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## **GENERAL STUDIES-1**

### **INDIAN CULTURE**

#### **MADHAVPUR MELA**

Ministry of Culture is organizing the Madhavpur Mela in Madhavpur Ghed, District Porbandar in Gujarat in a grand way.

#### **About Madhavpur Mela:**

- The purpose of this integration is to bring various parts of the country especially the North-East, close to each other under the banner of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat announced by the Prime Minister.
- The Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat shares its connect to the Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The Mishmi Tribe traces its ancestry to the legendary King Bhishmak and through him to his daughter Rukmini and Lord Krishna.

#### **About Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:**

“Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat” was announced by Hon’ble Prime Minister on 31st October, 2015 on the occasion of the 140th birth anniversary of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Subsequently, the Finance Minister announced the initiative in his Budget Speech for 2016-17.

#### **What is it for?**

Through this innovative measure, the knowledge of the culture, traditions and practices of different States & UTs will lead to an enhanced understanding and bonding between the States, thereby strengthening the unity and integrity of India.

#### **Implementation:**

All States and UTs will be covered under the programme. There will be pairing of States/UTs at national level and these pairings will be in effect for one year, or till the next round of pairings. The State/UT level pairings would be utilized for state level activities. District level pairings would be independent of the State level pairings.

#### **Significance:**

The activity will be very useful to link various States and Districts in annual programmes that will connect people through exchanges in areas of culture, tourism, language, education trade etc. and citizens will be able to experience the cultural diversity of a much larger number of States/UTs while realising that India is one.

## **NABAKALEBAR FESTIVAL**

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**Why in news?**

Commemorative coins in denominations of ₹10 and ₹1000 have been released on Lord Jagannath's Nabakalebar festival.

**What is the festival about?**

The Nabakalebara is an ancient ritual associated with most of the Jagannath Temples when the Idols of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarshan are replaced by a new set of Idols.

- A year with an extra Ashadha masa/month as per Hindu Calendar is considered auspicious for conducting the ceremony. This usually occurs every twelve to nineteen years.
- The Deities are made from a special type of Neem wood known as Daru Bramha.
- This festival is celebrated at the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Orissa.

**'ADOPT A HERITAGE PROJECT'**

Letter of Intent has been issued to 24 agencies for the Submission of Vision Bids for 75 sites under the Adopt a Heritage Project.

- The private players will undertake gap analysis of the actual requirement of the basic and advanced amenities, within the permissible guidelines of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and prepare a Vision Bid Proposal accordingly for the site opted by them.
- Once vision bid is accepted, MoU will be signed with the related party for upkeep of the Monument for overall enhanced tourist experience.

**Adopt a Heritage Project:**

The 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism was launched on World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017. This project is a key initiative of Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archeological Survey of India (ASI), to develop the heritage sites / monuments and making them tourist-friendly to enhance the tourism potential and their cultural importance in a planned and phased manner.

**How it works?** The project plans to entrust heritage sites/monuments and other tourist sites to private sector companies, public sector companies and individuals for the development of tourist amenities. The project aims to develop synergy among all partners.

**Monument Mitras:** Successful bidders selected for adopting heritage sites / monuments by the Oversight and Vision Committee shall be called as Monument Mitras. The basic and advanced amenities of the tourist destinations would be provided by them. They would also look after the operations and the maintenance of the amenities. The 'Monument Mitras' would associate pride with their CSR activities.

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## **GENERAL STUDIES-2**

### **POLITY**

#### **OFFICE-OF-PROFIT**

The Delhi High Court has quashed a notification issued by President Ram Nath Kovind disqualifying 20 AAP MLAs for holding offices of profit as Parliamentary Secretaries. The court has reinstated all 20 MLAs, holding that the opinion of the Election Commission of India to the President to disqualify the legislators was “vitiated and bad in law for failure to comply with the principles of natural justice”.

#### **Why was the notification quashed by the court?**

The High Court noted that the Election Commission failed to give oral hearing and opportunity to address arguments on merits to the AAP MLAs before arriving at its opinion that they held ‘office of profit’.

#### **What next?**

The court has asked the Election Commission to first decide the “all important and seminal issue; what is meant by the expression ‘office of profit held under the government’.” Then, “re-examine the factual matrix to decide whether the petitioners (MLAs) had incurred disqualification on appointment as Parliamentary Secretaries, without being influenced by the earlier order or observations on the said aspect in this order”.

#### **What’s the issue?**

The Delhi government, led by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, appointed the parliamentary secretaries attached to government ministries after coming to power in March 2015. The Election Commission had recommended that 20 MLAs of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi be disqualified as they held offices of profit while being legislators.

#### **What is an ‘office of profit’?**

If an MLA or an MP holds a government office and receives benefits from it, then that office is termed as an “office of profit”. A person will be disqualified if he holds an office of profit under the central or state government, other than an office declared not to disqualify its holder by a law passed by Parliament or state legislature.

#### **What are the basic criteria to disqualify an MP or MLA?**

Basic disqualification criteria for an MP are laid down in Article 102 of the Constitution, and for an MLA in Article 191. They can be disqualified for: a) Holding an office of profit under government of India or state government; b) Being of unsound mind; c) Being an undischarged insolvent; d) Not being an Indian citizen or for acquiring citizenship of another country.

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**What is the underlying principle for including 'office of profit' as criterion for disqualification?**

Makers of the Constitution wanted that legislators should not feel obligated to the Executive in any way, which could influence them while discharging legislative functions. In other words, an MP or MLA should be free to carry out her duties without any kind of governmental pressure.

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**KARNATAKA GOVT CLEARS MINORITY STATUS FOR LINGAYATS**

The Karnataka government has decided to declare Lingayats as a religious minority and include the Veerashaivas who follow Basavanna as a group within the community. The state government will, now, recommend to the Centre that the community be granted religious minority status.

**Backgrounder:**

The community has been demanding status of a separate religion for a long time. One part of the community demands the minority status for both Veerashaiva and Lingayats considering them the same, while another wants it only for the Lingayats as it considers Veershaivas to be Hindus.

Karnataka State Minorities Commission had formed a seven-member committee, headed by retired high court Judge HN Nagamohan Das on the issue. The Nagamohan committee has recommended minority status for only the Lingayats and has kept Veershaivas out.

**Who are Lingayats?**

Lingayats are followers of 12th-century social reformer Basavanna and his vachana (verses) philosophy. Their beliefs, practices and faith are different. Veerashaivas worship Lord Shiva, the one mentioned in Hindu mythology. However, the Shiva that Basavanna referred to in his vachanas (verses) is not the Hindu god Shiva but the ishtalinga (formless God), which people of the community wear around their neck.

**Who are Veerashaivas?**

Veerashaivas are a sub-sect of Lingayats and ardent followers of Lord Shiva. They preceded Basavanna, the founder of Lingayatism. Veerashaivism has its roots in the Vedas and Agamas, and Veerashaivas do not worship any god other than Shiva; they can be found spread across Karnataka, Kerala, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

**Who is Basavanna?**

Basavanna was a 12th-century social reformer. The revolution that Basavanna led came years after the Buddha. It was Basavanna and his contemporary Sharanas who launched a very strong spiritual, social and religious rebellion against Brahminical hegemony. Basavanna had declared that "work is worship". He gave women equal status in his movement through the vachanas (verses). In

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order to take the social movement closer to the people, Basavanna and all the other Sharanas voiced their concerns in simple Kannada vachanas so that even lay people could comprehend them.

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## **GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND POLICIES**

### **INDIA CONVENTION PROMOTION BUREAU**

The government of India has been providing necessary support to India Convention Promotion Bureau to promote India as a venue for International Conferences and Exhibitions.

#### **About ICPB:**

The India Convention Promotion Bureau (ICPB) has been set up under the patronage of the Ministry of Tourism.

- It has been set up to promote India as a venue for International Conferences and Exhibitions.
- It is a non-profit organization, with members comprising national airlines, hotels, travel agents, tour operators, tourist transport operators, conference organizers, etc.
- It participates in International Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) Tourism trade fairs like IMEX in Frankfurt and Las Vegas, EIBTM- Barcelona and AIME- Melbourne along with the India tourism overseas offices.

### **THE LOWDOWN ON THE AUDIT REGULATOR**

Union Cabinet has approved establishment of National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA). It is a big step forward in regulating the financial audit of large companies. The decision comes against the backdrop of various auditing lapses in the banking sector, including the Rs. 12,700 crore fraud at Punjab National Bank.

#### **What is NFRA?**

The NFRA is to be an independent regulator overseeing the auditing profession. Its creation was first recommended by the Standing Committee on Finance in its 21st report. The NFRA will act as an independent regulator for the auditing profession which was one of the key changes brought in by the Companies Act 2013.

NFRA would be an oversight body for auditors and its jurisdiction would extend to all listed companies as well as large unlisted public companies. The regulator will have a chairman, three full-time members, and one secretary — though no decision has yet been taken on who will fill these posts.

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**What does Companies Act, 2013 say about NFRA?**

As per the Companies Act, 2013 the NFRA is tasked with multiple jobs like recommending accounting and auditing standards, ensuring compliance with them and overseeing the quality of service of the accounting and audit professions. It has also been given the power to investigate matters of professional misconduct by chartered accountants or CA firms, impose penalty and debar the CA or firm for up to 10 years.

No other body shall initiate any proceedings in such matters of misconduct where the National Financial Reporting Authority has initiated an investigation. NFRA shall have the power to investigate, either suo motu or on a reference made to it. It will have the same powers as are vested in a civil court under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, while trying a suit.

**How did the need of setting up of NFRA come now?**

While many provisions of the Companies Act, 2013 came into force on April 1, 2014, the setting up of the NFRA, a key recommendation, was delayed. The decision appears to have been prompted by the latest bank scam of ₹12,636 crore Punjab National Bank fraud that went undetected by auditors.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) had initially voiced its discontent with the idea of a regulator for the sector, saying the existing structure was adequate.

The government has clarified that the roles of the new regulator and those of the ICAI will not overlap.

**What are the roles of NFRA, ICAI and QRB in auditing?**

The NFRA would cover all listed companies and large unlisted companies, the benchmark size for which would be set down in the rules. Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI) will continue to have monopoly on training and qualifying chartered accountants, giving them licence to practice and regulating them including scrutinising audit quality.

Smaller unlisted companies would continue to be audited by the ICAI.

NFRA is not meant to replace the disciplinary jurisdiction of the ICAI. The ICAI would continue to play its advisory role with respect to accounting and auditing standards and policies by making its recommendations to the NFRA. The Quality Review Board (QRB) would continue quality audits for private limited companies, and public unlisted companies below the prescribed threshold. The NFRA would also have the power to refer cases to the QRB as and when it decided to do so.

**Why does it matter?**

Most of the major economies of the world have independent audit regulators. India, as an emerging economy should also have an independent audit regulator.



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The need for such a body is further reinforced after several financial accounting scams, the most recent of which was the Punjab National Bank scam.

However, the idea for an NFRA came following the Satyam scam in 2009, following which the Standing Committee on Finance recommended the creation of an audit regulator.

### **In conclusion**

Apart from its audit regulator role, the NFRA will have the power to debar erring auditors or audit firm for up to 10 years and impose significant fines on them. According to the Companies Act, 2013, the NFRA will have powers to impose a fine of not less than ₹1 lakh, but the amount can extend up to five times of the fees received in case of individuals. The need of the hour is that the government has to set the rules that will stipulate the jurisdiction of the NFRA. Government should also set a limit on the size of an unlisted company that comes under the purview of the NFRA.

### **STRATEGY ON RESOURCE EFFICIENCY**

Niti aayog has initiated implementation of strategy on Resource efficiency. After detailed discussion, a road map for implementation of the RE in the country has also been evolved.

Following measures related to implementation of strategy on resource efficiency was announced by the NITI Aayog:

- NITI Aayog will facilitate the RE strategy implementation. Implementation however will be the responsibility of the line ministries/departments.
- A baseline survey on RE could be considered for better targeting.
- A Status paper on RE and Four sectoral strategy papers on RE are to be prepared.
- SWACH Bharat also means a clean production/mining environment, therefore resource efficiency and circular economy are also a part of this initiative.
- One pilot study on Ease of Doing RE Business in collaboration with DIPP could be considered.
- Finally, RE is a potential instrument for generating wealth from waste. Measures for promoting effective recycling of scrap generated in the country could be explored.

### **Strategy on Resource Efficiency:**

- NITI Aayog in collaboration with the European Union delegation to India have released the Strategy on Resource Efficiency. The strategy aims to promote resource efficiency in India.
- This strategy is the first policy document to emphasize resource productivity in the country. The Strategy emphasizes on Sustainable Public

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Procurement (SSP) as an action agenda which will be the market transformation tool to transform to a resource efficient economy.

- It is developed with the recommendations from the Indian Resource Efficiency Programme (IREP), launched by the Indian Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and Indian Resource Panel (InRP) in April 2017.

**What is Resource Efficiency and why do we need it?**

Resource efficiency very simply put is making more with fewer materials. In practice, through a life-cycle approach, it leads to minimizing impact on environment & the associated societal burdens, transforming 'waste' into 'resources' fostering circular economy, and strengthening resource security.

Resource Efficiency and Circular Economy are important goals and central principles for achieving sustainable development. Sustainability is a global priority and SDGs commitment and 11th Five year plan also clearly enunciate importance of Resource efficiency (RE).

**WELFARE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS**

**NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT FUND (NSDF) AND NATIONAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (NSDC)**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for restructuring of National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework. The approval would lead to restructuring of composition of Board of NSDF and the NSDC to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework.

**About NSDC:**

National Skill Development Corporation India (NSDC), established in 2009, is a not- for- profit company set up by the Ministry of Finance. The present equity base of NSDC is Rs.10 crore, of which the Government of India through Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) holds 49%, while the private sector has the balance 51%.

**Functions:**

- NSDC aims to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.
- It also provides funding to build scalable and profitable vocational training initiatives.
- Its mandate is also to enable support system which focuses on quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships.



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- It also develops appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives.

#### **About National Skill Development Fund:**

The National Skill Development Fund was set up in 2009 by the Government of India for raising funds both from Government and Non Government sectors for skill development in the country.

- A public Trust set up by the Government of India is the custodian of the Fund. The Trust accepts donation, contribution in cash or kind from the Contributors for furtherance of objectives of the Fund.
- The Fund meets its objectives through National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).

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### **ATAL INNOVATION MISSION**

NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) has announced the signing of a Statement of Intent (SOI) with SAP Global to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

#### **Significance of the SOI:**

As part of the SOI, SAP in 2018 will adopt 100 Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATL) for five years to nurture the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning among secondary school children across India. This aims to enable students to learn advanced technology topics relevant to digital transformation and the Internet of Things, e.g. Design Thinking methodology, introduction to programming languages and experiential science learning.

#### **What are tinkering labs?**

ATLs are innovation play workspaces for students between Class 6 to 12, stimulating innovations combining science and technology.

- These open-ended innovation workspaces are equipped with state-of-the-art technologies like 3D printers, robotics, sensor technology kits, Internet of Things, miniaturised electronics etc, to enable students to learn and solve local community problems using emerging technologies.
- The aim of Atal Labs is to promote innovation and entrepreneurship in schools, universities and industry with a vision to "cultivate one million children in India as the innovators of tomorrow".

#### **About AIM:**

The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is Government of India's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.

- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country and revolutionizing the innovation eco-system – touching upon the entire innovation life cycle through various programs.
- Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs) create innovators, Atal Incubation Centre and support to Established Incubation Centre will take the innovations to the market and a network of Incubators shall help create enterprises around these innovations.

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### **“E-TRIBES INDIA”**

The government has launched “E- Tribes”, TRIFED’s websites. It includes [www.tribesindia.com](http://www.tribesindia.com), [www.trifed.in](http://www.trifed.in) and Retail Inventory Software and M-commerce app. Going Digital will lead to expansion of tribal commerce and the availability of tribal products over large area, reaping greater benefits for tribal artisans. Retail Trade of tribal products would expand all over the country and the world.

### **About TRIFED:**

TRIFED is an apex organisation at National Level and functioning under the administrative control of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

TRIFED is serving the interests of Tribals, who are engaged in collection of NTFP and making of Tribal Art & Handicraft Products for their livelihood so as to ensure better remunerative price for their products as well as for the socio-economic betterment through Self Help Groups, Empanelled NGOs, State level Tribal Development Corporations, Forest Development Corporations for undertaking marketing development of the tribal products.

It also organizes exhibitions like National Tribal Craft Expo called “Aadi Mahotsav” etc. in which it promotes and markets tribal products.

### **RASHTRIYA UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (RUSA)**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for continuation of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) from April 2017 to March 2020.

### **About RUSA:**

Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS), launched in 2013 aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.

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**Funding:**

- The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category States, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories) would be norm based and outcome dependent.
- The funding would flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions.
- The funding to states would be made on the basis of critical appraisal of State Higher Education Plans, which would describe each state's strategy to address issues of equity, access and excellence in higher education.

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**Objectives:**

The key objectives of RUSA are to improve access, equity and quality in higher education through planned development of higher education at the state level. Objectives include creating new academic institutions, expanding and upgrading the existing ones, developing institutions that are self-reliant in terms of quality education, professionally managed, and characterized by greater inclination towards research and provide students with education that is relevant to them as well the nation as a whole.

**Components:**

- RUSA would create new universities through upgradation of existing autonomous colleges and conversion of colleges in a cluster.
- It would create new model degree colleges, new professional colleges and provide infrastructural support to universities and colleges.
- Faculty recruitment support, faculty improvements programmes and leadership development of educational administrators are also an important part of the scheme.
- In order to enhance skill development the existing central scheme of Polytechnics has been subsumed within RUSA. A separate component to synergise vocational education with higher education has also been included in RUSA.
- Besides these, RUSA also supports reforming, restructuring and building capacity of institutions in participating state

**INTEGRATED SCHEME FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal of Department of School Education and Literacy to formulate an Integrated Scheme on School Education.

**Key features of the scheme:**

- The new scheme subsumes Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
- The vision of the Scheme is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from nursery to senior secondary stage in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal for Education.

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- The main emphasis of the Integrated Scheme is on improving quality of school education by focussing on the two T's – Teacher and Technology.

The objectives of the Scheme, across all levels of schooling, are:

- Provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students.
- Bridging Social and Gender Gaps in School Education.
- Ensuring equity and inclusion at all levels of school education.
- Ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions.
- Promoting vocationalization of education.
- Support States in implementation of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.
- Strengthening and up-gradation of State Councils for Educational Research and Training (SCERTs)/State Institutes of Education and District Institutes for Education and Training (DIET) as nodal agencies for teacher training.

Significance of the scheme:

- The Scheme gives flexibility to the States and UTs to plan and prioritize their interventions within the scheme norms and the overall resource envelope available to them.
- It will help improve the transition rates across the various levels of school education and aid in promoting universal access to children to complete school education.
- The Scheme, by providing quality education, aims to equip the children with varied skills and knowledge essential for their holistic development and prepare them for the world of work or higher education in the future.
- It would lead to an optimal utilization of budgetary allocations and effective use of human resources and institutional structures created for the erstwhile Schemes.

**PRADHAN MANTRI ROJGAR PROTSAHAN YOJANA**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for enhancing the scope of Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY). The Government of India will now contribute the Employer's full admissible contribution for the first three years from the date of registration of the new employee for all the sectors including existing beneficiaries for their remaining period of three years.

**About Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana:**

The scheme "Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana" (PMRPY) was announced in the Budget for 2016-17.

- The objective of the scheme is to promote employment generation.

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- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment.
- Under the scheme employers would be provided an incentive for enhancing employment by reimbursement of the 8.33% EPS contribution made by the employer in respect of new employment.
- The PMRPY scheme is targeted for workers earning wages upto Rs. 15,000/- per month.

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### **AYUSHMAN BHARAT – NATIONAL HEALTH PROTECTION MISSION**

The Union Cabinet has approved the launch of a new Centrally Sponsored Ayushman Bharat -National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) having central sector component under Ayushman Bharat Mission anchored in the MoHFW.

It will subsume the on-going centrally sponsored schemes -Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY) and the Senior Citizen Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS).

#### **Highlights of the scheme:**

The scheme has the benefit cover of Rs. 5 lakh per family per year. To ensure that nobody is left out (especially women, children and elderly) there will be no cap on family size and age in the scheme. The benefit cover will also include pre and post-hospitalisation expenses.

**Target:** The target beneficiaries of the proposed scheme will be more than 10 crore families belonging to poor and vulnerable population based on SECC database. Benefits of the scheme are portable across the country and a beneficiary covered under the scheme will be allowed to take cashless benefits from any public/private empanelled hospitals across the country.

**Role of state governments:** State Governments will be allowed to expand AB-NHPM both horizontally and vertically. States will be free to choose the modalities for implementation. They can implement through insurance company or directly through Trust/ Society or a mixed model.

**Council:** For giving policy directions and fostering coordination between Centre and States, it is proposed to set up Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Council (AB-NHPMC) at apex level Chaired by Union Health and Family Welfare Minister.

#### **Who is eligible?**

It will be an entitlement based scheme with entitlement decided on the basis of deprivation criteria in the SECC database.

- The different categories in rural area include families having only one room with kucha walls and kucharroof; families having no adult member between

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age 16 to 59; female headed households with no adult male member between age 16 to 59; disabled member and no able bodied adult member in the family; SC/ST households; and landless households deriving major part of their income from manual casual labour.

- Also, automatically included families in rural areas having any one of the following: households without shelter, destitute, living on alms, manual scavenger families, primitive tribal groups, legally released bonded labour. For urban areas, 11 defined occupational categories are entitled under the scheme.

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### **Implementation Strategy:**

At the national level to manage, an Ayushman Bharat National Health Protection Mission Agency (AB-NHPMA) would be put in place. States/ UTs would be advised to implement the scheme by a dedicated entity called State Health Agency (SHA). They can either use an existing Trust/ Society/ Not for Profit Company/ State Nodal Agency (SNA) or set up a new entity to implement the scheme. States/ UTs can decide to implement the scheme through an insurance company or directly through the Trust/ Society or use an integrated model.

### **Benefits of the scheme:**

This will lead to increased access to quality health and medication. In addition, the unmet needs of the population which remained hidden due to lack of financial resources will be catered to. This will lead to timely treatments, improvements in health outcomes, patient satisfaction, improvement in productivity and efficiency, job creation thus leading to improvement in quality of life.

### **In conclusion**

The scheme, if implemented properly could be a game changer by enhancing access to health care including early detection and treatment services by a large section of society who otherwise could not afford them. The identification of beneficiaries can be done by linking with Aadhar and similarly following up for services received and health outcomes achieved, thereby helping to monitor and evaluate the impact of the programme.

Ultimately, the scheme could help country move towards universal health coverage and equitable access to healthcare which is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs.

### **PAYMENT OF GRATUITY (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017**

Parliament has passed the Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill, 2017.

### **Highlights of the Bill:**

The 2017 Bill empowers the central government to (i) notify the period of maternity leave eligible for qualifying as continuous service; and (ii) determine the amount of gratuity available to employees.



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- The Bill removes the reference to 12 weeks in the 1972 Act and empowers the central government to notify the maximum maternity leave.
- Under the Act, the maximum amount of gratuity payable to an employee cannot exceed Rs 10 lakh. The Bill removes the existing ceiling and states that the ceiling may be notified by the central government.

### **The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972:**

The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 applies to establishments employing 10 or more persons. The main purpose for enacting this Act is to provide social security to workmen after retirement, whether retirement is a result of the rules of superannuation, or physical disablement or impairment of vital part of the body. Therefore, the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 is an important social security legislation to wage earning population in industries, factories and establishments.

### **Who Are Eligible?**

The Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 allows for the payment of gratuity to employees in any establishment, factory, mine, oil field, plantation, port, railways, company, or shop employing 10 or more workers.

### **60 HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS GRANTED AUTONOMY**

In a historic decision, the University Grants Commission has granted autonomy to sixty Higher Educational Institutions which have maintained high academic standards.

Criteria for granting autonomy status:

Autonomy is granted to institutes based on the parameters of excellence in academic performances, capability of self-governance and enhancement in the quality of education, and it can be seen as a great opportunity to meet the emerging and evolving needs, in sync with the industry.

### **Implications:**

- These universities will remain within the ambit of UGC but will have the freedom to start new courses, off campus centers, skill development courses, research parks and any other new academic programs.
- They will also have the freedom to hire foreign faculty, enroll foreign students, give incentive based emoluments to the faculty, enter into academic collaborations and run open distance learning programmes.
- The eight autonomous colleges, granted autonomy, will be free to set their own syllabus, hold examinations, carry out evaluation as well as declare results. In this case, only the degree will be awarded by the respective university.

### **Why higher educational institutions need greater autonomy?**

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Higher education plays a crucial role in the realisation of India's potential for economic and technological growth. Autonomy helps institutionalise quality and accountability, thereby encouraging institutions to incorporate unique pedagogical developments and practices into the curriculum.

Management education is meant to be contemporary in nature and thus dynamic. Frequent changes are required in pedagogy, curriculum and other aspects. An autonomous status expedites these operations and thus enthuses constant fluidity in the pattern and curriculum, apart from accelerating and improving evaluation.

**Significance of autonomy:**

While expanding new horizons for higher education and strengthening the quality and relevance, autonomy can be considered a possible solution to enhance the quality of education and incorporate methods of skilling the students, thus contributing to creating a knowledge-based economy and paving the way to gear up the young workforce for Industry 4.0.

**'SATHE' PROGRAM**

**What is it?**

'Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-E)' is an initiative comprising comprehensive roadmaps and detailed timelines

**Prepared by:** NITI Aayog, the three States and the knowledge partners of the SATH Initiatives, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Piramal Foundation For Education Leadership (PFEL).

**Details**

These roadmaps, which operate between 2018 to 2020, lay out detailed interventions which will be taken by the three participating States- Jharkand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha – aiming to become 'Role Model States' in school education.

- These roadmaps are for the individual, district and State level.
- Aims to transform elementary and secondary school education across the selected states.

**Implementation:** The SATH-E initiative is based on formal agreements with the States and will be funded through a cost-sharing mechanism between NITI Aayog and the participating states.

**Significance:** SATH-E aims to create role model States for education and mainstream 'islands of excellence' across the country to facilitate qualitative and quantitative transformation of learning outcomes.

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- Marrying technology with need-based, data-driven assessment and a 'giving it what it takes' approach – be it innovation, incubation, external third party funding and Public- Private- Philanthropic Partnership (PPPP) experimentation – SATH-E puts the States in the driver's seat to transform education at scale.

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## **INDIA AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

### **INDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for closure of India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI) to enhance synergies in channelizing Diaspora's contributions to Government of India's various flagship programmes.

#### **About IDF- OI:**

IDF-OI was set up by Government of India with the approval of Cabinet in 2008 as an autonomous not-for-profit Trust, to facilitate Overseas Indian philanthropy into social and development projects in India.

- Later, promotion of Government of India's Flagship programmes – National Mission for Clean Ganga and Swachh Bharat Mission; and Social and Development projects identified by State Governments – was added to the mandate of IDF-OI.
- IDF-OI receives a Grant-in-Aid from the Government of India for meeting its operational expenses and administrative costs for its activities and outreach. Therefore, IDF-OI does not deduct any operational or administrative charges from the contributions it receives from Overseas Indians.
- The Trust is exempt from provisions of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 of the Ministry of Home Affairs which enables IDF-OI to receive foreign contributions.
- Chairperson: IDF-OI is chaired by External Affairs Minister.

#### **What necessitated this move?**

As the Foundation received only Rs. 36.80 Lakhs between December 2008 and March 2015 as donation from overseas Indian community, a comprehensive review of IDF-OI was undertaken in 2015.

Although, between April 2015 and March 2018, the Trust received Rs.10.16 crore, most of the contribution received were for either projects related to National Mission for Clean Ganga or Swachh Bharat Mission, which are separately administered by their respective Administrative Agencies. Therefore, in order to enhance synergies, improve efficiencies and avoid duplication of work, it was decided that the Trust would be closed.

## **THE FRENCH CONNECTIONS**

March 19<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>

French President's visit to India aims at strengthening the bilateral economic, political and strategic dimension of engagement between the two countries. During the talks both the leaders reviewed the progress achieved in bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. Besides, the visit is also aimed at forging not only strong manufacturing and technology partnerships, but also greater people to people contacts.

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### **Why is France important to India?**

France and India have a very long history of bilateral cooperation in defence, security, space and high technology. France is the 9th largest foreign investor in India with a cumulative investment of over 6 billion dollars from April 2000 to October 2017.

Indian Ocean region will be very important in future peace and development and both the countries will release the Indian Ocean cooperation Joint Strategic Vision. Today, with Brexit and the weakening of the leadership of German Chancellor, French President has positioned himself as the most credible interlocutor in Europe.

In the international context, India and France can benefit from a shared understanding of the challenges that the world is facing today like the global uncertainties produced by Trump's disruptive foreign policy and Chinese aggressive policies. India and France are working together to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change which US President has renounced.

### **Indo-France Relationship: Background**

France has always been sympathetic to similar Indian claims based on its ancient civilisation.

Defence cooperation with France began in the 1950s when India acquired the Ouragan aircraft and continued with the Mystères, Jaguar (Anglo-French), Mirage 2000. Both countries started joint naval exercises 'Varuna' in 1983. France has historically shown more understanding of our strategic programmes than others. It was the first western country with which we established a Strategic Partnership. France is the first country with which we initiated a Strategic Dialogue after our 1998 nuclear tests when France refused to impose bilateral any sanctions on us and displayed a far greater understanding of India's security compulsions compared to other countries.

France helped India set up the Sriharikota launch site assisted in engine development and hosting of payloads. After the Cold War, France decided that its preferred partner in the Indian Ocean Region would be India. It was the first P-5 country to support India's claim for a permanent seat in an expanded and reformed UN Security Council.

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**What are the outcomes of recent France President's visit?**

1. New Delhi and Paris signed 14 agreements in various fields of cooperation including nuclear energy, environment, narcotic drugs and people to people ties.
2. Both the countries reiterated their strong condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations including cross-border terrorism and terror-related incidents in France and India.
3. Also affirmed that terrorism cannot be justified on any grounds and it should not be associated with any religion, creed, nationality and ethnicity.
4. On trade, the two sides emphasized the importance of regular and sustained economic cooperation dialogue through the India-France Joint Committee.
5. MoUs were signed regarding the provision of reciprocal logistics support to each other's armed forces, exchange and reciprocal protection of classified information and developing shared space studies and assets for maritime awareness.
6. India and France have agreed to mutually recognize academic qualifications to help students.

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**India – France strategic partnership:**

**Defence:**

1. An agreement for building six Scorpène submarines in India with French help was signed in 2005.
2. Similarly, technology sharing and acquisitions of short range missiles and radar equipment were concluded.
3. Joint exercises between the air forces (Garuda series) and the armies (Shakti) were instituted in 2003 and 2011, respectively.
4. The government-to-government agreement for 36 Rafale aircrafts has taken place. The ambitious offset target of 50% (nearly ₹25,000 crore), properly implemented, can help in building up India's budding aerospace industry.

**Energy Sector:**

1. An agreement was signed about a decade ago for building six EPR (European Pressurized Reactors) nuclear power reactors with a total capacity of 9.6 GW for which negotiations have been on-going between the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL) and Areva.
2. On green energy, the International Solar Alliance is set in motion jointly by India and France.
3. France offered an extra \$861.5 million by 2022 for solar projects in developing countries.
4. The agreement on the industrial way forward between NPCIL and EDF(Areva) affirms that work at Jaitapur will commence before the end of 2018.

**Maritime cooperation:**

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1. Like India, France has expressed concern about China's growing presence in the Indian Ocean Region.
2. French overseas territories in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans provide it with the second largest exclusive economic zone globally. It has long maintained bases in Reunion Islands and Djibouti and established one in Abu Dhabi in 2009.
3. This regional dimension is reflected in the Vision Statement on cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
4. Strengthening cooperation with France, particularly in the western Indian Ocean Region makes eminent strategic sense even as India develops its presence in Oman (Duqm) and Seychelles (Assumption Island).
5. More synergy between the two navies in the Gulf area where France has a base (in Abu Dhabi) and better mutual understanding of the implications of a Chinese base in Gwadar is important for India.

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**Trade between two countries:**

1. Trade has grown in recent years but at \$10 billion is half of the trade with Germany.
2. Nearly \$16 billion worth of agreements at the business summit were signed. There are nearly 1,000 French companies present in while over a hundred Indian businesses have established a presence in France.
3. In the past, Indian companies saw the U.K. as the entry point for Europe; now with Brexit approaching, India can also look at France as its entry point for Europe.

**Space:**

1. Earlier France assisted India to setup Sriharikota launch site.
2. Today, it is a relationship of near equals and the 'vision statement' refers to world class joint missions for space situational awareness, high resolution earth observation missions with applications in meteorology, oceanography and cartography.
3. Inter-planetary exploration and space transportation systems are cutting edge science and technology areas that have also been identified.

**Urban Development:**

1. Another area identified was urban planning and management of services like housing, transport, water, sanitation using the public private partnership model which the French have employed successfully.
2. The flagship programme of Smart Cities in which France is focussing on Chandigarh, Nagpur and Puducherry is taking shape as more than half the business agreements signed related to electric mobility, water supply, waste management and smart grids.

**Education links:**

1. The most significant agreement was the focus on youth and student exchanges.



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2. Currently about 2,500 Indians go to France annually to pursue higher education, compared to more than 250,000 from China.
3. A target has been set to raise it to 10,000 by 2020.
4. The agreement on mutual recognition of academic degrees and the follow-on Knowledge Summit, where 14 MoUs between educational and scientific institutions were signed.

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### **Tourism:**

1. A target of a million Indian tourists and 335,000 French tourists has been set for 2020.

While there are only about 20 flights a week between India and France, there are four times as many to Germany and 10 times as many to the U.K. So no of flights between India and France has to be increased.

### **DIPLOMATIC TUSSE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN**

India and Pakistan have agreed to solve the diplomatic tussle over the allegations of harassment of the diplomats in each other's countries. The two countries have mutually decided to resolve matters as per the 1992 code of conduct (COC) ensuring the diplomats and their families are not harassed.

### **1992 Code of Conduct:**

As per the 1992 code of conduct, the two countries would ensure "smooth and unhindered functioning of their diplomatic and consular officials in conformity with recognised norms of international law and practice."

- The two governments will also ensure that there is "no violation of the privileges and immunities of their diplomatic and consular officials" and there should be "no offences against their dignity and person".
- It also states that intrusive and aggressive surveillance and actions such as verbal and physical harassment, disconnecting of telephone lines, threatening telephone calls, pursuit in cars and unauthorised entry into residences shall not be resorted to.

### **What's the issue?**

The diplomatic ties of India and Pakistan took a hit over the harassment of the diplomats in each other's countries. Both the countries have accused each other of harassing and intimidating their diplomats.

### **INTERSTITIUM: THE LATEST ORGAN DISCOVERED IN HUMAN BODY**

March 19<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>

Scientists have discovered a new organ in the human body which they have dubbed the 'interstitium'.

**About Interstitium:**

The new organ is known as the Interstitium and it is found everywhere in our bodies, acting as a shock absorber in all places where tissues are moved or subjected to force.

- It lies beneath the top layer of skin, but is also in tissue layers lining the gut, lungs, blood vessels, and muscles. The organ is a network of interconnected, fluid-filled spaces all over the body.
- Scientists say, it may even be one of the largest organs in the body. The organ acts like a shock absorber in all places where tissues are moved or subjected to force.

**What is the organ made of?**

The organ is a network of interconnected, fluid-filled spaces all over the body and is made up of both strong (collagen) and flexible (elastin) connective tissue proteins, with interstitial fluid moving throughout.

**Functions of the organ:**

- Interstitial spaces are organized by a collagen "mesh", can shrink, expand, and "may thus serve as shock absorbers."
- These "dynamically compressible and distensible sinuses" act as thoroughfares to transport critical fluids within organs and around the body.
- The Interstitium plays an important role in carrying lymph, the clear fluid that also travels through lymphatic vessels and supports immunity.

**Significance:** The discovery of the fluid 'highway' could help to explain how cancer spreads in the body, and pave the way for new ways to detect and treat the disease.

**INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**17TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION NETWORK  
2018**

**Why in news?**

India, for the first time, is hosting the ICN2018 in New Delhi.

**Significance**

The conference will provide an opportunity to exchange ideas and strategies for effective enforcement of competition law and for strengthening cooperation amongst the competition authorities as they strive to promote and sustain competition in rapidly changing markets.

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### **About ICN:**

ICN is an international body comprising 132 members from 120 competition jurisdictions exclusively devoted to international competition enforcement. The ICN's main goal is to improve and advocate for sound competition policy and its enforcement across the global antitrust community.

- The ICN is a voluntary, consensus-based organisation. The ICN is not a rule-making organisation and its work products are not legally binding instruments.
- ICN provides competition authorities with a specialised yet informal platform for addressing practical competition concerns, sharing experiences and adopting international best practices.
- Members: Its members are national competition authorities and NGA (Non-governmental Advisers) which include reputed law firms, eminent persons, and think tanks of international repute.

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### **Why have the ICN?**

Economic globalisation has resulted in an increasing number of investigations and reviews of mergers, cartels and unilateral conduct that transcend jurisdictional boundaries. Agencies need to cooperate with each other on cross-border cases in order to reduce the risk of:

- (i) sub-optimal enforcement if an agency only has a partial picture of the situation; and
- (ii) inconsistent outcomes if different jurisdictions reach different conclusions about the same practice.

The ICN helps facilitate cooperation and convergence, where appropriate. This is good for competition agencies, governments, businesses, and ultimately consumers.

### **KISS TO HOST 'COMMONWEALTH BIG LUNCH'**

Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), Bhubaneswar, in partnership with British Council, India, is hosting the 'Commonwealth Big Lunch'. KISS is the only organisation from Asia to be selected by British Council to host the Commonwealth Big Lunch.

**What is it?** British Council is celebrating 70 years of inception in Commonwealth countries. On this occasion, it has organised a mega lunch. The initiative launched by UK PM Theresa May. The motto of the programme is to encourage people to get together to celebrate their Commonwealth connections through food.

### **The Commonwealth:**

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53 independent and equal sovereign states. It was formally constituted by the London Declaration in 1949, which established the member states as "free and equal".

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- The Commonwealth operates by intergovernmental consensus of the member states, organised through the Commonwealth Secretariat and non-governmental organisations, organised through the Commonwealth Foundation.
- The Commonwealth is home to 2.4 billion people and includes both advanced economies and developing countries. Thirty of our members are small states, many of which are island nations.
- Member countries are supported by a network of more than 80 intergovernmental, civil society, cultural and professional organisations.
- The last country to join the Commonwealth was Rwanda in 2009.

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### **A NEW NAM FOR THE NEW NORM**

A renewed state of political and military tension between opposing geopolitical power-blocs, in the form of Cold War, is breaking out with one bloc led by Russia and China and the other led by the United States, European Union and NATO.

At the same time, the 17th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Venezuela's Margarita Island proved to be a failure because only 12 heads of states attended from the 120-member group. India was also represented by its Vice president instead of Head of the government.

However, the current changing global politics and major global problems like terrorism makes NAM platform highly relevant.

#### **Backgrounder:**

The Non-Aligned Movement was formed during the Cold War as an organization of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but sought to remain independent or neutral. It identifies the right of independent judgment, the struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism, and the use of moderation in relations with all big powers as the three basic elements that have influenced its approach.

#### **How the term "Cold War II" gained currency and relevance?**

The 'Cold War II' term has been used to describe on-going renewed tensions between Western nations and Russia & China. Cold War II" gained currency and relevance as tensions between Russia and the West escalated throughout the 2014 pro-Russian unrest in Ukraine followed by the Russian military intervention .

The United States has identified both China and Russia as adversaries. Whereas, leaders of China and Russia are strong and determined to stand up to US President Doctrines of ultra-nationalism and nuclear hegemony. Russia announced that it has invincible doomsday machines like an underwater drone

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armed with a nuclear warhead powerful enough to sweep away coastal facilities, aircraft carriers and a hypersonic vehicle.

Cuban “axis of evil” has emerged once again under Iran’s leadership. This time it is a three-cornered Cold War, without any corner having committed countries to act together as military allies.

Some observers judged the Syrian Civil War to be a proxy war between Russia and the United States. However, current tensions and ideologies of both sides are not similar to those of the original Cold War. Also, today Russia is far more integrated with the outside world which may constrain Russian actions.

### **Why is NAM needed?**

NAM establishes itself as a deliberative and coordinating platform for the developing countries as it deals with newly emerging problems from global warming, debt-affected low income countries to UN reforms. The world is more violent and big power rivalries from Middle East and North Africa to the South China Sea have increased in recent times.

NAM provides an alternative medium to tackle these issues in fresh and innovative ways. NAM declaration has several elements which developing nations need to take note of. These included—to decisively addressing the challenges posed in the areas of peace, economic and social development, human rights and international cooperation, to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes.

### **What is objective behind Nonalignment 2.0?**

NAM is anathema today even to those who helped shape it and partied in it for years. It can be observed in 17th Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in 2016 which was attended by only 12 Heads of the states from the 120 member group.

India was one of its leaders. India had a stake in its integrity and India worked tirelessly to keep it on the middle road. India fought to keep Egypt within it when every Arab country wanted it to be ousted. Even while building alliances with others, we availed of the NAM umbrella to promote our national strategies when it suited us.

NAM was effectively used for UN Reform, where we blocked an effort by the U.S. and others to add Germany and Japan as permanent members and close the doors for further expansion. An effort was made in 2012 to craft a ‘Nonalignment 2.0’ in the context of the new global situation, India’s growing importance and the rivalry between the U.S. and China.

The report moved the concept of nonalignment away from its origins. It reiterated that India needed to move quickly to extend its global role and influence and India must remain true to its aspiration of creating a new and

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alternative universality. In a situation where the world is no longer bifurcated between two dominant powers, nonalignment today will require managing complicated coalitions and opportunities in an environment that is not structurally settled.

### **Where does India stand today?**

India recently has become a defence partner of the U.S. and a member of the “Quadrilateral”. Both China and Russia, which have been identified as adversaries in the U.S. world view, have their problems with India.

Doklam and the Maldives have shown that China is in no mood for a compromise. In fact, China has attributed the increase of its defence budget to the formation of the Quadrilateral, which is being seen as a direct threat to China.

### **In conclusion**

An obvious way is to revive NAM by breathing new life into it and making it fit to deal with the new norm to suit current multipolar world. A partnership of near equals like IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) with similar interests without any ideological conflict is probably the best model to follow.

Something on the lines of the G-15 organised by India and like-minded countries some years ago could be put together with the objective of dealing with the issues like climate change, terrorism and protectionism. The members may have links with the U.S., China and Russia, but should be able to work together without the undue influence of the three.

### **AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA**

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has been signed by 44 African countries at a summit of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda. If successful, it will be the biggest trade agreement since the formation of the World Trade Organization in 1995. Nigeria, Africa’s largest economy and most populous country, as well as a host of others did not sign the agreement.

### **What is AfCFTA?**

African heads of government agreed to establish a continental free trade area in 2012 and started negotiations in 2015.

- The draft agreement commits countries to removing tariffs on 90% of goods, with 10% of “sensitive items” to be phased in later.
- The agreement will also liberalise services and aims to tackle so-called “non-tariff barriers” which hamper trade between African countries, such as long delays at the border.
- Eventually, free movement of people and even a single currency could become part of the free trade area.

### **Significance of AfCFTA:**



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The AfCFTA has the potential to bring over 1.2bn people together into the same market. The bloc of 55 nations would be the largest in the world by member states.

- The AfCFTA could improve trade between African countries, which in 2016 estimates stated accounted for only 10%. By reducing barriers to trade, such as removing import duties and non-tariff barriers, African countries hope to boost intra-continental business.

**Objectives of the AfCFTA:**

- Create a single continental market for goods and services, with free movement of business persons and investments, and thus pave the way for accelerating the establishment of the Continental Customs Union and the African customs union.
- Expand intra African trade through better harmonization and coordination of trade liberalization and facilitation regimes and instruments across RECs and across Africa in general.
- Resolve the challenges of multiple and overlapping memberships and expedite the regional and continental integration processes.
- Enhance competitiveness at the industry and enterprise level through exploiting opportunities for scale production, continental market access and better reallocation of resources.

**GENERAL STUDIES-3**

**INDIAN ECONOMY**

**E-WAY BILL**

As the country prepares for the nationwide mandatory rollout of the e-way bill system for inter-state movement of goods from April 1 under the goods and services tax (GST) regime, Karnataka will be an exception having notified the e-way bill for both inter-state as well as intra-state movement of goods.

**Background:**

Karnataka was the first state to operationalise the e-way bill system in September 2017, using the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure available with the state.

**What is e-way bill?**

An e-way bill is required for movement of goods worth more than Rs 50,000. When goods are transported for less than 10 km within a state, the supplier or the transporter need not furnish details on the GST portal.

The e-way bill mechanism has been introduced in the GST regime to plug tax evasion loopholes. Tax evasion was one of the reasons cited by the government for the fall in revenue collection in October.

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**Are there concerns from industry?**

Trade and industry have raised concerns about the system being a possible route for the re-emergence of supply chain bottlenecks, and discretionary power to tax officials. The industry views the e-way bill as a system that will check tax evasion to some extent, but may not be able to stop it completely. Also, it adds another layer of compliances for GST payers and, in case of technical glitches, may result in supply chain bottlenecks.

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**PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (PFMS)**

A “historic” Rs 71,633 crore was processed and routed through the PFMS portal on a single day. This is a Historical Record Breaking Volume of Digital Transactions achieved by PFMS.

**About PFMS:**

The Public Financial Management System (PFMS) is an end-to- end solution for processing payments, tracking, monitoring, accounting, reconciliation and reporting.

- It is administered by the Department of Expenditure.
- It is implemented by the Controller General of Accounts.

**Functions:**

- It provides scheme managers a unified platform for tracking releases and monitoring their last mile utilisation.
- It provides platform for efficient management of funds through tracking of funds and real time reporting of expenditure and receipts through treasury and bank interface.
- The line ministries/departments utilise this platform to monitor the utilisation of funds provided to the implementing agencies and state governments.
- PFMS is also used for DBT payments under MGNREGA and other notified schemes of the Government of India.

**GI TAG**

The Geographical Indication (GI) Registry has issued a notice to the West Bengal State Food Processing and Horticulture Development Corporation, asking why the GI recognition given to ‘Banglar Rosogolla’ not be withdrawn.

**Backgrounder:**

A petition was recently filed objecting to the GI status procured by West Bengal for ‘Banglar Rosogolla’ four months ago. The petitioner questioned the data and documents provided by West Bengal for getting GI tag for this famous sweet. He had also pointed out that Odisha was not given a chance to explain its stance when the West Bengal State Food Processing & Horticulture Development Corporation applied for GI status.

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**Evidences on the origin:**

According to one of the documents submitted by West Bengal citing historical evidence, Rasogollas invented in the Nadia district of West Bengal are 60 years old (lower end time frame). Haradhan, a confectioner of village Phulia is named as the inventor. West Bengal has given half-a-dozen historical evidences to back its claim.

While Odisha says the famous sweet was part of the offering in Sri Jagannath Temple of Puri at least five centuries ago.

**What is GI tag?**

A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.

Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

**MP'S BLACK CHICKEN KADAKNATH WINS GI TAG:**

Madhya Pradesh has won the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for Kadaknath, a black-feathered chicken known for its flavourful meat. The GI tag will ensure that no one else can use the name Kadaknath while selling any other black chicken and will also translate into higher prices for producers.

**Key facts:**

- It is found mainly in the tribal district of Jhabua.
- Kadaknath is in demand not only because of its taste but also due to its low cholesterol and high protein content.

**BASMATI GI TAG**

Madhya Pradesh has filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court challenging an order passed by Assistant Registrar of Geographical Indications (GI) on March 15 excluding the State from being granted the GI tag for basmati rice.

**What's the issue?**

In May 2010, GI status was given to basmati grown only in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and parts of western Uttar Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. Madhya Pradesh moved a statutory opposition demanding that its 13 districts be recognised as traditional Basmati growing regions. However, GI registry had rejected Madhya Pradesh's claim as being the original and unique basmati growing region. It had observed that the documents and evidence filed by Madhya Pradesh show the importance, special characters of

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rice cultivated in Madhya Pradesh but not the basmati cultivation in the traditional growing area.

**What's the concern now?**

Madhya Pradesh says non-inclusion of the state in the basmati growing areas would have an adverse effect on the lives of farmers who mainly depend upon basmati cultivation and it will also affect the export potential, which will indirectly reduce the country's turnover from the export of basmati.

**About GI tag:**

A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory. Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.

Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.

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**PRIVATISATION OF PSBs**

Former NITI Aayog vice chairman Arvind Panagariya has made a strong case for privatisation of public sector banks with the exception of SBI.

**Need for Privatisation:**

- Mainly, predominance of scandals and NPAs in PSBs highlight the need for privatisation of PSBs. Efficiency and productivity too demand that the government relinquish its control of the large number of banks whose market valuation has dwindled despite the fact that they hold the bulk of the deposits.
- Also, there is a continuous pressure on the government finances on account of the weak performance of the banks. Privatisation would reduce the drain on the exchequer and the money saved could be used for developmental schemes and programmes of the government.

**Benefits of private banks:**

Private banks will bring innovations in products, technology and customer servicing and a market-based discipline to lending. Private banks, knowing that they cannot count on government's protection, are unlikely to engage in the sort of risky lending that characterised public bank lending. Also, they will not be subject to the same pressure from politicians and others in government that has destroyed the public sector banks.

**Way ahead:**

The public-sector banks, which constitute almost 70% of the Indian banking system, are saddled with burgeoning stressed assets. The government has already injected over ₹2.6 lakh crore in the public-sector banks through recapitalisation in the last eleven years, which has had limited impact in improving the health of public sector banks thus far.

Therefore, recapitalisation of PSBs alone is not a permanent solution and will not be effective unless the inherent issues related to governance, productivity, risk management, talent, customer service, etc. are resolved. The government should

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shrink unproductive public sector banks and move forward with increasing private sector participation in the banking sector.

### **WORLD'S FIRST BRASS FUTURES CONTRACT:**

MCX, the country's largest commodity exchange, has launched futures trading in brass for first time in the world. With the launch of a transparent brass futures contract, MCX will emerge as the benchmark price as volume picks up in two months time.

#### **Key facts:**

- Brass would be first non-ferrous contract with compulsory delivery options – the IS-319 grade brass ingots and billets can be delivered at Jamnagar in Gujarat.
- Brass, an alloy, usually contains 60% zinc and the rest is copper. It finds varied industrial use in electrical appliance, switch gears, sanitary ware, automobiles and defence sectors.

### **AGRICULTURE AND CROPPING PATTERNS**

#### **NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVE FEDERATION OF INDIA LTD. (NAFED)**

National Agricultural Cooperative Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED) has signed the Debt Settlement Agreement with its eight lender banks. The One Time Settlement with the lender banks has been made at Rs. 478 Crore. In addition, the lenders are entitled to the assignment of auction right of the property of one of the defaulters of its tie-up business conducted in the years 2003-05.

#### **About NAFED:**

National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd.(NAFED), established in 1958, is registered under the Multi State Co-operative Societies Act.

- Nafed was setup with the object to promote Co-operative marketing of Agricultural Produce to benefit the farmers.
- Agricultural farmers are the main members of Nafed, who have the authority to say in the form of members of the General Body in the working of Nafed.
- The objectives of the NAFED shall be to organize, promote and develop marketing, processing and storage of agricultural, horticultural and forest produce, distribution of agricultural machinery, implements and other inputs, undertake inter-state, import and export trade etc.

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### **MEGA FOOD PARK**

Greentech Mega Food Park Private Ltd, first mega food park in Rajasthan, was recently inaugurated at Roopangarh Village in Ajmer. The Park has been set up at a cost of Rs 113.57 crore and will benefit around 25,000 farmers in this as well as neighbouring districts.

#### **About Mega Food Parks:**

Ministry of Food Processing Industries is implementing Mega Food Park Scheme in the country.

- The Scheme of Mega Food Park aims at providing a mechanism to link agricultural production to the market by bringing together farmers, processors and retailers so as to ensure maximizing value addition, minimizing wastages, increasing farmers' income and creating employment opportunities particularly in rural sector.
- These food parks give a major boost to the food processing sector by adding value and reducing food wastage at each stage of the supply chain with particular focus on perishables.
- A maximum grant of R50 crore is given for setting up a MFP, in minimum 50 acres of contiguous land with only 50% contribution to the total project cost.

#### **Mode of operation:**

- The Scheme has a cluster based approach based on a hub and spokes model. It includes creation of infrastructure for primary processing and storage near the farm in the form of Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) and Collection Centres (CCs) and common facilities and enabling infrastructure at Central Processing Centre (CPC).
- The PPCs are meant for functioning as a link between the producers and processors for supply of raw material to the Central Processing Centres.
- CPC has need based core processing facilities and basic enabling infrastructure to be used by the food processing units setup at the CPC. The minimum area required for a CPC is 50 acres.
- The scheme is demand-driven and would facilitate food processing units to meet environmental, safety and social standards.

### **KRISHI VIGYAN KENDRAS**

#### **Why in news?**

The ministries of agriculture and skill development have signed a pact to conduct programmes for training in farm and allied sectors at 690 Krishi Vigyan Kendras across the country.

#### **Need for skill upgradation:**

About 40% of the country's workforce is linked to agricultural knowledge activities. The government aims to double farmers' income. However, without



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skill upgradation, this is not possible. There are rapid technological strides in the agriculture sector; therefore, upskilling is needed.

### **What is Krishi Vigyan Kendra?**

Krsihi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) are agricultural extension centres created by ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) and its affiliated institutions at district level to provide various types of farm support to the agricultural sector. The first KVK was established during 1974 (Pondichery) and has grown as a largest network in the country.

### **Activities:**

KVKs provide several farm support activities like providing technology dissemination to farmers, training, awareness etc. To achieve the set objectives KVKs undertake following types of activities in the adopted villages:

(1) Farm Advisory Service (2) Training programme for different categories of people. (3) Training programme for the extension functionaries. (4) Front Line Demonstration (Fill) (5) On Farm Testing (OFT).

## **INDUSTRY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT**

### **'SAUBHAGYA' SCHEME**

Aiming to empower and uplift the rural youth and development, Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship has partnered with the Ministry of Power to ensure access to electricity for every household in the country through an ambitious scheme, Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojna (SAUBHAGYA).

### **About SAUBHAGYA Scheme:**

Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – 'Saubhagya' was launched in September, 2017.

- Under Saubhagya free electricity connections to all households (both APL and poor families) in rural areas and poor families in urban areas will be provided.
- Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) has been designated as nodal agency for the Saubhagya scheme.
- The scheme aims to achieve universal household electrification in all parts of the country at a cost of Rs 16,320 crore, including Gross Budgetary Support of Rs 12,320 crore from the government.
- All DISCOMs including Private Sector DISCOMs, State Power Departments and RE Cooperative Societies shall be eligible for financial assistance under the scheme in line with DDUGJY.
- The prospective beneficiary households for free electricity connections under the scheme would be identified using SECC 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under SECC data would also be provided

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electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 instalments through electricity bill.

**Scope of the Scheme:**

- Providing last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all un-electrified households in rural areas.
- Providing Solar Photovoltaic (SPV) based standalone system for un-electrified households located in remote and inaccessible villages / habitations, where grid extension is not feasible or cost effective.
- Providing last mile connectivity and electricity connections to all remaining economically poor un-electrified households in urban areas. Non-poor urban households are excluded from this scheme.
- There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018.

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**PERMANENT INDUS COMMISSION**

India and Pakistan will hold a meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission to discuss various issues under the Indus Waters Treaty.

**Key facts:**

- This will be the 114th meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC), which should meet at least once a year as per the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT).
- The meeting of the PIC is held alternately in India and Pakistan every year.
- The PIC had last met in March 2017 in Islamabad.

**About Indus Water Treaty:**

The Indus Waters Treaty is a water-distribution treaty between India and Pakistan, brokered by the World Bank. The treaty was signed in Karachi on September 19, 1960 by Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru and President of Pakistan Ayub Khan.

- According to this treaty, waters of the three western rivers (the Jhelum, the Chenab, and the Indus itself) were allocated to Pakistan, and those of the three eastern rivers (the Ravi, the Beas, and the Sutlej) were allocated to India.
- The Treaty also provides arbitration mechanism to solve disputes amicably. Though Indus originates from Tibet, China has been kept out of the Treaty.

**What is PIC?**

Permanent Indus Commission is a bilateral commission of officials from India-Pakistan, created to implement and manage goals of Indus Waters Treaty. Under the treaty, it is required that India and Pakistan meet every financial year. The Indus Commission is the first step for conflict resolution. If an agreement cannot be reached at the Commission level, the dispute is to be referred to the two

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governments. If the governments too fail to reach an agreement, the Treaty provides an arbitration mechanism. The last meeting of the commission was held in July 2016.

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### **UTES**

UTES is a Public Sector Enterprise under the Ministry of Railways. It is the export arm of the railways undertaking various projects worldwide.

UTES has engaged in the supply of Railway rolling stock (locomotives, coaches, wagons, permanent way maintenance vehicles), maintenance of railway infrastructure, technical studies, training of Myanmar Railway officials.

### **Why in news?**

Indian Railways recently handed over 18 microprocessor controlled Indian locomotives to Myanma Railways.

### **SOLAR POWER AND LIDAR**

### **Why in news?**

In Bengaluru, the Laser Mapping Technology — light detection and ranging (LiDAR) — is being used for mapping its potential to generate rooftop solar energy.

### **Working of LiDAR**

The LiDAR technology will send pulsed laser light on to the rooftop of a building and translate the reflected light into data points.

- Based on objects such as trees surrounding the rooftop, shadow-free area available for solar power generation will be calculated and an estimate will be arrived at.
- Once the data is collated and presented to the Energy Department, residents of the city will be able to check the capacity of solar power generation of the rooftops of their respective buildings.
- This looks similar to Google's Project Sunroof, which is currently available only in America.

### **Rooftop Solar**

#### **National Solar Mission**

The Jawaharlal Nehru National Solar Mission, also known as National Solar Mission, is one of the eight key National Missions of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC).

- The objective of the National Solar Mission is to establish India as a global leader in solar energy, by creating the policy conditions for its development across the country.
- The Mission has set the ambitious target of deploying 1, 00,000 MW of grid connected solar power by 2022.
- The target will comprise of 40 GW Rooftop and 60 GW through Large and Medium Scale Grid Connected Solar Power Projects.
- The mission is aimed at reducing the cost of solar

power generation in the country through long term policy; large scale deployment goals and aggressive R&D.

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Rooftop solar installations are needed if the target of creating 40 GW of capacity connected to the grid by 2022 is to be realised. Rooftop solar represents only about 11% of the country's 19,516 MW of total installed capacity at the start of 2018.

With steady urbanisation, solar maps of this kind will help electricity utilities come up with good business cases and investment vehicles and give residents an opportunity to become partners in the effort. This will need to be scaled up massively to achieve the national target.

### **In conclusion**

Domestic policy has to evaluate the impact of factors such as imposition of safeguard duty and anti-dumping duty on imports, and levy of the goods and services tax on photovoltaic modules. The Centre should come up with incentives, given the enormous investment potential waiting to be tapped and the real estate that can be rented.

India, which is a founder-member of the International Solar Alliance launched in Paris during the climate change conference more than two years ago, must strive to be a global leader.

## **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **BEIDOU NAVIGATION SATELLITE SYSTEM (BDS)**

China has successfully launched two satellites with a single rocket to strengthen its BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS). The two satellites are coded as the 30th and 31st members in the BDS.

#### **About BeiDou Satellite System:**

Named after the Chinese term for Big Dipper, the BeiDou system started providing independent services over China in 2000. It is being projected by Beijing as a rival to the American Global Positioning System (GPS).

- It has total 22 Operational satellites in orbit and the full constellation is scheduled to comprise 35 satellites.
- BeiDou has two separate constellations, BeiDou-1 and BeiDou-2. BeiDou-1 also known as first generation was a constellation of three satellites. BeiDou-2, also known as COMPASS, is the second generation of the system. It became operational in the year 2011.

#### **What are the various GNSS systems?**

The four global GNSS systems are – GPS (US), GLONASS (Russia), Galileo (EU), BeiDou (China). Additionally, there are two regional systems – QZSS (Japan) and IRNSS or NavIC (India).

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### **'SARMAT':**

What is it? It is Russia's most advanced nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile. It was flight-tested recently.

#### **Key facts:**

The Sarmat is a heavy ICBM intended to replace Russia's aging, Soviet-era missiles that form the basis of its nuclear deterrent. The chief innovation of the Sarmat is its ability to carry a large number of guided warheads. The missile is believed to be able to fly 16,000 miles and is capable of flying over the South Pole to strike the U.S. NATO has named this missile as 'Satan 2'.

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### **e-CIGARETTES**

WHO has released a report on E- Cigarettes and its effects on health.

#### **Highlights of the report:**

- As per the report, Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems (ENDS) (also known as e-cigarettes) emits nicotine, the addictive component of tobacco products. In addition to dependence, nicotine can have adverse effects on the development of the foetus during pregnancy and may contribute to cardiovascular disease.
- The WHO report further says that although nicotine itself is not a carcinogen, it may function as a "tumour promoter" and seems to be involved in the biology of malignant disease, as well as of neurodegeneration.
- Foetal and adolescent nicotine exposure may have long-term consequences for brain development, potentially leading to learning and anxiety disorders.
- The evidence is sufficient to warn children and adolescents, pregnant women, and women of reproductive age against ENDS use and nicotine.

#### **What are e-cigarettes?**

An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called "juice."

- Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavors and nicotine levels. e-liquid is composed of five ingredients: vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.) propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapor.
- Proponents of e-cigs argue that the practice is healthier than traditional cigarettes because users are only inhaling water vapor and nicotine.

#### **Why its hard to regulate them?**

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As e-cigarettes contain nicotine and not tobacco, they do not fall within the ambit of the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (COTPA), which mandates stringent health warnings on the packaging and advertisements of tobacco products.

**Need for regulation:**

The current unregulated sale of e-cigarettes is dangerous for a country like India where the number of smokers is on the decline (WHO Global Report, 2015) as it increases the possibility of e-cigarettes becoming a gateway for smoking by inducing nicotine addiction and perpetuating smoking by making it more attractive, thereby encouraging persons to become users of tobacco as well as e-cigarettes.

**In conclusion**

The government should also impose appropriate restrictions on the sale and advertisement, online and otherwise, of e-cigarettes, including proper health warnings, in order to plug the existing regulatory vacuum. This should be done with immediate effect, and simultaneously the government should also commission independent scientific research on the benefits and risks posed by these products in the Indian context.

**TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE (TESS)**

NASA and SpaceX joining hands for their all-new combined mission known as Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) mission. The mission will be launched in April this year.

**About TESS mission:**

The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is an upcoming NASA mission that will look for planets orbiting the brightest stars in Earth's sky. Its launch vehicle will be a Falcon 9 rocket from SpaceX.

**Mission:** The mission will monitor at least 200,000 stars for signs of exoplanets, ranging from Earth-sized rocky worlds to huge gas giant planets. TESS, however, will focus on stars that are 30 to 100 times brighter than those Kepler examined. This will help astronomers better understand the structure of solar systems outside of our Earth, and provide insights into how our own solar system formed.

**Orbit:** TESS will occupy a never-before-used orbit high above Earth. The elliptical orbit, called P/2, is exactly half of the moon's orbital period; this means that TESS will orbit Earth every 13.7 days. Its closest point to Earth (67,000 miles or 108,000 kilometers) is about triple the distance of geosynchronous orbit, where most communications satellites operate.



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### **BRAHMOS SUPERSONIC CRUISE MISSILE**

Supersonic cruise missile BrahMos was recently successfully flight-tested for the first time with an indigenous seeker. So far, the seeker, a critical technology in missiles, had come from Russia. The seeker technology determines the accuracy of a missile.

#### **Key facts:**

- The BrahMos is the fastest cruise missile of its class in the world.
- BrahMos missile flies almost three times the speed of sound at Mach 2.8 and has a range of 290 km.
- The missile has been jointly developed with Russia and is named after the rivers Brahmaputra and Moskva in Russia.
- BrahMos missile is the heaviest weapon to be deployed on India's Su-30 fighter aircraft.
- Since India's entry into the MTCR, the range has been extended to 450 km and the plan is to increase it to 600km.

### **COPERNICUS PROGRAMME**

#### **Why in news?**

India has joined Europe's mega global arrangement of sharing data from Earth observation satellites, called Copernicus.

The agreement:

- Under this arrangement, the European Commission intends to provide India with free, full and open access to the data from the Copernicus Sentinel family of satellites using high bandwidth connections.
- Reciprocally the DoS will provide the Copernicus programme and its participating states with a free, full and open access to the data from ISRO's earth observation satellites, including historical data sets.
- It is intended that ISRO's satellite data would be made available for distribution on the European 'Copernicus hub'.
- This comprises land, ocean and atmospheric series of ISRO's civilian satellites (Oceansat-2, Megha-Tropiques, Scatsat-1, SARAL, INSAT-3D, INSAT-3DR) with the exception of commercial high-resolution satellites data.

#### **About Copernicus programme:**

Copernicus is the most ambitious Earth observation programme to date. It will provide accurate, timely and easily accessible information to improve the management of the environment, understand and mitigate the effects of climate change and ensure civil security.

- Copernicus is the new name for the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme, previously known as GMES.

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- This initiative is headed by the European Commission (EC) in partnership with the European Space Agency (ESA).
- ESA coordinates the delivery of data from upwards of 30 satellites. The EC, acting on behalf of the European Union, is responsible for the overall initiative, setting requirements and managing the services.
- Services provided by Copernicus: land management, the marine environment, atmosphere, emergency response, security and climate change.
- Sentinel: ESA is developing a new family of satellites, called Sentinels, specifically for the operational needs of the Copernicus programme. The Sentinels will provide a unique set of observations, starting with the all-weather, day and night radar images.

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### **FESTIVAL OF INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP (FINE)**

#### **Why in news?**

It was recently inaugurated by the President of India.

**Organised by:** Rashtrapati Bhavan in association with the Department of Science and Technology and the National Innovation Foundation-India.

#### **What it celebrates?**

It is a celebration of country's Innovation potential, particularly those ideas for social good which stem from grassroots level including the citizen at the last mile and also a reflection of power of children's creativity.

- It is an initiative to recognise, respect, showcase, reward innovations and to foster a supportive ecosystem for innovators.
- It will also help in promoting lateral learning and linkages among the innovators to enrich the ecosystem for new India.

### **INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS IN MANIPUR**

#### **Why in news?**

105th Indian Science Congress was recently held in Manipur. It focussed on translational science for promoting affordable sustainable innovation.

- Indian Science Congress was organized by the Indian Science Congress Association.

**Theme:** "Reaching the Unreached Through Science & Technology".

#### **Indian Science Congress Association:**

Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA) is a premier scientific organisation started in the year 1914 in Kolkata. It has a membership of more than 30,000 scientists.

**Origin:** It owes its origin to the foresight and initiative of two British chemists, namely, Professor J. L. Simonsen and Professor P. S. MacMahon. It occurred to

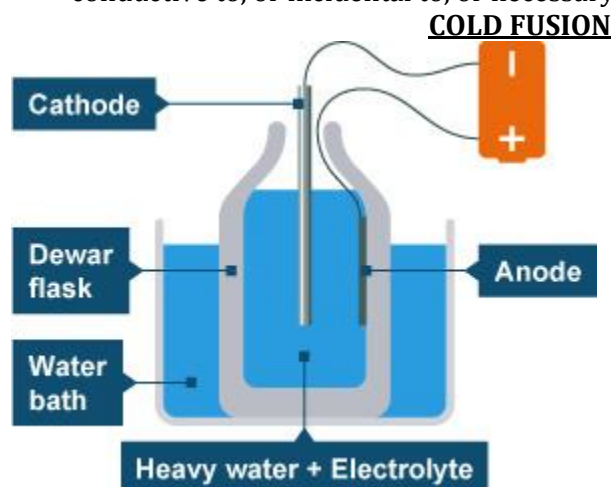
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them that scientific research in India might be stimulated if an annual meeting of research workers somewhat on the lines of the British Association for the Advancement of Science could be arranged.

Objectives:

- To advance and promote the cause of science in India.
- To hold an annual congress at a suitable place in India.
- To publish such proceedings, journals, transactions and other publications as may be considered desirable.
- To secure and manage funds and endowments for the promotion of Science including the rights of disposing of or selling all or any portion of the properties of the Association.
- To do and perform any or all other acts, matters and things as are conducive to, or incidental to, or necessary for, the above objects.

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Why in news?

India is taking tentative steps towards restarting research into Cold fusion, some 25 years after it was shut down at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) following global criticism heaped on the idea. Three research groups have taken up the theme.

The process

Cold fusion describes a form of energy generated when hydrogen interacts with various metals like nickel and palladium.

- Cold fusion is a field of condensed matter nuclear science CMNS, and is also called low-energy nuclear reactions LENR, lattice-assisted nuclear reactions LANR, low energy nanoscale reactions LENR, among others.
- Cold fusion is also referred to as the Anomalous Heat Effect AHE, reflecting the fact that there is no definitive theory of the elusive reaction.

When hydrogen, the main element of water, is introduced to a small piece of the metal nickel or palladium, a reaction occurs that can create excess heat and transmutation products. Excess heat means more heat comes out of the system

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than went in to the system. The excess heat can make hot water and useful steam to turn a turbine and produce electricity.

**Advantages of cold fusion:**

No radioactive materials are used in cold fusion. It occurs as the tiny protons, neutrons and electrons of hydrogen interact, releasing energy slowly, through heat and photons, without the dangerous radiation associated with conventional nuclear reactions, and cold fusion makes no radioactive waste.

**Criticism:**

Cold fusion seeks to produce nuclear energy without harmful radiation, complex equipment and the application of very high temperatures and pressures. But it has no conclusive theory explaining it and flies in the face of a well-established physics law that goes against easy fusion of nuclei. There is no guarantee that every time a cold fusion or LENR experiment is done, energy will be produced, say critics.

**BIOTECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY RESEARCH ASSISTANCE COUNCIL (BIRAC)**

**Why in news?**

The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) celebrated its 6th Foundation Day recently.

**SoCH awards:**

The event saw the announcement of the preliminary winners of the SoCH (Solutions for Community Health) awards.

- This award is an innovation challenge award which was launched on the MyGov portal in September 2017.
- This challenge has two themes, platform technologies for reducing disease burden (communicable and noncommunicable diseases) and sanitation and waste recycling.
- The winners will now have 6 months and rupees 15 lakhs to develop a minimal viable prototype and will then compete for the larger rupees 50 lakh award within their categories.

**ABOUT BIRAC:**

Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC) is a not-for-profit Public Sector Enterprise, set up by Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology Government of India, to empower the emerging biotech industry to undertake strategic research and innovation.

BIRAC is a new industry academia interface and implements its mandate through a wide range of impact initiatives, be it providing access to risk capital through targeted funding, technology transfer, IP management and handholding schemes that help bring innovation excellence to Indian biotech firms and make them globally competitive.

**CHANDRAYAAN-2**

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A recent report has confirmed that the launch of Chandrayaan-2, India's second mission to the moon will be in October this year.

### **About Chandrayaan-2:**

Chandrayaan-2 includes soft-landing on Moon and moving a rover on its surface. It is an advanced version of the previous Chandrayaan-1 mission. It consists of an orbiter, lander and rover configuration.

- The Orbiter spacecraft when launched from Sriharikota will travel to the Moon and release the Lander, which will in turn deploy a tiny Rover to roam the lunar surface — all three sending data and pictures to Earth.
- It is planned to be launched as a composite stack into the earth parking orbit (EPO) of 170 X 18,500 km by GSLV-Mk II.

### **JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE**

NASA has delayed the launch of its much awaited, \$8 billion James Webb Space Telescope — set to be the world's biggest space observatory — until at least May 2020.

### **What is the James Webb Space Telescope?**

The James Webb Space Telescope, also called Webb or JWST, is a large, space-based observatory, optimized for infrared wavelengths, which will complement and extend the discoveries of the Hubble Space Telescope.

It will cover longer wavelengths of light than Hubble and will have greatly improved sensitivity. The longer wavelengths enable JWST to look further back in time to see the first galaxies that formed in the early universe, and to peer inside dust clouds where stars and planetary systems are forming today.

### **Why is Webb an infrared telescope?**

By viewing the universe at infrared wavelengths Webb will show us things never before seen by any other telescope. It is only at infrared wavelengths that we can see the first stars and galaxies forming after the Big Bang. And it is with infrared light that we can see stars and planetary systems forming inside clouds of dust that are opaque to visible light.

#### **Who is James Webb?**

This space-based observatory is named after James E. Webb (1906- 1992), NASA's second administrator. Webb is best known for leading Apollo, a series of lunar exploration programs that landed the first humans on the Moon. However, he also initiated a vigorous space science program that was responsible for more than 75 launches during his tenure, including America's first interplanetary explorers.

### **GSAT-6A**

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) has successfully launched communication satellite GSAT-6A, on board its geosynchronous rocket GSLV-F08, at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh. This is

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the 12th flight of the GSLV rocket and the sixth with an indigenous cryogenic upper stage.

**About GSAT- 6A satellite:**

- The GSAT-6A is a high power S-band communication satellite with a mission life of about 10 years.
- A key feature of the satellite is to provide mobile communication to India through multi beam coverage facility.
- The satellite will also provide a platform for developing technologies such as demonstration of 6 m S-Band Unfurlable Antenna, handheld ground terminals and network management techniques that could be useful in satellite based mobile communication applications.
- The satellite is expected to be heavily used by security forces which are stationed in the remotest areas of the country.

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**About GSLV:**

The GSLV is a three stage/engine rocket. The core of first stage is fired with solid fuel while the four strap-on motors by liquid fuel. The second stage is the liquid fuel-propelled and the third is the cryogenic engine.

GSLV-F08, weighing 415.6 tonnes with a height of 49.1 meters comes with notable improvements like induction of High Thrust Vikas Engine, electromechanical actuation system in place of electro-hydraulic actuation system.

**What Is An 'Unfurlable Antenna'? What Does It Do?**

ISRO's 'unfurlable antenna' is a six-meter-wide antenna which looks somewhat like an umbrella. This will be 'unfurled' once the GSAT-6A satellite has been put in orbit. This antenna, specially designed for the mission, is three times as broad as the antennas that are usually used by ISRO. This antenna will allow mobile communication from anywhere via hand-held ground terminals. Apart from communications, the GSAT-6A satellite is believed to be designated for military use as well.

**What Is S-Band? How Is It Useful?**

S-band is an electromagnetic spectrum covering frequencies from 2 to 4 gigahertz (GHz). It crosses the conventional boundary between the Ultra High Frequency (UHF) and Super High Frequency (SHF) bands at 3.0 GHz. S-band is used by weather radars, surface ship radar, and some communications satellites. S-band is very useful because the 2.5 Ghz band is used globally for 4G services, and is worth billions of dollars. The S-band spectrum is extremely valuable for mobile broadband services.

**INSIGHT**



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It is the first-ever mission by NASA dedicated to exploring the deep interior of Mars. It will also be the first Nasa mission since the Apollo moon landings to place a seismometer, a device that measures quakes, on the soil of another planet.

**About the mission:**

InSight (Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport) is a NASA Discovery Program mission that will place a single geophysical lander on Mars to study its deep interior.

- But InSight is more than a Mars mission – it is a terrestrial planet explorer that will address one of the most fundamental issues of planetary and solar system science – understanding the processes that shaped the rocky planets of the inner solar system (including Earth) more than four billion years ago.
- By using sophisticated geophysical instruments, InSight will delve deep beneath the surface of Mars, detecting the fingerprints of the processes of terrestrial planet formation, as well as measuring the planet’s “vital signs”: Its “pulse” (seismology), “temperature” (heat flow probe), and “reflexes” (precision tracking).

**Significance of this mission:**

Mars is the exoplanet next door—a nearby example of how gas, dust and heat combine and arrange themselves into a planet. Looking deep into Mars will let scientists understand how different its crust, mantle and core are from Earth.

**ENVIRONMENT**

**CHIPKO MOVEMENT**

Google on March 26<sup>th</sup> commemorated the 45th year of the Chipko movement.

**What is Chipko movement?**

Chipko, signifying ‘embrace or hug’, was the strategy of hundreds of villagers – mostly women- in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand, to save the forest cover on the Garhwal Himalayas.

- Reckless felling of trees on the hill slopes was having a devastating effect on the livelihood of the villagers. The floods in 1970, when the Alakananda River broke its banks, led to massive landslides that blocked the river and washed away hundreds of hamlets downstream.
- Widespread protests followed in the early 70s, when villagers led by Chandi Prasad Bhatt, a Gandhian, literally embraced the trees to save them from the woodcutters’ axe.

**Background:**

The original Chipko andolan dates back to the 18th century and was started by Rajasthan’s Bishnoi community. The incident has been etched in the annals of history for the sacrifice of a group of villagers, who led by a lady named Amrita

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Devi, laid down their lives while protecting trees from being felled on the orders of then King of Jodhpur. After this incident, the king, in a royal decree, banned cutting of trees in all Bishnoi villages.

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### **IN A PLASTICS WORLD**

Plastics are detrimental to human health because of the chemicals used in their production. These chemicals are used to change the properties of plastics. Humans are exposed to such toxins through air and water, through food such as fish, or direct contact with plastic products.

Last year December, 193 nations signed pledge to tackle 'global crisis' of plastic in the oceans. Countries agreed to start monitoring the amount of plastic they put into the ocean and to explore ways to make it illegal to dump waste in the seas.

#### **Why do we need to act now?**

If current pollution rates continue, there will be more plastic in the sea than fish by 2050, said the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Nearly eight million tonnes of plastic – bottles, packaging and other waste – are dumped into the ocean every year. This plastic waste is then killing marine life and entering the human food chain.

According to the UN Environment Programme, the global production of plastics has reached at over 300 million tonnes a year. Micro plastics (particles of less than 5 mm) such as those used in scrubbers and cosmetics, ingested by marine animals can cause accumulation of certain chemicals and result in physiological impacts. Micro plastics can impair reproduction and development and alter how species function.

Like greenhouse gases, plastic is also not constrained by national boundaries, because it migrates via water and air currents and settles in benthic sediments. Majority of ocean's area is beyond national jurisdictions which resulted into "garbage patches" in oceanic gyres by the accumulation of plastic waste from different nations.

Unlike POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) or chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), Plastic pollution has received little attention in terms of international agreements. The health impact of the presence of polypropylene, polyethylene terephthalate and other chemicals in drinking water, food and even inhaled air may not yet be clear, but indisputably these are contaminants. No single solution

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will stop marine plastic pollution. Hence an internationally agreed and a legally binding instrument are required.

**Common sources of Plastic pollution**

Merchant ships expel cargo, sewage, used medical equipment, and other types of waste that contain plastic into the ocean. The largest ocean-based source of plastic pollution is discarded fishing gear (including traps and nets). Continental plastic litter such as Food Wrappers & Containers, Bottles and container caps, Plastic bags, Straws and stirrers etc. enters the ocean largely through storm-water runoff.

**What is 'Great Pacific Garbage Patch' of plastic debris?**

Five large mega-gyres—great whirlpools where currents collide—in the North and South Atlantic, the North and South Pacific, and the Indian Ocean have become filled with garbage. The enormous collection of detritus that floats in the Pacific Ocean, halfway between Hawaii and California is known as Great Pacific Garbage Patch (GPGP).

The GPGP is a galaxy of garbage composed of a network of plastic, large and small.

**What are some of the efforts at International level to curb Plastic waste?**

Local policies and actions such as bans on micro beads and single-use plastic bags are spreading across the globe, but there are only a handful of international documents focused on plastic pollution. International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, later modified as MARPOL, is an international agreement that addresses plastic pollution. MARPOL, which bans ships from dumping plastic at sea, was a great first step.

But even after MARPOL came into force, dumping of plastic waste into sea has not reduced. Steps to prevent plastic waste lack defined reduction targets, methods to monitor progress. In 2011, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the United States and UNEP created the Honolulu Strategy—a planning tool to reduce plastic pollution and its impacts.

In 2012, a voluntary commitment of a significant reduction of marine debris was introduced at Rio+20 with a deadline of 2025. In February 2017, UNEP announced the Clean Seas campaign, asking for individuals, industries, and member states to voluntarily commit to an action of their choice to reduce plastic pollution.

Recently, at the United Nations Environment Assembly in Nairobi, more than 193 nations passed a resolution to eliminate plastic pollution in our seas. However, it's not a legally binding treaty.

**What are the solutions?**

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Local actions are required for mitigating plastic pollution, using mechanisms such as bans on plastic bags, maximum daily limits for emissions into watersheds, and incentives for fishing gear retrieval. Countries should come together to establish measurable reduction targets for plastic waste. A meaningful international agreement—one with clearly defined waste reduction targets is the need of the hour.

Effective policies must take into account all stages of the lifecycle of plastic—connecting producers to users and ultimately to waste managers. Fossil fuel subsidies incentivise the plastic market. Hence, Countries should end fossil fuel subsidies. Annually, 4–8% of oil is used to produce raw plastic.

India has a major problem dealing with plastics, particularly single-use shopping bags that reach dumping sites, rivers and wetlands along with other waste. The most efficient way to deal with the pollution is to control the production and distribution of plastics.

Banning single-use bags and making consumers pay a significant amount for the more durable ones is a feasible solution.

Enforcing the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, which require segregation of waste will retrieve materials and greatly reduce the burden on the environment. Waste separation can be achieved in partnership with the community, and presents a major employment opportunity.

### **In Conclusion**

As the European Union's vision 2030 document on creating a circular plastic economy explains, the answer lies in changing the very nature of plastics, from cheap and disposable to durable, reusable and fully recyclable. Marine plastic pollution is a "planetary crisis," and we should hope for a "Paris-style" global treaty aimed at tackling it.

### **PROTECTED AREA PERMIT**

The Union Home Ministry is planning to relax the protected area permit (PAP) regime to enable foreign tourists to access border areas. The permit is being relaxed by the Centre following several requests by Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Nagaland, Manipur and the Tourism Ministry.

### **What is Protected area permit?**

Under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, all areas falling between the Inner line and the International Border of some states have been declared as protected areas.

The protected areas currently include whole of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Sikkim, besides parts of Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan,

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Uttarakhand and Jammu and Kashmir. Some parts of Sikkim fall under the protected area regime while others under the restricted area.

**How are these regions different?**

As per the guidelines, a foreign national is not normally allowed to visit a protected or restricted area unless the government is satisfied that there are extra-ordinary reasons to justify his or her visit.

- Every foreigner, except a citizen of Bhutan, who desires to enter and stay in a protected or restricted area, is required to obtain a special permit from a competent authority having the power to issue such permits to a foreigner, seeking it.
- In cases, where the power to issue such permits has not been delegated to a subordinate authority by the Union government, the application for the special permit has to be referred to the Ministry of Home Affairs for prior approval, at least eight weeks before the date of the expected visit.

**Who can issue such permits?**

Necessary powers have been delegated to various authorities to issue such special permits without the prior approval of the Union home ministry to facilitate foreign tourists subject to the certain exceptions.

- In cases of foreign diplomats, including the members of the United Nations and international organisations holding diplomatic or official passports, the special permits to visit such protected or restricted areas are issued by the Ministry of External Affairs.
- In cases of the citizens of Afghanistan, China and Pakistan and foreign nationals of Pakistani origin, no permit, however, can be issued without the prior approval of the Union home ministry.

**EARTH HOUR 2018**

Earth Hour is being observed on March 24 from 8:30 to 9:30 p.m. Earth Hour is also a “part and parcel” of the “Green Good Deeds” movement, in which every individual ought to take small, voluntary green actions to protect and conserve the environment and the earth.

**“Give Up to Give Back”:**

On the occasion of Earth Hour, the World Wide Fund India has made a strong pitch for “Give Up to Give Back”. The “Give Up to Give Back” initiative to inspire organisations, institutions and individuals to make the choice to curb some habits, practices and lifestyles that burden our lives and the environment. It includes taking steps like giving up single-use plastics, giving up fossil fuels, giving up lonely car rides for your employees, give up e-waste.

**What is Earth Hour?**

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Dating back to 2007, Earth Hour is an annual event organized by the World Wildlife Fund that promotes conservation and sustainable energy. During this time, civilians are encouraged to switch off their lights for one hour to help reduce the effect of global warming and raise awareness for climate change and wildlife conservation.

**Background:**

It was famously started as a lights-off event in Sydney, Australia in 2007. Since then it has grown to engage more than 7000 cities and towns worldwide. Today, Earth Hour engages a massive mainstream community on a broad range of environmental issues. The one-hour event continues to remain the key driver of the now larger movement.

**What's the difference between Earth Hour and Earth Day?**

Whereas Earth Hour stands as a climate change initiative where people reduce their electricity usage, Earth Day (April 22) celebrates our natural environment by inspiring people to plant trees, recycle regularly and keep the planet tidy.

**Why do we need earth hour?**

Global warming and climate change have dominated the scientific discourse in the past more than one decade. With ever rising population of the world, the climate change has put the humankind at a great risk along with other species.

- Global warming, rising levels of pollution due to ever increasing industrialisation, declining forest cover and rising sea levels are some of the dangers that drastically affect the workings of life on the earth.
- Though the largest polluters are big industries, the WWF tries to make the masses more and more aware about the impending dangers of adverse climate so that they could put pressure on the respective governments to frame environment-friendly policies and laws.
- With Earth Hour, the WWF aims to engage people across the globe to adopt more sustainable lifestyle. Turning off lights for an hour is just an annual reminder that if the world does not mend its ways, it will be heading to a dark age, literally.

**AWASH IN WATER CRISES**

Recently released United Nations World Water Development Report, 2018 stressed upon Nature based solutions to address many of the world's water challenges. These solutions are also aligned with the aims of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Report also says that Business-as-usual approaches to water security are no longer viable.

**UN World Water Development Report**

The United Nations World Water Development Report (WWDR) is a global report that provides a comprehensive assessment of the world's freshwater resources.



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It is produced annually by the World Water Assessment Programme and released by UN-Water.

The Report examines the ways that the world's water resources are being managed and the varied water problems that different regions of the world are experiencing. The Report also offers recommendations on how freshwater resources could be managed more sustainably. The topic of this year's report is "Nature-based Solutions for Water".

### **The world's water: challenges**

The world's population is expected to increase to nearly 10 billion people by 2050, with two-thirds of them living in cities. The global demand for water has been increasing at a rate of about 1% per year over the past decades as a function of population growth, economic development and changing consumption patterns.

Industrial and domestic demand for water will increase much faster. An estimated 80% of industrial and municipal wastewater is released without any prior treatment, with harmful impacts on human health and ecosystems. The global water cycle is intensifying due to climate change, with wetter regions generally becoming wetter and drier regions becoming even drier.

Ecosystem degradation is a leading cause of increasing water resources management challenges. Urbanisation, de-forestation, intensification of agriculture has further added to the existing water challenges. The International Water Management Institute estimates that total demand could increase from 680 billion cubic metres (BCM) to 833 BCM by 2025 and to 900 BCM by 2050.

India also faces major threats to its water security, with most water bodies near urban centres heavily polluted. A Central Pollution Control Board report indicates that almost half of India's inter-State rivers are polluted. Inter-State disputes over river resources are also becoming more intense and widespread.

### **How can Nature-based solutions address water challenges?**

Goal 6 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognises the importance of sustainable management of water and sanitation. Nature-based solutions are essential to meet this goal.

Nature-based solutions (NBS) are supported by nature and use natural processes to contribute to the improved management of water. An NBS can involve conserving or rehabilitating natural ecosystems and can be applied both at micro and macro levels. NBS support a circular economy that is restorative and regenerative by design and promotes greater resource productivity. NBS aims to reduce waste and avoid pollution, including through reuse and recycling.

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Green infrastructure for water refers to the natural systems that provide water resources management is the application of NBS. Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) is the application of a nature-based approach for managing the global climate. NBS also offer opportunities to reduce conflicts between sectors over water use through improved system performance.

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### **Different types of NBS solutions**

Natural methods like reforestation and forest conservation, reconnecting rivers to flood plains, wetland restoration and water harvesting will regulate the water supply.

- Agricultural systems that conserve ecosystem services by using practices such as conservation tillage, crop diversification, legume intensification and biological pest control.
- The environmental co-benefits of nature-based solutions decrease pressures on land conversion and reduced pollution, erosion and water requirements.
- Constructed wetlands for wastewater treatment can also be a cost-effective and provides adequate supply of water for irrigation and additional benefits that include energy production.
- Natural and constructed wetlands also biodegrade or immobilise a range of emerging pollutants.
- Watershed management is another nature-based solution that will spur local economic development, job creation, biodiversity protection and climate resilience.
- NBS for addressing water availability in urban settlements are of great importance. . Managing water flows through urban landscapes can improve water resources availability.
- Catchment management outside urban areas, improved recycling of water within urban water cycles, green infrastructure within urban boundaries are some of the Nature based solutions for improving water resources availability.

### **In conclusion**

Nature-based solutions are closely aligned with traditional and local knowledge including those held by indigenous and tribal peoples in the context of water variability and change.

Effective NBS require Intersectoral collaboration, for example between those working with water management, agriculture, forestry, urban planning, and ecological protection.

Harmonizing multiple policy areas at global, international, national, provincial and local scales is a key need for sustainable development. NBS offer a means to operationalize policy across scales. NBS applications need to be based less on generalized assumptions, and better assessed and designed specifically for local applications.

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### **OKHLA BIRD SANCTUARY:**

Foundation Stone for Redevelopment And Upgradation of Okhla Bird Sanctuary was recently laid.

#### **Details**

- Okhla Bird Sanctuary is located close to New Delhi and is one of the 467 Important Bird Areas (IBA) of the country and is home to a large number of resident, as well as migratory birds like grey-headed fish eagle, Baikal teal, Baer's pochard and Sarus crane.
- It is home to 32 species of reptiles, 7 species of amphibians and 186 plant species.
- Okhla Bird Sanctuary, belonging to the State of Uttar Pradesh, has an area of 400 ha, out of which 120 ha falls within the National Capital Region of Delhi.

### **LOKTAK LAKE**

A floating laboratory has been introduced to save the Loktak lake. Researchers in a custom motorboat monitor levels of pollution in the 300 sq km water body.

**Concerns:** Rising urbanisation and land-use change over the years has seen the Loktak Lake, the largest in the northeast, become a dump-yard for the city's municipal waste, ranging from plastic refuse to chemical runoff from farming. This worsens during years of floods.

**About Loktak lake:** Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, and is famous for the phumdis (heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matter at various stages of decomposition) floating over it. It has first of its kind loktak floating elementary school. Located on this phumdi, Keibul Lamjao National Park is the only floating national park in the world. The park is the last natural refuge of the endangered Sangai (state animal).

### **SECURITY CHALLENGES**

#### **ENEMY PROPERTIES**

The government has initiated the process of sale of more than 9,400 enemy properties by issuing guidelines and directing the office of the custodian to submit the list of all such movable and immovable assets within three months.

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The sale of enemy properties is expected to fetch around Rs 1 lakh crore for the government exchequer.

The move comes after the amendment of the Enemy Property (Amendment and Validation) Act 2017 and the Enemy Property (Amendment) Rules, 2018, which ensured that the heirs of those who migrated to Pakistan and China during partition and afterwards will have no claim over the properties left behind in India.

**Backgrounder:**

There are 9,280 properties left behind by Pakistani nationals and 126 properties which belonged to Chinese nationals.

**What are enemy properties?**

When wars broke out between India and China in 1962, and India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, the central government took over properties of citizens of China and Pakistan in India under the Defence of India Acts. These Acts defined an 'enemy' as a country that committed an act of aggression against India, and its citizens.

The properties of enemies in India were classified as enemy property. The properties included land, buildings, shares held in companies, gold and jewellery of the citizens of enemy countries. The responsibility of the administration of enemy properties was handed over to the Custodian of Enemy Property, an office under the central government.

**Enemy properties Act:**

- After the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, the Enemy Property Act was enacted in 1968, which regulates such properties and lists the custodian's powers.
- The government amended the Act in the wake of a claim laid by the heirs of Raja Mohammad Amir Mohammad Khan, known as Raja of Mahmudabad, on his properties spread across Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.
- The government has vested these properties in the Custodian of Enemy Property for India, an office instituted under the Central government.

**DRAFT POLICY ON DEFENCE PRODUCTION**

The defence ministry has come out with a draft policy on defence production. The aim is to make India one of the top five manufacturers of defence platforms with active participation of public and private sectors. At present, India is one of the world's largest importer of military platforms and weapons.

**Highlights of the policy:**

- It envisages achieving a turnover of Rs 1,70,000 crore in military goods and services by 2025 by promoting the domestic defence industry.
- The policy lists as a major aim achieving export of Rs 35,000 crore in military equipment and services by 2025 by promoting the domestic defence industry.

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- According to the policy, the government aims to make India self-reliant in defence production as well as fulfil demand of other friendly countries.
- The policy says the licensing process for defence industries will be liberalised and the list of items requiring licences will be reviewed and pruned.
- The policy says the tax regime will be rationalised to make domestic manufacturing attractive by ensuring that there is no tax inversion. Taxes on import of capital goods and services, inputs and components used in defence production will be rationalised.
- The government identified 12 military platforms and weapons systems for production in India to achieve the aim of “self-reliance”. They are fighter aircraft, medium lift and utility helicopters, warships, land combat vehicles, missile systems, gun systems, small arms, ammunition and explosives, surveillance systems, electronic warfare (EW) systems and night fighting enablers, among others.

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### **VARUNA-18**

#### **What is it?**

It is the Indo-French joint naval exercise, held in the Arabian Sea off the Goa coast.

#### **Details**

The Indian Navy and the French Navy have been conducting naval exercises since 1983. These exercises were christened as “Varuna” in 2001. The last edition of the exercise was conducted off the French coast last year.

### **ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT (AFSPA). 1958**

The government has informed the Lok Sabha that it was considering a proposal to make the AFSPA Act more “operationally effective and humane.” The AFSPA is in force in several northeastern States. The decision came after the Home Ministry decided to reduce the number of Central Armed Police Force personnel deployed in the northeastern States.

#### **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”.

#### **What are ‘disturbed’ areas?**

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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.

**How is a region declared 'disturbed'?**

Section (3) of the Afspa empowers the governor of the state or Union territory to issue an official notification in The Gazette of India, following which the Centre has the authority to send in armed forces for civilian aid. Once declared 'disturbed', the region has to maintain status quo for a minimum of three months, according to The Disturbed Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1976."

**What is state government's role?**

The state governments can suggest whether the act is required to be enforced or not. But under Section (3) of the act, their opinion can be overruled by the governor or the Centre.

**What are the arguments for Afspa?**

The army is opposed to the withdrawal of Afspa. Many argue that removal of the act will lead to demoralising the armed forces and see militants motivating locals to file lawsuits against the army.

**What do detractors say?**

Critics say the undemocratic act has failed to contain terrorism and restore normalcy in disturbed areas, as the number of armed groups has gone up after the act was established. Many even hold it responsible for the spiralling violence in areas it is in force.

The justice Jeevan Reddy Committee was set up in 2005 to review Afspa and make recommendations. It recommended that Afspa should be repealed and the Unlawful Activities Protection Act strengthened to fight militancy. However, no steps were taken to repeal or reform the act.

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