eastern North America.
- The stitching together of these combined land masses gave us the supercontinent known as Nuna. Nuna predates Pangea dating back to 1.5-2.5 billion years ago.

CAMPAIGN TO SAVE REEF FROM STARFISH

23th JANUARY

CONTEXT

In a push to preserve the World Heritage-listed ecosystem, a multimillion-dollar campaign has been launched by Australia to stop the predatory crown-of-thorns starfish devouring the **Great Barrier Reef.**

BY:

Australia

ABOUT THE CAMPAIGN

Money will be spent as incentives for farmers to prevent agricultural pollutants from running into the reef. Funds will also go towards increasing the number of patrol vessels and divers targeting the starfish.

BACKGROUND:

The coral-eating startish are naturally occur	ririg	but have promerated due to poliution and
agricultural run-off at the struggling reef.		V
Their impact has been profound-a major stu	ıdy	of the 2,300-km long reef's health in 2012

showed coral cover has halved over the past 27 years, with 42% of the damage attributed to the pest.

☐ The reef is also reeling from significant coral bleaching due to warming sea temperatures linked to climate change.

THE GREAT BARRIER REEF:

- The Great Barrier Reef is the world's largest coral reef system composed of over 2,900 individual reefs and 900 islands stretching for over 2,300 kilometres over an area of approximately 344,400 square kilometres.
- The reef is located in the Coral Sea, off the coast of Queensland, Australia.
- The Great Barrier Reef can be seen from outer space and is the world's biggest single structure made by living organisms. T
- his reef structure is composed of and built by billions of tiny organisms, known as coral polyps. It was selected as a World Heritage Site in 1981.

INTERNATIONAL DAM SAFETY CONFERENCE

23th JANUARY

CONTEXT

India will be hosting the International Dam Safety Conference – 2018 at Thiruvananthapuram. **Central Water Commission is organizing the event in association with Kerala Water Resources** Department (KWRD), Kerala State Electricity Board, National Institute of Technology Calicut and College of Engineering, Trivandrum. Dam safety conferences are organized as an annual event under the Dam Safety Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP) project.

LOCATION:

Thiruvananthapuram

THE EVENT ORGANIZED BY

Central Water Commission in association with Kerala Water Resources Department (KWRD), Kerala State Electricity Board, National Institute of Technology Calicut and College of Engineering, Trivandrum

DHARMA:

A software programme Dam Health and Rehabilitation Monitoring Application (DHARMA
will also be launched during the conference.
DHARMA is a web tool to digitize all dam related data effectively.
It will help to document authentic asset and health information pertaining to the large
dams in the country, enabling appropriate actions to ensure need based rehabilitation.
It is a new stride in asset management aspect by India.

ABOUT DRIP:

- The Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Government of India, with assistance from the World Bank, is implementing the DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP), which would be a six-year project.
- ❖ The project originally envisaged the rehabilitation and improvement of about 223 dams within four states namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu and later Karnataka, Uttarakhand (UNVNL) and Jharkhand (DVC) joined DRIP and total number of dams covered under DRIP increased to 250.
- ❖ The project will also promote new technologies and improve Institutional capacities for dam safety evaluation and implementation at the Central and State levels and in some identified premier academic and research institutes of the country.
- ❖ The Central Dam Safety Organisation of Central Water Commission, assisted by a Consulting firm, is coordinating and supervising the Project implementation.

OBJECTIVES

The project development of objectives DRIP are:

- (i) to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner and
- (ii) to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at central level.

FORIIM

ANGANWADI SERVICES TRAINING PROGRAMME

25th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The government has launched the Management Information System (MIS) portal for Anganwadi Services Training Programme.

BY:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development

ABOUT THE PROGRAMMED:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development in collaboration with National Informatics
Centre (NIC), has developed a Management Information System (MIS) portal for submitting
applications/estimates by NGOs for carrying out Anganwadi Services (ICDS) Training through
AWTCs/MLTCs.

☐ The first phase of the portal will enable NGOs to submit proposal to the respective States/UTs. They, in turn, process the proposals and recommend requirement of funds for running the Programme in the States/UTs.

ANGANWADI SERVICES TRAINING PROGRAMME:

- ❖ The Anganwadi Services Training Programme under the Umbrella Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme and the overall administration, management and monitoring of the implementation of the Scheme are being done by the respective State Government/UT Administration.
- The training provided to the Anganwadi Workers (AWWs)/Anganwadi Helpers (AWHs) and the Supervisors at the Anganwadi Workers Training Centres (AWTCs)/Middle Level Training Centres (MLTCs) is a part of the Anganwadi Services.
- AWTCs/MLTCs are run either by the respective State Governments/Union Territory Administrations or by NGOs under the supervision of respective State Governments/UT Administrations.
- The Government of India releases funds to the State Governments/UT Administrations for implementation of the Scheme.

SHRAM AWARDS

26th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Government has announced the Prime Minister's Shram Awards for the year 2016 to be awarded to 50 workers employed in the Departmental Undertakings & Public Sector

Undertakings of the Central and State Governments and Private Sector Units employing 500 or more workers.

AWARD GIVEN TO

The awards are given in recognition of their distinguished performances, innovative abilities, outstanding contribution in the field of productivity and exhibition of exceptional courage and presence of mind.

ABOUT SHRAM AWARDS:

- ❖ The Prime Minister's Shram Awards were instituted in 1985 by the Government of India. This national award is conferred on workers for outstanding contributions that improve productivity, innovation, and indigenization, resulting in saving foreign exchange.
- The award is also given for long-term exceptional dedicated work.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Prime Ministers Shram Awards is to recognize the outstanding contributions made by workmen as defined in the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947 in organizations both in public and private sector and who have distinguished record of performance, devotion to duty of a high order, specific contribution in the field of productivity and proven innovative abilities among others.

FOUR TYPES OF AWARDS:

- 1. Shram Ratna: Rs. Two lakhs and recognition of their contribution to their field a Sanad.
- 2. Shram Bhushan: RS. 100000 and a Sanad.
- 3. Shram Vir / Shram Veerangana: RS. 60000 and a Sanad.
- 4. Shram Devi / Shram Shree: RS. 40000 and a Sanad.

DELHI DECLARATION

26th JANUARY

CONTEXT

HELD BETWEEN:

ASEAN-India

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	The Declaration supports a common approach to counter terrorism and sought a
	"comprehensive approach to combat terrorism through close cooperation by disrupting and
	countering terrorists, terrorist groups and networks, including by countering cross border
	movement of terrorists and foreign terrorist fighters and misuse of Internet including social
	media by terror entities."
	The declaration urges countries to strengthen cooperation and collaboration in combating
	other transnational crimes, including people smuggling, trafficking in persons, illicit drug
	trafficking, cybercrime, and piracy and armed robbery against ships.
	The Delhi Declaration also reaffirmed "the importance of maintaining and promoting peace,
	stability, maritime safety and security, freedom of navigation and overflight in the region, and
	other lawful uses of the seas and unimpeded lawful maritime commerce and to promote
	peaceful resolutions of disputes, in accordance with UNCLO".
	ACKARAMAN
BA	ACKGROUND:
	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, was established on 8 August 1967 in
	Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the
	Founding Fathers of ASEAN, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
	At present there are 10 members namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos,

Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

☐ The motto of ASEAN is "One Vision, One Identity, One Community".

CHINA RELEASES ARCTIC POLICY

27th JANUARY

CONTEXT

China has released its Arctic Policy. The document draws a picture of how China views the economic possibilities the region offers. With this, China has vowed to actively participate in Arctic affairs as a "near-Arctic State" and a major stakeholder in the Arctic.

ABOUT THE POLICY

As per the policy, specifically, China will mainly focus its attention on four aspects:

FIRST

China will participate in the development of Arctic shipping routes which are composed of the Northeast Passage, Northwest Passage, and the Central Passage. Noting that "the Arctic shipping routes are likely to become important transport routes for international trade" as a result of global warming, China plans to build a "Polar Silk Road" by developing the Arctic shipping routes. To that end, China will encourage its enterprises to participate in the infrastructure construction for these routes and conduct commercial trial voyages.

SECOND

China aims to participate "in the exploration for and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and other non-living resources" in the Arctic. However, the white paper also places a particular emphasis on nontraditional energy sources.

THIRD

China will start to utilize fisheries and other living resources and participate in conservation, since "the Arctic has the potential to become a new fishing ground in the future." In recent years, Chinese fishermen have been sailing farther and farther abroad in search of fertile fishing grounds; including, unfortunately, illegal fishing.

DO YOU KNOW?

The land territories in the Arctic cover an area of about 8 million square kilometres, whose sovereignty belongs to Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the US. The Arctic Ocean has an area of over 12 million square kilometres, in which coastal and other countries share maritime rights and interests according to international law.

FOURTH

China will develop Arctic tourism, which the paper described as "an emerging industry." China will support and encourage "its enterprises to cooperate with Arctic States in

developing tourism in the region" and conduct "training for and regulates Chinese tourism agencies and professionals involved in Arctic tourism."

CONCERNS:

Although Beijing maintained that China's Arctic policy is based on the principle of "respect, cooperation, win-win results and sustainability," some analysts have raised concerns over China's increasing prominence in the region.

BACKGROUND:

China is an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs. Geographically, China is a 'Near-Arctic State', one of the continental States that are closest to the Arctic Circle. The natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China's climate system and ecological environment, and, in turn, on its economic interests in agriculture, forestry, fishery, marine industry and other sectors.

STREE SWABHIMAN INITIATIVE

29th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has announced an initiative by common services centres (CSCs) on women's health and hygiene. The initiative is named 'Stree Swabhiman'.

BY:

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, Govt. of India

ABOUT STREE SWABHIMAN:

☐ Stree Swabhiman' aims to create a sustainable model for providing adolescent girls and women an access to affordable sanitary products by leveraging CSCs.

	Under the 'Stree Swabhiman' project, sanitary napkin micro manufacturing units are being
	set up at CSCs across India, particularly those operated by women entrepreneurs.
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☐ The initiative is driven by awareness and personalised outreach by women entrepreneurs who produce and market sanitary napkins themselves.

ABOUT CSCS:

Common Services Centers (CSCs) are a strategic cornerstone of the Digital India programme. They are the access points for delivery of various electronic services to villages in India, thereby contributing to a digitally and financially inclusive society.

THE THREE VISION AREAS OF THE DIGITAL INDIA PROGRAMME:

- Digital infrastructure as a core utility to every citizen.
- Governance and services on demand.
- Digital empowerment of citizens.

AAI, LAO PDR SIGN CIVIL AVIATION COOPERATION AGREEMENT

29th JANUARY

CONTEXT

Celebrating 25 years of the India-ASEAN relationship, the Airports Authority of India (AAI) has signed a historic agreement with Lao Air Traffic Management, Department of Civil Aviation, Lao PDR, for providing SkyRev360, a comprehensive e-data gathering, invoicing and collection system.

SIGNED BETWEEN:

Airports Authority of India (AAI) with Lao Air Traffic Management, Department of Civil Aviation

ABOUT SKYREV360:

SkyRev360 is a fully automated and comprehensive data gathering, invoicing and collection
service which eliminates inaccuracies, errors and delays for better revenue management.
SkyRev360 has been developed in collaboration with the International Air Transport
Association (IATA) under the Government of India's Make in India initiative.

WHAT IT DOES?

- SkyRev360 automates data processing, helping ANSPs overcome strenuous manual processes which are prone to mistakes.
- A collaboration between two experts of the aviation industry: IATA and the Airports Authority of India (AAI).
- ❖ The solution gathers 100% of your flight data and produces comprehensive billing data.
- Therefore, with SkyRev360, ANSPs' financial operations become both more accurate and efficient in one stroke.

FEATURES:

- Data gathering and processing module: SkyRev360 can ensure the essential data for your invoices is always the latest and most complete.
- Invoicing module: The system maintains all account attributes and allows for an extensive view of associated data, including aircraft specifications, flight movements, billing ledger records, etc.
- <u>Collection</u>: All collections are managed with the IATA Enhancement & Financing Services
 (E&F) process, which offers efficiencies and automation to ANSPs and airlines by settling
 through IATA Settlement Systems.
- Airline queries: The IATA team handles all queries and disputes related to billing and collection from your air operators.
- <u>Dashboard and reports:</u> Incident reports, airspace usage, traffic volumes, economic values and more are always at your fingertips.

PROMPT CORRECTIVE ACTION (PCA)

29th JANUARY

CONTEXT

The Finance Ministry is planning to initiate a performance review of heads of public sector banks that are under the RBI's Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) as part of the reform process.

BY: Finance Ministry

BACKGROUND:

- ☐ So far, the Reserve Bank has put 12 public sector banks under watch in view of poor performance on parameters such as high levels of non-performing assets (NPAs), low capital level and low return on assets.
- ☐ These parameters indicate the financial health of banks and a need to initiate remedial measures to put them on the right course.

WHAT IS 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.
- The RBI can also supersede the bank's board, under PCA.

WHEN IS PCA INVOKED?

- The PCA is invoked when certain risk thresholds are breached.
- There are three risk thresholds which are based on certain levels of asset quality, profitability, capital and the like.
- 4 The third such threshold, which is maximum tolerance limit, sets net NPA at over 12% and negative return on assets for four consecutive years.

WHAT ARE THE TYPES OF SANCTIONS?

- There are two type 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 re new or access costly deposits or take steps to increase their feebased 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.

"RES EXTRA COMMERCIUM"

30th JANUARY

CONTEXT

To curb the \$11 billion tobacco industry's legal right to trade, the government, for the first time, has asked the top court to classify tobacco as "res extra commercium", which is a Latin phrase for "outside commerce". The move is part of the government's effort to tame the tobacco companies looking to challenge tough regulations pertaining to the industry.

WHAT IS "RES EXTRA COMMERCIUM"?

- Res extra commercium means things beyond commerce, i.e., which cannot be brought or sold, such as public roads, rivers, titles of owners etc.
- It is a doctrine originating in roman law.
- In some contexts, it can refer to areas beyond national borders, such as space and the seabed.

WHAT'S THE ISSUE?

	India's tobacco labelling rules, which mandate 85% of a cigarette pack's surface be covered
	in health warnings, have been a sticking point between the government and the tobacco
	industry since they were enforced in 2016.
	But a court in southern Karnataka state last month quashed those labelling rules after the
	tobacco industry successfully argued the measure was "unreasonable" and violated its right
	to trade.
П	Therefore, seeking to apply this doctrine to tobacco, the government argued it should have

CONCERNS ASSOCIATED:

- The doctrine would open the door to an outright ban on tobacco sales if a state so wished.
- ❖ It gives the state autonomy to completely ban trade in tobacco.
- ❖ It also gives governments the constitutional cover that will protect future litigation.

the power "to regulate business and to mitigate evils" to safeguard public health.

The industry will lose significant ground as your protection of right to trade is gone.

BACKGROUND:

This is not the first time the doctrine has been cited; in the 1970s, the top court's application of the doctrine led to two states completely banning alcohol, apart from allowing courts to take a stricter stance on regulating liquor.

EFFORTS BY GOVERNMENT TO CURB THE USE OF TOBACCO:

♣ The government, over the years, initiated several reforms in the recent years to curb the use of tobacco that kills almost nine lakh people in India each year.

♣ Increased taxes, campaigns, advertisements are some of the measures taken by the government to curb the use of tobacco.

WAY AHEAD:

If this Roman law doctrine is is applied, it would have severe implications on the tobacco industry; not only would the industry's legal rights to trade will suffer, but it will also give authorities more freedom to impose restrictions.

