**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 01 November 2016**

**Agricultural Marketing & Farm Friendly Reforms Index. Maharashtra ranks first**

A new ranking of states by the NITI Aayog, based on their performance in reforming agriculture marketing, land leasing and forestry on private land, has set the record straight on states’ eagerness to transform the farm sector.

* The new rankings come on the back of major central initiatives to integrate the Indian farmer with markets, like an electronic national agriculture market \_eNAM) and a new crop insurance scheme, both of which were rolled out this year.

About the index:

According to the ‘Agricultural Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index’, a score of 0 implies no reforms while a score of 100 means complete reforms. The index is aimed at helping the States identify and address problems in the farm sector, which suffer from low growth, low farm income and agrarian distress.

* The index takes into account several parameters like states’ implementation of the model agricultural marketing Act, joining eNAM, special treatment to fruits and vegetables for marketing and the level of taxes in state-regulated mandis (wholesale markets).
* These indicators reveal the ease of doing agribusiness and opportunities for farmers to benefit from modern trade. The indicators also reflect the levels of competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in agriculture markets.
* The other parameters included in the index are relaxation in restrictions related to lease of farm land to tenant farmers, and the freedom farmers have to fell and transport trees on their own land, which allows them to diversify their incomes.

Performance of various states:

* The state of Maharashtra achieved first rank in implementation of various reforms. The state has implemented most of the marketing reforms and it offers best environment for doing agribusiness among all the states and UTs.
* Gujarat ranks second followed by Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.
* Almost two third states could not reach even halfway mark of reforms score.
* Major states like U.P., Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and J&K are in this group.
* Bihar and Kerala were not included in the rankings as they revoked their agricultural produce marketing Acts.

Sources: pib.

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

**Vigilance Awareness Commences Across Indian Railways**

The observance of Vigilance Awareness Week, 2016 has commenced across Indian Railways with a Pledge taking ceremony by Officers and staff.

Key facts:

* The Central Vigilance Commission has given the theme of “Public participation in promoting integrity and eradicating Corruption” for the Vigilance Awareness Week this year.
* This is aimed to reinforce commitment of officials towards bringing about integrity and transparency in all spheres of their activities and to fight corruption with vigour.
* During this Vigilance Awareness Week, various events will be organized around the theme of anti-corruption by the field units of the Railways.
* There is a special focus on sensitizing the youth and to achieve this objective through lectures, panel discussions, debates, discussions, plays, essay writing competitions etc..
* Two “Integrity Pledges” will also be taken on-line by citizens and organisations/corporates to reinforce their commitment for incorruptible governance.

About CVC:

It is the apex vigilance institution. It was created via executive resolution (based on the recommendations of Santhanam committee) in 1964 but was conferred with statutory status in 2003.

* Presently, the body consists of central vigilance commissioner along with 2 vigilance commissioners.
* They are appointed by the President of India on the recommendations of a committee consisting of Prime Minister, Union Home Minister and Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha (if there is no LoP then the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
* Their term is 4 years or 65 years, whichever is earlier.
* It submits its report to the President of India.
* The Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner can be removed from his office only by order of the President on the ground of proved misbehavior or incapacity after the Supreme Court, on a reference made to it by the President, has, on inquiry, reported that the Central Vigilance Commissioner or any Vigilance Commissioner, as the case may be, ought to be removed.
* CVC is advisory body.

Sources: pib.

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

**Government Notifies Real Estate Rules**

Union government has notified Real Estate (Regulation and Development) (General) Rules, 2016.

* Notified by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, the Rules are applicable to the five Union Territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Chandigarh.

Highlights:

* New rules stipulate real estate developers furnish additional information regarding the ongoing projects besides depositing 70% of unused funds in a separate bank account to ensure their completion.
* Under the new rules, the developers will also be required to refund or pay compensation to the allottees with an interest rate of State Bank of India’s highest marginal cost of lending rate plus 2% within 45 days of the payments becoming due.
* The developers have also been mandated to upload various information about the project including number and type of apartments or plots, garages booked, status of the project with photographs floor-wise, status of construction of internal infrastructure and common areas with photos, etc.
* The Rules also provide for compounding of punishment with imprisonment for violation of the orders of Real Estate Appellate Tribunal against payment of 10% of project cost in case of developers and 10% of the cost of property purchased in case of allottees and agents. Compliance with reasons for punishment shall be complied within 30 days of compounding.
* Under the Rules, adjudicating officers, Real Estate Authorities and Appellate Tribunals shall dispose of complaints within 60 days.
* Real Estate Regulatory Authorities have been mandated to publish on their websites the information relating to profile and track record of promoters, details of litigations, advertisement and prospectus issued about the project, details of apartments, plots and garages, registered agents and consultants, development plan, financial details of the promoters, status of approvals and projects etc.
* All states and other union territories are also expected to notify the rules. As per the provisions of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, Real Estate Regulatory Authorities are required to be put in place by April 30, 2017 before full Act is brought into effect, the next day.

Sources: pib.

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

**More differently abled attend schools than before: Census**

Registrar General of India has released Census 2011 data on Disabled Population in the age-group 5-19 by their Attendance Status in Educational Institutions and type of Disability.

Highlights:

* There are 380.1 million people in the age group of 5-19 years, of which 269.8 million (71%) are attending educational institutions. In all, 44.9 million (11.8%) people have attended schools earlier, while 65.4 million (17.2%) have never been to a school.
* There were about 6.57 million disabled people in the age group of 5-19 at Census 2011 in India.
* The disabled population of 1.75 million (26.7%) has never attended any school, 0.8 million (12.1%) has dropped out of schools in the last decade while 4.02 million people (61.2%) are attending educational institutions.
* The proportion of disabled persons who never attended any educational institution in 2011, was found to be highest among persons with ‘multiple disability’ (54.4%), followed by ‘mental illness’ (50.3%) and ‘mental retardation’ (41.2%) whereas persons with ‘any other disability’ (17.7%) show the least percentage.
* Further, out of 4.02 million disabled persons attending educational institutions, 2.28 million (56.7%) are males and 1.74 million (43.3%) are females.
* In 2001, about 3.3 million (50.5%) out of 65.3 lakh disabled persons in the same age group reported attending educational institutions. There is an improvement of about 11 percentage points for the disabled persons attending schools in the age group 5-19 during the decade 2001-2011.
* It is further noticed that disabled persons with ‘any other disability’ show the highest percentage (71.2%) in attending educational institution followed by ‘seeing’ (68%), ‘hearing’ (67%), ‘movement’ (59.6%), ‘speech’ (58.9%), ‘mental retardation’ (47.2%), ‘multiple disability’ (37.2%) and least with ‘mental illness’ (34.1%).
* Maximum percentage of disabled persons who attended educational institution earlier is seen in ‘movement’ (17.7%) followed by ‘mental illness’ (15.5%), and least in ‘multiple disability’ (8.4%).
* Among the major States, Kerala had the best record with 76,394 out 104,418 such persons attending educational institutions. In Tamil Nadu, 150,883 of disabled persons out of a total of 239,756 persons aged 5-19 were attending such institutions, while in Karnataka, 20,7779 out of 330,781 such persons had access to education institutions.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**A.P., Telangana top in ease of doing business**

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, in partnership with the World Bank Group, has released results of the Assessment of State Implementation of Business Reforms 2015-16.

* The Assessment studies the extent to which states have implemented DIPP’s 340-point Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP) for States/UTs 2015-16, covering the period July 1, 2015 to June 30, 2016.
* The BRAP includes recommendations for reforms on 58 regulatory processes, policies, practices or procedures spread across 10 reform areas spanning the lifecycle of a typical business.

Background:

The 340 reform areas are broadly under categories including construction permit, environmental and labour registration, obtaining electricity connection, online tax-return filing, inspection reform, access to information and transparency, single window, land availability and commercial dispute resolution. The exercise is aimed at promoting competition among states with a view to improve business climate to attract domestic as well as foreign investments.

[](https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016-all-India-StateUnion-Territory-wise-ease-of-doing-business-rankings.jpg)

Highlights:

* Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have jointly topped the 2016 all-India State/Union Territory-wise ease of doing business rankings, while last year’s topper Gujarat slipped to the third spot.
* This year, four of the seven States with the lowest income levels in India have found a place in the top 10, while all the seven such States had an implementation rate of over 75%.
* These low-income States included Chhattisgarh (fourth rank), Madhya Pradesh (fifth), Jharkhand (seventh) and Rajasthan (eighth).
* Among other major states, Odisha occupied 11th slot, followed by Punjab, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Delhi.

Sources: the hindu.

**Facts for Prelims**

**10th Indo-Nepal Joint Exercise Surya Kiran Commences**

* Indo-Nepal Joint Military Exercise Surya Kiran-X has commenced at Army Battle School, Saljhandi, Nepal.
* The Surya Kiran series of Exercises are being conducted annually, alternatively in Nepal and India. Notably in the series of military training exercises undertaken by India with various countries, Surya Kiran series with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop’s participation.
* The aim of this exercise is to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on Counter Terrorism in mountainous terrain. Aspects of Disaster Management have also been included in the exercise.
* The Joint Battalion Level Exercise will enhance defence co-operation and relations between the two nations. It is an ideal platform for the contingent of both nations to share their experience and gain mutually. The Exercise will be yet another step towards taking traditional friendship between the two nations to greater heights.

**Rashtriya Ekta Diwas**

* Rashtriya Ekta Diwas was observed on 31st October across the nation. It marks the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel.
* The theme this year is Integration of India.
* The government had last year decided to observe Sardar Patel Jayanti Day as Ekta Diwas. This occasion provides an opportunity to re-affirm the inherent strength and resilience of the nation to withstand the threats to its unity, integrity and security.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 02 November 2016**

**ODF status**

The State of Kerala has become the third State overall and the largest State so far to be declared Open Defecation Free (ODF) under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) (Gramin).

* With this, all 14 districts, 152 blocks, 940 Gram Panchayats and 2117 villages of the State have been declared free from open defecation.
* Freedom from open defecation has been proven to lead to significant health benefits in terms of incidences of water-borne diseases, especially in children, and provide safety and dignity for all, especially women and senior citizens.
* Previously, Sikkim and Himachal Pradesh were declared ODF.

Background:

The Swachh Bharat Mission, launched in October 2014, consists of two sub-missions – the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin) (SBM-G), which will be implemented in rural areas, and the Swachh Bharat Mission (Urban), which will be implemented in urban areas.

* SBM-G seeks to eliminate open defecation in rural areas by 2019 through improving access to sanitation. It also seeks to generate awareness to motivate communities to adopt sustainable sanitation practices, and encourage the use of appropriate technologies for sanitation.
* SBM-Gramin mainly focuses on ensuring the use of toilets, besides their construction. The States and their implementing agencies will be given incentives for meeting performance standards: reducing open defecation, sustaining their open defecation-free status and improving solid and liquid waste management in rural areas.
* The World Bank will also provide a $25-million technical assistance for building the capacity of select State governments.

Sources: pib.

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

**New CBDT chairman**

**Sushil Chandra** has taken over as the new chairman of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

[](https://i2.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sushil-Chandra-CBDT.jpg)

*Sushi Chandra*

About CBDT:

The Central Board of Direct Taxes is a statutory authority functioning under the Central Board of Revenue Act, 1963.

* It is a part of the Department of Revenue in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India.
* It provides essential inputs for policy and planning of direct taxes in India and is also responsible for administration of the direct tax laws through Income Tax Department.
* It is also India’s official Financial Action Task Force unit.
* The CBDT Chairman and Members of CBDT are selected from Indian Revenue Service (IRS) whose members constitute the top management of Income Tax Department.

Sources: pib.

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

**Benami Property Transactions Prohibition Act comes into force**

The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016, designed to curb black money and passed by parliament in August, has come into effect on November 1.

Highlights of the Act:

* The new law amends the 1988 Benami Transactions Act.
* The law provides for up to seven years’ imprisonment and fine for those indulging in such transactions.
* The amendments aim to strengthen the Act in terms of legal and administrative procedure.
* The law prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamdar by the real owner. As per the Act, properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the government, without payment of compensation.
* An appellate mechanism has been provided under the act, in the form of an adjudicating authority and appellate tribunal. According to the government, the four authorities who will conduct inquiries or investigations are the Initiating Officer, Approving Authority, Administrator and Adjudicating Authority.

What is benami transaction?

A benami transaction is one where a property is held by one person and the amount for it is paid by another person. Therefore, in a benami transaction, the name of the person who paid the money is not mentioned. Directly or indirectly, the benami transaction is done to benefit the one who pays.

What isn’t a benami transaction?

* Property held under the name of spouse or child, for which the amount is being paid through a known source of income.
* A joint property with brother, sister or other relatives for which the amount is paid out of known sources of income.
* Property held by someone in a fiduciary capacity; that is, transaction involving a trustee and a beneficiary.

What falls under benami transaction?

Assets of any kind — movable, immovable, tangible, intangible, any right or interest, or legal documents. As such, even gold or financial securities could qualify to be benami.

How it affects the people?

It is being done to curb on black money. People with unaccounted income will sure have a tough time ahead. As for the general public, it won’t be much of an issue if their transactions are legal.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**After shutting liquor shops, Bihar seeks suggestions on prohibition**

A month after implementing the new stringent Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act 2016, Bihar government has invited the general public to provide feedback and suggestions regarding its provisions.

* The Supreme Court is to shortly hear a petition regarding prohibition in the State and the government is said to have taken this step to avoid any embarrassment.

Background:

The State government had implemented the new Bihar Prohibition and Excise Act 2016 from October 2. Many people had termed the legal provisions of the new act as stringent and questioned. Some provisions in the new act were seen as impractical and draconian.

Over 18,000 people have been sent to jail so far for violating prohibition laws since April 5 this year, when prohibition came into effect in the state, and several lakh litres of liquor were seized.

About Bihar prohibition and excise act, 2016:

This is a new and more stringent liquor-ban law with provisions such as arrest of all adults in the family if anyone consumes or stores alcohol.

* It aims to ensure that the ban on sale and consumption of alcohol, including Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL), continues in Bihar.
* Those flouting the ban face up to 10 years in jail, a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh and there is also a provision to confiscate the house or premises where liquor is stored or drunk.
* Though in a rare case, it also prescribes death penalty if people die after consuming hooch.
* Enforcement of the new law, calculated to impose prohibition in a holistic manner, would repeal the previous excise laws in the state.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**RCEP: Members worried about giving more market access to Chinese goods**

The concerns of 15 Asia-Pacific nations including India, over agreeing to give greater market access to Chinese goods without gaining similarly in return, are likely to take centre-stage in the forthcoming ministerial meeting on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

* Trade ministers of 16 countries are slated to meet on November 3-4 at Cebu, Philippines to take forward the FTA negotiations.

What is RCEP?

RCEP is the proposed mega-regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between 16 Asia-Pacific countries including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-member ASEAN bloc.

What are the main concerns?

Many countries in the RCEP grouping are worried about agreeing to eliminate tariffs altogether, a move that will mainly help China.

Concerns of these RCEP countries also stem from fears of China dumping its excess capacity in several items including steel, as well as highly subsidised items, thereby harming the local industry in the importing countries and distorting trade in the process.

What’s being proposed by India?

India could put forward a two-tier proposal on goods that will treat China differently from the remaining RCEP countries. When compared to the treatment for other RCEP nations, this proposal on China will include a larger negative list (goods that will be protected from tariff cuts), and longer time-frame for reducing / eliminating tariffs on the remaining goods.

* This proposal will be different from the initial proposal of a three-tier system with a greater coverage of goods for the ASEAN bloc (with an 80% threshold — that included a combination of percentage of tariff lines and that of total RCEP imports), slightly lesser for Japan & Korea (65% threshold) and the least for China, Australia and New Zealand (42.5% threshold).
* India is of the view that any concessions for opening up goods trade can be finalised only if there are equivalent gains for it in services market access.

Background:

The proposed FTA, which aims to open up trade in goods and services as well as liberalise investment policies, will cover a market of over three billion people in these countries — whose total GDP is more than $17 trillion and account for 40 per cent of world trade.

Sources: the hindu.

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

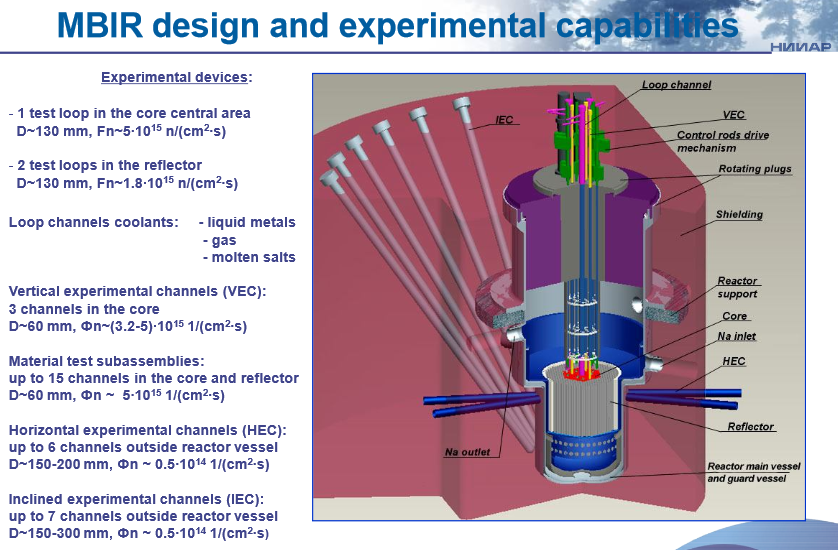
**Russia invites India to join fast reactor research project**

Russia has invited India to join in developing nuclear reactors and participate in its fast reactor research project.

About the project:

The multipurpose fast research reactor project, also known as MBIR, is coming up at the International Research Center in Dimitrovgrad, located in the Ulyanovsk region. The purpose of the programme is the creation of a new technological platform for nuclear energy, which will be based on the closed fuel cycle with fast neutron reactors.

* The closed fuel cycle, which involves recycling the nuclear waste as new fuel, in the case of the MBIR project, essentially signifies research on a sodium-cooled Generation 4 fast reactor to design an advanced fast neutron reactor for use in nuclear power plants.
* “MBIR’s design includes three independent loops that can be used to test different coolants like gas, lead, molten salt, among others, and therefore it will be possible to conduct material testing research in those different environments.”

[](https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/multipurpose-fast-research-reactor-project-MBIR.png)

What is a fast neutron reactor?

A fast neutron reactor, also known simply as a fast reactor, is a type in which nuclear fission chain reaction is sustained by fast neutrons. Such a reactor needs no neutron moderator.

Significance of fast neutron reactors:

With fast-neutron reactors, it is possible to solve the major ecological problem of reprocessing and deactivation of the accumulated radioactive waste, at the same time providing society much needed energy.

Also, transition to the closed fuel cycle, which is based on the fast neutron reactors, will lead to the solution of the five key problems — safety, competitiveness, shortage of fuel, reprocessing and refabricating the used nuclear fuel and radioactive waste — as well as in enforcing non-proliferation of fission materials and weapons technologies.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 03 November 2016**

**Researchers aim to scoop out marine oil spills**

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Thiruvananthapuram have developed a gelator to recover marine oil spills.

How gelators were produced?

These gelators were produced using glucose as a startling material and after several chemical reactions.

How it works?

The gelator molecule is partly hydrophobic and partly hydrophilic. While the hydrophilic part helps in self-assembling to form gelator fibres, the hydrophobic part is responsible for its diffusion into the oil layer.

* Since the outer part of the fibre is hydrophobic, oil tends to gets into the spongy network made of fibres.
* Once inside the fibre network, oil loses fluidity and becomes a gel. As the self-assembly is strong, the gel maintains its structure and rigidity even under pressure.

Key facts:

* Unlike current methods, the newly developed gelator can recover oil from oil-water mixture and the gelator can be reused several times.
* To achieve better diffusion of the molecule into the oil phase and enhance the oil recovery the hydrophobicity of the molecule needs to be increased. This is done by adding an aromatic/alkyl group at some part of the molecule.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Online applications for homes under PM Awas Yojana starts**

In a significant initiative, the Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation has enabled online submission of applications by the urban poor for affordable houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana(Urban).

* In this regard, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been signed by the Ministry of HUPA and Common Services Centre e-Governance Services India Limited of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.

Key facts:

* About 60,000 located in urban areas will enable online submission of applications from November 3,2016 at a nominal cost of Rs.25/- per application.
* As per the MoU, CSCs will also facilitate printing of the acknowledgement receipt with beneficiary photograph which helps applicants in tracking application status.
* Beneficiaries have to visit the nearest CSC for seeking assistance for seeking benefits of PMAY(Urban) online. In case the beneficiary does not have Aadhar Card, CSCs will enable beneficiaries acquiring them.

About PMAY:

The scheme was launched in June 2015 and envisages Housing for All by 2022. It involves building of more than two crore houses in a span of seven years.

* The beneficiaries are poor and people living under EWS and LIG categories in the country.
* The scheme is divided into three phases. In the first phase, a total of 100 cities will be covered from April 2015 to March 2017. In phase two, 200 cities will be covered from April 2017 to March 2019. In the third phase, the leftover cities will be covered from April 2019 to March 2022.
* The government is providing an interest subsidy of 6.5% on housing loans which can be availed by beneficiaries for 15 years from start of loan date.
* The government will grant Rs 1 lakh to all the beneficiaries of the scheme. In addition, Rs 1.5 lakh will be given to all eligible urban poor who want to construct their houses in urban areas or plan to go for renovation in their existing houses. One can also avail loans under this scheme to build toilets in existing houses.

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.*

**Centre moots registry to vet geospatial data**

The government is developing a national data registry (NDR) that will require all agencies— state, private and academic — that collect and store geospatial data to provide details of the data they store.

Need for NDR:

The purpose of such a registry is to create a “catalogue” that would “prevent duplication” of data sets and to help users locate the right agencies to source information.

Key facts:

* The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has been selected as the nodal coordinating agency.
* The registry will be a ‘meta-data’ repository: it will not actually be a source of geospatial data but will only inform about the nature of the data a service provider has.
* The registry will serve as a source of authenticated information.
* This initiative would also act as a clearing house for geospatial applications.

Way ahead:

Everyone from restaurant-location-services providers to hospital-location aggregators will have to comply with the directive, and the government may consider bringing in legislation.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**India, Palestine sign MoU for setting up of Techno Park in Ramallah**

India and Palestine have signed an agreement for setting up of a techno park in Ramallah with an Indian grant of $12 million.

[](https://i2.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Ramallah.png)

*Ramallah Map*

Background:

The decision to set up ‘Palestine-India Techno Park’ was taken during the visit of President Pranab Mukherjee to that country last October.

Key facts:

* Once completed, the Technopark will serve as an IT hub in Palestine with complete IT facilities offering a one-stop solution to all IT-related service requirements.
* It will also provide the state-of-the-art technology, hosts IT companies and foreign companies benefiting local business, universities and other institutions.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 3 Topic: Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices; Public Distribution System objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping; issues of buffer stocks and food security; Technology missions; economics of animal-rearing.*

**Duty drawback facility extended for textiles**

The government has extended duty drawback facility for one year on all textile products to boost exports, and has increased rates in some cases for the benefit of Indian exporters.

Key facts:

* The duty drawback has been announced by the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC).
* The duty drawback benefits textile exporters to overcome the barriers they face in exports.
* CBEC revises drawback rates every year on November 1 for one year.

Background:

Under the revised norms, home textiles attract drawback of 7.5% now as against 7.3% earlier. Similarly, incorporation of blanket and other cotton products in this category will attract drawback rate of 8% now from 7.2% earlier. These drawbacks are aimed at giving a boost to exports of cotton textiles as they will provide adequate neutralization of the incidence of duties and taxes on the export goods and make them more competitive in the international markets.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 04 November 2016**

**FSSAI Strengthens the Food Testing Infrastructure in the Country**

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has rolled out a major scheme for strengthening of Food Testing Infrastructure in the country at an estimated cost of Rs. 482-crore, in the light of the recent observations by Mumbai High Court regarding the urgent need to upgrade Food Testing Laboratories in India.

Key facts:

* In this regard, a meeting was recently held by the Empowered Committee constituted for implementing this scheme. Proposals from 7 States/UTs, namely, Goa, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Punjab were considered for strengthening their food Testing infrastructure.
* Two proposals, from Chandigarh (Punjab) and Calicut (Kerala), were approved in principle. The other States were requested to revise and resubmit their proposals according to the scheme guidelines with mentorship support from FSSAI.
* The Committee also approved the proposal for strengthening the Referral Food Laboratory at Central Food Technology Research Institute (CFTRI) through provision of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities.

Background:

Under this scheme, 45 State/UT Food Testing labs (at least one in each State/UT with a provision of two labs in larger states) and 14 Referral Food Testing labs will be upgraded to enable them to obtain NABL accreditation.

* 62 Mobile Testing labs will also be established across all States/UTs. There are currently 4 Mobile food Testing labs in Punjab, Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which will serve as a model for these Mobile Testing labs.
* Capacity building of the Food Testing labs is also an important component of this scheme. In addition, a School Food and Hygiene Programme has been envisaged under which basic Food Testing labs will be set up in 1500 schools/colleges across the country to promote a culture of safe and wholesome food.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.*

**Bidding Guidelines for setting up 1000 MW Wind Power Projects**

Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) has issued Guidelines for transparent bidding process for implementation of Scheme for setting up of 1000 MW Wind Power Project connected to inter-state transmission system (ISTS).

Highlights:

* As per Guidelines, the Wind Power Projects will be selected through open and transparent competitive bidding followed by e-reverse auction and the capacity may go higher than 1000 MW, if there is demand from Buying Entities.
* Discoms of non-windy State and UTs and also the bulk consumers of any State/UTs who intend to buy 10 MW or more can buy wind power under the Scheme.
* PTC India Ltd, trading company, will sign Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with wind projects at bidded tariff and back-to-back Power Sale Agreement (PSA) with Buying Entities at a pooled price of the total bids selected. The term of PPA and PSA will be 25 years.
* Bidder can bid for a minimum capacity of 50 MW and maximum up to 250 MW. The selected bidder is required to injected wind power at ISTS interconnection point. Bidder is allowed to install 5% of additional rated capacity that will compensate auxiliary consumption and system losses up to interconnection point.
* Provision relating to pass through of GST impact, part commissioning, efficiency in generation, performance monitoring have also been stipulated in the guidelines.

Background:

MNRE sanctioned a Scheme for setting up of 1000 MW ISTS connected Wind Power Project in June 2016.

* The objective of the Scheme is to encourage competitiveness through scaling up of project sizes and introduction of efficient and transparent e-bidding and e-auctioning processes.
* It will also facilitate fulfilment of Non-Solar Renewable Purchase Obligation (RPO) requirement of non-windy states.
* In order to facilitate transmission of wind power from these windy states to non-windy states provisions have been made in the Tariff Policy to waive the inter-state transmission charges and losses for wind power projects and Ministry of Power has already issued order in this regard.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.*

**Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction**

The three-day Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was recently inaugurated by PM Modi.

* The conference will adopt the New Delhi Declaration on the closing day which will be a political commitment by 61 participating governments towards preventing and reducing disaster risk reduction.

Key facts:

* This is the first AMCDRR after the advent of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRRR), adopted at the third UN World Conference in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015. It will set the direction of Sendai Framework implementation in the region.
* AMCDRR 2016 will focus on collaboration, consultation and partnership with governments and stakeholders to mainstream DRR in the region’s development narrative.
* The Conference will adopt the ‘Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework’ endorsed by the Asian countries.
* It will also consolidate the political commitment of governments towards preventing and reducing risk as well as strengthening resilience in the form of a political declaration.
* Voluntary statements of action of stakeholder groups towards a ‘shared responsibility’ approach in implementation of the SFDRR would also be adopted.
* 61 countries from Asia and Pacific region with nearly 4,000 delegates, including 1,100 foreign representatives, are participating in the conference.

Background:

Established in 2005, AMCDRR is a biennial conference jointly organized by different Asian countries and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). So far, six AMCDRR conferences have been organised. India had also hosted the second AMCDRR in New Delhi in 2007.

About Sendai Framework:

The “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030” was adopted during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015.[](https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Sendai-Framework.jpg)

* It is the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda, with seven targets and four priorities for action.
* It was endorsed by the UN General Assembly following the 2015 Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR).
* The Framework is for 15-year. It is a voluntary and non-binding agreement which recognizes that the State has the primary role to reduce disaster risk but that responsibility should be shared with other stakeholders including local government, the private sector and other stakeholders.
* The new Framework is the successor instrument to the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters.
* The implementation of the Sendai Framework involves adopting integrated and inclusive institutional measures so as to work towards preventing vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and strengthen resilience.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Council fixes 4-level GST rate structure**

In a step towards realising the Goods and Services Tax, the GST council has finalised a 4-tier tax structure of 5, 12, 18 and 28%, with lower rates for essential items and the highest for luxury and de-merits goods.

* The multiple rates have been fixed on lines of some European countries. The IMF has lauded India for adopting GST saying it would boost economic growth.

Key facts:

* Apart from the four fixed GST rates, a cess between 40% and 65% will be imposed on goods like high-end cars, pan masala, aerated drinks and tobacco products.
* The cess on demerit and sin goods ranging between 40 to 65% will create a revenue pool of Rs 5,000 crore to compensate the states for their revenue loss for the first five years of implementation of the GST.
* The cess will be lapsable after the first five years.
* Food grains will have a zero rate to protect people from pressure of inflation.
* The lowest slab of 5% will be for items of common consumption. The bulk of the goods and services including fast-moving consumer goods will be included in two standard rates of 12% and 18%.
* Heavy consumer durables like washing machines and refrigerators will be taxed at 28% with riders. These riders have been set because these goods are purchased by lower middle class too. The new tax would also include a separate central “cess” that will be levied on tobacco products, luxury cars and aerated drinks, charged on top of the 28% tax bracket.
* There has been no decision on a tax rate for gold.
* The standard rate of GST has been fixed at 18%.

Concerns:

Industry bodies and business leaders have expressed their concerns about the complexity of the final rate structure of the Goods and Services Tax.

* The main issues of concern seem to be the complexity brought on by the multiple rates and the uncertainty about the additional cess that will be levied on luxury goods and tobacco products.
* Another area of concern is the requirement for multiple registrations in each state for the supply of goods and services.

What next?

Next, the Parliament has to pass the tax rates agreed upon by the council.

Sources: the hindu.

**Facts for Prelims**

**Sampriti-7:**

* It is a 14-day joint military exercise by Bangladesh and India.
* It is to practise counter-terrorism and disaster-management operations.
* The exercise will be held at Shaheed Salauddin Cantonment in Bangladesh’s Ghatail, Tangail.
* The joint exercise will simulate a scenario where both nations are working together in a counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism environment under the U.N. Charter.
* With this exercise, personnel from both countries would be “familiarised” with each other’s organisational structure and tactical drills.
* The first exercise in this series was held at Jorhat in Assam in 2010.

**James webb space telescope:**

* The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is the largest space telescope ever built.
* It is an international collaboration between of about 17 countries including NASA, European Space Agency (ESA) and the Canadian Space Agency (CSA).
* When it is launched into space it will be able to peer back in time 3.5 billion years, teaching us more than ever before about the start of the universe.
* The telescope is 100 times more potent than its predecessor, Hubble, and three times larger.
* The telescope is set to go through a series of tests to make sure it can stand up to the conditions during lift off and the frigid conditions of space, ahead of its launch in 2018.
* The main component of the telescope is the primary mirror, which consists of 18 hexagonal mirrors and looks like a giant puzzle piece.
* The telescope will be used to look back to the first galaxies born in the early universe more than 13.5 billion years ago, and observe the sources of stars, exoplanets, and even the moons and planets of our solar system.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 05 November 2016**

**India, UNISDR sign Statement of Cooperation on Sendai Framework**

India and United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction have signed a Statement of Cooperation during the ongoing Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) 2016.

Key facts:

* The Statement underlines the guiding principles, objectives and areas of cooperation between India and UNISDR towards the effective implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), which was adopted at the Third World Conference on DRR at Sendai in Japan in March, 2015.
* According to the statement, India will partner with UNISDR to work towards strengthening the capacity of Asian countries in ensuring risk resilient development. It will also facilitate the sharing of knowledge and experiences, and collaborative efforts towards addressing critical regional challenges.
* The cooperation aims to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework through Training and capacity building for Asian countries; promoting international and regional cooperation to reinforce political commitment, facilitate knowledge sharing and strengthen the capacity of UNISDR for monitoring and review of the Sendai Framework.

About UNISDR:

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), created in December 1999, is the successor to the secretariat of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

* It was established to ensure the implementation of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.
* It is part of the United Nations Secretariat and its functions span the social, economic, environmental as well as humanitarian fields.
* UNISDR supports the implementation, follow-up and review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted by the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction on 18 March 2015 in Sendai, Japan.

UNISDR’s vision is anchored on the four priorities for action set out in the Sendai Framework:

* Understanding disaster risk.
* Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk.
* Investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience.
* Enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and to “Build Back Better” in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Govt launches scheme to provide free health check-ups to pregnant women**

With an aim to reduce maternal and infant mortality, the government has rolled out a new scheme to provide fixed-day antenatal care to pregnant women on the ninth of every month.

* The scheme — ‘Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan’ (PMSMA) — will provide free and comprehensive care on the ninth day of every month during the course of the pregnancy, especially to the poor.

Key facts:

* Launched by MoHFW
* Part of Reproductive Maternal Neonatal Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCH+A) Strategy.
* The scheme is aimed at ensuring that every pregnant woman undergoes essential checkup during pregnancy to avoid unnecessary complication. This is expected to significantly bring down maternal deaths, mainly in rural areas.
* Scheme is applicable to women through their third to sixth month of pregnancy.
* A key feature of the scheme includes services by gynaecology specialists and physicians with support from private sector doctors to supplement the efforts of the government sector.
* It also invites the private sector to provide free ante-natal services (ANC) on the 9th of every month on a voluntary basis to pregnant women, especially those living in under-served, semi-urban, poor and rural areas.
* Identification and follow up of high risk pregnancies. A sticker indicating the condition and risk factor of the pregnant women would be added onto MCP card for each visit:
  + Green Sticker- for women with no risk factor detected
  + Red Sticker – for women with high risk pregnancy

Background:

In India, one pregnant woman dies every 12 minutes, with 45,000 dying each year. Of them, less than one in five (19.7%) undergo pre-natal health checks.

* India’s MMR of 167 (167 maternal deaths per 100,000 births) failed to meet its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) target of bringing down maternal deaths to under 140 by 2015.
* India’s IMR stands at 40 deaths per 1,000 live births, against an MDG target of 29. Only 15 states and UTs — Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Goa, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Daman and Diu, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Puducherry, Manipur, Maharashtra, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim and Punjab — have achieved an IMR of 29 and under.

Way ahead:

The government plans to reach out to about three crore women across the country through the scheme. The health ministry has also identified 184 priority districts for greater focus on antenatal care.

**Environment Ministry Constitutes Four-Member Team for Conservation of Loktak Lake**

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has constituted a four-member team for conservation and management of Loktak Lake in Manipur.

* The team will visit Loktak Lake and hold discussions with the State government, its concerned agencies and other stakeholders. The consultations will also include people living in the vicinity of the lake.

The terms of reference of the team that will visit Loktak Lake are:

* To review the implementation of works carried out with financial assistance provided by the Central and State governments so far for the conservation and management of Loktak Lake and suggest further interventions required for conserving the lake in a holistic manner.
* Enumerate the steps required to be initiated for declaring Loktak Lake as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
* Identify the steps and actions to be taken to increase the tourism potential of Loktak Lake.

Background:

* Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, and
* It is famous for the phumdis (heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matter at various stages of decomposition) floating over it.
* Keibul Lamjao is the only floating national park in the world.
* It is located near Moirang in Manipur state, India.
* The Keibul Lamjao National Park is the last natural refuge of the endangered sangai.
* However, human activity has led to severe pressure on the lake ecosystem.

**Facts for Prelims**

**PETROTECH – 2016:**

* Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently inaugurated India’s flagship biennial international oil and gas conference and exhibition, PETROTECH-2016.
* Petrotech is Asia’s largest oil and gas event.
* The theme for this event is “Hydrocarbons to fuel the future – Choices and Challenges”.
* This global event aims at bringing Energy Ministers, industry leaders, professionals, academicians and domain experts from the energy sector on a common platform.
* The Conference showcases the strengths & potential of Indian Hydrocarbon industry to the world besides providing a vibrant platform for exchange of ideas, sharing of experience, knowledge and technological development across various segments of hydrocarbon industry.
* Petrotech will also include a BRICS Roundtable of Energy Ministers and a Roundtable discussion involving select CELAC countries of Latin America.

**Paris agreement:**

* The “Paris Climate Agreement” has come into force on 4th November 2016.
* India ratified the Paris Agreement on 2nd October 2016, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and the Agreement has the support of majority of the countries.
* Till date, 94 Parties have ratified it, of the 197 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
* The Paris Agreement’s central aim is to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change by keeping a global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius.
* The Paris Agreement requires all Parties to put forward their best efforts through “nationally determined contributions” (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all Parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 07 November 2016**

**DRDO Signs MoU With IIT Delhi to Establish JATC**

Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi to establish a ‘Joint Advanced Technology Centre’ (JATC).

What will the JATC do?

The objective for creation of JATC is to undertake and facilitate multi-disciplinary directed basic and applied research in the jointly identified research verticals.

* It will enable Directed, Basic & Applied Research and will engage with premier research institutes through multi-institutional collaboration.
* The researchers will get the opportunity to work in advanced areas of research namely Advanced Materials for Ballistic Protection, Advanced Mathematical Modelling and Simulation, Advanced Electromagnetic Devices and Terahertz Technologies, Smart & Intelligent Textile Technologies, Brain Computer Interface & Brain Machine Intelligence besides Photonic Technologies, Plasmonics and Quantum Photonics, etc.
* The focused research efforts at the centre will lead to realization of indigenous technologies in these critical areas, which will be used for speedy self-reliance.

Key facts:

* JATC will be located in the campus of IIT Delhi at the upcoming Science and Technology Park (Mini-Science Park ‘MSP’).
* As per the MoU, DRDO will support JATC in equipping it with advanced and unique research facilities that will enable the faculty and scholars to conduct advanced research and transform the JATC as Centre of Excellence.
* DRDO scientists and engineers will work with the academic research faculty and scholars in addressing scientific problems to find an innovative solution.
* DRDO will facilitate towards advanced research to utilize technology outcome in the futuristic applications.

**New Delhi Declaration, Asian Regional Plan adopted at AMCDRR 2016**

The Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) 2016 recently came to an end with the adoption of the ‘New Delhi Declaration’ and the ‘Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework’.

What is New Delhi Declaration?

The ‘New Delhi Declaration’ is a political statement spelling out the commitment of participating governments towards preventing and reducing disaster risk, and strengthening the resilience of communities, nations and the Asian region.

* Recognising the need to accelerate the implementation of global frameworks, it commits to a people-centred and whole-of-society approach towards Disaster Risk Reduction.
* It also emphasises the need to enhance the capacity of communities and ensure participation of all stakeholder groups towards achieving resilience.

What is Asian Regional Plan?

The ‘Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework’ focuses on the ‘How to’ reduce disaster risk at national and local levels. It has arrived at a longer term road map of cooperation and collaboration, spanning the 15-year horizon of the Sendai Framework, as well as a two-year action plan to further disaster risk reduction with specific, actionable activities.

**Retired judges to wield the gavel again**

The Union government has agreed to a resolution passed by the judiciary in the Chief Justices and Chief Ministers Annual Conference 2016 to use the services of retired High Court judges with proven integrity and track record to tackle pendency of cases.

Background:

Keeping in view the large pendency of civil and criminal cases, especially criminal appeals, where convicts are in jail, the judiciary had requested for enhancing the strength of judges to deal with the backlog of cases. The resolution had been hanging fire since April.

Constitutional provisions:

The provision to use the services of retired judges is open to the Chief Justices of High Courts under Article 224A of the Constitution with the previous consent of the President as an extraordinary measure to tide over case pile-ups.

Why this is necessary?

The pendency of cases in the High Court has been stagnant for over three years; 43% of the pendency is of cases of over five years; concentration of ‘five years plus’ cases in a few High Courts; and stagnant pendency figures of five years plus cases (33.5% in 2015) in district courts. The 24 High Courts face a shortage of nearly 450 judges. Nearly three crore cases are pending in courts across India.

Sources: the hindu.

**AERA to hold talks on new airport tariff**

The Airport Economic Regulatory Authority (AERA) has initiated a process to adopt a hybrid-till approach for calculating airport fees and the regulator is slated to hold talks with airlines and airport operators next week to seek their views.

* In this regard, the regulator has called for a meeting of airlines, airports, International Air Transport Association (IATA), Airports Authority of India (AAI), state governments, consumers’ organisation, fuel suppliers, and ground handling companies, among others.

What is hybrid-till model?

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

Implications:

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

Background:

* The National Civil Aviation Policy has called for adopting a hybrid-till model for all airports.
* So far, single-till model was adopted for determining aeronautical tariffs that can be set by airports, wherein passengers and airlines are charged less. Under the single-till model, both aeronautical and non-aeronautical revenues are taken into account to calculate passenger fee.
* Apart from its core operations, airports earn income from the non-aeronautical side which includes food and beverages, duty-free shops, advertising, car parking and hotels.
* Airlines are in favour of a single-till model as it reduces their charges and passenger fees. Airport costs constitute 10-14% of an airline’s operational costs.

**International Agrobiodiversity Congress + DELHI DECLARATION on Agrobiodiversity Mgmt:**

* The 1st International Agrobiodiversity Congress – IAC 2016 – has begun at New Delhi.
* In the declaration, 900 participants from 60 countries have urged researchers and policy-makers to strengthen and promote complementary conservation strategies to conserve and use agrobiodiversity.
* It is co-organized by the Indian Society of Plant Genetic Resources and Bioversity International, a CGIAR Research Center headquartered in Rome, Italy. It received support from many Indian and international organisations engaged in the conservation and use of genetic resources.
* The Congress addressed seven themes:
  + agrobiodiversity for food and nutrition;
  + agrobiodiversity for adaptation to climate change;
  + intellectual property rights (IPRs) and access and benefit-sharing (ABS) and farmers’ rights;
  + quarantine, biosafety and biosecurity issues;
  + conservation strategies and methodologies;
  + science-led innovation for agrobiodiversity management and sustainable use; and
  + capacity-building and strengthening partnerships.

**First World Tsunami Awareness Day commemorated:**

* The recently concluded three-day Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) 2016 commemorated the first World Tsunami Awareness Day to spread awareness on tsunami.
* The observance of the day stressed on the importance of early warning systems and preparedness of communities in order to mitigate damage from the often devastating natural hazard.

**Indian elected to UN International Law Commission: (not ICJ)**

* International court of Justice – judicial organ of UN;
* Aniruddha Rajput, a young Indian lawyer, has been elected to the UN International Law Commission. He bagged the highest number of votes in the Asia-Pacific group.
* Aniruddha Rajput is among 34 individuals elected by the UN General Assembly as members of the International Law Commission that is tasked with the progressive development of international law and its codification.
* The five-year term of the newly elected members will commence from January 2017.
* The members to the Geneva-based body have been elected from five geographical groupings of Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, Latin America and Caribbean and Western Europe.
* The commission was established by the UNGA in 1947.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 08 November 2016**

**9th International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines[AYUSH]**

The 9th Annual Meeting of International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH) has begun at New Delhi.

* The Ministry of AYUSH has organized the meeting. Being an active member of IRCH network since 2007 the Ministry of AYUSH has been represented in IRCH meetings held so far.
* 19 member countries of IRCH with 36 delegates including experts from WHO Headquarters, Geneva are participating in meeting.
* The event would be utilized to show case AYUSH strength to these countries.

About IRCH:

International Regulatory Cooperation for Herbal Medicines (IRCH), established in 2006, is a global network of regulatory authorities created by World Health Organization (WHO) responsible for regulation of herbal medicines.

Its mission is to protect and promote public health and safety through improved regulation for herbal medicines.

Objectives of IRCH:

* Globally promote and facilitate the safe use of herbal medicines, through regional initiatives, sharing information and fostering dialogue.
* Facilitate and strengthen cooperation between national regulatory authorities by sharing experience, information and knowledge related to the regulation, quality, safety and efficacy of herbal medicines.
* Further discuss existing requirements and standards to promote the regulation, quality, safety and efficacy of herbal medicines.
* Recommend future activities to WHO related to the quality and safety of herbal medicines.
* Refer issues to the International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities and other bodies, where ever needed, for further discussion related to the quality and safety of herbal medicines.

Goals of IRCH are:

* Develop a process that addresses and resolves questions related to the regulation and safe use of herbal medicines.
* Establish a communication network that fosters dialogue on the regulation and safe use of herbal medicines among the IRCH members.
* Develop, through WHO, efficient links between National Drug Regulatory Authorities and information focal points among the member countries of IRCH.

**India & UK Sign MoU on IPRS**

India and UK have signed an MoU to establish bilateral cooperation activities in the field of Intellectual Property.

Key facts:

* The MoU is between the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the Intellectual Property Office of the United Kingdom (UKIPO).
* It is intended to promote innovation, creativity and economic growth in both countries.
* It establishes a broad and flexible framework through which both countries can exchange best practices and work together on training programs and technical exchanges to raise awareness on IPRs and better protect intellectual property rights.

The priority initiatives under the MoU include:

* Exchange of best practices, experiences and knowledge on IP awareness among the public, businesses and educational institutions of both countries.
* Collaboration in training programs, exchange of experts, technical exchanges and outreach activities.
* Exchange and dissemination of best practices, experiences and knowledge on IP with the industry, universities, R & D organizations and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) through participation in programs and events.
* Exchange of information and best practices on processes for disposal of applications for patents, trademarks, industrial designs and Geographical Indications, as also the protection, enforcement and use of IP rights.
* Cooperation in the development of automation and implementation of modernization projects, new documentation and information systems in IP and procedures for management of IP.
* Cooperation to understand how Traditional Knowledge is protected; and the exchange of best practices, including traditional knowledge related databases and awareness raising of existing IP systems.

**New ‘super battery’ made from junkyard metal**

Researchers have developed a new high-performance, grid-scale battery made from metal scrap and common household chemicals.

* The battery, which is no bigger than a pill bottle, could withstand the equivalent of 13 years of daily charging and discharging while retaining 90% of its capacity.

How was it developed?

1. Researchers soaked metal pieces in a jar with a solution of water and salt or a solution of water and antifreeze.
2. They then applied a voltage to induce a known process called anodisation, which restructures the nanoscopic composition of a metal.
3. That exposes the metal’s interior surface and makes it more receptive to storing and releasing energy.
4. Researchers placed a physical barrier between the two pieces of metal and submerged it in an electrolyte solution made from water and potassium hydroxide.
5. When connected by wires to a device that generated a current, such as a solar panel, their contraption worked just like a car battery.

Background:

For this experiment, scientists drew inspiration from an ancient technology called the ‘Baghdad battery’, which dates to the first century BC. It consisted of a terracotta pot, a copper sheet and an iron rod along with some trace chemicals that could possibly have been electrolytes.

**Airborne lasers to throw light on Rajgir’s history**

Archaeologists are planning to deploy high-end scanning lasers on airborne platforms to survey the archaeological evidence, flora and fauna in the ancient Rajgir hills in Bihar, an area associated with Buddha.

As part of the inter-disciplinary Rajgir Archaeological Survey Project (RASP), archaeologists hope to use Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR), which is a remote-sensing technique that uses laser light to sample the surface of the earth.

* RASP is a collaborative project between the society and Nalanda University in co-ordination with Bihar’s Ministry of Art, Culture and Youth.

**Key facts: RAJGIR**

* With its complex of temples and monasteries, Rajgir in Bihar’s Nalanda district is one of India’s most important tourist places for Buddhist pilgrims.
* The city of Rajgir was the first capital of the Magadha empire. Buddha not only spent many years in Rajgir but also delivered sermons here.
* His teachings were penned at Rajgir and it was also the venue for the first Buddhist Council. The region is also associated with Jainism.
* First Buddhist Council was held under the leadership of Maha Kassapa.

**Tobacco Farming: Seventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP7)**

The seventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) has begun in Delhi. It is the first occasion that a COP meeting is being held in India.

* COP7 brings together the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC)’s parties – which includes almost every country in the world, as well as regional economic integration organizations like the European Union.

In the backdrop of declining demand for tobacco products among wealthier countries and measures to roll-back tobacco consumption in the developing world, supporting the tobacco farmers and finding alternative livelihood has become necessary to secure their future.

Steps that can be taken by the government and local authorities—

* Providing training that gives the skills needed for tobacco farmers to diversify their crops and income, while also emphasising tobacco's harmful environmental and health outcomes for consumers and farmers
* Industry strategies to promote tobacco farming must be identified and regulated and policies should be developed to protect tobacco growers and workers from industry practices that fix prices or create conditions that are disadvantageous.
* network of civil society organisations able to monitor industry malpractices.
* Appropriate research on market opportunities

About Tobacco Farming in India

• In India, Tobacco crop is grown in an area of 0.45 M ha (0.27% of the net cultivated area) producing ~ 750 M kg of tobacco leaf. India is the 2nd largest producer and exporter after China and Brazil respectively.

• In the global scenario, Indian tobacco accounts for 10% of the area and 9% of the total production.

• It is grown largely in semi-arid and rain-fed areas where the cultivation of alternative crops is economically unviable.

• The distinctive and positive features of Indian tobacco include the lower levels of heavy metals, very low levels of Tobacco Specific Nitrosamines (TSNAs) and pesticide residues compared to the other tobacco producing countries in the world.

• Further, endowed with varied agro-climatic conditions, India has the capacity to produce different styles of tobacco ranging from coloury neutral filler to flavourful leaf catering to the needs of a wide variety of customers globally.

• In addition, production and processing costs of tobacco are also quite low in India, thus making the Indian tobacco price-competitive and value for money.

About WHO FCTC:

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first global evidence-based public health treaty that recognises the right of all people to the highest standard of health.

* The Treaty was developed by countries in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic.
* There are currently 180 Parties to the Convention.
* India has been the forerunner in ratification of this public health treaty and was the 7th Country to ratify the Convention in 2004.
* India provided a leadership role in the negotiations of FCTC and was also the Regional Coordinator for the South-East Asia Region.
* India ratified the treaty in February 2004 and is therefore obligated to comply with the treaty provisions and its guidelines to reduce tobacco consumption globally.

About COP:

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the Governing Body of the WHO FCTC and is comprised of all Parties to the Convention. It keeps under regular review the implementation of the Convention and takes the decisions necessary to promote its effective implementation, and may also adopt protocols, annexes and amendments to the Convention. The regular sessions of COP are held at two yearly intervals.

**Facts for Prelims**

**Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 Award:**

* The winners of the Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 Competition recently received their awards from President, Shri Pranab Mukherjee.
* APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE 2016 competition –is a national competition of original technological ideas and innovations by children up to class 12 or those out of school up to the age of 17 years.
* It is organised by National Innovation Foundation (NIF) every year to promote creativity and originality among children.
* The awards of IGNITE competition are announced every year on October 15th, Dr APJ Abdul Kalam’s birthday, which is celebrated as the Children’s Creativity and Innovation Day by NIF.
* Starting in 2008, in the last eight years, 173 awards have been given to 246 children.
* Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE Award is an effort to focus primarily on the creativity of the children and promote inclusive and compassionate thinking among them.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 09 November 2016**

**‘Keep birth database to curb female foeticide’**

The Supreme Court has issued 16 directives to curb sex-selective abortion in the country. These directions aims to ensure immediate and effective implementation of the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act and the Rules framed thereunder.

* The Court, expressing concern over the worsening sex ratio in the country, has also said that any discrimination against women was “constitutionally impermissible”.

Background:

The court passed the verdict while disposing of a PIL by NGO Voluntary Health Association of Punjab urging it to intervene in the matter in view of decreasing number of girls-boys ratio in the country.

The Guidelines of SC

• To maintain a centralised database– All the States and the Union Territories in India shall maintain a centralized database of civil registration records from all registration units so that information can be made available from the website regarding the number of boys and girls being born.

• Fast track court-The Courts which deal with the complaints under the Act shall be fast tracked and the concerned High Courts shall issue appropriate directions in that regard.

• Constitution of a Committee of having three HC Judges that can periodically oversee the progress of the cases.

• Effective implementation of the The Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act, 1994.

• The awareness campaigns with regard to the provisions of the Act as well as the social awareness shall be undertaken.

• All India Radio and Doordarshan functioning in various States to give wide publicity pertaining to the saving of the girl child and the grave dangers the society shall face because of female foeticide.

• Incentive Schemes- directed that States and Union Territories, which do not have any incentive scheme for the girl child, shall frame the same.

**Centre extends AFSPA to check Naga factions**

The Centre has decided to extend the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh. It is being extended in the districts of Tirap, Changlang and Longding, all bordering Assam.

* The three districts were being declared as “disturbed area” under Section 3 of the AFSPA as “Naga underground factions including NSCN-IM and NSCN-K continue to indulge in extortion, area domination, recruitment of locals and inter-factional rivalry.”

Why?

One of the primary reasons cited by the Centre is “extortion and intimidation” by the cadres of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), who are “contriving to dominate areas hitherto occupied by NSCN (Khaplang).”

Background:

The notification has been issued even after the government signed a ‘framework agreement’ with NSCN-IM in September 2015 to find a final solution to the six-decade-old Naga issue. However, the government defends its move by saying that the ceasefire signed with NSCN-IM is only for Nagaland. It does not include Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.

What is AFSPA?

AFSPA, enacted in 1958, gives powers to the army and state and central police forces to shoot to kill, search houses and destroy any property that is “likely” to be used by insurgents in areas declared as “disturbed” by the home ministry.

* The Act provides army personnel with safeguards against malicious, vindictive and frivolous prosecution.
* Security forces can “arrest without warrant” a person, who has committed or even “about to commit a cognizable offence” even on “reasonable suspicion”.

Which states are under Afspa?

It is in force in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area). In Arunachal Pradesh, only the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts plus a 20-km belt bordering Assam come under its purview. And in Meghalaya Afspa is confined to a 20-km area bordering Assam.

What are ‘disturbed’ areas?

The state or central government considers those areas as ‘disturbed’ “by reason of differences or disputes between members of different religious, racial, language or regional groups or castes or communities.”

**No change in our stand on India’s NSG entry bid: China**

Ahead of NSG meet in Vienna, China has said there is ‘no change’ in its stand on India’s membership bid. The development comes just days after India’s National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and his Chinese counterpart, Yang Jiechi, failed to reach a consensus on the issue.

What China says?

China has maintained its stand that India’s bid will only be considered if rules for entry of non-NPT countries are finalised by the elite group.

Background:

India and Pakistan, which have applied for NSG membership, have not signed the NPT.

About NSG:

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

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

Once admitted, an NSG member state:

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

**Indo-Japan MOU for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC)**

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) and the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India has been approved by the Cabinet.

Key facts:

* The advancement of academic research in the field of Earth Sciences for the benefit of the peace and human welfare is the prime objective of the MOU.
* The collaboration with JAMSTEC will not only enhance capability in the field of atmospheric and climate research, ocean technology observation and hazard mitigation but also provide much needed exposure and hands-on experience to Indian scientists.
* The cooperation between parties and under Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be pursued primarily through joint survey, cruise and research and development activities, exchange of scientific visits, joint scientific seminars, workshops and meetings or exchange of information and data.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 3 Topic: awareness in space.*

**Water detected on metallic asteroid Psyche**

Scientists have detected the presence of water on Psyche, the largest metallic asteroid in our solar system and the target of a proposed NASA mission.

Key facts:

* New observations from the NASA Infrared Telescope Facility in Hawaii show evidence of water or hydroxyl on its surface.
* While the source of these molecules on Psyche remains a mystery, scientists propose a few possible mechanisms for its formation.
* Scientists say, water-rich minerals detected on Psyche may have been delivered by carbonaceous asteroids that impacted Psyche in the distant past.

About Psyche:

* Psyche is about 300 kilometre across and is made of almost pure nickel-iron metal.
* Located in the asteroid belt, it is thought to be the remnant core of a budding planet that was mostly destroyed by impacts billions of years ago.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 10 November 2016**

**SHOCK AND AWE WIN FOR DONALD TRUMP**

Republican Donald J. Trump is the 45th President of the United States. Mr. Trump is now the oldest person to be elected President.

* Trump defeated Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton by garnering about 300 votes in the electoral college.
* He did so by winning most of the “swing states,” despite losing the popular vote marginally to Ms. Clinton.

How the US election works?

All 50 US states and Washington DC have a set number of “electors” in the electoral college – roughly proportionate to the size of each state.

* California, the largest state, has 55 electoral votes, while sparsely-populated Wyoming and tiny Washington DC only get only three each.
* There are 538 electors and to win a majority and become president either candidate needs to accumulate 270 electors – half the total plus one.
* Americans technically vote for electors, not the candidates themselves. The electors are state officials or senior party figures, but they are not usually named on the ballot.
* The number of electors each state gets is also equal to the number of seats it has in the House of Representatives and the Senate.
* All but two states – Maine and Nebraska – use a winner-takes-all system, so if you win the most votes in a state you take its entire haul of electoral college votes.
* The key for either party to win the presidential election is to target specific battleground states. There are several swing states that over recent elections have gone both ways. They hold the key to winning the election.

What are swing states?

These states are called so because they swing between the Republicans and Democrats depending upon the election season. They do not have any one personal favourite party that they have been holding on to traditionally and have the potential to alter the course of the elections in favour or against either of the parties.

Swing states are largely determined through opinion polls and results of previous elections. In 2016, the states that are being regarded as swing states include, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Florida, Wisconsin, New Hampshire, Minnesota, Iowa, Michigan, Nevada, Colorado, and North Carolina. These states can be divided into three categories:

1. First, there are those states which over the years have kept oscillating between the parties. They include Ohio and Florida and these two states are crucial in making the final decision.
2. Then there are those states which have traditionally been Republican but might be swinging in favour of Clinton on account of Trump’s unpopularity.
3. Finally, there are some states which had been won over by Obama from the Republicans in 2008 and 2012 and Clinton would have to hold on to them lest they go back to the Republicans.

**Improve ports, logistics to boost exports: WB**

The World Bank has released a report titled ‘South Asia’s Turn: Policies to Boost Competitiveness and Create the Next Export Powerhouse’.

Important observations made by the report:

* India remains behind on ‘global value chain’ capabilities including physical capital, human capital, institutions and logistics.
* In the farm sector-
  + passive and non-targeted subsidies (e.g. water, fertilisers and minimum support price) have encouraged farmers to continue to produce low value crops using low productivity and unsustainable techniques while
  + Restrictions on agricultural markets have constrained productive private investments in higher value food products.
* The electronics sector faces constraints such as underdeveloped clusters and poor trade logistics,
* The apparel sector is facing difficulties to import man-made fibre, preventing upgrading and diversification.
* With the right set of productivity-enhancing policies, South Asia, led by India, could more than triple its share in global markets of electronics and motor vehicles and come close to doubling its already significant market share in wearing apparel (excluding textiles and leather) by 2030.

Suggestions made by the World Bank in its report:

It has suggested a set of policy actions in four sectors — agribusiness, apparel, electronics and automotive.

* India must frame policies to reduce farm subsidies and cut import tariffs on cars and take steps to improve ports and logistics to emerge as an export powerhouse.
* In order to enhance the business environment in the sector, the government needs to bring out reforms including reducing subsidies and promoting competition.
* agribusiness -The government needs to improve target subsidies so that only the poor farmers are benefited because passive and non-targeted subsidies are not encouraging farmers to adopt new technologies and (seed) varieties.
* automotive - The government should also consider gradually reducing tariffs on final cars, as the prevailing high import tariffs on the completely built units are slowing down diffusion of good practices.
* electronics -To become a significant player in electronics, India needs to facilitate the development of clusters (reducing transaction costs and facilitating access to large pools of skilled labour and services) and improve its trade logistics to enable the seamless import and export of hundreds of components.
* apparel -India needs to reform the duty drawback scheme to facilitate the import of fabrics for exports. The current system imposes delays that are unacceptable to global buyers, cutting Indian exporters from the increasingly important manmade fibre segment.

**Delhi Declaration on Agrobiodiversity Management**

The 1st International Agrobiodiversity Congress was recently held in New Delhi. It was attended by 900 participants from 60 countries.

* Throughout the Congress, delegated discussed various aspects of access, conservation and use of agrobiodiversity.
* Based on these deliberations, the delegates unanimously adopted the declaration at the concluding session.

Highlights of the declaration:

* It calls upon nations to accord top priority to the agrobiodiversity conservation and their sustainable use towards achieving targets of SDGs relating to poverty alleviation, food and nutritional security, good health, gender equity and partnership.
* It recognises the importance of traditional knowledge on agrobiodiversity of farm men and women, pastoralists and other tribal and rural communities and their central role in its conservation and use for a food and climate resilient world. The declaration, therefore, calls upon countries to develop the necessary funding, legal and institutional mechanism to ensure and facilitate their continued active participation.
* It urges researchers and policy-makers to initiate, strengthen, and promote complementary conservation strategies to conserve and use agrobiodiversity including crop wild relatives in more dynamic way to ensure a continuum between ex situ, in situ and on farm conservation strategies to combat food and nutrition insecurity as well as adverse effects of climate change, land degradation and biodiversity loss.
* It invites researchers to employ modern technologies including, but not limited to, genomic, space, computational, and nano-technologies for characterization, evaluation and trait discovery using genetic resources. The aim should be to achieve efficiency, equality, economy and environmental security in agricultural production systems and landscapes.
* It reemphasises the necessity of global exchange of plant, animal, aquatic microbial and insect genetic resources for food and agriculture to meet the ever-growing food and nutritional needs of each country.
* It strongly recommends that the governments and societies put grater emphasis on public awareness and capacity enhancement programs on agrobiodiversity conservation and use.
* It also suggests developing and implementing an agrobiodiversity index to help monitor conservation and use of agrobiodiversity.
* It urges public and private sector partnerships to actively invest in and incentivize the utilization of agrobiodiversity to address malnutrition, increase the resilience and productivity of farms, and enhance ecosystem services leading to equitable benefits and opportunities with particular emphasis on women and youth.
* The UN is also urged to consider declaring soon a ‘Year of Agrobiodiversity’ to draw worldwide attention and to catalyze urgent action.

**Competition Commission of India (CCI) selected to host ICN 2018 Annual Conference**

Recognising the growing stature of Competition Commission of India (CCI) in the world, International Competition Network (ICN) has accepted the proposal and decided that Competition Commission of India would host the 2018 ICN Annual Conference. This will be held at Delhi in March –April 2018.

* By virtue of this event, CCI has also been inducted as an ex-officio member of the steering group member of the ICN for a period of 3 years.

About ICN:

ICN is an international body comprising 132 members from 120 competition jurisdictions exclusively devoted to international competition enforcement.

* ICN provides competition authorities with a specialised yet informal platform for addressing practical competition concerns, sharing experiences and adopting international best practices.
* Its members are national competition authorities and NGA (Non-governmental Advisers) which include reputed law firms, eminent persons, and think tanks of international repute.
* The ICN holds an Annual Conference which is hosted by a member competition agency. The last such Conference was hosted by Competition Commission of Singapore in April 2016 and Portuguese Competition Authority is hosting the next conference in May 2017.
* CCI is a member of the ICN since 2003.

About CCI:

Competition Commission of India is a body responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition in India. It was established on 14 October 2003. It became fully functional in May 2009.

* CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
* The duty of the Commission is to-
  + eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition,
  + promote and sustain competition,
  + protect the interests of consumers
  + ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.
* The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

**Protocol amending the Double Taxation Amending Convention (DTAC) between India and Japan comes into force**

A Protocol amending the Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) between India and Japan for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income which was signed on 11th December, 2015 has entered into force on 29th October, 2016 on completion of procedural requirements by both countries.

Key facts:

* The Protocol amending the DTAC aims to promote transparency and cooperation between the two countries.
* The Protocol provides for internationally accepted standards for effective exchange of information on tax matters including bank information and information without domestic tax interest.
* It is further provided that the information received from Japan in respect of a resident of India can be shared with other law enforcement agencies with authorization of the Competent Authority of Japan and vice versa.
* The Protocol provides for exemption of interest income from taxation in the source country with respect to debt-claims insured by the Government/Government owned financial institutions.
* The Protocol also inserts a new article on assistance in collection of taxes. India and Japan shall now lend assistance to each other in the collection of revenue claims.

Background:

The existing Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC) between India and Japan was earlier signed on 7th March, 1989 and was notified on 1st March 1990. The DTAC was subsequently amended on 24th February, 2006.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 2 Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.*

**Government rolls out Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana for entrepreneurs**

The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has announced launch of Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana to scale up an ecosystem of entrepreneurship for youngsters.

Highlights of the scheme:

* The scheme spans over five years (2016-17 to 2020-21) with a project cost of Rs 499.94 crore.
* It will provide entrepreneurship education and training to over 7 lakh students in 5 years through 3,050 institutes.
* It will also include easy access to information and mentor network, credit, incubator and accelerator and advocacy to create a pathway for the youth.
* The institutes under the PM’s Yuva Yojana include 2,200 institutes of higher learning (colleges, universities, and premier institutes), 300 schools, 500 ITIs and 50 entrepreneurship development centres through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Other Initiatives of MSDE

* MSDE has plans to disburse around Rs 7,000 crore to states to help align them with the Centre’s skill development agenda.
* The ministry has allocated around Rs3000 crore of 25% from the funds earmarked for the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) to the States, to achieve its target of training 10 million people over 4 years.

**Facts for Prelims**

**Healthy India Initiative/Swastha Bharat-ek pehal:**

* It is a quarterly magazine launched recently by the government.
* It will cater to health related information and will raise awareness about healthy living.
* The magazine will cover different aspect of health: women and child health, elderly health, seasonal ailments, daily nutritional needs, safe medication practices, home remedies healthy living and many more.
* The magazine will be made available at all the government facilities up to the sub-centre and will be available free of cost.
* The current issue is in Hindi and English and the next version will be available in 13 other languages.

**No More Tension:**

* It is stress management mobile application. It helps users to manage stress. It was recently launched by the government.
* The main objective of ‘No More Tension’ is to provide information to users regarding stress such as, what is stress, effects, symptoms and its management.
* The application allows the user to measure their stress level and learn various techniques like yoga and meditation to reduce stress from their lives.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 11 November 2016**

**Smart India Hackathon 2017**

 Union HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar recently inaugurated the world’s largest digital national building initiative “Smart India Hackathon 2017”.

* The 'Smart India Hackathon 2017' is a pan-India 36-hour nonstop digital programming competition which will take place in more than 20 centres simultaneously.
* The initiative seeks to challenge the students of all the technology institutions in India to find innovative solutions to some of the daunting problems faced by our nation.
* The Hackathon will have nearly 500 problem statements in the beginning. For example, developing a dynamic Health Map that can tap into online data sources to ensure rapid response to disease outbreaks such as H1N1, dengue and chikungunya through faster information flow between public health systems.
* Significance: The initiative will help institutionalize a model for harnessing the creativity and skills of youth for nation-building.

Significance of this initiative:

‘Smart India Hackathon 2017’ will harness creativity & technical expertise of over 30 lakh students from technology institutes in remotest parts of India, to spark several institute-level hackathons countrywide and help build a funnel for ‘Startup India, Standup India’ campaign.

Besides its potential to be the inflection point for impacting campaigns such as Digital India, Skill India, Make in India, Startup India and Standup India, the Smart India Hackathon can also set an example for the world on how youth power can help find digital solutions to legacy problems within a matter of hours.

**Frank Fixation**

Why in news?

• The U.S. Department of Energy’s Joint Genome Institute recently oversaw an effort to piece together an artificial metabolism from the bits and pieces of biosynthetic pathways that were once scattered.

• They found a novel pathway based on a new CO2-fixing enzyme that is nearly 20 times faster than the most prevalent enzyme in nature responsible for capturing CO2 in plants by using sunlight as energy.

• Frankenfixation refers to the use of genetic modification to fix carbon dioxide into the soil.

Significance

• With this pathway, new species of plants, trees or entirely new organisms, could be grown that are specifically designed to take in carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and hold off the looming crisis of rising global temperatures.

**High Level Meeting of Interior Ministers of the Indian Ocean Region**

High Level Meeting of Interior Ministers of the Indian Ocean Region to Counter Drug Trafficking was recently held in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

* The high-level meeting in Colombo was attended by 18 littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region which included seven Ministers and Deputy Ministers of Interior/Home Affairs.
* The meeting was also attended by seven international organizations/partner agencies and UN agencies engaged in counter-narcotics initiatives in the region.
* The delegates resolved to work towards making the Indian Ocean a “Drug Free Zone”.

Colombo declaration:

The meeting concluded with the adoption of the Colombo declaration.

* The declaration states that narcotic drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean poses a threat to peace and security in the region and its possible link to organized crime and funding of terrorism.
* It stresses upon the need for coastal states to cooperate more closely on enforcing maritime law, sharing information, and providing mutual legal assistance, including the expansion and development of communication through the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC’s) Indian Ocean Prosecutors Network.
* The declaration also called on the littoral states of the Indian Ocean to meet on an annual basis within the framework of the Southern Route Partnership (SRP) of Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC) to assess and report on the drug trafficking threat in the Indian Ocean and develop a coordinated approach to counter such threats.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 3 Topic: awareness in space.*

**China launches pulsar test satellite**

China has launched a satellite into space to detect signs of pulsars, which are very high density stars formed by neutrons.

Key facts:

* The X-ray pulsar navigation satellite, weighing more than 200 kilogrammes, was launched from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Center in the country’s northwest.
* It was carried by a Long March-11 rocket, the 239th flight mission by a Long March carrier rocket series.
* The satellite operates in a Sun-synchronous orbit and will conduct in-orbit experiments using pulsar detectors to demonstrate new technologies.
* While in orbit, the satellite will undergo tests on its detector functions and space environment adaptability.

Significance of this launch:

The X-ray pulsar navigation will help reduce the spacecraft’s reliance on ground-based navigation methods and is expected to lead to autonomous spacecraft navigation in the future.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**India slams World Bank process on Indus Treaty**

India has taken strong exception to the World Bank’s “inexplicable” decision to set up a Court of Arbitration and appoint a Neutral Expert to go into Pakistan’s complaint against it over Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

* The Neutral Expert has been asked to go into Pakistan’s complaint against India on the Kishenganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects in Jammu and Kashmir.

Background:

While India had asked for a neutral expert to be appointed over Pakistan’s objections to the Kishenganga and Ratle dam projects first, Pakistan appealed directly for a Court of Arbitration (CoA) to be set up as it claims India has violated the 1960 Indus Water treaty.

What’s the issue?

Kishengaga is a tributary of the river Jhelum and the project is coming up in Bandipora.

* Pakistan argues that the project cannot be built in a way that will divert the river tributary. Its case was rejected by a Court of Arbitration in 2013.
* The project is almost complete and was to be commissioned this month.
* Pakistan also has objections on the Ratle project on the river Chenab in Doda district; it wants the water storage capacity to be reduced drastically, saying that the project will reduce the river flow into Pakistan.

What India says?

Surprised at the World Bank’s decision to appoint a Neutral Expert, as sought by the Indian government and at the same time establish a Court of Arbitration as wanted by Pakistan, India says proceeding with both the steps simultaneously “legally untenable”.

Also, India has made it clear that it cannot be party to actions which are not in accordance with the Indus Waters Treaty. The government has said that it will examine further options and take steps accordingly.

Background:

Under the Indus Waters Treaty, signed between India and Pakistan and also the World Bank in 1960, the World Bank has a specified role in the process of resolution of differences and disputes.

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.*

**SYL Land Bill unwarranted, says court**

The Supreme Court, referring to its 2006 Mullaperiyar dam judgment, has held that a State Assembly “cannot through legislation do an act in conflict with the judgment of the highest court which has attained finality”.

* The court declared that Punjab reneged on its promise to share the waters of rivers Ravi and Beas with neighbouring States like Haryana by unilaterally enacting the controversial Punjab Termination of Water Agreements Act of 2004.

Background:

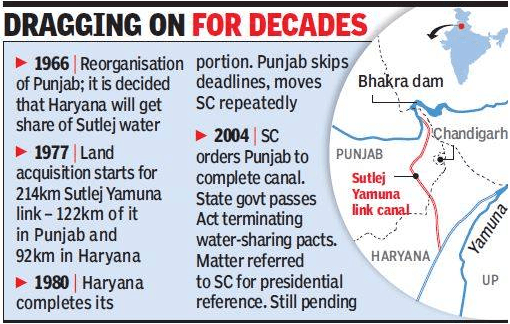
The court gave its opinion on a Presidential Reference made to it 12 years ago, on July 22, 2004, questioning the constitutional validity of the Act.

What else has the court said?

The court termed the enactment of the Punjab Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal Land (Transfer of Proprietary Rights) Bill in 2016 by the government as “unwarranted developments” when the Presidential Reference was still pending in the apex court.

Controversy surrounding the Bill:

The 2016 Bill, which is yet to receive the assent of the Governor, planned to give back to the farmers over 5000 acres acquired for the canal. Haryana argues the Bill would negate the Supreme Court’s 2004 decree calling for unhindered construction of the canal which will give Haryana its share of water.

[](https://i2.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Sutlej-Yamuna-Link-SYL-Canal-.png)

*Source: Times of India*

The Sutlej Yamuna Link (SYL) Canal and the controversy over it:

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.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 12 November 2016**

**NSDA Signs MoU with British Council to Collaborate for Joint Research in Skills Sector**

National Skill Development Agency and The British Council have signed a MoU to collaborate for undertaking joint research projects in the area of skill development.

Key facts:

* This collaboration comes as a part of strengthening the overall research mechanism in skill development space and to encourage research collaborations with various national and international organizations.
* Under this partnership, The British Council and the National Skill Research Division (NSRD), a research division under the National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) will work closely with each other to build research collaborations between the UK and India over a period of three years in the skilling domain.
* The partnership aims to promote knowledge exchange and research collaborations between UK and India in the skills space and to strengthen capacity of research organisations in both the countries so as to be able to work in collaborative research environments in the Sector.
* The topic for the joint research study in first year of collaboration is “Future Skills” that will focus on, understanding labour market trends and identifying future employment in India in selected manufacturing and service sectors in view of changing technology.
* This kind of collaboration is in alignment with the overall mandate of the recently established National Skill Research Division that will serve as a think tank on research related to skill development and evolve as a credible research organization in skills space at the national level.

About NSDA:

The National Skill Development Agency (NSDA) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

* It coordinates and harmonizes the skill development efforts of the Indian government and the private sector to achieve the skilling targets of the 12th Plan document and beyond.
* It plays a pivotal role in bridging the social, regional, gender and economic divide by ensuring that the skilling needs of the disadvantaged and marginalized groups like SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities, women and differently-abled persons are taken care of through the various skill development programmes and also by taking affirmative actions as part of advocacy.
* The NSDA’s role is also to anchor the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) and facilitate the setting up of professional certifying bodies in addition to the existing ones.

Sources: pib.

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

**Centre unveils steps to boost cybersecurity**

In an attempt to strengthen cyber security in India, the government has announced a slew of measures.

Highlights of the measures announced:

* All organisations having a significant IT infrastructure will need to appoint cyber security officers.
* Efforts are being made to strengthen Cert-IN, the governments’ cyber security arm. The government has approved 26 new posts.
* State Certs are being planned by Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Kerala and Jharkhand. Also, three sectoral Certs in power sector — generation, transmission and distribution, have been set up, in addition to the banking one.

About CERT-In:

What is it?

CERT-In (the Indian Computer Emergency Response Team) is a government-mandated information technology (IT) security organization. CERT-In was created by the Indian Department of Information Technology in 2004 and operates under the auspices of that department.

CERT organizations throughout the world are independent entities, although there may be coordinated activities among groups. The first CERT group was formed in the United States at Carnegie Mellon University.

It’s purpose:

* The purpose of CERT-In is to respond to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout the country.
* According to the provisions of the Information Technology Amendment Act 2008, CERT-In is responsible for overseeing administration of the Act.

Sources: pib.

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

**India signs landmark civil nuclear deal with Japan**

India has signed a historic civilian nuclear deal with Japan during the annual bilateral summit held recently in Tokyo.

Background:

The nuclear deal had been under negotiation for six years and was firmed up during the 2015 visit of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India when the principles of the agreement were frozen. However, the final seal on the text had to wait legislative clearance from Japan, which has 13 civil nuclear agreements with countries such as France and the U.S.

Key facts:

* India is the first non-member of the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) to have signed such a deal with Japan. The deal will help India access Japan’s nuclear market.
* The deal includes the option that Japan can give a year’s notice before terminating it in case India breaks the nuclear testing moratorium that it had extended to the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008.
* The deal is significant as it will help guarantee Japan’s continued support to India’s civil nuclear programme.
* The deal will bring Japan into the Indian nuclear market where France and Russia have already have a strong presence.

Significance of this agreement:

The completion of the nuclear deal comes as the NSG is meeting in Vienna to discuss, among other issues, if non-NPT (nuclear non-proliferation Treaty) countries like India can enter this exclusive grouping. The India-Japan deal, according to experts, will have an impact.

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.*

**No jail term for celebrities endorsing products in misleading ads: GoM**

A panel of ministers has approved imposing a fine of up to Rs 10 lakh and a one year ban on celebrities who endorse products making unrealistic claims for the first offence, but has dropped the controversial proposal for a jail term.

* A high-level Group of Ministers (GoM) was assigned to look into the issue. The GoM has deliberated on the issue and agreed to do away with the provision for imprisonment of celebrities, arguing that such provisions do not exist in any country.

Background:

The Consumer Protection Bill, 2015, which seeks to replace the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, by inserting tough measures for the protection of consumer rights and providing strict punishment to violators, was presented in Parliament in 2015.

* It was referred to a Standing Committee, which gave a report suggesting measures like making celebrities accountable for the brands they endorse, and called for severe penalties such as jail term for celebrities endorsing the brands, publishers and broadcasters of misleading advertisements and manufacturers of such products.
* The panel had recommended that for first-time offence, the offender celebrities may be penalised with either a fine of Rs 10 lakh or imprisonment up to two years or both. For second-time offences, it had suggested a fine of Rs 50 lakh and imprisonment of five years.

What has the GoM said?

The GoM has decided that instead of jailing the endorsers, they should be fined Rs 10 lakh and slapped a ban of one year for the first offence, and fined Rs 50 lakh and banned for up to three years for the second offence.

About the issue:

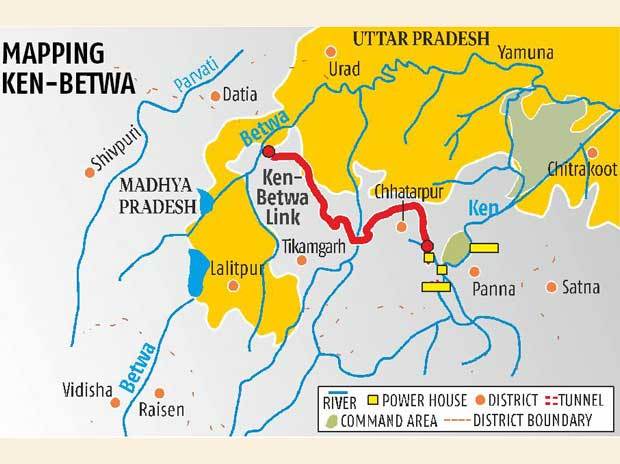
The issue of accountability of celebrities as brand endorsers came into the spotlight after the ban on Nestle India Ltd’s Maggi Noodles. The ban was subsequently lifted. Actors like Amitabh Bachchan, Madhuri Dixit and Preity Zinta had endorsed the product.

Cricketer M S Dhoni quit as brand ambassador of realty firm Amrapali following protests by residents who had invested in flats. Some other celebrities, too, faced public ire for endorsing brands that did not meet expectations.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 14 November 2016**

**Ken-Betwa project hangs on forest nod**

The Forest Advisory Committee has withheld its nod to the Ken-Betwa river-interlinking project. The committee tasked with giving the project forest clearance has deferred it at least until January.

[](https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Ken-Betwa-project.jpg)

Background:

The Rs. 9,000-crore Ken-Betwa river-interlinking project will partly submerge the Panna tiger reserve. The Forest Advisory Committee’s clearance is required for this diversion of forest land. The project requires separate wildlife, forest and environment clearances.

About the project:

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

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

Why is it being opposed?

Proponents of the project say that the proposed Daudhan dam and the 2.5 km canal — the key structures of the project — that will transfer surplus water from the Uttar Pradesh section of the Ken to the Betwa in Madhya Pradesh are critical to irrigate nearly 7,00,000 hectares in drought-ravaged Bundelkhand.

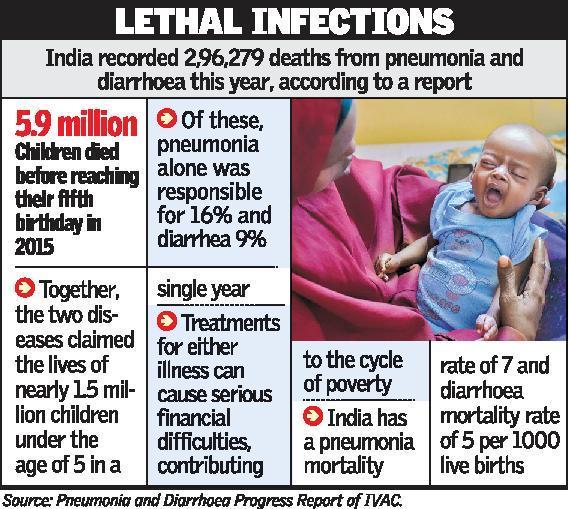
But, opponents also say such a dam will submerge at least 4,000 hectares of Madhya Pradesh’s Panna tiger reserve, whose tigers were almost lost to poaching in 2009 and have only recently been partially replenished. They also allege that most districts in Madhya Pradesh will not actually get the promised water. There are vultures in the region, whose nests will be threatened by the height of the dam.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**India still losing fight against child pneumonia, diarrhoea epidemics**

World Pneumonia Day 2016 was observed on November 12. *2016 Theme: “Keep the Promise, Stop Pneumonia Now”*.

[](https://i0.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/pneumonia-diarrhoea-epidemics.jpg)

*Source: The Hindu*

Report on Pneumonia:

On this day, the Pneumonia and Diarrhoea Progress Report was published by the International Vaccine Access Center (IVAC.)

Highlights of the report:

* The report puts India at the top of the list of 15 nations, as it did last year, and the years before. India had a total of 2,96,279 deaths from pneumonia and diarrhea.
* The report also notes that India is among the 12 nations that have improved their Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of Pneumonia and Diarrhoea (GAPPD) score this year.
* Nearly 15 years after the introduction of the pneumococcal conjugate vaccines in 2000, five countries among those with the highest pneumonia burden — India, Indonesia, Chad, China and Somalia — are still not using the vaccine in their routine immunisation programmes, the report noted.
* In addition to thinking of vaccines, the report points out other simple proven interventions in order to prevent these deaths, including antibiotics, exclusive breastfeeding, and access to treatment and care.
* Also urging nations to go beyond business as usual, the report chronicles innovations that help speed up the process and better chase the goal of cutting down the number of preventable child deaths.

What has India been doing in this regard?

India recently announced a partial introduction of the vaccine in five states (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh) from 2017. India introduced rotavirus vaccines in four States in 2015.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 2 Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections.*

**SC sets up panel on night shelters**

The Supreme Court has asked the government to respond on the lackadaisical attitude shown by authorities in providing sufficient number of night shelters to the poor and homeless in the towns and cities of northern States despite the availability of funds.

Committee to verify the availability:

The court has also directed that a committee headed by former Delhi High Court judge Justice Kailash Gambhir be constituted to verify the availability of night shelters, including if they are in compliance with the operational guidelines under the NULM and to inquire into the reasons for slow progress in setting up shelter homes by the States/Union Territories. The committee has been given four months to submit its report.

Terms of reference:

* The committee shall inquire about non-utilisation and/or diversion/misutilisation of funds allocated for the scheme for providing shelters to the urban homeless.
* The committee shall issue suitable recommendations to the States to ensure that at least temporary shelters are provided for the homeless in urban areas to protect them during winter season. The State governments shall ensure compliance with the recommendations along the time frame indicated by the committee.

Background:

Destitute in urban areas continue to suffer without shelters. In spite of the availability of funds and a clear mechanism through which to disburse them, there is unsatisfactory state of affairs on the ground. Poor continue to shiver in the winter cold as welfare measures like the National Urban Livelihoods Mission (NULM) scheme continue to remain a distant dream.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 3 Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.*

**PM inaugurates International Conference and Exhibition on Sugarcane Value Chain Vision 2025 Sugar – at Pune**

PM Modi recently inaugurated the International Conference and Exhibition on Sugarcane Value Chain Vision 2025 Sugar – at Pune.

Key facts:

* Vasantdada Sugar Institute (VSI) has organized the conference.
* There was an exhibition showcasing various technological developments in sugar industry and live demonstrations of sugarcane crop showing various advance technologies and practices in cultivation.
* Eminent international and national speakers delivered lectures on significantly different important aspects of sugarcane value chain.
* The conference was attended by around 1500 delegates.

About VSI:

VSI is an autonomous body established in 1975 by cane growers of co-operative sugar mills in Maharashtra with support of State and Central government.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**In Hyderabad, a coup in a coop**

In what is the first evidence of multidrug resistance in poultry sold in Indian markets, researchers in Hyderabad have isolated a bacterium in chicken that may well be the source of transmission of the drug-resistant pathogen to humans. This is the first data on prevalence and isolation of H. pullorum in India.

Key facts:

* The pathogen, called Helicobacter pullorum, was found in broiler and free-range chickens, which — besides being untreatable — could also be cancer-causing.
* pullorum is commonly found in the liver and gut of poultry birds and is believed to co-evolve with its natural host.
* Infected chicken, when consumed, are known to cause gastrointestinal infections in humans.

Concerns:

The greatest concern of news of resistance is H. pullorum’s ability to cause cancer. It is known to produce a cancer-causing agent called cytolethal distending toxin, which is the main concern. This toxin damages the DNA and interferes with the cell cycle. Since this bacterium also infects the liver, it increases the risk of cancer in the organ.

Cooking the Indian way — at temperatures higher than 60° Celsius — kills H. pullorum. However, eating uncooked or undercooked dishes like pickled chicken carries risk of infection.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 15 November 2016**

**U.K., France back UNSC permanent seat for India**

India’s bid for a permanent seat in a reformed U.N. Security Council has received a strong support from many U.N. member-states, including the U.K. and France.

Background:

More than 50 speakers shared their suggestions and concerns over reform of the 15-nation UNSC during a General Assembly session held recently. Among the large number of nations supporting a permanent seat for India and other emerging powers like Brazil and Germany were two veto-wielding permanent members of the Council, the United Kingdom and France.

India and the UNSC:

India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it.

* The U.S. is supporting India’s claim for a permanent UNSC seat, but it has been calling for consensus before reforms can move ahead.
* Pakistan is opposed to India, while China has been ambiguous in its approach though not openly opposed to reforms.
* Russia has also clarified that it is open to supporting India’s bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Why India should be given a permanent seat in the council?

* India was among the founding members of United Nations.
* It is the second largest and a one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.
* India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN’s five big powers combined.
* It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Chinese ship opens new trade route via Gwadar port in Pakistan**

A new international trade route in Southwest Pakistan has been opened up by a Chinese ship exporting goods to the Middle East and Africa. With this, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become a reality. This route that is being developed by the Chinese in Pakistan is expected to make huge amount of economic gains for the country.

What is CPEC?

The CPEC is one of the most important projects of the ‘one belt, one road’ project initiated by China that aims to connect the Asian economic giant with Europe and Africa, thereby making the country a bigger player in world economic affairs.

* Consisting of a number of road, rail and pipeline ventures, the CPEC connects Xinjiang in Northwestern region of China with Pakistan’s Gwadar port on the Arabian sea, going over the Pakistan occupied Kashmir territory of Gilgit-Baltistan and the disputed region of Balochistan.
* Reportedly, the port at Gwadar will have the capacity to manage 19 million tons of crude oil which will be directly transferred to China.
* As a multi-million dollar project, the CPEC is reported to have brought Pakistan twice the amount of foreign investments the country received since 2008.

[](https://i2.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/gwadar.png)

How does it benefit Pakistan?

For Pakistan, the Chinese investment in the south-western region of the country is a game-changer for the economy, especially considering the fact that despite the high concentration of mineral resources in the region it has remained the poorest district.

The $46 billion promised by China will be used in generating close to 17,000 megawatts of electricity at a cost of $34 billion through coal, nuclear and other renewable energy projects. The rest of the money would be utilised in building up transport infrastructure.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 1 Topic: Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc., geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water-bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes.*

**World likely to cross 1.2°C global warming level this year**

According to a preliminary assessment provided by the World Meteorological Organisation in its Status of the Global Climate in 2016 report, the world is likely to cross 1.2° C of global warming above pre-industrial levels in 2016. This comes dangerously close to breaching the 1.5° C warming levels advised as an ambitious target to stay safe from the worst impacts of climate change.

Background:

The Paris Agreement last year had adopted 2°C as the absolute threshold for staying within safe global warming levels. However, 1.5°C was advised as an ambitious target, especially bearing in mind the fate of small island countries such as Haiti or Maldives that are threatened with submergence due to sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

Global temperatures for January to September 2016 have been about 0.88°C (1.58°F) above the average (14°C) for the 1961-1990 reference period, which WMO uses as a baseline.

Highlights of the report:

* The report warned 2016 will be the hottest year on record, with global temperatures even higher than what 2015 experienced.
* While the extra heat from the powerful El Niño event has disappeared, the heat from global warming will continue.
* In parts of Arctic Russia, temperatures were 6°C to 7°C above the long-term average. Many other Arctic and sub-Arctic regions in Russia, Alaska and northwest Canada were at least 3°C above average.
* Because of climate change, the occurrence and impact of extreme events has also risen. ‘Once in a generation’ heatwaves and flooding are becoming more regular. Sea level rise has increased exposure to storm surges associated with tropical cyclones.

The WMO report also outlined the major weather events associated with increasing global warming levels in 2016:

* In total, there have been 78 tropical cyclones globally in 2016 as of October 31, close to the long-term average.
* The most significant, in terms of casualties, was Hurricane Matthew affecting Haiti and parts of the U.S. Typhoon Lionrock caused destructive flooding and heavy casualties in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and Cyclone Winston was the most severe tropical storm on record to affect Fiji.
* The Yangtze basin in China had its most significant summer floods since 1999. Sri Lanka experienced flooding and landslides in mid-May.
* Above-normal seasonal rainfall in the Sahel led to significant flooding in the Niger River basin, with the river reaching its highest levels in about 50 years in Mali.
* There were a number of major heat waves and droughts experienced during 2015-2016. The year started with an extreme heat wave in southern Africa, exacerbated by the ongoing drought.
* The report also mentions Phalodi in Rajasthan, India which set a new record for heat in India recording 51.0°C on May 19.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**‘Kohinoor represents sentiments of people’**

The Centre recently told the Supreme Court that the Kohinoor diamond, though a “symbol of victory” for the British Empire, represented the “sentiments of the people of India.”

Key facts:[](https://i2.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Kohinoor.jpg)

* The affidavit filed by the Centre said India’s credentials regarding the ownership of the Kohinoor diamond was based on historical evidence and could not be doubted. The affidavit was filed by the Ministry of Culture.
* The affidavit has an open-ended conclusion, saying the government was “continuing to explore ways for a satisfactory resolution” over the diamond with the U.K.
* The affidavit was perused by a Bench led by Chief Justice of India T.S. Thakur recently on a petition filed by the All India Human Rights and Social Front against the High Commissioner of the U.K.

Background:

The centre, in April 2016, had told Supreme Court that the Kohinoor diamond was neither “forcibly taken nor stolen” by British rulers, but given as a “gift” to East India Company by rulers of Punjab. Therefore, India should not stake claim to Kohinoor because other countries may start pressing India for return of their items. The government had clarified that the diamond was given by the successors of Maharaja Ranjit Singh to East India Company in 1849 as compensation for helping them in the Sikh wars.

About the issue:

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 Aghanistan, 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.

Way ahead:

Though both India and the U.K. were signatories to the UNESCO Convention on Means of Prohibiting and Preventing Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, a restitution of Kohinoor would require a “special agreement” between both countries.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 16 November 2016**

**Special Committee for Inter-Linking of Rivers**

The Union Cabinet has approved constitution of ‘special committee for inter-linking of rivers’ in compliance with a Supreme Court order.

Significance of this move:

* This move will help in monitoring of the precious Inter-linking of River Projects to be carried out under National Perspective Plan 1980 of Government of India.
* The Status-cum-Progress Report of Special Committee for Inter-linking of Rivers will be submitted bi-annually for information of Cabinet. This will facilitate faster and appropriate decisions in the interest of the country as expeditiously as possible.

Background:

The apex court of India had given the go ahead for the controversial inter-linking river project, seeking to transfer water from surplus to water deficit areas in the country. In its final judgement in 2012, the court had expressed the “pious hope of speedy implementation” to bring the project to a success.

* The court had also directed the Centre to constitute a ‘special committee’ forthwith for inter-linking of rivers for the benefit of the entire nation.
* The project, in the pipeline since 1980, has been touted by the Centre as one solution to a number of problems: making water available for irrigating 35 million hectares; enabling full use of existing irrigation projects; generating power to the tune of 34,000 MW with added benefits, including flood control.

Sources: pib.

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

**Hunar haat**

It was recently inaugurated at New Delhi. The exhibition is aimed at promoting and supporting artisans from Minority communities and providing them domestic as well as international market for display and sell their products.

Key facts:

* It is being organised for the first time at India International Trade Fair (2016). Union minority affairs ministry has organized the market.
* The market provides artisans from minority communities a chance to display their products and skills at an international platform.
* The special feature of this unique market is that besides providing free of cost stalls to artisans and craftsmen, the Union minority affairs ministry will also make arrangements for their transport and will help in their daily expenses so that these expert artisans can reach Delhi easily and display their arts and skills at an international platform.
* Over 184 master artisans will showcase their traditional art at this special crafts bazaar.

Sources: pib.

*Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.*

**Agreement between India and ADB**

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Government of India have signed a $500 million loan to build a 9.8 km long road bridge across the Ganges River.

Key facts:

* The bridge aims to improve transport connectivity between North and South Bihar and acts as a better link between the State Capital, Patna, and the surrounding areas.
* This will be India’s longest river bridge and is expected to benefit over 9 million people.
* The bridge will be a boon for the inhabitants of Raghopur Diara river island who will gain year-round road access. Currently, the 250,000 inhabitants of the island rely on boats and a seasonal pontoon bridge as their only links to Patna.
* The bridge, using state-of-the-art engineering techniques, will be the first of its kind in India. The height and length have been designed to minimize impacts on the river itself and to ensure the bridge will be able to withstand climate-related stresses such as a rise in the water level.
* Along with ADB’s loan and $900,000 in technical assistance to improve bridge operation and management, the state government of Bihar will provide support equivalent to $215 million. The project is expected to be completed by the end of December 2020.

Sources: pib.

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

**Hand-in-Hand 2016**

It is a joint military exercise between India and China which recently began in Pune. India has organised this joint military exercise.

Key facts:

* The exercise is aimed at sharing the expertise in drills and practices while tackling insurgency and terrorism and thereby promote healthy military-to-military relations between India and China.
* This is the sixth such joint exercise being organised between the two countries. First such exercise was held in China at Kunming of Yunnan province in 2007.
* Forming part of different levels of the military-to-military engagement across the entire spectrum of operations, this exercise will enrich the two contingents in further honing basic military skills.
* The first phase of the exercise consists of familiarisation with weapons and equipment. Thereafter, the second phase consists of basic training that includes combat conditioning, firing of personal weapon, support weapon and practice of drills like establishment of covert observation post, house clearing, cordon & search and humanitarian and disaster relief operations.

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.*

**‘272 products registered as geographical indication so far’**

As many as 272 products such as Sangli raisins, Banaras metal repousse craft and Beed custard apple have been registered as geographical indications since September 2003, according to a government data.

* During this fiscal so far, 11 products have been registered as GI from states including Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh. In 2015-16, 26 items got GI status.

[](https://i0.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/geographical-indication.png)

What GI tag?

GI status is an indication that identifies goods as produced from a particular area, which has special quality or reputation attributable to its geographical origin.

GI registration confers:

* Legal protection to the products.
* Prevents unauthorised use of a GI by others.
* Helps consumers get quality products of desired traits.
* Promotes economic prosperity of producers of goods by enhancing demand in national and international markets.

Key facts:

* The GI tag is an indication which is definite to a geographical territory. It is used for agricultural, natural and manufactured goods.
* India’s Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration & Protection) Act 1999, has come into force with effect from September 15, 2003.
* For a product to get GI tag, the goods need to be produced or processed or prepared in that region. It is also essential that the product has special quality or reputation.
* Under the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, geographical indications are covered as an element of intellectual property rights (IPRs).
* They are also covered under the WTO’s Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement.
* The famous goods which carry this tag include Basmati rice, Darjeeling Tea, Chanderi Fabric, Mysore Silk, Kullu Shawl, Kangra Tea, Thanjavur Paintings, Allahabad Surkha, Farrukhabad Prints, Lucknow Zardozi and Kashmir Walnut Wood Carving.

Sources: bs.

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

**Pune researchers fabricate a flexible nanogenerator for wearable electronics**

Researchers have produced a wearable electronics that uses a portable nanogenerator which generates electric power when pressure or twist is applied.

* The nanogenerator, fabricated by researchers, produced 14 volts when thumb pressure was applied.

How was this produced?

To produce the nanogenerator, researchers electrospun a piezoelectric polymer [P(VDF-TrFE)] directly onto a flexible, conducting carbon cloth. The carbon cloth was produced by the researchers by heating a piece of cotton cloth at 800 degree C for several hours in an inert atmosphere.

* To improve the piezo voltage of the polymer fibres, the researchers coated the fibres with a stronger, inorganic ferroelectric material (BaTiO3) paste. The nanoparticles from the coating helps fill the gaps between the polymer nanofibres and increase the piezoelectric property.
* In addition, the ferroelectric material was also incorporated into the polymer to further enhance the piezoelectric property. This was done right when the polymer was electrospun.
* The coated polymer was covered by another piece of flexible carbon cloth before the device was sealed. The carbon cloth on either side of the device acted as two electrodes. The carbon cloth too contributes to the enhanced piezo voltage generated by the nanogenerator through its peculiar morphology as a substrate.

How it operates?

The cloth has a surface microstructure which produces good bonding between the cloth (electrode) and the active layer. The bonding will be poor in the case of a metal layer. Due to the roughness of the cloth surface, when you press or flex the device the applied force is transmitted along different directions of the piezoelectric active layer. And this improves the piezoelectric property of the nanogenerator. If the electrode were a flat metallic surface then the force applied would be transmitted in only one direction.

When thumb pressure was applied on the polymer alone 2-3 volt was produced. In the case of the polymer with BaTiO3 coating, the piezo voltage generated was 7-8 volt. But 14 volt was produced when BaTiO3 was incorporated into the polymer and also coated on the fibre surface.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 17 November 2016**

**Setting up of Industry Driven SRTMI**

Ministry of Steel is planning to set up an Industry driven institutional mechanism namely Steel Research & Technology Mission of India (SRTMI), to facilitate joint collaborative research projects in the iron & steel sector in India.

* The conceptualization of SRTMI was done by a high level task force set up by the Ministry of Steel.

The salient features of SRTMI are as under:

* SRTMI is an industry driven initiative which will be setup as a Registered Society wherein Ministry of Steel is a facilitator.
* SRTMI will be governed and administered by a Governing Body comprising the steel CEOs, Domain Experts and a representative of Ministry of Steel.
* The executive functioning of SRTMI will be carried out by the Director, SRTMI, who will be assisted by a suitable/appropriate supporting structure.
* Initial corpus for setting up of SRTMI is Rs. 200 crore of which 50% is to be provided by Ministry of Steel and the balance by the participating steel companies.
* Thereafter, the centre will run on yearly contributions from the steel companies based on their turnover of the previous year.

Background:

Indian Steel Sector’s contribution to overall Gross Domestic Product of the country is nearly 2% during 2015-16.

The total exposure of steel industry is about Rs. 3.13 lakh crore out of which Gross Non Performing Assets is about Rs. 1.15 lakh crore. This works out to 36.94% of total loan outstanding as on March, 2016.

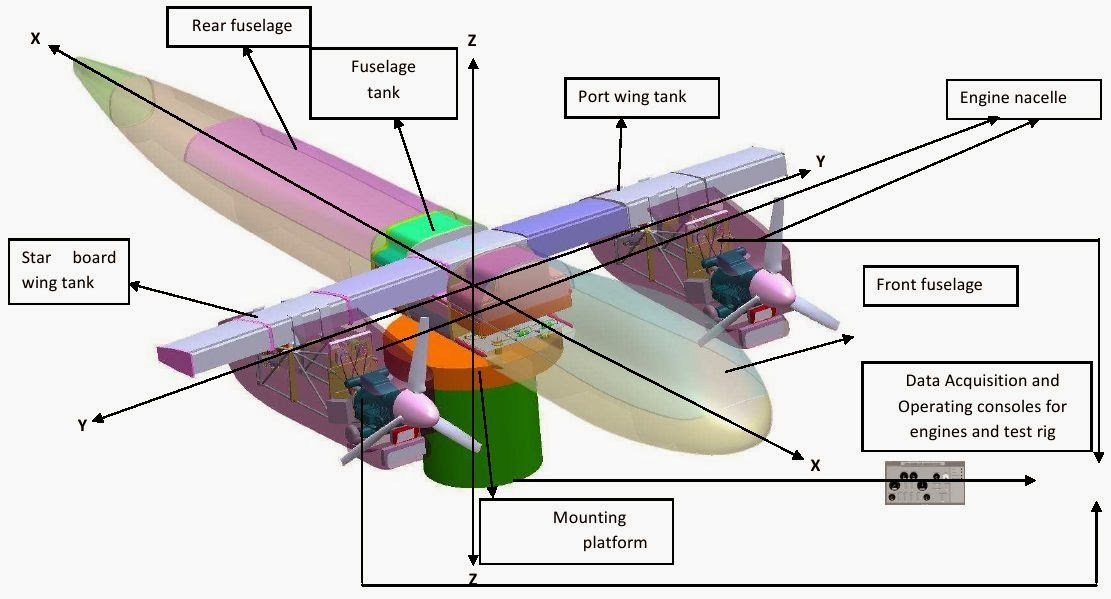
Sources: pib.

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

**Successful Maiden Flight of Rustom – II**

Heralding a new era in the indigenous development of Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV), DRDO has successfully carried out the maiden flight of TAPAS 201 (RUSTOM – II), a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) UAV.

* The flight accomplished the main objectives of proving the flying platform, such as take-off, bank, level flight and landing etc.

[](https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/ADE-Rustom-II-UAV-India.jpg)

About TAPAS 201:

TAPAS 201, the MALE UAV has been designed and developed by Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), the Bangalore-based premier lab of DRDO with HAL-BEL as the production partners.

* It is also the first R&D prototype UAV which has undergone certification and qualification for the first flight from the Center for Military Airworthiness & Certification (CEMILAC) and Directorate General of Aeronautical Quality Assurance (DGAQA).
* TAPAS 201 is being developed to carry out the Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) roles for the three Armed Forces with an endurance of 24 hours.
* It is capable to carry different combinations of payloads like Medium Range Electro Optic (MREO), Long Range Electro Optic (LREO), Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT), Communication Intelligence (COMINT) and Situational Awareness Payloads (SAP) to perform missions during day and night.
* Defence Electronics Application Laboratory (DEAL) of DRDO has developed the data link for the UAV.

Sources: pib.

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

**NHRC writes to Centre over foreign funding for NGOs**

Concerned about the rights of human rights defenders, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued a notice to the Union Home Ministry on the government’s alleged “draconian approach” in renewing the foreign funding approval for NGOs.

Background:

The Home Ministry had recently cancelled the FCRA licences of thousands of NGOs over not applying for renewal in time.

What has the NHRC said?

The NHRC said that the government’s approach towards renewing Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) licences for the NGOs that defend human rights had been brought to its notice.

NHRC also observed that prima facie, it appears that the FCRA licence non-renewal is neither legal nor objective, and thereby impinging on the rights of the human rights defenders, both in access to funding, including foreign funding.

Way ahead:

Taking suo-motu cognisance, the NHRC has directed the Home Secretary to provide details of the NGOs of human rights defenders whose licences had been cancelled, the number of such NGOs, the reason for nonrenewal and the amount of foreign funds received in the past three years.

The Commission directed the government to provide the information in six weeks so that it can start hearing the matter and look at “whether the review of the law [FCRA] can be recommended”.

About NHRC:

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India is an autonomous public body constituted on 12 October 1993 under the Protection of Human Rights Ordinance of 28 September 1993. It was given a statutory basis by the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993 (TPHRA).

* The NHRC is the national human rights institution, responsible for the protection and promotion of human rights, defined by the Act as “rights relating to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the individual guaranteed by the Constitution or embodied in the International Covenants”.

Composition:

* It consists of a Chairman and 4 members. Chairman should be a retired Chief Justice of India. Members should be either sitting or retired judges of the Supreme Court or a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court and 2 persons having practical knowledge in this field.
* Ex officio members are the chairmen of National Commission for Scheduled Caste, National Commission for Scheduled Tribes, National Commission for Minorities and National Commission for Women.

Other details:

**Appointment:** The chairman and members are appointed on the recommendation of a 6 member committee consisting of Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, leaders of opposition in both the houses of parliament and Union Home Minister.

**Term:** Term of the chairman and members is 5 years or 70 years whichever is earlier. After retirement they are not eligible for further reappointment.

**Removal:** President has to refer the matter to Supreme Court and if after enquiry Supreme Court holds it right then they can be removed by the President.

Sources: the hindu.

*Paper 1 Topic: Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India.*

**Plea against use of word ‘Dalit’ by media, HC seeks Centre’s reply**

The Delhi High Court has sought the response of the Centre on a plea seeking a direction to restrain media houses from using the word ‘Dalit’ in news articles, alleging it creates “inequality” in society.

* The court has issued a notice to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and asked it to take instruction on whether there is any law to prohibit the use of the word by media houses.

Background:

A plea has been filed in the High Court seeking a direction to restrain media houses from using the word ‘Dalit’ in news articles, alleging it creates “inequality” in society. The petitioner has also sought a direction to the Press Council of India to restrain all print and electronic media from using the word ‘Dalit’.

Petitioner’s arguments:

The petitioner says: “The legislature has made provisions to ensure no one may create any kind of hatred or animosity between the different communities or religions in India”. Aggrieved by the excessive use of the words ‘Dalit’ and ’upper caste’, the plea alleged that despite a law and guidelines in place, the media houses keep on raising the issue of ‘Dalit’ atrocities unnecessarily.

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.*

**Apex court refuses to lift ban on jallikattu**

Questioning the need to tame a domestic animal like the bull, the Supreme Court has dismissed a plea by Tamil Nadu to review a 2014 apex court judgment banning jallikattu.

Important observations made by the court:

The event had nothing to do with the exercise of the fundamental right of religious freedom and runs counter to the concept of welfare of the animal, which is the basic foundation of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960.

[](https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/jallikattu.jpeg)

*Source: jallikattu.in*

Tamil Nadu’s argument:

The State has countered that the event was defined as an act of “taming” of bulls under the Tamil Nadu Regulation of Jallikattu Act of 2009 and did not amount to cruelty.

Background:

Tamil Nadu has been arguing that Jallikattu – the mostly southern bull-racing sport – should be permitted as it showcases a cultural tradition that has been part of the custom and culture of people of the state for 5,000 years.

* The Supreme Court already banned Jallikattu once, in May 2014. At the time it said bulls could not be used as performing animals, either for Jallikattu or for bullock-cart races. However, in January, the Centre allowed the ‘sport’ in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.
* Days after the Centre allowed it, in January, the Supreme Court put Jallikattu on hold. It issued notices to the Centre and other states asking them to file their responses in four weeks, to petitions challenging the central government’s notification allowing Jallikattu and bullock-cart races.

Jallikattu:

Jallikattu is a bull taming sport played in Tamil Nadu as a part of Pongal celebrations on Mattu Pongal day. It is a Tamil tradition called ‘Yeru thazhuvatha’ in Sangam literature(meaning, to embrace bulls), popular amongst warriors during the Tamil classical period.

* Jallikattu is based on the concept of “flight or fight”. All castes participate in the event. The majority of jallikattu bulls belong to the pulikulam breed of cattle.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Soon, search engines to blank sex selection ads**

The Supreme Court has directed the Central government to constitute a nodal agency to monitor and trigger search engines to crack down on online pre-natal sex determination advertisements.

Key facts:

* The court has ordered that the nodal agency should receive complaints about illegal online advertisements under the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act of 1994.
* It should communicate the tip-offs to online search engines like Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, which would delete these advertisements within 36 hours of getting the information.
* This interim arrangement would continue till it took a final decision on the continued existence of online sex selection ads.

Background:

The court was hearing a petition filed in 2008 in the background of increasing instances of female foeticide. The petition contended that pre-natal sex determination tests continue with impunity despite being made illegal in 1994.

PCPNDT law prohibits pre-natal sex determination. The PCPNDT Act was brought in to stop female foeticide and arrest the declining sex ratio in India. Under this Act, gender selection is prohibited.

About PCPNDT Act:

The Pre-conception & Pre-natal Diagnostics Techniques (PC & PNDT) Act, 1994 was enacted in response to the decline in Sex ratio in India, which deteriorated from 972 in 1901 to 927 in 1991.

* The main purpose of enacting the act is to ban the use of sex selection techniques before or after conception and prevent the misuse of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion.
* Offences under this act include conducting or helping in the conduct of prenatal diagnostic technique in the unregistered units, sex selection on a man or woman, conducting PND test for any purpose other than the one mentioned in the act, sale, distribution, supply, renting etc. of any ultra sound machine or any other equipment capable of detecting sex of the foetus.

Key features of the act:

* The Act provides for the prohibition of sex selection, before or after conception.
* It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques, like ultrasound and amniocentesis by allowing them their use only to detect few cases.
* No laboratory or centre or clinic will conduct any test including ultrasonography for the purpose of determining the sex of the foetus.
* No person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.
* Any person who puts an advertisement for pre-natal and pre-conception sex determination facilities in the form of a notice, circular, label, wrapper or any document, or advertises through interior or other media in electronic or print form or engages in any visible representation made by means of hoarding, wall painting, signal, light, sound, smoke or gas, can be imprisoned for up to three years and fined Rs. 10,000.
* The Act mandates compulsory registration of all diagnostic laboratories, all genetic counselling centres, genetic laboratories, genetic clinics and ultrasound clinics.

Amendment:

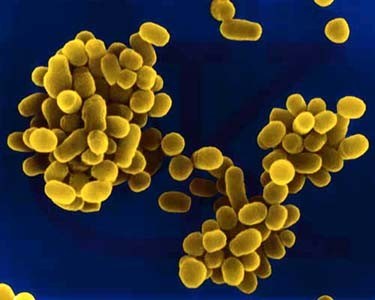
Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT), was amended in 2003 to The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act (PCPNDT Act) to improve the regulation of the technology used in sex selection. The Act was amended to bring the technique of pre conception sex selection and ultrasound technique within the ambit of the act. The amendment also empowered the central supervisory board and state level supervisory board was constituted. In 1988, the State of Maharashtra became the first in the country to ban pre-natal sex determination through enacting the Maharashtra Regulation of Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques Act.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 18 January 2016**

**International Conference on Brucellosis 2016**

International Research Conference on Brucellosis was recently inaugurated in New Delhi.

* On the sidelines, the centre also launched programme of “Brucella Free Villages” for implementation on pilot scale in 50 villages covering 10 states.
* This programme will be supported by guidelines and standard operating practices along with an IT enabled application.

[](https://i2.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Brucellosis.jpg)

*Brucellosis Bacteria*

Key facts:

* The three day International Conference on Brucellosis is being organized by the Department of Biotechnology in collaboration with Indian Council for Agriculture Research.
* The conference is result of DBT’s network programme on Brucellosis launched in 2012 to address this epidemiology and for development of new generation of vaccines and diagnostic kits.
* The Conference provides a technical platform for scientist and experts from all over the world.
* Participants from 26 countries include USA, Belgium, Germany, Nigeria, Argentina, Spain and Turkey.
* The three days deliberations would address various issues on Brucellosis covering broad and interdisciplinary field of “One Health” concept revolving around Brucella Pathogenesis & Host-pathogen interaction; Human Brucellosis; Epidemiology and Control; Brucella research in India; Canine and Wildlife Brucellosis; Diagnostic methods; and Vaccines & Immunology.

About Brucellosis:

Brucellosis is a dreadful disease caused by the genus of the **bacteria known as Brucella** infecting various species of Brucella cows, buffalos, sheep, goats, deer, pigs, dogs and other animals as well as humans. The disease causes economic losses of about Rs. 28000.00 Crores. **Brucellosis is endemic in India**.

Spread of the disease:

* Human become infected by coming in contact with animals or animal product like meat and milk contaminated with these bacteria.
* Dairy man, veterinarians, butchers and other animal handlers are exposed to high risk of brucellosis infection.

Symptoms:

* In humans brucellosis can cause range of symptoms that are similar to the flu and may include fever, sweats, headache, back pain and physical weakness.
* Severe infections of the central nervous system or lining of the heart may also occur.

Diagnosis:

Quite often brucellosis is diagnosed after ruling out all other fevers such as those caused by malaria, typhoid, dengue etc. Therefore, the disease is under reported and many medical professionals are not even aware of the problem.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Bhutan blocks India’s ambitious sub-regional road connectivity plan**

An ambitious road connectivity plan involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) has hit a roadblock with the upper house of Bhutan parliament deciding against ratifying the motor vehicle pact.

Why?

A large cross-section of people in Bhutan, including lawmakers, have expressed concerns over the environmental impact of allowing large number of vehicles enter the country after it ratifies the pact.

How will this impact the agreement?

The BBIN agreement – signed in Bhutan’s capital Thimpu in July – will become operational only when all the four countries ratify it. India, Bangladesh and Nepal have already ratified the pact.

This might also derail the entire plan as any restrictions which are beyond the reasonable won’t be accepted by the other member countries.

Background:

This is the second time that the Indian government’s sub-regional road connectivity plan has hit a hurdle. Earlier, Pakistan scuppered the Saarc motor vehicle agreement by refusing to come on board.

India then decided to tap its eastern neighbours to boost regional connectivity. Bypassing Pakistan, India moved to have an agreement with Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to remove restrictions on vehicular movement in the subcontinent.

About the agreement:

The Union Cabinet had approved a proposal to sign the SAARC MVA during the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November 2014. The SAARC declaration at the Kathmandu Summit in November 2014 also encouraged Member States to initiate regional and sub-regional measures to enhance connectivity.

* Accordingly, it was considered appropriate that a sub-regional Motor Vehicle Agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) may be pursued.
* The pact will allow seamless movement of passenger and cargo vehicles among the four countries.
* Under the agreement, the “contracting parties” will allow cargo vehicles for inter-country cargo, including third country cargo and passenger vehicles or personal vehicles, to ply in the territory of another country “subject to the terms of the agreement”. All vehicles, however, will require a permit for plying through the other country.

How will this help India?

India is in a bilateral motor vehicle agreement with Nepal and Bangladesh, but a multilateral pact would go a long way in boosting trade in the region.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Not a pipe dream: Govt to set up national gas hub**

The government is planning to come up with a national gas hub, which would be a trading platform for gas at market-determined price. A final form of this Indian benchmark will be ready within a year.

What is a gas hub?

A gas hub is a physical point where several gas pipelines come together or intersect. It is a trading place for gas at market determined prices.

Background:

The ministry of petroleum and natural gas is working towards setting up a common gas hub after the government introduced a new gas pricing formula in 2014. This gas price is applicable for six months wherein the average prices of US-based Henry Hub, the UK-based National Balancing Point, Canada’s Alberta Gas and Russian gas gets reflected.

Significance of this move:

If the idea gets cleared, India will also have a gas-trading place similar to international hubs such as the US’ Henry Hub and the UK’s National Balancing Point. While Henry Hub is a physical point where several gas pipelines come together, National Balancing Point is a virtual trading point.

Present scenario:

At present, the Indian domestic natural gas price is calculated on a half-yearly basis, based on a weighted average of Henry Hub, National Balancing Point, Russian gas and Canada’s Alberta Gas.

How it operates?

A gas hub works exactly like a stock exchange does. There are buyers and sellers, and prices are determined by market forces. Gas is thus freely traded.

Why is the setting up of gas hub good for India?

This is a huge positive for upstream companies in India as prices will be market-driven. Moreover, it seems like the domestic natural gas pricing will be uniform with the move.

Sources: the hindu.

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

**Student Startup Policy**

President Pranab Mukherjee recently launched the National Student Startup Policy.

Key facts:

* The National Student Startup Policy, formulated by AICTE, aims to create 100,000 technology based student start-ups and a million employment opportunities within the next 10 years.
* The policy plans on achieving this by developing an ideal entrepreneurial ecosystem and promoting strong inter-institutional partnerships among technical institutions.
* It emphasizes the much-desired need for an appropriate startup policy to propel the youth of India through and beyond the 21st century.

Sources: pib.

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

**India is ‘non-committal’ on market economy tag for China**

Indian government has indicated that it is not inclined to automatically grant the coveted ‘Market Economy Status’ (MES) to China this December under World Trade Organisation (WTO) norm.

Why?

According to India, granting MES to China will severely curb the ability of nations including India to impose anti-dumping duties on “unfairly priced” Chinese imports.

With this, India has taken sides with the U.S. and European Union in stating that unlike in ‘market economies’ where prices of items are market determined (based on demand & supply conditions), there is still a significant government influence in the Chinese market.

Background:

Citing the provisions in the ‘Protocol on the accession of China to the WTO’ in 2001, Beijing has said WTO member countries must fulfil their promise to deem China a ‘market economy’ from December 2016.

What is a non-market economy?

A “non-market economy” is any foreign country that does not operate on market principles of cost or pricing structures. When this is the case, sales by the exporting country do not reflect fair value.

Sources: the hindu.

**Facts for Prelims**

**Fastest supercomputer:**

* For the eighth consecutive year, China has retained the top spot in the list of the world’s fastest supercomputers for its ‘Sunway TaihuLight’ which can perform 93 million billion calculations per second.
* This was announced in the latest edition of the semiannual Top 500 list of supercomputers released recently.
* TaihuLight, the massive supercomputer, built entirely using processors designed and made in China has been crowned as the world’s fastest.
* TaihuLight made its appearance in June, replacing the former champion, Tianhe-2, also a Chinese system but built based on Intel chips.

**Women commandos by CRPF:**

* For the first time, CRPF has deployed a team of women commandos in anti-Naxal operations in Jharkhand.
* The 135 women belonging to the 232 battalion’s Delta company are currently undertaking operations under the close supervision of CRPF’s 133 battalion in Naxal-infested forests on the outskirts of Ranchi near Khoonti area.

**Insights Daily Current Affairs, 19 November 2016**

**UD Ministry begins approval of long term investment plans**

Seeking to ensure timely implementation of basic urban infrastructure projects and achieve mission targets by 2019-20, the Ministry of Urban Development, in a paradigm shift has begun approving investments in water supply, sewerage networks etc., for the next three financial years under Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT).

* In this regard, an Inter-Ministerial Apex Committee of AMRUT recently approved investments of Rs.5,815 cr during 2017-20 in the States of Gujrat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Bihar and Tripura.
* With this, total investment approved in water supply, sewerage and other components under AMRUT has gone up to Rs.51,505 cr.

About AMRUT:

AMRUT is the new avatar of the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). It adopts a project approach to ensure basic infrastructure services relating to water supply, sewerage, storm-water drains, transportation and development of green spaces and parks with special provision for meeting the needs of children.

* Under this mission, 10% of the budget allocation will be given to states and union territories as incentive based on the achievement of reforms during the previous year.
* AMRUT will be implemented in 500 locations with a population of one lakh and above. It would cover some cities situated on stems of main rivers, a few state capitals and important cities located in hilly areas, islands and tourist areas.
* Under this mission, states get the flexibility of designing schemes based on the needs of identified cities and in their execution and monitoring. States will only submit state annual action Plans to the centre for broad concurrence based on which funds will be released. But, in a significant departure from JNNURM, the central government will not appraise individual projects.
* Central assistance will be to the extent of 50% of project cost for cities and towns with a population of up to 10 lakhs and one-third of the project cost for those with a population of above 10 lakhs.
* Under the mission, states will transfer funds to urban local bodies within 7 days of transfer by central government and no diversion of funds to be made failing which penal interest would be charged besides taking other adverse action by the centre.

Sources: pib.

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

**Revised DTAA Agreement signed between India and Cyprus**

A revised Agreement between India and Cyprus for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal evasion (DTAA) with respect to taxes on income, along with its Protocol, was recently signed in Nicosia. The agreement will replace the existing DTAA that was signed by two countries in June 1994.

Key facts:

* New DTAA provides for source based taxation of capital gains arising from alienation of shares, instead of residence based taxation provided under the existing DTAA. However, a grandfathering clause has been provided for investments made prior to 1st April, 2017, in respect of which capital gains would continue to be taxed in the country of which taxpayer is a resident.
* The new Agreement provides for Assistance between the two countries for collection of taxes and also updates the provisions related to Exchange of Information to accepted international standards, which will enable exchange of banking information and allow the use of such information for purposes other than taxation with the prior approval of the Competent Authorities of the country providing the information.
* The new Agreement expands the scope of ‘permanent establishment’ and reduces the tax rate on royalty in the country from which payments are made to 10% from the existing rate of 15%, in line with the tax rate under Indian tax laws.
* It also updates the text of other provisions in accordance with the international standards and consistent policy of India in respect of tax treaties.

Sources: pib.

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

**India and UK Sign three Bilateral Advance Pricing Agreements**

The Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has signed three Bilateral Advance Pricing Agreements (APAs) with UK taking the total number of APAs signed [both- bilateral and unilateral] so far to 111.

Background:

These Agreements are a result of the understanding reached with the Competent Authority of United Kingdom (UK) some time ago. The Competent Authorities of India and UK had earlier exchanged mutual agreements amongst them under the Mutual Agreement Procedure (MAP) Article of the India-UK Double Taxation Avoidance Convention (DTAC).

Key facts:

* The newly signed Agreements cover international transactions in the nature of payment of intra-group service charges and pertain to the telecom industry. They also have a roll-back provision.
* With this, India and UK have concluded 5 bilateral APAs and some more would be concluded in the near future. The total number of bilateral APAs concluded so far by the CBDT is 7.

About APA programme:

The Advance Pricing Agreement (APA) Programme was introduced by the Finance Act, 2012 with a view to provide a predictable and non-adversarial tax regime and to reduce the litigation in the Indian transfer pricing arena. An APA can be entered into for a maximum of 5 years at a time.

Rollback of APAs was announced in the Budget in July 2014 to provide certainty on the pricing of international transactions for 4 prior years (rollback years) preceding the first year from which APA is to be applicable.

Sources: pib.

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

**Navy inducts four indigenously developed sonars systems**

Navy has formally inducted four types of indigenously developed sonars that will boost its underwater surveillance capability.

* The systems have been designed and developed by NPOL, a Kochi based laboratory of DRDO.
* With the induction of these four systems, the underwater surveillance capability of the Indian Navy will get a boost, besides providing a fillip to the quest for self-reliance in this critical area of technology.

The newly inducted systems include:

* **Abhay – compact hull mounted sonar for shallow water crafts.**

Abhay is an advanced active-cum-passive integrated sonar system designed and developed for the smaller platforms such as shallow water crafts and coastal surveillance/patrol vessels. It is capable of detecting, localizing, classifying and tracking sub-surface and surface targets in both its active and passive modes of operation. Indian Navy has proposed to induct this SONAR on three of the Abhay class ships.

* **Humsa UG – upgrade for the Humsa sonar system.**

Humsa -UG is designed for upgrading the existing Humsa sonar system. This system is proposed to be installed on seven ships of three different classes of ships.

* **AIDSS – Advanced Indigenous Distress sonar system for submarines.**

AIDSS is an Emergency Sound Signaling Device which is used to indicate that a submarine is in distress and enable quick rescue and salvage. It is a life-saving alarm system designed to transmit sonar signals of a pre-designated frequency and pulse shape in an emergency situation from a submarine for long period, so as to attract the attention of passive sonars of ships or submarines in the vicinity and all types of standard rescue vessels in operation. It is also provided with a transponder capability.

* **NACS – Near-field Acoustic Characterisation System.**

It determines the in-situ performance of the SONAR systems, which are used to find the frequency-dependent 3-D transmission and reception characteristics of the SONAR. It is also used to measure the magnitude and phase characteristics of the SONAR transmission and reception electronics and the transducers.

Sources: pib.

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

**Khehar made NALSA executive chairman**

The Union government has announced that Jagdish Singh Khehar, a judge of the Supreme Court, will be the new Executive Chairman of the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA). He succeeds Anil R. Dave.

[](https://i0.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Jagdish-Singh-Khehar.jpg)

*Jagdish Singh Khehar*

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.

Sources: the hindu.

**Facts for Prelims**

**Quami Ekta Week:**

* With a view to foster and reinforce the spirit of Communal Harmony, National Integration and pride in vibrant, composite culture and nationhood, the “Qaumi Ekta Week” (National Integration Week) is being observed all over the country for one week.
* The observation of the ‘Quami Ekta Week’ will help to highlight the inherent strength and resilience of our nation to withstand actual and potential threats to the eclectic and secular fabric of our country, and nurture a spirit of communal harmony in its widest sense.
* This occasion also provides an opportunity to reaffirm age old traditions and faith in the values of tolerance, co-existence and brotherhood in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society.