

JUNE 2016



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## DAILY CURRENT EVENTS

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**GS II**

**Paper 2 Topic:** *Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.*

**Government firm on its rules for judges' selection**

The government has decided to confront the higher judiciary by sticking to its proposed Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) that will guide the Supreme Court collegium on the appointment of judges to the apex court and high courts, notwithstanding the top judiciary rejecting almost all major suggestions made by the Centre.

**Background:**

Chief Justice of India (CJI) T S Thakur had sent back the MoP recently with a point-by-point rejection of the Centre's proposals. The government has referred the matter to attorney general (AG) Mukul Rohatgi and asked him to prepare a point-by-point rebuttal and give reasons why the collegium's rejection is not acceptable.

The SC had, after striking down the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act last year, agreed on framing of the MoP by the Centre in consultation with the collegium.

**Proposed contentious rules in MoC:**

- Government's right to reject a recommendation on concerns of national interest.
- Involvement of the AG in suggesting a list of suitable candidates.
- Names for judges' appointments could be suggested by all judges of the bench as well as by the AG and the bar.
- The list of candidates brought before the collegium will first be vetted by a committee of two retired judges and an eminent person.

**Present scenario:**

Presently, the government is bound to comply if the Supreme Court collegium chooses to override its disapproval of a person recommended for judicial appointment. If the government returns the candidate's file to the collegium, and the latter reiterates its recommendation, the government has no choice but to comply.

**Way ahead:**

The government should send a response to the apex court as early as possible to avoid any further delay in filling vacancies in HCs. There are over 40% judges' positions lying vacant in HCs.

Sources: toi.

### President declines assent to Delhi govt's bill on appointment of parliamentary secretaries

President Pranab Mukherjee has rejected a bill passed by the Delhi assembly last year seeking to exempt 21 AAP MLAs appointed as parliamentary secretaries from the purview of 'office of profit' criteria.

#### Background:

Through the bill, the Delhi government had sought an amendment to the Delhi Members of Legislative Assembly (Removal of Disqualification) Act, 1997. The bill, passed in June last year by the state assembly, aims to exclude the post of parliamentary secretary from the office of profit and exempt the post from disqualification provisions. The bill was forwarded by lieutenant governor Najeeb Jung to the centre, which in turn was sent to the President with its comments.

- The government had in March last year appointed 21 of its MLAs as parliamentary secretaries in various ministries to speed up public work. The move was criticized by members of the opposition, who called it unconstitutional.
- The bill was passed by the Delhi assembly after questions were raised over the legality of the appointment. The bill was also intended to provide security cover for those legislators appointed as parliamentary secretaries.
- At the time of their appointment, the government had said that parliamentary secretaries will not receive any remuneration or perks from the government. But later on, they were allowed use of government transport for official purposes and space in minister's office.

#### Implications:

The President's decision is a major setback to the Kejriwal government and leaves the AAP MLAs a few steps from possible disqualification. **Section 15 of the government of NCT of Delhi Act, 1991 says a person shall not remain an MLA if he or she holds any office of profit under the Centre or government of a state or UT.**

In the event of disqualification of the AAP MLAs, by-election to nearly one-third of the seats currently held by the ruling party will be necessitated. Such a development will follow only after the EC completes its proceedings on a petition seeking the disqualification of the MLAs.

#### What can be done now?

The legislator can escape disqualification only if the office is declared -by law made by Parliament, state legislature or UT -as a post that does not attract loss of membership. The fate of the MLAs will now be decided by the Election Commission that is considering a petition seeking their disqualification.

Sources: the hindu.



Paper 2 Topic: *Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.*

### Vermin tag arbitrary, welfare board tells Supreme Court

The Supreme Court has asked animal rights organisations to make representations before the Centre regarding three notifications declaring nilgais, monkeys and wild boar as vermin, with the Animal Welfare Board of India terming the government's step an arbitrary decision.

#### Background:

Animal Welfare Board had questioned the notification of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change declaring nilgais, monkeys and wild boar as vermin for one year in Bihar, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. It has also termed this as an arbitrary decision.

#### About Animal Welfare Board of India:

The Animal Welfare Board of India is a statutory advisory body advising the Government of India on animal welfare laws, and promotes animal welfare in the country of India.

- The Animal Welfare Board of India was established in 1960 under Section 4 of The **Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960**.
- The Board consists of 28 Members, who serve for a period of 3 years.
- It works to ensure that animal welfare laws in the country are followed and provides grants to Animal Welfare Organisations.
- The Board was initially within the jurisdiction of the Government of India's Ministry of Food and Agriculture. In 1990, the subject of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was transferred to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, where it now resides.
- The Board was initially within the jurisdiction of the Government of India's Ministry of Food and Agriculture. In 1990, the subject of Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was transferred to the Ministry of Environment and Forests, where it now resides.

Sources: the hindu.

### Centre notifies amended RBI Act to usher in MPC

The government has moved to give statutory backing to the monetary policy committee (MPC). In this regard, the centre has notified the changes made to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Act.

- This paves the way for a resetting of the monetary policy framework that will shift the responsibility of maintaining inflation targets on a six-member panel, with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) governor getting a casting vote in case of a tie.

- According to the monetary policy framework, agreed by RBI and the government last year, the central bank will look to contain inflation within a band of 4% plus/minus 2 percentage points from next year.

#### Background:

The idea of setting up an MPC was mooted by an RBI-appointed committee led by deputy governor Urjit Patel in February 2014 though that committee had recommended a five-member committee where three members would be from RBI and two external members would be appointed by the RBI governor and the deputy governor in-charge.

#### MPC:

It is a six member panel which will have the responsibility of maintaining inflation targets. The MPC will set interest rates to keep retail inflation within targets. Inflation targets will be set once every five years.

- The Committee is to meet four times a year and make public its decisions following each meeting.

#### Composition:

- The committee will have six members. Of the six members, the government will nominate three. The RBI Governor will chair the committee. The governor, however, will not enjoy a veto power to overrule the other panel members, but will have a casting vote in case of a tie. No government official will be nominated to the MPC.
- The other three members would be from the RBI with the governor being the ex-officio chairperson. Deputy governor of RBI in charge of the monetary policy will be a member, as also an executive director of the central bank. Decisions will be taken by majority vote with each member having a vote.
- The government nominees to the MPC will be selected by a Search-cum-Selection Committee under Cabinet Secretary with RBI Governor and Economic Affairs Secretary and three experts in the field of economics or banking or finance or monetary policy as its members.
- Members of the MPC will be appointed for a period of four years and shall not be eligible for reappointment.

#### Other details:

As per rules, no member of MPC should have any financial or other interest that prejudicially affects his functions as a member. Also, it will be considered that the panel failed in achieving the inflation target if the lower or the upper range of the target is breached for three consecutive quarters.

Sources: pib.

**NS Vishwanathan appointed as Deputy Governor of RBI**

The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) has appointed N S Vishwanathan as the Deputy Governor of RBI. Vishwanathan was executive director at RBI. He will succeed HR Khan as Deputy Governor of RBI.

**About Deputy Governors of RBI:**

The RBI has four deputy governors and typically two are from the outside, of which traditionally one is a commercial banker and the other an economist. The two others are promoted from within the central bank's ranks. A central bank Deputy Governor can be appointed for a term with a maximum of five years or till the age of 62, whichever is earlier.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional Bodies.*

**Shri Bhim Sain Bassi takes over as Member UPSC**

Shri Bhim Sain Bassi recently took the Oath of Office and Secrecy as Member, Union Public Service Commission. The Oath was administered by Shri Deepak Gupta, Chairman, UPSC.

**Key facts:**

- Members of UPSC are appointed by the President.
- Under the Constitution, a member of the UPSC can have a maximum tenure of six years or till he attains the age of 65 years.
- The members of the commission are mainly experts drawn from various streams which include the IAS, IPS and other all India services.
- A member can submit his resignation at any time to the President of India.
- He may be removed from his office by the President of India on the ground of misbehaviour (only if an inquiry of such misbehaviour is made and upheld by Supreme Court) or if he is adjudged insolvent.
- A member may also be removed if he engages during his term of office in any paid employment outside the duties of his office, or in the opinion of the President unfit to continue in office by reason of infirmity of mind or body.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 2 Topic: RPA.*

### Election Commission writes to Centre, seeks power to postpone, revoke polls

The Election Commission of India has written to the Centre seeking amendment to the Representation of the People Act to confer specific powers on the election watchdog to postpone or countermand polls based on evidence that money power was used to influence voters.

#### Way ahead:

The Commission has asked the government to insert a **new clause '58 B'** in the Representation of the People Act, 1951 to allow adjournment or countermanding of election in the affected polling areas on the grounds of use of money power. The provision would also empower the Commission to re-schedule the elections in such areas.

The Commission said in Clause 58 A and the proposed provision 58 B, the expression “countermand the election” would mean ab initio rescinding of the entire electoral process in the constituency. **Clause 58 A empowers the Election Commission to cancel polls only if there is an evidence of booth-capturing or use of muscle power to influence the outcome of elections.**

#### Why this is necessary?

Presently, ECI can take actions under **Article 324 of the Constitution**. But, there is no specific provision in the RPA to this effect. Since the Constitutional provisions need to be invoked sparingly ECI has sought insertion of a clause empowering the ECI to take action in case there is evidence proving that money was used to influence voters.

Section 58A was introduced in the 1980s when booth-capturing was rampant during elections in many parts of the country. Booth-capturing has come down drastically with the use of electronic voting machines. But with changing times ECI is faced with newer challenges that vitiate the polling atmosphere. Misuse of money is the biggest hurdle it faces in conducting free and fair elections.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 2 Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation.*

### Skill India Mission

According to government estimates, more than 1.04 Crore youth have been trained under the Skill India Mission in the year 2015-16 which is 36.8% higher than the previous year's recorded data.

Key facts:

- In the current arrangement, 60% of the trainings are directly under Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship while 40% are across other Central Ministries.
- Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), which was launched on July 15, 2015, alone has witnessed more than 20 lakh people, of which 40% are women candidates, being trained in their choice of skills.

About the National Skill Development Mission:

- The National Skill Development Mission aims to provide a strong institutional framework at the Centre and States for implementation of skilling activities in the country.
- The Mission will have a three-tiered, high powered decision making structure. At its apex, the Mission's Governing Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, will provide overall guidance and policy direction.
- The Steering Committee, chaired by Minister in Charge of Skill Development, will review the Mission's activities in line with the direction set by the Governing Council. The Mission Directorate, with Secretary, Skill Development as Mission Director, will ensure implementation, coordination and convergence of skilling activities across Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.
- The Mission will also run select sub-missions in high priority areas.
- The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA), the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and the Directorate of Training will function under the overall guidance of the Mission.
- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) provides a natural home for the Mission, organically linking all three decisions making levels and facilitating linkages to all Central Ministries/Departments and State Governments.

Sources: pib.

**Hindus from Pakistan, Bangladesh will get to claim Indian citizenship**

The home ministry has prepared draft amendments to citizenship law that will exempt minority citizens of Pakistan and Bangladesh who have come to India out of fear of religious persecution from being tagged as “illegal migrants”.

Details:

- The changes to the **Citizenship Act, 1955**, will give a legal path to the refugees to remain in India and even claim citizenship.
- As per the proposed amendments to Citizenship Act, **December 31, 2014 will be designated as the cut-off date for refugees** to be eligible to apply for citizenship.

- Also, Section 2 (1)(b) of the Act will have a provision that will exempt such citizens from being deemed “illegal migrants”.
- Besides, the government is also looking at simultaneous amendments to the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 and Foreigners Act, 1946.

#### Way ahead:

The draft will shortly be sent to the cabinet for its approval.

#### Implications:

The move stands to benefit nearly 2 lakh Hindus from Pakistan and Bangladesh who often complain they are treated as “second-class citizens” and are vulnerable to violence. They have also often found themselves at the receiving end of blasphemy laws.

Sources: toi.

### **RBI, govt. make peace over appointment panel**

In a departure from the past, government has asked the Cabinet Secretary to head the **search-cum-selection panel for the appointment of its Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank**. However, RBI has opposed the government’s move to have Cabinet Secretary P.K. Sinha as the head and has communicated its reservations. Following this a compromise has been worked out.

#### What’s the compromise?

Under the compromise, the RBI Governor will have a greater say in the short-listing of the names. However, technically, the Cabinet Secretary remains the head of the panel.

#### Practice so far:

As per the established practice, the interview panel for the appointment of deputy governors had always been headed by the RBI Governor.

#### Background:

The government had set up a Financial Sector Search and Recruitment Committee — headed by Mr. Sinha — to decide on the members and heads of financial sector regulators like the RBI, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA). The committee would have a permanent member from the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO), while representatives from the Finance Ministry, an economist, and the head of the regulatory body whose members are to be selected will be special invitees.

About Deputy Governors of RBI:

- The RBI has four deputy governors and typically two are from the outside, of which traditionally one is a commercial banker and the other an economist. The two others are promoted from within the central bank's ranks.
- A central bank Deputy Governor can be appointed for a term with a maximum of five years or till the age of 62, whichever is earlier.

Sources: the hindu.

**Sexual harassment law likely to be amended**

The Centre is contemplating an amendment to the rules on dealing with sexual harassment cases to make the committee on sexual harassment share its findings with the complainant in cases where no action is recommended or contemplated against the accused.

**Details:**

- With this, the panel will not only have to provide a copy of its report to the complainant but would also have to consider any representation against its findings as an appeal before completing its report.
- Where a Complaint Committee has not recommended any action against the charged officer in a case involving allegations of sexual harassment, the disciplinary authority shall supply a copy of the Report of the Complaints Committee to the complainant.
- These changes are aimed at providing more security to women government employees at work place and avoid any litigation in such cases.

**Benefits:**

- There may be instances where a complainant can be aggrieved in cases she find co-employee accused of sexually harassing her has not been found guilty. As per existing rules, she would go for appeal to tribunal or court after the final verdict which may delay the justice.
- By these proposed changes, a woman complainant will come to know in advance in case a complaint committee looking into such charges does not recommend action against the accused.
- The complainant will be able to appeal in such matter when the matter is being examined and it will be considered by disciplinary authority before arriving on its final decision. Existing rules allow appeal by complainants in tribunal or court against the final order only.



## THE SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN AT WORKPLACE (PREVENTION, PROHIBITION AND REDRESSAL) ACT 2013:

The Act seeks to cover all women, irrespective of their age or employment status and protect them against sexual harassment at all workplaces both in public and private sector, whether organized or unorganized.

### Some important provisions of the Act:

- The Act defines sexual harassment at the work place and creates a mechanism for redressal of complaints. It also provides safeguards against false or malicious charges.
- The definition of “aggrieved woman”, who will get protection under the Act is extremely wide to cover all women, irrespective of her age or employment status, whether in the organized or unorganized sectors, public or private and covers clients, customers and domestic workers as well.
- Along with the traditional office set-up where there is a clear employer-employee relationship, the Act also includes organisations, department, office, branch unit etc. in the public and private sector, organized and unorganized, hospitals, nursing homes, educational institutions, sports institutes, stadiums, sports complex and any place visited by the employee during the course of employment including the transportation.
- Every employer is required to constitute an Internal Complaints Committee at each office or branch with 10 or more employees. The District Officer is required to constitute a Local Complaints Committee at each district, and if required at the block level.
- The Committee is required to complete the inquiry within a time period of 90 days. On completion of the inquiry, the report will be sent to the employer or the District Officer, as the case may be, they are mandated to take action on the report within 60 days.
- The Complaints Committees have the powers of civil courts for gathering evidence. The Complaints Committees are required to provide for conciliation before initiating an inquiry, if requested by the complainant.
- Penalties have been prescribed for employers. Non-compliance with the provisions of the Act shall be punishable with a fine of up to 50,000. Repeated violations may lead to higher penalties and cancellation of licence or registration to conduct business.

### What is sexual harassment?

Sexual harassment includes physical contact and advances, demand or request for sexual favours, sexually coloured remarks, showing any pornography and any other unwelcome physical, verbal, non-verbal conduct of a sexual nature. Besides, implied or explicit promise of preferential or detrimental treatment in employment, implied or explicit threat about her present or future employment status, interference with her work and humiliating treatment likely to affect her health or safety may also amount to sexual harassment.



Sources: the hindu.

### Safety body mooted to put the brakes on road accidents

The Centre has decided to form the National Road Safety and Traffic Management Board through an executive order after it failed to push the Road Safety Bill owing to the logjam in Parliament.

#### Details:

- This board will help the government to lay down standards and oversee activities related to road safety. It would be funded by the Ministry. It will be mandated to advise on rules and regulations, road safety and road engineering.
- The proposed body will have a permanent office and five or six members with expertise in road engineering, road safety, automobile manufacturing, traffic and trauma care. It will also have a joint secretary from the Ministry as its member.

However, experts say that setting up a road safety body through an executive order makes it toothless.

Sources: the hindu.

### Government frames new policy for ads in print media

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has framed a New Print Media Advertisement Policy for Directorate of Advertising & Visual Publicity (DAVP) with the objective to promote transparency and accountability in issuing of advertisements in print media.

- The policy focuses on streamlining release of Government advertisements and to also promote equity and fairness among various categories of newspapers/periodicals.

#### Highlights of the policy:

- For the first time, the policy introduces a new marking system to incentivise newspapers which have a better professional standing and get their circulation verified by Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) or Registrar of Newspapers for India (RNI).
- The marking system is based on six objective criteria. The six parameters include circulation certified by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) or the Registrar of Newspapers in India (RNI) (25 marks), employee provident fund subscription (20), number of pages (20), subscription to news services of PTI, UNI or Hindustan Samachar (15).
- Other criteria include a paper having its own printing press (10) and annual subscriptions to the Press Council of India (10).
- Advertisements shall be released by DAVP to newspapers based on marks obtained by the publication.

- The policy framework includes circulation verification for empanelment of newspapers and journals with DAVP. It involves certification by RNI or ABC if circulation exceeds 45,000 copies per publishing day and for circulation up to 45,000 copies per publishing day certificate from cost or chartered accountant, statutory auditor certificate or ABC is mandated.
- The policy also says that RNI circulation certificate will be valid for a period of two years from the date of issue and in case of ABC, the current certificate will be used.
- The policy allows relaxations to encourage publications in regional languages, small and medium newspapers, mass circulated newspapers (over 1 lakh), papers in the Northeast, Jammu and Kashmir and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.
- To promote regional equity, the budget for all India release of ads shall be divided among states based on circulation of newspapers in each state or language.

Sources: pib.

### Judicial commission on OROP gets extension

With concerns on the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme expressed by ex-servicemen still to be addressed, the government has given an extension to the one man judicial commission appointed on the issue.

#### Background:

The government, had in December last year, appointed the one man commission headed by Justice L. Narasimha Reddy, former Chief Justice of Patna High Court with a six month mandate which ended on June 15.

- The commission was part of the notification issued on November 7, 2015 implementing the long pending scheme for military personnel to bring parity in pensions based on rank and service, and irrespective of the date of retirement.

#### One-rank one-pension scheme:

This is a scheme which will ensure that soldiers of the same rank and the same length of service receive the same pension, irrespective of their retirement date. In simple words, it demands equal pensions for those who have retired in one particular year, as those who retire in another year at the same position, and for the same duration of services rendered. The difference in the pension of present and past pensioners in the same rank occurs on account of the number of increments earned by the defence personnel in that rank.

Sources: the hindu.

### 1st Meeting of National Committee on Ramayana Circuit & Krishna Circuit under Swadesh Darshan Scheme

The 1st Meeting of National Committee on Ramayan Circuit and National Committee on Krishna Circuit under Swadesh Darshan Scheme of Ministry of Tourism was recently held under the chairmanship of the Minister of Tourism & Culture Dr. Mahesh Sharma.

#### Key facts:

- Under Ramayana Circuit, 11 destinations spread across 6 states have been proposed. The destinations covered are: Ayodhya, Nandigram, Shringherpur & Chitrakoot (Uttar Pradesh); Sitamarhi, Buxar & Darbhanga (Bihar); Jagdalpur (Chhattisgarh); Bhadrachalam (Telangana); Hampi (Karnataka); and Rameshwaram (Tamil Nadu). Expert committee has suggested to include Chitrakoot (Madhya Pradesh), Nashik & Nagpur (Maharashtra) and Mahendragiri (Odisha) in the proposed circuit.
- Under Krishna circuit, 12 destinations spread across 5 states have been proposed. The destinations covered are: Dwarka (Gujarat); Nathdwara, Jaipur & Sikar (Rajasthan); Kurukshetra (Haryana), Mathura, Vrindavan, Gokul, Barsana, Nandgaon & Govardhan (Uttar Pradesh); Puri (Odisha). The destinations were approved by the expert committee.

#### Swadesh Darshan scheme:

The Ministry of Tourism has launched the Swadesh Darshan Scheme in 2014-15 with an aim to develop theme based tourist circuits in the country on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner by synergizing efforts to focus on needs and concerns of all stakeholders to enrich tourist experience and enhance employment opportunities.

Under the Swadesh Darshan scheme, **thirteen thematic circuits have been identified**, for development namely: North-East India Circuit, Buddhist Circuit, Himalayan Circuit, Coastal Circuit, Krishna Circuit, Desert Circuit, Tribal Circuit, Eco Circuit, Wildlife Circuit, Rural Circuit, Spiritual Circuit, Ramayana Circuit and Heritage Circuit.

Sources: pib.

### Parliamentary panel to review election code, suggests ways to curb freebies

The model code of conduct (MCC) for polls is under review by a Parliamentary Committee. It will suggest ways to check use of cash and other freebies to lure voters during the elections. The Committee is visiting three states to talk to various stake holders about it.

- The move comes after it took cognisance of the cancellation of polls in Aravakurichi and Thanjavur constituencies in Tamil Nadu recently following evidence of use of money and gifts to influence the voters.

Background:

The committee had, in an earlier report submitted three years ago, recommended reducing the time between enforcement of the model code and the day of polling. The panel had suggested that the MCC should come into force from the date of notification and not the announcement of poll schedule. However, the proposal is pending with the government.

Model Code of Conduct(MCC):

What is 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.

Sources: the hindu.

### Model for airport fees may increase passenger fares

According to a study, the civil aviation policy's adoption of a **hybrid-till model** for calculating airport fees could push up airfares, by raising airport charges for airlines instead of bringing them down as per the policy's stated objective. Airlines prefer a single-till model as it reduces their charges and passenger fees.

#### What's proposed in the policy?

According to the new Civil Aviation Policy, future tariffs at all airports will be calculated on a 'hybrid-till' basis.

#### What is hybrid-till model?

Under hybrid-till model 30% of airport operator's non-aeronautical revenues would be used to subsidise airport costs.

#### Implications:

- This move may marginally increase costs at 13 other major airports (with capacity of more than 15 lakh passengers) such as Ahmedabad, Calicut, Chennai, Hyderabad, Kolkata, among others.
- This move also may revive private developer interest in running airports as the model increases their revenue.

#### Background:

So far, single-till model was adopted for determining aeronautical tariffs that can be set by airports, wherein passengers and airlines are charged less. Under the single-till model, both aeronautical and non-aeronautical revenues are taken into account to calculate passenger fee. Apart from its core operations, airports earn income from the non-aeronautical side which includes food and beverages, duty-free shops, advertising, car parking and hotels.

Sources: the hindu.

### New education policy draft clashes with RTE

Several recommendations in the draft National Education Policy, 2016 will require amendments to the Right to Education Act, 2009.

#### Details:

- The draft National Education Policy insisting on "consolidation", proposes merging "small, non-viable" schools. This subverts the RTE Act on neighbourhood schools being located "**within a walking distance of one kilometre**" for children attending Classes 1 to 5.
- The draft emphasizes "school mapping" – as opposed to RTE's "**child-mapping**" – but stresses that for children attending "non-viable" schools, transport must be provided.

- The proposal to extend the 25% economically weaker section quota in private schools to minority institutions will also need an amendment. The committee notes that number of schools claiming religious or linguistic minority status has increased tremendously.
- The RTE mandates a **no-detention policy -banning grade-repetition -till Class VIII**; the draft wants it limited to Class V. Its recommendations cover remedial classes “by school teachers or volunteers” and supplementary examinations.
- The committee suggests amending the RTE to “provide, in addition to infrastructure, learning outcome norms that affect quality of education”, a longstanding private school demand.

#### Right to Education (RTE) Act:

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. Article 21-A and the RTE Act came into effect on 1 April 2010.

- It is seen as the most historic development in universalisation of elementary education in the country. It implies that every child in the age group of 6 to 14 years has Right to elementary education. They are entitled for free and compulsory education.

#### Salient features:

- The RTE Act provides for the right of children to free and compulsory education till completion of elementary education in a neighbourhood school.
- It clarifies that ‘compulsory education’ means obligation of the appropriate government to provide free elementary education and ensure compulsory admission, attendance and completion of elementary education to every child in the six to fourteen age group. ‘Free’ means that no child shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from pursuing and completing elementary education.
- It makes provisions for a non-admitted child to be admitted to an age appropriate class.
- It specifies the duties and responsibilities of appropriate Governments, local authority and parents in providing free and compulsory education, and sharing of financial and other responsibilities between the Central and State Governments.
- It lays down the norms and standards relating inter alia to Pupil Teacher Ratios (PTRs), buildings and infrastructure, school-working days, teacher-working hours.
- It provides for rational deployment of teachers by ensuring that the specified pupil teacher ratio is maintained for each school, rather than just as an average for the State or District or Block, thus ensuring that there is no urban-rural imbalance in teacher postings. It also provides for prohibition of deployment

of teachers for non-educational work, other than decennial census, elections to local authority, state legislatures and parliament, and disaster relief.

- It provides for appointment of appropriately trained teachers, i.e. teachers with the requisite entry and academic qualifications.
- The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is the main vehicle for implementation of the RTE Act. It is one of the largest programmes of its kind in the world. It is primarily funded from central budget and it covers the whole country.
- Under SSA, special attention has been given to urban deprived children, children affected by periodic migration and children living in remote and scattered habitations. Attempts have also been made to reach out to children suffering from autism. It involves their identification, preparation of individualized Education Plan, teacher training on Autism and therapeutic support.

Sources: toi.

### Draft forest policy out, brace for green tax

The environment ministry has come out with a **draft National Forest Policy (NFP)**. The policy is aimed at facilitating ecologically responsible behaviour among stakeholders. The draft policy has been prepared by the Bhopal-based Indian Institute of Forest Management (IIFM).

#### Highlights:

- The policy proposes levy of a green tax and calls for safeguarding forest land by exercising strict restraint on diversion for non-forestry purposes like mining and industrial projects and practising responsible eco-tourism in forest areas to ensure safety of wildlife.
- It aims to bring a minimum one-third of India's total geographical area under forest or tree cover through scientific interventions and enforcing strict rules to protect the dense cover.
- The new policy will replace the existing one that has been guiding the government to manage forests since 1988.
- On generating resources to manage the forest cover, the draft policy said the budget of the forestry sector should be appropriately enhanced so that the objectives enshrined in this policy can be achieved. The policy will guide the forest management of the country for the next 25-30 years.
- The policy also proposes to levy environmental cess, green tax, carbon tax etc. on certain products and services.
- On the contentious issue of diversion of forests for mining and industrial projects, the draft policy said, "Forest land diversion projects related to mining, quarrying, construction of dams, roads and other linear



infrastructure needs to adopt special caution. Use of state-of-the-art technology which causes minimum pollution and damage should be promoted.”

- The draft policy also called for developing “sound eco-tourism models” with the focus on conservation while supplementing the livelihood needs of local communities. “
- The policy envisages that a national implementation framework be put in place within six months of the notification, to deliver on the commitments. It also urged states to formulate their forest policies and prepare an implementation framework.
- The policy also emphasised on large-scale expansion of agro-forestry and farm forestry through incentives and operational support systems such as lowering input costs and enabling access to reasonably priced quality planting material.

#### Background:

Forests and trees constitute nearly one fourth of the geographic area of the country. Protection of this vast and valuable resource, improving and increasing the forest and tree cover requires adequate investment keeping in view the pressures on these forests, and the ecosystem services that they provide to the nation. Large tracts of forest area in the country have degraded due to immense biotic pressure and lack of adequate investment.

Sources: the hindu.

#### Jews In Maharashtra To Get Minority Status

Maharashtra government has approved a proposal to grant minority status to Jews in the state. The decision was taken at a meeting of the state Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister.

#### Details:

- After being officially recognised as a minority community, the Jews would enjoy several privileges like other minority communities.
- This decision will benefit students from these communities to avail scholarships from the state government and setting up of educational institutions.
- It would become easier for them to register their marriages. They would also be able to set up their own educational institutes and practice and promote their culture.

#### Background:

Jews have been a part of the Indian society for over 2,300 years now. According to 2001 Census, the number of Jews living in India was 4,650 with 2,466 of them residing in Maharashtra. The Jews of Manipur and Mizoram identify themselves as Beni Menashe. There are also some in Andhra Pradesh who call themselves



Bene Ephraim Jews. India is one of the few countries in the world where Jews have never faced any harassment or persecution.

Sources: the hindu.

### Bill nixed due to wrong definition of Manipuri

A contentious legislation passed by the Manipur Assembly last year to define who is a “Manipuri” was rejected by President Pranab Mukherjee recently as the definition was found to be “incorrect”.

- As per the Bill, “Manipur people means persons of Manipur whose names are in the National Register of Citizens, 1951, Census report 1951 and village directory of 1951 and their descendants who have contributed to the collective social, cultural and economic life of Manipur.”

#### Background:

- The definition of a “Manipuri” proposed by the State was based on the census conducted in 1951, which is flawed as the census exercise that year did not cover the entire State. Since the infrastructure at that time was not enough, many people were left out in the process. And hence the computation was not exhaustive. If 1951 figures are taken into account, half of the tribes would be declared stateless.
- The other ground on which the Bill was rejected was that it was passed by the Assembly as a “Money Bill” and not sent to the Hill Areas Committee for consultation. As per rules, any Bill concerning people living in the hills of Manipur has to be vetted by the panel.

Manipur merged with India on October 15, 1949. Before the merger, entry into the State was regulated by a permit system, which was later abolished.

Sources: the hindu.

### ‘FDI in private security requires change in Act’

An Indian trade body has said that the Centre will need to amend the **Private Security Agencies Regulation (PSAR) Act** (2005) to help in implement its decision to allow foreign direct investment of up to 74% in private security agencies.

#### Why?

Investment in the private security sector is capped at 49% as result of the provisions under the PSAR Act (2005). Hence, the Government’s decision to allow majority foreign ownership in private security industry up to 74% would require amendments to the PSAR Act (2005).

Private security agency:

Private security agency means security provided by a person, other than a public servant, to protect or guard any person or property or both and includes provision of armoured car service. Its services include offering training to private security guards and providing private security guards to any company.

Sources: the hindu.

Textiles get tax sops in output impetus

The Centre has announced a Rs.6,000-crore special package, with tax and production incentives, for the textile and apparel sector to enable domestic firms to compete globally. The package aims to help in creating one crore jobs, mostly for women, in the next three years.

Key facts:

- The package includes several tax and production incentives. The package also provides the sector more flexible labour laws and financial incentives. The government hopes the package will create one crore new jobs in three years, attract Rs74,000 crore in investment and generate \$30 billion in exports earnings.
- In a first-of-its-kind move, a new scheme will be introduced to refund the state levies which were not refunded so far. Of the Rs.6,000 crore package, Rs.5,500 crore is for an additional 5% duty drawback for garments. Drawback at 'all industries rate' would be given for domestic duty paid inputs even when fabrics are imported under 'Advance Authorization Scheme.'
- The remaining Rs.500 crore will be for additional incentives under Amended Technology Upgradation Funds Scheme (ATUFS), where the subsidy provided to garmenting units under the scheme is being increased from 15% to 25%, providing a boost to employment generation.
- The package breaks new ground in moving from input-based to outcome-based incentives; a unique feature of the scheme will be to disburse subsidy only after expected jobs have been created.
- To ensure increased earnings for workers, the package specifies that overtime hours for workers shall not to exceed eight hours per week — in line with International Labour Organisation norms.
- Taking note of the seasonal nature of the garment industry, fixed term employment will be introduced for the sector and a fixed term workman will be considered at par with permanent workman in terms of working hours, wages, allowances and other statutory dues.
- Considering the industry's seasonal nature, the provision of 240 days under Section 80JJAA of Income Tax Act (allowing deduction of 30% of additional wages paid to new regular employees for three years

where the worker has worked at least for 240 days in a previous year) would be relaxed to 150 days for the garment industry.

- Also, the government said it will bear the entire employer's contribution of 12 per cent under the Employees' Provident Fund Scheme, for new employees of garment industry earning less than Rs. 15,000 per month, for the first three years.

#### Background:

Compared with Bangladesh and Vietnam India was the leader in apparel exports between 1995 and 2000. Bangladesh's apparel exports exceeded that of India in 2003, while Vietnam surpassed India in 2011.

With the package the Indian textile and apparel sector would be strengthened by improving its cost competitiveness in the global market. With policy support, India can again regain its position in the next three years.

Sources: the hindu.

### DGCA to get more punitive powers

The Civil Aviation Ministry will soon send a proposal to amend the Aircraft Act, 1937, to the Law Ministry, to empower the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to impose fines for violations under the Act. DGCA will be empowered to penalise airlines and airports for various offences and non-compliance of air regulations. .

- Under the present rules, the DGCA is authorised to either suspend the operations of airlines or airports or take away their licence, but has no powers to impose fines or penalties.

#### Key facts:

- The violations under the act include operating aircraft without the specified minimum crew, flying without a valid pilot licence or medical fitness, not maintaining records, fraudulent entry in logbooks and not maintaining airports. However, the DGCA will not impose a fine on airlines on commercial matters.
- The DGCA may be empowered to fill vacancies on deputation or promote its employees without getting the consent of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).
- The DGCA will be given full financial autonomy, enabling it to spend money without taking the consent of the Civil Aviation Ministry, through a notification.

#### About DGCA:

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) is the regulatory body for civil aviation under the Ministry of Civil Aviation. The DGCA is responsible for implementing, controlling, and supervising airworthiness

standards, safety operations, crew training in India. This directorate investigates aviation accidents and incidents.

Sources: the hindu.

### Amendments to Specific Relief Act being examined

The Centre is contemplating amendments to the Specific Relief Act, 1963, to limit the compensation and relief that courts can grant in cases relating to execution of infrastructure and development projects.

#### Background:

These amendments are based on the recommendations made by a Central government-appointed expert committee. Anand Desai led Expert committee set up to examine the Specific Relief Act, 1963 recently submitted its report to the government. In its report the committee has recommended modifications in the Specific Relief Act, 1963, which will help in ensuring the ease of doing business. The recommendations are aimed at ensuring that public works contracts happen without unnecessary delays.

#### Highlights of the recommendations made:

- The committee has asked for specific performance to be made the rule and not an exception. This would mean that even if contractual obligations cannot be met, the court could ask the parties to fulfil terms of the contract. Monetary compensation will be an alternative when contracts cannot be fulfilled.
- It has also suggested guidelines to the courts for exercising discretion in these matters, in order to streamline how courts interpret the provisions. The committee said that there was need to see whether intervention of courts in public works should be minimal.

#### What does the Specific Relief Act do?

Specific Relief is legalese for performing a contract when monetary compensation for failing to complete contractual obligations is not enough. The law prescribes that in an event where the actual damage for not performing the contract cannot be measured or monetary compensation is not adequate, one party can ask the court to direct the other party to fulfil the requirements of the contract. This is called specific performance of a contract. This extends to infrastructure contracts, like construction of housing societies or sale and purchase of land.

#### Why does the government want to change this law?

Specific performance of contracts under the 1963 law is an alternative—only when monetary compensation is not sufficient can the court ask for it. There is a provision which says that there will be no specific performance of those contracts where monetary compensation is sufficient, or the contract involves performance of a continuous duty which the court cannot supervise.

- It is also a discretionary relief, that is, it is left to the court to decide whether specific performance should be given to a party asking for it. This gives rise to uncertainty in contracts.
- The government wants to ensure that there is ease of doing business, and the specific relief law is a hindrance. Uncertainty in contracts often means investors become wary of getting entangled in legal trouble.

Sources: the hindu.

### National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP)

The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has approved the National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP).

- The NMEP primarily aims at accelerating the exploration activity in the country through enhanced participation of the private sector.

#### Highlights:

- The policy emphasizes on making available baseline geoscientific data of world standards in the public domain, quality research in a public-private partnership, special initiatives for search of deep-seated and concealed deposits, quick aerogeophysical surveys of the country, and creation of a dedicated geoscience database etc.
- The Ministry of Mines will carry out auctioning of identified exploration blocks for exploration by private sector on revenue sharing basis in case their exploration leads to auctionable resources. The revenue will be borne by the successful bidder of those auctionable blocks.
- If the explorer agencies do not discover any auctionable resources, their exploration expenditure will be reimbursed on normative cost basis.
- Government will carry out a National Aerogeophysical Program for acquiring state-of-the-art baseline data for targeting concealed mineral deposits.
- A National Geoscientific Data Repository is proposed to be set up to collate all baseline and mineral exploration information generated by various central & state government agencies and also mineral concession holders and to maintain these on geospatial database.
- Government proposes to establish a not-for-profit autonomous institution that will be known as the National Centre for Mineral Targeting (NCMT) in collaboration with scientific and research bodies, universities and industry for scientific and technological research to address the mineral exploration challenges in the country.

- There are also provisions for inviting private investment in exploration through attractive revenue sharing models.
- On the lines of UNCOVER project of Australia, the government intends to launch a special initiative to probe deep-seated/ concealed minerals deposits in the country in collaboration with National Geophysical Research Institute and the proposed NCMT and Geoscience Australia.

In order to implement the recommendations of the NMEP, initially an amount of about Rs.2116 crore over 5 years would be required over and above the annual plan budget of the Geological Survey of India under the Ministry of Mines. The NMEP will benefit the entire mineral sector across the country.

Sources: the hindu.

### **Model Shops and Establishment (Regulation of Employment and Condition of Services) Bill 2016**

The Union Cabinet recently cleared the Model Shops and Establishment (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Bill, 2016.

#### **Highlights:**

- The law will allow shops, malls and cinema halls, among other establishments to run 24×7 throughout the year.
- It covers establishments employing 10 or more workers except manufacturing units and will provide freedom to operate 365 days with flexibility on timing to open and close.
- It also provides for women to be employed on night shifts with adequate security, and calls for better working conditions for employees such as drinking water, canteen, first-aid, lavatory and creche.
- The law also provides exemption to highly-skilled workers like those in IT and biotechnology from daily working hours (9 hours) and weekly working hours (48 hours).
- There are also provisions in the bill regarding powers of Government to make rules regarding adequate measures to be taken by the employer for the safety and health of workers.

#### **Way ahead:**

As per the proposal mooted by Labour Ministry, the model law can be adopted by states with a provision to modify it as per their requirements. This is designed to bring in uniformity in legislative provisions, making it easier for all states to adopt it and ensure uniform working conditions across the country. It should be noted here that the model law will not require Parliament's approval.

Background:

The Centre has been receiving suggestions from time to time to enact the model law, which states could consider for enforcement either by adopting the central law or through necessary modification by the state law.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries and Departments of the Government; pressure groups and formal/informal associations and their role in the Polity.*

**Union Home Minister chairs 22nd meeting of Eastern Zonal Council at Ranchi**

The Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh recently chaired the 22nd meeting of the Eastern Zonal Council held at Ranchi, Jharkhand.

- The Council discussed the issues like modernisation of State Police Forces, measures to curb communal tension and Left Wing Extremism (LWE), curbing of drug trafficking, measures for bringing Green Revolution to Eastern India, issues relating to fisheries, productivity of livestock and poultry to usher Blue Revolution.
- The issues of sharing of water of major rivers, development of Railways, construction of Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) and Multi –Sectoral Development Programme in the Eastern Zone were also discussed in detail.
- The Zonal Council also reviewed the progress of the implementation of the recommendations made at the previous meeting of the Council held at Patna last year.

Zonal councils:

Zonal councils have been **established by the Parliament** to promote interstate cooperation and coordination. They are **statutory bodies** established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and **advisory bodies**.

There are 5 five Zonal councils namely:

- The Northern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- The Central Zonal Council, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- The Eastern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.



- The Western Zonal Council, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- The Southern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.

#### Composition:

- Chairman – The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- Vice Chairman – The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- Members- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.
- Advisers- One person nominated by the Planning Commission (which has been replaced by NITI Ayog now) for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.
- Union Ministers are also invited to participate in the meetings of Zonal Councils depending upon necessity.

#### The main objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils are:

- Bringing out national integration.
- Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies.
- Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences.
- Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

Sources: pib.

### Parched Panchayati Raj Ministry on verge of closure

After facing a massive budget cut last year, from Rs. 7,000 crores to Rs. 96 crores, the future of the Panchayati Raj Ministry continues to look bleak. According to few experts, soon the Ministry will be closed down and turned into a department under the Ministry of Rural Development.



Present scenario:

With no funds in hands, the ministry is acting like an advisory body. The government had also recently shuttered two of its key programmes — the Backward Regions Grants Fund (BRGF) and the Rajiv Gandhi Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan (RGPSA). Also, in view of the budget cuts, the Ministry recently realigned its mandate from financing panchayats to capacity-building and training.

Background:

Ministry of Panchayati Raj looks into all matters relating of Panchayati Raj and Panchayati Raj Institutions. It was created in May 2004.

- With the passage of 73rd and 74th amendment act of the Constitution of India, in 1993 the division of powers and functions have been further trickled down to Local Self Governments (Panchayat at Village levels and Municipalities and Municipal Corporations in towns&large cities).
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj is responsible for the work of advocacy for and monitoring of the implementation of Constitution 73rd Amendment Act the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996.
- One major task of the Ministry will be to ensure that the State Governments/UT Administrations devolve funds, functions and functionaries on the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the spirit of the Constitutional provisions.
- The Ministry of Panchayati Raj will also be responsible for formulation and implementation of an Action Plan for seeing PRIs to emerge as “Institutions of Local-Self Government” securing economic development and social justice in their respective areas.

Why its existence is necessary?

According to estimates, there are 58,000 gram panchayats across the country without permanent office facilities. This goes against the spirit of grass-root democracy. Hence, for the overall upliftment and development of Panchayati Raj institutions in the country the existence of ministry is necessary.

Sources: the hindu.

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**Ministries can approve up to Rs. 500 cr. of non-Plan spending**

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According to the latest decision of the government, Ministers can now approve non- plan expenditure proposals of up to Rs 500 crore as against the earlier limit of Rs 150 crore.

Details:

- As per the new directives, competent authority to approve scheme/project between Rs 75 crore and Rs 500 crore will be the minister-in-charge of the ministry or department. Earlier, the minister had powers to approve proposals up to Rs 150 crore.
- Proposals up to Rs 75 crore can be approved by the secretary of the administrative ministry/department.
- In case of non-plan schemes entailing expenditure between Rs 500 crore and Rs 1,000 crore, the competent authority is the minister-in charge and minister of finance.
- Expenditure beyond Rs 1,000 crore require clearance of the Cabinet or Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.
- For faster clearance, the government has also raised the financial limit of projects that can be approved by officials.
- The government has also changed its rules to enable quick processing of any rise in project costs. A 20% increase in the cost of a project can now be assessed by financial advisers of ministries and approved by an officer. But if the absolute cost escalation is higher than Rs.75 crore, the minister will need to clear it.
- Also, a Committee on Non-Plan Expenditure, which cleared all proposals worth over Rs. 75 crore, will now have the power to assess proposals worth Rs. 300 crore and more.
- Non-plan expenditure constitutes the biggest portion of the government's spending. A major part of non-plan expenditure is about interest payments, pensions, statutory transfers to states and Union Territories.
- Non-Plan Expenditure committee with three members will be constituted in this regard. It will have Expenditure Secretary as chairman. The other members are — CEO of NITI Aayog and Secretary of the Department concerned.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources, issues relating to poverty and hunger.*

### **Middle-aged smoke and drink the most: Survey**

According to data from the Sample Registration System (SRS) Baseline Survey 2014, released by the Registrar General of India, West Bengal and Chhattisgarh had the highest proportions among people who reported to be smokers and alcohol drinkers respectively.

#### **Highlights of the survey:**

- A fourth of West Bengal men smoke and a third of Chhattisgarh men drink — the highest among the 21 'bigger states' for which data is available.
- Maharashtra has the lowest proportion of male smokers and drinkers, at 2% and 2.7%.
- There are more smokers (11.4%) than drinkers (10%).
- People in the age group 45-59 reported the highest proportion both in smoking and drinking while the 15-29 age group reported the lowest.
- The numbers are significantly low for women — a mere 0.7% of total women, for both smoking and drinking. At 3%, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh have the highest proportion of female drinkers.
- 13 of the 21 states have more drinkers than smokers, including Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Telangana — where the difference is the highest.
- Caste-wise, reported drinking is more among men belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (18.2%). This can explain why Chhattisgarh tops the drinking list, as the State has a large adivasi population.
- Smoking is most prevalent among the Scheduled Castes (16.3%).
- Overall, 1.4% people reported to have quit smoking and drinking. For every seven men who smoke and for every eight men who drink, there is one who has quit the respective habit.

Sources: the hindu.

### **WHO team probes suspected polio case in Uttar Pradesh**

A WHO team is in Uttar Pradesh to investigate a suspected case of polio in a six-year-old in Balrampur district of Uttar Pradesh. The suspected case of polio comes on the back of a wild polio-virus strain being found in a drain in Hyderabad earlier this week.

#### **Background:**

Reacting to reports from the virus in Telangana, the Union Health Ministry had said that India remained polio-free amidst concerns over a wild polio virus (P2 strain) being found in a Hyderabad drain. The polio

virus (P2 strain) that has been detected in Telangana was from a sewage sample near the Secunderabad railway station. The last case of Wild Polio Virus Type 2 in country was reported 17 years back in 1999.

- However, as a preventive measure the government is planning to launch a special immunisation drive in the high-risk areas of Hyderabad and Rangareddy districts, from June 20, where an estimated 3,00,000 children will be protected against polio using Inactivated Polio Vaccine.
- The special campaign will ensure all vulnerable children living in high-risk areas are given protection against polio.
- The last case due to wild poliovirus in India was detected on 13 January 2011 and the country was certified polio-free by the WHO in March 2014. India continues to maintain a highly sensitive surveillance system for polio.

Polio is a highly infectious viral disease, which mainly affects young children. The virus is transmitted by person-to-person spread mainly through the faecal-oral route or, less frequently, by a common vehicle (e.g. contaminated water or food) and multiplies in the intestine, from where it can invade the nervous system and can cause paralysis.

Sources: the hindu.

### Panel on education policy wants UGC Act to lapse

A high-power committee headed by former Cabinet Secretary T.S.R. Subramanian, tasked with drawing a blueprint for a new national education policy, has recommended that the law that set up the higher education regulator University Grants Commission (UGC) be allowed to lapse. The committee recently submitted its report to the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

#### Why scrap UGC?

The report says that the UGC has been unable over the years to effectively implement its regulations aimed at ensuring the quality of higher education in the country. Hence, the UGC act should be allowed to lapse. Widespread irregularities in grant of approval of institutions and courses were also found by the committee. Also, there are serious concerns about the quality of education provided by a large number of colleges/universities. But, UGC has failed in its responsibility to monitor standards of education in higher education institutions and it has not succeeded in ensuring this. Besides, the credibility of the UGC has been seriously dented by approvals given to a large number of sub-standard colleges and deemed universities

Alternative arrangement:

The panel has instead suggested an alternative arrangement for a pruned UGC. The UGC could be revamped, made considerably leaner and thinner, and could be the nodal point for administration of the proposed National Higher Education Fellowship Programme, without any other promotional or regulatory function.

Background:

An expert Committee headed by Hari Gautam recently had examined thoroughly the past, present and future role of UGC. The report is under examination by the Ministry. The report had concluded that the UGC does not have the adequate number of personnel, of requisite quality, to be an effective regulatory force in the higher education sector.

Important recommendations made by the Subramanian committee:

- An **Indian Education Service (IES)** should be established as an all India service with officers being on permanent settlement to the state governments but with the cadre controlling authority vesting with the Human Resource Development (HRD) ministry.
- The outlay on education should be raised to at least **6% of GDP** without further loss of time.
- There should be **minimum eligibility condition with 50% marks at graduate level for entry to existing B.Ed courses**. Teacher Entrance Tests (TET) should be made compulsory for recruitment of all teachers. The Centre and states should jointly lay down norms and standards for TET.
- **Compulsory licensing or certification for teachers in government and private schools** should be made mandatory, with provision for renewal every 10 years based on independent external testing.
- **Pre-school education for children in the age group of 4 to 5 years should be declared as a right** and a programme for it implemented immediately.
- The **no detention policy must be continued for young children until completion of class V** when the child will be 11 years old. At the upper primary stage, the system of detention shall be restored subject to the provision of remedial coaching and at least two extra chances being offered to prove his capability to move to a higher class.
- **On-demand board exams should be introduced** to offer flexibility and reduce year end stress of students and parents. A National Level Test open to every student who has completed class XII from any School Board should be designed.
- The **mid-day meal (MDM) program should now be extended to cover students of secondary schools**. This is necessary as levels of malnutrition and anaemia continue to be high among adolescents.
- Top 200 foreign universities should be allowed to open campuses in India and give the same degree which is acceptable in the home country of the said university.

### About University Grants Commission (UGC):

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of India is a **statutory body** set up in 1956, and is charged with coordination, determination and maintenance of standards of higher education.

- It provides recognition to universities in India, and disburses funds to such recognized universities and colleges.
- Previously, UGC was formed in 1946 to oversee the work of the three Central Universities of Aligarh, Banaras and, Delhi. In 1947, the Committee was entrusted with the responsibility of dealing with all the then existing Universities.
- After independence, the University Education Commission was set up in 1948 under the Chairmanship of S. Radhakrishnan and it recommended that the UGC be reconstituted on the general model of the University Grants Commission of the United Kingdom.
- The UGC was however, formally established in November 1956, by an Act of Parliament as a statutory body of the Government of India.

Sources: the hindu.

### Use of potassium bromate as food additive banned

The government has banned the use of potassium bromate as a food additive following a Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) study that found its presence in bread caused cancer.

#### Background:

A recent study had found that 84% of 38 commonly available brands of pre-packaged breads, including pav and buns, tested positive for potassium bromate and potassium iodate. The two food additives are banned in many countries and are listed as “hazardous” to public health. According to the study, potassium bromate typically increases dough strength, leads to higher rising and gives uniform finish to baked products. Potassium iodate is a flour treatment agent.

#### What is Potassium Bromate and how it works?

It is added to wheat flour to strengthen the dough and to allow it to rise higher. It bleaches the dough and increases its elasticity by making tiny bubbles that help the bread rise.

- However, the real problem arises when bromate flour isn't baked for long enough or at a high enough temperature, or if too much potassium bromate is added in the first place.

#### Health impacts:

- The chemical is said to cause renal tubular tumours (adenomas and carcinomas) thyroid follicular tumours peritoneal mesotheliomas in laboratory animals.

- Also, long-term carcinogenicity studies and in vivo and in vitro mutagenicity studies showed that potassium bromate was a “genotoxic carcinogen” or a chemical agent that damaged genetic information, causing mutations.

Sources: the hindu.

### Zika virus may not cause microcephaly: Study

The microcephaly epidemic in Brazil has been speculated to be caused by the Zika virus. However, a new study claims Zika may not be the real cause of microcephaly after all so further research is still needed to verify this.

#### Details:

- In Brazil, more than 1,500 microcephaly cases have been recorded. But the researchers from the New England Complex Systems Institute (NECSI), an independent research and educational institution, say microcephaly cases were not found in other countries hit with Zika virus, as in the case of Colombia.
- A recent data analysis reveals that the 12,000 Colombian mothers infected with Zika, all of whom have Zika infection symptoms, did not give birth to microcephalic infants, babies with small head that can lead to learning problems.
- The findings imply that there could be another cause for microcephaly in Brazil. Some researchers say Brazil's microcephaly cases could be blamed to the pesticide **pyriproxyfen**. Pyriproxyfen is used to eliminate the larvae of the mosquitoes that spread Zika, which include the female Aedes aegypti mosquito, Zika's primary vector. The pesticide is introduced into the drinking water in some areas of Brazil.
- The research team explains that pyriproxyfen is a juvenile hormone analog that regulates an insect growth, development, and reproduction. This substance is cross reactive with retinoic acid, which has been known to cause microcephaly.

#### What is microcephaly?

Microcephaly is a condition where a baby's head is much smaller than expected. During pregnancy, a baby's head grows because the baby's brain grows. Microcephaly can occur because a baby's brain has not developed properly during pregnancy or has stopped growing after birth, which results in a smaller head size. Microcephaly can be an isolated condition, meaning that it can occur with no other major birth defects, or it can occur in combination with other major birth defects.



Zika:

Zika virus disease is an emerging viral disease transmitted through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito. This is the same mosquito that is known to transmit infections like dengue and chikungunya.

Sources: toi.

Prices of 45 essential drugs slashed

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority has fixed the prices of 45 drug formulations, including three insulin formulations. NPPA has fixed/revised ceiling prices of 45 scheduled formulations of Schedule-I under Drugs (Price Control) Amendment Order, 2016, and retail price of 12 formulations under DPCO, 2013.

- NPPA has also directed all manufacturers to comply with the ceiling prices of the medicines and reduce prices, if the retail prices were higher than the revised amount, and maintain the prices, if they are lower than the set standard.
- The manufacturers not complying with the ceiling price and notes specified hereinabove shall be liable to deposit the overcharged amount along with interest thereon under the provisions of the Drugs (Price Control) Order, 2013, read with Essential Commodities Act, 1955.

Background:

The NPPA periodically revises prices of essential medicines under the Drug (Pricing Control) Order (DPCO) that has about 650 formulations under it. These prices can be increased by companies by a maximum of 10% depending on inflation.

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.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.*

### **Govt. mulls 'outcome-linked' incentive for NIIF chief**

The government is considering an 'outcome-linked' payment package as part of incentives for the recruitment of a chief executive of India's first sovereign wealth fund, the National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF).

- However, negotiations on the incentive payment, which will be paid for every \$10 billion the fund succeeds in raising, are still on.

#### **Background:**

The Cabinet had given its approval in July for setting up NIIF. The Finance Ministry, in October 2015, constituted a search-cum-selection committee for selecting a chief executive. The governing council of the fund, chaired by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, had decided to complete the selection process by January-end.

#### **About NIIF:**

National Infrastructure and Investment Fund (NIIF) was set up as a trust with a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore.

- The Fund aims to attract investment from both domestic and international sources.
- The government's contribution would be limited to 49% of the subscribed capital.
- The government will seek participation from strategic investors such as sovereign fund, quasi sovereign funds and multilateral or bilateral investors, which can help leverage this fund to many times.
- Cash-rich PSUs, pension funds, provident funds, National Small Saving Fund will be able to pick up stake in the fund.

- The objective of NIIF is to maximize economic impact mainly through infrastructure development in commercially viable projects, both greenfield and brownfield, including stalled projects, NIIF would solicit equity participation from strategic anchor partners.
- Sovereign funds and pension funds from a number of countries, including the U.K., UAE, Russia and Singapore, have already expressed interest in investing in NIIF. India and the UAE signed a pact to mobilise up to \$75 billion long-term investment.

Sources: the hindu.

### PAC slams DoT, FinMin units on revenue loss to Govt

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has slammed telecom and finance Ministries for “inefficient functioning” of some units. PAC examined a CAG audit showing Rs 12,488 crore loss to exchequer due to under-reporting of revenue by six firms including Airtel, Vodafone and RCOM.

- PAC has observed that the lack of proper supervision of Controllers of Communications Accounts (CCAs) in Department of Telecom (DoT) and the Financial Wing in the Finance Ministry has “contributed to significant financial loss to the exchequer”.

#### Background:

In its report, the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had said that Reliance Communications, Tata Tele, Vodafone, Airtel, Idea and Aircel under-reported their adjusted gross revenue by Rs 46,045.75 crore, leading to a loss of Rs 12,488.93 crore to the exchequer from 2006 to 2010.

The CAG had said adjustment of one-time entry fee paid by telecom firms, whose licences were quashed by the Supreme Court, deprived exchequer of Rs 5,476.3 crore.

#### Facts- Public Accounts Committee:

- The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is a committee of selected members of Parliament, constituted by the Parliament of India, for the **auditing of the expenditure of the Government of India**.
- The Committee is formed **every year** with strength of not more than 22 members of which **15 are from Lok Sabha and 7 from Rajya Sabha**.
- The **Chairman is appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha**. Since 1967, the chairman of the committee is selected from the opposition. Earlier, it was headed by a member of the ruling party.
- Its chief function is to **examine the audit report of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) after it is laid in the Parliament**. CAG assists the committee during the course of investigation.

- A Minister is not eligible to be elected as a member of the Committee and if a member, after his election to the Committee, is appointed as a Minister, he ceases to be a member of the Committee from the date of such appointment.
- The term of office of members of the Committee does not exceed one year at a time.
- The Committee is assisted by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the examination of Accounts and Audit Reports.

Sources: the hindu.

### CIC rejects plea seeking info on Sebi chief's assets

A full bench of the central information commission (CIC) has refused to disclose information on the assets and liabilities of Sebi chief U K Sinha, saying there was no public interest involved overturning its own four-year old order.

- CIC said that the appellant in the instant case has not made a bona fide public interest in seeking information and the disclosure of such information is likely to cause unwarranted invasion of privacy of the individual under Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act.

#### Background:

An RTI query was filed with Sebi in 2012 seeking details of the assets and liabilities of its chairman for the last three years along with his emoluments and perquisites.

#### CIC:

The Central Information Commission (CIC) is set up under the Right to Information Act and is the authorised body, established in 2005, under the Government of India.

- The Chief Information Commissioner heads the Central Information Commission. CIC hears appeals from information-seekers who have not been satisfied by the public authority, and also addresses major issues concerning the RTI Act.

The Chief Information Commissioner and Information Commissioners are appointed by the President on the recommendation of a committee consisting of—

- The Prime Minister, who shall be the Chairperson of the committee.
- The Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
- A Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister.

Sources: the hindu.

### Soon, an e-dropbox for kids to report abuse

The ministry of women and child development (WCD) is working on an e-dropbox that will let children complain about abuse, molestation or harassment in everyday situations in school, bus, tuition classes or at home. Simple language, pictures and icons will be used to ensure that even young children can use this facility.

- The e-dropbox will be hosted on the website of National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR). The icons and the response system are being designed by the commission.

#### Background:

The project was inspired by Delhi Police's 'Operation Nirbheek', under which complaint boxes were placed in different schools, allowing girls to anonymously complain about any abuse. Many of the complaints were converted into FIRs. They helped bring to light incidents of abuse at homes and schools that children were too scared or inhibited to speak about.

#### Why this is necessary?

A 2007 government study found that more than 53% of children in India are subjected to sexual abuse, but most don't report the assault to anyone. The survey, carried out across 13 states and with a sample size of 12,447, revealed that 53.22% of children reported having faced one or more forms of sexual abuse, with Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and Delhi reporting the highest percentage of such incidents. In 50% of the child abuse cases, the abusers were known to the child or were in a position of trust, and most children did not report the matter to anyone.

Sources: toi.

### Crime drops as Chittoor embraces community policing in a big way

With 4,500 volunteers enrolled as Community Police Officers (CPOs) in just five months, the community policing effort launched by the Chittoor district police in Andhra Pradesh has evoked an overwhelming response. Professionals, including doctors, lawyers and engineers and students have signed up to help in various aspects of policing.

- CPOs are being used in almost all areas of policing, including crime, traffic regulation, night beats, security duties, road accidents, data entry and operations against red sanders smuggling.

#### Who are CPOs?

CPOs are community police officers who do not require any education qualification. They should be just above 18 years of age with good health and clean background. Women and transgenders can also be CPOs. After preliminary training, the CPOs would also be eligible for special orientation in their field of interest.

The concept's motto is to promote people-friendly policing where there will be zero crime rate.

Sources: the hindu.

### CSIR lab to certify coal used in power plants

The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has signed an annual Rs. 250-crore deal with several state-run coal and thermal power companies to certify the quality of the coal being supplied and used in their facilities. The certification will help power plants use coal appropriate to the machinery and technology available in the plant and contribute to efficient use and, in the long run, reduce emissions.

- The Dhanbad-based CSIR-Central Institute of Mining and Fuel Research (CSIR-CIMFR), Dhanbad, a constituent laboratory of CSIR, will be doing the certification and it expects to analyse about 300 million tonnes of coal samples per year. While the grading of a coal would be voluntary and organisations affiliated to the Coal Ministry would have already checked the quality of coal, the CSIR's grading would be finer and more reliable.

#### Background:

There have been disputes between power companies and coal suppliers over the quality of coal. Last week several power distribution companies in Delhi reportedly filed a petition with the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission accusing the NTPC of supplying poor quality coal and overcharging. The NTPC had responded that the coal was supplied by Coal India Ltd. and only a 'third party' could impartially decide on the quality of coal. India's coal is known to be of high ash content and of a lower quality, compared with that of several countries, that has forced many private companies to import coal.

#### About CSIR:

CSIR, constituted in 1942 by a resolution of the then Central Legislative assembly, is an autonomous body registered under the Registration of Societies Act XXI of 1860.

- Known for its cutting-edge R&D knowledgebase in diverse S&T areas, CSIR is a contemporary R&D organization, having pan-India presence, with a dynamic network of 38 national laboratories, 39 outreach centers, 3 Innovation Complexes and 5 units.
- CSIR covers a wide spectrum of science and technology – from radio and space physics, oceanography, geophysics, chemicals, drugs, genomics, biotechnology and nanotechnology to mining, aeronautics, instrumentation, environmental engineering and information technology.
- It provides significant technological intervention in many areas with regard to societal efforts, which include environment, health, drinking water, food, housing, energy, farm and non-farm sectors. Further, CSIR's role in S&T human resource development is noteworthy.

Sources: the hindu.

### New members to UNSC

The 193 members of the United Nations General Assembly has elected Sweden, Bolivia, Ethiopia and Kazakhstan to serve on the UNSC for a period of two years, starting from 1 January 2017. With this, now only one non-permanent Council seat remains to be filled.

- The newly-elected countries will replace Spain, Malaysia, New Zealand, Angola and Venezuela.

#### Background:

Under the UN Charter, the Security Council has the primary responsibility for international peace and security, with all UN Member States required to comply with Council decisions.

- The Security Council has 15 members, including five permanent. The five permanent members, each with the power of veto, are China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. Other current non-permanent members are Japan, Egypt, Senegal, Ukraine and Uruguay.
- The Council's 10 non-permanent seats are allocated according to a rotation pattern set by the Assembly in 1963, to ensure a proportionate representation over time from the different parts of the world: five from African and Asian States; one from Eastern Europe; two from Latin American States; and two from Western European and Other States.
- The Security Council is also responsible for determining the existence of a threat against peace and to respond to an act of aggression. It is also responsible for finding peaceful means to settle a conflict or a dispute between States.
- In some cases, the Council can resort to sanctions or even authorize the use of force to maintain or restore international peace and security.
- The Security Council also recommends to the General Assembly the appointment of the Secretary General and the admission of new Members to the United Nations.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: *India and its neighbourhood- relations.*

### Chinese scholars may soon get India visa easily

India is planning to remove China from the prior referral category (PRC) for issuing of research visas. This will follow a similar concession announced recently for conference visas sought by Chinese citizens. However,

PRC restrictions will still apply to Chinese citizens seeking business or employment visas, apart from certain categories of even conference and research visas.

Implications:

By removing China from the list of PRC countries as regards research visa, India seeks to facilitate research projects/assignments of Chinese scholars on Indian soil as their applications will no longer be subjected to elaborate scrutiny by the security establishment prior to clearance.

Research visa:

Research visas are given to research professors or scholars and participants attending research conferences/seminars/workshops.

Background:

China has seen major relaxations in its visa regime with India under the new government. The government had last year announced launch of e-tourist visa facility for Chinese citizens. Around a fortnight ago, India took off China from the list of PRC country as regards conference visa.

What is prior referral category?

Prior referral category (PRC) country means visas are issued by the respective Indian missions and consulates after running a thorough background check on individual applicants.

Countries in PRC:

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, foreigners of Pakistani origin and stateless persons come under the restricted category, requiring prior security clearance from the intelligence agencies for obtaining a visa.

Sources: toi.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.*

**India signs agreement with IBRD**

The Government of India and the World Bank have signed a US\$ 9.2 million grant agreement under the World Bank-Global Environment Facility (GEF) Program for the Efficient and Sustainable City Bus Service Project to improve the efficiency and attractiveness of bus services in select Indian cities.

Key facts:

- The project will demonstrate low cost high impact initiatives in efficient bus operations by focusing on modernizing city bus services through modern depots for improving the maintenance of buses; introducing modern Intelligent Transport Systems and Management Information Systems for better



planning and management of operations; and by providing technical support to vehicles and drivers for better fuel efficiency, among others.

- Demonstration cities where the various initiatives for improving city bus services will be undertaken are Mira Bhayandar in Maharashtra, Chandigarh, Jaipur, and Bhopal.
- This project will complement the Government of India's Bus Funding Scheme launched to promote public transport by supporting cities to modernize their bus services.
- The initiatives for modernizing city bus transport services under this project will also help select cities reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) while offering practical transport solutions.
- The project is designed to specifically focus on identifying regulatory, institutional and fiscal constraints to operation of sustainable city bus services and address the weak capacity in the urban bus sector and facilitate the development of a vibrant urban bus sector community through the development of a comprehensive capacity building program.

#### Background:

The World Bank Group-Global Environment Facility (GEF) directly support actions to combat major environmental issues such as climate change, loss of biodiversity, polluted international waters, land degradation and desertification, and persistent organic pollutants, as well as stimulate green growth. The program supports an active portfolio of over 200 investments globally.

Sources: pib.

### India joins The Hague Code of Conduct

India has joined The **Hague Code of Conduct against Ballistic Missile Proliferation (HCoC)**.

- India's joining the Code signals its readiness to further strengthen the global non-proliferation regimes.
- The government has also made it clear that this joining will not have any impact on the national security as well as country's missile programmes.

#### About HCoC:

HCoC is a global ballistic missile proliferation regime established in 2002. It is a **voluntary legally non-binding multilateral body** aimed at preventing the spread of ballistic missiles that can deliver weapons of mass destruction.

- It is the **only multilateral code in the area of disarmament** which has been adopted over the last years. It is the only normative instrument to verify the spread of ballistic missiles.
- The HCoC **does not ban ballistic missiles**, but it does call for restraint in their production, testing, and export. Presently, there are 137 signatories.

- The Code is meant to **supplement the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)** but its membership is not restricted. Under the Code, States make politically binding commitments to curb the proliferation of WMD-capable ballistic missiles and to exercise maximum restraint in developing, testing, and deploying such missiles.
- Given the similarities between the technologies used in ballistic missiles and civilian rockets, the Code also introduces transparency measures such as annual declarations and pre-launch notifications regarding ballistic missile and space launch programs.
- **Austria is the administrative Central Contact of the Code**, coordinating the information exchange under HCOC.

Sources: the hindu.

### Crucial meetings await Parrikar on sidelines of Shangri-La Dialogue

Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar is in Singapore to attend the 15<sup>th</sup> **Shangri-La Dialogue**. On the sidelines, he will also be holding crucial meetings with his counterparts from France and the U.S.

- The Shangri-La Dialogue **hosted annually by independent think-tank International Institute for Strategic Studies**, is being held from June 3-5.
- It is attended by defence ministers and military chiefs of 28 Asia-Pacific countries besides those of other countries.

### What is the Shangri-La Dialogue?

The dialogue, also called as IISS Asia Security Summit, was launched in 2002 by British think tank the International Institute for Strategic Studies and the Singaporean government. This annual dialogue brings together defence ministers and military chiefs from 28 Asia-Pacific countries to talk about security in the region. It gets its name from the location of the meeting, the Shangri-La hotel in Singapore.

### Why is the Shangri-La Dialogue important?

- The dialogue gathers military representatives from some of the world's most powerful countries to discuss pressing and significant defence and security issues.
- The meeting is a chance for defence ministers, military chiefs and high-ranking defence officials to hold bilateral meetings on its sidelines.
- It is also attended by legislators, academic experts, journalists and business delegates from around the globe, making it a vehicle for public policy development and discussions on defence and security in the Asia-Pacific.

Sources: the hindu.

### Singapore Arbitration Centre to open India office

The Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) is all set to establish a **representative office at the Gujarat International Finance Tec-City (GIFT City)** to resolve international commercial disputes.

#### Background:

SIAC has signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Gujarat International Finance Tec-City Company Limited (GIFTCL) and GIFT SEZ Limited (GIFT SEZ).

#### Details:

- SIAC will establish a representative office at GIFT City to promote its international arbitration services to Indian users. Indian parties are among the top five foreign users of SIAC in the last five years. It was the top foreign user of SIAC in 2013 and 2015.
- As per the terms of the agreement, GIFTCL, GIFT SEZ and SIAC will collaborate to promote the use of arbitration, mediation and other dispute resolution mechanisms, including the innovative '**Arb-Med-Arb**' service offered by the SIAC and the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC).

#### What is IAC?

An international arbitration centre or IAC is a centre where disputes arising out of commercial agreements from sectors like insurance, shipping, construction, private equity and other trades are handled. Arbitration is different from court litigation and is typically less time-consuming as it is done in private between the lawyers representing the aggrieved parties.

#### Arb-Med-Arb:

Arb-Med-Arb is a process where a dispute is first referred to arbitration before mediation is attempted. If parties are able to settle their dispute through mediation, their mediated settlement may be recorded as a consent award. The consent award is generally accepted as an arbitral award, and, subject to any local legislation and/or requirements, is generally enforceable in approximately 150 countries under the New York Convention. If parties are unable to settle their dispute through mediation, they may continue with the arbitration proceedings.

Sources: the hindu.

### India, Qatar Sign 7 Agreements To Boost Cooperation And Investment

India and Qatar have signed seven agreements to boost cooperation and bilateral investments. These agreements were signed during the recent visit of PM Modi to Qatar.

MoUs signed:

- According to one memorandum of understanding (MoU), **Qatar will invest in India's National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF)**. The government had set up the Rs 40,000-crore NIIF last year for enhancing infrastructure financing in India.
- Another MoU was signed between **India's Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, and Qatar's National Qualifications Authority/Supreme Educational Council**, on cooperation in skill development and recognition of qualifications.
- A third MoU calls for **Cooperation in tourism between the two countries**.
- Another MoU was signed on **cooperation between India and Qatar in the field of health**.
- A fifth MoU was signed between **Finance Intelligence Unit-India (FIU-IND) and the Qatar Financial Information Unit (QFIU)**.
- An agreement was signed on **cooperation and mutual assistance in customs matters**.
- A first executive programme for MoU in the field of youth and sports between the two countries was also signed.

Sources: the hindu.

**India, U.S. to ratify Paris deal by 2017**

India and the U.S have agreed to initiate domestic processes to ratify the Paris Agreement on climate change — negotiated by over 190 countries in December 2015 — and complete the process within this year.

**Background:**

The Paris Agreement on climate change is a milestone in global climate cooperation. It is meant to enhance the implementation of the Convention and recognizes the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in the light of different national circumstances.

- India had advocated a strong and durable climate agreement based on the principles and provisions of the Convention. The Paris Agreement addresses all the important concerns and expectations of India.

**The salient features of the Paris Agreement are as follows:**

- The Paris Agreement acknowledges the development imperatives of developing countries. The Agreement recognizes the developing countries' right to development and their efforts to harmonize development with environment, while protecting the interests of the most vulnerable.
- The Paris Agreement recognizes the importance of sustainable lifestyles and sustainable patterns of consumption with developed countries taking the lead, and notes the importance of 'climate justice' in its preamble.

- The Agreement seeks to enhance the ‘implementation of the Convention’ whilst reflecting the principles of equity and common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.
- The objective of the Agreement further ensures that it is not mitigation-centric and includes other important elements such as adaptation, loss and damage, finance, technology, capacity building and transparency of action and support.
- Pre-2020 actions are also part of the decisions. The developed country parties are urged to scale up their level of financial support with a complete road map to achieve the goal of jointly providing US \$ 100 billion by 2020 for mitigation and adaptation by significantly increasing adaptation finance from current levels and to further provide appropriate technology and capacity building support.

Sources: the hindu.

### To mollify China, India eases curbs on conference visas

India has removed **conference visas for Chinese participants from the prior referral category**.

#### Details:

- Not all categories of visas for Chinese have been removed from the restricted category. The relaxation is only for conference visas as it was a major hindrance for the Chinese to come here and share technological advancements and strategies.
- China continues to be under prior referral category of countries for research, business, employment, medical and student visas.

#### What are conference visas?

Conference visas are issued for seminars, workshops and conferences organised by government departments, Union ministries, public sector undertakings, central educational institutions or public funded universities.

#### What is prior referral category?

Prior referral category (PRC) country means visas are issued by the respective Indian missions and consulates after running a thorough background check on individual applicants.

#### Countries in PRC:

Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, foreigners of Pakistani origin and stateless persons come under the restricted category, requiring prior security clearance from the intelligence agencies for obtaining a visa.

#### Background:

China had, on several occasions, pressed India for lifting restrictions on conference and research visas.

Sources: the hindu.

### India eyes uranium from Africa

India is planning to ask African countries to relax commitment to the **Pelindaba Treaty** which controls supply of uranium from key mineral hubs of Africa to the rest of the world. As part of this, President Pranab Mukherjee would begin the process by trying to convince Namibia in his upcoming trip, to implement a bilateral treaty with India and supply uranium to Indian nuclear energy projects.

#### Background:

India and Namibia signed two MoUs on Cooperation in the field of geology and mineral resources and Cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy during the visit of President Hifikepunye Lucas Pohamba to India in 2009. However, the Pelindaba Treaty has prevented it from ratifying the agreements. Namibia is the fourth largest producer of uranium.

#### About Pelindaba treaty:

The Pelindaba Treaty signed in 1996, also known as the **African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty**, aims at **preventing nuclear proliferation and preventing strategic minerals of Africa from being exported freely**. The treaty was signed in 1996 and came into effect with the 28th ratification on 15 July 2009.

- The Treaty prohibits the **research, development, manufacture, stockpiling, acquisition, testing, possession, control or stationing** of nuclear explosive devices in the territory of parties to the Treaty and the dumping of radioactive wastes in the African zone by Treaty parties.
- The Treaty also prohibits any attack against nuclear installations in the zone by Treaty parties and requires them to maintain the highest standards of physical protection of nuclear material, facilities and equipment, which are to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
- It also requires all parties to apply **full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards** to all their peaceful nuclear activities.
- It covers the entire African continent along with few islands. Presently, the treaty has been ratified by 40 countries.

Sources: the hindu.

### Logistics agreement with Washington inches forward

The logistics pact between India and the U.S., **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)**, has found mention in the joint statement issued after recent talks between Prime Minister

Narendra Modi and U.S. President Barack Obama. Both leaders have welcomed the finalisation of the text of the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).

- In the coming weeks the agreement will go through the administrative procedure and has to be formally approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) before it can be signed.

#### **About the agreement:**

The agreement will give two nations access to logistic support from each other besides refueling and birthing facilities. It requires both countries to provide their bases, fuel and other kinds of logistics support to each others' fighter jets and naval warships. Logistical support with regard to weapons facilities would involve non-offensive military equipment. This support will involve cashless transactions on a reciprocal basis. It would be particularly beneficial at the time of disaster relief operations like the one India undertook in the wake of the Asian Tsunami in 2004.

Sources: the hindu.

#### **Shanghai meet crucial for NSG nod**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping as well as Central Asian leaders, including Kazakh President Nazarbayev in Tashkent on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit, to make a final attempt to push through India's NSG membership. India is slated to join the SCO after its membership was approved last year.

#### **About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):**

It is a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. These countries, except for Uzbekistan, had been members of the **Shanghai Five**, founded in 1996; after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the members renamed the organisation.

- The SCO is seen as a counter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- With observer states included, its affiliates account for about half of the world's population.
- The SCO has established relations with the United Nations, where it is an observer in the General Assembly, the European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.
- India and Pakistan were accepted as full members of the organization in July 2015.
- Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia enjoy observer status.

Sources: the hindu.



### India warned against pitfalls in ASEAN trade agreement

Many civil society organizations have warned India that it will no more remain 'the pharmacy of the developing world' if the proposals in the ASEAN trade pact are adopted.

- Civil society organisations are pushing for the removal of harmful intellectual property provisions that could potentially increase drug costs by creating new monopolies and delaying the entry of affordable generics in the market.

#### Concerns:

Concerns have been raised over the proposals made by Japan and South Korea that go beyond the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights.

- Two of the most worrying are the demands for 'Data Exclusivity' and 'Patent Term Extensions'. Data exclusivity is a form of legal monopoly protection for a drug, over and above the patent protections. This is given expressly to compensate for the investment made during clinical trials. It implies that regulators cannot approve a similar drug with similar data for the next five years, delaying the entry of generic, affordable versions.
- Patent term extensions are given to compensate the company for delays in processing patent applications. A company gets a 20-year patent monopoly on a drug from the date that the application is filed. Sometimes processing these applications takes time and the companies get only 13 years instead of 20. A patent term extension will give another five-year monopoly to the innovator company, again delaying the entry of generic drugs in the market.

#### About Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership:

The RCEP is among the proposed three mega FTAs in the world so far – the other two being the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership, led by the US) and the TTIP (Trans -atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the US and the EU).

- The agreement is proposed between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.

Sources: the hindu.

### India sets sights on gold in ocean

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing of a 15-year contract by the Ministry of Earth Sciences with the **International Seabed Authority (ISA)** for undertaking exploration and other developmental activities related to **polymetallic sulphides** in the allotted area of 10,000 sq km.

#### Key facts:

- By signing the contract, India's exclusive rights for exploration of polymetallic sulphides in the **allotted area in the Central Indian Ridge, and South West Indian Ridge in Indian Ocean will be formalized.**
- It will also enhance India's presence in the Indian Ocean where other players like China, Korea and Germany are active.
- The program will be implemented by the **Ministry of Earth Sciences** with the participation of various national institutes and research laboratories and organisations.
- Previously, in 2002, the government was granted permission only to explore ocean regions and prospect for precious metals.

#### What are PMS?

Deep seabed polymetallic sulphides (PMS) containing iron, copper, zinc, silver, gold, platinum in variable constitutions are precipitates of hot fluids from upwelling hot magma from deep interior of the oceanic crust discharged through mineralized chimneys. PMS in the Ocean Ridges have attracted worldwide attention for their long term commercial as well as strategic value.

- Initial estimated resource of polymetallic nodules on the site retained by India on the central Indian Ocean basin is 380 million tonnes with 0.55 tonnes of cobalt, 4.7 tonnes of nickel, 4.29 tonnes of copper and 92.59 tonnes of manganese.

#### About ISA:

The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an intergovernmental body based in Kingston, Jamaica, that was established to organize, regulate and control all mineral-related activities in the international seabed area beyond the limits of national jurisdiction, an area underlying most of the world's oceans.

- It is an organization established by the 1982 **United Nations Law of the Sea Convention**. It was established in 1994.
- ISA governs non-living resources of seabed lying in international waters.

Sources: the hindu.

### India, South Korea to review trade pact

India and South Korea are planning to jointly review their Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to boost trade and investment ties. This exercise is expected to be concluded in the favour of both the countries.

- The review will involve, among other things, fresh negotiations on elimination/reduction of duties on various products.

#### Background:

The FTA, officially called the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), had come into effect in 2010.

- As per the agreement South Korea will cut tariffs on 93% on goods from India. India will cut 75% of total tariffs.
- The agreement provided better access for the Indian service industry in South Korea. Services include Information technology, engineering, finance, and the legal field.
- The agreement eased restrictions on foreign direct investments.
- Both countries avoided issues over agriculture, fisheries, and mining and choose not to decrease tariffs in those areas. This was due to the very sensitive nature of these sectors in the respective countries.

Sources: the hindu.

### Cabinet approves India's Membership of the International Continental Scientific Drilling Program

The Union Cabinet recently gave its approval for Indian membership of the International Continental Scientific Drilling Program (ICDP) consortium by signing an MoU with the Helmholtz Centre Potsdam GFZ German Research Centre for geosciences. This is a government-funded, Public Law Foundation of the State of Brandenburg, Germany.

#### Details:

- By signing the MoU on the membership for a period of five years with ICDP, India would enable engaging internationally renowned experts with profound expertise in different aspects of scientific drilling in order to accomplish deep drilling and associated investigations in Koyna region.
- As a part of the membership agreement, India will get a seat on two ICDP panels – Executive Committee (EC) and Assembly of Governors (AOG). Also, ICDP will provide technical / operational support, facilitate capacity building in terms of manpower training in key scientific areas, sample and data management and support workshops for the Koyna scientific deep drilling project undertaken by Ministry of Earth Sciences.

- As a member of ICDP, scientists/engineers from India would have right to submit proposals, to participate in all ICDP co-funded workshops and drilling projects and have access to all data results from ICDP projects. This will shed new light on the genesis of seismicity and better understanding of earthquake processes.

#### About International Continental Scientific Drilling Program:

It is a multinational program to further and fund geosciences in the field of Continental Scientific Drilling. It was founded in February 1996 in the German Embassy in Tokyo as a result of the German Continental Deep Drilling Program.

- The research findings will provide direct insight into Earth processes by testing geological models.
- The GFZ German Research Centre for Geosciences serves as the headquarters for the ICDP.
- Members of ICDP: Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Israel, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the UK, the USA and UNESCO.

Sources: the hindu.

#### Cell to help Korean investments

India and Korea have unveiled a **Korea Plus initiative** to promote and facilitate Korean investments in India. A memorandum of understanding for establishing Korea Plus was earlier signed between the Korean ministry of trade, industry and energy and Invest India in January 2016.

#### Details:

- The mandate of Korea Plus covers the entire investment spectrum including supporting Korean enterprises entering the Indian market for the first time, looking into issues faced by Korean companies doing business in India and policy advocacy to the Indian government on their behalf.
- Korea Plus will act as a mediator in arranging meetings, assisting in public relations and research, evaluation and provide information and counselling in regard to Korean companies' investing in India.

#### Composition:

Korea Plus comprises of a representative each from the Korean ministry of industry, trade and energy, Korea Trade Investment and Promotion Agency as well as three representatives from Invest India — the national investment promotion and facilitation agency of India.

Sources: the hindu.

### AYUSH set to get international treatment

The Ministry of External Affairs is planning to send out groups of AYUSH experts to help set up departments of AYUSH in the leading universities of the member countries of the U.N.

#### Background:

In line with the new scheme, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and Indian missions abroad had reached out to foreign governments to host the AYUSH experts. The initiative found quick response from Iraq, Colombia and Reunion Island, which will soon be hosting AYUSH experts.

#### Details:

Apart from Iraq, Colombia and the Reunion Island, the first phase of the project will include twelve other countries. Each group of experts will have teachers, practitioners and demonstrators, who will train a first generation of teachers and students of AYUSH in these countries.

#### Ministry of AYUSH:

Department of Indian System of Medicine and Homeopathy (ISM&H) was created in March 1995 and re-named as Department of Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) in November 2003 with a view to providing focused attention to development of Education and Research in Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homoeopathy systems. The Department has been elevated to an independent Ministry in September 2014.

Sources: the hindu.

### India has to complete a long process for SCO membership

The government has confirmed that a long-drawn process lies ahead for India to complete its entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which will begin its annual summit on June 23-24 at Tashkent.

- India will attend the summit as an “Acceding Member” but will speak from the category of “Observers.”

#### What next?

- At this upcoming summit, the process of India's accession to the SCO will start with a signature on the 'base document' which is called the 'Memorandum of Obligations.
- The Memorandum of Obligations will begin a process of more intense engagement. The memorandum will also provide opportunity to intensify anti-terror cooperation between India and China.
- Also, there is a schedule laid down for India to sign up to the other documents that are required that India needs to accede to and that will happen as the year goes by. India would have to sign at least 30 sets of documents.

### About the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO):

It is a Eurasian political, economic and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. These countries, except for Uzbekistan, had been members of the Shanghai Five, founded in 1996; after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001, the members renamed the organisation.

- The SCO is seen as a counter to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).
- With observer states included, its affiliates account for about half of the world's population.
- The SCO has established relations with the United Nations, where it is an observer in the General Assembly, the European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.
- India and Pakistan were accepted as full members of the organization in July 2015.

Sources: the hindu.

### U.S. wants progress in investment pact talks with India: Envoy

Expressing concern over 'on-again, off-again' progress in Bilateral Investment Treaty with India, the US has said "things have become a bit more difficult" after the model draft proposed by the Indian side.

- The US has expressed concerns over departures from the high standards in the recent model draft BIT which India negotiated with countries like South Korea and Japan.
- As alleged by the US, the new model substantially narrows the scope of investments covered by the treaty as it requires that disputes be exhausted in local Indian jurisdictions before alternative investor-state dispute mechanisms can be initiated.
- The objective of BITs is protection of the interests of investors but in the process these pacts aim to balance the obligations of the respective governments and the rights of investors.

### Background:

The first round negotiations on the India-U.S. BIT was held in August 2009. However, the negotiations were initially delayed as India and the U.S. had undertaken a review of their respective model BIT texts.

Investors from developed countries including the U.S. have been citing 'judicial delays' in India to demand that they be granted the flexibility in the BITs to take disputes to international arbitration tribunals without waiting to exhaust remedies available in India.

About BIT:

The Union Cabinet, in December 2015, gave its approval for the revised Model Text for the Indian Bilateral Investment Treaty. The revised Indian model text for Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) will replace the existing Indian Model BIT.

Revised Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) text:

- It will be used for re-negotiation of existing BITs and negotiation of future BITs and investment chapters in Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements (CECAs)/ Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPAs) / Free Trade Agreements (FTAs).
- It will provide appropriate protection to foreign investors in India and Indian investors in the foreign country, in the light of relevant international precedents and practices, while maintaining a balance between the investor's rights and the Government obligations.

Significance of Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT):

- A BIT increases the comfort level and boosts the confidence of investors by assuring a level playing field and non-discrimination in all matters while providing for an independent forum for dispute settlement by arbitration.
- BITs help project India as a preferred foreign direct investment (FDI) destination as well as protect outbound Indian FDI.

Features of BIT:

The essential features of the model BIT include an "enterprise" based definition of investment, non-discriminatory treatment through due process, national treatment, protections against expropriation, a refined Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) provision requiring investors to exhaust local remedies before commencing international arbitration, and limiting the power of the tribunal to awarding monetary compensation alone. The model excludes matters such as government procurement, taxation, subsidies, compulsory licenses and national security to preserve the regulatory authority for the Government.

Background:

The first BIT was signed by India on March 14, 1994. Since then, till date, the Government of India has signed BITs with 83 countries. These BITs were largely negotiated on the basis of the Indian Model BIT of 1993.

Sources: the hindu.



***Paper 2 Topic:** Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.*

### **'Don't make binding concessions for APEC'**

Union commerce ministry has conveyed to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) its concern over demands that India offer the concessions in lieu of consideration for APEC membership. It has cautioned the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) against ceding to demands that India offer binding concessions to secure an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) membership.

#### **What is being demanded?**

- An agreement to reduce industrial tariffs to very low levels or eliminate them over a specified time period.
- An early deal on a Bilateral Investment Treaty with the U.S.
- Participation in negotiations for a proposed Investment Facilitation Agreement at the World Trade Organisation-level.

#### **Background:**

India has applied for APEC membership in 1991 on the basis of its geographic location, potential size of the economy and degree of trade interaction with the Asia-Pacific. However, at the fifth APEC Leaders' meeting in Vancouver in 1997, a decision was taken to place a ten-year moratorium on expanding membership, which continues informally till date.

#### **Way ahead:**

India is engaging with APEC member countries to develop a consensus on lifting the informal moratorium on accepting new members and to actively push for India's candidature for membership of APEC.

#### **Benefits for India:**

- Membership in APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) would provide India a constructive forum to glean insight from other Asian countries that have already taken significant steps to advance their economies.
- India is also striving for major economic reforms to open India's markets, improve trade volume, and facilitate its growing population's need for continued job growth. Hence, APEC can be the right platform.

#### **APEC:**

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a regional economic forum established in 1989 to leverage the growing interdependence of the Asia-Pacific. It aims to create greater prosperity for the people of the region by promoting balanced, inclusive, sustainable, innovative and secure growth and by accelerating regional economic integration.

#### **Functions:**

- APEC works to help all residents of the Asia-Pacific participate in the growing economy.

- APEC projects provide digital skills training for rural communities and help indigenous women export their products abroad.
- Recognizing the impacts of climate change, APEC members also implement initiatives to increase energy efficiency and promote sustainable management of forest and marine resources.
- The forum adapts to allow members to deal with important new challenges to the region's economic well-being. This includes ensuring disaster resilience, planning for pandemics, and addressing terrorism.

#### Members:

- APEC's 21 member economies are Australia; Brunei Darussalam; Canada; Chile; People's Republic of China; Hong Kong, China; Indonesia; Japan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; New Zealand; Papua New Guinea; Peru; The Philippines; The Russian Federation; Singapore; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States of America; Viet Nam.
- APEC Members account for approximately 40% of the world's population, approximately 54% of the world's gross domestic product and about 44% of world trade.

In APEC, all economies have an equal say and decision-making is reached by consensus. There are no binding commitments or treaty obligations. Commitments are undertaken on a voluntary basis and capacity building projects help members implement APEC initiatives. The APEC process is supported by a permanent secretariat based in Singapore.

Sources: the hindu.

#### Saudi plan to tax expats creates unease

Saudi Arabia is considering a plan to tax millions of foreign residents as the kingdom seeks to reduce its reliance on oil revenue after the plunge in crude prices.

- The proposal was included in the Saudi's National Transformation Plan, an ambitious multi-year program released recently. The government has, however, made it clear that the tax element is only an initiative that will be discussed.

#### How will this help Saudi?

- Deepening the taxation base will be an important step in increasing non-oil revenue for the country. Introducing the tax could support efforts to create more jobs for nationals.
- The government wants to get more Saudi nationals into private sector jobs instead of working in well-paid but marginally productive roles for the government, something that labour reforms since 2011 have already tried to achieve. Increasing the cost of foreign workers through the imposition of an income tax will help make locals more competitive hires.

**Negative implications:**

- If the proposal is implemented it could hamper the kingdom's ability to attract the foreign investment it needs to revive growth hit by the oil slump.
- It may also reduce the competitiveness of Saudi Arabia to attract labour.
- A tax on foreigners may end up being borne by their employers, who will find it more difficult to attract staff and fill posts whether it's for low or high wage jobs.

**Background:**

The status of Gulf Arab monarchies as tax-free havens has helped attract millions of foreign workers. The revenue wasn't missed when oil prices were high, but some economists say introducing income tax may be inevitable now. There are nine million foreigners living and working in Saudi Arabia.

Sources: the hindu.

**Bill seeking special status for India fails in U.S. Senate**

The US Senate has failed to recognise India as a "global strategic and defence partner" of the U.S. after a key amendment necessary to modify its export control regulations could not be passed.

- A republican senator had recently moved an amendment to the National Defence Authorisation Act (NDAA-17) which if passed would have recognised India as a global strategic and defence partner.

**Background:**

The U.S. had recognised India as a "major defence partner" during PM Modi's recent visit to the country. A joint statement issued during the visit supported defence-related trade and technology transfer to the country which would now be treated on par with America's closest allies.

**NDAA Act:**

The NDAA was recently passed by the Senate. But some of the key amendments including the (SA 4618) — even though they had bipartisan support — could not be passed by the Senate. It is a \$602 billion defense authorization law. The bill includes among its many Pentagon reforms a provision requiring women to register for the draft.

Sources: the hindu.

**Determined to honour pact on uranium supply: Namibia**

Reiterating its commitment to honour the 2009 pact to supply uranium to India at the earliest, Namibia has asked India to enter into similar agreements with other countries to convince the member-states of the

African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty (ANWFZT). **Namibia is the fourth largest producer of uranium.**

### Why?

Namibia, a member of ANWFZT, is barred from supplying uranium to India as the latter is not a member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, commonly known as the Non-Proliferation Treaty or NPT. Namibia is keen on supplying uranium to India as part of the civil nuclear cooperation, for augmenting its resources.

### Background:

So far, India has signed civil nuclear cooperation agreements with 12 countries, including the United States, Russia, Korea and Japan. India and Namibia signed two MoUs on Cooperation in the field of geology and mineral resources and Cooperation in peaceful uses of nuclear energy in 2009. However, the Pelindaba Treaty has prevented it from ratifying the agreements.

### About Pelindaba treaty:

The Pelindaba Treaty signed in 1996, also known as the **African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty**, aims at preventing nuclear proliferation and preventing strategic minerals of Africa from being exported freely. The treaty was signed in 1996 and came into effect with the 28th ratification on 15 July 2009.

- The Treaty prohibits the research, development, manufacture, stockpiling, acquisition, testing, possession, control or stationing of nuclear explosive devices in the territory of parties to the Treaty and the dumping of radioactive wastes in the African zone by Treaty parties.
- The Treaty also prohibits any attack against nuclear installations in the zone by Treaty parties and requires them to maintain the highest standards of physical protection of nuclear material, facilities and equipment, which are to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes.
- It also requires all parties to apply full-scope International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards to all their peaceful nuclear activities.
- It covers the entire African continent along with few islands. Presently, the treaty has been ratified by 40 countries.

Sources: the hindu.

### **India's NSG bid stops at China wall**

China has remained the last major obstacle in the way of India's membership bid in the Nuclear Suppliers Group as 47 of 48 members supported New Delhi's application at the group's special plenary session in Seoul recently.

Details:

- The session failed to come to a conclusion after hours of discussions, with China adamant in its opposition. Questions and doubts by other fence-sitting countries dissolved in the course of the evening, leaving China as the last man standing against India.
- China raised a procedural block, refusing to admit the India membership issue to be discussed in the meeting. Brazil and South Africa, two other members of BRICS, stood behind India, as did Russia.
- China's stand might wreck India's chances this time if Beijing continues to hold out. But the fact that India has mounted such a huge diplomatic exercise will play to India's advantage going forward.

Implications:

China's continued obduracy raises serious questions in the Indian government about the value of organisations like BRICS, RIC or even BASIC, where India and China are believed to be working together. If China continues with its opposition, there could be consequences for bilateral relations with Beijing, because it would be a direct refusal to an Indian head of the government.

About NSG:

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multinational body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials that may be applicable to nuclear weapon development and by improving safeguards and protection on existing materials.

- Interestingly, the NSG was set up in 1974 as a reaction to India's nuclear tests to stop what it called the misuse of nuclear material meant for peaceful purposes. Currently, it has 48 members.

Once admitted, an NSG member state:

- Gets timely information on nuclear matters.
- Contributes by way of information.
- Has confirmed credentials.
- Can act as an instrument of harmonization and coordination.
- Is part of a very transparent process.

Sources: the hindu.

**Can Britain opt for the Norway model?**

European leadership is planning to expedite the U.K.'s exit from the EU. But still, the vote doesn't mean that Britain will be immediately out of the club.

### Why?

Under the Lisbon treaty, a member state wishing to leave the EU should first notify the European Council its decision, triggering Article 50. This would set in motion a process by which the member and the EU leadership will negotiate the terms of the departure and reach an agreement in two years. This means even if the British government invokes the Article 50 now, the earliest exit of Britain will take place after two years. Even if the new British Prime Minister triggers the Article 50, Britain need not necessarily leave the EU after two years. If there's no agreement by the end of the two-year period, the EU could unanimously extend the talks.

### Is there any other option?

Some economists have suggested that one of the options Britain could follow in the wake of a Brexit vote is the **Norway model**.

### What is Norway model?

Norway, along with Liechtenstein and Iceland are members of the European Economic Area (EEA). They have access to the single market while staying out of the EU. They also make contributions to the EU budget. There is a separate secretariat in Brussels to manage the relationship between the EU and EEA countries. Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.*

### Swiss back India's bid for nuclear group membership

In a major boost to its diplomatic push for Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership, India has managed to win crucial support from Switzerland.

- In this regard, Swiss President Johann Schneider-Ammann has announced his country's support for India's membership to the elite NSG after holding comprehensive talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on a range of bilateral and global issues.

### Background:

Switzerland is a key member of the NSG and its support for India's bid for membership is seen as crucial in the backdrop of China harping on the need for consensus as India was not a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

The U.S. and many other NSG member countries have supported India's inclusion, based on its non-proliferation track record. The **NSG works under the principle of unanimity and even one country's vote against India will scuttle its bid.**

### About NSG:

Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a multinational body concerned with reducing nuclear proliferation by controlling the export and re-transfer of materials that may be applicable to nuclear weapon development and by improving safeguards and protection on existing materials.

It was set up in 1974 as a reaction to India's nuclear tests to stop what it called the misuse of nuclear material meant for peaceful purposes. Currently, it has 48 members.

Sources: the hindu.

### India 'clears final hurdle to join Missile Technology Control Regime'

The members of the Missile Technology Control Regime, a key anti-proliferation grouping, have agreed to admit India.

- This breakthrough comes days after India announced that it is subscribing to 'The Hague Code of Conduct' against ballistic missile proliferation, which is considered to be complementary to the missile technology control regime (MTCR).

### Background:

India, had applied for its membership last year. A deadline for the members of the group to object to India's admission had expired recently. Under this so-called '**silent procedure**', India's admission follows automatically.

### Benefits for India:

- India's entry into the MTCR is a step closer to its Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership.
- The entry into this group will shape the future of India's engagement with not just the MTCR but also the broader global non-proliferation community.
- Admission to the MTCR would open the way for India to buy high-end missile technology.

### About MTCR:

Established in April 1987, the **voluntary** MTCR aims to limit the **spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks**.

- The MTCR regime urges its **34 members**, which include most of the world's key missile manufacturers, to restrict their exports of missiles and related technologies capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload at least 300 kilometers or delivering any type of weapon of mass destruction.
- Since 2008 India has been one of the five countries that are unilateral adherents to the MTCR.

Sources: toi.



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**\$500-m ADB loan for bridge in Bihar**

Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a \$500-million loan to build a bridge across the Ganga in Bihar.

**Details:**

- The 9.8-km road bridge in Bihar will be India's longest river bridge and will provide vital transport link between the northern and southern parts of the State and neighbouring Nepal.
- The new bridge will span both channels of the Ganga and serve as an alternate route to the existing Ganga bridge, which has begun to deteriorate.

**Asian Development Bank:**

It is a regional development bank established on 22 August 1966 and is headquartered in Philippines. It aims to facilitate economic development of countries in Asia. It also aims for an Asia and Pacific free from poverty.

**Membership and voting:**

- The bank admits the members of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP, formerly known as the United Nations Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East) and non-regional developed countries.
- Currently, it has 67 members – of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside.
- ADB was modeled closely on the World Bank, and has a similar weighted voting system where votes are distributed in proportion with member's capital subscriptions.

**Funding:**

- ADB raises funds through bond issues on the world's capital markets.
- ADB also rely on its members' contributions, retained earnings from its lending operations, and the repayment of loans.
- Japan holds the largest proportions of shares at 15.67%. The United States holds 15.56%, China holds 6.47%, India holds 6.36%, and Australia holds 5.81%.

**Board of Governors:**

- It is the highest policy-making body of the bank.
- It is composed of one representative from each member state.
- The Board of Governors also elect the bank's President who is the chairperson of the Board of Directors and manages ADB.

The Alternate Board of Governors are nominated by Board of Governors of ADB's 67 to represent them at the Annual Meeting that meets formally once year to be held in a member country.

Loans:

It offers both Hard Loans and Soft loans. The ADB offers “hard” loans from ordinary capital resources (OCR) on commercial terms, and the Asian Development Fund (ADF) affiliated with the ADB extends “soft” loans from special fund resources with concessional conditions.

ADB focuses on five core areas of operations: infrastructure; the environment, including climate change; regional cooperation and integration; finance sector development; and education.

Sources: the hindu.

**India to become full member of Missile Technology Control Regime**

India is all set to join the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) as a full member. India had applied for the membership of MTCR last year and all the procedural formalities have been completed now.

Background:

Since its civil nuclear deal with the US, India has been trying to get into export control regimes like NSG, MTCR, the Australia Group and the Wassenaar Arrangement that regulate the conventional, nuclear, biological and chemicals weapons and technologies.

- India's case in MTCR was opposed last year by Italy which is not happy with New Delhi over the marines dispute. However, after both marines, accused of murdering two fishermen off the Kerala coast in 2012, were allowed to return, the Italians have softened their opposition.
- India's efforts to get into the MTCR also got a boost after it agreed to join the Hague Code of Conduct, dealing with the ballistic missile non-proliferation arrangement, earlier this month.

About MTCR:

Established in April 1987, the voluntary MTCR aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks.

- The MTCR regime urges its 34 members, which include most of the world's key missile manufacturers, to restrict their exports of missiles and related technologies capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload at least 300 kilometers or delivering any type of weapon of mass destruction.
- Since 2008 India has been one of the five countries that are unilateral adherents to the MTCR. MTCR membership will enable India to buy high-end missile technology and also enhance its joint ventures with Russia.
- China is not a member of 34-nation MTCR.

Sources: the hindu.

### GS III

***Paper 3 Topic:** Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.*

#### Proposal to hire private sector talent in PSUs wins approval

The Cabinet has given an 'ex-post facto' approval for amending public sector recruitment rules to allow the selection of candidates from the private sector and state public sector enterprises.

##### Details:

The nod is for the selection of candidates from state public sector enterprises and the private sector as "non-internal candidates for a period of five years for appointment in Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs)."

##### Who will benefit?

The good talent at the top of the private sector will not migrate. Those not in the top rungs may see an advantage in PSUs.

##### Concerns:

The move is expected to bring in greater efficiency but there are some concerns that need to be addressed. There must be careful selection so that those who have not been able to make it in the private sector don't opt for a government job just because of higher job security. The selection process must be shielded from politics which is something difficult to do in India.

Sources: the hindu.

#### Govt to come out with updated IIP, WPI indices by year-end

Government is all set to come out with revised IIP and WPI indices by the end of this year with a new base year of 2011-12 in order to make them more representative of the changing economic scenario. Both IIP and WPI are due for revision.

- The National Statistical Commission has recommended to revise the base year of all economic indices every five years.

##### Key facts:

- As part of the revision, the basket of items and weightage assigned to different entries on the basis of which indices is computed will be updated. The **present indices of IIP and WPI have base year of 2004-05.**
- With the new series in place, both the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) and Wholesale Price Index (WPI) will become more comparable with the GDP numbers than it is currently.
- Government had last revised these indices in 2011 with the base year of 2004-05.

Sources: the hindu.

### Centre to evolve norms to enhance product quality

The Commerce Ministry is planning to bring out a five-year '**National Standards Strategy Paper**' to weed out substandard products from the domestic market and boost India's exports of high quality goods.

- In this regard, an inter-ministerial panel is already working on identifying goods that do not conform to safety, security, environment and health standards.

#### Why this is necessary?

Improved regulations are necessary to ensure that India moves gradually towards adoption of more mandatory standards, also called technical regulations that are harmonised with international standards. This is also necessary for India to develop a coordinated national response to meet the challenges of the World Trade Organisation regime in standards and conformity assessment.

#### Benefits associated:

- A strong standards and regulatory framework would help **domestic industry in becoming competitive** in the world as well as domestic market.
- This would help in **increasing the exports** by measuring up to standards and conformity assessment procedures both in quantitative terms and also getting higher value exports.
- This will also fulfil the vision of '**zero defect, zero effect** (meaning, environment-friendly)' and 'Make In India' campaigns.
- It would also help **prevent flooding of domestic market** with unsafe/sub-standard imports which adversely affect consumers and domestic industry, according to the note.

Sources: the hindu.

### Axis Bank launches India's first certified green bond at London Stock Exchange

Axis Bank has raised \$500 million at the London Stock Exchange after it launched **India's first internationally-listed certified green bond** to finance climate change solutions around the world.

- The proceeds of the bond will be invested in green energy, transportation and infrastructure projects, reinforcing India's commitment to produce 175,000 MW of renewable power by 2022.

#### What are Green bonds?

Green bonds are like any other debt instrument but the funds raised from such a bond sale are used exclusively for renewable energy projects.

- With the Indian government and private sector increasingly focusing on renewable energy projects, the demand for such funds is expected to rise over time.

Sources: the hindu.

### **SEBI to relax REIT, portfolio manager norms to woo investors**

To deepen Indian capital markets, regulator Sebi has lined up wide-ranging relaxations to its norms for REITs.

#### **Highlights:**

- Among the changes, which would be considered by Sebi, the regulator is looking to make Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) more attractive to investors by allowing them to invest a large portion of funds in under-construction assets.
- Besides, REITs would be allowed to have a larger number of sponsors, while regulations regarding the minimum public offer size and related party transactions could also be eased.
- Sebi is also planning to remove curbs on the SPV to invest in other SPVs holding the assets, which in turn would allow REITs to invest in a holding company owning stake in SPVs.

#### **What are REITs?**

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

#### **How does an REIT work?**

REITs raise funds from a large number of investors and directly invest that sum in income-generating real estate properties (which could be offices, residential apartments, shopping centres, hotels and warehouses). The trusts are listed in stock exchanges so that investors can buy units in the trust. REITs are structured as trusts. Thus, the assets of an REIT are held by an independent trustee on behalf of unit holders.

#### **Tax and other issues:**

Short-term capital gain tax is applicable for unit holders at the rate of 15%. While interest is tax-exempt for REITs, it is taxable for unit holders. The registration charges for every purchase and sale of property is still applicable.

Sources: The hindu.

### **Sebi Issues Stricter KYC, Disclosure Regime For P-Notes**

Markets regulator Sebi has put in place a stricter KYC and disclosure regime for Participatory Notes to make it tougher to use these offshore instruments without disclosing the money-trail and details of their users.

**Background:**

The new norms follows approval from the regulator's board to amend its regulations for Offshore Derivative Instruments (ODIs)– popularly known as P-Notes — after taking into account suggestions from the Special Investigation Team (SIT) on Black Money to ensure this route is not used for money laundering.

**Details:**

- Under the new norms, all the users of ODIs would have to follow Indian KYC and AML (Anti Money Laundering) Regulations, irrespective of their jurisdictions, while the ODI issuers will be required to file suspicious transaction reports, if any, with the Indian Financial Intelligence Unit, in relation to the ODIs issued by them.
- Presently, the details of ODI holders need to be mandatorily reported to Sebi on a monthly basis. Sebi has now decided that in the monthly reports on ODIs all the intermediate transfers during the month would also be required to be reported.
- Besides, ODI issuers will have to carry out reconfirmation of the ODI positions on a semi-annual basis. In case of any divergence from reported monthly data, the same should be informed to Sebi in a prescribed format.
- In order to bring about an uniformity in KYC/AML norms, it has been decided that Indian norms will now be applicable to all ODI issuers. These norms will be the same as that applicable for all other domestic investors.
- Also, ODI Issuers will be required to identify and verify the beneficial owners in the subscriber entities, who hold in excess of the applicable threshold – 25% in case of a company and 15% in case of partnership firms, trusts or unincorporated bodies. In such cases, the ODI issuers will need to identify and verify the persons who control operations of these entities.

**What are P-notes?**

P-Notes are derivative products issued by FPIs in foreign markets which give their holders the right to have a share of the profit and loss from underlying Indian stocks but at the same time help maintain anonymity about the actual owners of those notes.

Sources: the hindu.

**RBI revises debt recast norms**

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has revised the norms for banks to undertake debt restructuring if they feel the project is viable in the long run.

Details:

- Under the scheme titled '**Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A)**,' at least 50% of the debt should be serviced in the same period as that of the existing loan. The balance can be converted into equity or quasi-equity instruments.
- Once the unsustainable debt is converted to equity, banks can sell this stake to a new owner who will have the advantage of getting to run the business with a more manageable debt.
- Where malfeasance on the part of the promoter has been established, through a forensic audit or otherwise, this scheme shall not be applicable if there is no change in promoter or the management is vested in the delinquent promoter.
- According to the norms, an advisory body called **Overseeing Committee (OC)** will be constituted by the Indian Banks Association (IBA) in consultation with the RBI. The members of OC cannot be changed without the prior approval of RBI.
- Banks have to submit the resolution plan to the OC. The OC will review the processes involved in preparation of the plan, etc. for reasonableness and adherence to the guidelines and give an opinion.
- The scheme is applicable to projects that have commenced commercial operation and where the banks' exposure is over Rs.500 crore.

Implications:

- This move is expected to give an impetus, especially for projects that are viable in the long term but strapped for cash and/or good management.
- The new restructuring scheme will help public sector banks in cleaning up large chunks of their bad loans, which amount to Rs 4.76 lakh crore.

Sources: the hindu.

**GST inches closer to reality as states unite**

The stage is all set for the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) with states unanimously backing it and agreeing that the ceiling rate should not be prescribed in the Constitution Amendment Bill that is awaiting a Rajya Sabha nod. However, Tamil Nadu has expressed some reservations.

Details:

- States have rejected the provision for a constitutional cap on the GST rate. There has been complete consensus on no constitutional cap, as exigencies may arise in future to revise the rates.



- Some States, including, Tamil Nadu have expressed reservations about the proposed GST Council. They believe the council, as a constitutional body, would impinge on the legislative sovereignty of both Parliament and the State Legislatures and jeopardise the fiscal autonomy of States.
- The states have, however, expressed the view that there were several “nuts and bolts” issues which need to be tackled before implementing the ambitious tax reform.

### Way ahead:

The government has made it clear that there was no deadline for the implementation of the GST. Earlier, after the passage of the Constitutional **122<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Bill** in May 2015 in the Lok Sabha, the Government had said that it was trying to roll out the single-tax regime from April 1, 2016.

- The first thing which will have to be done is to pass the constitutional amendment. It will have to be then ratified by the States. Then Parliament will have to pass the Central GST (CGST) Bill and States, the State GST (SGST) Bills.
- The government aims to introduce the GST Constitution Amendment Bill in the Rajya Sabha in the monsoon session of Parliament.

### What is GST?

GST bill, considered to be the biggest indirect tax reform in independent India, aims to transform the country into a uniform market by replacing a slew of federal and state levies. Amalgamating several Central and state taxes into a single tax would mitigate cascading or double taxation. For consumers the biggest advantage of GST will come in the form of a reduction in the overall tax burden on goods.

GST will subsume: excise, service tax, state VAT, entry tax, octroi and other state levies.

### Structure of GST:

GST will have two components—Central GST and state GST. Both Parliament and state legislatures will have concurrent powers to make laws on GST. Only the Centre may levy an integrated GST (IGST) on the interstate supply of goods and services, and imports.

### GST council:

A council will be set up to recommend rates of tax, period of levy of additional tax, principles of supply, special provisions to certain states etc. The GST Council will consist of the Union finance minister, Union minister of state for revenue, and state finance ministers.

Sources: the hindu.

### Model GST law put out for stakeholders' view

The government has released model GST law after it was recently approved by the state finance ministers.

#### Highlights:

According to the draft, the GST rate will be specified in the schedules of this law.

- The model law provides for a levy of GST on all online sales. It says the ecommerce operator should collect the appropriate GST while making a payment to the supplier of goods or service sold through its portal. The amount is to be deposited with the appropriate state government within 10 days from the end of the month in which the payment was made to the supplier. This provides clarity for taxation of goods sold by a supplier in one state to a consumer in another through electronic commerce.
- The model GST law contains two parts – the Goods and Services Tax Act, 2016 and the Integrated Goods and Services Tax Act, 2016 – providing the framework for implementation of this tax that is estimated to add as much as 2% to the country's GDP. Along with the constitutional amendment, the government needs to get these two laws passed to get GST rolling.
- The model law calls for registration of supplier in the state from where the supplier makes a taxable supply of goods and/or services with an annual turnover of above Rs 9 lakh, except for supply of goods or services from Northeastern states, where the threshold has been set at Rs 4 lakh.
- The draft model law also provides for constitution of a National Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal by Centre on the recommendation of the GST Council. The Tribunal shall be headed by a national president, with a branch in each state. The state GST tribunal will be headed by a state President and consist of Members (Judicial), Members (Technical – CGST) and Members (Technical – SGST). Every appeal has to be filed within three months from the date on which the order sought to be appealed against is communicated to the person.
- The model law also proposes to empower senior tax officials with the powers of search, seize, summons and arrest. A person can be imprisoned for up to five years for evasion of tax, the model law said.
- A National GST Settlement Commission to be set up by the Centre has also been proposed in the draft law for settlement of cases under the proposed GST Act. The National Commission chairman will be a High Court judge and the commission will have one bench for one or more states. The authority for advance ruling in GST will be established in each state for taxpayers seeking advance rulings, the draft law said.
- The draft law also seeks to establish a Consumer Welfare Fund, which shall be utilised by the Centre/state government for the welfare of the consumers in accordance with such rules as that government may make in this behalf. A GST compliance rating has also been proposed for every taxable person. The score will be based on his/her record of compliance with the provisions of the Act.

### NITI Aayog submits proposals for divestment

The NITI Aayog has submitted two sets of recommendations to the Centre for strategic disinvestment of State-owned companies. With this, the Government is expected to kickoff reforms for the public sector this year.

#### Details:

- NITI Aayog has submitted a list of recommendations on each of the sick and loss-making government-owned companies. Of 74 such companies, it has recommended closure of 25 companies in which revival plans were attempted but had failed. After the closure their assets, especially land holdings, could be disposed off and employees be offered voluntary retirement.
- In the remaining cases, either mergers with other public sector units or strategic disinvestment is recommended. In some companies, the Aayog preferred to let revival plans run their course, before taking a call on their future.
- In another set of suggestions, it has recommended strategic disinvestment on priority in 15 PSUs. This list has been submitted to the Department of Investment and Public Asset management in the Finance Ministry.

#### Background:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had in February directed the Aayog to identify PSUs that the Department could take up for strategic disinvestment and also suggest norms for doing so. Any disinvestment of government's shareholdings, closure or mergers of PSU will need the Union Cabinet's approval.

#### Disinvestments in India:

Disinvestment has become an important source of raising resource for the Government. The policy of 'disinvestment' in CPSEs has evolved over the years. Disinvestment of government equity in CPSEs began in 1991-92 following the Industrial Policy Statement of 1991, which stated that the Government would divest part of its holdings in select CPSEs.

**Objective:** The main objective of disinvestment is to put national resources and assets to optimal use and in particular to unleash the productive potential inherent in our public sector enterprises.

#### Current Policy on Disinvestment:

The current Government policy on disinvestment envisages people's ownership of CPSEs while ensuring that the Government equity does not fall below 51% and Government retains management control.

Sources: the hindu.

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**It's 100% FDI in most sectors, including defence**

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The government has announced a “radical liberalisation” of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) regime by easing norms for a host of important sectors including defence, civil aviation and pharmaceuticals, opening them up for complete foreign ownership.

**Details:**

- In **defence**, foreign investment beyond 49% (and upto 100%) has been permitted through the government approval route, in cases resulting in access to modern technology in the country. The condition of access to ‘state-of-art’ technology in the country has been done away with, as many foreign investors had complained about the ambiguity regarding that term.
- FDI limit also has been made applicable to Manufacturing of Small Arms and Ammunitions covered under Arms Act, 1959.
- 100% FDI has been permitted under government approval route for trading, including through e-commerce, in respect of food products manufactured or produced in India, bringing into effect the proposal made in the Budget 2016-17.
- To promote the development of pharmaceutical sector, the government has permitted up to 74% FDI under automatic route in existing pharmaceutical ventures. The government approval route will continue beyond 74% FDI and upto 100% in such brown-field pharma.
- 100% FDI has been permitted in India-based airlines. However, a foreign carrier can only own upto 49% stake in the venture, and the rest can come from a private investors including those based overseas. This is expected to bring in more funds into domestic airlines.
- To boost airport development and modernisation, 100% FDI in existing airport projects has been allowed without government permission, from 74% permitted so far.
- Entities undertaking single brand retail trading have been relaxed from local sourcing norms up to 3 years. Entities engaged in of single brand retail trading of products having ‘state-of-art’ and ‘cutting edge’ technology have been relaxed from local sourcing norms up to 5 years.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: infrastructure.

### DMIC states asked to mull options to 5 gas-fired plants

The Centre has asked three states along the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor (DMIC) to consider using land allotted for five gas-based power plants to set up “industrial areas” or renewable energy projects following the non-availability of gas.

#### Background:

The gas-fired projects, each with capacity of 1,000-1,200 MW, were to come up in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat as part of the corridor. However, the structuring and implementation of these projects is pending since long due to the lack of availability of domestic gas. Hence, the projects became non-viable.

#### About DMIC:

Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor is a mega infra-structure project of USD 90 billion with the financial & technical aids from Japan, covering an overall length of 1483 KMs between the political capital and the business capital of India, i.e. Delhi and Mumbai. A MoU in this regard was signed in 2006.

- The project would include six mega investment regions of 200 square kilometres each and will **run through six states** Delhi, Western Uttar Pradesh, Southern Haryana, Eastern Rajasthan, Eastern Gujarat, and Western Maharashtra.
- The project aims to develop an environmentally sustainable, long lasting and technological advanced infrastructure utilizing cutting age Japanese technologies and to create world class manufacturing and investment destinations in this region.

Sources: the hindu.

### Centre's new bill to give more power to major sea ports

The centre has proposed a legislation that will replace more than the five-decade-old Major Port Trust Act 1963 and will enable port authorities to function like a corporate entity. The draft **Central Port Authorities Bill 2016** has been proposed.

- The draft would provide more autonomy and flexibility to the 11 major ports and will bring in a professional approach in their governance.

#### Proposals in the draft:

- Reduce the extent of litigation between Public Private Partnership operators and Ports.

- Set up an independent Review Board to carry out the residual function of the erstwhile Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP) for major ports and to look into disputes between ports and PPP concessionaries.
- The board will also review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to review stressed PPP projects. At present, there is no independent body to look into these aspects.
- The draft bill has also proposed a simplified structure for the board by bringing it down to nine members. The board will include three to four independent members instead of the 17-19 under the Port Trust model.
- Provisions have been made for inclusion of three functional heads of major ports as members in the board apart from a Government nominee member and a labour nominee member.
- The disqualification of the appointment of the Board members, their duties and provision of the meetings of the Board through video conferencing etc., have been introduced on the lines of Companies Act, 2013, as has been the concept of internal audit.
- The Board of Port Authority has been empowered to raise loans and issue security for capital expenditure and working capital requirements.
- The need for Government approval for raising loans, appointment of consultants, execution of contracts and creation of service posts has been dispensed with.
- A distinction has been made between the usage of land for port and non-port related activities in terms of approval of leases. The Port Authorities are empowered to lease land for port-related use for up to 40 years and for non-port related use up to 20 years, beyond which the approval of the Central Government is required.

Sources: the hindu.

### Renewable energy pip Hydro

The renewable energy sector in the country has for the first time surpassed hydro power generation.

#### Key facts:

- According to the Central Electricity Authority data, the total capacity of renewable energy sector increased to 42,849.38 MW, surpassing the total capacity of hydro power sector at 42,783.42 MW, out of the nation's total installed capacity of a little over 3 lakh MW on April 30, 2016.
- The renewable energy investments in solar and wind have benefited from a strong central policy and several years of early-stage private sector investment, respectively.

- In contrast, hydro power suffered from multiple challenges, including non-availability of long-term financing; the cost imposed by royalty power to be offered free to the state government; and limited opportunities for the private sector.
- The government has ambitious plans for deployment of 175 GW renewable power capacities by 2022, including 100 GW of solar and 60 GW of wind, which may require investment of around \$150 billion in the next seven years.
- The total capacity of the thermal sector stood at 2,11,420.40 MW.

Sources: the hindu.

### Govt. clears civil aviation policy, makes flying cheaper

The Union Cabinet has cleared the Civil Aviation Policy in order to boost the domestic aviation sector and provide passenger-friendly fares.

- The Civil Aviation Ministry had sent the policy to the Cabinet for approval on June 3 after the government proposed a new draft in October 2015.
- This new policy aims at providing various benefits to domestic airline passengers.
- In a boost for domestic carriers, the government also amended what is called the 5/20 rule, which allowed only airlines that had operated for five years and had 20 aircraft in their fleets to fly internationally.

#### The Policy aims at:

- India to become **3rd largest civil aviation market by 2022 from 9<sup>th</sup>**.
- Domestic ticketing to grow from 8 crore in 2015 to 30 crore by 2022.
- Airports having scheduled commercial flights to increase from 77 in 2016 to 127 by 2019.
- Cargo volumes to increase by 4 times to 10 million tonnes by 2027.
- Enhancing ease of doing business through deregulation, simplified procedures and e-governance.
- Promoting 'Make In India' in Civil Aviation Sector.
- Ensuring availability of quality certified 3.3 lakh skilled personnel by 2025.

#### WHAT'S THERE IN THE POLICY?

- **Capping of fare:** Rs 1,200 for 30 minutes and Rs 2,500 for hour-long flights.
- **A single window for all aviation related transactions, complaints, etc.**
- **5/20 rule scrapped.** Under the new rules, airlines must still have 20 planes before they can fly internationally, but no longer need to have operated for five years.



- Start-up airlines can now fly abroad after operating at least 20 planes or 20 per cent of their total flying capacity, whichever is higher, on domestic routes.
- 2% levy on all air tickets to fund regional connectivity scheme and providing viability gap funding for airlines to encourage operations on regional routes.
- **Restoration of air strips** at a maximum cost of Rs 50 crore through Airports Authority of India (AAI).
- India will have an **open-sky policy** for countries beyond the 5,000-km radius from Delhi on a reciprocal basis. This means that airlines from European or SAARC countries will have unlimited access, in terms of number of flights and seats, to Indian airports, leading to increased flight frequencies with these countries.
- Permission for Indian carriers to get into **code-sharing agreement** with foreign carriers for any destination within India.
- More focus on ease-of-doing business as government plans to liberalise regime of regional flights.
- The government will look to develop about 350 dilapidated or underused airstrips across India into “**no frills airports**”.
- Four heli-hubs to be developed. Helicopter Emergency Medical Services to be facilitated
- Development of greenfield and brownfield airports by State government, private sector or in PPP mode to be encouraged.

Sources: the hindu.

### Regional connectivity subsidy subject to passenger loads

The centre has clarified that the subsidy provided to airlines under the **regional connectivity scheme (RCS)** may be tapered if the passenger load factor increases to a decent level, according to the new civil aviation policy. The RCS will give airlines an easy exit option in case they find the unconnected routes unviable.

#### What was proposed in the policy?

As per the new Civil Aviation Policy, the Centre will subsidise the losses incurred by airlines by flying on the regional routes in a bid to allow them to charge Rs.2,500 to passenger for an hour's flight.

For this, the Centre will create a regional connectivity fund through a small levy on departure of each flight, as per the policy. While Centre will contribute 80% for the viability gap funding, the rest 20% will come from the states.

Clarification:

The centre has now clarified that continuance of VGF [viability gap funding] for a particular route will be subject to appropriate passenger load factor continuously for a prescribed period. If airlines are able to fill 70-80% of their seats, the subsidy could be reduced. The subsidy will be reviewed after every three years. And, the cargo industry will not be entitled to viability gap funding from the government.

Airlines free to change N-E flights:

Also, airlines will be free to withdraw or change flights to and within north-eastern states, island territories and Ladakh as per their business requirements, according to the new civil aviation policy. The move might come as a big relief to airlines that may re-deploy its planes to profitable or viable routes.

- At present, airlines need to take permission from the Civil Aviation Ministry to withdraw routes from these regions, largely because these were unconnected routes in the past.
- With the new norms, the airlines will only need to inform the Civil Aviation Ministry and the Directorate General of Civil Aviation three months in advance before withdrawing or revising its routes.
- The airlines can do so provided they fully comply with the route dispersal guidelines (RDG) that mandate them to deploy a certain share of flights on smaller and remote routes.

Sources: the hindu.

Govt releases draft national wind-solar hybrid policy

The government has released the draft **National Wind-Solar Hybrid Policy** which aims at providing a framework to promote large grid connected wind-solar PV system for optimal and efficient utilisation of transmission infrastructure among others.

- The goal of the policy is to reach wind-solar hybrid capacity of 10 GW by 2022. The main objective of the policy is to provide a framework for promotion of large grid connected wind-solar PV system for optimal and efficient utilisation of transmission infrastructure and land, reducing the variability in renewable power generation, thus, achieving better grid stability.

Highlights:

- Broadly, the draft policy proposes hybridisation of existing solar photovoltaic (PV) and wind power plants as well as providing a guideline towards setting up of new hybrid wind-solar PV power plants.
- The draft policy proposes to provide fiscal and financial incentives for hybridisation of existing plants as well as setting up of new hybrid wind-solar PV plants. Low cost financing for hybrid projects may be made available through IREDA and other financial institutions like multilateral banks.

- If existing plants want to hybridize, they will have to ensure that the power injected into the grid is not more than the existing capacity sanctioned for the plant. Further, the additional power generated from the hybrid project may be used for captive purpose or sold either to the distribution utility at a price determined by the state regulator or lowest bid price discovered by any government agency, whichever is lower.
- For new hybrid wind-solar projects, the draft policy proposes to provide the developer with the option of using the hybrid power for captive use, third party sale or sale to state electricity distribution utilities at prices determined by the state electricity regulatory commissions for the project. The hybrid power so purchased by the distribution company may be used to offset both solar and non-solar renewable purchase obligations.

Sources: the hindu.

### Cabinet extends UDAY scheme deadline

The Cabinet has approved an extension in the deadline for implementing the Ujjwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) by a year to March 31, 2017. The Cabinet decision extends this provision from the earlier deadline of March 31, 2016.

#### Implications:

- This decision would allow states, which could not participate in UDAY earlier to join the scheme.
- The extension of the timeline is also to give states that have given their in-principle approval a little more time to order their finances before signing the official document.

So far, 19 States have given in-principle approval to join the scheme, out of which 10 states—Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Punjab, Bihar, Haryana, Gujarat, Uttarakhand and Jammu & Kashmir—have signed MoUs with the Centre.

#### About UDAY:

The UDAY scheme is aimed at bringing ailing power distribution companies (discoms) to a state of operational efficiency, with state governments taking over up to 75% of their respective discoms' debt and issuing sovereign bonds to pay back the lenders.

UDAY envisages a permanent resolution of past as well as potential future issues of the sector. The scheme seeks to achieve this through several simultaneous steps including reducing the interest burden on the discoms by allowing the states to take over the bulk of their debt, reducing the cost of power, and increasing the operational efficiencies of the discoms by providing capital and infrastructure like coal linkages.

Sources: the hindu.

### Torpid airports may convert into SEZs

The government is looking at converting some unused airports into special economic zones where aircraft leasing companies can park their planes and showcase them to potential customers.

- Besides, it would explore ways to reduce the cost of leasing aircraft as part of larger efforts to make the domestic aviation space more attractive.
  - The new civil aviation policy, unveiled recently, provides for measures to enhance regional connectivity and reducing the cost of leasing would help this initiative.
  - The Civil Aviation Ministry would look at the possibility of utilising certain unused airports for the purpose of parking aircraft and even use aerodromes for plane-breaking or dismantling of old aircraft.
- There are around 400 unused airports and airstrips across the country.

#### What is a Special Economic Zone(SEZ)?

Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a specifically delineated duty-free enclave and shall be deemed to be foreign territory for the purposes of trade operations and duties and tariffs. SEZ is a geographical region that has economic laws different from a country's typical economic laws. Usually the goal is to increase foreign investments.

#### Who can set up SEZs? Can foreign companies set up SEZs?

Any private/public/joint sector or state government or its agencies can set up an SEZ.

#### What is the role of state governments in establishing SEZs?

State governments will have a very important role to play in the establishment of SEZs. Representative of the state government, who is a member of the inter-ministerial committee on private SEZ, is consulted while considering the proposal. Before recommending any proposals to the ministry of commerce and industry (department of commerce), the states must satisfy themselves that they are in a position to supply basic inputs like water, electricity, etc.

#### The main objectives of the SEZ Act are:

- Generation of additional economic activity.
- Promotion of exports of goods and services.
- Promotion of investment from domestic and foreign sources.
- Creation of employment opportunities.
- Development of infrastructure facilities.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 3 Topic:** Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science & technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.*

### IIT Madras researchers dissolve silver using glucose water

IIT Madras researchers have found that **silver can slowly dissolve in water if heated to about 70 degree C in the presence of glucose.**

- Like gold, **silver is a noble metal**. So far, it was supposed to be inert (resistant to chemical corrosion, especially to chemical reagents used in daily life).

#### Highlights of the study:

- The researchers observed that as much as 0.5 weight per cent of a silver plate can get dissolved in glucose water within a week.
- The study shows that silver atoms gets released from a plate in a simple, two-step mechanism — silver ions are first formed at the metal surface, which later form specific metal complexes with sugar. Atoms are highly reactive on the surface of the metal as they less connected and less bound and this allows the atoms to be released.
- Metal dissolution leads to corrosion of the plate and nanoscale pits get formed on the plate. Further dissolution occurs at the pits and as a result the pits get bigger, making a polished silvery metal appear black. Under favourable conditions, up to 10% of the metal can get dissolved in 90 days.
- Dissolution of silver by glucose directly from the metallic state gets enhanced in the presence of ions such as carbonate and phosphates. The study found that enhancement of silver dissolution in glucose was about 10 and 7 times in the presence of 50 ppm of phosphate and carbonate respectively. But in the absence of glucose, phosphate and carbonate were found to have no significant effect on silver dissolution.

#### Significance of this study:

- This is helpful in studying the effect of metals in food and how toxic metals get into our food chain from soil, water and fertilizers. Silver foils are used to decorate sweets and often such foils are eaten along with the sweets. Silver vessels are also used for cooking.
- An offshoot of the study is that the method can be used for developing novel and green extraction processes for noble metals. In general, toxic chemicals such as cyanide are used for extracting silver. The newly developed method can extract silver effectively by a simple and green method. It does not require any harmful chemicals or high temperature or expensive set-up.

Sources: the hindu.

### A 'sweet' option to fix broken bones

A team of scientists from Bengaluru's Indian Institute of Science (IISc) has come up with a new bone reconstruction method similar to sutures. For this, they are using is an unlikely ingredient: **maltitol, derived from maltose**, a **sweetening agent** found in most sugar-free foods such as ice-creams.

- So far, there were only two options for injuries to bones: a cast for minor fractures, and implants like metal rods for more serious injuries.

#### About the new method:

Maltitol is combined with other components to make long chain-like structures that become plastic. This is then used to fill in the bone gap caused by fracture, instead of the traditional rod. Also, since the maltitol reacts to water and as the body is primarily made of water, the bonds start breaking slowly, over a course of time. The molecules are soluble in water, and they eventually come out. Once the bone grows back, the structure simply disintegrates.

- This material would be a huge advantage over existing ones, such as metal rods, which do not allow growth of the bone.
- The advantage of using maltitol to make the scaffold is that drugs can then be injected into it to hasten healing. The other benefit of using maltitol is fewer side-effects.

Sources: the hindu.

### Scientists turn CO<sub>2</sub> into rock to combat climate change

In a unique experiment, scientists turned carbon dioxide into a stone by pumping it with water underground. Carbon dioxide is a huge menace and probably the only way to fight it is to bury it as deep as possible.

#### Details:

- In the experiment called **CarbFix**, scientists pumped CO<sub>2</sub> and water 540 metre underground into volcanic rock at the Hellisheidi geothermal power plant in Iceland- the world's largest geothermal facility. After two years, 95% of the gas was captured and converted.
- In this method, CO<sub>2</sub> is dissolved with water and the mixture is pumped into volcanic rocks called basalts. Once that happens, the CO<sub>2</sub> turns into a solid mineral (calcite), which can then be stored.
- The Iceland project has been increased in scale and is set to store 10,000 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> a year.

#### Benefits:

One of the methods to battle climate change, in addition to reducing fossil fuel emissions, is to capture carbon dioxide from the air and turning it into rock. According to experts this new method might be a new hope for an effective weapon to help fight man-made global warming.

Implications:

- Carbon capture, however, can be expensive – especially the capturing part. Once the gas is grabbed from the air storing it is another issue.
- It can be stored underground and is sometimes injected to depleted oil wells, but there are concerns about monitoring it and preventing it from escaping.
- It's not yet clear whether this approach could be viable on a large scale. The process requires a significant amount of water — 25 tons for every ton of CO<sub>2</sub> — and some question whether it could be easily applied to other parts of the world.

Sources: the hindu.

Space technology to safeguard thatched roofs

The scientists of the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) are planning to use the technology that protects rocket launch vehicles from high-temperature fire to protect the thatched roofs and even prevent water seepage in concrete buildings.

Details:

The technology uses the ceramic-polymer hybrid (CASPOL). CASPOL is water-based ready-to-coat product. It was originally developed to protect the rockets from high temperature and fire to which they are exposed during the initial moments of launch. Caspol can withstand up to 800 degree Celsius. The centre has described the product as one which is **eco-friendly as it is free of toxic materials**.

Benefits:

- This could protect public transport systems and poor men residing in thatched homes from fire accidents. Seats in automobiles, public transport system and seat cushions of railway coaches can be made fireproof when Caspol is applied.
- Besides its ability to protect against fire and high temperature, Caspol can also make surfaces waterproof. When applied over the concrete surface of buildings, fill up the micro cracks and holes on concrete to prevent water from seeping in.
- Also, when applied over concrete surface of buildings, the high emissivity of the product reduces the temperature inside the building by at least 5 to 6 degree Celsius.

Sources: the hindu.



### New elements on the periodic table are named

Names for four new elements, formerly known by their respective atomic numbers 113, 115, 117 and 118, have been proposed by the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC).

- The proposed names are- nihonium (Nh), moscovium (Mc), tennessine (Ts) and oganesson (Og).
- The names are on a five-month probation before things are made official.

#### Background:

The elements were recognized by IUPAC on December 30, 2015. Their addition completed the seventh row of the periodic table.

#### Naming:

The discoverers of the elements were invited to propose the names. IUPAC provided the discoverers with guidelines to assist them in creating the names. These names keep with the longstanding tradition of being named after a mythological concept or character (including an astronomical object), a mineral or similar substance, a place or geographical region, a property of the element or a scientist. Also, they must end in “-ium,” “-ine,” or “-on” depending on the grouping of elements they belong to. IUPAC also prefers the names translate easily across major languages.

#### Key facts:

- All four elements are **not found in nature**, and were synthetically created in laboratories. They are **super-heavy elements**.
- Tennessee is the second US state to be recognized with an element; California was the first.
- oganesson, symbol Og, for element 118. The name honors Russian physicist Yuri Oganessian.
- nihonium, symbol Nh, for element 113. The element was discovered in Japan, and Nihon is one way to say the country's name in Japanese. It's the first element to be discovered in an Asian country.
- Moscovium has been named after Russia's capital Moscow.

#### Periodic table:

There are seven rows, called periods, and 18 columns, called groups, in the table.

- Elements in the same group share similar properties. Those in the same period have the same number of atomic orbitals (the wave-like behaviour of either one or a pair of electrons in an atom) – for instance, the first period only has two elements, hydrogen and helium, with only a single orbital.
- Most elements on the table are metals divided into six broad categories – alkali metals, alkaline earths, basic metals, transition metals, lanthanides and actinides. They are located on the left, separated from the non-metals on the right by a zig-zag line.

- Lanthanides and actinides, often called “inner transition metals”, are commonly hived off as a separate section under the main table as including all 30 – including Uranium – would make the table too wide.
- The table is a useful tool for people to derive relationships between the different properties of the elements. It can also help predict the properties of new elements that have yet to be discovered or created.

Group→	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
↓Period																		
1	1 H																	2 He
2	3 Li	4 Be											5 B	6 C	7 N	8 O	9 F	10 Ne
3	11 Na	12 Mg											13 Al	14 Si	15 P	16 S	17 Cl	18 Ar
4	19 K	20 Ca	21 Sc	22 Ti	23 V	24 Cr	25 Mn	26 Fe	27 Co	28 Ni	29 Cu	30 Zn	31 Ga	32 Ge	33 As	34 Se	35 Br	36 Kr
5	37 Rb	38 Sr	39 Y	40 Zr	41 Nb	42 Mo	43 Tc	44 Ru	45 Rh	46 Pd	47 Ag	48 Cd	49 In	50 Sn	51 Sb	52 Te	53 I	54 Xe
6	55 Cs	56 Ba	* 71 Lu	72 Hf	73 Ta	74 W	75 Re	76 Os	77 Ir	78 Pt	79 Au	80 Hg	81 Tl	82 Pb	83 Bi	84 Po	85 At	86 Rn
7	87 Fr	88 Ra	* 103 Lr	104 Rf	105 Db	106 Sg	107 Bh	108 Hs	109 Mt	110 Ds	111 Rg	112 Cn	113 Uut	114 Fl	115 Uup	116 Lv	117 Uus	118 Uuo
			* 57 La	58 Ce	59 Pr	60 Nd	61 Pm	62 Sm	63 Eu	64 Gd	65 Tb	66 Dy	67 Ho	68 Er	69 Tm	70 Yb		
			* 89 Ac	90 Th	91 Pa	92 U	93 Np	94 Pu	95 Am	96 Cm	97 Bk	98 Cf	99 Es	100 Fm	101 Md	102 No		

### About IUPAC:

The International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry (IUPAC) is an international federation of National Adhering Organizations that represents chemists in individual countries. It is a member of the International Council for Science (ICSU).

- The international headquarters of IUPAC is in Zürich, Switzerland.
- The IUPAC was established in 1919 as the successor of the International Congress of Applied Chemistry for the advancement of chemistry.
- Its members, the National Adhering Organizations, can be national chemistry societies, national academies of sciences, or other bodies representing chemists.
- There are fifty-four National Adhering Organizations and three Associate National Adhering Organizations.
- The IUPAC's Inter-divisional Committee on Nomenclature and Symbols (IUPAC nomenclature) is the recognized world authority in developing standards for the naming of the chemical elements and compounds.

Sources: the hindu.

### Second breakthrough for LIGO detectors

For the second time, scientists have directly detected gravitational waves — ripples through the fabric of space-time, created by extreme, cataclysmic events in the distant universe.

#### Details:

- Scientists at LIGO have determined that the incredibly faint ripple that eventually reached Earth was produced by two black holes colliding at half the speed of light, 1.4 billion light years away.
- The scientists detected the gravitational waves using the twin Laser Interferometer Gravitational-wave Observatory (LIGO) interferometers, located in Livingston, Louisiana, and Hanford, Washington.
- While LIGO's first detection, reported on Feb. 11, produced a clear peak, or "chirp," in the data, this second signal was far subtler, generating a shallower waveform that was almost buried in the data. Using advanced data analysis techniques, the team determined that indeed, the waveform signaled a gravitational wave. A special technique called **matched filtering invented in 1949 by Wiener** had to be adapted for gravitational wave data analysis.
- The researchers calculated that the gravitational wave arose from the collision of two black holes, 14.2 and 7.5 times the mass of the sun. The signal picked up by LIGO's detectors encompasses the final moments before the black holes merged. This cataclysm produced a more massive spinning black hole that is 20.8 times the mass of the sun.
- This second detection of gravitational waves, which once again confirms Einstein's theory of general relativity, successfully tested LIGO's ability to detect incredibly subtle gravitational signals.

#### About LIGO:

The observatory, described as "the most precise measuring device ever built," is actually two facilities in Livingston, Louisiana, and Hanford, Washington. They were built and operated with funding from the National Science Foundation, which has spent \$1.1 billion on LIGO over the course of several decades.

- The project is led by scientists from the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is supported by an international consortium of scientists and institutions.

#### What are Gravitational Waves?

Gravitational waves are the ripples in the pond of spacetime. The gravity of large objects warps space and time, or "spacetime" as physicists call it, the way a bowling ball changes the shape of a trampoline as it rolls around on it. Smaller objects will move differently as a result – like marbles spiraling toward a bowling-ball-sized dent in a trampoline instead of sitting on a flat surface.

### ISRO gears up to test scramjet engine

ISRO is gearing up to test a **scramjet engine based on air-breathing propulsion**. The test flight of the indigenously-developed scramjet engine is scheduled to take place from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre at Sriharikota sometime in July.

#### Key facts:

- The test platform, named Advanced Technology Vehicle (ATV), will comprise a scramjet engine hitched to a two-stage sounding rocket (RH- 560).
- The vehicle has been characterised and is being fabricated at the VSSC and the ISRO Propulsion Complex, Mahendragiri.
- The air-breathing engine will be released at a height of 70 km and ignited during the coasting phase. Apart from the hypersonic ignition at Mach 6, ISRO hopes to sustain the combustion for 5 seconds. The test is also expected to help ISRO achieve good thrust value with the scramjet engine.
- Maintaining combustion in hypersonic conditions poses technical challenges because the fuel has to be ignited within milliseconds.

#### Background:

Space agencies across the world are focussing on the development of scramjet technology because it contributes to smaller launch vehicles with more payload capacity and promises cheaper access to outer space. The technology has been successfully tested in Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV- TD) last month.

#### What is a scramjet?

Scramjet is a supersonic combustion engine that uses oxygen from the atmosphere for fuel, making it lighter and faster than fuel-carrying rockets. This is helpful for flying at hypersonic speed – Mach 5 and above.

- These engines have no moving parts. Instead of the rotating compressor and turbine in a jet engine, air is compressed and expanded by complex systems of shockwaves under the front of the aircraft, inside the inlet and under the fuselage at the rear.
- The scramjet engine can also liquefy the oxygen and store it on board.

Sources: the hindu.

### New method can kill cancer cells in two hours, shows study

Researchers have developed a new, non-invasive method that can kill cancer cells in two hours.

#### About the new method:

The method involves injecting a chemical compound, nitrobenzaldehyde, into the tumour and allowing it to diffuse into the tissue. A beam of light is then aimed at the tissue, causing the cells to become very acidic

inside and, essentially, commit suicide. With this method, within two hours, up to 95% of the targeted cancer cells are dead or are estimated to be dead.

Advantages:

- This method may significantly help people with inoperable or hard-to-reach tumours as well as young children stricken with the deadly disease.
- This will also help cancer patients with tumours in areas that have proven problematic for surgeons, such as the brain stem, aorta or spine.
- It could also help people who have received the maximum amount of radiation treatment and can no longer cope with the scarring and pain that go along with it, or children who are at risk of developing mutations from radiation as they grow older.

Sources: the hindu.

Surface-to-air missile test successful

A new generation **Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM)**, developed by India and Israel, was recently successfully test-fired from the Integrated Test Range off Odisha Coast.

- This is the first time that the MRSAM system was tested in India. In the next few days, a series of tests will take place before the system joins the Indian Air Force arsenal.

Key facts:

- The missile is similar to the Barak-8 missile used by the Navy's new destroyers.
- The supersonic missile system was jointly developed with the Israel Aerospace Industries. 400 scientists, including 100 from Israel, worked for seven years to make this weapon system.
- The missile is designed to defend any type of airborne threat including aircraft and helicopters. It can intercept supersonic aircraft and even missiles.
- The MR-SAM has strike ranges from 50 to 70 km. Once inducted into Indian Armed forces, it will provide the users capability to neutralise any aerial threats.
- The system also includes a multi-functional surveillance and threat alert radar for tracking, detection and guidance of the missile.
- Companies like Bharat Electronic Limited, L&T, Bharat Dynamics Limited and the Tata Group have developed sub systems that have been put to use in this flight test.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: *Awareness in the fields of IT and Computers.*

### India's NIIT to train 50,000 China students on 'Big Data'

The National Institute of Information Technology (NIIT) located in new industrial park in southwest China is gearing up to train 50,000 Chinese students over the next five years on Big Data.

#### Background:

The training contract was signed on the sidelines of China's 'Big Data' conference and exhibition at Guiyang recently. An agreement was also sealed with the provincial government to establish a Big Data Talent Research Centre in Guiyang "to enhance innovation and research".

#### What is Big Data?

'Big Data' refers to a massive accumulation of information, siphoned from multiple sources and domains, which can then be analysed to make informed decisions.

- It is an all-encompassing term for any collection of data sets so large and complex that it becomes difficult to process using traditional data processing applications. Big data "size" is a constantly moving target.
- It requires exceptional technologies to efficiently process large quantities of data within tolerable elapsed times.
- The use and adoption of Big Data within governmental processes is beneficial and allows efficiencies in terms of cost, productivity, and innovation.

Sources: the hindu.

### Living Bone Grown In Lab For First Time

In a first, scientists have grown a living bone in the lab to repair large defects in the head and face of patient, taking a step forward in improving treatments for people with craniofacial defects.

#### Details:

- This has been made possible by a new technique which uses **autologous stem cells** derived from a small sample of the recipient's fat and precisely replicates the original anatomical structure of the bone.
- Scientists have been able to show, in a clinical-size porcine model of jaw repair, that this bone, grown in vitro and then implanted, can seamlessly regenerate a large defect while providing mechanical function. The quality of the regenerated tissue, including vascularisation with blood perfusion, exceeds what has been achieved using other approaches.
- An unexpected outcome was that the lab-grown bone, when implanted, was gradually replaced by new bone formed by the body, a result not seen with the implantation of a scaffold alone, without cells.



- This is step forward in improving regenerative medicine options for patients with craniofacial defects.
- Researchers are now including a cartilage layer in the bio-engineered living bone tissue to study bone regeneration in complex defects of the head and face.

Sources: the hindu.

### Not all is bright and shining with LED light: Study

According to a study, excessive blue light emitted by light emitting diodes (LED) can adversely impact human health. The report looked at LED street lighting on U.S. roadways.

#### Why blue light emitted by LED is harmful?

- The human eye perceives the large amount of blue light emitted by some LEDs as white. Blue light directly affects sleep by suppressing the production of the hormone melatonin, which mediates the sleep-wake cycle in humans. Compared with conventional street lighting, the blue-rich white LED street lighting is five times more disruptive to sleep cycle.
- Available evidence suggests blue light leads to a long-term increase in the risk for cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and obesity caused by chronic sleep disruption.
- The excessive blue wavelength also contributes to glare effects as a result of larger scattering in the human eye. Contrary to the popular notion that bright LED lighting increases road safety, discomfort and disability glare caused by unshielded, bright LED lighting negatively impacts visual acuity, thus “decreasing safety and creating road hazards”. Glare forms a veil of luminance that reduces the contrast, thus in turn reducing the visibility of a target.
- Besides, unshielded LED lighting causes papillary constriction, leading to “worse night-time vision between lighting fixtures.” Intense blue spectrum can even damage the retina.

#### What's the solution?

The correlated colour temperature (CCT) of first-generation LEDs, which are currently used, is 4,000K. Higher CCT values indicate greater blue light emission, and in the case of 4,000K LED lighting, 29% of the spectrum is emitted as blue light. Hence, researchers prefer 3000K LED. At 3,000K, the blue light emitted is only 21% and appears slightly warmer in tone. While discomfort and disability glare is reduced, there is only a 3% drop in energy efficiency compared with 4,000K LED lighting.

Also, experts suggest more attention should be paid to proper design, shielding and installation so that no light shines above 80 degrees from the horizontal.



**LED:**

The LED is a light source which uses semiconductors and electroluminescence to create light. The LED uses a small semiconductor crystal with reflectors and other parts to make the light brighter and focused into a single point.

- Unlike ordinary incandescent bulbs, they don't have a filament that will burn out, and they don't get especially hot. They are illuminated solely by the movement of electrons in a semiconductor material, and they last just as long as a standard transistor.

**What determines the color of an LED?**

The material used in the semiconducting element of an LED determines its color. The two main types of LEDs presently used for lighting systems are aluminum gallium indium phosphide (AlGaInP, sometimes rearranged as AlInGaP) alloys for red, orange and yellow LEDs; and indium gallium nitride (InGaN) alloys for green, blue and white LEDs. Slight changes in the composition of these alloys changes the color of the emitted light.

Sources: the hindu.

**MoU signed between RD Ministry & ISRO for geo-tagging assets**

A Memorandum of Understanding was recently signed between the Rural Development Ministry and ISRO, Department of Space for geo-tagging the assets created under MGNREGA in each gram panchayat.

**Details:**

- Around 30 lakh assets are created annually across the country under the rural job scheme and the Ministry has decided that through convergence with other schemes, the geo-tagging of such assets will be done on a mission mode.
- Through Bhuvan Mobile Platform, completed asset will be Geo-tagged along with photograph by Gram Rozgar Sahayak or Junior engineer.
- This move helps to check leakages and for effective mapping of terrain for future developmental works. Application of technology for rural development will go a great way in planning and execution of projects in a transparent manner.
- This is necessary as huge amount of funds are now flowing through the 14th Finance Commission to Gram Panchayats and hence quality assets through MGNREGA has to be ensured. This will lead to poverty reduction in rural areas.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: *awareness in space.*

### Einstein ring

Scientists have discovered an unusual astronomical object: an Einstein ring. These phenomena, predicted by Einstein's theory of **General Relativity**, are quite rare but scientifically interesting.

- The interest is sufficiently strong that this object has been given its own name: the "The Canarias Einstein ring".

#### What is it?

An Einstein ring is a distorted image of a very distant galaxy, which is termed "the source". The distortion is produced by the bending of the light rays from the source due to a massive galaxy, termed "the lens", lying between it and the observer. The strong gravitational field produced by the lens galaxy distorts the structure of space-time in its neighbourhood, and this does not only attract objects which have a mass, but also bends the paths of light. When the two galaxies are exactly aligned, the image of the more distant galaxy is converted into an almost perfect circle which surrounds the lens galaxy. The irregularities in the circle are due to asymmetries in the source galaxy.

#### Theory of relativity explained:

<https://youtu.be/3OKfPtHec4s>

Sources: toi.

### LISA Pathfinder results boost plans for future detectors

LISA Pathfinder, a mission led by the European Space Agency (ESA) with contributions from NASA, has successfully tested a key technology needed to build a space-based observatory for detecting gravitational waves. These tiny ripples in the fabric of space, predicted by Albert Einstein a century ago, were first seen last year by the ground-based Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO).

- Researchers have found that the European Space Agency's technology-testing mission LISA Pathfinder is working five times better than its design specification, opening Einstein's gravitational universe for investigation from space.
- In an experiment, two cubical test masses placed at the heart of the spacecraft have demonstrated that they are **almost motionless with respect to each other and show a relative acceleration which is less than one part in ten millionths of a billionth of Earth's gravity**. This is an accuracy about five times better than expected.
- This extraordinary degree of precision is needed by this experiment as the measured strain caused by gravitational waves on their detectors is comparably minute.

**Background:**

Laser Interferometer Space Antenna (LISA) Pathfinder spacecraft has positioned itself in gravitational stasis at the first Lagrangian Point (L1) that lets its instruments hang in freefall. This is expected to filter out extraneous cosmic noise so the spacecraft can achieve its mission: measuring gravitational waves, the “sound” of the universe. Lisa Pathfinder was launched by Europe last December.

**Way ahead:**

The demonstration of the mission’s key technologies opens the door to the development of a large space observatory capable of detecting gravitational waves emanating from a wide range of exotic objects in the Universe.

**Gravitational waves:**

Hypothesised by Albert Einstein a century ago, gravitational waves are oscillations in the fabric of spacetime, moving at the speed of light and caused by the acceleration of massive objects. They can be generated, for example, by supernovas, neutron star binaries spiralling around each other, and pairs of merging black holes.

**About LISA pathfinder:**

LISA Pathfinder, formerly **Small Missions for Advanced Research in Technology-2 (SMART-2)**, is an ESA spacecraft that was launched on December 3, 2015. It began orbiting a point called Earth-sun L1, roughly 930,000 miles (1.5 million kilometers) from Earth in the sun’s direction.

- It is an **ESA-led mission**. It involves European space companies and research institutes from France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, UK, and the US space agency NASA.
- LISA stands for Laser Interferometer Space Antenna, a space-based gravitational wave observatory concept that has been studied in great detail by both NASA and ESA.
- The primary goal of ESA’s LISA Pathfinder mission is to test current technology by flying around an identical pair of 1.8-inch (46 millimeter) cubes made of a gold-platinum alloy, a material chosen for its high density and insensitivity to magnetic fields.
- LISA Pathfinder also carries a NASA experiment called the ST-7 Disturbance Reduction System. Managed by NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, California, the experiment combines novel “electrospray” thrusters with drag-free control software provided by Goddard on a dedicated computer.

Sources: the hindu.

### Deep space rocket booster tested

NASA has performed its second and last test-fire of a rocket booster for the Space Launch System (SLS).

- NASA has described the SLS as the “world’s most powerful rocket,” and said the test aims to see how the propellant performs at the colder end of its temperature range. This is seen as a powerful engine that may one day launch astronauts to Mars.
- On its upcoming first flight, the SLS will launch the Orion spacecraft to a stable orbit beyond the moon to demonstrate the integrated system performance of Orion and the SLS rocket prior to the first crewed flight.

#### About SLS:

NASA’s Space Launch System, or SLS, is a powerful, advanced launch vehicle for a new era of human exploration beyond Earth’s orbit. With its unprecedented power and capabilities, SLS will launch crews of up to four astronauts in the agency’s Orion spacecraft on missions to explore multiple, deep-space destinations. Offering more payload mass, volume capability and energy to speed missions through space than any current launch vehicle, SLS is designed to be flexible and evolvable and will open new possibilities for payloads, including robotic scientific missions to places like Mars, Saturn and Jupiter.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: *Issues relating to Intellectual property rights (IPR).*

### Odisha wages a literary struggle to claim rasagulla as its own

The bitter contest over the Intellectual Property Rights to an iconic sweet, the ‘rasagulla’ has moved into a new phase with Odisha citing ‘literary evidence’ to buttress its claim over West Bengal.

Odisha’s Department of Science and Technology has been poring over literary evidence and has decided to study it in depth, to reinforce the State’s demand for a Geographical Indication for the famous cottage cheese balls in sugary gravy. Odia litterateurs say the sweet is found in many works well before 1868.

#### Background:

- A bitter-war broke out last year over the origins of the Rasgulla. The fight is between Odisha and West Bengal, with each one claiming ownership of rasagolla.
- Odisha has staked claim to have ‘invented’ years ago, the sweet associating it with a centuries old ritual of Lord Jagannath. West Bengal always thought of rasagolla as its own.

GI tag:

The GI tag is an indication which is definite to a *geographical territory*. It is used for *agricultural, natural and manufactured* goods. For a product to get GI tag, the goods need to be *produced or processed or prepared* in that region. It is also essential that the product has special *quality or reputation*.

Sources: the hindu.

Consumer awareness vital to hold drug prices

NPPA chairman recently said that the biggest challenge in the 'access to medicine' debate in India was to get the consumer to be aware of his/her rights. In this regard, doctors have an important role to play in making drugs affordable to the patients. But the real challenge is in getting every one to prescribe generic drugs.

What can be done?

NPPA has made a request to the health ministry that central government hospitals prescribe only generic drugs from now on.

Why this is necessary in India?

This is necessary because in India we do not have a system where the government insures or provides health care for everyone, like they do in United States. Instead, this objective is being achieved in India by bringing more medicines under National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM). However, at present, only 17% of the pharmaceutical market is covered under this.

Background:

The price revision is a part of the Drug price Control Order (DPCO) of 2013, which expanded India's National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM) from 74 to 799 formulations. Despite facing pressure from domestic generic drug manufacturers, NPPA has been working on revising and lowering prices of NLEM in a phased manner.

- The DPCO was put in place after the Sino-Indian war of 1962 because companies started to profiteer and it became necessary to cap drug prices. Over the years, it has been modified five times.
- The health ministry revises the NLEM list every three years, going by public health interests and the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) enforces it through DPCO. So far, NPPA has revised prices of 330 out of 799 formulations.

Sources: the hindu.

### Patent Office issues norms for start-ups

Indian Patent Office has issued guidelines for facilitators and start-ups with respect to filling and processing of applications for patent, designs and trade marks aiming to encourage budding entrepreneurs and boost innovation.

- The move is aimed at promoting awareness and adoption of intellectual property rights by start-ups and facilitate them in protecting and commercialising those rights.

#### New guidelines:

- A start-up willing to file a patent application for an invention will have to select a facilitator who would help in preparing the request and also assess the patentability of the invention as per acts and rules, the Controller General Patents, Designs and Trade Marks.
- If the start-up is unable to select a facilitator, it should contact the head office of the respective Patent Office as per jurisdiction, who shall provide 3 names of the facilitator and the start-up will finalise the name.
- The fee for filing the application and other statutory fees would have to be borne by the start-up.
- The facilitator shall also have to monitor and perform further steps of proceedings of start-ups patent application, prepare the reply to any query from patent office. The office has also released a list of about 280 facilitators in such regard.
- For filing and processing applications for designs, the patent facilitators would provide their services.

The government has decided to bear the entire cost of facilitation for filing of patents, trademarks or designs.

Sources: the hindu.

#### *Paper 3 Topic: conservation.*

### ‘Revered’ nilgai turns farmers’ enemy

The environment ministry has allowed culling of nilgai in Bihar. They were seen as a “menace” for farmers. The crop-raiding species is found on acres of agricultural fields in riverine areas of the Ganga and Gandak basins. Bihar’s farmers have been demanding a licence from the State government to cull the blue bulls.

#### Background:

Increasing man-animals conflict that causes damage to crops and other human property had led the Union ministry of environment, forest and climate change (MoEFCC), in June 2015, to ask states to send proposals to declare wild animals **vermin** for specified period in a given area.

### What happens when animals are declared Vermin?

- Once declared vermin, that particular species can be hunted or culled without restriction.
- If implemented, it will apply to wild animals listed in various Schedules of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) 1972, other than Schedule I & Part II of Schedule II that lists most endangered and iconic species like tigers, leopards, and elephants.

### Existing legal provisions for objective management of man-animal conflict:

- Section 11(1)a of the Wildlife Protection Act (WPA) authorizes chief wildlife warden to permit hunting of any problem wild animal only if it cannot be captured, tranquillized or translocated.
- For wild animals in Schedule II, III or IV, chief wildlife warden or authorized officers can permit their hunting in a specified area if they have become dangerous to humans or property (including standing crops on any land).
- Section 62 of Act empowers Centre to declare wild animals other than Schedule I & II to be vermin for specified area and period.

### About Nilgai:

- Nilgai, also called bluebuck, the largest Asian antelope (family Bovidae). The nilgai is indigenous to the Indian subcontinent.
- It is the only one of the four Indian antelopes that is still abundant.
- It is the largest of all Asian antelopes and is one of the most commonly seen wild animals in all of India.
- The nilgai is categorised as Least Concern by the IUCN.

Sources: the hindu.

### Ken-Betwa project, a threat to wildlife?

Environmentalists have opposed Ken-Betwa River linking project. They warn of the dangers to the ecology and animal life due to the proposed Ken-Betwa project. Hence, this project has become a stage for a unique man-animal conflict.

### Details:

- Proponents of the project say that the proposed Daudhan dam and the 2.5 km canal — the key structures of the project — that will transfer surplus water from the Uttar Pradesh section of the Ken to the Betwa in Madhya Pradesh are critical to irrigate nearly 7,00,000 hectares in drought-ravaged Bundelkhand.
- But, opponents say such a dam will submerge at least 4,000 hectares of Madhya Pradesh's Panna tiger reserve, whose tigers were almost lost to poaching in 2009 and have only recently been partially replenished.



- They also allege that most districts in Madhya Pradesh will not actually get the promised water. There are vultures in the region, whose nests will be threatened by the height of the dam.

**Background:**

Since the project involves clearing forest land, affects endangered animals and involves relocating some farmers, it requires multi-pronged environmental clearance by the Ministry of Environment Forests and Climate Change. The National Board for Wildlife has constituted a committee of experts, which includes ecologists, hydrologists, representatives from the Water Ministry, and tiger conservationists to study the impact on wildlife. Their go-ahead is essential for the environmental impact assessment and forest clearance by the Madhya Pradesh government. These authorities have given an 'in-principle' clearance but funds for the project — Rs. 9,000 crore — won't be cleared by the Union Cabinet unless all the clearances are in order.

**About the project:**

The Ken and Betwa rivers in the states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Madhya Pradesh (MP) are to be linked under an historic agreement that marks the first such project in India's ambitious and controversial national river-linking project.

- The project envisages construction of a dam across river Ken in Chhatarpur district in Madhya Pradesh to irrigate 6.35 lakh hectare area of land, drinking water purposes and generation of 78 MW hydropower.
- The project comprises two powerhouse of 2×30 MW and 3×6 MW each, two tunnels of 1.9 km long upper level, 1.1 km long tunnel lower level and a 221 km long Ken-Betwa link canal, proposed on the left bank of the river.
- The project will provide irrigation facilities for 6,35,661 hectares of land in Panna, Chhattarpur, Tikamgarh districts in Madhya Pradesh, and Banda, Mahoba and Jhansi districts in Uttar Pradesh.
- The project was first mooted in the early 1980s but was actively taken up by the NDA government under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. It was then challenged in the Supreme Court, which finally gave the nod in 2013.

Sources: the hindu.

**Coastal zone report relaxes curbs on constructions**

An environment ministry committee has recommended reduction of the "no development zone" (NDZ) as specified under the coastal regulation zone (CRZ) notification 1991.

**Background:**

The committee headed by Sailesh Nayak, secretary, ministry of earth sciences has suggested a number of amendments to the CRZ notification in its report based on its review of issues in coastal states. The committee report was released under RTI about 16 months after the application was filed.

Highlights:

- The committee has made some recommendations that could dilute several aspects of protection to CRZ areas. For instance, the committee suggests that buildings can be constructed behind existing structures and roads in CRZ II (built up cities and towns) areas as per existing Town and Country Planning norms.
- It divides CRZ III (relatively undisturbed areas including rural areas) areas into densely populated rural areas and rural areas with lesser regulation through the reduction of the “no development zone” to 50 metres.
- The “no development zone” (NDZ) is 200 metres from the high tide line as per CRZ notification 1991. The committee has recommended allowing tourism facilities and other constructions within the NDZ.
- The report also allows for housing infrastructure and slum redevelopment activities in CRZ II and tourism in CRZ III areas based on town and country planning norms and other state regulations.
- The committee recommends “temporary tourism facilities in the NDZ. But if the NDZ falls on the landward side of a national or state highway, it suggests permitting construction of permanent tourism facilities.
- The committee also mentions reclamation of the sea bed in CRZ IV (coastal stretches in the Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep and small islands, except those designated as CRZ-I, CRZ-II or CRZ-III) area for “ports and harbour, fisheries-related activities and other infrastructure required in the larger public interest such as bridges, sea-links on stilts, roads, important national installations related to coastal security, tourism.”
- The committee mentions the identification and delineation of “ecologically sensitive areas” (ESAs) in CRZ I (ecologically sensitive) along the coasts, which includes mangroves, beaches, coral reefs and others. It suggests that state and union territories prepare coastal zone management plan (CZMP) as per guidelines suggested by the committee. All ESAs should be notified under the environment protection act 1986 by state governments.

Sources: the hindu.

**NHAI to mitigate impacts on wildlife**

NHAI has approved an estimate of Rs. 58.16 Crore to mitigate impacts on Wildlife in **Karnala Bird Sanctuary (KBS)** for widening of part of Panvel – Indapur section of **NH-17**. This section constitutes the

**direct connectivity from Mumbai to Goa.** The highway stretch passes for about 1.5 km length within the Karnala Bird Sanctuary under Thane wildlife division of West Mumbai Wildlife Circle.

- The total length of the project is 84 Km, and the total project cost is Rs 943 crore. The State Government endorsed the proposal of widening the highway within the sanctuary, saying that this may smoothen the traffic and reduce the fuel emissions from recurring traffic jams that may be harmful to the birds and other wildlife.
- The major mitigation measures being adopted by NHAI, as per the recommendations of the Wildlife Institute of India, include four wildlife passages in the 1.5 km sanctuary stretch. Besides, seven number of box culverts are also being provided.
- In all, 27 structures will be provided for total length of 3.5 km stretch, i.e., 12 falling within 1.5 km length in protected area, and remaining 15 on the 1 km stretch on each side.

#### About Karnala Bird Sanctuary (KBS):

The KBS is covered with moist **mixed deciduous forest** and falls in the Western Ghat bio-geographic zone. The sanctuary is particularly rich in climbers and as many as 11 species are recorded from KBS.

- Among mammals, three species of primates (Common Langur, Bonnet Macaque and Rhesus macaque) are occurring in the sanctuary. Barking Deer, Wild Pig, Jackals, Hyaena, Jungle Cat, Squirrel, Porcupine and Indian Hare are also reported from the sanctuary.
- KBS is particularly known for its rich avifauna and is home to over 146 species of resident and 37 species of migratory birds that visit during winter.
- Rare endemic birds of Western Ghats such as Malabar grey Hornbill, Ashy Minivet, three-toed Kingfisher and Malabar Trogon are reported from Sanctuary.
- Among other significant bird species the records of Malabar Whistling Thrush, long-billed Vulture, Indian Scimitar Babbler and Shaheen Falcon are significant.

Sources: the hindu.

#### Tigers roar loud in Manas, population up 50% in 3 years

The second survey to monitor big cats across the **Transboundary Manas Conservation Area (TraMCA)**, which covers Manas National Park (MNP) on the Indian side and the Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) in Bhutan, has thrown up 21 tigers — a heartwarming increase of 50% over the first survey in 2011-12 that had counted just 14 big cats in the Manas landscape.

- The latest Tiger monitoring, carried out by the MNP, RMNP, National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), WWF-India and conservation group Aaaranyak last year, covered an area of 560 sq km across the two protected areas.
- **TraMCA, floated in 2008, is a joint initiative of India and Bhutan for trans-boundary biodiversity conservation.**

#### Manas National Park (MNP):

Manas National Park is a national park, UNESCO Natural World Heritage site, a Project Tiger reserve, an elephant reserve and a biosphere reserve in Assam, India.

Located in the Himalayan foothills, it is contiguous with the Royal Manas National Park in Bhutan.

- The Manas river flows thorough the west of the park and is the main river within it. It is a major tributary of Brahmaputra river and splits into two separate rivers, the Beki and Bholkaduba as it reaches the plains.
- The Manas river also serves as an international border dividing India and Bhutan.
- The bedrock of the savanna area in the north of the park is made up of limestone and sandstone, whereas the grasslands in the south of the park stand on deep deposits of fine alluvium.
- The combination of Sub-Himalayan Bhabar Terai formation along with the riverine succession continuing up to Sub-Himalayan mountain forest make it one of the richest areas of biodiversity in the world.
- The fauna of the sanctuary include Indian elephants, Indian rhinoceros, gaurs, Asian water buffaloes, barasingha, Indian tigers, Indian leopards, clouded leopards, Asian golden cats, dholes, capped langurs, golden langurs, Assamese macaques, slow loris, hoolock gibbons, smooth-coated otters, sloth bears, barking deers, hog deers, black panthers, sambar deers and chitals.
- The park is well known for species of rare and endangered wildlife that are not found anywhere else in the world like the Assam roofed turtle, hispid hare, golden langur and pygmy hog.

Sources: the hindu.

#### ZSI to record climate change impact on animals

The Zoological Survey of India has started five long-term monitoring plots in the Himalayas to document the impact of climate change on the animal world.

#### Key facts:

- The project is funded by the Ministry for Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

- It will monitor indicators in species like fish, butterflies, bees and other insects to find out how their distribution has been affected by climate change.
- ZSI will compare the distribution of species in the past and present to come out with a study report on the impact of climate change on their survival.
- The project will run for three years in West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh and more than Rs. 2 crore has been earmarked for the exercise.

#### About ZSI:

Established in 1961, it is a premier organisation in zoological research and studies. It was established to promote the survey, exploration and research of the fauna in the region.

- The activities of the ZSI are coordinated by the Conservation and Survey Division in the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.

#### Main objectives:

- Exploration and Survey of Faunal Resources.
- Taxonomic Studies.
- Status Survey of Endangered Species.
- Publication of Results through Departmental Journals.
- Publication of Fauna of India.
- Maintenance and Development of National Zoological Collections.

#### Red Data Book:

- Similar to the Red Data Book produced by IUCN, ZSI also releases a Red Data Book on Indian Animals. It was first published in 1983.

The ZSI also participates in the Indian Antarctic Program, since its inception in 1989.

Sources: the hindu.

#### Paper 3 Topic: disaster and disaster management.

#### PM Modi releases country's first National Disaster Management Plan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently released the **National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP)**. This is the **first ever national plan prepared in the country**.

#### Key facts:

- The plan **aims to make India disaster resilient and reduces loss of lives**.
- The plan is based on the **four priority themes of the "Sendai Framework,"** namely: understanding disaster risk, improving disaster risk governance, investing in disaster risk reduction

(through structural and non-structural measures) and disaster preparedness, early warning and building back better in the aftermath of a disaster.

- The plan covers all phases of disaster management: Prevention, Mitigation, Response and Recovery.
- It provides for **horizontal and vertical integration among all the agencies** and departments of the Government.
- The plan also spells out the **roles and responsibilities of all levels of Government right up to Panchayat and Urban local body level in a matrix format.**
- The plan has a regional approach, which will be beneficial not only for disaster management but also for development planning.
- It is designed in such a way that it can be implemented in a scalable manner in all phases of disaster management.
- It also identifies major activities such as early warning, information dissemination, medical care, fuel, transportation, search and rescue, evacuation, etc. to serve as a checklist for agencies responding to a disaster.
- It also provides a generalised framework for recovery and offers flexibility to assess a situation and build back better.
- To prepare communities to cope with disasters, it emphasises on a greater need for Information, Education and Communication activities.
- It even calls for **ethical guidelines for the media for coverage of disasters as well as self-regulation.** The plan wants the media to respect the dignity and privacy of affected people.
- Also, in a move aimed to stop rumours and spread of panic, the plan directed the authorities to schedule regular media briefing (depending on the severity of the disaster) and designate a **nodal officer for interacting with the media on behalf of the government.**

Sources: pib.

***Paper 3 Topic:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.*

### **Ships get relief from piracy related insurance premium at Indian ports**

Ships now entering or leaving Indian ports are not required to pay a piracy-related additional insurance premium now. This move is expected to help thousands of the vessels.

- About 22,000 ships, that called on Indian ports between 2010 and 2015, paid an estimated additional war risk premium (AWRP) of about Rs.8,500 crore.

Background:

The development has come after seas near the country's western coast were removed from the list of the High Risk Areas (HRA) for piracy. European Union then Chair of the Contact Group of Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), in October 2015, had announced the revision of the limits of the piracy High Risk Area (HRA). With this, India's west coast was excluded from piracy High Risk Area (HRA). HRA was redrawn at **65 Degrees E**. The decision came into effect from December 1, 2015.

About Contact Group of Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS):

The CGPCS was set up as a group of affected nations, industry associations and multilateral agencies to take steps for checking piracy in the Indian Ocean. It was established in 2009.

- It was **established in response to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1851 (2008)**, later recalled and replaced with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1918 (2010).
- The CGPCS does not have a standing secretariat. Chairpersonship of the plenary and the working groups is rotating.

Sources: the hindu.

**Police stations to have wider jurisdiction over coasts**

To end the ambiguity over jurisdiction in the wake of Italian marines case, 10 police stations located along India's coastline have been empowered to register and investigate crimes committed within the country's **exclusive economic zone (EEZ)**. The Union Home Ministry has now extended the jurisdictional limits for notified police stations from the existing 12 nautical miles to 200 nautical miles into the high seas.

- In this regard, the home ministry has invoked the Territorial Waters, Continental Shelf, Exclusive Economic Zone and Other Maritime Zones Act, 1976, and said the 10 police stations located on both east and west coasts can investigate any offence committed by any person within the EEZ.
- The extension is an important development in allowing a greater say to local police while dealing with cases of smuggling and terrorism.

Background:

India has a 7,517-km coastline, which is dotted with 12 major ports and 187 minor or intermediate ports. India's territorial waters end at 12 nautical miles while exclusive economic zone stretches to 200 nautical miles from the coast.

EEZ:

An Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a concept adopted at the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea (1982), whereby a coastal State assumes jurisdiction over the exploration and exploitation of



marine resources in its adjacent section of the continental shelf, taken to be a band extending 200 miles from the shore.

- The EEZ includes the contiguous zone. Countries also have rights to the seabed of what is called the continental shelf up to 350 nautical miles from the coastal baseline, beyond the EEZ. But such areas are not part of their EEZ.
- The legal definition of the continental shelf does not directly correspond to the geological meaning of the term, as it also includes the continental rise and slope, and the entire seabed within the exclusive economic zone.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 3 Topic: Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security; money-laundering and its prevention.*

### J&K militants use app to evade Army snooping

Indian intelligence agencies have found a new app called “Calculator” which is used by terrorists.

- This application is found on the smartphones of terrorists. It helps them remain in touch with their handlers in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) without being detected by the Army’s technical surveillance.

#### Details:

The technology is based on the concept of ‘**cognitive digital radio**’ that enables users to turn their smartphones into peer-to-peer, off-grid communication tools.

- The technology was first used by a U.S.-based company during Hurricane Katrina so that the affected residents could remain in touch with each other. Terror outfits have modified this technology and created the application “Calculator”, which can be downloaded on smartphones attached to the off-air network created specifically for them.
- The network generates its own signal through proprietary ad hoc networking protocols and automatically coordinates with other units within range which enables users to send and get text messages, share their GPS locations on offline maps regardless of access to WiFi or cellular service.

#### What is Cognitive radio (CR)?

It is a form of wireless communication in which a transceiver can intelligently detect which communication channels are in use and which are not, and instantly move into vacant channels while avoiding occupied ones. This optimizes the use of available radio-frequency (RF) spectrum while minimizing interference to other users.

Sources: the hindu.

### App downloads expose most Indian users

According to a study by Norton, about one in two Indians have allowed app developers to access their contact directories and other data stored on their smartphones in exchange for free applications, exposing themselves to privacy risks in the process. The survey covered 1,005 Indian smartphone and tablet users aged 16 and above.

#### Highlights of the study:

- The survey notes that one in three consumers in India accepts that many apps they use are likely to collect data about them, one in five would download any app that looked cool, regardless of its origin or reputation.
- Close to 50% of Indians with smartphones and tablets have over 20 apps installed on them, according to the survey.
- 36% would either always grant permissions or simply don't know enough about the kind of permissions they may have granted and only eight per cent reject requests bearing in mind the risks involved.
- 50% users grant permission to send promotional texts/emails, while close to 40% grant permission to access their camera, bookmarks and browser history.
- About 68% of the users worry about the security threats of online shopping and 42% said they have in fact experienced a security problem, threat or nuisance as a result of using their devices for online shopping. However, only 26% of online shoppers believe that threats are increasing.
- Security issues causing the most concern for Indian mobile users were virus/malware attacks (34%), threats involving fraudulent access or misuse of credit card or bank account details (21%) and leaking of personal information (19%).

#### Why be concerned about this?

Mobiles are digital warehouses storing our most personal moments and information, such as photos and videos, conversations with friends and family, health and fitness information, financial data and more. Yet, most consumers unknowingly put personal information which resides on their mobile phones at risk and compromise their privacy.

Sources: the hindu.

### Centre seeks to calm black money fears

The government has sought to assure industry that it would not harass those who came forward with their undeclared income.

- In this regard, finance Minister Arun Jaitley recently held a meeting with industry leaders and chambers of commerce regarding the Income Declaration Scheme where he sought to assuage these concerns.
- He said the compliance window is open for people with undisclosed income to legitimise it by paying 45% tax between June 1 to September 30 and any declaration made under this law (the Income Declaration Scheme 2016) is protected and won't be shared with any other authority.

#### Background:

The Income Declaration Scheme was announced by the Finance Minister in his most recent Budget speech.

#### About the scheme:

The Income Declaration Scheme offers people with undisclosed income to declare it by paying a penal tax rate of 45% on such income.

An amendment in this regard was also recently moved in the Finance Bill, 2016. The Finance Bill has imported Section 138 of the Income Tax Act into the declaration scheme's ambit. Bringing in Section 138 to the Scheme brings in objectivity on confidentiality of income tax information and the limitations thereof.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: cyber security.

### Reserve Bank tells lenders to expedite cyber security policy

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has asked the commercial banks to 'immediately' put in place a cyber security policy, duly approved by the board, in the wake of increasing cyber attacks in the financial system.

#### Key facts:

- According to the RBI, the policy should elucidate the strategy containing an appropriate approach to combat cyber threats given the level of complexity of business and acceptable levels of risk.
- The policy would also include setting up an adaptive incident response, management and recovery framework to deal with adverse incidents/disruptions, if and when they occur.
- Banks have also been asked to formulate a Cyber Crisis Management Plan (CCMP) which should be a part of the overall board-approved strategy.

- According to the central bank, CCMP should address the following four aspects—Detection, Response, Recovery and Containment.
- The regulator has emphasised that the cyber security policy should be distinct and separate from the broader IT policy/IS Security policy so that it can highlight the risks from cyber threats and the measures to address or mitigate these risks.

#### Why this is necessary?

With the use of technology by banks gaining momentum, the number, frequency and impact of cyber incidents/attacks has increased manifold in the recent past.

Sources: the hindu.

### **Facts for Prelims:**

- A three day '**100 Smart Cities India**' Conference was recently inaugurated by the Minister of Urban Development Shri M.Venkaiah Naidu in Berlin, Germany. Leading global companies, policy makers and experts are attending the conference being organized to highlight investment opportunities in smart city development set in motion in India.
- The Prime Minister has approved the proposal of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for enhancing the **age of superannuation of all doctors of the Central Health Service to 65 years** with effect from 31st May 2016. This will enable the Government to retain experienced doctors for a longer period, and to provide better services in its public health facilities, particularly to the poorest, who are entirely dependent on public facilities.
- The Centre has **achieved the fiscal deficit target of 3.9% of GDP in FY16**. The Centre's fiscal deficit stood at Rs 5.32 lakh crore or 3.9% of GDP in FY16, marginally lower than the revised estimate (RE) of Rs 5.35 lakh crore. This was the second year in a row that the government met the fiscal deficit target but it did not have to significantly cut spending to meet the projections. Fiscal deficit is the difference between the government's total spending and receipts, which includes tax, non-tax revenue as well as capital receipts such as proceeds from disinvestment.

- The Supreme Court, in its recent verdict, has observed that **mere possession of assets disproportionate to known sources of income is not an offence** and a person can be held guilty only if it is proved that the assets were acquired through **illegal** means.

**GBT/PK Sinha Committee/IPPB**

- The world's **longest tunnel** has officially been opened. The 57-kilometre (35-mile) **Gotthard Base Tunnel** (GBT) is longest tunnel now. It runs from Erstfeld in the central canton of Uri, to Bodio in the southern Ticino canton. With its official opening, the GBT has surpassed Japan's 53.9-kilometre Seikan tunnel as the world's longest train tunnel. The 50.5-kilometre Channel Tunnel that links England and France has been bumped into third place.
- The government has set up the **Financial Sector Search and Recruitment Committee** headed by cabinet secretary P K Sinha to decide on members and heads of financial regulatory agencies. The head of the regulatory body, whose members are to be selected, will be a special invitee to the panel.
- The Cabinet has approved the decision that the chairperson and members of the public enterprises selection board (**PESB**) should hold office for a period of three years from the assumption of charge or until they turn 65 years of age, whichever is earlier.
- The Cabinet has approved the signing of three memoranda of understanding (MoU) between India and Qatar for cooperation in skill development and 'recognition of qualifications.' It will strengthen ties in the field of tourism, and provide cooperation and mutual assistance in matters related to customs.
- Cabinet has approved the MoU between the United States of America and India to enhance cooperation in wildlife conservation and combating **wildlife trafficking**. The pact seeks cooperation in various areas including wildlife forensics and conservation genetics which is useful in species conservation efforts and better scientific evidence collection in wildlife crimes leading to better enforcement. Both the countries, under the pact, will also cooperate in the area of natural world heritage conservation which includes facilitating the institutional capacity of the existing UNESCO Category -2 centre at Wildlife Institute of India. The pact also seeks cooperation in nature interpretation and conservation awareness

which involves use of information technology in strengthening interface of forest managers with the people to sensitise people.

- The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of India Post's payments bank at a total project cost of Rs 800 crore. The India Post Payment Bank (**IPPB**), which will generate employment opportunities for about 3,500 skilled banking professionals, will set up 650 branches and 5,000 ATMs across the country. The total fund requirement for the proposal is Rs 800 crore, which will be split up as Rs 400 crore equity and Rs 400 crore as grant. IPPB will start operations in March 2017 in about 50 districts and will cover the entire country by the end of FY 2018-19.

### VLA/Pench-Kanha Tiger Corridor

- Using the **Very Large Array (VLA)**, located in New Mexico, US, an international team of scientists has detected a faint signal emitted by hydrogen gas in a galaxy more than five billion light years away. This incredible measurement is almost **double the previous record of distance**. According to scientists, these signals would have begun their journey before our planet even existed. As the **most abundant element in the universe**, and the raw fuel for creating stars, hydrogen is **used by radio astronomers to detect and understand the makeup of other galaxies**.
- For the road project of widening of the Madhya Pradesh/Maharashtra border – Mansar section of the existing NH-7 which cuts across the tiger corridor in the state of Maharashtra, NHAI has approved Rs. 186 Crore for wildlife mitigation measures to take care of any possible adverse impact on the **tiger population in the Pench – Kanha Tiger Corridor**. This is only a part of the amount to be spent for the purpose. As per the recommendations of the Wildlife Institute of India and the National Tiger Conservation Authority, also endorsed by the Hon'ble High Court at Nagpur, NHAI is providing elaborate mitigation measures on the stretch. The measures include three elevated sections of 750m, 750m and 300m length, so that wildlife can move across the highway alignment following their natural paths. Besides these, 6 other wildlife crossings of different dimensions are also being provided.
- Mega Luxury Cruise Vessel "**M.V.Ovation of the Seas**" has reached the Cochin Port for a 2-day stop-over in its circuit of Dubai-Muscat-Kochi-Penang-Singapore. "M.V.Ovation of the Seas" is a brand new

ship of the Royal Caribbean Lines which was floated out in April this year. It is 348 m long and is in the 2nd largest class of cruise vessel.

- **V.O. Chidambaranar Port, Tamil Nadu has bagged National Award for Excellence in Cost Management for the year 2015 from The Institute of Cost Accountants of India under the category of Public Service Sector- Small.** The port participated in the 13th National Awards for Excellence in Cost Management-2015, organised by The Institute of Cost Accountants of India. This is the third time this port is receiving the award , the earlier years being 2008 and 2012. The award has been given for exemplary performance of V.O. Chidambaranar Port towards optimization of manpower, savings in electricity, implementation of Solar Energy Systems, reduction of overall cost of handling by mechanization and improvising efficiency and logistics support. The **Institute of Cost Accountants of India, a statutory body under an Act** of Parliament, presents awards for excellence in Cost Management to promote and recognize Cost Management practices in the Corporate Sector.
- The Home Ministry has signed an agreement to join the **global terror database maintained by the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC) of the U.S.** The U.S. has already finalised such agreements with 30 countries and the Terrorist Screening Center has details of 11,000 terror suspects on its database, including nationality, date of birth, photos, fingerprints (if any) and passport number. Under this arrangement, both sides will give each other access to terrorism screening information through designated contact points, subject to domestic laws and regulations.
- The Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has been conferred with **Amir Amanullah Khan Award**, Afghanistan's highest civilian honour. The Amir Amanullah Khan medal is highest civilian honor of Afghanistan. The award is named after the Afghan national hero, Amanullah Khan (Ghazi), who championed the cause of Afghanistan's freedom. He was the ruler of the Emirate of Afghanistan from 1919-1929 who led Afghanistan to independence. This award was instituted by the Afghanistan government in 2006. Previous recipients include: US President George Bush, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, NATO General James Jones, former Afghan President spiritual leader Sibghatullah Mujaddedi, and Afghan Chief Justice (CJ) Abdul Salam Azimi.



**Landsat/Sihu/WED/GRDI/SAFAR/SDC**

- According to the new Landsat study, **Arctic regions of North America are getting greener due to changing climate**. According to the study, almost a third of the Arctic land cover is now looking more like landscapes found in warmer ecosystems. Temperatures are warming faster in the Arctic than elsewhere, which has led to longer seasons for plants to grow in and changes to the soils. **Landsat is a programme that provides the longest continuous space-based record of Earth's land vegetation in existence**. It shows the climate impact on vegetation in the high latitudes.
- Assam's **Guwahati became the first city in the country to have its own city animal with the district administration declaring the Gangetic river dolphin as the mascot**. It is locally known as 'SiHu'. The district administration had organised online and offline voting among three protected creatures, which are on the verge of extinction, to decide the mascot. Along with Gangetic river dolphin, the other two animals were black softshell turtle (Bor Kaso) and greater adjutant stork (Hargila).
- At the recent meeting of Contact Group of Piracy off the Coast of Somalia' (CGPCS) in Mahe, **India was chosen to co-chair the Working Group** on improving maritime situational awareness in the Indian ocean region through consensus. Seychelles is the current chairman of the CGPCS for the biennium 2016-17.
- World Environment Day (WED) was celebrated across the globe on 5th June. The objective of the event is to raise awareness about the leading issue of the sustainability of our environment. It was initiated in 1973 by the United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to address colossal issues like global warming, deforestation and food shortages among many others. The Theme for 2016 is **"Go Wild for Life"** (ZERO TOLERANCE FOR THE ILLEGAL WILDLIFE TRADE). Angola is the host country of this year.
- India has been placed at the **second position in retail potential in the 2016 Global Retail Development Index (GRDI)**. The country was ranked 15 in the previous year. The report profiled 30 developing countries. It is released by AT Kearney, a Chicago-based consultancy. India's retail sector has expanded at a compound annual growth rate of 8.8 per cent between 2013 and 2015, according to the report.

- Rajasthan Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje recently launched two apps. One, a mobile app '**RajVayu**' for sharing information about air quality index of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur. Another app '**Drishti**' for monitoring of pollution levels in industrial regions. Both apps were launched on the eve of World Environment Day. RajVayu is based on the data collected by sophisticated air quality monitoring equipment and weather sensors. It would share details about the air quality, such as levels of pollutants like Particulate Matter, SO<sub>x</sub>, NO<sub>x</sub>, CO, Ozone particles with the city residents and tourists. Also, temperature, humidity, wind speed, weather forecast and advisories would be issued through this. Rajasthan State Pollution Control Board (RSPCB) is the **first state Board in the country to have this app for its citizens**. This is based on the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting Research (SAFAR-India). Presently, Delhi, Mumbai and Pune are connected with this system.
- **Himachal Pradesh has become the first state in the country to have a State Data Centre (SDC), designed using green data centre concept**, to offer 101 people-oriented service online through an integrated data base. SDC would integrate the websites of various departments and all services could be accessible through the integrated data base, saving time and money spent on creation of infrastructure. It is a major green initiative as all services would be provided online and online and paperless governance will become a reality.

#### USICEF/ Malware Infection Index

- The **Nuclear Power Corporation of India and US firm Westinghouse have agreed to begin engineering and site design work for six nuclear power plant reactors in India** and conclude contractual arrangements by June 2017. Once completed, the project would be among the largest of its kind, fulfilling the promise of the US-India civil nuclear agreement and demonstrating a shared commitment to meet India's growing energy needs while reducing reliance on fossil fuels.
- India and the US have announced the setting up of **two financial assistance programmes** worth \$60 million for supporting India's much-needed clean energy initiatives including in solar power and other renewables. This includes a creation of a \$20 million US-India Clean Energy Finance (USICEF) initiative, equally supported by the United States and India. This is expected to mobilise up to \$400 million to provide clean and renewable electricity to up to 1 million households by 2020. The two countries have also agreed on a \$40 million US-India Catalytic Solar Finance Programme, which would be equally supported by the United States and India. This would provide much needed liquidity to

smaller-scale renewable energy investments, particularly in poorer, rural villages that are not connected to the grid, and could mobilise up to \$1 billion of projects.

- In a significant development, the US has recognised India as a **“major defence partner”** which means that for defence related trade and technology transfer the country would now be treated at par with America’s closest allies. Under the ‘major defence partner’ recognition, the US will continue to work toward facilitating technology sharing with India to a level commensurate with that of its closest allies and partners.
- A technical arrangement was recently signed between the Indian Navy and the US Navy concerning **unclassified maritime information sharing** that will allow sharing of unclassified information on White Shipping as permitted by respective national laws, regulations and policies, and provides a framework for mutually beneficial maritime information.
- **Pakistan tops** the list of countries figuring in the **Malware Infection Index 2016 prepared by Microsoft. India is placed at the 8th position.** The index identifies the key malware threats in the region and ranks markets in Asia-Pacific according to how much they are affected. The index has also identified the top three most encountered malware as Gamarue, a malicious computer worm that is commonly distributed via exploit kits and social engineering; and Skeeyah and Peals which are trojans that try to look innocent to convince you to install them, the index reveals. Out of the top five locations across the globe most at risk of infection, a total of four are from the Asia Pacific – Pakistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Nepal, topping the rankings at first, second, fourth and fifth places respectively.

### Vennar Irrigation Project/Assumption Island

- Multilateral lending agency Asian Development Bank has approved a USD 100 million loan to strengthen a key irrigation system and improve water management in the Vennar sub-basin of Cauvery Delta in Tamil Nadu. The **Vennar irrigation project** will support both physical improvements and stronger water management, giving a significant boost to the lives of coastal communities who often go without sufficient irrigation water. The project will strengthen the embankments of six major irrigation water channels in Vennar system to make them more resilient to floods and upgrade water regulators. The **Cauvery delta, on the east coast of Tamil Nadu, is known as the ‘rice bowl’ of the state,**

with over 70 per cent of the delta population engaged in farming and fishing, but access to water is unreliable and flooding common during the monsoon season.

- With its oil demand galloping 8.1% in 2015, India has surpassed Japan to become the **world's third-largest oil consumer**. India is the third-largest consumer behind the U.S. and China. Also, global demand for primary energy grew only 1% in 2015, which is significantly slower than the 10-year average. **Oil remained the world's leading fuel**, accounting for 32.9% of global energy consumption and is gaining market share for the first time since 1999. **Coal came in as the second-largest fuel by market share** (29.2%). Natural gas' market share of primary energy consumption stood at 23.8%.
- India and Seychelles are working together to ensure safety and security in the Indian Ocean. In this regard, both countries have agreed to jointly build a **naval base in Assumption Island**. This will enhance maritime security along India's west and south coast.

#### UNGA-HIV

- UNGA member states have adopted a new political declaration, including time-bound global targets, to be reached over the next five years and end the AIDS epidemic as a public health threat by 2030. India has proposed a five-point strategy to end AIDS. The five point strategy includes adoption of the fast-track target; reaching 90 per cent of all people in need with HIV treatment; commitment to maintain the TRIPS flexibilities; creating an inclusive society with programmes that work towards restoring the respect and dignity of individuals, and lastly, global solidarity.

#### NSG Meet @ Vienna/Malabar Naval Exercise

- The Centre is considering granting **subsidy to power looms** operating on solar energy as part of its clean energy initiatives. The centre is planning to provide 50% subsidy to them. The total subsidy to be given is Rs.3.75 lakh to persons belonging to the General Category, Rs.5.62 lakh for OBC category and Rs.6.75 lakh to SC/ST.
- A two-day meeting in **Vienna of the Nuclear Suppliers Group** to decide on India's application for membership to the 48-nation club has ended without a breakthrough. India's application is now expected to be taken up in a meeting in Seoul on June 20. Most countries support India, but some want

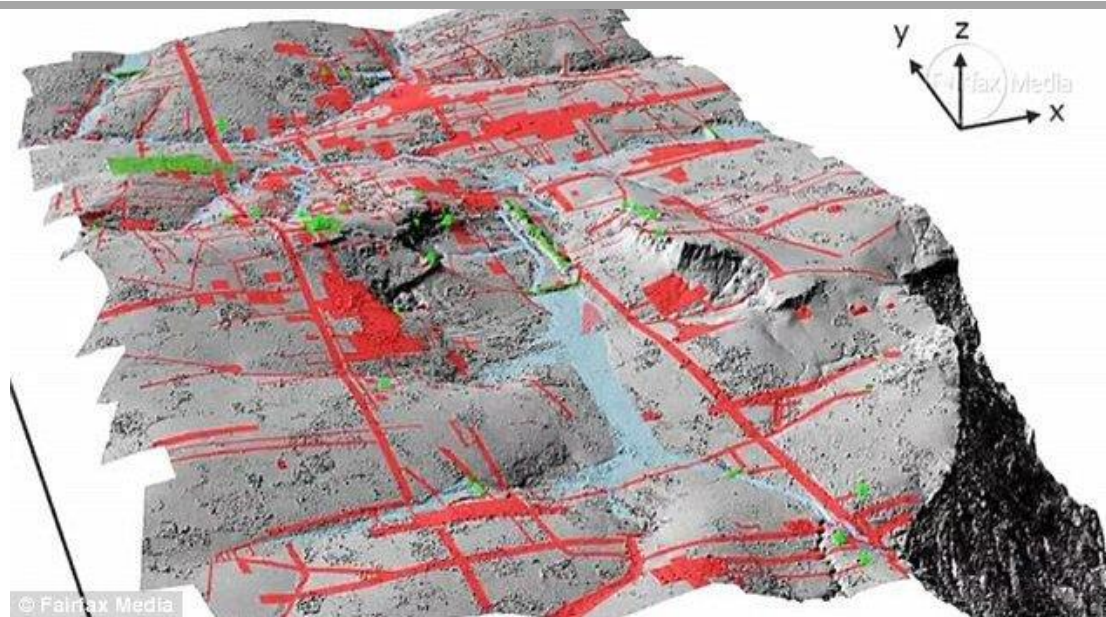
a well-defined process rather than an exception made for India. **NSG decision needs full consensus, not simple majority.**

- The navies of India, Japan and the U.S. have started the annual **Malabar naval exercises** in Japan, close to islands contested by China. The location of the exercise, which will be conducted over hundreds of miles, is of particular interest as they are not very far from the Air Defence Identification Zone imposed by China over the East China Sea in November 2013, including the Senkaku Islands, controlled by Japan but claimed by Beijing, and the nine dash line. This is the 20th edition of the exercise, and the first after the formal expansion of the bilateral exercise to a trilateral format last year. The primary aim of this exercise is to increase interoperability among the three navies and develop common understanding of procedures for maritime security operations. The major emphasis will be on anti-submarine drills and protecting aircraft carriers from hostile assets lurking under water. Additionally, the special forces of the three navies will interact during the exercise.

#### Angkor Wat/ BeiDou/Yoga Medals/World Day against child labour

- Unprecedented new details of medieval cities hidden under jungle in Cambodia near **Angkor Wat** have been revealed using lasers shedding new light on the civilisation behind the world's largest religious complex. Angkor Wat, a **UNESCO World Heritage site** seen as among the most important in south-east Asia, is considered one of the ancient wonders of the world. It was constructed from the early to mid 1100s by King **Suryavarman II at the height of the Khmer Empire's** political and military power and was among the largest pre-industrial cities in the world. While the Khmer Empire was initially Hindu, it increasingly adopted Buddhism and both religions can be seen on display at the complex.





- **Public sector banks have increased their presence across the country in the last four years—in terms of ATMs and points of sale devices—far faster than private sector banks have recent data released by the Reserve Bank of India shows.** There are 2Bei7 public sector banks and 19 private sector banks in operation currently. One common view is that this increase in the number of ATMs by PSBs is due to the government-mandated rural financial inclusion programme. Also, PSBs have a higher share of ATMs than private banks in metro, urban, and semi-urban areas as well. However, the **issuance of credit cards and the share in credit card transactions are two areas where the private sector outshines the public sector.**
- With the country set to celebrate the second International Yoga Day (IYD) on June 21, the government has proposed instituting '**Yoga medals**' for Central paramilitary troops for displaying exceptional skills in the ancient discipline for physical, mental and spiritual well being. It has also planned to re-employ retiring personnel of the Central Armed Police Forces as Master Yoga Trainers in order to create a constant resource pool of teachers for about 9 lakh personnel of the CRPF, the CISF, the ITBP, the SSB and the BSF.
- China has successfully launched its **23rd BeiDou Navigation Satellite** to support its global navigation and positioning network. BeiDoU is being developed as an alternative to GPS of US. It has a total of 35 satellites.

- The **World Day Against Child Labour** was observed across world on 12 June to bring awareness against child labour. The observance seeks to bring together governments, employers and workers organizations, civil society, as well as millions of people from around the world to highlight the plight of child labourers and what can be done to help them. 2016 Theme: ‘End child labour in supply chains – It’s everyone’s business.’

### Expo 2017 Astana/ Norway

- India’s solar dome project has been nominated for display in the Astana Expo 2017 that will be held in Kazakhstan. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has announced India’s participation in ‘Expo 2017 Astana’ during his visit to Kazakhstan. The main Theme of the Expo is to showcase cutting edge technologies. The subtitle for the Exhibition is ‘**Reducing Co2 emission**’.
- India and Ghana have signed three bilateral agreements to strengthen co-operation in varied fields. The three agreements signed with Ghana include one for visa waivers for holders of diplomatic and official passports and one for setting up a Joint Commission. The commission will periodically review various aspects of the multi-dimensional relationship between the two countries. India is the largest foreign investor in Ghana today, with more than 700 projects. More than 222 of these projects are in the manufacturing sector. Bilateral trade between India and Ghana has increased to \$1.2 billion from \$538 million in 2010.
- Norwegian Parliament has pledged to make government’s public procurement policy deforestation-free. With this, Norway has become the **first country in the world to prohibit deforestation**.

### INSV Mhadei

- Indian Institute of Technology-Madras has broken into the top 50 of the 2016 Asia university rankings that were released recently by British company Quacquarelli Symonds (QS). Jumping 13 places from its position last year, **IIT-Madras is ranked 43**. IISc-Bangalore (33), IIT-Bombay (35), IIT-Delhi (36) and IIT-Kanpur (48) were the other Indian universities in the top 50. IIT-Kharagpur was placed 51st and two other IITs – Roorkee (78) and Guwahati (94) – made it to the top 100 as well.



- The **Navy sail boat INSV Mhadei** — steered by an all-woman, six-member crew that will attempt to circumnavigate the world next year — recently entered Port Louis, Mauritius. This historic open ocean voyage by the all-women crew, the first such in Indian maritime history, is designed to help them get used to the conditions they will face during their mission.

### IARC/Cote D Ivoire

- **International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)**, an agency of the UN's World Health Organisation has said that drinking very hot coffee and other drinks "probably" causes cancer of the oesophagus. However, the agency has indicated that coffee served "normal serving temperatures" would do no harm. It is dangerous if consumed hotter than 65 degrees Celsius.
- The Union Cabinet has approved the **merger of State Bank of India (SBI)**, the country's largest lender, and its associate banks. The merged entity will have an asset base of about Rs.37 lakh crore, with nearly 24,000 branches and about 58,700 ATMs across the country as of March 2016. Associate banks to be merged are- State Bank of Bikaner & Jaipur, State Bank of Hyderabad, State Bank of Mysore, State Bank of Patiala and State Bank of Travancore.
- The cabinet has given its nod to the **signing of an Air Services Agreement between India-Taipei** Association in Taipei (India's representative office in Taiwan) and Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India (Taiwan's representative office in India) got the nod. The Cabinet has also given its ex-post facto approval to the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Taipei Economic and Cultural Centre in India and India Taipei Association in Taipei, for cooperation in agriculture.
- The Cabinet has given its approval for the **enhancement of the age of superannuation of non-teaching and public health specialists of the Central Health Service (CHS)** from 62 years to 65 years and doctors of General Duty Medical Officers sub-cadre of CHS to 65 years of age.
- An ex-post facto approval for a **pact on labour cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia** and a 10% disinvestment of paid-up equity in Housing and Urban Development Corporation were also cleared.

- **India and Cote D'Ivoire have inked an agreement** to re-establish the headquarters of the Exim Bank in Abidjan after a gap of nearly two decades. The agreement was inked in the presence of the Presidents of India and Cote D'Ivoire — Pranab Mukherjee and Alassane Ouattara. Cote D'Ivoire (also known as **Ivory Coast**), a francophone country, is the **biggest producer and exporter of cashew nuts to India which procures nearly 80% of their total exports**. It also **leads the world in production and export of the cocoa beans** used in the manufacture of chocolate, supplying 33% of cocoa produced globally. Meanwhile, **President Pranab Mukherjee has been accorded the highest honour of Cote D'Ivoire** by its President Alassane Ouattara on his maiden visit here.
- In a first, an instrument onboard an orbiting spacecraft has measured the methane emissions from a specific leaking facility on Earth's surface. The observation — by the **Hyperion spectrometer on NASA's Earth Observing-1 (EO-1)** — is an important breakthrough in our ability to eventually measure and monitor emissions of this potent greenhouse gas from space.

#### RAPID/CMPE

- At the recently held two-day **Rajasva Gyan Sangam**, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has asked senior tax officials to aim for widening the tax net from the present 5.4 crore households to 10 crore households — all non-agricultural income households — mainly, by changing their attitudes towards taxpayers. He has given a five-point charter to tax administrators embodied in the word '**RAPID.**' **These are: revenue, accountability, probity, information and digitisation.** In India, while nearly 92% of India's tax revenue comes from self-assessments, advance tax payments and tax deducted at source, the 42,000 taxmen raise barely 8% through assessments and scrutiny of returns. PM has also asked the officers to ensure their behaviour is soft and sober and change their attitude so that the fear of harassment is erased from the minds of taxpayers.
- State Bank of India has floated a Rs.200 crore fund to assist start-ups in the fintech space. The fund named '**IT Innovation Start-up Fund**' will consider assistance of up to Rs.3 crore to a firm registered in India for promoting their business innovations using technology in financial services.

- The government has approved proposal to set up a **Central Marine Police Force** to protect sea, coasts, ports and vital institutions along 7,516-km national coastline. The detailed structure, operations and modalities of the force will be worked out in the coming weeks. The decision to have a central command for Marine Police elicited support from all ministers and officials from across states and Union territories participating in the marathon meeting.

### Arkitika

- The Centre has announced that **non-resident Indians (NRIs) can now open National Pension Scheme (NPS) accounts online**. All that is required is an Aadhaar or PAN card. In addition, NRIs will get to open these NPS accounts on both repatriable and non-repatriable basis. So far, NRIs could only make paper-based applications to banks. Both repatriable and non-repatriable schemes will greatly appeal to NRIs who intend to return to India after their employment abroad, in view of their attractive returns, low cost, flexibility and their being regulated by the PFRDA (Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority). India has the second-largest diaspora in the world, with around 29 million people living in over 200 countries and out of these 25 per cent live in the Gulf countries.
- The **India-Bangladesh waterways transit**, carrying goods from Kolkata, was inaugurated recently in Dhaka. As part of this, the vessel carrying Indian goods consigned for Tripura marked the official transit to India's north-east via the inland waterways of Bangladesh. The opening is part of the **Indo-Bangladesh Protocol** on Inland Water Transit and Trade signed by the Prime Ministers of the two nations last year. The transit would reduce the transportation cost substantially to carry goods from rest of India to country's north-east as the distance reduces from about 1,700 km via Siliguri in north Bengal to about 500 km via Bangladesh.
- Russia's new Project 22220 nuclear-powered icebreaker dubbed "**Arktika**" was recently launched from the Baltic Shipyard in Russia's second-largest city of St. Petersburg. Built at the Baltic Shipyard, which belongs to Russia's United Shipbuilding Corporation, project 22220 is the world's largest and most powerful vessel of its kind. The Project 22220 vessel is 189.5 yards long and 37.1 yards wide. The ship displaces 33,540 metric tons. Fitted with two specifically designed RITM-200 nuclear-power reactors, new vessels of this kind will be able to escort convoys in the Arctic, breaking ice up to 10 feet thick and 13 feet deep.

20.06.2016

- **Willy Mutunga**, ex-Chief Justice of Kenya till now, has been made **Commonwealth Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Maldives**. This has been done at the request of the government of Maldives against the backdrop of the Commonwealth's concern over the political situation in the last few years following the arrest and detention of senior political figures, constriction of space for civil society and the media, and weakening of the separation of powers.
- Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar formally commissioned **India's first three women fighter pilots – Bhawana Kanth, Avani Chaturvedi and Mohana Singh** – along with flight cadets of various branches of the Indian Air Force at the Air Force Academy in Dundigal recently. The three women have cleared the first stage of training and have about 150 hours of flying. After getting their wings as flying officers, they will train for six months on the Advanced Jet Fighter – the British-built Hawk – they will be assigned fighters and their squadrons. In February 2016, President Pranab Mukherjee had announced that all military combat roles will be opened to women in the future.

### Sunway Taihu Light

- Bengaluru's Indian Institute of Science (IISc) is among the **top 30 Asian universities in the 2016 Times Higher Education (THE) Asia University Rankings**. This is the first time an Indian university has made it to the top 30, with **IISc in 27th place**. Eight Indian institutions are among the top 100 on the list and India has the most institutions overall among the top 200 South Asian universities list of THE. The other Indian universities in the top half of the ranking include the Indian Institutes of Technology in Bombay (43rd), Kharagpur (51st), Delhi (60th), Madras (62nd), Roorkee (65th), and Guwahati (joint 80th) and Jadavpur University in joint 84th place. Also, for the first time Singapore took the first two spots with the National University of Singapore and Nanyang Technological University in first and second place, respectively.
- A Chinese supercomputer built using **domestic chip technology** has been declared the world's fastest. The **Sunway TaihuLight** takes the top spot from previous record-holder Tianhe-2 (also located in China), and more than triples the latter's speed. The new number one is capable of performing some 93 quadrillion calculations per second (otherwise known as petaflops) and is roughly five times more powerful than the speediest US system, which is now ranked third worldwide. The TaihuLight is comprised of some 41,000 chips, each with 260 processor cores. This makes for a total of 10.65 million

cores, compared to the 560,000 cores in America's top machine. In terms of memory, it's relatively light on its feet, with just 1.3 petabytes used for the entire machine. It's also unusually energy efficient, drawing just 15.3 megawatts of power — less than the 17.8 megawatts used by the 33-petaflop Tianhe-2. **The previous fastest supercomputer, China's Tianhe-2, was built using US-made Intel processors.**

### Visakhapatnam Port/World Investment Report (UNCTAD)/GLS-5700

- **Visakhapatnam Port has been declared as the second gateway port for Nepal after Kolkata-Haldia.** The movement of traffic-in-transit between Port of Visakhapatnam and Nepal will be in sealed containers and in full rake only and the cost of transshipment will be borne by the consignor/consignee. **Visakhapatnam Port has the deepest container terminal among major ports with permissible draft of 15 metres and LOA up to 320 metres.** Most of the transit cargo of Nepal will be from China. The terminal can act as an ideal gateway for east-bound cargo. Handling of cargo will be advantageous in terms of ocean freight and liner detention, export-import traders say. India and Nepal signed the agreement recently to provide the additional transit facility to Nepal through the Visakhapatnam Port as second gateway port.
- **India has retained its ranking as the tenth-highest recipient of foreign direct investment in 2015,** receiving \$44 billion of investment that year compared to \$35 billion in 2014, according to the United Nations. The World Investment Report 2016 released by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) recently found that India also jumped a place in terms of attractiveness as a business destination in 2015, to sixth place, with 14% of the respondents naming it as their destination of choice. US has occupied the first place.
- The first Phase-1 human clinical trial of a vaccine for the Zika virus is set to begin in the coming weeks, with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) green-lighting it. **The DNA vaccine (GLS-5700)** developed by the U.S.-based Inovio Pharmaceuticals and GeneOne Life Science, South Korea, has already been tested on animals and found to elicit "robust" antibody and T cell responses. The human trial will be carried out on 40 healthy adults to evaluate safety, tolerability and immunogenicity and the interim results are expected before the end of the year. But it may take a couple of years to know if the vaccine works against Zika. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), four of the 14

companies working on a candidate vaccine have reached the preclinical stage. WHO declared Zika as a global public health emergency of international concern in February 2016.

### **FFS/Cartosat-2 Series Satellite**

- The iconic high courts of **Bombay and Madras may soon undergo a change in their nomenclature**. Amid demands, the Centre is mulling changing the names of the two high courts through an Act of Parliament. The Law Ministry has started working on a bill to rename Bombay and Madras high courts to correspond to the present names of the cities. There have been demands to rename the high courts as Mumbai High Court and Chennai High Court after the metros were rechristened in the 1990s. The proposal of the Department of Justice in the Law Ministry is to bring a bill to rename the **two high courts established in the 1860s under the Indian High Court Act, 1861**. The 'Indian High Court Act' of 1861, vested in the Queen of England to issue letters patent to establish high courts of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay.
- The Cabinet has approved the establishment of '**Fund of Funds for Startups**' (FFS) at Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) for contribution to various Alternative Investment Funds (AIF) registered with SEBI which would extend funding support to startups. The fund will be built up over the 14th and 15th Finance Commission cycles to provide a stable and predictable source of funding for startup enterprises and facilitate large scale job creation. The central government has already sanctioned Rs 500 crore for the project in 2015-16, while Rs 600 crore has been earmarked in the 2016-17. Provisions will also be made to grant assistance through gross budgetary Support by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), which will monitor and review performance in line with the 'Start up India Action Plan'.
- Expanding its horizons, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) recently launched 20 satellites through a single rocket, surpassing its 2008 record of launching 10 satellites in a single mission. Besides the primary **Cartosat-2 Series satellite**, the PSLV C-34 rocket launched two satellites from Indian universities and 17 foreign satellites, including one for a Google company. The 725.5-kg **Cartosat-2 series satellite would be for Earth observation and its imagery would be useful for cartographic applications**, urban and rural applications, coastal land use and regulation, and utility management like road networking. In 2014, Russian Dnepr rocket launched a record 37 satellites in a single mission.

### Swachh Bharat Mission – National Parks

- Former Indian test captain **Anil Kumble has been appointed as the head coach of Team India** for one year. This was announced by BCCI recently. Kumble is the first Indian to be appointed full-time India coach since Kapil Dev resigned in September 2000.
- **China has launched its first dark sky reserve for astronomical observation in the Tibetan prefecture of Ngari**, bordering Nepal and India. The reserve covers an area of 2,500 square kilometre and aims to **limit light pollution** by stepping up protection of dark-sky resources for education and tourism development. It was jointly launched by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation and the regional government of Tibet. The reserve will also try to seek accreditation from the International Dark-Sky Association, a non-profit organisation based in the US that is devoted to preserving and protecting the night time environment and dark skies globally. Ngari is among the best sites for astronomical observation on earth, due to its high altitude and large number of cloudless days throughout the year.
- As part of a Swachh Bharat Mission drive, the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests has decided to do away with **garbage bins in 10 prominent wildlife parks** and make visitors take their litter home. This was done because people dropped litter around garbage bins, inviting animals and thus aggravating the man-animal conflict. The parks have been compelled the visitors to arrange for jute bags to collect their trash. The **ten wildlife parks** identified are- *Jim Corbett National Park, Coringa Wildlife Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh; Gir Wildlife Sanctuary and National Park in Gujarat; Kanha Tiger Reserve in Madhya Pradesh; Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra; Flamingo Sanctuary in Maharashtra; Nagarhole Tiger Reserve in Karnataka; Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala; Sariska Tiger Reserve in Rajasthan; and Mudumalai Tiger Reserve in Tamil Nadu.*
- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of a **Protocol amending the Agreement between India and Belgium** for avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. The amendment in the Protocol will broaden the scope of the existing framework of exchange of tax related information between the two countries, which will help curb tax evasion and tax



avoidance. The Protocol will also revise the existing treaty provisions on mutual assistance in collection of taxes.

25.06.2016

- Sri Lankan Parliament has unanimously passed the Right to Information (RTI) bill aimed at restoring transparency and good governance in the country. The RTI bill seeks to give citizens access to public information which is in the possession, custody or control of a public authority.

### Global Fraud Report/Panama canal-Gatun Lake

- The **Global Fraud Report 2015-16** by risk mitigation consultancy Kroll, with the aid of the Economist Intelligence Unit, has found that the perceived prevalence of fraud in **India is the third-highest among all countries** and regions surveyed across six continents. Only Colombia (83%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (84%) surpass India. An overwhelming 80% of companies polled in India said they had been victims of fraud in 2015-16, up from 69% in 2013-14. The report's authors observed that while the incidence of fraud was on the rise globally, a combination of a lack of preventive measures at Indian companies and a poor legal system had resulted in 92% of the respondents saying they had witnessed an increase in exposure to fraud.
- Panama has opened the long-awaited \$US5.4 billion (\$7.2 billion) expansion of its **shipping canal**, completed after nearly a decade of work forecast to boost global trade and improve the 80-kilometre **shortcut between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans**. Chinese merchant ship Cosco became the first ship to use the expanded canal. The Expansion will double the Canal's capacity, having a direct impact on economies of scale and international maritime trade. It will help maintain the Canal's competitiveness and the value of the maritime route through Panama. The original canal has two lanes, each with its own set of locks. The expansion project added a third lane through the construction of lock complexes at each end of the canal. One lock complex is located on the Pacific side, southwest of the existing Miraflores Locks. The other is located east of the existing **Gatun Locks**. Each of these new lock complexes have three consecutive chambers designed to move vessels from sea level to the level of **Gatun Lake** and back down again.

- **Domestic airlines can now import aircraft that are up to 18 years old** into the country with the government amending more than two-decade rules in this regard. The move is expected to provide a fillip for the government's ambitious efforts to boost regional air connectivity as it gives more leeway for operators in expanding their fleet. Till now, aircraft that are more than 15 years old were not allowed to be imported. With the revised norms, pressurised aircraft that are not over 18 years old or those which have not completed 50% of design economic pressurisation cycle can be imported. A pressurised aircraft is one which is equipped to handle cabin pressure at an altitude of above 10,000 feet. The regulations would be applicable for entities having scheduled, non-scheduled and general aviation operations.

### Languages in India and Nihali

- According to an independent study conducted by Bhasha Research Centre, close to 800 languages and dialects exist across India and nearly 300 languages have gone extinct in the country since the time of independence. Census of India surveys found close to 1,600 languages in use in 1961, 108 in 1971 and 122 in 2011. Those spoken by less than 10,000 people were excluded after 1961. The UN Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation has been counting too, and found there are 197 endangered languages in India, with 42 classified as Critically Endangered. Included in the list is Nihali, traced to the pre-Aryan and pre-Munda period.
- New Census data released by the government shows that the median age at the time of marriage has increased across categories of people and genders, a trend that experts say will continue due to the socio-economic changes taking place in the country. The data, released by the Registrar-General and Census Commissioner, show that the median age for men increased to 23.5 at the time of the 2011 Census, from 22.6 as per the 2001 figures. These numbers were 19.2 years and 18.2 years for women in the respective years. The median age for marginal workers increased from 21.8 to 22.5 for men and from 17.6 to 18.7 for women. The reason for the upswing is the increasingly mobile and migratory nature of work in the country. Higher levels of school enrolment may also be the reason for this change.

### Varunastra

- The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) and Royal Civil Service Commission (RCSC), Bhutan. The MoU is aimed at strengthening the existing relationship between RCSC and UPSC. It will facilitate sharing of experience and expertise of both the parties in the area of recruitment. The areas of cooperation include

the sharing of experience and expertise in recruitment and selection of officers, development of professional skills of the officers, use of Information Technology in examination processes and digitization of records among other things.

- Four Indian-Americans, including Google CEO Sunder Pichai, are among 42 US nationals to be honoured with this year's prestigious "Great Immigrants: The Pride of America" award for their inspiring professional accomplishments. The other three Indian-Americans are Hari Sreenivasan, anchor and senior correspondent, PBS NewsHour, Vikram Malhotra Chairman of the Americas, McKinsey & Company and Bharati Mukherjee National, Book Critics Circle Award-winning author.
- Indigenously-built heavyweight anti-submarine torpedo **Varunastra** has been successfully inducted in the navy, making India one of the eight countries to have the capability to design and build such a system. The submarine is developed by Naval Science and Technological Laboratory (NSTL), a premier laboratory of DRDO.

