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IAS EXAM PREPARATION

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#DAILY

CURRENT EVENTS

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GENERAL STUDIES-I

***Paper 1 Topic:** Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.*

PM's gift to the King of Saudi Arabia

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, during his recent visit to Saudi Arabia, gifted His Majesty King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud a gold-plated replica of the **Cheraman Juma Masjid in Kerala**.

- The Prime Minister also visited the **All Women IT and ITES Centre of Tata Consultancy Services in Riyadh** during the tour.

About the Masjid:

Situated in Thrissur district, the Cheraman Juma Masjid is believed to be the **first mosque built in India by Arab traders around 629 AD**, and symbolic of active trade relations between India and Saudi Arabia since ancient times.

- According to oral tradition, **Cheraman Perumal was the Chera King and a contemporary of the Holy Prophet** who went to Arabia and embraced Islam after meeting the Holy Prophet at Mecca.
- Some years later, he sent letters to his relatives and the ruling chieftains of Malabar through his friends Malik bin Dinar and Malik bin Habib who, along with their companions, were then given permission by the local rulers to build the mosque at Kodungallur.
- The mosque has an ancient oil lamp that is always kept burning and believed to be over a thousand years old. People from all religions bring oil for the lamp as an offering.

Sources: pib.

Hindu New Year

Hindu New Year is being welcomed in different parts of the country today with traditional festivities and celebrations.

- The Chaitra Sukladi, Ugadi, Gudi Padava, Navareh, Navroz and Chetti Chand are the same festivals in different names, marking the occasion.

Key facts:

- People of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana use the term Ugadi and Karnataka use the term Yugadi /Ugadi for this festival.
- The people of Maharashtra term the same festival, observed on the same day, Gudi Padwa.
- The Marwari of Rajasthan celebrate the same day as their new year day Thapna.
- The Sindhis, people from Sindh, celebrate the same day as Cheti Chand, which is the beginning of their calendar year.
- The Manipuris also celebrate their New Year as Sajibu Nongma Panba on the same day.
- The Hindus of Kashmir call it as Navreh.
- The Hindus of Bali and Indonesia also celebrate their new year on the same day as Nyepi.

Sources: pib, wiki.

Buddhist inscription found in Gadag district

A new inscription that sheds more light on the history of **Buddhism in Karnataka** has been discovered at Lakkundi village in Gadag district in Karnataka.

- It is for the first time that an inscription related to Buddhism has been found in Lakkundi, a place of antiquarian interest with nearly 50 temples, 101 stepped wells and a large number of inscriptions spread over the Chalukya, Kalachuri, Seuna and Hoysala periods.

About the inscription:

The inscription's lower portion has been severed off. The inscription makes salutations to Lord Buddha, 'dhamma', 'sangha' and Tara Bhagavati. It also admires Hoysala ruler Veeraballala II and others.

- There is also a mention about a merchant but that part has been lost. There are possibilities of the inscription speaking about donations to a Buddhist monastery located at Lakkundi.
- Besides, it was among a handful of inscriptions making specific reference to the **Tara Bhagavati cult of the Vajrayana Buddhism** which was in vogue here till 12th century. The period of this inscription could be assigned to the regime of **Hoysala king Veeraballala II (1173–1220 CE)**.
- Discovery of this inscription establishes the existence and popularity of Buddhism in this part of the State. In all possibility, a Buddhist monastery existed in this village or in the vicinity.

Sources: the hindu.

'Pulakeshin's victory over Harsha was in 618 AD'

Researchers from the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (BORI) claim to have fixed the **date of Emperor Harshavardhan's defeat to the Chalukya King Pulakeshin II** by decoding a copper plate. Accordingly, they have fixed the date at **618 AD**.

- The copper plate also records the grant of 50 '**nivarthanas**' (a unit of land) by Pulakeshin from the village Brahmana-Vataviya to a Vedic scholar, Nagasharma.

Background:

Pulakeshin, who ruled from the Chalukyan capital of Badami, challenged Harsha's conquests. The former had established himself as '**lord paramount**' of the south, as Harsha had of the north.

- Unwilling to tolerate the existence of a powerful rival in the south, Harsha had marched from Kanauj with a huge force. The battle was fought primarily with elephants, on the banks of the Narmada.

- After the defeat, Harshavardha was compelled to accept the river as the demarcation and retire from the battlefield after losing most of his elephant force.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 1 Topic: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.

Canada to offer formal apology for Komagata Maru tragedy

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau will offer an apology in the House of Commons on May 18 almost 102 years after the **Komagata Maru incident**, where the government of the day turned away more than 300 Indians seeking a better life in Canada.

About the incident:

A Japanese steam ship named Komagata maru, filled with Indian immigrants was forced to return to India on September 29, 1914 from Canada when the passengers were not allowed to land in Canada (only 24 out of 352 passengers were admitted to Canada). This was due to the **Continuous passage act** enacted by the Canadian government to check the immigrants and particularly from India.

- In this incident, 19 Canada-bound Indian immigrants were killed in police firing and many were arrested by the British police.
- This incident had also made the Ghadar Party proclaim war and inspired thousands of Indian immigrants to come back and organize an armed rebellion against British imperialism in India.

Sources: the hindu.

Kohinoor given away voluntarily to British: Govt.

The centre has told the Supreme Court that the **Kohinoor was given away voluntarily to British**. This was stated by the centre during a hearing of a petition filed by an NGO, on whether the government intends to make a bid to get back the Kohinoor.

What the centre says?

The heirs of Maharaja Ranjit Singh gave the Kohinoor to the British as voluntary compensation to cover the expenses of the Anglo-Sikh Wars.

Way ahead:

The court has asked the petitioner to file a comprehensive affidavit covering all possible dimensions of the matter after consulting the Ministry of External Affairs and the Union Ministry of Culture.

Background:

The return of Kohinoor diamond to India has been a long-standing demand, with many claiming that the diamond was taken forcibly. The fight to get back the diamond has been ongoing since India's independence.

The Indian government, believing the gem was rightfully theirs, made the first demand for the return of the Kohinoor diamond soon after independence. A second request followed in 1953, the year of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. Each time, the British government refuted the claims, saying that ownership was non-negotiable.

In 2000, several members of the Indian Parliament signed a letter calling for the diamond to be given back to India, claiming it was taken illegally. British officials said that a variety of claims meant it was impossible to establish the gem's original owner.

Who owns the diamond, anyway?

It is not just India that is claiming ownership of the diamond; the list includes Pakistan and Afghanistan, too.

Key facts:

- The diamond belonged to the Sikh Ruler, Maharaja Ranjit Singh.
- It has been in British possession for more than 150 years.
- It is now priced at 100 million euros.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 1 Topic: Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism.

Elderly women outnumber men, says NSS report

The latest National Sample Survey report on 'Health in India' notes that the share of 60-plus women is higher than that of men in both rural and urban areas.

Key facts:

- India has more elderly women than men with the sex ratio of the country's 60-plus population recorded at 1,033 women per 1,000 men in the 2011 Census, up from 1,029 in the 2001 census.
- The sex ratio in the country had shot up from 930 in the 1991 Census to 1,029 in 2001. However, the National Sample Survey in 2004 recorded a drop in this ratio to 999, before it went up again in 2011.
- Among rural areas, the highest sex ratio (1,289) was reported in Gujarat and in urban Assam it was recorded as 1,476.

- The share of elderly women (per 1,000 population) in both urban and rural areas is higher than those of men.
- The overall proportion of the elderly in India, home to the world's largest youth population, too has gone up. An estimated 87.6 million aged people live in India, about 69% of them in rural parts. Their magnitude in terms of number or in terms of share to total population is found to rise gradually over the decades. In 1981, the share of the elderly population per 1,000 in rural India was 68, which went up to 88 in 2011. In urban India, the elderly share was recorded at 54 per 1,000 in 1981, going up to 81 in the 2011 Census. But about 50% of the elderly population is totally economically dependent on others.

Concerns:

Experts describe the pattern as **feminisation of ageing**, which in the context of a developing country like India, brings with it health and financial concerns.

- According to the Health in India report, around 70% elderly women in both urban and rural India are economically dependent on others. And around 35% of women aged over 80 are immobile.
- Financial constraints are further compounded by illnesses of old age. The survey found a high proportion of the elderly battling chronic illnesses and around 8% of the elderly, particularly those aged over 80, confined to their beds.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 1 Topic:** Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.*

Spot fine for open defecation, states told

The urban development ministry has suggested state governments amend their municipal laws to incorporate provisions for spot fine, penalty or cleaning charge from people caught defecating in open. It has also suggested similar changes in the state laws to fine people caught littering.

- This was stated by the ministry in its recent circular issued to chief secretaries of all states.

Suggestions:

- The ministry has asked them to enforce such provisions in municipal wards that are declared open defecation free (ODF) and litter free.
- The ministry has asked all state governments to ensure that such provisions cover all municipal wards by October 2018.

- It has advised that the municipal commissioners or any authorised officer can levy the fine, penalty or charge from violators.

Key facts:

Rajasthan has already notified the mechanism for levying such penalty or carrying charges for littering in public places. For example, Rs 200 fine for peeing in public places, Rs 1,500 per day for pasting posters in public buildings or monuments.

Sources: toi.

Paper 1 Topic: *Important Geophysical phenomena.*

Above normal monsoon

India's official weather forecasting agency, IMD, has said that the monsoon is likely to be “**above normal**” and likely to be 106% of the average of 89 cm.

- Monsoon rains within 96% and 104 % per cent of this average are considered “normal” in the terminology of the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

Several reasons underlie the IMD's optimism:

A major reason for the good outlook this year was the weakening of El Nino, which is expected to dissipate during or before the monsoon season. El Nino, an abnormal warming of surface waters in the east-central Pacific that drives weather changes across the globe, is seen to have depressed the last two monsoons in India.

Another meteorological phenomenon known as a positive Indian Ocean Dipole — where the western portions of the Indian Ocean are warmer than the east and thereby push rain-bearing clouds over India — is also likely to form during the middle of the monsoon season, according to the IMD.

Sources: the hindu.

Heat wave warning for Telangana

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a **heat wave warning** for the next two days for Telangana.

- It has warned that heat wave conditions were likely to prevail over parts of Hyderabad, Nizamabad, Karimnagar, Rangareddy, Khammam and Nalgonda districts.
- According to IMD, the State would have day temperatures hovering between 40 degree Celsius and 45 degree Celsius.

Heat Wave:

A heat wave is a combination of temperature and humidity for a prolonged period. It is an extended period of very high summer temperature with the potential to adversely affect communities.

- High temperature are often accompanied by high humidity, that the body cannot tolerate are defined as extreme heat. A heat wave is a very dangerous situation and major threat to lives.
- According to IMD, Heat Wave occurs when temperatures are greater than 4.5 degree Celsius above what's usual for the region.

Sources: the hindu.

GENERAL STUDIES-II

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

SC can't be bypassed on inter-State disputes: Haryana

The Haryana government has invoked judicial precedents in the Cauvery river water sharing dispute case involving Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka to submit in the Supreme Court that **no State Assembly can pass a law to negate the apex court's constitutional powers to adjudicate and decide inter-State disputes.**

- This has been stated by Haryana during a hearing of the Presidential Reference on the validity of the Punjab Termination of Agreements Act of 2004 — which has jeopardised the **Sutlej-Yamuna Link Canal project.**
- The Haryana government argues that a law passed by the State legislature to circumvent or render infructuous a Supreme Court verdict is a clear encroachment by the lawmakers into the judiciary's terrain.

Background:

The Supreme Court, in March 2016, ordered status quo on the land meant for the Sutlej-Yamuna Link canal after Haryana alleged attempts by Punjab to alter its use by levelling it.

- This issue escalated when the Punjab assembly passed the Punjab Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal (Rehabilitation and Re-vesting of proprietary Rights) Bill, 2016 to de-notify the land acquired to build the canal in Punjab.
- Haryana argues the Bill, awaiting the Governor's assent, would negate the Supreme Court's 2004 decree calling for unhindered construction of the canal which will give Haryana its share of water.

Controversy surrounding the Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal:

The creation of Haryana from the old (undivided) Punjab in 1966 threw up the problem of giving Haryana its share of river waters. Punjab was opposed to sharing waters of the Ravi and Beas with Haryana, citing riparian principles, and arguing that it had no water to spare.

- However, Centre, in 1976, issued a notification allocating to Haryana 3.5 million acre feet (MAF) out of undivided Punjab's 7.2 MAF.
- To enable Haryana to use its share of the waters of the Sutlej and its tributary Beas, a canal linking the Sutlej with the Yamuna, cutting across the state, was planned. In April, 1982, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi ceremonially dug the ground at Kapoori village in Patiala district for the construction of the 214-km Sutlej-Yamuna Link (or SYL) canal, 122 km of which was to be in Punjab, and 92 km in Haryana.
- A tripartite agreement was also negotiated between Punjab, Haryana, and Rajasthan in this regard.
- However, following the protests in Punjab, the Punjab Assembly passed The Punjab Termination of Agreements Act, 2004, terminating its water-sharing agreements, and thus jeopardising the construction of SYL in Punjab.

Sources: the hindu.

Insult to God to have unauthorised places of worship: SC

The Supreme Court has expressed anguish over inaction of authorities for allowing the existence of unauthorised places of worship on roads and pavements across the country, saying "it is an insult to God."

- The court has warned chief secretaries of states and Union territories of serious consequences if they did not comply with its orders directing removal of religious structures which came up on pavements and public land after September 2011.

2011 order of the court:

The court, in September, 2011, had said that it had undertaken the exercise primarily to ensure that "henceforth no public land, public park or public street is encroached for constructing religious structures".

- All collectors and district magistrates in the country were directed to meticulously ensure that no further land is encroached in their respective districts. The district magistrates and collectors had to ensure that no commercial activity is carried out from unauthorised structures on public land.

- The district magistrates were also directed to send their reports every month to the chief secretary of the state regarding fresh encroachment and status of existing unauthorised structures. The chief secretaries, in turn, were to file affidavits before the court once in three months on regular basis.
- However, none of the states had complied with its interim orders and were taking the matter lightly by seeking time to file even the court-mandated quarterly status reports.

Why be concerned about this?

Individuals or groups occupying public spaces by setting up places of worship is a rampant problem everywhere in India. In this regard, it is most welcome that the Supreme Court is taking such a tough stance on this issue.

- However, disheartening is the lack of enthusiasm among governments to act against those grabbing land in this manner. Every case of such grabbing allowed to succeed has the effect of emboldening many more to follow suit.

What needs to be done?

Governments should act promptly and sternly to signal loud and clear that such encroachment on public spaces will no longer be tolerated.

Sources: the hindu.

President's Decision is subject to Judicial Review

The Uttarakhand high court has observed that the **legitimacy of the President's decision to suspend the Uttarakhand assembly is subject to judicial review as even he can go wrong.**

Background:

The court was responding to an argument by additional solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing on behalf of the Centre, who contended that the President relies on his political wisdom in many matters.

About President's rule:

What's in the constitution?

The **Article 356** of the constitution which focuses on the failure of the Constitutional machinery of the State is often termed as the President's rule. There are various reasons for which President's rule can be imposed on a State. The failure of the State government to function as per the constitution is the first step towards this.

- Other factors include the loss of majority, break down of law and order, indecisive outcome of elections, no alternate claimant to form the government, insurgency, defections and break-up of coalition.
- It can be imposed initially for a period of six months.

What happens to the legislative assembly?

When President's rule is imposed, the assembly is either dissolved or kept in suspended animation.

Shift in role:

The state comes under the direct control of the Central government. The authority shifts from the Chief Minister and the council of ministers to the Governor. The Governor gets the power to appoint civil servants and some administrators to assist him who will take on the role and responsibilities of the Council of Ministers.

Sources: the hindu.

President's Rule set aside by the HC

The Uttarakhand High Court has quashed the order of the Central government that had put the State under President's Rule on March 27.

What the court said?

Coming down heavily on the Centre for the March 27 proclamation under Art 356, the court said the **imposition of the President's rule was contrary to the law laid down by the Supreme Court.**

What next?

Following this, the Harish Rawat government will be reinstated and will be asked to prove majority in the state assembly.

Options before the Centre:

Move to Supreme Court challenging HC's order.

Background:

In March, just one day before Mr Rawat was scheduled to prove his majority in the legislature, the Centre declared that it would govern Uttarakhand through Governor KK Paul.

Sources: the hindu.

Supreme Court stays Uttarakhand high court verdict

The Supreme Court has revived central rule in Uttarakhand by staying the hard-hitting high court verdict until April 27 on the technical ground that the **written judgment wasn't available**.

Implications:

The decision provides the Centre a breather from the withering criticism for alleged misuse of Article 356.

What else has the court said?

The court has forbidden the government from revoking Central rule in Uttarakhand without informing it.

Way ahead:

The Supreme Court has asked the Uttarakhand high court to provide the parties with the written judgment and has posted the Centre's appeal for a detailed hearing. The court has also indicated that it will examine the issues on merit and determine whether the interim order staying the HC verdict is to be continued or not.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.*

Coterminous LS, State polls not feasible: Quraishi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's advocacy of making Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls coterminous has set off a debate on whether, in fact, this move is at all feasible or practically implementable.

Why this is needed?

It is necessary due the **administrative issues** arising out of frequent and successive elections in various states. Also, the way the electoral calendar of the country is set up, there are polls every year in some part of the country or the other. With the **Model Code of Conduct coming into force in one State or the other and even for the Centre in some cases, this leads to administrative lethargy, and issues.**

Why this is not feasible?

Constitutionally it will be impossible to implement this mandate. According to this mandate, if, for example, the central government falls, all state assemblies have to be dissolved too. This would, however, disturb the mandate of those governments.

What's the way ahead?

Solutions should be found to the specific worries with regard to electoral calendar of the country and its effect on administration and the financial health of political parties. All of these issues can be tackled through electoral reforms, without getting into Constitutional matters.

What has the expert committee said?

A *parliamentary standing committee of Law and Justice* that had been asked to go into the issue in detail had recommended a **two-phase election schedule to make the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls coterminous**.

- In its recommendations, the committee suggests a two-phase poll, with States divided into two groups, one for which elections would be in the middle of the current Lok Sabha (16 States) and another where elections will be held at the end of the current Lok Sabha (19 States).
- By this process, at least half the States in India will have polls alongside Lok Sabha polls, and the rest in the middle of that term.

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.*

Legal system too expensive for most: Study

According to the nationwide “**Access to Justice**” survey, legal system in India is too expensive to access for most citizens in the country.

- The survey was conducted across 305 locations in 24 States between November 2015 and February 2016 to hear the voice and explore the profile of people making use of judicial system in India.

Important observations made:

- 90% of the litigants earn less than Rs. 3 lakh per annum and the median expected cost of litigation for this group is around Rs. 16,000.
- For most, the judicial system of our country is shut because they cannot access lawyers in the first place and the quality of legal aid is poor.

- Though legal aid aims to provide free legal services to the weaker sections who otherwise can't afford it, the survey found that just 1% of the respondents make use of this service.
- Accountability of legal aid lawyers towards their clients and lack of communication between the two are serious concerns plaguing the system.
- The financial barrier is not just limited to accessing courts. The main reason individuals could not meet the conditions of bail was found to be lack of funds. Also, around half the litigants cited expense as a major deterrent for filing appeals in the High Court if their cases were not resolved in their favour.

Sources: the hindu.

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

President nominated six members to Rajya Sabha

The President of India has nominated Shri Swapan Das Gupta, Shri Navjot Singh Sidhu, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, Shri Narendra Jadhav, Sh. Suresh Gopi and Ms. Mary Kom to the Rajya Sabha.

- 12 people can be recommended to the Upper House. As of now, there are seven vacancies among these 12, for which six names have been announced, and one kept in abeyance.

Nominations to the Upper House:

The government recommends names of people having “special knowledge or practical experience in literature, science, art and social service”.

- As per Article 80 of the Indian constitution, members are nominated by the President to the Upper House on the recommendation of the government.
- The government recommends members in this category at anytime and it is not bound to an electoral cycle like the other seats.

Sources: the hindu.

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

CSIR Features in the Thomson Reuters Top 50 Indian Innovator Companies and Research Organizations for the Year 2015

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) features in the Thomson Reuters top 50 Indian Innovator companies and research organizations for the year 2015.

- The Top 50 Indian Innovators lead the country in innovation output. They are a group of businesses and research institutions that develop, recognize and protect great ideas and use it to their full potential.
- CSIR was also the recipient of the Thomson Reuters India Innovation Awards 2013 in the category of Hi-Tech Academic & Government.

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: pib.

Bank Board Bureau's first meeting discusses stressed assets

The first meeting of the Bank Board Bureau (BBB) was recently held.

- During the meeting, board members discussed about non-performing assets (NPAs), or bad loans, as well as strategies for recapitalising banks.
- Filling up of vacancies of directors and non-executive chairmen was also discussed at the meeting.

Background:

Taking the first step towards a holding company structure for state-run banks, the government, in August last, announced the setting up of the BBB.

About the Bureau:

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

- BBB is an **autonomous body**.

- The bureau will have three ex-officio members and three expert members, in addition to the Chairman.

What it does?

- The Bureau is mandated to play a critical role in reforming the troubled public sector banks by recommending appointments to leadership positions and boards in those banks and advise them on ways to raise funds and how to go ahead with mergers and acquisitions.
- It will constantly engage with the boards of all 22 public sector banks to formulate appropriate strategies for their growth and development.
- They will also constantly engage with the Board of Directors of all the public sector banks to formulate appropriate strategies for their growth and development.
- The bureau will search and select heads of public sector banks and help them develop differentiated strategies of capital raising plans to innovative financial methods and instruments.
- It would also be responsible for selection of non-executive chairman and non-official directors on the boards.
- Besides, the body will also steer strategy discussion on consolidation based on the requirement.

Sources: toi.

FIPB clears FDI proposals worth Rs.505 crore

FIPB has cleared 10 foreign direct investment (FDI) proposals worth Rs.505 crore, including that of Singapore-based Helix Investment.

About FIPB:

The Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), housed in the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, is an inter-ministerial body, responsible for processing of FDI proposals and making recommendations for Government approval.

Main tasks:

- It considers and recommends foreign direct investment (FDI) which does not come under the automatic route.
- It provides a single window clearance for proposals on FDI in India.

FIPB comprises of the following Secretaries to the Government of India:

- Secretary to Government, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of **Finance** – Chairperson
- Secretary to Government, Department of **Industrial Policy & Promotion**, Ministry of **Commerce** & Industry
- Secretary to Government, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- Secretary to Government, Economic Relations, Ministry of **External Affairs**
- Secretary to Government, Ministry of **Overseas Indian Affairs**.

Sources: the hindu.

Warrant against I&B Secretary

In an unprecedented move, the Press Council of India (PCI) recently took a unanimous view to serve I&B Secretary Sunil Arora with a bailable arrest warrant, setting the government on a collision course with the Council.

Why?

Mr. Arora had questioned the powers of the Council to serve summons directing him to appear before its members.

Background:

PCI had several issues to be discussed and had issued notices to the Secretary on this matter as is the practise. He chose not to appear and questioned the jurisdiction of the Council to issue notices

About PCI:

The Press Council of India is a **statutory body** in India that governs the conduct of the print media.

- Presently, the Council functions under the **Press Council Act 1978** which arose from the recommendations of the Second Press Commission of India (1978).
- The Press Council is a quasi-judicial body which acts as a watchdog of the press. It adjudicates the complaints against and by the press for violation of ethics and for violation of the freedom of the press respectively.

Sources: the hindu.

PFRDA may regulate unregulated pension funds

The **Department of Financial Services (DFS)**, which functions under the finance ministry, is examining a proposal to bring all unregulated retirement funds under the purview of the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA).

- DFS is looking at forming a panel to look into the matter and study the scale of unregulated superannuation funds in the country to protect subscribers' interest.
- The idea is basically to reduce the grey areas and close down the regulatory gaps. However, the matter is complex as multiple ministries are involved.

Background:

PFRDA has been pitching that all unregulated pension funds in the country be regulated. Under the proposed PFRDA Act, the pension regulator is responsible for promoting the pension fund industry and protecting consumers by supervising these funds. Currently, it is responsible only for regulating the National Pension System (NPS) and the Atal Pension Yojana.

- A number of companies extend superannuation schemes to employees through insurance companies or set up their own PF trusts. Many of these trusts are under the ambit of Sebi, Irdai or EPFO. They all seek tax exemptions from the Central Board of Direct Taxation (CBDT).
- PFRDA has been trying to accumulate information on existing pension and superannuation schemes being run by various entities and details of their regulatory jurisdiction, supervisory mechanism, investment guidelines, risk management strategies, number of subscribers and assets under their management.

PFRDA:

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is a pension regulatory authority which was established in 2003. It is authorized by Ministry of Finance, Department of Financial Services.

- It is also responsible for appointment of various intermediate agencies such as Central Record Keeping Agency (CRA), Pension Fund Managers, Custodian, NPS Trustee Bank, etc.

Sources: bs.

[Are there no rights violations in Union Territories? , SC asks Centre](#)

In what could be a first step towards Union territories getting better access to justice, the Supreme Court has questioned why people in these central government regulated regions were to come to Delhi to file their complaints regarding human rights violations.

What the Centre says?

The Centre has told the Supreme Court that Delhi cannot have a State Human Rights Commission as it is a Union Territory and not a State. It says, "Delhi has to continue without an SHRC until Parliament amends the law."

Background:

The court's question came on a contempt petition filed against the government for failing to set up a state human rights commission (SHRC) in Delhi. The apex court, in a verdict last year, had directed Delhi, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh to set up SHCs in their respective states within six months. The petition was filed for the alleged violation of this verdict.

- It should be noted here that Delhi accounts for the second largest human rights violation cases, after Uttar Pradesh, with the National Human Rights Commission.

State Human Rights Commission:

The **Protection of Human Rights Act of 1993** provides for the creation of not only the National Human Rights Commission but also a State Human Rights Commission at the state level.

Jurisdiction:

A State Human Rights Commission can inquire into violation of human rights only in respect of subjects mentioned in the State List (List-II) and the Concurrent List (List-III) of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. However, if any such case is already being inquired into by the National Human Rights Commission or any other Statutory Commission, then the State Human Rights Commission does not inquire into that case.

Composition:

- The State Human Rights Commission is a multi-member body consisting of a chairperson and two members.
- The chairperson should be a retired Chief Justice of a High Court and members should be a serving or retired judge of a High Court or a District Judge in the state with a minimum of seven years experience as District Judge and a person having knowledge or practical experience with respect to human rights.
- The chairperson and members are appointed by the Governor on the recommendations of a committee consisting of the chief minister as its head, the speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the state home minister and the leader of the opposition in the Legislative Assembly.
- In the case of a state having Legislative Council, the chairman of the Council and the leader of the opposition in the Council would also be the members of the committee.
- A sitting judge of a High Court or a sitting District Judge can be appointed only after consultation with the Chief Justice of the High Court of the concerned state.

Term:

- The chairperson and members hold office for a term of five years or until they attain the age of 70 years, whichever is earlier.
- After their tenure, the chairperson and members are not eligible for further employment under a state government or the Central government.

Appointment and removal:

- Although the chairperson and members of a State Human Rights Commission are appointed by the governor, they can be removed only by the President (and not by the governor).
- The President can remove them on the same grounds and in the same manner as he can remove the chairperson or a member of the National Human Rights Commission.

Sources: the hindu.

FSSAI expansion plans shelved by government

The plan to expand the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** is proposed to be shelved by the government.

- In contrast, the FSSAI is expected to wind up its regional offices and leave enforcement of safety laws to state governments.
- With the Rs 800 crore support to states under the central scheme being shelved, it has also been recommended to amend existing regulations, allowing state officials to monitor food safety as an additional duty and not necessarily on a full-time basis.
- Also, instead of setting up government labs to test food samples, as was previously planned, FSSAI is expected to depend on private labs.

Background:

In 2014, the government had mooted a draft cabinet note for a Rs 1,750 crore-central scheme for strengthening of FSSAI, e-governance, food safety surveillance and expansion of states' capacity.

About FSSAI:

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has been established under **Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006** which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.

- It was created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.

- **Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.**
- The Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) are appointed by Government of India.
- The Chairperson is in the rank of Secretary to Government of India.

Important functions performed by the authority:

- Framing of Regulations to lay down the Standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food and specifying appropriate system of enforcing various standards thus notified.
- Laying down mechanisms and guidelines for accreditation of certification bodies engaged in certification of food safety management system for food businesses.
- Laying down procedure and guidelines for accreditation of laboratories and notification of the accredited laboratories.
- To provide scientific advice and technical support to Central Government and State Governments in the matters of framing the policy and rules in areas which have a direct or indirect bearing of food safety and nutrition.
- Collect and collate data regarding food consumption, incidence and prevalence of biological risk, contaminants in food, residues of various, contaminants in foods products, identification of emerging risks and introduction of rapid alert system.
- Creating an information network across the country so that the public, consumers, Panchayats etc receive rapid, reliable and objective information about food safety and issues of concern.
- Provide training programmes for persons who are involved or intend to get involved in food businesses.

Sources: bs.

NPPA caps prices of another 50 drugs

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has capped the prices of 50 drugs and revised the prices of four others.

- This is **part of the new drug pricing control order**, notified on March 14, which effectively brings 200 more drug formulations under regulation.
- NPPA is also planning to cap the prices of 40 other drugs, for which it has asked all the companies to provide requisite information by May 10.

Background:

In December 2015, while issuing a new National List of Essential Medicines (NLEM), the government had added 106 and removed 70 medicines from the earlier one of 2011, expanding the list to 376 from 348 earlier. **Whenever there is a new NLEM, the government has to issue a new Drug Price Control Order and NPPA needs to set their ceiling prices subsequently.**

Based on the new NLEM, the government on March 14 notified the Drugs (Price Control) Amendment Order, 2016. It has 820 formulations. There were 628 formulations under the DPCO of 2013, notified in the wake of the NLEM of 2011.

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: bs.

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

NHRC notice on 'go-slow' promise

The National Human Rights Commission has issued notices to the commerce and health ministries over reports that India has reassured the US-India Business Council to take a restrained approach in handing out licences to produce cheaper versions of drugs patented with the American firms.

- Taking cognisance of the issue through media reports, the commission has observed that the step will deny the people of India access to generic medicines at affordable prices.

Background:

The NHRC notice comes after reports that came in March that the United States-India Business Council (USIBC) had been verbally assured that India's patent offices would take a restrained approach in handing out licences to produce cheaper, generic versions of drugs patented by American companies. It had also been reported that at least two applications for CLs to domestically produce generic versions of drugs patented in the U.S. were rejected in India last year.

- The USTR has placed India on its "priority watch list" for two years now, saying its patent laws favour the local drug industry in an unfair manner.

Way ahead:

The Commission has sought reports within two weeks from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as well as of Health. In the notice, the NHRC states that the reported verbal assurances raise questions on issues that impinge on the right to health of citizens in India.

- The notice points out that if the government, by invoking the provisions of the Indian Patents Act, grants CLs to manufacture particular drugs, that would increase access to affordable generic versions of the same drugs, bringing solace to thousands.
- The commission has also observed that providing an affordable healthcare system is a basic and bounden duty of any government.

All about Compulsory licenses:

Compulsory licenses are generally defined as "authorizations permitting a third party to make, use, or sell a patented invention without the patent owner's consent."

- Under Indian Patent Act, 1970, the provision with regard to compulsory licensing is specifically given under Chapter XVI. The conditions which need to be fulfilled in order for a compulsory licence to be granted are also laid down under Sections 84 and 92 of the Act.
- Under Section 84 (1) of the Indian Patent Act, any person may request a compulsory license if, after three years from the date of the grant of a patent, the needs of the public to be covered by the invention have not been satisfied; the invention is not available to the public at an

affordable price; or the patented invention is not “worked in,” or manufactured in the country, to the fullest extent possible.

Sources: the hindu.

Government backs verdict denying AMU minority status

The government has backed out of challenging an Allahabad High Court order denying the historic Aligarh Muslim University the minority status.

- The government has made it clear in the Supreme Court that the government is convinced that the 1967 Constitution Bench judgment, which had held that AMU was not “established” by Muslims, still held sway.

Background:

The **Azeez Basha versus Union of India** verdict of the Supreme Court had denied AMU protection under **Article 30 of the Constitution**. *Article 30 provides minority communities the fundamental right to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice.* The verdict was criticised as AMU was not even a party to or heard in that case.

In 1981, Parliament restored the minority status to the university. But the Allahabad High Court in January 2006 struck down the provision of the AMU (Amendment) Act, 1981, according minority status to the university. This order was challenged in the Supreme Court by the UPA government. For detailed analysis, please visit: <http://www.insightsonindia.com/2016/01/25/the-big-picture-minority-status-to-universities-is-it-necessary/>.

Sources: the hindu.

‘Capital punishment rose by 54% in 2015’

Amnesty International (AI), in its latest Death Penalty Report 2015-16, has said that at least 1,634 people were executed by 25 countries last year alone.

Highlights of the latest report:

- The report notes that these numbers show an alarming 54% increase over the previous year. Significantly, the rise also represents the maximum number the group has recorded in a single year since 1989.
- Most executions take place in China, where such data remains a state secret. Barring information from Beijing, the Asia-Pacific region saw 367 people subjected to the death penalty — more than a ten-fold rise from 2014. Pakistan alone accounted for 326 of them.

- West Asia and North Africa saw a 26% rise in executions, even if there was no addition to the eight countries that resorted to the punishment in 2014. While Iran accounted for 82% of executions in the region, for Saudi Arabia, the total rose by 76% over 2014.
- For the seventh year running, the U.S. remained the lone country in the Americas to have executed convicts. But the numbers were the lowest since 1991.
- Four more countries abolished the death penalty for all crimes in 2015, taking the tally of abolitionist states to 102.

Sources: the hindu.

India launches skill standards

With an aim to align skill standards which are recognized globally, the government has launched Transnational Skill Standards in India.

Details:

- The Transnational Standards will highlight the gaps in Indian Standards against the UK standards. To cover the gaps, those intending to migrate, will undergo 'bridge training'.
- These standards in skill development are benchmarked to United Kingdom across 82 identified job roles. The Ministry has chosen UK standards to benchmark Indian Skills standards since all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries recognize UK skill certification.
- The Further Education Colleges (FE) of the United Kingdom will partner with Indian Training Providers to impart training on bridge courses. These Colleges will set up Skill Academies of Excellences in the identified sectors in India.
- The training will be provided in several economic activities including agriculture, life science, healthcare, capital goods, textiles, hospitality, information technology, etc.

Benefits of these standards:

- Transnational Skill Standards will support international mobility of Indian workforce and also prepare them to work in international companies having their operations in the country.
- These standards are expected to bring more quality in vocational education which will open more avenues for employment across countries for the youth.

Sources: pib.

Road to Smart Cities not smooth

According to 'Reforms to Accelerate the Development of India's Smart Cities', a joint report by World Economic Forum and PwC, there are challenges limiting private sector participation in urban development projects, and institutional, business-environment and sector-specific reforms are required to enhance private participation.

Important observations made by the Report:

- The problems in the business environment stem from archaic bureaucratic processes, where obtaining licences and approvals takes a long time, and land acquisition is fraught with delays and uncertainties. The dispute resolution system also adds to businesses' costs.
- In most cases, when an urban development project becomes involved in a dispute, activities are stalled, as are vendor payments. With poor cost recovery and high legal costs, companies engaged in disputes find it difficult to sustain their activities.
- ULBs (urban local bodies) will play a crucial role in implementing the urban rejuvenation programmes, but they lack the resources to execute the programmes.
- Also, city governments are the least-prepared to execute the programmes from among all the stakeholders, which include the national government, state governments, the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academic institutions.
- The report highlights the paucity of funds which urban local bodies are facing. The revenue collected by ULBs in India is less than 0.9% of the gross domestic product, significantly less than that of Brazil (7.4%) and South Africa (6%).
- The report also highlights sector-specific problems, such as water management, where around 50% of water production is lost due to theft or leakages during the distribution process, the lack of metering, and low user charges.
- There are other infrastructural issues plaguing India's urban centres, such as the unavailability of 100% power, the poor quality of roads, and the paucity of social infrastructure in healthcare, and safety and security.

Way ahead:

- Reforms are needed in the areas of land acquisition, dispute resolution, permitting processes, information availability and procurement processes to accelerate the development of smart cities.
- Collaboration among multiple administrative entities is necessary if smart city projects are to be completed within budget and timeframe.

- For ULBs to function independently, the devolution of power to determine and collect user charges and local taxes, along with capacity development, are necessary. They also need to streamline internal processes by adopting e-governance and by making data-driven decisions.
- Single-window systems that ease the permitting process will accelerate project execution, reduce cost and time overrun, and improve intra- and inter-departmental collaboration.
- For sectors that deal with physical infrastructure, reforms will be required to establish independent regulators, ensure metering, develop skilled resources, enforce collections (of user charges and taxes) from large defaulters and adopt integrated planning.

Sources: the hindu.

Supply of look-alike drugs in Kerala hospitals to end

The Kerala Medical Services Corporation Limited (KMSCL) has decided to stop procuring look-alike medicines to government hospitals and dispensaries in the State.

Why?

KMSCL has initiated measures to stop the procurement of look-alike medicines in the wake of complaints of wrong usage and confusion, reported from different parts of the State.

- Several medicines meant for critical health issues were wrongly administered to other patients as the medicines looked similar.
- Various civil society groups had also raised concerns over the situation that put the lives of people, including children, at risk in the State. Following this, the doctors had demanded withdrawal of all look-alike medicines.

KMSCL, the government company that procures all essential medicines for government hospitals, will no longer accept medicines with the same label.

What now?

KMSCL has now included a clause in its tender which says labels and colours of all medicines should be different. Manufacturers failing to comply with this will invite a penalty of five per cent of the total value of the drugs in question and its rejection too.

Sources: the hindu.

Maharashtra Legislative Council clears Bill to regulate dance bars

The Maharashtra Legislative Council has unanimously cleared the Bill to regulate dance bars in Mumbai and rest of Maharashtra.

- Following its clearance in the Upper House, the Bill will now be introduced in the Assembly.

As per the bill:

- Dance bars have not been banned but stringent conditions have been imposed to ensure that no owner comes forward to set up a dance bar.
- All performances will have to be approved by the censor board for theatre performances.
- Approximately five feet distance must be maintained between customers and dancers.
- Performers cannot be touched by anyone and neither money nor gifts can be showered on them. Podium will be isolated by a three-foot wall.
- Restaurant and dancing area should be kept separate by building a wall and liquor will not be served where the performance is on.
- No more than four dancers can perform on a platform at a time.
- Performance cannot be vulgar. However, the bill does not specify the definition of “vulgar.”
- All dancers should be 21 years old and it is the responsibility of the hotel owner to provide Provident Fund to them. Dance bars cannot be opened in a residential area.

Sources: the hindu.

Law to increase workers' bonus faces fresh hurdles

The government's attempt to appease the working class by paying higher bonus under a 2015 law, applicable with retrospective effect from April 2014, has hit an embarrassing roadblock with High Courts in eight states staying the payment of such benefits.

What has happened?

The Payments of Bonus Act of 2015, passed by Parliament in December 2015 and notified on January 1, doubled the statutory bonus paid to employees and made more workers eligible for bonus by raising the salary ceiling under the law from Rs.10,000 a month to Rs.21,000 a month.

- Following this, state-level industry bodies across the country approached the courts for relief and the first stay on the retrospective applicability of the law was secured from the Kerala High Court on January 27. The court said the Act will be implemented from April 2015 till the plea is disposed.
- Since then, employers in Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and even Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states such as Gujarat, Rajasthan and Haryana have procured similar stays from respective High Courts.

- High courts in at least eight states have already stayed the retro-active provisions of the law in the last two months.

Concerns:

Experts had warned the ministry about the financial implications of the retro-active amendments on employers and pointed out that distributing bonus for the previous year after the books of accounts are closed is a difficult prospect.

However, government looks at it as an incentive for the industry as giving bonus to workers will lead to more productivity.

What the law says?

According to the law, an employer is mandated to give a minimum bonus of 8.33 per cent of salary to employees earning upto Rs 21,000 a month. However, for the purposes of calculating the bonus, only Rs.7,000 a month is considered as the salary.

What next?

The labour ministry has sought the opinion of the law ministry and will take necessary action as per their advice. The ministry may also solve the deadlock by approaching the Supreme Court.

Sources: the hindu.

Government revives talks to revamp Factories Act

The government is reviving talks on revamping the Factories Act of 1948 and has called a meeting of all state governments, central ministries, trade unions and industry representatives to discuss a new legislation.

What's there in the new proposed factories act?

- Apart from speeding up registration and compliance processes to help new entrepreneurs and start-ups, the proposed new Factories Act seeks to do away with the 'inspector raj.'
- To increase the level of competency of the inspectors, the labour ministry has proposed that only those with a minimum B.Tech degree can become inspectors and they can enter factory premises after specific written directions of the Chief Inspector.
- However, the inspection could take place without prior consent if there is a complaint from any worker or for carrying out investigation into a reported accident. This has been proposed to remove the arbitrariness in inspection.
- However, existing inspectors with five years of experience or more, and a degree or diploma on industrial safety will continue to be eligible to inspect a factory.

- All factories that manufactures or deals with “hazardous substance and processes and dangerous operations will be covered under this Act even if they employ a single worker.” The sectors that manufacture hazardous processes include coal, gas, iron and steel, petroleum, cement and leather.
- For setting up factories with hazardous activities, the site appraisal committee — a body with representatives from environment, meteorological, town planning departments — will have to convene a meeting within 15 days of receiving an application.
- The committee will have to compulsorily send its recommendations within the next 30 days to the state government, from 90 days at present.
- The proposed law will apply to all factories that employ at least 40 workers.

Background:

The Factories Act is a legislation that deals with safety, health and welfare of workers. The present Factories Act is applicable on factories (with electricity connection) with 20 workers and factories, without electricity, with 10 workers.

The government had introduced Factories (Amendment) Bill 2014 in Lok Sabha in August 2014. However, it did not come up for discussion as it was referred to a standing committee which presented its report in December 2014.

Sources: the hindu.

To push mineral hunt, Govt. to tweak 1967 data-sharing curbs

The Ministry of Defence has decided to alter the guidelines issued in 1967 that bar putting in public domain geological and geospatial data related to 40% of India’s landmass, in order to enable faster exploration of mineral riches. This move is expected to boost mining in the country.

Significance of this move:

This would speed up mining operations in areas where exploration had been done in the past by government agencies but the findings were not in the public domain and thus, out of reach for private mining firms.

Why this move was necessary?

While the Geological Survey of India has a data sharing and accessibility policy, the ministry of defence had imposed a number of restrictions on the dissemination of maps, ground and aero geophysical data and data pertaining to restricted areas, in August 1967.

- About 40% of the country falls within the restricted area. An estimated 10% of territory with obvious geological potential also falls in such restricted areas.
- Availability of comprehensive data is critical for attracting the private sector into exploration. Though India has digitised a lot of its baseline geo-science data — including gravity contour maps, aeromagnetic, radiometric and geo-chemical mapping — it cannot be put in the public domain or shared without a defence ministry clearance for ‘restricted’ areas. The lack of credible geological data had also dented investor interest so far.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre plans loss-making PSU land bank

The government is looking at creating a bank from the land available at loss-making state-run enterprises as part of its efforts to sell these entities and push the overall disinvestment programme.

What's the plan?

The idea is to create a special purpose vehicle (SPV) which will hold all the land resources from loss-making public sector enterprises. The SPV then can give the land for other projects which may come up.

Background:

The government has accelerated efforts to wind up several loss-making state-run firms and the NITI Aayog is drawing up a strategy on the issue. Land available with state-run firms is seen as an asset and several defunct PSUs have huge tracts of land available with them. Latest data shows there are 77 CPSEs which incurred a loss of Rs 27,360 crore in 2014-15.

- The effort to monetize land with government entities is not new. In 2012, a government panel headed by former finance secretary Vijay Kelkar had backed the idea of monetizing government's unutilized and under-utilized land resources.

Benefits:

These resources can finance infrastructure needs, particularly in urban areas. Such a policy has been effectively utilized in many countries, including USA, France, Canada, Australia and China. For monetizing land resources, the potential is considerable given the under-utilized prime lands of PSU's, port trusts, railways.

Way ahead:

The plan is at a preliminary stage and several rounds of consultations are expected before a final decision is taken.

Sources: toi.

Govt mulls sops to attract doctors to rural postings

The union health ministry has come up with a new plan to attract doctors to rural postings.

What's the new plan?

The plan is to incentivise students and doctors, by making their access to postgraduate courses easier or by offering them better pay.

Will it work?

Yes, say experts. According to them, easier PG admissions may attract many doctors as there are limited seats in specialised courses and securing admission is tough.

- Also, a rural stint will help doctors gain practical experience as the disease burden is increasing in non-urban settings.

Background:

Back in 2013-14, the UPA government had tried to make one year of rural posting mandatory for MBBS graduates to seek admission in post-graduate courses. The move met with severe opposition from resident doctors and MBBS students, leading to strikes. Under pressure, Medical Council of India had kept the notification on hold.

Hence, the new government, instead of forcing a village posting on MBBS students or resident doctors, plans to work out lucrative incentive options.

Way ahead:

The ministry has already deliberated on the plan and it has inprinciple approval from the health minister. However, a formal proposal with details of incentives has to be drawn up before it is taken to the next level in the government for approval.

Concerns:

At present, there is just one doctor for around 1,700 people in India, whereas the WHO stipulates a minimum ratio of 1:1,000. Apart from shortage of doctors, unwillingness to work in rural areas is a major obstacle.

- Though government initiatives and participation from the private sector have improved availability of health facilities, workforce shortages continue to be a major cause for concern.

Sources: toi.

New PF withdrawal norms on hold

The government has announced a complete and unconditional rollback of new PF norms that barred employees from withdrawing their provident fund corpus before retirement.

Background:

Under the rules notified in February, employees were not allowed to withdraw their entire PF amount if they had quit or lost their present jobs, making it mandatory for them to wait till 58 years of age for a final settlement.

- Under the norms that now stand reversed, employees could withdraw their own share of PF savings along with the interest on them. The balance, comprising the employer's contribution, was to be withheld by the EPFO till the employee attained 58 years of age.
- Previously, employees had been allowed to withdraw the total EPF amount before retirement for medical emergencies, to fund children's marriage or while changing jobs.

EPF accounts are mandatory for firms hiring at least 20 employees and are funded by employees paying 12 per cent of their salary with a matching contribution from employers.

Sources: the hindu.

A step towards gender equality

In a step towards giving equal status to women officers, the Navy has granted permanent commission to seven officers and has formalised plans to grant permanent commission in eight branches from 2017. The seven woman officers were inducted as short-service commission (SSC) officers.

Background:

So far women were allowed permanent commission in select streams by the Army and the Air Force while the Navy permitted only Short Service Commission for 14 years which means they were denied pension.

- In a landmark judgement in October last year, the Delhi High Court granted permanent commission for women and pulled up the Defence Ministry and the Navy for a 2008 order which it called "sexist bias."
- Officials later clarified that the 2008 order for permanent commission was gender neutral and it granted women permanent commission along with male officers in three streams — education, law and naval construction as other areas had logistical issues.

Facts and figures:

Previously, the Army and IAF had granted permanent commission to women. There are currently only about 340 woman officers who have been granted permanent commission in select branches of the Army and IAF, even though they have been allowed to join the three Services since the early-1990s as SSC officers for a maximum tenure of 14-15 years. Overall, women number just 1,436 in the Army, 1,331 in IAF and 532 in Navy.

What is a permanent commission?

A permanent commission means a career in the Army/Navy till one retires. A permanent commission also entitles 20 years of service and a pension.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre issues notification for protection of Good Samaritans

The government has issued a notification for the protection of Good Samaritans in the wake of the Supreme Court (SC) direction on helping accident victims.

Background:

- The Supreme Court had directed all the states to follow the Centre's guidelines that encouraged witnesses in road accidents to report to police and also help survivors with medical treatment.
- The apex court had also directed the Centre to publish its guidelines notified last year to ensure that all those who help accident victims/survivors were not harassed by the police.

Standard operating procedure (SOP) for the protection and examination of 'Good Samaritans':

The SOP was framed by the government on the orders passed by the Supreme Court on a PIL plea filed by NGO SaveLIFE Foundation in 2012, highlighting the fact that more lives of accident victims can be saved if a law can be made to protect Good Samaritans from legal and procedural hassles at the hands of police and hospitals.

- Following this, the Centre issued a series of guidelines on May 12, 2015, to protect Good Samaritans. These included assuring them anonymity and protecting them from any civil or criminal liability for taking the victim to the nearest hospital. The government had also indicated that an SOP should be further evolved in this regard.
- In the January 16 notification, the government highlighted that bystanders or passers-by, who chose to help a person in distress on the road, should be "treated respectfully and without discrimination on the grounds of gender, religion, nationality, caste or any other."

- Other SOPs include complete anonymity in case the Good Samaritan does not want to reveal his name or details, use of video-conferencing in case of any further interaction with him by the authorities and provision for the police to examine him at his residence or office or any place of his convenience. This should be done only once and in a time-bound manner.

Sources: pib.

Ministry asks RBI to examine Workers' Bank proposal

The Labour Ministry has asked the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to form a panel headed by a former Deputy Governor of the central bank to look into a proposal of creating a **Workers' Bank using Employees' Provident Fund (EPF)**.

What the Workers' Bank does?

It aims to **improve the earnings of Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO)** by investing its corpus in various instruments. As on 31 March 2015, EPFO's total corpus stood at Rs.6.34 lakh crore.

Background:

The proposal was mooted by the trade unions about a decade ago and has been discussed by Labour Ministry and Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) for several years now.

- A theme paper to the government was submitted in 2004 on setting up 'Workers' Capital Trust'.
- The idea was modelled on similar experiences in countries like Canada, Netherland, Switzerland and South Africa where a collective pension fund system invests worker's savings in equities of domestic and global markets.

Sources: the hindu.

Joint parliament standing committee clears bankruptcy law

The joint parliament standing committee has cleared the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Code and is likely to be discussed in the current budget session of parliament. The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha in December 2015.

- Also, to make the recovery process more efficient and expedient, the SARFAESI (Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest) Act and Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT) Act have been amended.

About the Bankruptcy Bill:

The proposed Bill aims for a complete renovation of the current insolvency and bankruptcy system in India, which will help streamline the procedure of revival of companies facing financial distress.

- It also aims to improve the ease of doing business and attract more investment in the country.
- The Code will help Indian firms to exit an ailing business while banks stand to gain as they can recover their dues in time.
- The Bill proposes adherence to strict deadlines to decide whether to liquidate a sick company or not, wherein the decision to liquidate a company will have to be reached within 180 days.
- The Bill proposes the setting up of an **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India** to regulate insolvency professionals and agencies. It also proposes the setting up of a fund dubbed the '**Insolvency and Bankruptcy Fund of India**'.

Significance of this Bill:

As of now, there is no single law that deals with insolvency and bankruptcy in India. A number of provisions spread across various statutes have rendered the insolvency and bankruptcy-related process a legal quagmire significantly hindering the ease of doing business in the country. The new Bill seeks to consolidate all of this into a single Code.

Background:

The Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, in his Budget Speech 2015-16, had identified Bankruptcy Law Reform as a key priority for improving the ease of doing business and had announced that a comprehensive Bankruptcy Code, meeting global standards and providing necessary judicial capacity, will be brought in fiscal 2015-16.

Accordingly, the Government had constituted the Bankruptcy Law Reform Committee to look into various Bankruptcy related issues and give its report along with a draft Bill on the subject to the Government.

Sources: the hindu.

Parliament Passes Bill For States' Control Over Potable Alcohol Production

Parliament has passed the **Industries (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2015**. This bill seeks to **transfer the control over industries producing potable alcohol from the central government to the state governments**.

- The Industries (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2015 amends the 1951 act. It was already passed by the Lok Sabha in December last year.

Details:

- The amendment would bring potable alcohol under the jurisdiction of states, and clearly demarcates what is within the powers of the centre and what is within the powers of states.
- The 1951 act provides for development and regulation of certain industries including fermentation (which includes production of alcohol), and its first schedule includes all industries that are regulated under the act. The bill amends the schedule to exclude production of alcohol for potable purposes from the ambit of the act.

Background:

The Supreme Court in its judgement on January 20, 1997, had demarcated the regulation of production of alcohol between the central and state governments in the case of *Bihar Distillery and another vs. Union of India and others*.

The court ruled that central government should regulate the production of alcohol *for industrial use* and states should regulate the production of alcohol for *potable purpose* (domestic consumption).

The bill conforms to the Supreme Court's decision.

Sources: pib.

Food Act implemented without proper preparation: CAG

The Comptroller and Auditor General, in its audit report, has rapped the Centre for delay in implementation of the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and extending its rollout thrice without Parliament approval.

Details:

- The NFSA, which came into force from July 5, 2013, has been rolled out in 33 regions so far. The CAG has evaluated preparedness of 18 regions for implementation of the law in its audit report. In these states, only 51% of the eligible beneficiaries have been identified and 49% beneficiaries were yet to be identified in all states/UTs.
- CAG notes that states have not identified beneficiaries in a systematic manner and has blamed the Centre for failing to resolve the issues raised by states during the formulation phase and also after enactment of the law, which led to delay in implementation in several states and union territories.
- The delay in implementation of NFSA by non-implementing states/UTs is attributed to non-finalisation of a number of beneficiaries under the socio-economic caste census, lack of infrastructure facilities, insufficient funds and manpower.

- Also, most implementing states did not identify the poorest of the poor called Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) and priority households' beneficiaries as per the provisions of the NFSA, but used the old database for extending the benefits.
- To check anomalies in identification of beneficiaries, the CAG recommended that the Centre may issue, in consultation with state governments, guidelines on identification of beneficiaries to maintain transparency.
- It also said the Centre "must assure itself of the actual beneficiaries by the states/UTs by following transparent processes before allowing them revised/enhanced entitlements."

NFSA aims to provide foodgrains to 81.34 crore beneficiaries at highly subsidised rate of Rs 1-3 per kg. The law seeks to bring about changes in PDS that suffered from several deficiencies.

Sources: bs.

Gujarat clears 10% quota for poor in a bid to pacify Patels

Gujarat government has announced a separate 10% quota for **economically backward classes (EBC)** in higher education and government jobs.

- The new category would cover all upper castes, including Patidars, whose family income does not exceed Rs 6 lakh per annum.
- In this regard, the state government will come out with an ordinance on May 1, celebrated as the foundation day of Gujarat.

Criticisms:

- According to few experts, the quota is impermissible in the Constitution under its **Article 16(1), which prohibits reservation on the basis of economic backwardness.**
- It also goes against **Article 16 (4), which provides for reservation on caste basis.**
- The Supreme Court has also made it clear that there cannot be a quota on the basis of economic backwardness in the *Indra Sawhney case* in 1992.

Way ahead:

The government is firm about this. It has decided to take the fight to the highest level for implementation of the 10% EBC quota. If there is any legal issue, the government has indicated that it will fight it till the Supreme Court.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Development processes and the development industry- the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

NITI Aayog Launches the 'Grand Innovation Challenge'

NITI Aayog has launched the first phase of the 'Grand Innovation Challenge' to seek citizens inputs on the key developmental challenges facing India.

- The '**Grand Innovation Challenge**' is being launched on the MyGov portal.

What is it all about?

It aims at involving citizens at the very first stage in innovating for India's development. The idea is to work together with the States and every citizen as Team India to ensure progress leaving no one behind.

- The focus is on the social sector, the most vulnerable sections and to involve citizens in crowd sourcing ideas to address challenges facing India's development.

It will be implemented in two phases-

Phase 1:

In Phase I of the Grand Innovation Challenge, NITI Aayog will seek the views of the citizens on the key challenges facing India, across areas significant for the country's development.

- The idea is to find out from the people what are the critical issues which need to be addressed to develop the social sector and the challenges which need to be tackled on a priority basis.

Phase I of the Grand Challenge ends on April 25th.

Phase 2:

In Phase II, a shortlist of the urgent challenges as suggested by citizens would be prepared and innovative solutions would be sought from the people to address them using appropriate technology.

- The idea is to encourage innovation, entrepreneurship & citizen-led solutions to problems through this Grand Challenge.
- NITI Aayog will ensure that the best, innovative solutions to pressing challenges receive full backing from the Government of India – from funding, mentoring, technical & academic support to scaling it up across the country and absorbing them in government schemes.
- These solutions should be specifically designed for India, be made in India, and adopted by Government of India to radically develop India.

- Citizens are expected to pick one of 14 given, crucial, sectors that need to be addressed on priority to ensure that most vulnerable, and maximum number of citizens, are best impacted.

At the end of the phase, NITI Aayog will identify and acknowledge 10 most pressing challenges from among those suggested by the citizens of India.

Sources: pib.

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

Health cover: Too little, too scarce

The latest National Sample Survey (NSS) shows that over 80% of India's population is not covered under any health insurance scheme. The data reveals that despite seven years of the Centre-run Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), only 12% of the urban and 13% of the rural population had access to insurance cover.

What else the survey notes?

- Around 86% of the rural population and 82% of the urban population are not covered under any scheme of health expenditure support.
- Coverage is correlated with living standards, as in urban areas, over 90% of the poorest residents are not covered, while the figure is 66% for the richest residents.
- The poorer households appear unaware or are beyond the reach of such coverage, both in rural and urban areas.

Share of Private doctors:

Private doctors are the single-most significant source of treatment in both rural and urban areas. 72% of the treatment provided in rural areas and 79% in urban areas was availed in the private sector. The corresponding figures in the previous survey were 78% in rural areas and 81% in urban areas, which shows that the overall share of public sector saw a slight increase.

- The rural population spent, on an average, Rs.5,636 for hospitalised treatment in a public sector hospital and Rs.21,726 at a private sector hospital.

Challenges:

- The biggest hurdle in seeking medical treatment was financial constraint, reported by over 55% and 60% people in rural and urban areas, respectively.
- In rural areas, the next most important reason was no medical facility available in neighbourhood, accounting for 15% cases, while this figure was just 1.3% for urban areas.

Sources: the hindu.

Proof to link Zika virus with brain defects

Researchers have now produced evidence of how Zika virus causes brain defect in babies. Several cases of microcephaly, a rare birth defect in which the brain fails to grow properly, continue to be reported in Brazil following the outbreak of Zika virus, first detected in the country in May 2015.

Details:

To study how the virus causes birth defects in babies, researchers used human induced pluripotent stem (iPS) cells to make neural stem cells (NSC), neurospheres and brain organoids.

- How quickly the neural stem cells get infected with Zika virus became clear when the researchers detected it just 24 hours after they were exposed. The researchers used the virus-infected neural cells and cultured them as neurospheres.
- While those cells not infected with the virus generated normal neurospheres, the virus-infected neural cells generated neurospheres with abnormalities. At the end of six days, the virus killed most of the neurospheres.

However, further studies are needed to characterise the consequences of Zika infection during different stages of foetal development.

Zika virus:

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.

- World Health Organisation has reported 22 countries and territories in Americas from where local transmission of Zika virus has been reported.

Sources: the hindu.

Proposals on Biology of childhood under nutrition invited by DBT

The department of Biotechnology (DBT) of the union Ministry of Science and Technology has called for proposals on Biology of childhood undernutrition and healthy growth with an emphasis on linear growth retardation.

Background:

Childhood under nutrition is a major national concern, which needs urgent remedies to optimise our human resource development. Under nutrition, especially linear growth retardation, probably

occurs through several inter-related or independent mechanisms. However, the precise biological or pathogenic pathways are unknown and require optimization for designing of public health intervention packages.

What has the DBT said?

The DBT has called for research and development proposals in thematic areas such as measuring under nutrition, especially biomarkers and functional correlates, genetic and epigenetic influences on healthy growth, endocrine influences facilitating linear growth, nutrition requirements and dietary composition for healthy growth among others.

- This call for proposals is intended to enhance our understanding to facilitate healthy growth in children at the population level.
- Proposals can be submitted by clinicians, scientists, inter-disciplinary groups working in recognised R&D institutions. The proposals can be submitted online on the DBT website by May 6.

WHO gives 2 weeks to replace problem polio vaccine

The World Health Organization has given countries two weeks to replace a problem polio vaccine blamed for some outbreaks of the crippling disease. WHO is hoping to wipe out this virus once and for all.

Why?

The live polio virus used in some vaccines is one of the biggest obstacles to eradicating the disease. The wild version of the virus now exists only in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but a type of vaccine that contains small amounts of weakened but live polio still causes occasional outbreaks elsewhere.

What's the concern now?

Oral polio vaccine (OPV) replicates in the gut and can be passed to others through faecal-contaminated water — meaning it won't hurt the child who has been vaccinated, but could infect their neighbours.

What needs to be done?

Long-term, WHO recommends that the OPV should be phased out worldwide and replaced by the inactivated polio vaccine (IPV).

Background:

A massive global effort has in recent decades come close to wiping out polio, a crippling and potentially fatal viral disease that mainly affects children under the age of five. Cases have

decreased by 99% since 1988, when polio was endemic in 125 countries and 350,000 cases were recorded worldwide.

Difference between IPV and OPV:

There are two types of vaccine that protect against polio: inactivated poliovirus vaccine (IPV) and oral poliovirus vaccine (OPV). IPV contains live killed virus and OPV contains live weakened virus.

Its usage in India:

The union government launched India's first injectable inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) as part of the country's commitment to global polio eradication in December 2015.

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: toi.

Most of rural India still opts for open defecation: NSS report

According to recently released **Swachhta Status Report** by the National Sample Survey (NSS) Office, more than half the rural population of the country still opts for open defecation.

About the survey:

The nation-wide rapid survey was conducted during May-June 2015, concurrently with the 72nd round of the NSS. The survey was to track the government's flagship programme, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Highlights of the survey:

- The survey estimates that 52.1% of people in rural India choose open defecation compared to 7.5% in urban India.
- Only 45.3% rural households have a sanitary toilet, while in urban areas, the figure stands at 88.8%.
- The lowest percentage of households having sanitary toilets was reported in Jharkhand (18.8%), Chhattisgarh (21.2%) and Odisha (26.3%).
- The States with the highest numbers were Sikkim (98.2%), Kerala (97.6%) and Mizoram (96.2%).

- 1% of the villages and 42% urban wards have community toilets. However, they were not being used in 1.7% villages and 1.6% urban wards. Also, in 22.6% of the villages and 8.6% urban wards, community toilets were not being cleaned.
- While 87.9% of the urban households were found to have access to water for use in toilets, only 42.5% rural households had this facility. For this situation to improve, under Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), the incentive for individual toilet has been increased from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 12,000, to provide for water, including for storing water for hand-washing and cleaning.

Why open defecation is still rampant?

The main reason for open defecation is behaviour and mindset of the people who have continued the practice for centuries. Adequate availability of water for toilets is also a concern.

Performance of Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin):

Since the launch of Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) on October 2, 2014 there is an improvement of 8.12 percentage points in number of rural households having toilets, with 50.17% rural households covered as of February 2016.

Sources: the hindu.

CGMP compliant facility

Shri J P Nadda, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare recently inaugurated the first of its kind **Current Good Manufacturing Practise (CGMP)** compliant facility within the Central Government for manufacture of DPT and TT vaccine **at the Central Research Institute (CRI), Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh**. This makes CRI the **first Central Government Institute to have cGMP compliant infrastructure for vaccine production**.

- Recent advancements in regulatory requirements and introduction of cGMP concept in vaccine manufacturing had led to the need for creation of cGMP compliant infrastructure and processes.

What are CGMPs?

CGMP refers to the Current Good Manufacturing Practice regulations enforced by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). CGMPs provide for systems that assure proper design, monitoring, and control of manufacturing processes and facilities.

- Adherence to the CGMP regulations assures the identity, strength, quality, and purity of drug products by requiring that manufacturers of medications adequately control manufacturing

operations. This includes establishing strong quality management systems, obtaining appropriate quality raw materials, establishing robust operating procedures, detecting and investigating product quality deviations, and maintaining reliable testing laboratories.

- This formal system of controls at a pharmaceutical company, if adequately put into practice, helps to prevent instances of contamination, mix-ups, deviations, failures, and errors. This also assures that drug products meet their quality standards.

Sources: the hindu.

Cure for high medicine bills: A generics prescription law

The Central government is considering the introduction of a law to make it mandatory for doctors to prescribe generic drugs so that patients can access affordable medicines provided through state-run Jan Aushadhi stores.

Why a law in this regard is necessary?

It is because doctors usually don't prescribe generic medicines supplied through Jan Aushadi stores. So patients find it tough to ask for the correct generic equivalents.

- Also, ex-factory cost of medicines gets marked up multiple times owing to supply chain costs and incentives for medical representatives. But, the Jan Aushadhi stores are able to provide the same drugs at very cheaper prices.

Background:

The Government, in June 2015, had proposed to open 1000 more stores under the 'Jan Aushadhi Scheme' to make available quality generic medicines at affordable prices through these special outlets.

What is Jan Aushadhi Scheme?

It is a scheme which seeks to make available quality medicines at affordable prices for all, especially the poor and the disadvantaged.

- Under this, less priced quality unbranded generic medicines will be made available through Jan Aushadhi stores which inherently are less priced but are of same and equivalent quality, efficacy and safety as compared to branded generic medicines.
- Under this Scheme, the State Government has to provide space in Government Hospital premises for the running of the outlets (JAS). Government hospitals, NGOs, Charitable Organisations and public societies like Red Cross Society, Rogi Kalyan Samiti typically constituted for the purpose can be operating agencies for the JAS.

- The operating agency for JAS is nominated on the basis of the recommendations of the State government. Operational expenditure is met from trade margins admissible for the medicines.
- The State Government has to ensure prescription of unbranded generic medicines by the Government doctors.
- The Jan Aushadhi Programme is accordingly a self sustaining business model not dependent on government subsidies or assistance. It is run on the principle of “Not for Profits but with Minimal Profits”.

The Jan Aushadhi Campaign will help:

- Improve access to healthcare in as much as cost of treatment would come down substantially. This would enable the Public Health System to increase the coverage.
- Secure a socio-economically viable mechanism/institutional arrangement for efficacious sales of Pharma CPSU products, thereby improving their viability.
- Promote & encourage private industry to sell their quality unbranded generic products through these retail outlets.
- Educate doctors that unbranded generic medicines provide a better option than branded products since quality of generic medicines can be equally efficacious and safe at much lower prices.
- Create consumer awareness by involving private, charitable bodies and NGOs by making them part of the campaign.
- Reduce promotional cost and profits for the benefit of patients.

At present, there are 283 stores in 22 States and Union Territories.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 2 Topic:** Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States.*

Modi unveils scheme to make Dalits entrepreneurs

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launched the “**Stand up India scheme**” to enable Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women entrepreneurs to access loans, setting a target of creating 2.5 lakh such entrepreneurs across the country.

Key features:

- Under the scheme 1.25 lakh bank branches will provide loans up to Rs 1 crore. Each branch will be required to provide two such loans ranging from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 1 crore without collateral for setting up a new enterprise.
- Under the scheme people from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and women entrepreneurs, will get support such as pre-loan training, facilitating loan, factoring and marketing.
- There will be a Rs 10,000 crore refinance window through Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) and the National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Ltd (NCGTC) will create a corpus of Rs 5,000 crore.
- SIDBI will engage with the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and various other institutions to take the scheme forward.
- The offices of SIDBI and National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development will be designated '**Stand Up Connect Centres**'.
- Debit Card (RuPay) will be used for withdrawing working capital and history of borrowers will be developed.

Sources: the hindu.

OROP gets retrospective Cabinet nod

The One Rank-One Pension scheme, brought in last November to benefit more than 2.5 million ex-servicemen and war widows, has received ex-post facto approval from the Union Cabinet.

- Under the scheme, pension would be revised on the basis of the pension of retirees of calendar year 2013 and the benefit will be effective from July 1, 2014. In future, the pension would be revised every five years.
- Financial implications on account of grant of OROP, including pre-matured retiree cases, would be Rs 10,925.11 crore for payment of arrears and annual financial implication would be Rs 7,488.7 crore.

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: pib.

Give plan for welfare of elderly: Supreme Court to government

The Supreme Court has expressed concern for the over 10 crore senior citizens in the country, a majority of whom are deprived of love, care and respect by their kin in a fast-paced world.

- The court has asked the Centre for a roadmap to provide them basic facilities like shelter, food and healthcare.
- This was based on a PIL that narrated to the court the pitiable condition in which the aged find themselves.

What the PIL says?

We are a trillion dollar economy and yet the central government allocates just Rs 25 crore for welfare of the aged. Of this, more than half does not get spent.

- Also, the government has not taken any action on Mohini Giri's report on welfare of senior citizens, which was given in 2011.

Background:

- At present, India has a population of 10.38 crore senior citizens. Their number is going to increase to 14.3 crore by 2021. These people are often neglected by their children.
- There are several welfare schemes for the elderly but successive governments' lack of concern and lethargy towards this section of the population had rendered these schemes non-operational and defunct over the years.
- Besides, no money is allocated by big companies under the corporate social responsibility head.

Sources: toi.

Gram Uday Se Bharat Uday Abhiyan

PM Narendra Modi recently launched 'Gram Uday Se Bharat Uday Abhiyan' in Madhya Pradesh.

- The campaign was launched on **the 125th birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar** at his birthplace.

The aim of this campaign is to make nationwide efforts to strengthen Panchayati Raj and through it, boost social harmony in the villages, promote rural development and foster farmers' welfare & livelihoods of the poor.

- The campaign will be run jointly by the Ministries of Rural Development, Agriculture, Social Justice, Labour and Information and Broadcasting along with the States.

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.

British Medical Journal calls for radical revamp of MCI

The British Medical Journal (BMJ) in its latest issue has called for a radical revamp of the Medical Council of India (MCI) in order to eliminate corruption and lack of ethics in healthcare.

- This observation is based on the parliamentary standing committee report which was submitted to the Rajya Sabha recently.
- In its report, BMJ has also said that the MCI has failed to create a rigorous transparent system for accrediting medical colleges, leading to geographical maldistribution and creation of 'ghost faculties' in private medical colleges.

Background:

The parliamentary standing committee, in its report, had pointed out the MCI's failure to oversee quality and integrity in health services in the country.

- The committee had criticised the MCI for being a biased organisation, acting against larger public health goals. It described the Council as an "exclusive club" of medical doctors from corporate hospitals and private practice.
- The committee had called for extensive reforms in the MCI and removal of roadblocks to the Common Medical Entrance Test for admission to MBBS and PG courses.

BMJ had launched a campaign against corruption in the health sector in 2014. The journal published articles on kickbacks for referrals from doctors, revenue targets at corporate hospitals, and capitation fees in private medical colleges in India.

Way ahead:

The centre now will have to muster strong political support to act on the committee's recommendations as this will inevitably involve hurting well entrenched and powerful interests.

About MCI:

The Medical Council of India (MCI) is the **statutory body** for establishing uniform and high standards of medical education in India.

- The Council grants recognition of medical qualifications, gives accreditation to medical schools, grants registration to medical practitioners, and monitors medical practice in India.
- The Medical Council of India was first established in 1934 under the Indian Medical Council Act, 1933. The Council was later reconstituted under the Indian Medical Council Act, 1956 that replaced the earlier Act.

Important functions performed by the council:

- Establishment and maintenance of uniform standards for undergraduate medical education.
- Regulation of postgraduate medical education in medical colleges accredited by it.
- Recognition of medical qualifications granted by medical institutions in India.
- Recognition of foreign medical qualifications in India.
- Accreditation of medical colleges.
- Registration of doctors with recognized medical qualifications.
- Keeping a directory of all registered doctors (called the Indian Medical Register).

Sources: the hindu.

Vidyut PRAVAH

The government has launched **Vidyut PRAVAH**- Electricity, Price Availability and Highlights mobile application.

- The app is aimed at empowering common people to demand 24X7 power from the states and is expected to take transparency to the next level and make state governments more accountable.
- The mobile application provides highlights of the power availability in India on real time basis.

Salient Feature of Vidyut PRAVAH mobile app

- The main features include dashboard for All India summary, link for each states from All India Map and state specific pages on single click.
- It provides a wealth of information pertaining to the current demand met, shortages if any, surplus power available and the prices in the Power Exchange.
- The real time data and comparison with previous day or year data is also available.

- It is a user friendly interface which facilitates all the consumers or stakeholders in visualization of the power availability and prices at the overall country level and at States and UTs level based on the Geographical map of India.
- The information disseminated through the Application will empower the consumer, thereby leading all the stakeholders to be more responsive and efficient, bringing more economy to the country.

Sources: pib.

FCRA tweaked to boost CSR spend

The government has proposed an amendment with **retrospective effect** that will allow political parties to accept donations from overseas companies whose ownership of Indian entities is within the foreign investment limits prescribed for the sector.

- The amendments were proposed by the Finance Minister in the Finance Bill as part of the Union Budget of 2016-17. The amendment is retrospective and will come into effect from 2010, when the FCRA was introduced.

Background:

Until now, the **Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010**, or FCRA, banned political parties from receiving funds from any foreign source. The original law defines “foreign source” to include any company with foreign investment of above 50%.

About the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA): Quick look

The Ministry of Home Affairs is mandated to administer the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, for regulating the receipt and utilization of foreign contribution by the associations/NGOs.

- Expeditionary action is taken as and when adverse inputs of violations of provisions of the Act are received against any association. The NGOs/Civil Societies registered/given Prior Permission under Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 are required to follow the provisions of Act, Rules and instructions issued in this regard from time to time.
- The Government receives inputs from various security agencies, including Intelligence Bureau, from time to time, about the violations of FCRA, however, action is initiated against the alleged violators only after due scrutiny and following due process as prescribed in the said Act.

- If any NGOs/Civil Societies violate any of the provisions of the Act and Rules, then only, action is initiated as per provisions of Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010. Actions include compounding of offence, putting in prior reference category, suspensions of registration, freezing of accounts, cancellation of registration, prosecution etc.

The following persons are prohibited from accepting foreign contribution :

- Candidate for election.
- Correspondent, columnist, cartoonist, editor, owner, printer or publisher of a registered newspaper.
- Judge, government servant or employee of any entity controlled or owned by the government.
- Member of any Legislature.
- Political party or its office bearers.
- Organisations of a political nature as may be specified.
- Associations or company engaged in the production or broadcast of audio news or audiovisual news or current affairs programmes through any electronic mode or form or any other mode of mass communication.

However, foreign contribution can be accepted by the above-mentioned persons in the following specific situation:

- By way of remuneration for himself or for any group of persons working under him.
- By way of payment in the ordinary course of business transacted in or outside India or in the course of international trade or commerce.
- As agent of a foreign source in relation to any transaction made by such foreign source with the Central or State Government.
- By way of gift or presentation as a member of any Indian delegation. However, the gift or present should be accepted in accordance with the rules made by the Central Government.
- From his relative.
- By way of any scholarship, stipend or any payment of like nature.

Sources: the hindu.

Messaging becomes 'snoop-proof'

The world's largest messaging app, WhatsApp which is owned by Facebook, has beefed up its security feature for users around the world across all platforms.

Details:

- All private communications now would be protected by enabling end-to-end encryption.
- The new feature will allow users to access messages while barring everybody else, including government agencies, from snooping.

Using Textsecure, WhatsApp launched encryption of messages in 2014, but this was limited to Android devices. Indian security agencies had difficulty tracking these messages on these devices. The latest announcement is part of the company's plan to use encryption on platforms such as iOS and Windows.

User base: The company currently has around one billion registered users, nearly 100 million of them in India.

Background:

This comes at a time when the U.S. government had asked Apple to provide a backdoor entry into encrypted iPhone, which was denied by the company. With the new security feature, the debate on use of encryption is likely to get louder.

Last September, the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) had come out with a draft National Encryption Policy that proposed to make it mandatory for every citizen to save all digital communications, including e-mails and chats, for a period of 90 days. But the proposal was withdrawn in the wake of protests.

Concerns:

- Security agencies fear that strong encryption will allow criminals and terrorists to communicate safely.

But technology companies and many free speech advocates believe that encryption allows more privacy in the new digital age.

Sources: the hindu.

Make GM mustard data public: CIC

In an order intended to make the decision-making process on transgenic food crops in India more transparent, the Central Information Commission (CIC) has directed the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) — the apex regulatory body for GMOs (genetically modified organisms) — to make public the non-confidential biosafety dossier of GM mustard and other GMOs by April 30.

- The order has been issued on the application of an environment activist who sought information on field trials of GM mustard, arguing that biosafety data could not be confidential since it pertained to results of testing of a GMO for public safety assessment.

What next?

Under the CIC order, the GEAC is expected to put out all the biosafety details in public domain after separating confidential information.

What the CIC says?

It says, “People should know how and why GM mustard is being permitted or denied because they have to consume that food or feed and face the consequences. It is a policy decision by the public authority which needs to be revealed to the public in general as mandated because they are going to be affected if GM mustard is marketed.”

Background:

The GEAC, which comes under the environment ministry, had refused to part with the information saying sharing of data would breach the commercial confidence of the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of Delhi University that had approached the regulator for clearing commercial release of the GM mustard (DMH11). But the Central Information Commission rejected the central regulator’s argument.

- The decision to release GM mustard for commercial cultivation is currently pending with the central regulator.
- At present, only GM cotton is allowed for commercial cultivation in India. Although the central regulator has given its nod for scientific field trials of many transgenic varieties of food crops including rice, wheat and maize among others, it has so far not cleared any GM food crop for commercial release.

Sources: the hindu.

ISBN Portal

The centre has launched a portal for registration and allotment of International Standard Book Number (**ISBN**).

About the Portal:

The ISBN portal is a part of central government’s **e-governance initiative** for streamlining the **process of registration for publishers and authors** which will make the process user friendly.

- The portal has been created to facilitate publishers and authors to register for ISBN number. ISBN gives an identity to a book without which the bookshops will not sell it.
- The ISBN portal seeks to completely automate the process of seeking application, their examination and allotment of ISBNs. The developed software has several modules including users' registration and online application submission.
- The automation process also seeks to maintain inventory as well as process the data that will be provided by the users. There will be doing away with receipt of hard copy of any document unless considered appropriate for establishing the identity of the applicant and for confirming the book publishing activity.

What is ISBN?

ISBN is a unique number used to identify **monographic** publications. Displayed in **barcode** format, ISBN is a 13-character identification allotted by the International ISBN Agency based in Britain through the National ISBN Agency. It provides access to bibliographic data bases used by the book industry and libraries to provide information.

Significance:

This initiative is aimed at ensuring ease of registration, enhanced accessibility, wider transparency, trust and credibility and greater efficiency for the book writing fraternity in the country.

Sources: pib.

New health initiatives and Mobile APPS launched on World Health Day

Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare J P Nadda has launched several new e-Health and m-Health initiatives to mark the World Health Day (April 7th). These include:

ANM Online application-ANMOL:

ANMOL is a tablet-based application that allows ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife) to enter and updated data for beneficiaries of their jurisdiction.

- This will ensure more prompt entry and updation of data as well as improve the data quality since the data will be entered "at source" by providers of health services themselves.
- Since the Application is Aadhaar-enabled, it will help in authentication of the records of field workers and beneficiaries.

E-RaktKosh initiative:

It is an integrated Blood Bank Management Information System that has been conceptualized and developed after multiple consultations with all stakeholders. This web-based mechanism interconnects all the Blood Banks of the State into a single network.

- The Integrated Blood Bank MIS refers the acquisition, validation, storage and circulation of various live data and information electronically regarding blood donation and transfusion service.
- Such system is able to assemble heterogeneous data into legible reports to support decision making from effective donor screening to optimal blood dissemination in the field.
- This initiative will be of great use to persons and families in need of blood transfusion.
- The Application will enable not only information of the nearest blood bank on a mobile but also of the availability of the particular blood group in a given radius.

India Fights Dengue:

This application will find wide use. As the fight against Vector Borne Diseases, especially Dengue, can be won only with effective community participation, this App empowers the community members how to contribute towards prevention of Dengue.

Sources: pib.

PMO's no to smart cards, insists on Aadhaar

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has issued strict instructions to the Information Technology Ministry to ensure that States and the Central government stop issuing smart cards for new programmes for beneficiaries, and to rely on the Aadhaar-based Direct Benefit Transfer platform instead. Aadhaar is now backed by a law.

Details:

PMO has asked the department to examine the need for state and central government departments to issue separate smart cards in the light of the near universal coverage of Aadhaar and the delivery of the most public welfare benefits through Aadhaar enabled platforms.

- The move will impact ministries such as Labour, Social Justice and Health, which are in the process or have already rolled out smart cards.
- The IT department has also been asked to prepare policy on the delivery of various public services using Aadhaar, Jan Dhan Yojana and existing platforms without the issuance of new smart cards.

The government had recently said that over 100 crore people, constituting 93% of the adult population, had a unique identification (UID) number under the Aadhaar platform.

What experts say?

Experts are sceptical of the government's move. They argue, "Smart cards are always better than biometrics. If that was not the case, the global financial infrastructure today will be working on biometrics and not on smart cards."

- Also, smart cards work using cryptography, which is more fool-proof than biometrics.

Biometrics allow for remote, covert and non-consensual identification.

Sources: the hindu.

Don't share Aadhaar information: UIDAI

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) has asked e-commerce players like e-Bay, Flipkart, Amazon and Snapdeal to stop merchants on their platform from collecting Aadhaar information of people transacting.

- The ministry of communications and IT has also warned the general public against sharing personal information to people who are charging between Rs 50 to Rs 200 on a plastic card in the name of smart card.
- The ministry has also warned that collecting information related to Aadhaar card or its unauthorised printing or aiding such persons in any manner may amount to a **criminal offence punishable with imprisonment under Indian Penal Code and also Chapter VI of The Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016.**

About UIDAI:

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) was set up in 2009 as an attached office of the erstwhile Planning Commission of India.

- Its objective is to collect the biometric and demographic data of residents, store them in a centralised database, and issue a 12-digit unique identity number called Aadhaar to each resident.
- The UIDAI has also been given the responsibility to lay down plan and policies to implement UID scheme, to own and operate the UID database and be responsible for its updation and maintenance on an ongoing basis.

Sources: the hindu.

SC defends Lodha panel

Defending Justice Lodha Panel recommendations, Supreme Court of India has observed that these recommendations do not infringe on anyone's fundamental right as there are no private citizens on the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

- These observations were made by the court when BCCI and CCI said the recommendations affected Article 19 (1) (c), which enshrines the fundamental right of citizens to form union or associations under the Indian Constitution.

Background:

Lodha committee was set up by the Supreme Court to recommend reforms in the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI). The three-member panel was headed by Justice (Retd) RM Lodha.

Important recommendations made by the committee:

Constitute one cricket body for each state: One association of each state will be a full member and have right to vote. One unit should represent one state.

CEO-run organisation: Committee suggested the restructuring of the BCCI's administrative set-up, proposing the position of a CEO accountable to a nine-member apex council. An apex council for the BCCI comprising 9 members, of which 5 should be elected, 2 should be representatives of players association, and one woman. CEO to be assisted by 6 professional managers and the team of CEO and managers will be accountable to the apex council.

Under RTI: To ensure transparency in its functioning, the panel had said that it is important to bring the body under the purview of the Right to Information Act.

Ethics officer: The committee recommended the institution of the office of an Ethics Officer, who would be responsible for resolving issues related to the conflict of interest. Ethics officer would be a former High Court judge.

Electoral officer: The committee had also suggested the appointment of an Electoral Officer to conduct the Board elections. The electoral officer would oversee the entire election process relating to the office-bearers namely, preparation of voters list, publication, dispute about eligibility of the office-bearers

Ombudsman: It had also proposed an Ombudsman for dealing with internal conflicts. Ombudsman can take cognisance of complaints suo moto, or received complaint or referred complaint by the apex council.

It also suggested that a person cannot be a BCCI office-bearer and a state association office-bearer at the same time.

Sources: the hindu.

Government constitutes a Three Member Committee for Content Regulation of Government Advertising

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has constituted a three member committee to address the issues related to Content Regulation in Government Advertising.

- The committee would be chaired by Shri B.B. Tandon, Former Chief Election Commissioner of India.

Background:

Hon'ble Supreme Court had directed to constitute the Body for ironing out the creases that are bound to show from time to time in implementation of the judgement of Apex Court on Content Regulation of Government Advertising.

Terms of reference:

- As per the Terms of Reference, the Committee would, inter-alia, address complaints from the general public of violation on the implementation of the guidelines set out by Hon'ble Supreme Court.
- The Committee would also take suo motu cognizance of any violation / deviation of the guidelines of Hon'ble Supreme Court and recommend corrective action to the Ministry /Department.
- The Committee may recommend suitable changes to the Supreme Court guidelines to deal with new circumstances and situations that may arise from time to time, without making major policy changes within the policy direction of Supreme Court.
- The Committee is not bound by any legal rules of evidence and may follow such procedure that appears to it to be fair and proper for swift settlement of grievances. For all decisions of the Committee, the view of majority would prevail.

The Committee would be operational from Delhi and Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity would facilitate day to day functioning of the Committee. The tenure of the members would be initially for a period of two years which shall be extendable by one year at a time, but overall extension should not be more than two times.

Sources: pib.

National Agriculture Market

PM Modi recently launched an electronic mandi to help farmers sell their produce online and do away with the problems many farmers face in agricultural markets. **National Agriculture Market (NAM)** has been incorporated by the **Department of Agriculture & Cooperation**.

- This e-platform aims to provide more options to farmers to sell their produce and is part of implementation of the roadmap for doubling income of the farmers by 2022.
- In July last year, the Cabinet had approved setting up of an online national agriculture market with a budget of Rs 200 crore.

Key facts:

- The purpose behind NAM is the creation of a common national market for agricultural commodities through an e-platform network.
- National agricultural products market platform will integrate 585 wholesale markets across India under an online platform.
- NAM will ensure farmers get competitive returns and consumers get stable prices and steady availability.
- It will be implemented in 3 phases covering 250, 200 and 135 mandis during 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 respectively.
- A budgetary provision of Rs.200 crores has been made to be spent over the next three years (2015-16 to 2017-18).

National Agriculture Market (NAM) was launched on the occasion of 125 birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar.

Sources: the hindu.

India ranked low in Press Freedom Index

The 2016 '**World Press Freedom Index**' released by Reporters Without Borders (RSF), has placed India at 133rd position among 180 countries.

Key facts:

- The list is topped by Finland, which retained its top spot for the sixth consecutive year, followed by the Netherlands and Norway.
- India jumped three spots from the 136th position it had in 2015.

- Among India's neighbouring countries, Pakistan ranks 147, Sri Lanka (141), Afghanistan (120), Bangladesh (144), Nepal (105) and Bhutan (94). China is ranked 176.
- The United States is ranked 44th and Russia is placed at the 148th place.
- At the bottom of the index lies Eritrea at 180th rank. It is preceded by North Korea, Turkmenistan, Syria and China at 179th, 178th, 177th and 176th position respectively.

About World Press Freedom Index:

World Press Freedom Index is published annually by RSF since 2002. It measures the level of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries using the following criteria – pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative environment, transparency, infrastructure, and abuses.

Sources: the hindu.

Shyam Benegal committee submits recommendations on film certification

A committee chaired by eminent filmmaker Shyam Benegal has submitted its recommendations to the government.

Background:

The committee had been set up by the Ministry on January 1 this year to lay down norms for film certification that took note of best practices in various parts of the world and gave sufficient and adequate space for artistic and creative expression.

- The committee was also asked to lay down procedures and guidelines for the benefit of the CBFC to follow and examine staffing patterns with a view to recommending a framework that would provide efficient and transparent user friendly services.

Important recommendations made by the committee:

- The Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) should only be a film certification body whose scope should be restricted to categorizing the suitability of the film to audience groups on the basis of age and maturity.
- The CBFC should refuse certification only when a film contains anything that contravenes the provisions of Section 5B (1) of the Cinematograph Act, 1952 or when its content crosses the ceiling laid down in the highest category of certification.
- The categorisation of films should be more specific and apart from U category, the UA Category can be broken up into further sub-categories – UA12+ and UA15+. The A category should also be sub-divided into A and AC (Adult with Caution) categories.

The recommendations broadly cover the areas related to Film Certification Process and its simplification, Restructuring staffing pattern of Central & Regional censor advisory panels and Recertification of films for purposes of telecast on television and measures to preserve the identity of Indian Cinema.

Sources: the hindu.

Panel suggests fine or jail for celebs in misleading ads

In its report on the **Consumer Protection Bill 2015**, a parliamentary panel has suggested legal teeth to make **celebrities accountable for misleading advertisements**.

- The panel has suggested legal teeth to the Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) to curb misleading ads, besides proposing severe penalties, jail and cancellation of license of those involved in food adulteration.

Details:

- According to the committee, the existing laws are not deterrent enough to discourage manufacturers or publishers from using such personalities for misleading ads. Therefore, it recommends that stringent provisions may be made in the bill to tackle misleading advertisement, as well as, to fix liability on endorsers/celebrities.
- The committee recommends that for first time offence, the offender may be penalised with either a fine of Rs 10 lakh or imprisonment up to two years or both. For second time offence, a fine of Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of five years. For subsequent offences, the penalties may be increased proportionately based on the value of sales volumes of such products or services.
- The panel also suggested the government to clearly and comprehensively define the word 'endorsement' in the bill so that there is no room for any misinterpretation or ambiguity.

Background:

Some celebrities have come under fire for endorsing brands misleading consumers. Recently, Indian cricket captain M S Dhoni had to resign as brand ambassador of Amrapali after residents of a housing society started a protest against the builder and the cricketer on social media.

About Consumer Protection Bill 2015:

Consumer Protection Bill 2015 seeks to replace the old consumer protection law and proposes to set up a regulatory authority which will have powers to recall products and initiate class class suit against defaulting companies, including e-tailers.

- The key features of the new bill include establishment of an executive agency ‘**Central Consumer Protection Authority**’ (CCPA) which will protect and enforce the rights of consumers.
- The authority will intervene when necessary to prevent consumer detriment arising from unfair trade practices and to initiate class action including enforcing recall, refund and return of products.
- The bill has provisions for “product liability” if product/services causes personal injury, death or property damage and will take action against defaulting manufacturers or service providers.
- For speedy disposal of court cases, the bill proposes “mediation” as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism. The mediation will be under the aegis of consumer courts.
- The bill also has a provision for setting up of a ‘circuit bench’ to facilitate quicker disposal of complaints and there is an enabling provisions for consumers to file complaints electronically and file complaints in consumer courts that have jurisdiction over the place of residence of the complainant.

Sources: bs.

Govt. to set up sex offenders registry

The government is planning to set up a **sex offenders registry** in the country, on the lines of those maintained in western countries including the U.S. and the U.K.

About the Registry:

It will be an online database of charge-sheeted sexual offenders in the entire country, which people can access through a Citizen Portal in the upcoming Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems (CCTNS) project.

- Details of sexual offenders even below 18 years of age would be included in the database, which will be put up on the website of National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).
- The names and details of sexual offenders, both below and above 18 years of age would be put up only after they have been convicted and completed their sentence in jail. The details will not be included if the case are under trial and are in appeal in a higher court.
- According to the draft guidelines proposed, extensive information on the offender will be collected. This will include, inter-alia name and aliases, registration of primary or given name, nicknames, pseudonyms, telephone numbers, addresses including temporary lodging information, travel and immigration documents.

- Besides, the information on offenders to be collected for the Registry include those related to their jobs, professional licences, information of school, college, institute with which they have been associated, vehicle information, date of birth, criminal history, current photograph, fingerprints and palm prints, DNA sample, driver's licence, identification card, PAN card number, Aadhaar card number and Voter ID number.

Benefits:

- It would be a handy tool for the law enforcement agencies as well.
- It will instill fear in the minds of repeat sexual offenders and the public would be benefited from it.

Way ahead:

Draft guidelines on the proposal to set up Sex Offenders Registry in India are under preparation in consultation with relevant Ministries/organisations, before they are put out for wider consultation with the State governments and the public.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighborhood- relations.

Chabahar Port Project Put On The Fast Track

India and Iran have agreed to move forward quickly on the crucial Chabahar port project during foreign minister Sushma Swaraj's ongoing trip to Iran.

Why India is interested in this port?

- India believes the port is critical to its interests and wants to develop it as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar port which was built with Chinese assistance.
- The port will allow India to bypass Pakistan to transport goods to Afghanistan and Central Asia using a sea-land route.
- Chabahar Port lies outside the Persian Gulf in Iran and will help India in expanding its maritime commerce in the region.
- It also provides opportunities to Indian companies to penetrate and enhance their footprint in the region.

Background:

An MoU was signed between India and Iran in May 2015. As per the MoU, India is to equip and operate two berths in Chabahar Port Phase-I with capital investment of USD 85.21 million and annual revenue expenditure of USD 22.95 million on a ten year lease.

- Ownership of equipment will be transferred to Iranian side on completion of 10 year period or for an extended period, based on mutual agreement.
- The Iranian side had requested for provision of a credit of USD 150 million in accordance with the MoU.
- As per the MoU, operation of two berths will commence within a period of maximum 18 months after the signing of the Contract.
- The two berths will be operated by the India Ports Global Private Limited, a Company promoted by the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and Kandla Port Trust – two major ports working under the Ministry of Shipping.

Sources: toi.

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

Nuclear Security Summit

The fourth Nuclear Security Summit being held in Washington DC from today will be attended by the leaders of more than 50 countries, including PM Modi.

What is a Nuclear Security Summit? When did it start?

The Nuclear Security Summit (NSS) is a world summit, aimed at preventing nuclear terrorism around the globe. The first summit was held in Washington, D.C., United States, in 2010.

What are the key goals of the NSS?

The goal of the NSS is to address concerns about fissile material falling into the wrong hands at a head-of-state level. It includes minimizing the use of highly enriched uranium (HEU), bolstering security at nuclear facilities through enhanced national regulations and implementation of best practices, enhanced membership in international instruments and organizations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), instituting measures to detect and prevent illicit trafficking in nuclear and other radioactive materials, and Centers of Excellence, build capacity, develop technology and coordinate assistance on nuclear Security.

How many countries are participating in the fourth NSS?

This summit will be attended by 53 countries and five global institutions, which cover 98% of the nuclear material on the planet. Iran and North Korea are not invited, and Russia's President Putin

who attended the first three summits, will stay away due to his differences with President Obama over Ukraine.

The twin goals for the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit are:

1. Advancing tangible improvements in nuclear security behavior.
2. Strengthening the global nuclear security architecture.

Action plans:

Action Plans on nuclear security will be endorsed for international organizations and institutions (International Atomic Energy Agency, United Nations, INTERPOL, Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism, and Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction).

What are the limitations of the NSS process?

- As NSS covers nuclear material only for non-military purposes, 83% of the nuclear material falls outside its ambit.
- Despite its intent, the NSS has also not been able to amend the IAEA's convention on nuclear safety.
- The fact that there is no legally binding outcome at the end of six years of NSS process is its major drawback. The NSS process has instead focused on asking countries to tighten their national laws, rules and capabilities on nuclear security. This has meant that military facilities are treated as national responsibilities and dealt as per international obligations.

What has been India's contribution to the NSS?

India has played an active role at the summits with the first two being attended by then Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. As part of the house gift, India made a voluntary contribution of one million dollars to the **Nuclear Security Fund** and has established a **Global Centre of Excellence for Nuclear Energy Partnership (GCENEP)**, where more than a dozen national and international training programmes have been conducted so far.

Threats faced by India:

India is a source of nuclear material and a potential target of nuclear terrorism. While India takes pride in the security of its nuclear installations, 'orphan sources' i.e devices with radioactive materials outside regulatory and security measures could pose serious risks.

According to a recent report by the Washington DC-based Nuclear Threat Initiative, India also has groups that want to acquire nuclear material. The report that ranked India low in nuclear security measures, cited *corruption as a key reason* that could compromise its nuclear facilities.

Security experts have identified at least four types of specific threats that terror outfits pose-

1. These groups could acquire a nuclear weapon from the arsenal of a nuclear state.
2. They could acquire enough fissile material to construct an improvised nuclear device.
3. They could acquire radioactive material from civilian sources such as hospitals or university laboratories that could be mixed with conventional explosives to make a radioactive dispersal device or 'dirty bomb.'
4. Terror groups could also sabotage a nuclear facility leading to large-scale loss of lives and destruction.

Sources: the hindu.

Obama and President Xi of China Vow to Sign Paris Climate Accord

President Obama and President Xi Jinping of China have decided to sign the **Paris Agreement on climate change** on **April 22 (Earth Day)**, the first day the United Nations accord will be open for government signatures.

- The two world leaders made the announcement on the sidelines of a nuclear security meeting in Washington.
- Combined, the United States and China account for about 40% of global emissions.

Paris Agreement:

The Paris Agreement, reached in December, is the **first global accord to commit nearly every nation to take domestic actions to tackle climate change.**

- The agreement requires any country that ratifies it to act to stem its greenhouse gas emissions in the coming century, with the goal of peaking greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible and continuing the reductions as the century progresses.
- Countries will have to aim to keep global temperatures from rising more than 2°C by 2100 with an ideal target of keeping temperature rise below 1.5°C.
- The agreement also includes a provision requiring developed countries to send \$100 billion annually to their developing counterparts beginning in 2020. This figure is expected to increase with time.
- The agreement gives countries considerable leeway in determining how to cut their emissions but mandates that they report transparently on those efforts. Every five years nations will be required to assess their progress towards meeting their climate commitments and submit new

plans to strengthen them. Some elements in the agreement are binding-like reporting requirements.

- The **Paris Agreement will enter into legal force only when enough countries have signed on: Together they have to be responsible for causing 55% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions.**

Sources: the hindu.

Cabinet nod for India-UAE MoU to prevent human trafficking

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between India and United Arab Emirate to prevent human trafficking.

Key facts:

- Under this MoU a joint task force with representatives from both sides would be constituted to monitor its implementation.
- This MoU will strengthen the bonds of friendship between the two countries and increase bilateral cooperation on issues of prevention, rescue, recovery and repatriation related to human trafficking, especially of women and children, expeditiously.
- The MoU will strengthen cooperation to prevent all forms of human trafficking and ensure speedy investigation and prosecution of traffickers and organised crime syndicates in either country.
- It will ensure taking preventive measures that would eliminate human trafficking in women and children and in protecting the rights of victims of trafficking.
- Anti-trafficking cells and task forces will work on both sides to prevent human trafficking. Police and other concerned authorities will work in close cooperation and exchange information which can be used to interdict human traffickers.
- The repatriation of victims would be done as expeditiously as possible and the home country will undertake the safe and effective re-integration of the victims.

Sources: pib.

India-Chile preferential trade agreement

The cabinet has approved expanding the present India-Chile **preferential trade agreement (PTA)**.

Details:

- Under the expanded PTA, Chile has offered concessions to India on 1,798 products and India reciprocated with concessions on 1,031 products.
- Under the proposed expanded PTA, 86% of India's exports to Chile will get covered with concessions, which is likely to result in doubling of our exports in the near future.

Benefits:

- Expansion of India-Chile PTA will enhance the trade and economic relations between the two countries.
- The expansion would be an important landmark in India-Chile relations and consolidate the traditional fraternal relations that have existed between India and Latin American countries.

Background:

The India-Chile PTA signed in March 2006 came into force in August 2007. Bilateral trade registered growth of 58.49% from 2006-07 to 2014-15 after the PTA came into force. India exported \$570 million worth of goods to Chile in 2014-15 and imported goods worth \$3.08 billion, leading to a trade deficit of \$2.5 billion.

What is a PTA?

A preferential trade agreement is a trading bloc that gives preferential access to certain products from the participating countries. This is done by reducing tariffs but not by abolishing them completely.

Sources: pib.

Cabinet approves signing the Paris Agreement

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the Paris Agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of Parties held in Paris in December 2015. The agreement will be signed on 22 April 2016.

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: pib.

[Heart of Asia conference begins today in New Delhi](#)

The Heart of Asia (HoA) conference has begun in New Delhi with the objective of bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and speeding up its reconstruction with a focus on enhancing investment and connectivity to the country.

- The conference will be attended by officials of a number of countries including Pakistan.
- The key elements of HoA process have been to devise a sustained, incremental approach to implementation of the confidence building measures (CBM) in Afghanistan and the officials are set to deliberate on them during the conference.

About the conference:

The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process presents a new vision of cooperation and confidence building for the region with Afghanistan at its centre.

- The Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process articulates a set of principles, such as respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promoting cooperation in the areas of common challenges and shared interests in the region.
- It provides a platform for discussing key regional issues among participating states.
- Since its inception in 2011, the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process has been lead by two co-chairs: Afghanistan as a permanent co-chair, and one of the Heart of Asia countries hosting the annual ministerial meeting as the co-chair.
- As permanent co-chair of this regional process, Afghanistan has been recognized as the main focal point/ coordinator of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process.

The 14 participating countries in HoA process are Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and UAE. The supporting countries include Australia, Canada, Denmark, Egypt, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Iraq, Japan, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, U.K., U.S. and the E.U.

Sources: the hindu.

India, Papua New Guinea sign four crucial agreements

India and Papua New Guinea have signed four agreements, including in areas of healthcare and information technology, during President Pranab Mukherjee's recent visit to this Pacific island-nation. **Papua New Guinea is the largest of all the Pacific island-nations** and Mukherjee's visit is the **first ever presidential visit** from India to this country.

The four MoUs are:

- A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between India's ministry of health and family welfare and Papua New Guinea's ministry of health and HIV/AIDS for a broad range of cooperation in the field of healthcare and medical science.
- Another MoU was signed between the Papua New Guinea government and the Export Import Bank of India for a \$100-million credit line for development of infrastructure in the island-nation.
- The third MoU was between the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi, and PNG University of Technology, Lae, for cooperation in agricultural research.
- The fourth MoU was signed between the governments of India and Papua New Guinea for establishing of India-Papua New Guinea Centre for Excellence in IT.

Sources: the hindu.

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

World military spending up in 2015, India in sixth position

As per the latest report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India is the **sixth largest military spender** in 2015 having spent \$51.3 billion.

Key facts:

- World military expenditure rose by 1% in 2015. It stood at \$1,676 billion in 2015. This reflects continuing growth in Asia and Oceania, Central and Eastern Europe, and some Middle Eastern states.
- The U.S. remained by far the **world's largest spender** in 2015 despite its defence expenditure falling by 2.4% to \$596 billion followed by China, Saudi Arabia, Russia and U.K.
- China's expenditure rose by 7.4% to \$215 billion.

India's performance:

- India moved one rank up from last year accounting for 3.1% of global military expenditure. Over a ten-year period from 2006-15 this represents a 43% jump.
- India is also ahead of countries like France, Germany and Israel who happen to be among its top arms suppliers.

Concerns:

The military spending in 2015 presents contrasting trends. On the one hand, spending trends reflect the escalating conflict and tension in many parts of the world; on the other hand, they show a clear break from the oil-fuelled surge in military spending of the past decade.

Sources: the hindu.

Foreign Ministry suspends Mallya's diplomatic passport

Within days of a request from the Enforcement Directorate, in connection with a money laundering probe in the over Rs. 900 crore IDBI Bank loan fraud case, the Ministry of External Affairs has suspended Vijay Mallya's diplomatic passport. It has also threatened to revoke it if he doesn't appear before the Indian High Commission in London within a week.

- The External Affairs Ministry has suspended the validity of Mr. Mallya's diplomatic passport under **Section 10 A of the Passports Act**. Section 10 A of the Act empowers the authorities to suspend passports or travel documents in certain cases.

- Mallya, whose ordinary passport is also rendered invalid by a Ministry order, is now left with the sole option of returning to the country on an emergency certificate issued by the Indian mission.

Types of Indian Passport:

There are three types of Indian Passport, which are-

Regular Passport has a Navy Blue cover and is issued for ordinary travel, such as vacations and business trips.

Diplomatic Passport has a Maroon cover and is issued to Indian diplomats, top ranking government officials and diplomatic couriers.

Official Passport has a White cover and it is issued to individuals representing the Indian government on official business.

Sources: the hindu.

Trading bloc to India: Cut tariffs or exit FTA talks

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership has asked India to either agree to eliminate tariffs on most products quickly or leave the talks on the proposed Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Background:

RCEP members are upset over India's protectionist stance, focusing only on the export of manpower and not on liberalising trade in goods and other services, as well as investment. They have issued this ultimatum being irked by what they perceive as New Delhi's "obstructionist, defensive and half-hearted approach" that is "delaying" the conclusion of the talks.

What's the demand?

Some member countries want India to take a long-term approach and agree to eliminate duties in goods (barring in a few sensitive sectors in agriculture & industrial goods) on a higher threshold within a decade to help India leverage the opportunities arising out of the Global Value Chain.

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 (FTA) 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.
- RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the TPP trade agreement, which includes the United States but excludes China.

Sources: the hindu.

RCEP draft moots tough curbs on cheap medicines

According to a report, the draft Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement, being negotiated by 16 countries, in its current form could reduce access to affordable medicines in many developing countries.

How?

The chapter on Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) is part of the RCEP agreement. This chapter contains proposals for patent extensions, restrictive rules on exceptions to copyright, and dozens of other anti-consumer measures.

- These provisions illustrate the power of rights-holder groups to use secret trade negotiations to influence democratic decisions that impact access to knowledge, the freedom to innovate and the right to health in negative ways.

India's opposition to RCEP proposals is on:

- Patent extensions.
- Restrictive rules on copyright.
- Anti-consumer measures.

Concerns:

The draft proposals will compel governments to commit to newer Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights provisions like TRIPS plus — including the Patent Law Treaty (Geneva, 2000), which involve harmonisation in the examination of patent applications and requirements of patentability.

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).

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- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
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Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: *important international organizations.*

Highlights of the 4th NSS

The fourth NSS, **the last in its current format**, ended with leaders from more than 50 countries and four international organisations stating in a joint communiqué that “more work remains to be done to prevent non-state actors from obtaining nuclear and other radioactive materials, which could be used for malicious purposes.”

- The two-day summit was aimed at getting political leaderships directly involved in dealing with the threat of nuclear terrorism.

What's expected ahead?

- India and Pakistan need to make progress in reducing their *nuclear arsenal* and ensure they do not continually move in the wrong direction while developing military doctrines.
- To reduce the global nuclear arsenal it is necessary for the U.S. and Russia, the two largest possessors of nuclear weapons, to lead the way.
- The Islamic State (IS) terror group obtaining a nuclear weapon was one of the greatest threats to global security. World leaders should work together to prevent such spread.

What has India done in this regard?

India has taken multiple measures to prevent terrorists acquiring nuclear weapons.

- India has set up a **permanent team of technical and security experts** from multiple ministries and agencies that conducts tabletop exercises simulating nuclear smuggling, phased out the use of highly enriched uranium (HEU) and built a database of all radioactive sources in the country.

- It has also started **real-time tracking of radioactive sources** when they are transported and set up a network of 23 **emergency response centres** across the country for detecting and responding to any nuclear or radiological emergency.
- India is also in the process of equipping all major seaports and airports of the country with **radiation detection machines**.
- While nuclear security is a serious domestic concern, India also used the platform to push its desire for **membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)**, the exclusive club that controls global nuclear trade.
- India's export controls list and guidelines have been harmonised with those of the NSG, and India looks forward to strengthening its contribution to shared non-proliferation objectives through membership of the export controls regimes.

Sources: the hindu.

'Hidden' vetoes must go, India tells U.N.

India has sought changes in the U.N. procedures to designate a group or an individual terrorist.

Background:

The demand for more transparency comes days after China blocked India's bid to designate Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar a terrorist.

Existing rules:

The existing rules allow Security Council members to oppose any move in the sanctions committees in a clandestine manner and without offering any explanation.

- The sanctions committees can take decisions only unanimously, and this means any of the 15 members can veto a move. This amounts to allowing a "hidden veto" for every member of the council.
- The general membership of the UN is never ever formally informed of how and why requests for listing terrorists are not acceded to.

The Security Council has Al-Qaeda, Taliban and Islamic State Sanctions Committees that can mandate international sanctions, which will require countries to freeze the targeted group's or individual's assets, ban designated individuals from travelling and prevent the supply of weapons, technology and other aid.

UNSC: Quick facts

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security.
- Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.
- The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body's five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.
- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

Sources: the hindu.

BRICS bank okays first loan of \$811 mn

The New Development Bank (NDB), formed by the BRICS group of emerging nations, has approved its first loans – \$811 million for renewable energy projects in Brazil, China, India and South Africa.

- The decision to approve the first loans, which are to be handed out in tranches, was approved by the NDB at the board of governors on the sidelines of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank spring meetings in Washington DC.

About the New Development Bank:

It is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).

- The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013. The bank, with authorized capital of \$100 billion, started work last year.
- The bank will be headquartered in Shanghai, China and its first President is Kundapur Vaman Kamath.
- Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

Main role of the bank:

The New Development Bank will mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies and developing countries, to supplement existing efforts of multilateral and regional financial institutions for global growth and development.

Benefits:

- The establishment of the Bank will help India and other signatory countries to raise and avail resources for their infrastructure and sustainable development projects.
- It would also reflect the close relations among BRICS countries, while providing a powerful instrument for increasing their economic cooperation.
- It is expected to allow India to raise and obtain more resources for the much needed infrastructure development, the lack of which is coming in the way of inclusiveness and growth as of now.
- It will make available additional resources thereby recycling the savings accumulated in emerging countries which are presently being locked up in Treasury bonds having much lower returns.

Sources: the hindu.

UN Chief Appoints Indian Academician To University Council

Indian academician, Radha Kumar, is among 12 people appointed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the global body's **University Council to formulate its principles and policies, consider and approve biennial budget and work programme.**

- The 12 appointees, who will take office next month, will serve for terms of either three or six years.

About the UN University Council:

The main functions of the UN University Council are to formulate the principles and policies of the University, govern its operations, and consider and approve its biennial budget and work programme.

- Appointed members of the Council serve in their individual capacity and not as representatives of their country's government.

- They are selected with the aim of achieving a geographic and gender balance, with due regard for major academic, scientific, educational and cultural trends, as well as each member's fields of expertise.

Sources: toi.

GENERAL STUDIES-III

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

Taxes from disinvestment help government receipts balloon

In one day, the centre has raised Rs 4,500 crore by participating in a shares buyback offer of Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) and Bharat Dynamics Ltd (BDL). The Government has also raised Rs 980 crore through the taxes it generated in these two disinvestment transactions.

Key facts:

Overall, in this financial year the Government has raised a total of Rs 25,000 crore. Including taxes, the Government has raised the highest amount garnered through disinvestment in a single year since 1991. In 2014-15, the Centre had raised Rs 24,348.71 crore, the maximum in a single year through disinvestment.

Way ahead:

In 2016-17 the Government plans to participate in more offers of shares buybacks of central public sector units. In the Union Budget, a disinvestment target of Rs 56,500 crore has been set for the year. Of this, Rs 36,000 crore is to be raised from sales of minority stakes in PSUs. The remaining Rs 20,500 crore is projected to come from strategic sales in both profit and loss-making enterprises.

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. Keeping this objective in view of disinvestment policy, the Government has adopted the following approach to disinvestment:

Department of Disinvestment:

The Department of Disinvestment was set up on December 10, 1999, with the responsibility to deal with all matters relating to disinvestment of Central Government equity in Central Public Sector Undertakings. This department now works under the Ministry of Finance.

National Investment Fund:

In 2005, the government formed a National Investment Fund or NIF, to which the proceeds of disinvestment were channeled. The mandate of the Fund, managed by professional investment managers, was to utilise 75% of annual funds in social sector schemes to promote education, health and employment. But with the economic slowdown of 2008-09, and later a drought, this was waived for three years — and later, in 2013, restructured to provide flexibility in using the Fund.

It was decided that the NIF would be utilized for the following purposes:

- Subscribing to the shares being issued by the CPSE including PSBs and Public Sector Insurance Companies, on rights basis so as to ensure 51% ownership of the Government in those CPSEs/PSBs/Insurance Companies, is not diluted.
- Preferential allotment of shares of the CPSE to promoters as per SEBI (Issue of Capital and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2009 so that Government shareholding does not go down below 51% in all cases where the CPSE is going to raise fresh equity to meet its Capex programme.
- Recapitalization of public sector banks and public sector insurance companies.
- Investment by Government in RRBs/IIFCL/NABARD/Exim Bank.
- Equity infusion in various Metro projects.
- Investment in Bhartiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam Limited and Uranium Corporation of India Ltd.
- Investment in Indian Railways towards capital expenditure.

Sources: the hindu.

SBI wants banks to hold government's cash balance

In view of the liquidity crunch that banks have been facing for the last few months, the State Bank of India (SBI) – the country's largest lender – has demanded that the government's **cash balances to be kept with the lenders (Banks) and not with the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).**

Why?

Currently, the issue of high volatility in currency holdings of public (both in the form of cash and jewellery) as well as Government's cash balances with RBI is leading to volatility in system liquidity.

- If cash balances are placed with public sector banks, instead of with RBI, the cash remains within the banking system and **does not create unnecessary volatility in money markets**.
- Besides, such an action will provide a clear picture of the money available within the system which will not get distorted by government borrowing.
- Also, if government keeps its cash with banks, it can even **earn interest** which the banks will offer. **RBI offers no interest to the government for keeping its cash.**

Background:

With government curtailing its spending towards the end of the last financial year, its cash balances with RBI had gone up. Bankers estimate the liquidity deficit in the system in March 2016 was over Rs. two lakh crore, mainly on account of lack of government spending, and the deficit was higher than the comfort level of RBI which is around Rs.75,000 crore.

Sources: the hindu.

Key takeaways from RBI's first monetary policy review of FY17

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI), in its latest monetary policy review, has slashed key lending rate by 25 basis points.

Key facts:

- Repo rate was reduced by 25 basis points from 6.75% to 6.5%.
- The cash reserve ratio (CRR), which is the quantum of liquid funds against deposits which commercial banks have to hold, has been left unchanged at 4%.
- The minimum daily maintenance of CRR has been cut to 90% from 95%.
- Reverse repo rate has been increased to 6% from 5.75%.
- GDP growth is projected to improve gradually to 7.6% in 2016-17.
- Retail inflation is projected to moderate in 2016-17 to around 5%.
- The marginal standing facility (MSF) rate stands at 7%.
- The bank rate which is aligned to the MSF rate stands at 7%.
- The policy rate corridor narrowed from 100 basis points (bps) to 50 bps.

- The statutory liquidity ratio, or the value of specified securities which commercial banks have to subscribe to, is at 21.25%, effective from April 2.

Glossary:

Basis Point: It is one hundredth of one percent. 1 basis point means 0.01%. Used for measuring change in interest rate/yield.

MSF: Marginal standing facility is a window for banks to borrow from Reserve Bank of India in emergency situation when inter-bank liquidity dries up completely. Banks borrow from the central bank by pledging government securities at a rate higher than the repo rate under liquidity adjustment facility or LAF in short.

Repo rate: is the rate at which the RBI lends short-term money to the banks against securities.

Reverse Repo rate: is the rate at which banks park their short-term excess liquidity with the RBI. The banks use this tool when they feel that they are stuck with excess funds and are not able to invest anywhere for reasonable returns.

SLR: Every bank is required to maintain at the close of business every day, a minimum proportion of their Net Demand and Time Liabilities as liquid assets in the form of cash, gold and unencumbered approved securities. The ratio of liquid assets to demand and time liabilities is known as Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR). An increase in SLR restricts the bank's leverage position to pump more money into the economy.

CRR: Banks in India are required to hold a certain proportion of their deposits in the form of cash. However, Banks don't hold these as cash with themselves, but deposit such case with Reserve Bank of India (RBI) / currency chests, which is considered as equivalent to holding cash with RBI. This minimum ratio (that is the part of the total deposits to be held as cash) is stipulated by the RBI and is known as the CRR or Cash Reserve Ratio. It is a tool used by RBI to control liquidity in the banking system.

Sources: the hindu.

Cabinet approves recommendations of 14th Finance Commission

The Cabinet has approved the 14th Finance Commission's recommendations on fiscal deficit targets and additional targets for states during 2015-20.

Details:

- The government approved a fiscal deficit target of 3% for states, as recommended by the FC for the 2015-20 period.

- Besides, the Commission has also provided for year-to-year flexibility for additional deficit. It has provided additional headroom to a maximum of 0.5% over and above the normal limit of 3% in any given year to states that have had a favourable debt-GSDP ratio and interest payments-revenue receipts ratio in the previous two years.
- However, the flexibility in availing the additional fiscal deficit will be available to a state if there is no revenue deficit in the year in which borrowing limits are to be fixed and immediately preceding year.
- Since the year 2015-16 is already over, the States will not get any benefit of additional borrowings for 2015-16. However, the implications for the remaining period of FFC award of 2016-17 to 2019-20, would depend upon respective States' eligibility based on the criteria prescribed by FFC.
- If a State is not able to fully utilise its sanctioned fiscal deficit of 3% of GSDP in any particular year during the 2016-17 to 2018-19 of FFC award period, it will have the option of availing this un-utilised fiscal deficit amount (calculated in rupees) only in the following year but within FFC award period.

Financial implications:

There is no financial implication for Government of India as the borrowings are made by the respective State Governments within the fiscal deficit limits laid down by Finance Commission and incorporated in FRBMA of the States. However, the State will get additional space to raise borrowings which may result in much needed Government Expenditure for capital projects and infrastructure.

Sources: pib.

Bharti's payments bank unit gets final RBI nod

Bharti Airtel's payments bank venture — **Airtel M Commerce Services Ltd.** — has become the **first entity to receive final approval from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI)** to start a payments bank.

Background:

In August last year, the banking regulator granted in-principle licences to 11 entities to start payments banks.

- The 'in-principle' approval was valid for 18 months, during which time the applicants were asked by RBI to comply with the licensing norms.

- Most of the players who received the payments licences are yet to apply for the final licences.

All about Payment Banks:

Payment Bank is a step towards financial inclusion.

- Capital requirement: The minimum paid-up equity capital for payments banks is Rs. 100 crore.
- The payments bank should have a leverage ratio of not less than 3%, i.e., its outside liabilities should not exceed 33.33 times its net worth (paid-up capital and reserves).
- Promoter's contribution: The promoter's minimum initial contribution to the paid-up equity capital of such payments bank shall at least be 40% for the first five years from the commencement of its business.
- Foreign shareholding: The foreign shareholding in the payments bank would be as per the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy for private sector banks as amended from time to time.
- Apart from amounts maintained as Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) with the Reserve Bank on its outside demand and time liabilities, it will be required to invest minimum 75% of its "demand deposit balances" in Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) eligible Government securities/treasury bills with maturity up to one year and hold maximum 25% in current and time/fixed deposits with other scheduled commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

What are the scopes of activities of Payment Banks?

- Payments banks will mainly deal in remittance services and accept deposits of up to Rs 1 lakh.
- They will not lend to customers and will have to deploy their funds in government papers and bank deposits.
- The promoter's minimum initial contribution to equity capital will have to be at least 40% for the first five years.
- They can accept demand deposits.
- Payments bank will initially be restricted to holding a maximum balance of Rs. 100,000 per individual customer.
- Can issue ATM/debit cards but not credit cards.
- Can carry out payments and remittance services through various channels.

Sources: the hindu.

Tap forex pool to help exporters: Ministry

The Commerce Ministry has asked RBI to use a part of its foreign exchange reserves to give long-term loans at low interest rate to the Exim Bank of India, which can pass it on to exporters at lower rates than bank credit.

Why?

The aim is to help reduce the costs and enhance the competitiveness of exporters at a time of global trade slowdown and weak demand overseas.

Commerce Ministry's proposal:

According to the commerce ministry, a part of India's foreign exchange (forex) reserve can be used for loans as the forex reserve has now increased to a record high of around \$360 billion.

- The ministry argues that higher import cover indicates greater currency stability and India's capacity to absorb external shocks, such as the impact of an outflow of funds following a rate hike by the US Fed, and support its domestic economy.

What necessitates this?

Rate of export credit in India is between 11 and 12% as against 2-3% in the Euro area (except Greece), 2.6% in Taiwan, 4.6% in Thailand, 5.5% in China and 6.2% in Malaysia.

- Exporters, citing the contraction in the country's goods exports for 15 months since December 2014, have been demanding credit at lower rates to help increase their competitiveness in global markets.
- Exim Bank of India has also been citing constraints including that it is permitted a low leverage ratio, of around 11 times the bank's net-owned funds, in comparison to that of its Chinese counterpart, where the ratio is 77 times. Exim Bank has sought relaxation of norms including a higher leverage ratio, of at least 15 times its NOF, and more capital from the government.
- However, the Finance Ministry is unwilling to give more capital to the Exim Bank given the fiscal constraints. Therefore, the Exim Bank is finding it difficult to finance project exports due to these operational limitations.

Sources: the hindu.

HC upholds legal provision against foreign tax havens

The Madras High Court has upheld the Constitutional validity of Section 94A(1) of the Income Tax Act, 1961 which empowers the government to declare any country, with which it lacks

effective exchange of information, a ‘**notified jurisdictional area.**’ Section 94A(1) was inserted into the Act in 2011 through an amendment.

- This is being seen as a major boost to the Centre’s efforts to prevent infusion of black money through shell companies in foreign tax havens.

What the Court says?

The insertion of Section 94A(1) did not amount to disrespecting international bilateral treaties to avoid double taxation.

Background:

These observations were made by the court while dismissing a batch of writ petitions challenging this provision.

Sources: the hindu.

World output faces risk of 3.9 % drop by 2021

The decline in oil prices has helped countries such as India improve their external positions, but low commodity prices have kept risks elevated in emerging market economies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said in its latest Global Financial Stability Report.

- The financial stability report assesses the risks faced by the global financial system and the current edition surveys the issues that surfaced since October 2015.

Important observations made in the report:

- The spill-over effects of the growing uncertainty about China’s economy and setbacks to growth and confidence in advanced economies are other factors undermining global financial stability. These developments tightened financial conditions, reduced risk appetite, raised credit risks and stymied balance sheet repair.
- Global output could decline 3.9% by 2021 if action isn’t taken to address the risks faced by the financial system.

The main message of this report is that additional measures are needed to deliver a more balanced and potent policy mix for improving the growth and inflation outlook and securing financial stability. In the absence of such measures, market turmoil may recur. However, if timely measures are taken, world output could expand by 1.7%, relative to the baseline, by 2018.

Suggestions made by the report:

The report identifies a window of opportunity in the current economic recovery to deal with what it calls a “triad of global challenges,” namely, the legacy issues in advanced economies,

vulnerabilities in emerging markets and greater systemic market liquidity risks. IMF suggests that in advanced economies, banks must deal with bad assets and other legacy issues.

Sources: the hindu.

Government mulls sovereign gold bond issue around Akshaya Tritiya

The government is planning to issue the fourth tranche of sovereign gold bonds around Akshaya Tritiya.

Why on this day?

Akshaya Tritiya, which falls on May 9 this year, is an important day for the bullion market as people consider buying gold on that day as auspicious. In the past two years, gold demand on this day stood at 25-30 tonnes. In 2013, around 50 tonnes of gold was estimated to have been sold on Akshaya Tritiya.

Background:

The government has issued three tranche of sovereign gold bonds so far, with a total subscription of around 5,000 kg. Of this, the second tranche accounted for around 60%.

About Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

Under the scheme, gold bonds are issued in denominations of 5 grams, 10 grams, 50 grams and 100 grams for a term of 5-7 years with a rate of interest to be calculated on the value of the metal at the time of investment. The scheme has an annual cap of 500 grams per person.

- The bonds will be sold through banks, Stock Holding Corporation of India Limited and designated post offices.
- As per the scheme, the gold bonds will be sold only to resident Indian entities including individuals, Hindu undivided families, trusts, universities, and charitable institutions.
- The bond tenure will be eight years with exit option beginning the fifth year onwards. They will also be tradable in the bourses.
- Bonds can also be used as collateral for loans.

Sources: bs.

Services corner bulk of FDI inflows

According to an analysis of the official data by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion and Citi Research, **more than half of total FDI inflows in 2015 came into the services** sector, comprising software, financial services, trading, hospital and tourism.

Key facts:

- Although India received an all-time high annual foreign direct investment (FDI) in 2015, the surge is led by the inflows into the services sector.
- In 2014, the services sector accounted for about a third of the gross inflows. FDI into the sector in 2015 was 111% higher than in 2014.
- The inflows into the manufacturing sector are up 6% in 2015 after the 19% fall in 2014. FDI into infrastructure in 2015 was marginally lower than in 2014.
- Inflows to construction surged 188% from \$1527 million to \$4,405 million. Insurance received \$581 million against \$236 million, a 146% jump.
- FDI in Railways declined 67% to \$71 million from \$213 million in the previous year. Air transport too saw lower inflows — \$50 million against \$73 million. For mining the fall was from \$666 million to \$547 million. The defence sector is yet to receive FDI.
- In the 20 months of the NDA government, India has received total FDI of \$85 billion compared to \$59 billion in a similar period before that. FDI outflows (Indians investing overseas) declined 37%, confirming the change in investor sentiment.

Sources: the hindu.

India Overtakes China As Top FDI Destination

India has replaced China as the **top FDI destination for the year 2015**.

Key facts:

- India attracted FDI worth \$63 billion in 2015, emerging as the highest-ranked country by capital investment.
- Five Indian states were among the top 10 destination states for FDI in 2015. **Gujrat emerged as top state for FDI with \$12.4 billion in investment**, while Maharashtra attracted FDI worth \$8.3 billion in 2015.
- Domestic market growth potential and proximity to markets are the two main reasons for rising FDI.

Sources: the hindu.

Govt. looking to axe 52 out of 200 allowances

The government is planning to scrap 52 of the nearly 200 allowances.

Why?

It is because the Seventh Pay Commission found inadequate the justifications offered by the Ministries for these allowances. Besides recommending that 52 allowances be abolished, the Commission suggested that another 36 be subsumed in an existing allowance or in new allowances it proposed.

Background:

- The Pay Commission found the entire system of nearly 200 allowances haphazard. Hence, the government was asked to suggest rationalisation of a variety of allowances.
- The commission found that many allowances were meagre cash payments and have lost significance.
- Allowances which will be abolished include family planning allowance, cycle allowance to postal officials and the briefcase allowance.

What are allowances?

Allowances are paid to employees — both in civil and defence jobs — over and above the basic pay, either as a percentage of it, or as a specified amount, which usually varies with employees' "level or status".

Sources: the hindu.

Peer-to-peer lending to come under RBI purview

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released a consultation paper on **peer-to-peer (P2P)** lending and proposed to bring such platforms under its purview by defining them as **non-banking finance companies (NBFCs)**.

What is P2P lending?

P2P lending is a **form of crowdfunding**; an online platform that matches lenders with borrowers in order to provide unsecured loans. The borrower can either be an individual or a business requiring a loan. A fee is paid to the platform by both the lender and the borrower.

RBI's proposal:

- The central bank has proposed a **minimum capital requirement of Rs 2 crore**, and wants players not to offer any extraordinary returns.
- The borrower can either be an individual or a business requiring a loan. A fee is paid to the platform by both the lender and the borrower.
- The RBI has also stated that P2P lenders could **act only as an intermediary**, wherein none of the lending/borrowing gets reflected in their balance sheets.

- It has also been proposed to make it mandatory for transfer of funds to take place directly from the lender's bank account to that of the borrower.
- The central bank also said confidentiality of customer data and data security would be the responsibility of the platform.

Why P2P regulation is necessary?

Although nascent in India and not significant in value yet, the potential benefits that P2P lending promises to various stakeholders and its associated risks to the financial system are too important to be ignored. Coming under the purview of the RBI will not only be a confidence booster for the sector, but also for individual lenders.

Present scenario:

According to the data released by Peer to Peer Finance Association, the cumulative lending through P2P platforms globally, at the end of Q4 of 2015, had reached 4.4 billion pounds. In India, P2P lending platforms are largely technology companies registered under the Companies Act.

Sources: the hindu.

Govt. throws open I-T data; tax base stays narrow

The government has for the first time put the data on income tax in public domain.

Highlights:

- Just 1% of individuals, who declared their income in assessment year 2012-13, accounted for almost 20% of the taxable income. Among corporates, however, this imbalance is starker, with a little more than 5% of the companies accounting for a whopping 94% of the taxable income.
- Direct tax collections have fallen drastically in the last five years, growing at an average annual rate of 8.5% between assessment years 2011-12 and 2015-16, compared to the 14.1% over the previous five years.
- The drop in the growth rate of direct tax collections was accompanied by an equally dire slowdown in the growth of corporate tax. Corporate tax grew at an average annual rate of 7.1% between assessment years 2011-12 and 2015-16, down from the heady 15.6% seen in the previous five years.
- The personal income tax data — which also includes securities transaction taxes — on the other hand, barely witnessed a change in growth rates in this period, growing at an annual average of 9.1% between 2011 and 2015, just 0.2 percentage points slower than the growth seen in the previous five years.

- The data also shows that there were 13.3 lakh individuals declaring an income of more than Rs 10 lakh a year — the section of people the government has excluded from the LPG subsidy.
- Among the states, Gujarat saw the fastest growth in its direct tax collections, growing 185% in FY2014-15 to Rs 12,577 crore compared to its level in FY2008-09. Tamil Nadu saw the next-fastest growth in the period, with its direct tax collections growing 116% to Rs 20,651 crore in FY2014-15. Maharashtra and West Bengal were the other states seeing rapid growth in their direct tax collections.
- The State-wise data also revealed some anomalies. For example, Mizoram recorded Rs 39.8 crore of direct tax collections in FY2014-15, which is more than double what it collected in the previous year. Chattisgarh, on the other hand, saw its direct tax collections grow 0.01% in FY2014-15 to Rs 1,287 crore compared to its level in 2008-09.

Sources: the hindu.

***Paper 3 Topic:** Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.*

Panama disease stalks banana cultivation in Kerala

The **Panama disease caused by a soil-borne fungus** is threatening banana crops across Kerala, posing a potential crisis for farmers.

Main concern:

Scientists are concerned that the sporadic cases of infestation could turn into an epidemic. Most of the popular cultivars have shown signs of infestation.

How to prevent it?

Scientists have recommend **soil treatment with fungicides** for control of the disease.

About the disease:

Also called **Fusarium Wilt of banana**, Panama is caused by the **soil-borne fungus Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. Cubense (Foc)**. The fungus enters the plant through the roots and goes on to colonise the plant through the vascular system.

- It causes **discoloration and wilting of leaves**, and eventually kills the plant.
- The fungus spreads through infected planting material, soil and water.

Background:

In the 1950s, Panama wiped out the Gros Michel banana, the dominant cultivar. Over the years, it spread from Panama to neighbouring countries. A new virulent strain of the disease known as Tropical Race 4 (TR4) is now threatening banana crops in Asia, Australia, Africa and the Middle East.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Land reforms in India.

NITI Aayog finalises Model Act for farm land lease

An expert panel appointed by NITI Aayog has submitted its recommendations to create a **model law to formalise leasing of agricultural land**.

What necessitated this?

Due to lack of any legal framework for leasing, the informal tenants of agricultural land have, in many parts of the country, been deprived access to institutional credit, disaster relief, and other support services.

- The situation, where beneficiaries of agricultural support services have been the land-owners and not the actual tillers, has fuelled problems of farmer suicides, default on agricultural loans among others.
- Also, agricultural land leasing has hitherto been informal due to legal restrictions imposed by some states, and these restrictions have affected agricultural productivity growth.

What's there in the proposed model law?

- One of the key objectives of the model law is to facilitate insurance, disaster relief, and bank credit to the tenant without mortgaging of the leased land. Since the draft model law moots clear ownership of land with the lessor, it **disallows using the asset for mortgage purposes**.
- The Act is meant for **States that plan to legalise farm land leasing**. State governments are expected to improvise it to suit the local socio-political requirements.
- Land ownership will remain secure and will revert to the owner and in case the parcel of land is sold before the tenure of the lease is complete, the rights of the tenants will be secure. **No changes will be made in the land records**.
- **Attestation** of the lease is proposed to be done at the level of the sarpanch, local bank official or notary.

- The Model Act also proposes that farmers and farmer groups be allowed to lease out land. The definition of ‘**farm land**’ is proposed to be broadened **to include food processing**.
- The Model Act proposes **quicker litigation process in case of disputes**, by suggesting recourse through criminal proceedings and special tribunal. It is expected that the dispute settlement will be taken up at the level of the Gram Sabha, Panchayat and Tehsildar.
- At present, only land owners can avail of crop insurance schemes or loans. Also, disaster relief in case of drought and crop damage is provided only to the owners and not cultivators. The Model Act will enable **share croppers to receive such benefits and relief**. Lessee cultivators could raise crop loans on the basis of expected produce.
- The proposed model law, however, **does not restrict the owner of the land from selling the asset even during the lease period**, as long as the cultivation rights of the tenant are not affected.

Background:

To review the existing agricultural tenancy laws of various states and prepare a model agricultural land leasing act, the **NITI Aayog**, in September 2015, had set up an Expert Committee on Land Leasing headed by T Haque. Prior to submitting its report to the NITI Aayog, the committee held several rounds of discussion with states, farmer organisations and civil society groups.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: *Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.*

PMO asks NITI Aayog to widen ambit of DBT

The government is considering expanding the ambit of Direct Benefits Transfer (DBT). The Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) has asked the NITI Aayog to explore all government services and delivery schemes for this purpose.

- The idea is to try and provide all subsidies through an Aadhaar (the citizen identification scheme)-enabled DBT by 2017-end.

Present scenario:

DBT, at present, encompasses various government schemes including directly crediting Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme payments to bank accounts. At present, about 30% of DBT is through Aadhaar; about Rs 4,000 crore is paid monthly for 57 such schemes.

- The government has met success in using the mechanism for transfers in cooking gas (liquefied petroleum gas, or LPG) and foodgrain. DBT in LPG has enabled the Centre to eliminate duplication in these accounts.
- For beneficiaries of the Public Distribution System in foodgrain, there's an option of getting the allotment directly or being paid cash directly into their accounts, especially the new accounts under the Jan-Dhan Yojana.
- Some new transfers, such as those for kerosene, are also planned to be through DBT, this financial year.

Sources: bs.

***Paper 3 Topic:** Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.*

Centre's nod for NIMZ in Medak

The government has granted the final approval to the National Investment and Manufacturing Zone (NIMZ) at Zaheerabad in Medak district, Telangana.

- The estimated total investment by the manufacturing industry by the end of the ultimate phase of the NIMZ's development is Rs.17,300 crore and the employment generation is about 2.77 lakh.

What are National Investment and Manufacturing Zones (NIMZs)?

The National Investment & Manufacturing Zones (NIMZs) are an important instrumentality of the National manufacturing policy. The NIMZs are envisaged as integrated industrial townships with:

- State of the art infrastructure.
- Land use on the basis of zoning.
- Clean and energy efficient technology.
- Necessary social infrastructure.
- Skill development facilities etc.

Aim: NIMZs aim to provide a productive environment for persons transitioning from the primary to the secondary and tertiary sectors.

What the National Manufacturing Policy (NMP) says?

The National Manufacturing Policy (NMP) has the objective of enhancing the share of manufacturing in GDP to 25% and creating 100 million jobs over a decade. The NMP provides for

promotion of clusters and aggregation, especially through the creation of national investment and manufacturing zones (NIMZ).

The National Manufacturing Policy (NMP) provides for:

- Relief from Capital Gains Tax on sale of plant and machinery of a unit located in a National Investment and Manufacturing Zone (NIMZ) in case of re-investment of sale consideration within a period of three years for purchase of new plant & machinery in any other unit located in the same NIMZ or another NIMZ.
- Rollover relief from long term Capital Gains tax to individuals on sale of a residential property (house or plot of land) in case of re-investment of sale consideration in the equity of a new start-up SME company in the manufacturing sector for the purchase of a new plant and machinery.
- Simple and expeditious exit mechanism for closure of sick units while protecting labour interests.
- In respect of environmental laws/regulations, inspection by specially trained/designated/notified agencies for third party inspection to supplement the inspection by the Government agencies for compliance monitoring.

Some notable points:

- NIMZ can be proposed with land area of at least 5000 hectares.
- Land will be selected by state governments and preference would be given to uncultivable land.
- NIMZ will be managed by Special Purpose Vehicle, headed by Govt. officials and experts, including those of environment.
- To enable NIMZs to function as self governing autonomous bodies, they will be **declared by the state government as industrial townships under Article 243 Q (c) of the constitution.**
- NIMZs will be **notified by the central government.**

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure- energy; ports; Roads;

Govt. launches two new energy efficiency schemes

The Centre has launched two new energy efficiency schemes:

1. National Energy Efficient Agriculture Pumps Programme.

2. National Energy Efficient Fan Programme.

These schemes will be implemented by *Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)*, a joint venture of public sector undertakings (PSUs) under the *Ministry of Power*.

National Energy Efficient Agriculture Pumps Programme:

Under the National Energy Efficient Agriculture Pumps Programme, farmers can replace their inefficient pumps free of cost with the new BEE star rated energy efficient agricultural pump-sets.

- These pumps will come enabled with smart control panel and a SIM card, giving farmers the flexibility to remotely control these pumps from their mobile phones and from the comfort of their homes, an official press release said.
- EESL will distribute 200,000 BEE star rated pump-sets to the farmers under this programme, which will lead to 30% of energy savings by 2019. This translates into an annual savings of approximately Rs 20,000 crore on agricultural subsidies or a saving of 50 billion units of energy every year.

National Energy Efficient Fan Programme:

With the usage of the 50 Watts BEE 5 Star rated ceiling fans, to be distributed under the National Energy Efficient Fan Programme, it is estimated that consumer's electricity bills will come down by about Rs. 700-730 per year. Thus, the cost recovery of purchasing these fans would be less than two years.

- These fans are 30% more energy efficient as compared to conventional fans, which range from 75-80 watts. At present, two energy efficient fans will be provided to each consumer at Rs 60 a month per fan on EMI basis. The EMI amount will be added to the consumers' electricity bills for two years.
- This scheme will be available to the consumer on providing a copy of latest electricity bill along with a copy of residence proof at the designated distribution centre. The consumer can also purchase the fan by paying Rs. 1250 upfront.

Sources: pib.

Panel gives green light to Sagarmala port project

The apex committee for the **Sagarmala project** has approved the national perspective plan on Sagarmala port project.

- The project targets to provide one crore employment. Port-led development has potential for direct employment generation for 40 lakh persons and for 60 lakh persons indirectly.

Sagarmala Initiative:

The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a string of *ports around India's coast*. The objective of this initiative is to promote “Port-led development” along India’s 7500 km long coastline.

- It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.
- The Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.

The Sagarmala initiative will address challenges by focusing on three pillars of development, namely:

- Supporting and enabling Port-led Development through appropriate policy and institutional interventions and providing for an institutional framework for ensuring inter-agency and ministries/departments/states’ collaboration for integrated development.
- Port Infrastructure Enhancement, including modernization and setting up of new ports.
- Efficient Evacuation to and from hinterland.

Other objectives:

- In addition to strengthening port and evacuation infrastructure, it also aims at simplifying procedures used at ports for cargo movement and promotes usage of electronic channels for information exchange leading to quick, efficient, hassle-free and seamless cargo movement.
- It also strives to ensure sustainable development of the population living in the Coastal Economic Zone (CEZ). This would be done by synergising and coordinating with State Governments and line Ministries of Central Government through their existing schemes and programmes such as those related to community and rural development, tribal development and employment generation, fisheries, skill development, tourism promotion etc.

Sources: the hindu.

UDAY bonds fetch Rs.99,000 crore

Eight states have issued bonds worth over Rs 98,959.96 crore under UDAY Bonds scheme in 2015-16, which is aimed at improving operational and financial efficiency of state power distribution companies.

- As part of the scheme, Reserve Bank had issued the special bonds (non-SLR special securities) on behalf of eight state governments in the last fiscal.

- The securities have been issued by the state governments under the Government Securities Act, 2006 and are eligible for market repo.

The state-wise issuance of UDAY Bonds during 2015-16 is as: Uttar Pradesh (Rs 24,332.47 crore); Rajasthan (Rs 37,349.77 crore); Chhattisgarh (Rs 870.12 crore); Punjab (Rs 9,859.72 crore); Jammu & Kashmir (Rs 2,140 crore); Bihar (Rs 1,554.52 crore); Jharkhand (Rs 5,553.37 crore) and Haryana (Rs 17,300 crore).

About UDAY:

The Power Ministry had launched UDAY (Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana) on November 20, 2015. The scheme is expected to help discoms save around Rs 1.8 lakh crore in the next three years. The cumulative debt of discoms is Rs 4.37 lakh crore.

- UDAY is an effort to make these DISCOMs financially and operationally healthy, to be able to supply adequate power at affordable rates, and enable the Governments to make efforts towards 100% Village electrification and 24X7 Power For All.
- It envisages to reduce interest burden, cost of power and AT&C losses. Consequently, DISCOM would become sustainable to supply adequate and reliable power enabling 24x7 power supply.
- UDAY has inbuilt incentives encouraging State Governments to voluntarily restructure their debts. These incentives include taking over of DISCOM debt by the States outside the fiscal deficit limits; reduction in the cost of power through various measures such as coal linkage rationalization, liberal coal swaps and priority/additional funding through schemes of MoP & MNRE.
- UDAY is different from earlier restructuring schemes in several ways including flexibility of keeping debt taken over outside fiscal deficit limit, reduction in cost of power and a series of time bound interventions for improving operational efficiency.
- UDAY also provides for measures that will reduce the cost of power generation, which would ultimately benefit consumers.

Sources: the hindu.

National corridor body plan shelved

The Centre has decided to shelve its plan to set up a **National Industrial Corridor Authority (NICA)**.

Why?

The Authority has been put on the back burner due to the delay foreseen by the Prime Minister's Office and the Cabinet Secretariat in getting Parliamentary approval for it to be conferred 'statutory' status on the lines of the National Highways Authority of India.

About NICA:

It was the proposed nodal body to oversee work relating to all national 'industrial corridors', in the face of hurdles in implementation.

- The plan to set up NICA was announced by Finance Minister Arun Jaitley in his maiden Budget speech in July 2014.
- The centre had planned to go in for a Constitutional amendment and ensure passage of 'NICA Act' in Parliament. The Constitutional amendment was to remove doubts on whether the topic 'industrial corridor' falls under the 'State List' or 'Union List' of Constitution.
- The aim was to grant NICA overarching powers including primacy over State bodies on all aspects of 'industrial corridors' thus allowing it comprehensive operational freedom.

What next?

To fill the gap, the government has decided to make the **Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (DMICDC) the coordinating body** for corridors, to move ahead with proposals relating to corridors in the works.

- As per the new plan, DMICDC head will have the powers to approve proposals relating to corridors. These will then be forwarded to the DMIC Trust for final clearance.
- The Trust — currently managed by the Secretaries of Department of Economic Affairs, Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion and that of NITI Aayog — could be expanded to include the Secretaries of Shipping, Road Transport and Urban Development (for including 'smart cities' in these corridors).

Why make DMICDC the coordinating agency?

Making DMICDC the coordinating agency only needs a Cabinet nod and is easier than obtaining Parliamentary approval for NICA.

Sources: the hindu.

5/20 rule 'anarchic': Raju

Civil Aviation Minister Ashok Gajapathi Raju has termed the 5/20 rule, which regulates Indian carriers flying abroad as "anarchic". He also said that he was trying to change it so that new airlines can connect with foreign destinations.

What is 5/20 rule?

According to the '5/20 rule,' all airlines in India need five years of domestic flying experience and at least 20 aircrafts in its fleet in order to fly abroad. The rule has been a subject of heated debate between domestic airline operators. This was proposed in the new draft civil aviation policy.

Present status:

- While the private airlines which are allowed to fly abroad — IndiGo, Jet Airways, SpiceJet — have all opposed the proposal to abolish the rule, new airlines Vistara and AirAsia India are in strong favour of relaxing the norm.
- However, the Civil Aviation Ministry is still undecided on whether to keep the 5/20 rule, abolish it or replace it with some other regulation in the civil aviation policy which is yet to go to the Union Cabinet.

Sources: the hindu.

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

Asia's largest telescope

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Belgian counterpart Charles Michel have remotely launched Asia's biggest telescope, the **Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES)**, built with Belgian assistance. It is located in Nainital, Uttarakhand.

Key facts:

- ARIES telescope is a joint collaboration between Indian, Russian, and Belgian scientists.
- The total cost of the construction and setup of the telescope is estimated to be Rs 120 crore.
- The telescope is located at Devasthal, Nainital at a height of 2,500 metres.
- It is said that the site was chosen to get a clear view of the sky.
- The ARIES optical telescope's mirror is 3.6 metres (360 centimetres) in diameter.
- The high end technology incorporated in the telescope enables it to be operated with the help of remote control from anywhere in the world.
- The telescope will be used in the study and exploration of planets, stars, magnetic field and astronomical debris.
- The scientists will also help in research of the structures of stars and magnetic field structures of stars.

- In March 2007, the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences and Belgian company Advanced Mechanical and Optical Systems (AMOS) had entered a contract for design, manufacture, integration, testing, supply, and installation of the telescope.

Sources: the hindu.

Create your own blood bank account

Indian Red Cross Society has launched a unique mobile app using which one can create their own personal blood bank account.

How this account can be utilized?

With this a person can deposit blood (by donating) and withdraw it as and when required, and can even transfer blood to a friend's account.

Key facts:

- The app is based on the '**banking**' concept. It is part of a larger **digital blood banking initiative** that the Indian Red Cross Society has rolled out along with J. Walter Thompson India.
- To be initially launched in Bengaluru, it will be extended across the country in phases.
- The app has been designed to encourage blood donations and ensure availability. The app would enable people to deposit their blood on a regular basis. Users can open a Blood Bank Account at any Red Cross-affiliated Blood Bank.
- The account can be created through the app and a unique account number will be assigned to each individual. The app will record the required information, track the account and provide timely reminders on when the next savings (blood donation) is due. And most importantly, users can make 'Blood Transfers' to their near and dear ones at the click of a button.
- It will also allow blood bank account holders to keep track of the blood deposit cycle on the digital platform.

Why such an app was necessary?

In order to maintain stock, blood banks depend heavily on replacement donors. Even if a person finds the right group in a bank, the blood is usually made available only with the replacement. The app is meant to avoid all these hassles.

Sources: the hindu.

A new state of matter detected

An international team of scientists has successfully detected a mysterious new state of matter that causes electrons, thought to be nature's indivisible building blocks, to break into pieces.

What is the new state called?

The new state is known as a *quantum spin liquid*.

Background:

Scientists have found this new state in a two-dimensional material with a structure similar to graphene. They were first predicted 40 years ago and were thought to be hiding in certain magnetic materials, but had not been conclusively sighted in nature.

What happens in this state?

In a typical magnetic material, electrons each behave like tiny bar magnets. When a material is cooled to a low enough temperature, they will order themselves so that all the north magnetic poles point in the same direction. But in a material containing a spin liquid state, even if cooled to absolute zero, the bar magnets would not align but form an entangled soup.

Sources: the hindu.

ISRO's New Light-As-Air Gel Can Keep Indian Soldiers Warm In Siachen Snow

ISRO scientists have developed the world's lightest synthetic material called 'silica aerogel' or 'blue air' or 'frozen smoke'.

What is Silica Aerogel?

Silica aerogel is a nano-structured material with high specific surface area, high porosity, low density, low dielectric constant and excellent heat insulation properties.

About the material:

- This material has excellent thermal resistance and if used as a filler in soldiers' uniforms it can possibly help save many lives at the Siachen glacier.
- The material has uses both in space and on Earth.
- It can also be used in thermal jacket, foot insoles, as well as in window glazing. It is extremely useful for people working in very cold environments, in a very strategic way.

What are aerogels?

Aerogels are a unique class of open-pore polymer foams that can be prepared from either organic or inorganic precursors. Aerogels are typically prepared using sol-gel chemistry, starting with liquids that form tiny sol particles, which eventually connect together in chain-like fashion to make

a semi-solid gel. When the solvent is removed from the wet gel and replaced by air in a manner that does not collapse the delicate gel structure, a solid aerogel results. What makes the aerogels unique is their nano-sized structure; they consist of particles and pores both of which are smaller than wavelengths of visible light. This unique nano-structure is responsible for many of the unusual acoustic, mechanical, optical and thermal properties observed for aerogels.

Aerogel properties:

With the lowest density, highest thermal insulation, lowest refractive index, dielectric constant and sound speed, and highest surface area per unit volume of any solid, aerogels exhibit an amazing range of properties which are not observed in any other kind of material. The following table summarizes physical properties of typical silica aerogels.

Sources: toi.

Paper 3 Topic: indigenization of technology.

Akash Missile Test Fired For Second Consecutive Day

India's indigenously developed **surface-to-air** Akash missile was recently test fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Chandipur near Balasore in Odisha.

Key facts:

- Akash is a **medium range surface-to-air anti-aircraft defence system developed by the DRDO as part of the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme.**
- Akash missile has a strike range of 25 km and can carry warhead of 60 kg.
- Akash is powered by **Ramjet-rocket propulsion system**, which renders thrust for the missile to intercept the target at supersonic speed without any retardation.
- It can fly at supersonic speed ranging from Mach 2.8 to 3.5 and can engage aerial targets up to a range of approximately 25 km.

Sources: pib.

Paper 3 Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Walk on Mars with Buzz Aldrin

NASA and technology giant Microsoft have teamed up to create '**Destination: Mars**', a guided tour of Mars using the **HoloLens headset** technology that helped scientists plan the Curiosity

rover's activities on the Red Planet. The 'Destination: Mars' exhibit will open at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

Key facts:

- The technology will offer people a virtual tour of an area of Mars with astronaut Buzz Aldrin in an interactive exhibit using the Microsoft HoloLens mixed reality headset.
- Aldrin, an Apollo 11 astronaut who walked on the moon in 1969, will serve as the "holographic tour guide" on the journey.
- Guests will "visit" several sites on Mars, reconstructed using real images from NASA's Curiosity Mars Rover, which has been exploring the Red Planet since August 2012.

"Mixed reality" means virtual elements are merged with the user's actual environment, creating a world in which real and virtual objects can interact.

Sources: the hindu.

Government Launches Intellectual Property Information Portal

The government has launched a portal which will act as a single window interface for information on intellectual property and provide guidance on leveraging it for competitive advantage.

About the Portal:

The Indian IP Panorama is a **customised version of IP Panorama Multimedia toolkit**, developed by World Intellectual Property Organisation, Korean Intellectual Property Office and Korea Invention Promotion Association.

- The Indian IP Panorama has been developed under the aegis of Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) and DIPP, Government of India by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), in close coordination with the Indian IP office.
- The portal seeks to increase awareness and build sensitivity towards IP, among stakeholders in the SME sector, academia and researchers.
- The toolkit has been adapted to cater to SMEs and startups, especially in the ICTE sector of India, based on an agreement signed between WIPO and DeitY.
- The Indian IP Panorama is in accordance with Indian IP laws, standards, challenges and needs of the Indian ICTE sector.
- The five modules of the Indian IP Panorama include importance of IP for SMEs, Trademark, Industrial design and Invention and Patent.

About WIPO:

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is one of the 17 specialized agencies of the United Nations.

- It was created in 1967 “to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world.”
- It has currently 188 member states, administers 26 international treaties, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Non-members are the states of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, South Sudan and Timor-Leste. Palestine has observer status.
- **India is a member of WIPO** and party to several treaties administered by WIPO.

Sources: the hindu.

Planet with triple-star system found

A team of researchers working at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics has announced the finding of a **triple-star system**—one that also has a stable orbit planet in it.

- Known planets with three stars appearing in their sky are rare and this new discovery is just the fourth.

Details:

- The objects under study in the new system are **KELT-4Ab**, a gas giant planet, similar in size to Jupiter—it takes approximately three days to make its way around the star KELT-A, which serves as its sun.
- The other two stars, named KELT-B and C, are much farther away and orbit one another over the course of approximately 30 years.
- Scientists found that the main star was brighter than the other stars that serve as suns for their planets.
- It takes the pair approximately four thousand years to orbit KELT-A.
- The triple-star system offers a unique opportunity for scientists working to try to understand how it is that gas giants, such as KELT-4Ab, manage to orbit so close to their star.

Background:

Space scientists have known of the existence of the KELT system for several years, but it was thought that the binary stars were actually just one star.

Sources: the hindu.

'Fast radio burst 'afterglow' came from black hole'

Scientists have found that a radio emission believed to be an **afterglow** from a mysterious event called **fast radio burst**, actually originated from a supermassive black hole in the core of a distant galaxy.

What are FRBs?

As their name suggests, fast radio bursts (or FRBs) are brief yet powerful spurts of radio energy lasting only a few milliseconds.

Background:

The first ones were only identified in 2007. Their source has remained a mystery. Most FRBs have been identified in archival data, making immediate follow-up impossible. The new event is only the second one to be identified in real time.

Sources: the hindu.

Google now offers 'health card' for disease search

For health-related searches in India, Google will now present results for over 400 diseases in an easy-to-read graphic or "card". Running a Google search for a disease will now return the usual results along with a panel, which Google calls "card".

- **India is the third country to get this feature after the US and Brazil.**

About the Health Card:

- Health cards were rolled out in the US last year and in Brazil two weeks ago.
- It carries an illustration, major symptoms, need for lab tests for diagnosis, most commonly affected age groups and indicates whether a disease is contagious, among other kinds of information.
- In India, the cards are available in Hindi and English.
- Google has worked with AIIMS, Apollo hospitals and Columbia Asia hospitals for this feature in India.

Globally, according to Google, one in 20 searches on its platform are related to health.

Sources: toi.

National Hydrology Project

The union cabinet has cleared the Rs.3,679-crore **National Hydrology Project (NHP)** that aims to collect hydro-metrological data across India and use it for efficient water management in the country.

Key features:

The project intends to set up a system for timely and reliable water resource data acquisition, storage, collation and management.

- The NHP will cover the entire country, unlike earlier hydrology projects that covered only 13 states.
- It also seeks to build capacity of state and central organisations in water resource management through the use of information systems and adoption of state-of-the-art technologies like remote sensing.
- The project is expected to assist in promoting “efficient and equitable” use of water, especially groundwater, down to the village level and provide information on quality of water as well.
- The NHP will also help in gathering hydro-meteorological data which will be stored and analysed on a real-time basis and can be seamlessly accessed by any user at the state, district or village-level.

Benefits:

- The scheme will help address the water crisis in the country. The project will inform the public about how much water is available and assist farmers in planning their crops and other farm-related activities.
- It will increase lead time in flood forecast from one day to at least three days.
- It will also facilitate mapping of flood inundation areas for use by disaster management authorities.
- It will also help improve Reservoir operations through seasonal yield forecast and drought management.
- The NHP will lead to better assessment of surface and ground water resources in a river basin for better planning and allocation of resources, improve reservoir operations through seasonal yield forecast and improve drought management.

Funding:

Half of the total NHP project outlay would come from a World Bank loan and would be repaid by the central government, while the remaining 50% would be in the form of budgetary support from the centre. The central funds would be passed on as grants to states and central organizations undertaking it.

Sources: pib.

Global Connectivity Index

Huawei has announced its third **Global Connectivity Index report** during the Global Analyst Summit 2016 in Shenzhen, China. The report sheds light on various global improvements in the field of internet connectivity.

- In terms of numbers, United States, Singapore and Sweden top the rankings.

India's performance:

- India with a GCI score of 30 ranks number 44 in the report, and is seen as starter in the world of ICT deployment.
- The report notes that India may not have ranked well, but the situation might change rapidly in 2017. The Indian government's Digital India initiative is driving growth, and improved broadband penetration. The report says the initiative will enable last mile connectivity, bringing many people online for the first time, and enables a whole new opportunity for telecom operators.

About GCI:

The 2016 Global Connectivity Index (GCI) is a study that benchmarks where a country stands within its journey to connectivity.

- This was the third Global Connectivity Index report announced by the Chinese multinational networking and telecommunications equipment and services company Huawei, during the Global Analyst Summit 2016 in Shenzhen, China.
- The report measures the growth of various global improvements in the field of internet connectivity.
- The GCI findings are sourced from 50 countries that, in total account for 90% of global GDP and 78% of the global population, on investment and deployment of Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

Microsoft sues US government over data requests

Microsoft Corp has sued the US government for the right to tell its customers when a federal agency is looking at their emails.

What is it all about?

The lawsuit, filed in federal court, argues that the government is violating the US Constitution by preventing Microsoft from notifying thousands of customers about government requests for their emails and other documents.

Microsoft's suit focuses on the storage of data on remote servers, rather than locally on people's computers, which Microsoft says has provided a new opening for the government to access electronic data.

Microsoft's arguments:

The government's actions contravene the Fourth Amendment, which establishes the right for people and businesses to know if the government searches or seizes their property, and the First Amendment right to free speech.

Background:

Using the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, the government is increasingly directing investigations at the parties that store data in the so-called cloud.

- Microsoft argues that the government has exploited the transition to cloud computing as a means of expanding its power to conduct secret investigations.
- The 30-year-old law has long drawn scrutiny from technology companies and privacy advocates who say it was written before the rise of the commercial Internet and is therefore outdated.

Significance of this lawsuit:

The lawsuit represents the newest front in the battle between technology companies and the US government over how much private businesses should assist government surveillance.

- By filing the suit, Microsoft is taking a more prominent role in that battle, dominated by Apple Inc in recent months due to the government's efforts to get the company to write software to unlock an iPhone used by one of the shooters in a December massacre in San Bernardino, California. Apple, backed by big technology companies including Microsoft, had complained that cooperating would turn businesses into arms of the state.
- Microsoft and other companies won the right two years ago to disclose the number of government demands for data they receive. This case goes farther, requesting that it be allowed to notify individual businesses and people that the government is seeking information about them.
- Increasingly, US companies are also under pressure to prove they are helping protect consumer privacy. The campaign gained momentum in the wake of revelations by former government contractor Edward Snowden in 2013 that the government routinely conducted extensive phone and Internet surveillance to a much greater degree than believed.

Sources: toi.

‘Telcos may go intranet to bypass Trai’s order’

Existing and new 4G players are planning to offer content such as movies and sports through private servers as they plan to take the **intranet route** to bypass **Trai’s order banning differential tariffs over the internet**.

What is the issue?

New entrants in this sector are planning to take intranet route to offer various services. The intranet route would be encouraged by the exemption given to the channel in Trai’s order on differential tariffs.

- Telcos may attempt to monetize such an opportunity/regulatory exemption. The mobile operators could selectively choose data/content and charge carriage fees from content providers/ e-commerce players for providing them access on their intranet platforms.

Concerns:

- At present, telcos monetize data connectivity and charge for data usage. But, 4G new entrants are looking at leveraging intranet-based data offerings in an attempt to take market share. They may disrupt the traditional data business model, leveraging intranet-based data offerings.
- This would also severely violate the tenets of net neutrality as the mobile companies – which will include new ‘4G entrants’ – would subsidize the content, and may even provide it for free, as they look for ways to capture customers.
- The 4G entrants may also attempt to tweak the traditional business model by providing more value to subscribers via aggregating movie and other content. So, 4G entrants may offer all such intranet-based content virtually free to subscribers in addition to their basic data plan.

Is it allowed under TRAI rules?

Trai’s suggestion that rules prohibiting differential pricing will not be applicable to intranet-based offering, will allow telcos to have a B2B model by charging content providers/e-commerce players a carriage fee and in turn subsidizing subscribers’ data services.

What are intranet services?

Intranet services are a network based on internet protocols belonging to an organization accessible only by that organization’s members, employees and others with authorization. The essence of such services is that they would not be available to the public from the internet.

- For telcos to provide such services, they will need to store all content on their servers and to avail themselves such offerings, subscribers will still need data connectivity. As data is stored on the servers of telcos, there will be a need for telcos to increase spend on data centers.

Limitations of Intranet:

There may be physical limitations, even with significant investments in data centers. Social network sites may push daily updates; e-commerce sites may push their deals and look for better conversion rates. Movie-based content may have to be provided free by telcos to bring footfall to intranet platform.

Sources: toi.

Centre steps in to expedite patent approvals

The government is taking measures to reduce the time to examine patent applications for clearing them at the earliest.

What's the target?

Now the time is between 5 and 7 years for the first examination of patent applications. The target is to bring it down to 18 months, which is the benchmark in the U.S. for the first examination after the applications are filed.

What is being done to achieve this?

To bring down the examination time, government will be setting a monthly, quarterly, half-yearly and an annual benchmark. In addition to the existing strength of 130 examiners of patents and designs, the government recently hired 458 new examiners. An additional 263 examiners will soon be recruited on a contract basis.

Also, online examination has begun to reduce pendency. The government has already hired around 100 new examiners for trademarks. Examination time for trademarks has been reduced from 13 months to 8 months. And the new target is to bring this time down to one month by March 2017.

Present scenario:

The pendency in patent applications and trademark registration as on February 1, 2016 was around 2.37 lakh and 5.44 lakh respectively. One of the main reasons for this situation was shortage of manpower.

Sources: the hindu.

‘Make in India’ not at cost of IPR: U.S.

The US Trade Representative’s **annual Special 301 report**, that identifies trade barriers to U.S. companies and products due to a foreign government’s intellectual property regime, has placed India on the **Priority Watch List**, the same as last year.

About the Report:

The report ranks countries depending on the inadequacy of IP protection and enforcement into two categories — **priority foreign country (PFC) and priority watch list (PWL)**. While a PFC grading obligates the US Trade Representative (USTR) to initiate unilateral measures like suspension of trade concessions in case of failure of negotiation, the PWL increases “bilateral attention concerning the problem areas.”

Details:

- According to the report, India stays on the highest priority watch list due to lack of measurable improvements to its intellectual property legal framework, despite stepped up enforcement efforts.
- The report has identified many measures taken by the government as encouraging in terms of providing a better IP protection regime, but raised multiple concerns, particularly related to the potential erosion in IP standards due to its push for promoting domestic manufacturing.
- The U.S remains concerned particularly about actions and policies in India that appear to favour local manufacturing or Indian IPR owners.

Criticisms:

The government of India, however, does not engage with this process as it considers it an infringement on the country’s sovereignty. India feels the categorisation is arbitrary and mostly a political decision, in order to reward or punish a target country.

Overall, the agency has 11 countries on the “Priority Watch List”: Algeria, Argentina, Chile, China, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Russia, Thailand, Ukraine, and Venezuela. These countries will be the subject of particularly intense bilateral engagement during the coming year.

Sources: the hindu.

IRNSS Is Now NAVIC: India’s Navigation System Gets a Simpler Name

The seventh satellite to make up the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS), called the IRNSS-1G, has been launched into space via the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) C33 rocket from Sriharikota spaceport in southwestern India.

- This was the final step towards completing India's own satellite navigation system. This has made the nation self-reliant in the field of space-based positioning.

Renaming:

PM Narendra Modi has christened the navigation system '**Navic**', which in Hindi means 'sailor' or 'navigator'. The name is also supposed to be a contraction of the phrase 'navigation with Indian constellation'.

Significance of this launch:

While GPS and Glonass are fully functional global systems, the Chinese and the Japanese systems offer regional coverage and Europe's Galileo is yet to be operational. India will formally join the select group of nations owing such system once IRNSS is declared operational after checking the systems – space (satellites), ground (ground stations) and the user-end signal receivers.

About IRNSS:

What is it?

IRNSS is an independent regional navigation satellite system designed to provide position information in the Indian region and 1500 km around the Indian mainland. Simply put, the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) is similar to the GPS (global positioning system) of the US, Glonass of Russia and Galileo of Europe as well as China's Beidou. It consists of a constellation of seven satellites.

What all services are provided?

IRNSS would provide two types of services, namely Standard Positioning Services available to all users and Restricted Services provided to authorised users.

Applications of IRNSS:

- Terrestrial, Aerial and Marine Navigation.
- Disaster Management.
- Vehicle tracking and fleet management.
- Integration with mobile phones.
- Precise Timing.
- Mapping and Geodetic data capture.
- Terrestrial navigation aid for hikers and travelers.
- Visual and voice navigation for drivers.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

More heatwaves likely this summer

Meteorologists have said that an average rise of 1 degree Celsius in summer temperatures over most of India would mean more days of extreme heat as well as a higher likelihood of heat waves compared to last year.

What is a heatwave?

The Indian Meteorology Department (IMD) defines a heatwave as an excess of five to six degrees C over the maximum daily temperature (over a 30-year period) of less than 40 degree C or an excess of four to five degree C over a normal historical maximum temperature of over 40 degree C.

- The IMD declares a heat wave when the actual maximum temperature is above 45 degree C.

Concerns:

More heatwaves could mean a greater public health concern. Last year, heat waves killed over 1,500 in Andhra Pradesh alone.

What the Met department said?

The Met Department has stated that the summer months of 2016 would be warmer than normal across all meteorological sub-divisions of the country and above-normal, heat wave (HW) conditions are very likely over central and northwest India during the period.

Why there is increased frequency and duration of heat waves?

The IMD concurs that the frequency and duration of heat waves over the country are increasing and attributes it to increasing greenhouse gases due to anthropogenic activity and the El Nino — characterised by the warming of sea surface temperatures over the Pacific Ocean and correlated with droughts in India — that is also linked to more heat waves.

Sources: the hindu.

Ballast water bringing invasive species to coasts

Scientists fear that the expansion of seaports and minor ports could pave the way for the arrival of invasive species in coastal areas. It is because the ballast water carried by ships is providing a vehicle to bring in exotic species.

Background:

A recent survey by the Department of Aquatic Biology and Fisheries, University of Kerala, had recorded the presence of as many as 10 invasive species in the biodiversity-rich intertidal habitats of the Kerala coast. They include one seaweed, one species of bryozoan, one species of mollusc and seven species of ascidian. It was assumed that the distribution of invasive species reported from the Kerala coast was likely to have been assisted by shipping. The survey argues that the expansion of ports in Kerala has opened ways for the introduction of alien species in marine and coastal areas. The survey also recorded the presence of a sea slug called Winged Thecacera (Thecacera Pennigera) in the southwest coast of India. Originally reported from the Atlantic coast of Europe, the presence of sea slug is currently reported from South Africa, West Africa, Pakistan, Japan, Brazil, eastern Australia and New Zealand.

What is Ballast?

Ballast is a compartment in a ship that provides it stability. It holds water which moves in and out of it to balance the ship. It remains below the water level, to counteract the weight above the water level.

Concerns:

- Ballast water is one of the biggest transporters of non-native marine species. Studies done by experts have indicated that over 10,000 marine species are being transported across the world in ballast water carried by ocean-going vessels for stability and safety.
- Ballast water is discharged when the ship enters a new port, releasing alien organisms into the local waters.
- The colossal loads of ballast water carried by ships could transport fish, viruses, bacteria, algae, zooplankton and benthonic invertebrates to harbours at a faster pace.
- Very few of the invasive species establish a beachhead in their newfound homes, but those that do have the potential to wreak havoc on the ecosystem by preying on local species or competing with them for food and habitat space.
- Ballast water is also considered a vehicle for toxic algae causing red tides and harmful algal blooms.

Ballast Water Management Convention:

The Ballast Water Management Convention, adopted in 2004, aims to prevent the spread of harmful aquatic organisms from one region to another, by establishing standards and procedures for the management and control of ships' ballast water and sediments.

- Under the Convention, all ships in international traffic are required to manage their ballast water and sediments to a certain standard, according to a ship-specific ballast water management plan.
- All ships will also have to carry a ballast water record book and an international ballast water management certificate.
- The Convention will require all ships to implement a Ballast Water and Sediments Management Plan. All ships will have to carry a Ballast Water Record Book and will be required to carry out ballast water management procedures to a given standard. Existing ships will be required to do the same, but after a phase-in period.
- Parties to the Convention are given the option to take additional measures which are subject to criteria set out in the Convention and to IMO guidelines.

India's Union Cabinet has already approved accession to the International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments, 2004 (Ballast Water Management Convention) of International Maritime Organization (IMO).

Sources: the hindu.

The World's First White Tiger Safari Opened in Madhya Pradesh

World's First White Tiger Safari has been opened in Madhya Pradesh.

Key facts:

- The sanctuary is spread over an area of 25 crore and is built at a cost of Rs 50 crore.
- Presently, there are three white tigers and two Royal Bengal tigers. The safari will get nine white tigers in the coming months.
- Vindhya region holds a special relevance because the **world's first white tiger was discovered here around 100 years ago**. However, in 1976, the region lost its lone white tiger named Virat.
- The safari will be named after **Rewa princely state's ruler Maharaja Martand Singh** who had a 'pet' white tiger named Mohan in 1951. It later became the progenitor of all known white tigers in the world after the ruler arranged for its breeding.

Sources: toi.

Government Issues New Rules On Management Of Hazardous Waste

Government has released new rules for management of hazardous wastes which for the first time include a separate category of items like tyre, metal scrap, paper and certain electronic goods that can be recycled and reused.

- The Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016 notified by the Union environment ministry replaces its older version made in 2008.

New rules:

- The new rules distinguish hazardous waste from others such as waste tyre, paper waste, metal scrap and used electronic items. The rules recognise the latter as a resource for recycling and reuse supplementing industrial processes, thereby reducing the load on the country's resources.
- Among other items banned for import are waste edible fats and oil of animals, household waste, tyres for direct re-use purpose, solid plastic wastes, including PET bottles, waste electrical and electronic assemblies scrap and other chemical wastes especially in solvent form.
- Metal scrap, paper waste and various categories of electrical and electronic equipment for re-use purpose, however, can be imported without permission from the environment ministry.
- Hazardous waste includes material like lead acid battery scrap, used oil, waste oil and spent catalysts.
- The rules make state governments responsible for environmentally sound management of hazardous and other wastes and mandate them to set up industrial space or sheds for recycling, pre-processing and other utilization of hazardous or other waste.
- The state authorities have also been asked to register the workers involved in recycling, undertake industrial skill development activities and ensure safety and health of workers.
- States must also submit annual reports regarding implementation of these rules to environment ministry. This is because workers employed in unscientific hazardous waste management practices suffer from neurological disorders, skin diseases, genetic defects and cancer.
- The rules also mandates state pollution control boards to prepare an annual inventory of the waste generated, recycled, recovered, utilised including co-processed, waste re-exported and waste disposed.
- The ambit of the rules has been expanded by including 'Other Waste'.

Significance of new rules:

The new hazardous waste rules will ensure resource recovery and disposal of hazardous waste in an environmentally sound manner. The rules are environment and industry-friendly. The provisions of the new rules are in line with this government's priority for Ease of Doing Business and Make in India, but with responsible concerns for sustainable development.

Sources: the hindu.

Teak absorbs max CO₂ from air, helps check global warming

Teak has the *highest capacity for carbon sequestration* among trees in India. This is the finding of a study conducted by the Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) to prepare a hierarchy of local trees in India that can reduce the carbon dioxide content of the atmosphere.

Key findings:

- In its lifetime, a teak tree with a girth of 10-30 cm can absorb 3.70 lakh tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- Teak's common name in India is *sagwaan* while its botanical name is **Tectona Grandis**.
- It is followed by Neelgiri tree which absorbs 2.46 lakh tonnes of carbon dioxide and the Neem tree with a carbon sequestration capacity of 1.45 lakh tonnes in its lifetime.

Significance of these findings:

GEER has sent a list of trees with high capacity for carbon sequestration to different state forest departments that can choose them for plantation in areas where CO₂ emission is high. In any tree plantation or any tree plantation programme, the choice of species is crucial to the total amount of carbon dioxide absorbed from the atmosphere.

The study will help researchers and different state forest departments to calculate the carbon sequestration potential of the trees they have. It will also help different forest departments go in for plantation of trees with high capacity for absorbing carbon dioxide from the air where CO₂ emission is high.

Why CO₂?

Carbon dioxide traps heat and is the main villain insofar as global warming is concerned.

What is carbon sequestration?

Carbon sequestration is the process by which carbon dioxide is captured from the atmosphere by trees for long-term storage.

Sources: toi.

World Bank Group Climate Change Action Plan

The World Bank has unveiled an ambitious climate action plan that will help developing countries add 30 gigawatts of renewable energy, bring early warning systems to 100 million people and develop climate- smart agriculture investment plans for at least 40 nations. The World Bank has set the target for achieving this by 2020.

- The new Climate Change Action Plan aims to accelerate efforts to tackle climate change over the next five years and help developing countries deliver on their national climate plans submitted for the historic climate agreement reached at COP21 in Paris in December last year.

Highlights of the Action Plan:

- To maximize impact, the Action Plan is focused on helping countries shape national policies and leverage private sector investment. IFC, a member of the World Bank Group, aims to expand its climate investments from the current \$2.2 billion a year to a goal of \$3.5 billion a year, and lead on leveraging an additional \$13 billion a year in private sector financing by 2020.
- The World Bank also intends to mobilize \$25 billion in commercial financing for clean energy over the next five years. The Bank Group will also continue to deepen its work to help countries to put a price on carbon pollution to create incentives for public and private sector decision makers to make the right climate choices.
- The Action Plan recognizes that climate change is a threat to efforts to end poverty, and that there is an increasing urgency to protect poor people and poor countries. As part of its response, the Bank Group plans to bring early warning systems to 100 million people across 15 developing countries, and help bring adaptive social protection – social safety nets that can quickly support people affected by a disaster or an economic shock – to an additional 50 million poor people by 2020.
- At the same time, the Bank Group will pilot a new approach in 15 cities that aims to boost urban resilience by integrating infrastructure, land use planning and disaster risk management.
- The Action Plan also lays out plans to quadruple funding over five years to make transport systems more resilient to climate change, as well as invest at least US\$1 billion to promote energy efficiency and resilient building by 2020.
- The World Bank Group will also develop climate smart agricultural investment plans for at least 40 countries, design sustainable forest strategies for 50 countries by 2020 and promote climate-informed fisheries management.

- The Bank Group will also help “green” the financial sector through a coordinated approach across banking, pensions and capital markets to implement changes needed nationally and globally. It will also create special teams to work with countries to generate a robust pipeline of bankable projects, with a focus on areas like rooftop solar and boosting the growth of distributed solar in Sub-Saharan Africa
- The Action Plan aims to deliver on the Bank Group’s commitment – announced in October 2015 – to increase climate financing to potentially \$29 billion annually by 2020, with the support of its members.
- It also sets out a new approach to take the growing threat of climate change into account across the Bank Group’s operations. Climate risk screening – which is already applied to projects supported by IDA, the World Bank’s fund for the poorest countries – will be extended across other World Bank operations in early 2017.

Sources: the hindu.

Massive effort to conserve Olive Ridleys

Wildlife authorities have launched a massive exercise to conserve Olive Ridley turtles in the **Krishna Wildlife Sanctuary (KWS) in Andhra Pradesh**.

Details:

- The officials, in collaboration with the local communities, have collected over 10,500 eggs of the turtles. They are being conserved in the rookeries set up within the KWS limits.
- 139 artificial nests have been arranged in the three rookeries set up as part of the in situ conservation method.
- The first batch of hatchlings will be released into the sea by April 24 as the incubation period ranges from 45 to 60 days.

Members of the **Yanadi tribe** are directly involved in the conservation bid. They have been given the task of collecting the eggs on the beach and maintaining the rookeries.

About Olive Ridley turtles:

Also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle, Olive turtles are a medium-sized species of sea turtle found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

- They are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in mass numbers.
- The olive ridley is classified as **Vulnerable** according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and is listed in **Appendix I of CITES**.

- The Convention on Migratory Species and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles have also provided olive ridleys with protection, leading to increased conservation and management for this marine turtle.

Sources: the hindu.

Three of India's natural world heritage sites face threat from harmful activity: WWF

India's three major natural World Heritage Sites – the **Western Ghats, Sundarbans National Park and Manas Wildlife Sanctuary** – are facing threats from harmful industrial activities like mining, according to a the survey 'Protecting People Through Nature' by World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

What's affecting them?

While ecology of Western Ghats covering six states – Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala – is threatened by mining and oil and gas exploration, Manas Wild Life Sanctuary faces threat from dams and unsustainable water use.

- Sundarbans in West Bengal and neighbouring Bangladesh have been hit by various activities including unsustainable water use, dams, wood harvesting, over-fishing and shipping lanes.

Way ahead:

These iconic places face a range of threats, including climate change. Removing pressure from harmful industrial activity is therefore critical to increase the sites' resilience.

Significance of world heritage sites:

- World Heritage sites are not just important environmentally, they also provide social and economic benefits.
- Two-thirds of natural sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List are crucial sources of water and about half help prevent natural disasters such as floods or landslides.
- WWF survey estimates that "11 million people – more than the population of Portugal – depend directly on World Heritage sites for food, water, shelter and medicine. Harmful industrial development poses a threat to these ecosystem services and communities that depend on them."

UNESCO world heritage site:

A UNESCO World Heritage Site is a place that is **listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as of special cultural or physical significance.**

- The list is maintained by the international World Heritage Programme administered by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, composed of 21 UNESCO member states which are elected by the General Assembly.
- Each World Heritage Site remains part of the legal territory of the state wherein the site is located and UNESCO considers it in the interest of the international community to preserve each site.
- The List of recorded sites on the World Heritage now stands at 981 which include both cultural and natural wonders.
- **Italy is home to the greatest number of World Heritage Sites with 50 sites.**

Sources: the hindu.

Indian, Germany sign agreement to rejuvenate Ganga

India and Germany have signed an agreement to adopt and replicate, wherever possible, the river basin management strategies of the European rivers Rhine and Danube to rejuvenate the river Ganga.

Objective of the agreement:

The objective of the agreement is to enable responsible stakeholders at national and state level to apply integrated river basin management approach for the rejuvenation of the river Ganga. This will be based on Indo-German knowledge exchange and practical experience on strategic river basin management issues, effective data management system and public engagement.

Key facts:

- The agreement was signed between the ministry of water resources and Ganga rejuvenation of India and the German International Cooperation (GIZ) of Germany under the 'Namami Ganga' – a flagship programme of the government with a renewed impetus to decrease river pollution and conserve the country's national river.
- The project duration will be of three years (from 2016 to 2018) where the German contribution would be to the tune of Rs 22.5 crore.
- Though initial actions will be focussed on the stretch of the river in Uttarakhand, it will later be expanded to other Ganga states.
- The project will closely cooperate with other national and international initiatives, including Indo-German bilateral projects like Support to National Urban Sanitation Policy (SNUSP) and Sustainable Environment-friendly Industrial Production (SEIP).

Namami Gange Programme:

The Union government approved “Namami Gange” Program in May 2015. It integrates the efforts to clean and protect the Ganga river in a comprehensive manner.

Focus of the programme:

Among other things, the programme will focus on pollution abatement interventions namely Interception, diversion & treatment of wastewater flowing through the open drains through bio-remediation / appropriate in-situ treatment / use of innovative technologies.

Implementation:

- The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
- In order to improve implementation, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of a) High level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary assisted by NMCG at national level, b) State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary assisted by SPMG at state level and c) District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- The program emphasizes on improved coordination mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.

Other details:

- The program has a budget outlay of Rs. 20,000 crore for the next 5 years.
- Under this programme, the focus of the Government is to involve people living on the banks of the river to attain sustainable results.
- The programme also focuses on involving the States and grassroots level institutions such as Urban Local Bodies and Panchayati Raj Institutions in implementation.

Cabinet nod to adopt statute of South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network to check wildlife crimes

The Union Cabinet has given its nod for India adopting the statute of the **South Asia Wildlife Enforcement Network (SAWEN)** which will help in checking cross border wildlife crimes.

- The approval allows the country to become a formal member of SAWEN in order to strengthen ties with the member countries in controlling the trans-boundary wildlife crime through communication, coordination, collaboration, capacity building and cooperation in the region.

What is SAWEN?

SAWEN is a regional network comprises **eight countries in South Asia** –Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

- It aims at working as a strong regional intergovernmental body for combating wildlife crimes by attempting common goals and approaches for combating illegal trade in the region.

Significance of SAWEN:

The South Asia region is very vulnerable to illegal traffic and wildlife crimes due to presence of precious biodiversity and large markets as well as traffic routes for wildlife products in the region. The collaboration in harmonising as well as enforcing the wildlife protection in the region is considered very important for effective conservation of biodiversity.

How will this statute benefit India?

Now, India along with other member countries will take initiatives to bring “harmonisation and standardisation” in laws and policies to conserve fauna and flora and will also document the trend of poaching, illegal trade and related threats to the natural biodiversity.

- This will also strengthen institutional responses to combat wildlife crime by promoting research and information sharing, training and capacity building, technical support, sharing experiences and outreach and to encourage member countries to prepare and implement their national action plans in curbing wildlife crime.

Cabinet approves changes in bill on afforestation

The Union cabinet has given its approval to move official amendments in the **Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management And Planning Authority (CAMPA) Bill, 2015**.

Details:

- The legislation will ensure expeditious utilisation of accumulated unspent amounts available with the ad hoc Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), which is currently around `40,000 crore, and fresh accrual of compensatory levies and interest on accumulated unspent balance, which will be of the order of approximately `6,000 crore per annum, in an efficient and transparent manner.
- Apart from facilitating timely execution of appropriate measures to mitigate impact of diversion of forest land, utilisation of these amounts will also result in creation of productive assets and generation of huge employment opportunities in the rural areas, especially the backward tribal areas.

- The amendments include deleting some of environmental services for which credible model to assess their monetary value does not exist while it also provides for prior consultation with states for making a rule under it. The amendments provide for use of monies realised from the user agencies in lieu for forest land diverted in protected areas for voluntary relocation from protected areas.

About the Bill:

The CAMPA Bill is meant to promote afforestation and regeneration activities to compensate for forest land diverted to non-forest uses, by regulating and managing \$5.3 billion (almost Rs.350 billion) collected over years.

- The union government in April 2015 approved the bill for introduction in parliament. However, it was rejected in the Rajya Sabha, where the government is in minority.
- The bill basically envisages the establishment of a national Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAF) and state CAFs to credit amounts collected by state governments and Union territory administrations to compensate for the loss of forest land to non-forest projects.

Sources: pib.

Earth Day

Earth Day 2016 is being celebrated around the world today (April 22).

Theme for Earth Day 2016: Trees for the Earth!

What is Earth Day?

Earth Day was first celebrated in 1970. The idea for it was first proposed at a UNESCO conference a year earlier, when activist John McConnell suggested a day to honour the planet and the idea of peace. US senator Gaylord Nelson founded Earth Day in the US. It was made into an international day in 1990 and now is celebrated by over 193 countries every year.

The aim of the day is to bring attention to environmental issues to spark changes that will result in a healthy, sustainable environment. This includes addressing climate change and finding ways to protect the planet for future generations.

Significance of Earth Day 2016:

Earth Day 2016 is particularly important as it will see nations across the world sign the **Paris Agreement on climate change**, set out in COP21 last year. The historic agreement saw countries pledge to limit global warming to below 2C on pre-industrial levels. From 22 April, it will be open for signatures for one year. The agreement will come into effect in 2020.

Sources: the hindu.

US Senate passes legislation for a modern energy landscape

The US Senate has passed the **first broad energy Bill** that reflects significant changes in U.S. oil and natural gas production over the past decade and boosts alternative energy sources such as wind and solar power.

Details:

- The bill would boost renewables such as solar and wind power, as well as hydropower, geothermal energy and even critical minerals such as cobalt, beryllium and lithium that are used in cell phones, computers and other electronics.
- The bill also would encourage so-called clean-coal technology, including projects to capture carbon dioxide generated by coal-fired power plants, and increase public-private partnerships to develop advanced nuclear technologies.
- The bill would update building codes to increase efficiency, strengthen electric-grid safety standards and reauthorize a half-billion-dollar conservation fund that protects parks and other public lands.
- The bill also would speed federal approval of projects to export liquefied natural gas to Europe and Asia, where prices are higher than in the U.S. following a yearlong boom in domestic gas production.

Sources: the hindu.

Bird hit: NGT halts Tawang hydro power project

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) has suspended the Union Environment Ministry's clearance for the Rs. 6,400-crore **hydro power project in Tawang**, Arunachal Pradesh. The clearance by the centre was granted in 2012.

Why?

This move was particularly aimed at **protecting the vulnerable black-necked crane** in the region.

Background:

The project was planned on the **Nyamjang Chhu river** and was the largest of 13 hydro power projects to be built in the Tawang basin.

About the species:

- Black-necked crane is a species that **breeds on the Tibetan plateau and migrates to Tawang for the winter.**
- The bird, most **commonly found in China, is legally protected in Bhutan and India** and is considered sacred to certain Buddhist traditions.
- It is rated as '**vulnerable**' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) list of endangered species.
- It is also **listed in India's Wildlife Act as a Schedule 1 species**, which gives animals and birds the highest legal protection.

Other species that are found in the region include the red panda, the snow leopard and the Arunachal macaque *Macaca munzala*, a recently-described primate species in the area.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: *biodiversity.*

Primate species new to India discovered in Arunachal Pradesh

A new primate species in India has been discovered by a team of biologists and wildlife photographers during their bird watching trip to Arunachal Pradesh's Anjaw district.

- With this, **White Cheeked Macaque has become a new primate species in India.**

Details:

- The White Cheeked Macaque, hitherto unknown in India, was actually spotted by the team last year, but it took almost a year to confirm.
- The White Cheeked Macaque differs considerably from all macaque species such as Rhesus Macaque, Arunachal Macaque, Tibetan macaque and Assamese macaque.
- It has relatively hairless short tail, long and thick hair on its neck and chin-whiskers creating a white cheek, among other characteristics.
- White-cheeked macaques are threatened by illegal hunting and potential habitat loss.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: *Disaster and Disaster management.*

SC: Why not treat drought as disaster?

With around 10 states reeling under drought, the Supreme Court has asked the Centre **why the natural calamity could not be brought under the Disaster Management Act to release funds**

for the welfare of affected families. The court mooted the idea after noting that many states had not declared drought.

What the centre says?

The Centre informed the court that its hands were tied and it could not force states to declare a drought as **the matter came within states' domain.** Also, there is no statute to regulate declaration of drought.

- The centre says, "The onus of declaring drought rests entirely with the State governments, and it has only a limited role — of providing funds and putting in place a monitoring system."

What the Court says?

The court pointed out that drought could be covered under the Disaster Management Act. Drought was not expressly mentioned in the Disaster Management Act, but it can be covered under loss of crops.

Way ahead:

The court has sought information on the number of people and districts affected by drought, as well as the budgetary allocation for and expenditure of national and state disaster relief funds. The Centre has assured that it would place the information before the court on the next hearing.

DM Act:

The Disaster Management Act, 2005 came into force in India in January 2006. The Act **extends to the whole of India.** The Act provides for "the effective management of disasters and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto."

- The Act calls for the **establishment of National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), with the Prime Minister of India as chairperson.**
- The Act enjoins the **Central Government to Constitute a National Executive Committee(NEC) to assist the National Authority.**
- All State Governments are mandated to **establish a State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA).**

Sources: toi.

Potassium chlorate, beautiful but dangerous

Investigators probing the cause of the fireworks disaster at the Puttingal Devi temple near Kollam recently, hinted that rival teams possibly used **potassium chlorate**, a banned explosive. They had also probably sourced the chemical illegally from matchstick factories.

About Potassium chlorate:

Potassium chlorate was discovered by French chemist Claude Louis Berthollet during the end of the 18th Century.

Where is it used?

It is commonly used in **pyrotechnics**. The principal reason for using it in pyrotechnics is for the production of **beautiful colours**. Despite its inherent risk, the reason it is sometimes used in pyrotechnics is because it is **cheap and easily available**.

How does it work?

Potassium chlorate has very powerful oxidising ability. When heated, it decomposes to produce oxygen. The oxygen so produced fuels the flame of the lit firework, thereby increasing the temperature of the firework even further. The extra heat generated excites the electrons in the colour-producing chemicals added in the firework mixture and thus produces beautiful colours.

Why is it banned?

The **oxidising property** of potassium chlorate is also its biggest disadvantage when used in fireworks. It has an inherent property to become **very reactive**, especially when mixed with sulphur; the potassium chlorate-sulphur mixture becomes dangerously sensitive to friction and may spontaneously ignite. Hence, potassium chlorate is banned for use in fireworks.

Sources: the hindu.

81 cities added to India's earthquake-prone list

Eight new cities and towns have been added to a government list of urban areas vulnerable to earthquakes of “very severe intensity”.

- In all, 81 new towns and cities were added to a list of areas prone to earthquakes, bringing the total to 107, according to government data released on March 16, 2016.

Latest additions to “very severe intensity zone”:

The recent additions are Jorhat, Sadiya and Tezpur in Assam, Bhuj in Gujarat, Darbhanga in Bihar, Imphal in Manipur, Kohima in Nagaland and Mandi in Himachal.

Sources: bs.

***Paper 2 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.*

All new mobiles to have panic button from 2017

According to a notification issued recently by the Department of Telecom, “from January 2018, mobile handset manufactures will be able to sell their products in India **only if the product has the emergency feature that enables identifying the location through satellite-based GPS.**”

- These rules are called the **panic button and Global Positioning System facility in all mobile handsets Rules, 2016**. They shall come into force on the date of their publication in the Official Gazette.

What else is there in the notification?

- The notification says that effective January 2017, mobile phones without facility of panic button by pressing ‘numeric key – 5’ or ‘numeric key – 9’ to invoke emergency call cannot be sold.
- Once the panic button is pressed, a signal/call will be made to the nearest security agency. However, the details of how the system will work are yet to be finalised.

Sources: the hindu.

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

India opts not to join global terror database

The Indian government has decided not to join a U.S. maintained global terror database in the face of objections from the intelligence agencies. The proposal has been stuck since it was initially proposed by the U.S. in 2012.

Background:

Unhindered access to the Americans to the database of terror suspects in India, which includes their biometric details, was opposed by both the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and the Intelligence Bureau (IB).

About the database:

The Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD-6) is a model text agreement for exchange of terrorist screening information between Terrorist Screening Centre (TCS) of the U.S. and any Indian security agency. If India signs it, it could get access to the U.S. database of 11,000 terror suspects. The database includes name of the terror suspect, nationality, date of birth, photos, finger prints (if any), and passport number.

Why is India not interested in this pact?

Indian security agencies are apprehensive of giving unhindered access to the U.S. on sensitive data related to terrorists.

Sources: the hindu.

To prevent Pathankot-like attacks, India plans 5-layer 'lock' at Pakistan border

The government has given its nod to the '**Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System**' (CIBMS) for 24x7x365 surveillance of the border through technology. It is a five-layer elaborate plan to completely stop infiltration on the 2,900-km western border with Pakistan.

- It entails round-the-clock surveillance through sophisticated technology which in effect will totally "lock" India's western border to prevent Pathankot-like terror attacks and smuggling.

Five layers include:

1. CCTV cameras.
2. Thermal image and night-vision devices.
3. Battlefield surveillance radar.
4. Underground monitoring sensors.
5. Laser barriers.

Details:

- The integrated set-up will ensure that if one device doesn't work, another will alert the control room in case of a transgression. Laser barriers will cover 130 unfenced sections including riverine and mountain terrain from Jammu & Kashmir to Gujarat — often used by the infiltrators.
- The new plan would also help security forces catch those who help in infiltration from the Indian side of the border, as the radars would have a 360-degree coverage and the cameras would work day-and-night looking on both sides.
- Interestingly, it is also the first time since Independence that India will completely lock its western border.

Sources: the hindu.

Facts for Prelims from "The Hindu":

1. Among the larger States, **Uttar Pradesh has seen the highest growth in enterprises and employment generation** over the past decade, according to data from the **Sixth Economic Census released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation**.

2. The Central government is planning to begin consultations with states to frame an **Act to prevent the misuse of fresh water**, a rapidly diminishing resource in India. **Water is a state subject.**
3. The Bihar government has banned country-made and spiced liquor, which had high consumption in rural areas. It has also banned the sale of 'toddy' in the state.

India Rankings 2016

'**India Rankings 2016**' have been released by the Union Human Resource Development Minister Smriti Irani. This is the first-of-its-kind indigenous ranking framework for higher education institutions. The National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has put IIT Madras on the top spot, as the topmost engineering college, followed by IIT Mumbai and IIT Kharagpur. The top management institution is IIM Bangalore, while Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore is the best university in India. While the JNU has been ranked third, Hyderabad University has been named fourth best institute.

All 122 centrally-funded institutions – including all central universities, IITs and IIMs – participated in the first round of ranking. The framework is primarily divided into two categories:

1. Category A covered institutions with academic autonomy and a greater focus on research.
2. Category B comprised colleges and centres affiliated to a university and more focused on teaching. An institution can volunteer to be ranked in both categories.

Ranking criteria:

The criteria for ranking included teaching/learning resources, research, graduation outcomes, outreach/inclusivity and perception. The data for the first four parameters, which account for 90% of the weightage, was submitted by the institutions and verified by National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), a body constituted by the HRD ministry last year to conduct annual surveys. For the perception criterion, various stakeholders including parents, teachers, and alumni were engaged to give their feedback. More than 3,500 top higher educational institutions are under consideration for the ranking.

First woman CM

Mehbooba Mufti, who succeeded her father Mufti Mohammad Sayeed as the chief minister of Jammu and Kashmir, has become the **16th woman CM in post-Independent India** after taking the oath of office. She is also **Jammu's first woman CM**.

- Sucheta Kriplani was the first woman to become chief minister of an Indian state, Uttar Pradesh, in 1963.
- Of the 29 states and seven Union territories, only 11 states and one UT have seen woman chief ministers in the last seven decades.
- Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Delhi have had two women chief ministers. Haryana and Himachal Pradesh are yet to have a woman chief minister.

Semi high speed train to start operations

India's **first semi-high speed train** christened as **Gatimaan Express** capable of running at a maximum speed of 160 KMPH is all set to be introduced on the Indian Railway system on 5th April, 2016. It'll start operations from Delhi to Agra, covering the distance between the two cities in around 100 minutes.

World's first mass dengue vaccination

The Philippines has launched the first public immunization program for dengue fever, seeking to administer to a million schoolchildren the world's first licensed vaccine-Dengvaxia- against a mosquito-borne disease that the World Health Organization estimates infects 390 million people a year globally. The Philippines had the highest dengue incidence in the WHO's Western Pacific region from 2013 to 2015, recording 200,415 cases last year. Dengvaxia is developed by the French pharmaceutical company Sanofi Pasteur and has already been tested in Mexico.

UNIDO places India at 6th position in top-10 manufacturers list

United Nations Industrial Development Organization in its report has placed India at 6th among the world's top 10 largest manufacturing countries. China tops the list of 10-top industrial producers followed by the US, Japan, Germany and Korea. Indonesia was at the bottom of the list.

Ban on Alcohol in Bihar

The Nitish Kumar government has declared Bihar a dry State by imposing total prohibition on the sale and consumption of liquor, both country-made and Indian-Made Foreign Liquor, with immediate effect. Earlier, following an excise amendment law, the ban on country-made liquor had become effective across the State from April 1. The government will stick to the 1991 guidelines on the sale and consumption of toddy. No new liquor licences will be issued to for sale and consumption of alcohol in places like hotels, bars and clubs, in towns and cities too. However,

Army cantonment areas would be exempt as they regulate sale and consumption of alcohol in their own way.

Use of pig hearts

Scientists from the United States and Germany have succeeded in keeping transplanted pig hearts alive in baboons, primate cousins of humans, for a record 2.5 years. This is very significant because it brings scientists one step closer to using these organs in humans. **Xenotransplants** — organ transplants between different species — could potentially save thousands of lives each year that are lost due to a shortage of human organs for transplantation. Given the dire shortage of organ donors, the use of animal hearts, lungs or livers to save human lives has long been a holy grail of medical science.

President of India presents National Geoscience Awards 2014

The President of India, Shri Pranab Mukherjee recently presented the National Geoscience Awards – 2014.

About the award:

The National Geoscience Awards, previously known as the National Mineral Awards, was instituted by the Ministry of Mines in 1966, to honour individuals and teams of scientists for their extraordinary achievements and outstanding contributions in fundamental and applied geosciences and mining and allied fields.

MHA constitutes Committee to strengthen border protection

The Ministry of Home Affairs has constituted a Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri Madhukar Gupta, in order to strengthen border protection and address the issue of gaps and vulnerability in border fencing along Indo-Pakistan border. The mandate of the Committee will be to study all types of gaps in fencing and all other vulnerabilities in the International Border on Indo-Pakistan Border and to suggest comprehensive approach to fix these gaps in fencing and other vulnerabilities on interim and permanent basis. The Committee will submit its report in 3 months.

Ranthambore opens for full day safari

Ranthambore has, with immediate effect, opened the forest for full day safari from sunrise to sunset. The full day safari has been introduced at Ranthambore on the lines of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh governments.

Key facts:

- Ranthambore National Park is located in the Sawai Madhopur district of southeastern Rajasthan.
- Park lies at the edge of a plateau and is bounded to the north by the **Banas River** and to the south by the **Chambal River**.
- It is named after the historic Ranthambore fortress, which lies within the park.
- Ranthambore was established as the Sawai Madhopur Game Sanctuary in 1955 by the Government of India and was declared one of the Project Tiger reserves in 1973.
- Ranthambore became a national park in 1980. In 1984, the adjacent forests were declared the Sawai Man Singh Sanctuary and Keladevi Sanctuary, and in 1991 the tiger reserve was enlarged to include the Sawai Man Singh and Keladevi sanctuaries.

India's first aadhaar based ATM

In a first for any domestic bank, small-sized lender DCB Bank has started an Aadhaar-based ATM usage facility in Mumbai wherein a customer can transact using his biometric details instead of the PIN. The user can key-in the 12-digit Aadhaar number or swipe the card at an automated teller machine (ATM) to start a transaction, but at the stage of confirming the identity, it requires biometric details rather than the PIN.

Points:

1. The **number of adults living with diabetes has nearly quadrupled** to 422 million over 35 years, the WHO has warned, adding that the condition now affects nearly one in 11 people.
2. In a bid to revive tiger population in the country, the Cambodian government has approved a plan to reintroduce tigers into the protected forests. Tigers will be brought from other countries. The plan will see a chunk of suitable habitat marked in Cambodia's selected forests and protected against poachers by strong law enforcement. Action would also be taken to protect the tigers' prey. This would be the **world's first transnational tiger re-**

introduction and will be based on best practices developed from successful tiger re-introductions within India.

3. Britain's Royal Mail has issued a set of special postage stamps to mark the **400th death anniversary of playwright William Shakespeare**.
4. The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval to Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on 15th February, 2016 between **India and Sweden on Technical Cooperation in the Railway Sector**. The MoU provides a platform for Indian Railways to interact and share the latest developments and knowledge in the railway sector. It also facilitates exchange of technical experts, reports and technical documents, training and seminars/workshops focusing on specific technology areas and other interactions for knowledge sharing.

Points:

- Punjab state government has approved the launch of 'Dr B R Ambedkar Scholarship Scheme' for meritorious students of Class X and XII of government schools. The decision was taken by Mr Badal while presiding over a meeting of **125th Dr B R Ambedkar Janam Shatabdi Utsav** Committee to finalise the year-long celebrations.
- 3rd **SAARC** Agricultural Ministers' meeting was recently held in **Dhaka**, Bangladesh.

Chhattisgarh sign MoU worth crores

Chhattisgarh government has signed investment intents worth Rs 6600 crore during chief minister Raman Singh's visit to China to participate in 10th China (**Henan**) International investment trade and fair at **Zhengzhou**.

- These MoUs are expected to bring in a cumulative investment of Rs 6,600cr. These investments will add facilities to manufacture for several innovative products in the renewable energy and building materials sectors.
- This will also provide opportunities to the local higher education colleges for exposing their students to innovative technologies improving their employability as well as new possibilities for entrepreneurs.
- The investment and trade fair in Zhengzhou is one of the main investment events in China and attracts participation from countries across the globe.

MII Dashboards

The government has unveiled two dashboards to dynamically monitor progress made in its ‘**Make In India**’ (MII) initiative as well as rank States on a real-time basis based on ‘**Ease Of Doing Business**’ (EODB).

- The MII Dashboard will allow ministries to update on the progress made by them in short and medium-term targets, facilitate timely delivery of identified action points and allow for monitoring and identification of delays in implementation.
- The EODB Dashboard will allow States to report their progress on the reforms they need to undertake under the State Level Business Reforms Action Plan as well as in validation of responses received from the States/Union Territories (UTs) by the [DIPP](#).

Retrieval satellite

China recently launched a retrieval scientific research satellite in a bid to aid scientists to study microgravity and space life science.

- **SJ-10** was put into orbit by **Long March 2-D rocket** from the **Jiuquan** Satellite Launch Centre in north-western China’s **Gobi** desert.
- While in space, the probe will house 19 experiments involving microgravity fluid physics, microgravity combustion, space material, space radiation effect, microgravity biological effect and space biotechnology.
- On-board experiments include one that will study early-stage development of mouse embryos in microgravity to shed light on human reproduction in space, and another studying space radiation effects on genetic stability of fruit flies and rat cells.

Greece sells its biggest port

Greece has sold its biggest port, **Piraeus** Port Authority, to shipping giant China COSCO Shipping Corporation. This is the second major privatisation for the bailed out country since late last year.

Solar Boat

An eco-friendly solar-powered boat was launched on the pristine waters of River Krishna in Andhra Pradesh recently. There are only a handful of such boats operating on solar power in the country.

- The solar boat, facilitating clean and efficient cruise, has been imported from China.
- Solar-powered boats get their energy from the sun. Using electric motors and storage batteries charged by solar panels fitted to the roof, these boats can significantly reduce or eliminate use of fossil fuels.
- The first solar boat designed in India was named **Surya**, a 25-seater, by Kerala-based Team Sustain in 2008. It operated in the backwaters of Kerala ferrying passengers and in 2010, it was included in the Limca Book of Records as Asia's largest solar-powered passenger boat.

North East-ASEAN Business summit

The first-ever two-day North East-ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Business Summit was recently inaugurated in **Imphal**. The Summit was organised by Manipur Department of Commerce and Industries in association with ICC, an apex business organisation and ICSI, an apex professional organisation.

11.04.2016

- Mother Teresa has been posthumously conferred with the U.K.'s prestigious Founders Award, which is given to recognise exemplary achievements of people within the global Asian community.
- The birth anniversary of B.R. Ambedkar, father of the Indian Constitution, will be observed on April 13 at the United Nations for the first time with focus on combating inequalities to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.
- The IIT-Kharagpur has won an award from the Indian government for being the top academic institute for patents in 2016. The **Indian Intellectual property office confers national intellectual property awards** on outstanding innovators, organisations and companies in the fields of patents, designs, trademarks, and geographical indications on the occasion of World IP Day every year. The National IP Award carries an amount of Rs 1,00,000, a citation and a memento.
- Drug major Sun Pharmaceutical Industries has received approval from the US health regulator for its non-steroid drug **BromSite**, used to treat inflammation and prevent pain in patients undergoing cataract surgery.
- The world's count of wild tigers roaming forests from **Russia to Vietnam has gone up** for the first time in more than a century, with 3,890 counted by conservation groups and national

governments in the latest global census. The tally marks a turnaround from the last worldwide estimate in 2010, when the number of tigers in the wild hit an all-time low of about 3,200, according to the **World Wildlife Fund and the Global Tiger Forum**. Interestingly, India alone holds more than half of the world's tigers, with 2,226 tigers roaming reserves across the country, from the southern tip of Kerala state to the eastern swamps in West Bengal, according to its last count in 2014. Also, this is the first time tiger counts are increasing since 1900, when there were more than 100,000 tigers in the wild.

- Saudi Arabia's king has announced that a **bridge** linking the country to Egypt will be built over the **Red Sea**.

Dubbed mcr-1

Researchers have discovered a new antibiotic-resistant gene, called **Dubbed mcr-1**, which is resistant to **colistin**, a life-saving medication. **Mcr-1**, the resistance-conferring gene easily transfers between bacteria, benign or otherwise, found in humans, animals or the environment.

- First identified in China last November, the gene has since been discovered in livestock, water, meat and vegetables for human consumption in several countries, and in humans infected with E.coli— one of the disease-causing bacteria it targets. For the first time now, mcr-1 has been found living in the gut of healthy humans.
- Colistin has been available since 1959 in order to treat infections caused by **Gram-negative bacteria**— a category including the food-poisoning germs **E-coli and Salmonella**, as well as Acinetobacter which can cause pneumonia or serious blood and wound infections. It was abandoned for human use in the 1980s due to high kidney toxicity, but is widely used in livestock farming, especially in China.

13.04.2016

- Haryana Government has decided to **rename Gurgaon as "Gurugram."** The decision to change the name of Gurgaon was taken on the basis of several representations recommending "Gurugram" as the appropriate name for the city. Haryana was a historic land of the Mahabharata period and Gurgaon was a great centre of learning where Guru Dronacharya taught the Pandavas and Kauravas. The town derived its name from Guru Dronacharya, who was gifted the village as "gurudakshina" by his students, the Pandavas. It came to be known as "Gurugram", which in the course of time got distorted to Gurgaon.

- Tiny South Pacific island nation **Nauru has become the 189th member of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank**. Nauru will be WB's **smallest member by land mass**, at 21 square kilometers. By joining the World Bank, Nauru gains access to financial support, technical support and special expertise in dealing with Pacific area issues, such as water and sanitation and disaster risk management amid the threat of climate change and rising sea levels. With the IMF, Nauru can benefit from the crisis lender's advice on managing government finances and monetary policy.
- In a significant decision that could have far-reaching implications for India's military posture, **India and the U.S. have agreed "in principle" on a logistics support agreement** — the first proposed in 2004 — that would make it easier for both militaries to share each other's facilities.
- As India's HIV policy struggles with a funding crisis, the Health Ministry — in a marked departure from the Centre's policy on financial decentralisation — has taken back control of the programme's funding. After a year of experimenting with routing money through State treasuries, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) **will once again route money directly to State-level AIDS societies from this month**.
- Maharashtra government has presented the much-awaited **bill against caste panchayats in the State**. Once introduced, **Maharashtra will be the first State in the country to enact a law against social boycott of individuals or families by caste panchayats**. As per the proposed law, an imprisonment of up to three years or fine which may extend to rupees one lakh is proposed. The offence registered under the act will be cognizable and bailable. It will be tried by a judicial magistrate of the first class.
- According to a survey by research firm New World Wealth, **India's Maharajas' Express is ranked fourth among the top-rated trains in the world**, while Eastern and Oriental Express (Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand) was rated the best globally.
- Consumer sentiment in India deteriorated in the first quarter of 2016 with consumers getting more pessimistic about the future than they were at the start of the year, according to a new index formulated by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). The **CMIE Consumer Sentiments Index**, which was introduced in January, shows that consumers' economic conditions, sentiments, and expectations of what the future holds, have all been on a declining trend from January to March. The index of consumers' current economic

conditions was 4% lower in March than it was in January and 1.4% lower than what it was in February.

14.04.2016

- **Sushila Karki has become the first female acting Chief Justice of Nepal's Supreme Court.**
- India and South Korea have signed a **memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation and mutual assistance in development of ports**. The MoU is expected to help both countries to encourage and facilitate development of ports, port-related industries and maritime relationship. It will also enhance cooperation in the tasks of sharing of technology, experiences in the fields of port development and operation, exchange of information on construction, building, engineering and related aspects in the field of port development, among others.

15.04.2016

- Former Miss World and Bollywood actress, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan has won the **Global Indian Of The Year Award**.
- The World Bank in its annual report "Migration and Development Brief" has said that, **India was the world's largest remittance recipient in 2015** despite experiencing a \$1 billion drop from the previous year, the first decline in its remittances since 2009. India retained its top spot in 2015, attracting about \$69 billion in remittances, down from \$70 billion in 2014. Other large remittance recipients in 2015 were China, with \$64 billion, the Philippines (\$28 billion), Mexico (\$25 billion) and Nigeria (\$21 billion).
- The **maiden Maritime India Summit was recently inaugurated in Mumbai** by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The three day Maritime India Summit is aimed at attracting potential investors to the vast opportunities that the various components of the Maritime Sector have on offer. It is showcasing projects covering sectors like port development and modernization, Greenfield ports, port led development under "Sagarmala", shipbuilding, ship repair and ship breaking, inland water transportation, coastal shipping, lighthouse tourism and cruise shipping, hinterland connectivity and logistics handling facilities to the potential investors from across the world.

16.04.2016

NASA's **Cassini spacecraft**, in orbit around Saturn since 2004, has collected and analysed dust coming from beyond our solar system. Cassini is the **fourth space probe to visit Saturn** and the first to enter orbit.

The Delhi government has reintroduced the **odd-even experiment** for another 15 days. This rule disallows vehicles with odd and even registration plates to ply on roads on alternate days.

The Water Resources Department in Maharashtra has started releasing water to Karnataka from its **Kalammawadi dam across the Dudhganga river, a tributary of the Krishna river** in Kolhapur district. **Dudhganga river rises in Sindhudurg district of Maharashtra in the Western Ghats and flows eastward through Kolhapur district and Belgaum district in Karnataka before joining the Krishna.** The river is **dammed to form the Kalammawadi reservoir** in the west of Kohlapur district.

The Delhi government has banned the sale, purchase and storage of all forms of chewable tobacco, including gutka, pan masala, khaini and zarda, in the Capital for one year.

The national capital has been recognised as one of the 50 future-ready cities around the world that are **embracing technology to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing and globalised future**, according to a report by information technology major Dell. **Delhi is ranked 44th** on the list, which is topped by San Jose, followed by San Francisco. The cities in the list were evaluated along three dimensions — human capital, infrastructure and commerce.

SHATRUJEET/PARAM Kanchenjunga

- With about 30,000 soldiers in action, the Indian Army recently conducted a major Exercise called **SHATRUJEET** in deserts of **Rajasthan**. During the exercise, the capability to Strike deep in enemy territory in an integrated Air-Land battle environment was tested. The operationally oriented exercise is focusing on validating **integrated theatre battle fighting** concept incorporating new age technologies, weapon platforms and systems as well as long range precision targeting vectors. Indian Army undertakes such exercises at regular intervals at different levels to ensure forces are provided real war like situations and are kept in high state of battle readiness.
- Built at a cost of over Rs 2 crore, northeast has got its **fastest supercomputer** with a peak computing power of 15 **Teraflops**. Housed at the National Institute of Technology **Sikkim's**

campus, near Gangtok, the supercomputer, ‘PARAM Kanchenjunga’ is a collaboration between Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C—DAC) and the Ministry of Communications and IT.

19.04.2016

- **IndianOil Corporation has inked an MoU with Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation to examine the possibility of jointly working on setting up a LPG** (liquefied petroleum gas) import terminal at Chittagong port and other downstream infrastructure in that country. The agreement would help India use the **Chittagong port for importing LPG and then transporting it to Tripura** through pipeline for use in northeastern states.
- Scientists have identified **three new species of mouse lemurs in Madagascar**, taking the total number of known mouse lemur species to 24. **Mouse lemurs are small, nocturnal primates, which are only found in Madagascar** – and they all look very similar with their brown fur and large eyes. The three new discovered species are named- Ganzhorn’s mouse lemur, *Microcebus manitatra* and *Microcebus boraha*. According to the “Red List” of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (**IUCN**) more than 100 known species of lemurs are threatened by extinction and represent the world’s most endangered group of mammals.
- Reliance Jio has announced the launch of its 8,100-km **Bay of Bengal Gateway (BBG)** offering direct connectivity to South East Asia and the Middle East. The **undersea cable landing facility is housed in Chennai**. BBG connects India to South East Asia and the Middle East, with onward connectivity to Europe, Africa and Far East Asia via connections to other cable systems. It has an initial capacity of **9 Tbps**, based on 100-Gbps wavelengths. Other members of the consortium include Dialog Axiata, Etisalat, Omantel, Telecom Malaysia, and Vodafone. The consortium awarded a construction contract for the submarine cable systems in 2013 to Alcatel-Lucent. BBG uses high-speed broadband fibre optic technology; dense wavelength division multiplexing (DWDM) which allows the capacity to be increased without any additional submarine intervention.

- The Government has released a Rs.200 commemorative coin and a Rs.10 circulation coin on the occasion of the **Martyrdom day of Tatya Tope**, one of the outstanding Indian leaders of the 1857 revolt against the British. Tatya tope fought during 1857 revolt along with **Jhansi ki Rani and Nana Sahib**. He was defeated by General **Napier's** British Indian troops at **Ranod** and after a further defeat at **Sikar** abandoned the campaign. He was executed by the British Government at **Shivpuri** on April 18, 1859.
- Maharashtra government has decided to make it **mandatory to have a hologram on every alcohol bottle manufactured and sold in the state** in order to check sale of spurious liquor.

20.04.2016

India has signed an **MoU with Mauritius on cooperation in the field of traditional system of medicine and Homoeopathy**. The MoU was signed during the recent visit of Minister of State for **AYUSH** (Independent Charge) and Health & Family Welfare, Shri Shripad Yesso Naik to **Mauritius**. This MoU will promote cooperation in the field of traditional system of health and medicine between the two countries which already share these traditions due to our unique historical and cultural ties. It envisages exchange of experts, supply of traditional medicinal substances, joint research and development and recognition of the traditional systems of health and medicine in both countries. It also aims at promotion and popularization of the various Indian traditional systems which fall under AYUSH.

IISER/Europe – World's 1st region to wipe out malaria

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for **signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Bhutan on technical cooperation in the field of capacity building, benchmarking and bilateral exchange in infrastructure engineering**. The MoU will provide an Umbrella for educational, scientific & technical research and environment protection which are also stated aim of the India-Bhutan foundation established in August 2003.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for **operationalisation of new *Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER)* at Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh**.

- **Europe has become *the world's first region to wipe out malaria***, with zero cases reported last year. The number of indigenous malaria cases dropped to zero in 2015 from 90,712 in 1995, and the last cases were reported in Tajikistan in 2014.

22.04.2016

- China's President Xi Jinping has taken on a new military title, in his latest move to exert greater control over the armed forces. Mr Xi is now **Commander-in-Chief of the Joint Battle Command of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)**.
- The commerce and industry ministry has launched a '**Twitter Seva**' to address queries and grievances on matters relating to the ministry. Through this Twitter Seva, queries on matters relating to Department of Commerce (DoC) and Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) will be answered. In particular, queries regarding the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT), Directorate General of supplies and Disposals, SEZs, tea, coffee, rubber, spices, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) would be addressed by the ministry. Issues related to manufacturing policy, industrial corridors, investment promotion, Make in India, Start up India, FDI, intellectual property rights will be addressed by the DIPP.

Paris Agreement

As many as 175 countries, including India, China and the US, signed the Paris Agreement on climate change at the UN headquarters in New York on 22nd April, to coincide with 'International Mother Earth Day'.

- This was the first day of the signing ceremony of the historic global deal. Union Environment Minister Prakash Javadekar signed the agreement on behalf of India.
- The agreement aims to take multiple measures to save the world from disastrous consequences of climate change and was adopted by 195 countries in Paris on December 12, 2015.
- That such a large number of countries signed the agreement in a single day is significant. The previous record for the most countries to sign an international agreement on one day was set in 1982, when 119 countries signed the '**Law of the Sea Convention**'.

- The agreement will be open for signature for one year – till April 21, 2017. However, merely signing the agreement will not make it operational. At least 55 countries, that account for an estimated 55 per cent of the total global greenhouse gas emissions will have to ratify the agreement before it enters into force.

Khongjom/National Panchayat Raj Day

- President Pranab Mukherjee recently inaugurated the war monument at **Khongjom in Manipur** on the occasion of the **125th anniversary of the last battle of independence of the Manipur is against the British army**.
- A huge 9,300 sq km **coral reef system** has been found below the muddy waters off the mouth of the river **Amazon**. The 600-mile-long (nearly 966 kilometer) reef ranges from about 30-120 m deep and stretches from French Guiana to Brazil's Maranhao state.
- National Panchayati Raj Day (National Local Self-Government day) was celebrated across the country on 24 April annually. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been celebrating the National Panchayati Raj Day (NPRD) on 24 April since 2010, as on this day, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into force in 1993.
- The **Indian Olympic Association (IOA)** has declared Salman Khan as the first Bollywood celebrity to be the goodwill ambassador for the Indian contingent at the Rio de Janeiro Olympics scheduled to start on August 5, 2016.

Nomadic Elephant-2016/Mumbai: Noisiest city in India

- The **eleventh India-Mongolia joint training exercise, 'Nomadic Elephant-2016'**, to promote military associations between the countries has begun at Mongolia. The exercise aims to develop synergy and inter operatability between the armies to battle in counter insurgency and counterterrorism environment under the UN mandate.
- Based on the data gathered from 35 noise monitoring systems installed in 9 metro cities, CPCB has named **Mumbai as the noisiest city in India**. Mumbai is followed by Lucknow, Hyderabad and Delhi. Though the most common source of noise pollution is motor vehicles, the other sources like generator sets, office machines, aircraft, industrial and construction activities too substantially contribute to increasing the noise level in the cities. **Noise level beyond the prescribed limits of 55 dB during day and 45 dB during night is considered as noise pollution**. CPCB also notes that noise pollution can cause aggression, hypertension, hearing loss, tinnitus and sleep disturbance.

Himalayan wolf

Scientists have confirmed the presence of **Himalayan wolf** — the most ancient wolf lineage known — in Nepal's largest protected area- the Annapurna Conservation Area. It has been listed as **Critically Endangered in the National Red List**.

Laser wells/Cassini Spacecraft

- The Cabinet has approved a proposal to provide 400 hectares of barren land at Central State Farm (CSF), Jetsar in Rajasthan for setting up of more than **200 mw solar power plant**.
- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing an **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and Papua New Guinea on cooperation in the field of Healthcare and Medical Science**. The bilateral MoU will encourage cooperation between the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare of India and the Ministry of Health and HIV/AIDS of the Papua New Guinea through joint initiatives in the health sector. It will strengthen bilateral ties between India and **Papua New Guinea**.
- The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for the **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) and the Insurance Authority of United Arab Emirates**. The MoU was signed in February, 2016. The MoU provides for enhanced cooperation between the two authorities in the field of **insurance supervision** by providing a framework for co-operation such as channels of communication. It will also result in increasing mutual understanding through the exchange of regulatory and relevant supervisory information including confidential information to enforce or **ensure compliance** with their respective laws and regulations.
- **Laser walls** have been made operational along the **India-Pakistan international border in Punjab** to plug the porous riverine and treacherous terrain and keep an effective vigil against intruders and terrorists exploiting the frontier areas to cross over.

- **Nasa's Cassini** spacecraft, orbiting **Saturn** and its moons since 2004, has confirmed that a huge **sea on Saturn's moon Titan is composed mostly of pure liquid methane**. The sea, called **Ligeia Mare**, has a surface area of about 126,000 sq. kms. Cassini also found that the seabed may be covered in a sludge of carbon- and nitrogen-rich material, and its shores may be surrounded by wetlands. Methane, a compound made of one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms, **exists as a gas on Earth. It becomes liquid only at -161.5 degrees Celsius**. Saturn's great distance from the Sun ensures that gases like methane exist as liquids there.

SMARC Citizen App / Hitomi Satellite

- **Rahuri Municipal Council of Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra** has become the **first Municipal Council to attain the status of integrated with digital locker** for the issuance of all essential Documents. This service was recently launched as **part of Digital India Programme**.
- Based on a proposal from the National Monuments Authority (NMA), the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) has developed an app named "**Smarac Citizen**". The app is aimed at granting construction permits within few minutes to architects and real estate developers who plan to construct buildings close to national monuments. The app contains the maps of 3,686 Centrally-protected monuments across the country. Apart from easing the process of obtaining construction permits, the app will help the NMA keep a tab on encroachments around monuments. The app will also give the elevation details— the height of the site with respect to mean sea level. It will help architects not only for the NMA approval, but also for the approval of the Airports Authority of India.
- Japan has decided to abandon a quarter-of-a-billion-dollar satellite it sent to study black holes. The ultra-high-tech "**Hitomi**" – or eye – was launched in February to find X-rays emanating from black holes and galaxy clusters. But shortly after it reached orbit, researchers admitted they had lost control of it and said it was no longer communicating. The satellite, developed in collaboration with NASA and other groups, was intended to help unlock the mystery of black holes, phenomena that have never been directly observed.

30.04.2016

- Colombia's top court has legalised same-sex marriage, making the country the **fourth in Latin America** to do so. Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay have previously legalised same-sex marriage.

- Reliance Defence has signed an agreement with three **Ukrainian state-owned firms** — Ukroboronprom, Spetstechno Exports and Antonov — to collaborate on a range of military products including transport aircraft, armoured vehicles, maritime gas turbines and unmanned aerial vehicles.

- India has resumed **publishing its income tax data**, which was suspended in 2000 owing to staffing and technical issues. India had first started publishing its income tax statistics in 1961.

- Sri Lanka, in the midst of a crisis over deterioration of the balance of payments (BOP) position, has got the much-needed reprieve with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreeing to provide \$ 1.5 billion through a three-year-long **Extended Fund Facility (EFF)**. The EFF was established to provide assistance to countries: (i) experiencing serious payments imbalances because of structural impediments; or (ii) characterized by slow growth and an inherently weak balance of payments position. The EFF provides assistance in support of comprehensive programs that include policies of the scope and character required to correct structural imbalances over an extended period.

- Rajya Sabha was recently adjourned abruptly because of lack of quorum. As per the rules, at least **10% members of the total strength of a House are required to be present for quorum**. That is, 25 members. The sanctioned strength of the Rajya Sabha is 245.