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Comprehensive **NEWS** Analysis

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TO
09-09-2018
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Week 02

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Polity and Governance

1. Krishna Kutir - widows home inaugurated

Context:

Union Ministry of Women and Child Development recently inaugurated widows' home 'Krishna Kutir' at Vrindavan in Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. The construction of the home was funded by Central Government and it will be managed by the Uttar Pradesh Government.



Krishna Kutir:

- Krishna Kutir is a special home for 1000 widows set under Swadhar Greh scheme and is the largest ever facility of its kind created by government organization. It was constructed to mitigate the plight of widows living in pathetic condition in Vrindavan.

About Swadhar Greh Scheme:

- The Swadhar scheme was launched by the Union Ministry of Women and Child Development in 2002 for rehabilitation of women in difficult circumstances.
- The scheme provides shelter, food, clothing and care to the marginalized women/girls who are in need.
- The beneficiaries include widows deserted by their families and relatives, women prisoners released from jail and without family support, women survivors of natural disasters, women victims of terrorist/extremist violence etc.

Implementation of the scheme:

- The State Governments/UT Administration invite applications from eligible organizations and the proposals which fulfil the norms are

placed before a Project Sanctioning Committee (PSC) chaired by Secretary(WCD) of the State/UT concerned.

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

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

- It should ordinarily have been engaged in the field of women's welfare/ social welfare for a minimum period of two years.
- Its financial position should be sound.
- It should have facilities, resources, experience and personnel to undertake the management of such project.
- It should run Swadhar Greh on a no-profit basis.
- It should have facilities like computers, internet connection etc at Swadhar Greh.

2. Poshan Maah

In News:

The Government is celebrating the month of September, 2018 as the National Nutrition Month under the Poshan Abhiyan.

About Poshan Maah (National Nutrition Month):

- The primary objective of the celebration of Poshan Maah is to take the messages of POSHAN to the grass root level.
- The programme- an initiative of WCD Ministry and NITI Aayog is supported by 18 line Ministries/Departments/Government Organizations.
- It seeks to synergise all efforts by leveraging technology and intends to take nutrition awareness to the level of Jan Andolan or People's Movement.
- The programme focuses on 8 themes – Antenatal Care, Optimal Breastfeeding (Early & Exclusive), Complementary Feeding, Anemia, Growth Monitoring, Girls-education, diet, right age of Marriage, Hygiene & Sanitation, Food Fortification.

About POSHAN Abhiyan:

POSHAN Abhiyaan (National Nutrition Mission) was launched on 8th March, 2018.

Objectives: The programme through use of technology, a targeted approach and convergence strives to reduce the level of Stunting, Under-nutrition, Anemia and Low Birth Weight in Children, as also, focus on Adolescent

Girls, Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers, thus holistically addressing malnutrition.

Aim: POSHAN Abhiyaan aims to ensure service delivery and interventions by use of technology, behavioural change through convergence and lays-down specific targets to be achieved across different monitoring parameters over the next few years.

Coverage: To ensure a holistic approach, all 36 States/UTs and 718 districts will be covered in a phased manner by the year 2020.

3. Public Credit Registry

Context:

Recently, RBI Deputy Governor Viral Acharya made a case for setting up a Public Credit Registry (PCR), incorporating unique identifiers: Aadhaar for individual borrowers and Corporate Identification Number for firms.

About Public Credit Registry:

- The PCR will be an extensive database of credit information for India that is accessible to all stakeholders. The idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower and, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

Management of PCR:

- Generally, a PCR is managed by a public authority like the central bank or the banking supervisor, and reporting of loan details to the PCR by lenders and/or borrowers is mandated by law.
- The contractual terms and outcomes covered and the threshold above which the contracts are to be reported vary in different jurisdictions, but the idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

Need for a PCR:

- A central repository, which, for instance, captures and certifies the details of collaterals, can enable the writing of contracts that prevent over-pledging of collateral by a borrower. In absence of the repository, the lender may not trust its first right on the collateral and either charge a high cost on the loan or ask for more collateral than necessary to prevent being diluted by other lenders.
- This leads to, what in economics is termed as, pecuniary externality – in this case, a spillover of one loan contract onto outcomes and terms of other loan contracts.
- Furthermore, absent a public credit registry, the 'good' borrowers are disadvantaged in not being able to distinguish themselves from the rest in opaque credit markets; they could potentially be subjected to a

rent being extracted from their existing lenders who enjoy an information monopoly over them.

- The lenders may also end up picking up fresh clients who have a history of delinquency that is unknown to all lenders and this way face greater overall credit risk.

Benefits of having a PCR:

- A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.
- The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.
- Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.
- A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a 'public good' and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

Task force on PCR:

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had formed a high-level task force on public credit registry (PCR) for India. The task force was chaired by Y M Deosthalee.
- The task force has suggested the registry should capture all loan information and borrowers be able to access their own history. Data is to be made available to stakeholders such as banks, on a need-to-know basis. Data privacy will be protected.

4. Draft rules for E Pharmacies

Context:

Ministry of health and family welfare has issued a draft notification recently on the sale of drugs by E-Pharmacies. The notification is about the amendment of Drugs and Cosmetics Rules amendment to enable registration of the e pharmacies and monitoring of their functioning.

Significance of these rules:

- With this, Rs 3000 crore online pharma business will be regularised from the day of final notification.
- These rules have been proposed to ensure accessibility and availability of drugs to the people across India.
- After the rules are finalised, people will be able to get genuine drugs through these online pharmacies.

Highlights of the Draft:

- All the e-pharmacies have to be registered compulsorily with the Central Drugs Standard control organisation.

- Psychotropic substances, habit-forming medicines like cough syrup and sleeping pills, schedule x drugs will not be sold online.
- Apart from registration, the e pharmacies have to obtain a license from the State government to sell the medicines online.
- The application of registration of e-pharmacy will have to be accompanied by a sum of Rs 50,000 while asserting that an e-pharmacy registration holder will have to comply with provisions of Information Technology Act, 2000 (21 of 2000).
- The details of patient shall be kept confidential and shall not be disclosed to any person other than the central government or the state government concerned, as the case may be.
- The supply of any drug shall be made against a cash or credit memo generated through the e-pharmacy portal and such memos shall be maintained by the e-pharmacy registration holder as record.
- Both state and central drug authorities will be monitoring the data of sales and transactions of e pharmacies. Any violation of rules the registration of e-pharmacies will be suspended, and it can be cancelled too.
- The premises from which e-pharmacy is operated regular inspections will be conducted every two years by the central licencing authority.

Significance of the sector:

- Patients can order medicines by uploading the prescription, and they will be delivered at home by the e pharmacies. As there are no distribution costs involved and the e pharmacies procured directly from the manufacturers, the price may come down by 20 to 30% than Maximum Retail Price.
- All the transaction will be done electronically which will encourage digital payments, and these bills can be tracked online for any misuse.
- Each E pharmacy shall appoint pharmacists with customer care which will create the additional jobs in addition to the existing offline pharmacists that are already giving jobs to the pharmacists.

5. Supreme Court bats for minor rape survivors

Context:

In support of minor survivors of rape or sexual assault, the Supreme Court of India has issued a slew of guidelines.

- Minor survivors of rape or sexual assault will get compensation on par with women victims. National Legal Services Authority's (NALSA) compensation scheme for women rape and sexual assault survivors shall be extended to minor children.
- Special Judges under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act should disburse compensation to minor victims of sex

abuse as per the NALSA's 'Compensation Scheme for Women Victims/Survivors of Sexual Assault/Other Crimes-2018'.

The NALSA compensation scheme:

- The NALSA scheme provides a uniform payment of Rs. 5 lakh to a maximum Rs. 10 lakh for "loss of life" and to gang rape survivors in any part of the country. Similarly, in case of rape and unnatural sexual assault, the victim would get a minimum of Rs. 4 lakh and maximum of Rs. 7 lakh as compensation.
- Among other categories, if a victim suffers the loss of foetus, that is, by miscarriage as a result of assault or loss fertility, the NALSA scheme offers a compensation of Rs. 2 lakh to 3 lakh.
- The scheme provides a victim of acid attacks, in case of disfigurement of face, would get a minimum compensation of Rs. 7 lakh, while the upper limit would be Rs. 8 lakh. In acid attack cases, if the injury was more than 50%, a minimum compensation of Rs. 5 lakh would be given, while the maximum would be Rs. 8 lakh.

Way ahead:

- The NALSA scheme would be made applicable to minor victims from October 2 until the Centre frames compensation guidelines under the POCSO.

Background:

- The order is a product of the legal efforts undertaken by senior advocate Indira Jaising, who has lent her expertise in the case for uniform compensation for rape survivors.
- The case had begun in the Supreme Court with Ms. Jaising raising her voice against the dormant state of the Nirbhaya funds. She has argued that compensation for sex abuse survivors should be a source of financial solace for victims of sex crimes and acid attacks during court trial.

About NALSA:

NALSA has been constituted under the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, to provide free legal services to weaker sections of society. The aim is to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reasons of economic or other disabilities.

Important functions performed by NALSA:

- NALSA organises Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- NALSA identifies specific categories of the marginalised and excluded groups and formulates various schemes for the implementation of preventive and strategic legal service programmes.
- Services provided by the agency include free legal aid in civil and criminal matters for the poor and marginalised people who cannot afford the services of a lawyer in any court or tribunal.

- Free legal services include provision of aid and advice to beneficiaries to access the benefits under the welfare statutes and schemes and to ensure access to justice in any other manner.

6. Section 377

Context:

The Supreme Court has pronounced its much-awaited verdict on a clutch of petitions challenging the constitutional validity of section 377 of the IPC which criminalises consensual gay sex.

The verdict and its significance:

- The Court said gay sex among consenting adults is not an offence. The verdict assumes significance as in the earlier round of litigation in 2013 the Supreme Court had reversed the Delhi high court ruling decriminalising homosexuality or same sex relationship.
- However, bestiality will continue as an offence. Any kind of sexual activity with animals shall remain penal offence under Section 377 of the IPC.
- The judgement is based on the interpretation of Article 14 (Right to Equality); Article 15 (prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth); Article 19 (Freedom of Speech and Expression); and Article 21 (Right to Life and Right to Privacy) of the Indian Constitution.

The law:

- Section 377 of IPC – which came into force in 1862 – defines unnatural offences. It says, “Whoever voluntarily has carnal inter-course against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to 10 years, and shall also be liable to fine.”

Delhi HC legalises homosexuality:

- The Delhi high court had in July 2009 de-criminalised consensual homosexual acts in private by declaring as unconstitutional a part of Section 377 of IPC that criminalises unnatural sex, saying “the section denies a gay person a right to full personhood...”

SC re-criminalises homosexuality:

- The Supreme Court chose to reverse the verdict in December 2013. Upholding the constitutional validity of Section 377 IPC, an SC bench headed by Justice GS Singhvi (since retired), put the ball in the Parliament’s court, saying it was for the legislature to take a call on the desirability of the controversial provision.

Implications for heterosexuals:

- The case has implications for heterosexuals also, as consensual sexual

acts of adults such as oral and anal sex in private are currently treated as unnatural and punishable under Section 377 IPC.

Background:

- Homosexuality is considered a taboo in a largely conservative Indian society which appears to be divided on the controversial issue.
- Freedom loving people (not necessarily belonging to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender or LGBT community) want homosexuality de-criminalised but many still consider it a “deviant behaviour” and not merely a question of one’s sexual orientation or preference.

International developments:

- There have been many positive developments in favour of LGBT community on the international front. In May 2015, Ireland legalised same-sex marriage. The country which had decriminalized homosexuality in 1993 became the first country to allow same sex marriage a national level by popular vote.
- In June 2015, the US Supreme Court ruled that same sex marriages were legal. Near home, Nepal legalised homosexuality in 2007 and the new Constitution of the country too gives many rights to the LGBT community.
- France, UK, Canada, United States, Australia and Brazil have de-criminalised homosexuality. Other countries like Belgium, Brazil, Canada, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Uruguay allow either same sex marriage or a civil union.
- India currently stands with a host of countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Mauritania, Qatar and Pakistan which criminalises homosexuality.

Criticisms:

- **Child abuse and Section 377:** Many child rights activists had criticised the Delhi HC verdict de-criminalising homosexuality on the ground that Section 377 was needed to be on the statute book to tackle cases of child abuse. However, the enactment of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act 2012 has removed the need to use Section 377 in child sexual abuse cases. POCSO is more child-friendly and much more stringent.
- **Law and morality:** Those against legalising gay sex argue that it is against the moral values of the society. However, activists arguing for it say what is forbidden in religion need not be prohibited in law. They argue that morality cannot be a ground to restrict the fundamental rights of citizens. A legal wrong is necessarily a moral wrong but vice versa is not correct. A moral wrong becomes a legal wrong only when its consequences are for society and not just the person/s committing it.

- **Challenges ahead:** The Supreme Court judgment only deals with a narrow interpretation of Section 377. Besides decriminalising homosexuality, the judgment does not confer any further rights.
- **Gay marriages:** Marriages between same-sex partners are not recognised in India, but this can be changed by inserting a provision in the Special Marriage Act.
- **Adoption:** Law prohibits adoption of a child by a gay couple.
- **Inheritance:** One partner cannot inherit properties left behind by their same-sex partner, unless a will is drawn in favour of the person. A will, too, can be contested by family members of the partners.
- **On pending criminal cases:** The judgment will have a bearing on criminal cases pending trial, appeal or revision on disposed off cases. The judgment will have no bearing on disposed off cases and old cases cannot be reopened. It opens the flood gates for securing other civil rights.

7. Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

In News:

Union Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) has officially decided to participate in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) after gap of nine years. It will send team of officers to Paris to negotiate India's terms of participation in PISA 2021.

Background:

India had taken part in Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2009 and bagged the 72nd rank among 74 participating countries. Then UPA government had boycotted PISA, blaming "out of context" questions for India's dismal performance.

About the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA):

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an international assessment that measures 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years.

First conducted in 2000, the major domain of study rotates between reading, mathematics, and science in each cycle.

PISA also includes measures of general or cross-curricular competencies, such as collaborative problem solving.

By design, PISA emphasizes functional skills that students have acquired as they near the end of compulsory schooling.

PISA is coordinated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), an intergovernmental organization of industrialized countries, and is conducted in the United States by NCES. Data collection for the most recent assessment was completed in Fall 2015.

In 2012 PISA test, schools of Shanghai in China topped reading, mathematics and science test, followed closely by Singapore. In 2015, Singapore, Japan and Estonia were ranked as top three countries, in that order.

PISA 2021:

PISA 2021 test is likely to be administered in schools in Union Territory of Chandigarh. Apart from schools in Chandigarh, HRD Ministry also suggested that all Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Navodaya Vidyalayas (NVs), funded and run by Centre, shall take the test.

Chandigarh was selected for its compact area, students are taught in Hindi and English (Government wants to keep number of languages in which test has to be administered to minimum). Chandigarh has record of performing well in learning assessments.

8. Draft charter of Patients' Rights

Context:

The draft Charter of Patients' Rights, prepared by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), has been released. The Ministry plans to implement the Charter of Patients' Rights through State governments for provision of proper health care by clinical establishments.

Highlights of the draft:

The draft charter includes 17 rights with description, draws upon all relevant provisions, inspired by international charters and guided by national level provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document.

The proposed Charter draws upon all the existing relevant provisions, with the objective of consolidating these into a single document, thereby making them publicly known in a coherent manner.

There is an expectation that this document will act as a guidance document for the Centre and state governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that patient's rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set-up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law.

The charter also prescribes certain responsibilities that the patient must adhere to.

These include: providing all required information to their doctor, without concealing relevant facts, so as to ensure a correct diagnosis and treatment.

Patients are also expected to follow all instructions regarding appointment time, co-operate with hospital staff and fellow patients, avoid creating disturbance to other patients, and maintain cleanliness in the hospital.

Patients should respect the dignity of the doctor and other hospital staff. Whatever the grievance may be, patient or caregivers should not resort to violence in any form.

The patients should also take responsibility for their actions based on choices made regarding treatment options and in case they refuse treatment.

Significance of the charter:

If the draft Charter of Patients' Rights released by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare comes into force, patients will not just have the right to emergency medical care and informed consent, but will also have the right to non-discrimination, seek a second opinion and choose alternative treatment options, if available.

Way ahead:

Once adopted, the charter will have to be prominently displayed at all hospitals, clinics, pharmacies and diagnostic laboratories. Further, the Centre and state governments need to set-up a grievance redressal mechanism for patients.

This charter is expected to act as a guidance document for the Union Government and State Governments to formulate concrete mechanisms so that Patients' Rights are given adequate protection and operational mechanisms are set up to make these rights functional and enforceable by law. The onus is now on the States to follow the charter effectively.

Need for a charter on this:

Right to non-discrimination is an important right. Every patient has the right to receive treatment without any discrimination based on his or her illnesses or conditions, including HIV status or other health condition, religion, caste, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

The charter assumes significance as India does not have a dedicated regulator like other countries. Existing regulations in the interest of patients and governing healthcare delivery systems are still on the anvil.

9. Swadesh Darshan Scheme

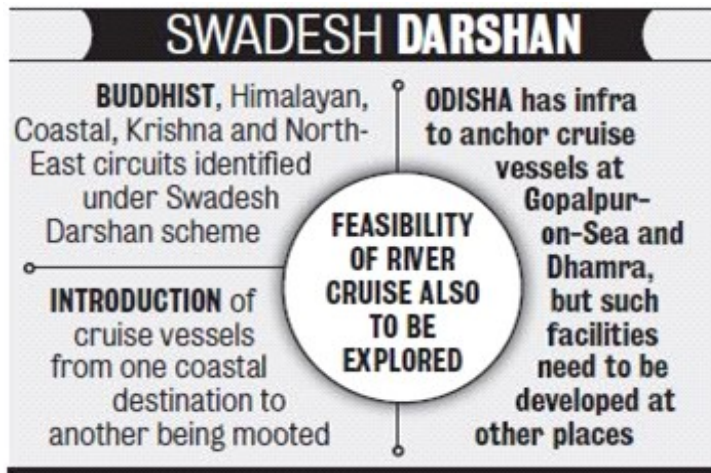
Context:

The Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned the project "Development of Rural Circuit: Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project" in Kerala under Swadesh Darshan Scheme for Rs. 80.37 Crores. The project focuses on development of water based thematic cruise experiences in and around Valapattanam and Kuppam Rivers of Kannur District.

The three thematic cruises developed under the project are as follows:

- Malabari Cuisine and Culinary Cruise in Valapattanam River (Muthappan Cruise) – Cruise starts from Valapattanam to Munambu Kadavu in Valapattanam River with an effective Cruise Length of 40 km.
- Valapattanam River- Theyyam Cruise- Cruise starts from Valapattanam to Pazhayangadi in Valapattanam River with an effective length of 16 km.

- Mangrove Cruise in Kuppam River – Cruise starts from Pazhayangadi to Kuppam in Kuppam River with an effective Cruise length of 16 km.



Background:

- Waterways have been an important mode of transport in Kerala from the time immemorial with its 44 Rivers and 7 Backwater regions.
- The total length of the navigation route in the Kerala is 1900 km. This is tune with the water based tourism which is getting prominence all over the world.

About Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

The Tourism Ministry had launched 'Swadesh Darshan' scheme with an objective to develop theme-based tourist circuits in the country. These tourist circuits will be developed on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner.

Features of Swadesh Darshan Scheme:

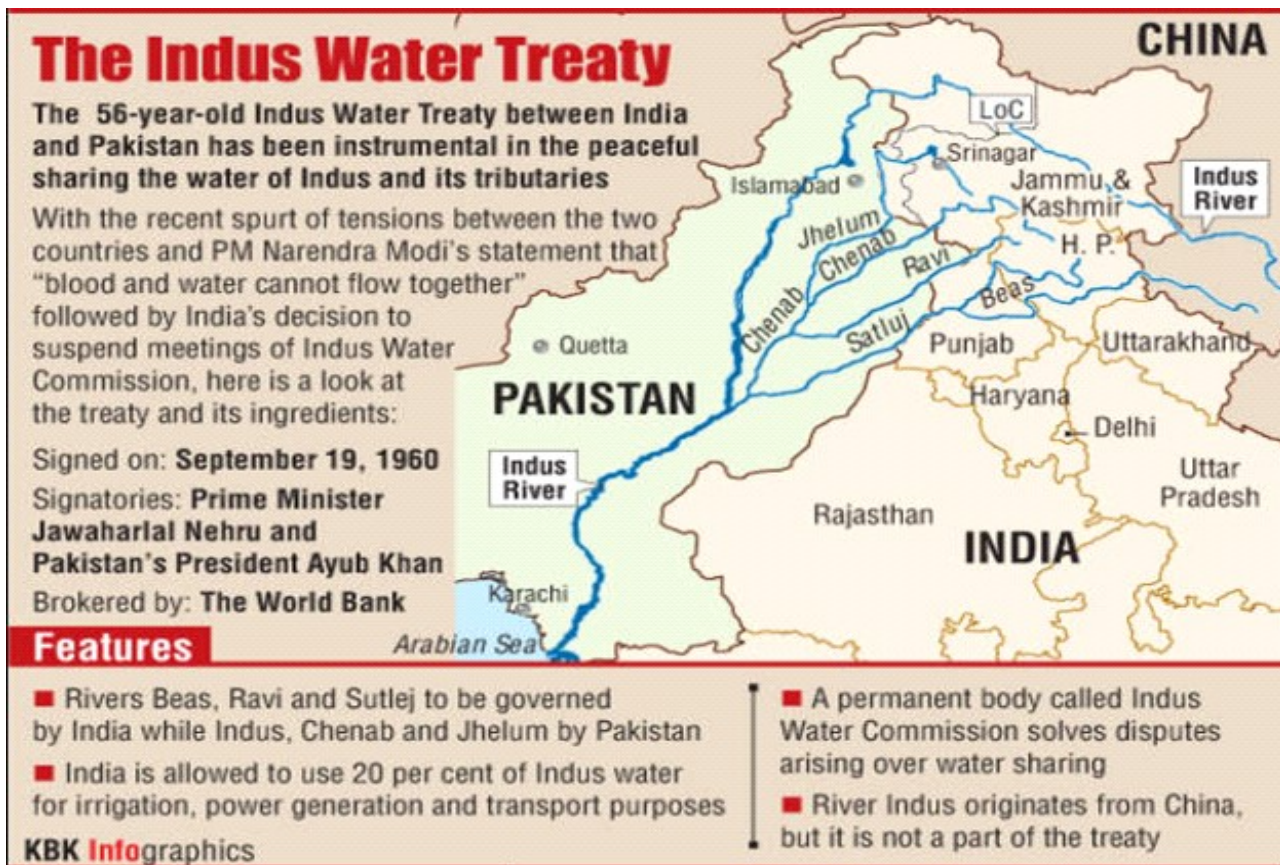
- The scheme is 100% centrally funded for the project components undertaken for public funding.
- To leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector.
- Funding of individual project will vary from state to state and will be finalised on the basis of detailed project reports prepared by PMC (Programme Management Consultant).
- A National Steering Committee (NSC) will be constituted with Minister in charge of M/O Tourism as Chairman, to steer the mission objectives and vision of the scheme.
- A Mission Directorate headed by the Member Secretary, NSC as a nodal officer will help in identification of projects in consultation with the States/ UTs governments and other stake holders.
- PMC will be a national level consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

International Relations

10. Indus Water Treaty

Context:

India and Pakistan have agreed to undertake the Indus Waters Treaty mandated tours by their Commissioners in the Indus basin on both sides to resolve issues on the various hydroelectric projects, including the Pakal Dul and Lower Kalnai in Jammu and Kashmir.



- The recently concluded deliberations were held to further strengthen the role of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) for matters under the 1960 Treaty.

About the treaty:

- Signed in 1960 by then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and then Pakistan President Ayub Khan, the treaty allocates 80% of water from the six-river Indus water system to Pakistan.
- Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum from the Indus water system that flows from India to Pakistan. The Indus river basin spans parts of 4 countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and China) in an area that is more than 30% arid.
- Under the treaty, control over six north Indian rivers were divided between the two countries. India got control over the rivers Beas, Ravi and Sutlej whereas Pakistan got control over Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.

- This is a unique treaty involving a third party. It was brokered by the World Bank.
- A Permanent Indus Commission was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty. The Commission solves disputes arising over water sharing.
- The Treaty also provides arbitration mechanism to solve disputes amicably.

Mechanism for cooperation:

- The treaty sets out a mechanism for cooperation and information exchange between the two countries regarding their use of the rivers. However, there have been disagreements and differences between India and Pakistan over the treaty.
- The water commissioners of Pakistan and India were required to meet twice a year and arrange technical visits to projects' sites and critical river head works, but Pakistan had been facing a lot of problems in timely meetings and visits.

11. 15th ASEAN Economic Ministers – India Consultation**Context:**

15th ASEAN Economic Ministers – India Consultation was recently held in Singapore. Singapore is currently holding the Chair of ASEAN.

Outcomes of the meeting:

- The meeting attended by Economic Ministers from 10 ASEAN countries took stock of the current level of trade and economic engagement between India and ASEAN and reaffirmed the commitment to further strengthen ASEAN-India economic relations.
- It was also announced in the Singapore meeting that the next ASEAN-India Business Summit will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in November 2018 with the theme “Towards Building Strategic Partnership between ASEAN and India in the Era of the 4th IR and Digital Economy”.
- It will be followed by the 4th India-ASEAN Dialogue Partner Expo and Summit scheduled for 21-23 February 2019, in New Delhi.
- Issues related to promoting connectivity, collaboration on Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) development, blue economy, healthcare, and tourism as well as women and youth economic empowerment were discussed.

What is ASEAN?

- The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (more commonly known as ASEAN) is a political and economic organization aimed primarily at promoting economic growth and regional stability among its members.

- There are currently 10 member states: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Why was it set up?

- ASEAN was founded half a century ago in 1967 by the five South-East Asian nations of Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. This was during the polarized atmosphere of the Cold War, and the alliance aimed to promote stability in the region. Over time, the group expanded to include its current 10 members.
- Regional cooperation was further extended with the creation of the ASEAN Plus Three forum in 1997, which included China, South Korea and Japan. And then the East Asia Summit, which began taking place in 2005 and has expanded to include India, Australia, New Zealand, Russia and the United States.

How important is the region economically?

- If ASEAN were a country, it would be the seventh-largest economy in the world, with a combined GDP of \$2.6 trillion in 2014. By 2050 it's projected to rank as the fourth-largest economy.
- Home to more than 622 million people, the region has a larger population than the European Union or North America. It also has the third-largest labour force in the world, behind China and India.

12. COMCASA

Context:

India and the U.S. have signed the foundational or enabling agreement COMCASA on the side-lines of the inaugural 2+2 dialogue.

- COMCASA stands for Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement and is one of the four foundational agreements that the U.S. signs with allies and close partners to facilitate interoperability between militaries and sale of high end technology.
- COMCASA is an India-specific version of the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA). It comes into force immediately, and is valid for a period 10 years.
- COMCASA allows India to procure transfer specialised equipment for encrypted communications for US origin military platforms like the C-17, C-130 and P-8Is. Currently, these platforms use commercially available communication systems.
- COMCASA is a “technology enabler” to help transfer high-tech avionics, encrypted communication and electronic systems to India as well as ensure secrecy of its C4ISR (command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) systems from leaking to other countries like Russia. This agreement would allow the interoperability of India and United States equipments.

Benefits of this agreement:

- The Comcasa provides the legal framework for the US to part with its sensitive communication equipment and codes to enable transfer of realtime operational information. This equipment is largely used for ground-to-air communication, on installed US-origin military aircraft, to enable best battle situation awareness.
- The US data link is considered the most secure communication platform, which will also allow India access to big data base of American intelligence, including real-time imagery.
- The Comcasa will allow both sides to operate on the same communication systems, enabling an “interoperable” environment for militaries. Without this agreement, the US cannot part with highly coded communication equipment with the military platforms they sell to India. India has to depend on commercially available less secure systems on, otherwise, high-end platforms like C-130Js and the P8I maritime surveillance aircraft, among others. COMCASA will change that. Now the US government will be able to give the go-ahead to install the best communication equipment on relevant platforms such as aircraft being sold to India.
- COMCASA will effectively mean India sharing the real-time American intelligence on military deployments by China and Pakistan.
- COMCASA will also help India obtain the armed version of the Sea Guardian drones. The US could not part with the weapon systems on the drone without COMCASA which will now allow installation of data and communication systems.

What next?

- India had signed the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002 and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016. The last one remaining is the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-spatial Cooperation (BECA).

13. East Asia Summit

Context:

6th East Asia Summit- Economic Ministers’ Meeting (EAS-EMM) was recently held in Singapore.

Outcomes of the meeting:

- The 6th East-Asia Economic Ministers’ Meeting was attended by Economic Ministers from 10 ASEAN countries and their eight dialogue partners, Australia, China, India, Japan, Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Russian Federation and the United States of America.

- Acknowledging the potential for disruptions in the macro-economy that could affect overall market sentiments and global growth, the EAS-EMM forum expressed the hope that the economic linkages among the EAS members will enable them to address these challenges.
- The Ministers agreed to the importance of keeping markets open and fair as well as improving transparency and predictability of the business environment.
- The meeting recognized the importance of ongoing work to maximize the opportunities of, and address the challenges presented by, the digital economy and the rise of regional and global value chains, as part of their efforts to promote economic growth and integration in the region.

About East Asia Summit:

- The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a forum held annually by leaders of, initially, 16 countries in the East Asian, Southeast Asian and South Asian regions. Membership expanded to 18 countries including the United States and Russia at the Sixth EAS in 2011.
- EAS meetings are held after annual ASEAN leaders' meetings. The first summit was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 14 December 2005.
- EAS is an initiative of ASEAN and is based on the premise of the centrality of ASEAN.
- EAS has evolved as a forum for strategic dialogue and cooperation on political, security and economic issues of common regional concern and plays an important role in the regional architecture.
- There are six priority areas of regional cooperation within the framework of the EAS. These are – Environment and Energy, Education, Finance, Global Health Issues and Pandemic Diseases, Natural Disaster Management, and ASEAN Connectivity. India endorses regional collaboration in all six priority areas.

Evolution of EAS:

- The concept of an East Asia Grouping was first promoted in 1991 by the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir bin Mohamad. The final report of the East Asian Study Group in 2002, established by the ASEAN+3 countries (i.e. China, Japan and ROK), recommended EAS as an ASEAN led development limited to the ASEAN +3 countries.
- However, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) held in Vientiane on July 26, 2005 welcomed the participation of ASEAN, China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, India and New Zealand, in the first EAS. USA and the Russian Federation were formally included as members of the EAS at the 6th EAS held in Bali, Indonesia on 19 November 2011.

Way ahead:

EAS, representing nearly 50% of the world's population and over 20% of global trade, is a mega gathering and is a testimony to the rise of Asia and how rapidly the world's politico-economic equations are shifting.

14. China-Maldives Friendship Bridge**Context:**

China-Maldives Friendship Bridge has been officially opened for traffic.

- The bridge is an iconic project of the Maldives and China in co-building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.
- The 2-km bridge connects capital Male and neighboring Hulhule island where the Maldives' main international airport is located.
- The bridge has made it possible for locals and tourists to transit between the two islands on land within five minutes.
- The China-Maldives Friendship Bridge has the power to unlock Malé's economy, and position China as a leading investor in Maldives' transport and trade for years to come.

15. WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia**Context:**

71st Session of the WHO Regional Committee for South-East Asia was recently held.

About Regional Committee for South-East Asia:

- The Regional Committee for South-East Asia is the World Health Organization's
- governing body in the South-East Asia Region, with representatives from all 11
- Member States of the Region.
- It meets in September every year to review progress in health development in the Region, formulate resolutions on health issues for the Member States, as well as to consider the regional implications of World Health Assembly resolutions, among others.

World Health Organization in South-East Asia:

- The South-East Asia Region of the World Health Organization, established in 1948, was the first of its six regions.
- Home to a quarter of the world population, WHO SEARO provides leadership on health matters, articulates evidence-based policy options, provides technical support to countries and monitors health trends.

WHO South-East Asia Countries:

- Democratic People's Republic of Korea.
- Indonesia
- Maldives
- Myanmar
- Nepal
- Sri Lanka.
- Thailand
- Timor-Leste.

WHO by a resolution, has delineated six geographic areas for regional organizations as follows:

- Eastern Mediterranean.
- Western Pacific.
- South-East Asia.
- Europe
- Africa (South of the Sahara).
- The Americas.

16. Spain offers referendum on greater Catalan autonomy**Context:**

Spain's prime minister has proposed a referendum on whether Catalonia should be given greater autonomy, in a bid to dampen tensions between Madrid and Barcelona.

- While stopping short of offering the wealthy region a vote on full independence, this proposal will still be seen as an olive branch for many in Catalonia who simply want to see more devolved regional powers.

Background:

- This comes in the wake of a political crisis last year when the Catalan government attempted a unilateral declaration of independence.
- Catalonia, which has its own distinct language, was granted autonomy under Spain's 1978 Constitution adopted three years after the death of longtime dictator Francisco Franco.
- In 2006, a statute granting even greater powers to the northwestern region, boosting its financial clout, was approved by the Spanish and Catalan parliaments. And in a referendum at the time, over 73% of voters in Catalonia approved it.

- But in 2010 Spain's Constitutional Court struck down several articles of the charter, among them attempts to place the distinctive Catalan language above Spanish in the region and a clause describing the region as a "nation". The ruling sparked a rise in support for independence in Catalonia, which is home to some 7.5 million people and accounts for about one-fifth of the Spanish economy.

Where is Catalonia?

- Catalonia is an autonomous community of Spain in the north-east end of the Iberian Peninsula, designated as a nationality by its Statute of Autonomy. It has four provinces: Barcelona, Girona, Lleida, and Tarragona. The capital and largest city is Barcelona, which is the second most populated city in Spain.

How would a secession affect the Spanish economy?

- The Catalan region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, with textile and shipbuilding, and more recently, finance, services, and technology. Barcelona has a thriving start-up culture, and plays host to the annual Mobile World Congress, where the bleeding edge of technology is on display.
- Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain. It accounts for 20.07% of the Spanish GDP. Secession would therefore cost Spain almost a fifth of its economic output, and trigger a row on how to carve up the €836 billion of national debt.
- If Catalonia were to secede from Spain, it would have a GDP of \$314 billion, according to calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That would make its economy larger than Singapore and South Africa, and on a par with Israel. Its GDP per capita would be \$35,000, which would make the average citizen of the Catalanian state wealthier than his counterparts from South Korea or Italy.

17. KAZIND 2018

Context:

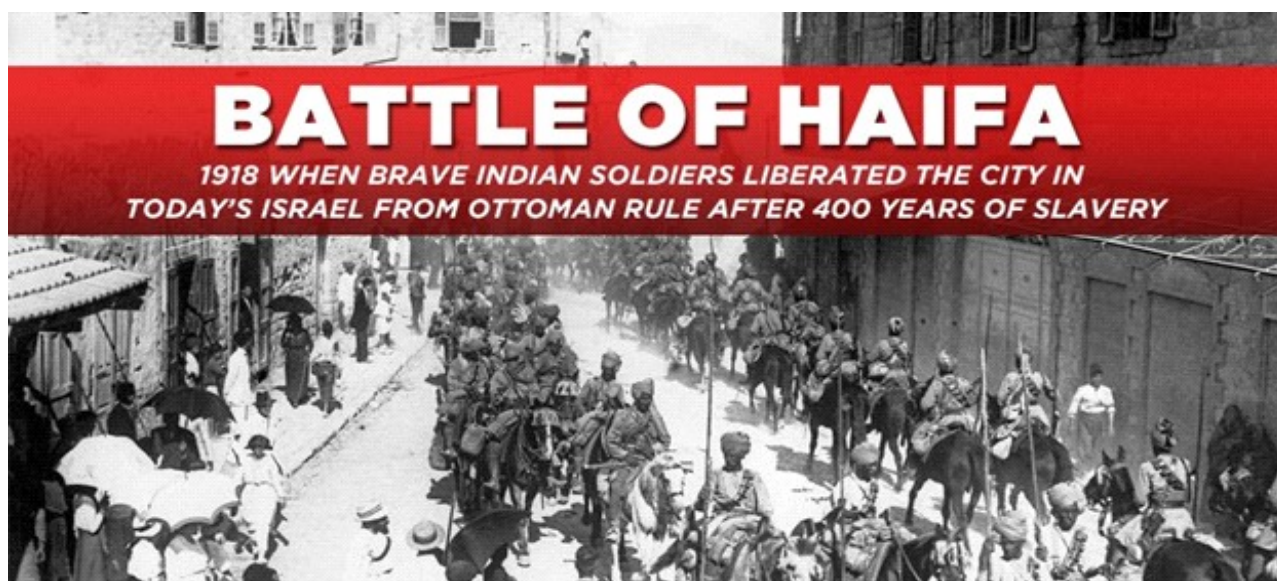
The 2018 edition will be held in Otar region, Kazakhstan.

- It is a joint military exercise between India and Kazakhstan. The aim of the exercise is to build and promote bilateral Army to Army relations and exchange skills and experiences between Kazakhstan Army and the Indian Army. The exercise will also serve as a platform for exchange of drills and procedures.
- This is the third joint military exercise between the two countries which have a history of extensive cooperation in the defence arena. The second edition of the exercise was held in India last year.

18. Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

Context:

3rd ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting) Conference on 'Global Ageing and Human Rights of Older Persons' is being held in Seoul, Korea.



Aims and objectives of the conference:

- The Conference will reaffirm the universal value of the human rights of older persons, share information on discrimination against the elderly and exemplary cases of long-term and palliative care in Asia and Europe, and also discuss operation and tasks of the ASEM Global Ageing Centre as an implementing institution for mutual cooperation among ASEM members for the protection and promotion of the human rights of older persons.

ASEM:

- The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation bringing together the 28 European Union member states, 2 other European countries, and the European Union with 21 Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretariat.
- The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between the two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership.
- It was officially established on 1 March 1996 at the first summit in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The ASEM Summit is a biennial meeting between the Heads of State and Government, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

19. Battle of Haifa

Context:

The northern Israeli coastal city of Haifa, on September 6th, celebrated the centenary year of its liberation from Ottoman rule during World War I, honouring the brave Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in what is considered “the last great cavalry campaign in history”.

Haifa day:

- The Indian Army commemorates September 23 every year as Haifa Day to pay its respects to the three Indian Cavalry Regiments – Mysore, Hyderabad and Jodhpur Lancers, that helped liberate Haifa following a dashing cavalry action by the 15th Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade of the then British Indian Army at the Battle of Haifa in 1918.

History and significance of Haifa war and its Indian Cemetery:

- Owing to its rail and harbour, Israeli port city of Haifa was a strategic supply base. In addition to Haifa, the Allied Forces also engineered a plan to annexe Nazareth and Damascus in present-day Israel and Syria.
- On September 23, 1918, the 15th (Imperial Service) Cavalry Brigade comprising lancers from the regiments of princely states of Jodhpur and Mysore inflicted heavy assault on positions held by Ottoman Turks in and around the city of Haifa. Eventually, the Indian cavalry brigades fighting under the leadership of British General Edmund Allenby helped liberate Haifa from the clutches of the Turkish-German forces.
- The victory was even more special as the Indian soldiers were armed only with lances (a kind of spear) and swords while the Turks had in their possession advance artillery and machine guns. The Indian troops displayed exemplary cavalry skills and valour during what was considered to be the last major cavalry campaign in military history.

Teen Murti memorial:

- The Teen Murti memorial was constructed in 1922 in the memory of the Indian soldiers from three princely states namely Jodhpur, Hyderabad and Mysore who served present day Gaza strip, Israel and Palestine during the World War I under British India Army.

20. Mobilise Your City (MYC) programme

Context:

India and France have signed an implementation agreement on “MOBILISE YOUR CITY” (MYC) programme.

- Based on a proposal made by AFD in 2015, the European Union has agreed to provide funds of Euro 3.5 million through the AFD to contribute to specific investments and technical assistance components within the Mobilise Your City (MYC) programme in India.

About Mobilise Your City (MYC):

- MobiliseYourCity (MYC) is a global climate initiative for integrated urban mobility planning, and one of 15 international transport initiatives of the UN Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA).
- Mobilise Your City (MYC) is part of an international initiative which is supported by the French and the German Governments and was launched at 21st Conference of Parties (COP21) meeting in December, 2015.
- The MYC is an initiative combining urban mobility objectives and climate considerations. It aims at providing solutions in a fully integrated manner, analysing different modes of transportation within the urban fabric, with the objective of providing people long-term, sustainable, adequate, reliable and cost-efficient transportation opportunities.
- The project seeks to back 100 cities worldwide in three years, which are engaged in sustainable urban mobility planning to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- In India, the MYC aims at supporting three pilot cities viz. Nagpur, Kochi and Ahmedabad in their efforts to reduce their Green House Gas (GHG) emissions related to urban transport by implementing urban mobility plans at local level and to help India at national level to improve their sustainable transport policy.
- The three pilot cities selected under the programme as well as MoHUA will benefit from the Technical Assistance activities.

The main components of the proposed assistance are:

- To support planning and implementation of sustainable urban transport projects.
- Support to strengthening institutional capacity for regulating, steering and planning urban mobility.
- Learning and exchange formats with other cities across India for exchanges on best practices.

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<p>ADMISSIONS OPEN FOR NEW BATCHES</p>				

Economy

21. Ombudsman scheme

Context:

The Reserve Bank of India has tightened the banking ombudsman scheme with the objective to strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism for customers.

New guidelines:

- The banking regulator has asked all commercial banks having 10 or more banking outlets to have an independent internal ombudsman (IO) to review customer complaints that are either partly or fully rejected by the banks.
- The IO shall, inter alia, examine customer complaints which are in the nature of deficiency in service on the part of the bank, that are partly or wholly rejected by the bank.
- As banks should internally escalate complaints that are not fully redressed to their respective IOs before conveying the final decision to the complainant, customers need not approach the IO directly.

Internal Ombudsman Scheme:

- The Internal Ombudsman Scheme of 2018 mandates banks to grant a fixed term of three to five years, which cannot be renewed, to the IO.
- The IO can be removed only with prior approval from RBI. The remuneration would have to be decided by the customer sub-committee of the board and not by any individual.
- The Ombudsman Scheme of 2018 covers appointment/tenure, roles and responsibilities, procedural guidelines and oversight mechanism for the IO, among others.
- The implementation of IO Scheme 2018 will be monitored by the bank's internal audit mechanism apart from regulatory oversight by RBI.

Who is a Banking Ombudsman?

- Banking ombudsman is a quasi judicial authority, created to resolve customer complaints against banks relating to certain services provided by them.
- The Ombudsman is a senior official, who has been appointed by the Reserve Bank of India to address grievances and complaints from customers, pertaining deficiencies in banking services.
- It covers all kinds of banks including public sector banks, Private banks, Rural banks as well as co-operative banks.

22. International Women Entrepreneurs Summit

Context:

The International Women Entrepreneurs Summit 2018 is being held in Kathmandu, Nepal.

- It is organised by the South Asian Women Development Forum.
- **Theme:** "Equality begins with Economic Empowerment".

Objective:

- The main objective of the summit is to bring together achievers, women business leaders, professionals, international service providers, resource organisations, experts, government representatives and other stakeholders with a focus on innovative economic transformation through discussions and collaborations.

South Asian Women Development Forum (SAWDF):

- SAWDF is an autonomous, nonprofit organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal.
- It was granted the status of SAARC Recognized Body by 36th Session of SAARC Council Ministers at 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in 2014.
- It is first SAARC Recognized Body organisation working on women entrepreneurs issues.
- It represents national women entrepreneurs' associations or organizations, institutions working towards economic issues of women entrepreneurs in SAARC Region.
- Its membership is based on organizations with extensive work around women's entrepreneurship.

23. International Aviation Summit

Context:

The International Aviation Summit is being held New Delhi.

- The summit has been jointly organised by the Airports Authority of India, Ministry of Civil Aviation and International Air Transport Association (IATA).
- The Indian Government is preparing for a massive air traffic surge to handle as many as 100 crore passengers in next 15-20 years, much above the 50 crore trips a year as predicted by IATA.
- According to IATA, India is expected to overtake Germany, Japan, Spain and the UK within the next ten years to become the world's third largest air passenger market.

Challenges to growth of the sector:

- India's aviation industry is showing contrast as on one hand there are

infrastructural and economic issues plaguing the sector while on the other, airline companies are busy buying planes to meet the demand.

- With a surge in domestic air travel demand in India, the country's airlines are gearing up for a rise and have ordered around 1,000 aircraft over the next eight years. But despite traffic growth, the financial outlook for domestic airlines has deteriorated dramatically since January.
- Imposing GST on international air tickets is being seen as a violation of international standards. The GST rate is 5% and 12% on economy and business class tickets respectively.

About IATA:

- The International Air Transport Association (IATA) is the trade association for the world's airlines, representing some 280 airlines or 83% of total air traffic. Formed in April 1945, it is the successor to the International Air Traffic Association, which was formed in 1919.
- IATA supports airline activity and helps formulate industry policy and standards. It also provides consulting and training services in many areas crucial to aviation.
- **Headquarters:** It is headquartered in Montreal, Quebec, Canada with Executive Offices in Geneva, Switzerland.

24. Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana

Context:

The Union Government has decided to make the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) an open-ended scheme and added more incentives to encourage people to open bank accounts.

Under the new incentives:

- The overdraft limit for account holders has now been doubled to Rs 10000.
- The free accident insurance cover for those opening Jan Dhan accounts after August 28 too has been doubled to Rs 2 lakh.
- There will be no conditions attached for over-draft of up to Rs 2,000.
- The upper age limit for availing the facility has also been hiked to 65 from the earlier 60 years.

About PMJDY:

- The primary aim of this scheme is to provide poor people access to bank accounts.
- The scheme covers both urban and rural areas of India. All bank accounts will be linked to a debit card which would be issued under the Ru-Pay scheme. Rupay is India's own unique domestic card network

owned by National Payments Corporation of India and has been created as an alternative to Visa and Mastercard.

- Under the first phase of this scheme, every individual who opens a bank account becomes eligible to receive an accident insurance cover of up-to Rs 1 Lakh for his entire family.
- Life Insurance coverage is also available under PMJDY. Only one person in the family will be covered and in case of the person having multiple cards/accounts, the benefit will be allowed only under one card i.e. one person per family will get a single cover of Rs 30,000.
- The scheme also provides incentives to business and banking correspondents who serve as link for the last mile between savings account holders and the bank by fixing a minimum monthly remuneration of Rs 5000.

25. National Mission on GeM

Context:

The government has launched the National Mission on Government eMarketplace (GeM) for increasing awareness and accelerating the use of (GeM).

Highlights of the mission:

- The National Mission will cover all central government departments, states and public sector undertakings in a mission mode.
- It is aimed at creating awareness about GeM, train the buyers and sellers, get them registered in GeM and increase the procurement through GeM.
- It also aims to promote inclusiveness by empowering various categories of sellers and service providers such as MSMEs, start-ups, domestic manufacturers, women entrepreneurs, and Self-Help Groups.
- It will also Highlight and communicate the value addition via transparency and efficiency in public procurement, including corruption-free governance in sync with the Central Government's objective of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance'.
- The mission also aims to give a boost to cashless, contactless, paperless transactions in line with Digital India objectives.

About GeM:

It is an online marketplace to facilitate procurement of goods and services by various Ministries and agencies of the Government.

The platform offers online, end to end solution for procurement of commonly used goods and services for all central government departments and state governments, public sector units and affiliated bodies.

It aims to enhance transparency, efficiency and speed in public procurement of goods and services and eliminate corruption.

Performance:

The e-marketplace completed two years in 2018 and on August 26, 2018, it crossed Rs 10,800 crore in terms of value and 6.96 lakh in terms of volume of transactions through the platform. The platform has more than 1.35 lakh sellers offering 4.43 lakh products and around 26,500 organisations as buyers.



Geography and Environment

26. Conservation of Western Ghats

Context:

The six Western Ghats States, including Kerala, have been restrained by the National Green Tribunal (NGT) from giving environmental clearance to activities that may adversely impact the eco-sensitive areas of the mountain ranges.

Important directions issued by the NGT:

- The extent of Eco-Sensitive Zones of Western Ghats, which was notified by the Central government earlier, should not be reduced in view of the recent floods in Kerala.
- Any alteration in the draft notification of zones may seriously affect the environment, especially in view of recent incidents in Kerala.

Background:

- The Western Ghats Ecological Expert Panel had earlier proposed “much larger areas for being included in the eco-sensitive zone” though the Kasturirangan-led High Level Working Group, also appointed by the MoEF to look into the WGEEP report, had reduced it.
- The Ministry had accepted the Kasthurirangan report and issued the draft notifications on ecologically sensitive zones.

Need of the hour:

- Western Ghats region is under serious stress. The region is one of the richest biodiversity areas which needed to be conserved.

Why was the Gadgil Committee set up?

- Environment Ministry set up the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel under Gadgil. The panel was asked to make an assessment of the ecology and biodiversity of the Western Ghats and suggest measures to conserve, protect and rejuvenate the entire range that stretches to over 1500 km along the coast, with its footprints in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

What did the Gadgil Committee say?

- It defined the boundaries of the Western Ghats for the purposes of ecological management.
- It proposed that this entire area be designated as ecologically sensitive area (ESA). Within this area, smaller regions were to be identified as ecologically sensitive zones (ESZ) I, II or III based on their existing condition and nature of threat.
- It proposed to divide the area into about 2,200 grids, of which 75 per cent would fall under ESZ I or II or under already existing protected areas such as wildlife sanctuaries or natural parks.

- The committee proposed a Western Ghats Ecology Authority to regulate these activities in the area.

Important recommendations of Madhav Gadgil Committee:

- Ban on the cultivation of genetically modified in the entire area.
- Plastic bags to be phased out in three years.
- No new special economic zones or hill stations to be allowed.
- Ban on conversion of public lands to private lands, and on diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes in ESZ I and II.
- No new mining licences in ESZ I and II area.
- No new dams, thermal power plants or large-scale wind power projects in ESZ I.
- No new polluting industries in ESZ I and ESZ II areas.
- No new railway lines or major roads in ESZ I and II areas.
- Strict regulation of tourism.
- Cumulative impact assessment for all new projects like dams, mines, tourism, housing.

Why was Kasturirangan committee to set up?

- None of the six concerned states agreed with the recommendations of the Gadgil Committee, which submitted its report in August 2011.
- In August 2012, then Environment Minister constituted a High-Level Working Group on Western Ghats under Kasturirangan to “examine” the Gadgil Committee report in a “holistic and multidisciplinary fashion in the light of responses received” from states, central ministries and others.
- Its report revealed that of the nearly 1,750 responses it had examined, 81% were not in favour of the Gadgil recommendations. In particular, Kerala had objected to the proposed ban on sand mining and quarrying, restrictions on transport infrastructure and wind energy projects, embargos on hydroelectric projects, and inter-basin transfer of river waters, and also the complete ban on new polluting industries.

Way ahead:

- Kerala flood is a lesson worth of learning for India’s disaster management system. India, having more than 7500 km of coastline, should have a strong disaster early warning and management system.
- Cooperation between the states can create an expert and integrated national structure, to manage any kind of natural disaster.

27. Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats

Context:

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved continuation of

the Centrally Sponsored Umbrella Scheme of Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-IDWH) beyond the 12th Plan period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

About Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats:

- The Scheme consists of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger (CSS-PT), Development of Wildlife Habitats (CSS-DWH) and Project Elephant (CSS-PE).
- The implementation of the schemes would be done through the respective States in designated Tiger Reserves, Protected Areas and Elephant Reserves.
- The activities covered under the scheme include the staff development and capacity building, wildlife research and evaluation, anti-poaching activities, wildlife veterinary care, addressing man-animal conflicts and promoting eco-tourism.
- Financial assistance is also provided to States for relocation of communities from within protected areas to other areas.

The scheme has following three components:

- Support to Protected Areas (National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, Conservation Reserves and Community Reserves).
- Protection of Wildlife Outside Protected Areas.
- Recovery programmes for saving critically endangered species and habitats.

Significance and benefits of the scheme:

- A total of 18 tiger range States, distributed in five landscapes of the country would be benefitted under the Project Tiger scheme. Similarly, for other two schemes, the coverage is entire country in case of Development of Wildlife Habitats (DWH) and 23 elephant range States for Project Elephant. It would foster wildlife conservation in general with specific inputs for tiger in Project Tiger area and elephant in Project Elephant area.
- Besides immense environmental benefits and effective implementation of tiger conservation inputs in and around tiger reserves under Project Tiger, wildlife conservation inputs in Protected Areas & nearby areas under Development of Wildlife Habitats and Elephant conservation inputs in Project Elephant areas, the schemes would result in overall strengthening/ consolidation of tiger, elephant and wildlife conservation in the country.
- The schemes would address the human wildlife conflict effectively. Besides, the communities opting for voluntary relocation from the Core/Critical Tiger Habitat (6900 families) would be benefitted under Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger (CSS-PT) and 800 families under Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Development of Wildlife Habitat.

- These schemes would generate employment opportunities resulting in economic upliftment of people in and around tiger reserves/ Protected Areas besides leading to reduction in natural resource dependency with substitution by clean energy use. People living in vicinity would also get indirect benefits. Local populace would get opportunities to serve as guides, driver, hospitality personnel and in other ancillary jobs. These schemes would foster imparting various skills towards making people self-dependent through various eco-development projects, thereby enabling them to go for self-employment.
- These schemes would result in resource generation through tourist visits, thereby fostering in securing tiger source areas and other areas important for wildlife conservation, besides being helpful in sustaining life support systems as well as ensuring the food, water and livelihood security.

28. New Ganga clean-up law

Context:

With an aim to clean the river Ganga, Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation has prepared a draft bill. The draft bill has provisions for several stringent measures.

Highlights of the Draft Bill:

- Constitution of an armed Ganga Protection Corps (GPC): The draft seeks to constitute GPC whose personnel will have the authority to arrest those who pollute the river. The offenders may face a prison term of up to three years and a fine of up to Rs 5 lakh. GPC will follow Code of Criminal Procedure.
- Its personnel will be provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs and will be deployed by National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority.
- The draft bill lays down provision for a National Ganga Council and a National Ganga Rejuvenation Authority to enforce the law and protect the river which flows over 2500 km.
- Among the cognizable offences, there are “Construction activities causing obstruction in the river; withdrawal of ground water for industrial or commercial consumption from the land fronting the river and its tributaries; commercial fishing or aqua culture in the river and its tributaries; discharging untreated or treated sewage into the river”.
- No person or municipal authority will establish or take any steps to set up any industrial or residential or commercial premises or structure which may result in discharge of any sewage or trade effluent into the Ganga, otherwise he may face a five-year prison term or a fine of Rs 50,000 per day or both.

Background:

- In July 2016, a committee was constituted under retired judge of the

Allahabad High Court Justice Girdhar Malviya who had submitted a draft Bill last year named The National River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Bill, 2017.

- Subsequently, a four-member committee was set up by the Ministry to examine that and the Ministry has circulated a Cabinet note which includes a revised version of that draft Bill.

29. Technology Initiatives for Coffee Stakeholders

Context:

The government has launched Coffee Connect – India coffee field force app and Coffee Krishi Tharanga – digital mobile extension services for coffee stakeholders.

Coffee Connect:

- The mobile app Coffee Connect has been developed to ease the work of field functionaries and to improve the work efficiency.
- This application provides solution by harnessing the power of mobility comprising the latest technology in easing the whole process of the field. This includes activities like digitization of Coffee Growers & Estates with Geo Tagging, collecting the Plantation details.
- It will also help in transparency in the activities of the extension officers and officials, transparency in subsidy disbursement and real time report generation.

Coffee Krishi Tharanga:

- The Coffee KrishiTharanga services are aimed at providing customized information and services to increase productivity, profitability, and environmental sustainability. NABARD has partly funded the Pilot project.
- The solution will help in to reach maximum growers in limited period, efficient, timely, customised advisory, improve the efficiency through digitization and leverage existing mobile reach for wider delivery of improved technology.

Coffee cultivation in India:

- Coffee is cultivated in India in about 4.54 lakh hectares by 3.66 lakh coffee farmers and 98% of them are small farmers. Its cultivation is mainly confined to Karnataka (54%), Kerala (19%) and Tamil Nadu (8%) which form traditional coffee tracts.
- Indian coffee, grown mostly in southern states under monsoon rainfall conditions, is also termed as “Indian monsooned coffee”.
- The two well known species of coffee grown are the Arabica and Robusta. The first variety that was introduced in the Baba Budan Giri hill ranges of Karnataka in the 17th century was marketed over the years under the brand names of Kent and S.795.

Coffee Board of India:

The Coffee Board of India is an organisation managed by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the government of India to promote coffee production in India.

- It was established by an act of Parliament in 1942.
- Its duties included the promotion of the sale and consumption of coffee in India and abroad, conducting coffee research, financial assistance to establish small coffee growers, safeguarding working conditions for laborers, and managing the surplus pool of unsold coffee.

30. Plan to save Himalayan springs**Context:**

A NITI Aayog constituted group of experts has urged the government to set up a dedicated mission to salvage and revive spring water systems in the country's Himalayan States.

- In this context, it has released a report titled 'Inventory and Revival of Springs in the Himalayas for Water Security.'

Significance of spring water systems for the region:

- Himalayan spring water systems are important as a source of water for both drinking and irrigation for the region's inhabitants. Spanning States across the country's north and northeast and home to about 50 million people, the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR) has been heavily reliant on these natural groundwater sources.
- Also, with almost 64% of the cultivable area in the Himalayas fed by natural springs, they are often the only source of irrigation in the region.

Concerns:

- Almost half of the perennial springs have already dried up or have become seasonal and tens of thousands of villages are currently facing acute water shortage for drinking and other domestic purposes.
- Almost 60% of low-discharge springs that provided water to small habitations in the Himalayan region have reported clear decline during the last couple of decades.
- The extent of the crisis plaguing the mountainous region was recently evident when more than half a dozen districts of Himachal Pradesh and the State capital Shimla faced a severe drinking water crisis this May after major water sources either went fully or partially dry.

Threats:

- These water sources today are under increasing threat from the urbanisation caused by a constant push for development and climate change.

- There are also multiple sources of pollution in springs and these were due to both geogenic, or 'natural' causes and anthropogenic, or man-made, ones.
- Microbial content, sulphates and nitrates were primarily because of anthropogenic reasons and contamination from fluoride, arsenic and iron was mainly derived from geogenic sources.

Distribution of springs:

- Meghalaya with 3,810 villages with springs has the highest number of these water sources in the Eastern Himalayan States.
- Sikkim has the greatest density with 94% of its villages having a spring.
- In the Western Himalayas, Jammu & Kashmir had both the highest number of villages with springs at 3,313 and the greatest density of 50.6%.

What needs to be done?

- A multidisciplinary, collaborative approach of managing springs that will involve building upon the existing body of work on spring water management is needed.
- The programme could be designed on the concept of an action-research programme as part of a hydrogeology-based, community-support system on spring water management.

A long- term plan:

- The task force moots an 8-year programme to overhaul spring water management. This includes: preparing a digital atlas of the country's springsheds, training 'para-hydrogeologists' who could lead grassroots conservation and introduction of a 'Spring Health Card.'

31. IOWave18**Context:**

Indian Ocean Wave Exercise 2018 (IOWave18) is being held in the Indian Ocean.

- India along with 23 other nations is participating in this major Indian ocean-wide tsunami mock drill which involves evacuation of thousands of people from coastal areas in over half a dozen coastal states.
- This tsunami warning exercise is being organised by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO. It was the IOC that coordinated the setting up of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System (IOTWMS) in the aftermath of December 2004 tsunami.

Objective:

- Besides testing the standard operating procedure (SOP) and communication links at all levels of the warning chain, a primary objective of IOWave18 exercise is to enhance tsunami preparedness at community level.
- The purpose of exercise is to increase tsunami preparedness, evaluate response capabilities in each state and improve coordination throughout the region.

Significance:

- Exercise IOWave18 will simulate Indian Ocean countries being put in a tsunami warning situation and require the respective National Tsunami Warning Centres and the Disaster Management Offices in each country to implement their Standard Operating Procedures.
- IOWave18 will also provide an opportunity for Member States to test the indicators of Indian Ocean Tsunami Ready (IOTR) programme in pilot communities. IOTR is a community performance-based programme that facilitates a structural and systematic approach in building tsunami preparedness.

About the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC):

- UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) promotes international cooperation and coordinates programmes in marine research, services, observation systems, hazard mitigation, and capacity development to understand and manage the resources of the ocean and coastal areas.
- The Commission aims to improve the governance, management, institutional capacity, and decision-making processes of its Member States with respect to marine resources and climate variability.
- IOC coordinates ocean observation and monitoring through the Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS) which aims to develop a unified network providing information on the oceans.
- IOC also coordinates and fosters the establishment of regional intergovernmental tsunami warning and mitigation systems in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, in the North East Atlantic, Mediterranean and Caribbean seas.

Science & Technology

32. Emirates Mars Mission - HOPE Probe

Context: UAE has started its preparations for the upcoming Mars Mission named- HOPE.

- In July 2014, the UAE leadership announced the launch of the Emirates Mars Mission project by the President of the UAE. Subsequently, the President issued a decree establishing the UAE Space Agency.

HOPE Probe:

- The probe will be built by an Emirati team of engineers and experts and will be sent on a scientific voyage of discovery to the Red Planet.
- This will mark the Arab world's entry into the era of space exploration and place the UAE among the major scientific countries that have begun programmes to explore Mars.
- The probe will be sent to explore the Red Planet by 2020. Following a journey of several months, the probe is expected to enter the Red Planet's orbit in 2021, coinciding with the 50th anniversary of the formation of the UAE.

Scientific Objectives of the Probe Voyage:

- The Emirates Mars Mission project will answer scientific questions that have long puzzled scientists. These are questions about the Red Planet, which scientists have not been able to explain before because of the lack of data and information.
- The project will cover all aspects that have not been previously covered, whether scientific or knowledge-based, and it will work on drawing a clear and comprehensive picture of the Martian climate and the causes of the corrosion of its surface that has made it impossible for water to exist on the planet.
- The project will also provide insights about the weather on the Red Planet. It will observe weather phenomena such as dust storms and changes in temperature and how the atmosphere interacts with topography, from the highest volcano peaks to ice sheets to the vast deserts and the deepest canyons.

33. Drug-resistant superbug spreading

Context:

Australian scientists have warned that *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, a superbug resistant to all known antibiotics that can cause "severe" infections or even death is spreading undetected through hospital wards across the world.

- Researchers discovered three variants of the multidrug-resistant bug in samples from 10 countries, including strains in Europe that cannot be reliably tamed by any drug currently on the market.
- The bacteria, known as *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, is related to the better-known and more deadly MRSA superbug.
- It's found naturally on human skin and most commonly infects the elderly or patients who have had prosthetic materials implanted, such as catheters and joint replacements.
- It can be deadly, but it's usually in patients who already are very sick in hospital. It can be quite hard to eradicate and the infections can be severe.
- **Concerns:** Some strains of the bug can make a small change in DNA that can lead to resistance to two of the most common antibiotics.

What is a superbug?

A superbug, also called multiresistant, is a bacterium that carries several resistance genes. These are resistant to multiple antibiotics and are able to survive even after exposure to one or more antibiotics.

What causes them to mutate like that?

Like any living organism, bacteria can mutate as they multiply. Also like any living organism, bacteria have a strong evolutionary drive to survive. So, over time, a select few will mutate in particular ways that make them resistant to antibiotics. Then, when antibiotics are introduced, only the bacteria that can resist that treatment can survive to multiply further, proliferating the line of drug-resistant bugs.

Why is Antibiotic Resistance a Big Deal?

The discovery of antibiotics less than a century ago was a turning point in public health that has saved countless lives. Although antibiotic resistance develops naturally with normal bacterial mutation, humans are speeding it up by using antibiotics improperly. According to a research, now, 2 million people a year in the US develop antibiotic-resistant infections, and 23,000 of them die of those infections.

Why is the medical community worried?

Basically, superbugs are becoming more powerful and widespread than ever. Medical experts are afraid that we're one step away from deadly, untreatable infections, since the mcr-1 *E.coli* is resistant to that last-resort antibiotic Colistin. Antibiotic-resistance is passed relatively easily from one bacteria to the next, since it is transmitted by way of loose genetic material that most bacteria have in common.

The World Health Organization (WHO) is afraid of a post-antibiotic world, where loads of bacteria are superbugs. Already, infections like tuberculosis, gonorrhea, and pneumonia are becoming harder to treat with typical antibiotics.

What Can We Do?

First step would be to limit antibiotic use. If a patient has a virus, for instance, an antibiotic won't work, so doctors shouldn't prescribe antibiotics even if the patient insists. And when patients do need antibiotics, it's important to make sure they take the full course to kill off every last infection-causing germ. Otherwise the strong survive, mutate, and spread. As a society, curbing antibiotic use in healthy animals used in human food production is another important step.

Recent developments:

According to few recent studies, nanotechnology holds the key to stopping antibiotic-resistant bacteria and the deadly infections they cause. Scientists have developed light-activated nanoparticles — each roughly 20,000 times smaller than the thickness of a single human hair and have shown in lab tests that these “quantum dots” are more than 90% effective at wiping out antibiotic-resistant germs like Salmonella, E. coli and Staphylococcus. With the emergence of this Colistin-resistant E.coli, the medical community is going to be working harder and faster to contain superbugs and develop new treatments for infections.

Way ahead:

The global community needs to urgently address the indiscriminate use of antibiotics in an actionable manner, and fast-track research on the next generation of drugs.

34. Japan to test mini 'space elevator'

Context:

A Japanese team has developed a space elevator and will conduct a first trial this month, blasting off a miniature version on satellites to test the technology.

Key facts:

- The test equipment will hitch a ride on an H-2B rocket being launched by Japan's space agency.
- The test involves a miniature elevator stand-in a box just 6 cm long, 3 cm wide, and 3 cm high. The mini-elevator will travel along the cable from a container in one of the satellites.
- If all goes well, it will provide proof of concept by moving along a 10-metre cable suspended in space between two mini satellites that will keep it taut.

Background:

- The idea was first proposed in 1895 by Russian scientist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky after he saw the Eiffel Tower in Paris, and was revisited nearly a century later in a novel by Arthur C. Clarke. But technical barriers have always kept plans stuck at the conceptual stage

Miscellaneous

35. Exercise Kakadu

Context:

Exercise Kakadu 2018 will be held in Australia. KAKADU 2018 is the 14th edition of the exercise.

- Exercise KAKADU, which started in 1993, is the premier multilateral regional maritime engagement exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and supported by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
- The exercise is held biennially in Darwin and the Northern Australian Exercise Areas (NAXA).
- Exercise KAKADU derives its name from Kakadu National Park, which is a protected area in the northern territory of Australia, 171 km south-east of Darwin.
- During the exercise, professional exchanges in harbour and diverse range of activities at sea, including complex surface, sub-surface and air operations would enable sharing of best practices and honing of operational skills.

36. Magsaysay Award

Context:

Two Indians Bharat Vatwani and Sonam Wangchuk are among six who have been declared winners of 2018 Ramon Magsaysay Award.

About Ramon Magsaysay Award:

- It is Asia's highest honour and is often regarded as the region's equivalent of the Nobel Prize.
- It was established in 1957 by trustees of the New York City based Rockefeller Brothers Fund and Philippine government in the memory of Philippines' third President Ramon Magsaysay.
- It is awarded annually to individuals or organizations from Asia region for their altruistic and philanthropic service.
- It carries Medallion bearing the likeness of the late President Ramon Magsaysay, cash prize and a certificate.

37. Raxaul-Kathmandu railway line

Context:

India and Nepal have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the proposed Raxaul-Kathmandu railway line.

- The MoU is the first step forward in the ambitious rail connectivity initiative between the two countries announced in April this year.
- India's Konkan Railway has been asked to conduct a preliminary engineering-cum-traffic survey of the new rail line in consultation with the Nepalese government.

38. Maralal Camel Derby

Context:

The 2018 edition of this race was held recently in Kenya.

- The Maralal Camel Derby is an annual event, held midyear just outside of Maralal town.
- This is Kenya's best known and most prestigious camel race, attracting both local and international competitors. The event is a major draw for spectators as well as racers.

39. Fourth International Ayurveda Congress (IAvC)

Context:

Fourth IAvC was recently held in Leiden, Netherlands.

- It was jointly organized by International Maharishi Ayurveda Foundation, Netherlands; All India Ayurvedic Congress, New Delhi and International Academy of Ayurveda, Pune in association with Indian Embassy in Netherlands.
- **Focus:** The congress focused on promotion and propagation of Ayurveda in Netherlands and its neighboring countries of Europe.

40. SLINEX-2018

Context:

India, Sri Lanka joint naval exercise SLINEX-2018 was recently held at Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

- SLINEX exercise started in 2005 was previously held once in two years and now it has been converted to annual event this year onwards.
- SLINEX exercise is continuation of ongoing operational interaction between both navies wherein regular ships visits are being undertaken between the two countries.
- SLINEX 2017 was held at Visakhapatnam in September 2017 wherein two ships SLNS participated from Sri Lanka Navy.

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