

GENERAL STUDIES-1

INDIAN CULTURE

UNESCO'S 'CREATIVE CITIES NETWORK'

Why in news?

Chennai has been included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for its rich musical tradition. Jaipur and Varanasi are the other Indian cities that feature on the list.

What's the network about?

Created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

Objective:

The 180 cities which currently make up this network work together towards a common objective: placing creativity and cultural industries at the heart of their development plans at the local level and cooperating actively at the international level.

KAMBALA

Why in news?

The Supreme Court has refused to pass an interim stay on the Ordinance allowing kambala. However, the apex court has agreed to examine the Constitutional validity of the Ordinance.

The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), a non-governmental organisation, had challenged the Ordinance.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Kambala:

Kambala in its traditional form is non-competitive with buffalo pairs made to race one after another in paddy fields (Slush track), which is considered a thanksgiving to the Gods for protecting the animals from diseases.



A Controversial event, now

The non-competitive sport has become more organized over the years. The animal rights activists claim that the buffaloes run in the race due to fear of being beaten, which the organizers dismiss, saying no violence is involved and that several modifications had been made to ensure that it is an animal friendly event.

KRISHNA SOBTI GETS JNANPITH AWARD

Noted writer of Hindi literature Krishna Sobti will be conferred with the country's highest literary honour, Jnanpith Award this year in 2017.



Jnanpith awards:

The Jnanpith Award is one of the prestigious literary honours in the country. The award was instituted in 1961.

Eligibility: Any Indian citizen who writes in any of the official languages of India is eligible for the honour.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

UNESCO AWARD FOR SRIRANGAM TEMPLE

The Sri Ranganathaswamy temple at Srirangam has bagged an award of merit from Unesco for protecting and conserving cultural heritage, thus becoming the first temple from Tamil Nadu, as also in the whole of South India, to grab the prestigious honour from the UN body.

The temple was lauded by the international body for undertaking renovation and beautification work without harming its centuries-old heritage.



Other monuments

The famous Christ Church in Mumbai and Royal Bombay Opera House are the other historic Indian monuments that received the Award of Merit this year, in addition to the temple.

About the award:

Launched in 2000, Unesco Asia-Pacific awards for cultural heritage conservation programme is aimed at acknowledging the efforts taken to restore and conserve historical structures without affecting their heritage value in the region comprising 48 countries.

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2nd Nov to 12th Nov

POLITY, GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND POLICIES

CAUVERY TRIBUNAL EXTENSION

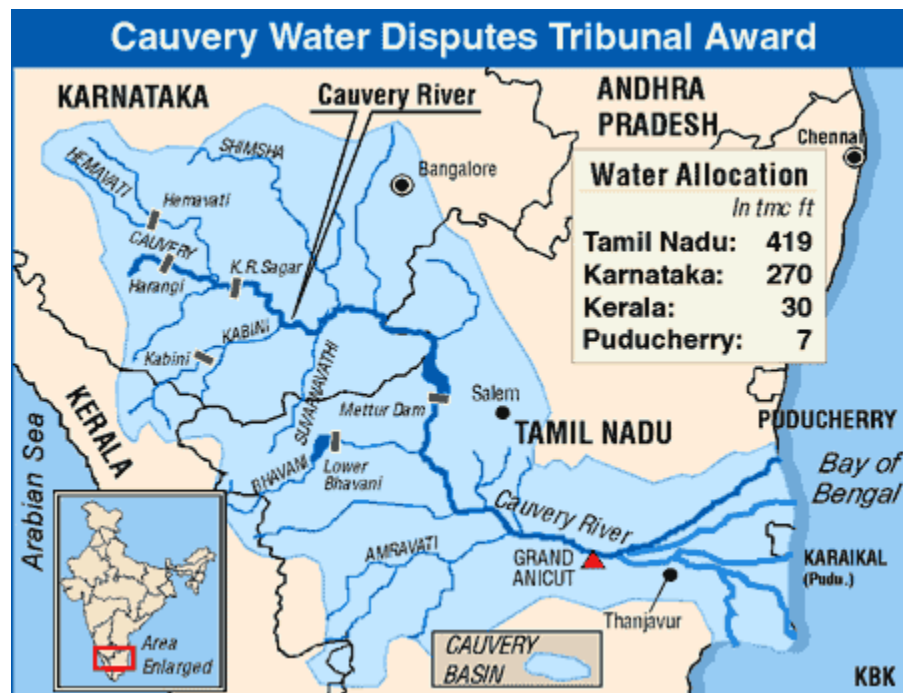
The term of Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) has been extended by 6 months by the Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

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About CWDT

Cauvery is an inter-state basin having its origin in Karnataka and flowing through Tamil Nadu and Puducherry before it flows into Bay of Bengal. The sharing of waters of the Cauvery has been the source of a serious conflict between the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

In this regard, Government of India in June 1990 constituted the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal (CWDT) to adjudicate the water dispute regarding inter-state river Cauvery and the river valley thereof among the States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala and Puducherry.



Constitutional provisions:

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River waters use / harnessing is included in state list. However, union government can make laws on regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys in the public interest.

Whenever the riparian states are not able to reach amicable agreements on their own in sharing of an interstate river waters, The Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (IRWD Act) provides dispute resolution process in the form of Tribunal.

- ✓ In case the constitutional rights of states are ingressed upon by the tribunal award in any manner, the central government for extending purview of its enactment to implement the tribunal order, is obliged to take the consent of all riparian states under Article 252 of the constitution before publishing the tribunal awards in the official gazette.

Powers of the tribunal:

As per the Act, the tribunal shall not only adjudicate but also investigate the matters referred to it by the central government and forward a report setting out the facts with its decisions.

- When the tribunal's final verdict is issued and accepted by the central government and notified in the official gazette, the verdict becomes law and binding on the states for implementation.
- The tribunal's verdict after its publication in the official gazette is

IRWD Act:

The Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (IRWD Act) is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted under Article 262 of Constitution to resolve the water disputes that would arise in the use, control and distribution of an interstate river or river valley.

Article 262 of the Indian Constitution provides a role for the Central government in adjudicating conflicts surrounding inter-state rivers that arise among the state/regional governments.

Recently, a Permanent water dispute tribunal, with its members from sitting judges of Supreme Court or High courts, has been proposed to resolve the growing number of interstate river water disputes expeditiously.

equivalent to Supreme Court verdict as per IRWD Act.

NATIONAL GREEN TRIBUNAL

Why in news?

The National Green Tribunal has issued a slew of directions to the Delhi Government to deal with the situation in Delhi, including banning construction and industrial activities and entry of trucks, over the worsening air quality in Delhi and neighbouring states.

A brief Backgrounder

The national capital is experiencing 'severe' air quality, as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), under a blanket of thick haze, as pollution levels have breached the permissible standards by multiple times.

National Green Tribunal (NGT)

NGT has been established under the National Green Tribunal Act 2010 for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.

Ambit: The tribunal deals with matters relating to the enforcement of any legal right relating to environment and giving relief and compensation for damages to persons and property.

Powers

- The Tribunal is not bound by the procedure laid down under the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, but shall be guided by principles of natural justice.
- The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide speedy environmental justice and help reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.
- The Tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of filing of the same.

Composition

Sanctioned strength: Presently, 10 expert members and 10 judicial members (although the act allows for up to 20 of each).

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Chairman is the administrative head of the tribunal, also serves as a judicial member and is required to be a serving or retired Chief Justice of a High Court or a judge of the Supreme Court of India.

Selection

Members are chosen by a selection committee (headed by a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India) that reviews their applications and conducts interviews. The Judicial members are chosen from applicants who are serving or retired judges of High Courts.

Expert members are chosen from applicants who are either serving or retired bureaucrats not below the rank of an Additional Secretary to the Government of India (not below the rank of Principal Secretary if serving under a state government) with a minimum administrative experience of five years in dealing with environmental matters. Or, the expert members must have a doctorate in a related field.

EXPEDITE THE TRIALS

The SC asked the Centre whether the March 10, 2014 order to complete the trial in all cases related to sitting MLAs and MPs within a year's time had been complied with or not.

Details

The Supreme Court asked the government to frame a central scheme for setting up special courts across the country to exclusively try criminal cases involving 'political persons.'

The Centre has written to the chief ministers and chief justices of high courts to fix responsibility on district administrations to expedite probe and trial of MPs and MLAs facing charges for serious crimes.

- If for some extraordinary circumstances, the court concerned is not able to conclude the trial within one year from the date of framing of charges, such court shall submit a report to the CJs of high courts indicating reasons for not adhering to the time limit.
- While the trial in cases against MPs/MLAs has to be completed within a year, the investigating officer and the senior

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superintendent of police may be held personally responsible for any lapse and may be liable for disciplinary proceedings for non-compliance.

Significance:

- If such trials are delayed, he or she would have served as a minister or legislator several times over.
- It is a determined effort to cleanse politics of criminality and corruption
- It will make the criminal justice system more responsive and effective.

The law ministry has already started an e-court expansion project and very soon all cases related to undertrials shall be available on the click of a mouse that would help the higher authorities take action against any authority which may be responsible for delay in trial.

NO SOLUTION UNDER THE SHADOW OF THE GUN

Context

The special representative or the interlocutor will initiate dialogue in Kashmir on what led to unrest in the Valley and will be delineating recommendations for the way forward.

Why was this necessary?

J & K Valley's prolonged anti-India protest; rising insurgency in Kashmir, intense counter- insurgency operation has caused acute distress in the region. A political outreach has been suggested for long to prevent radicalisation of the local youth, which is the topmost concern for the Indian security establishment.

It is now clear that we can neither by bullet nor by abuses but only by an embrace can we solve the problem of Kashmir

Mandate of Interlocutor:

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Having a rank equivalent to a Cabinet Secretary and complete independence in deciding who to hold talks with, he is likely to hold talks with mainstream local political workers of various parties, heads of various religious seminaries in the Valley, local student unions etc.

He would try to know how things are panning out on the ground for and against India and try to understand the legitimate aspirations of the people of the state.

Centre's intention

The interlocutor will initiate a 'sustained interaction and dialogue to understand the legitimate aspirations of the wide cross sections of society, particularly the youth in Jammu and Kashmir and communicate them to the state government and the Centre.

The government is in no hurry to talk to the separatists and would like to approach the Kashmiri people directly through various other organisations. The focus is on bringing permanent peace in the Kashmir Valley.

On-going security operations

The number of operations have escalated to the highest in the past seven years. The actions of security forces are there to counter the actions of terrorists or armed groups. These operations also contribute to peace but a more permanent solution can only be brought about by dialogue.

Causes for escalation of unrest

Radicalisation played a major role, though its impact was felt in other parts of the country as well, as several men were arrested for being inspired by the Islamic State.

- Brainwashing via the Internet is another factor.
- Radicalisation targeted the Poor and Unemployed youth, who are more vulnerable

The situation has been under close watch and the govt has taken several steps to ensure that the youth don't fall prey to such propaganda.

Tread cautiously

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It is imperative for the guns of terrorists to fall silent. At the same time, Security forces should not harass ordinary Kashmiris. They should not be targeting innocent people. Instead, security forces should have the confidence of the people living in the State.

Previously appointed interlocutors

This is the 4th time an interlocutor has been appointed, since 2000.

- In the 1st case, the Hurriyat Conference played spoilsport with its demand for getting Pakistan also part of the talks.
- In the 2nd instance, it was pretty much the repetition of the old story but managed to get the moderates of the Hurriyat for talks but they were not fruitful.
- The immediate predecessor (third one) was appointed in 2010 which was a three-member committee headed by Dileep Padgaonkar. It suggested in its final report in 2012 among other steps to review AFSPA, talks with Hurriyat and setting up of the constitutional committee. The government has not yet taken any decisions on the report. Incidentally, the separatists stayed away from talks with the panel also.

In conclusion

Contentious legacy issues have to be sidelined by the interlocutor in order to bring all stakeholders to the table. First, issues on which consensus can be built easily should be taken up. Later on, ironing out strategies for successful resolution of contentious issues can be considered.

WELFARE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS

SHE-BOX

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

SHe-Box is an online complaint Management System for women working in both public and private organizations to lodge complaints of sexual harassment at workplace.

Objective

To ensure the effective implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (the SH Act), 2013.

Operation

Once a complaint is submitted to the portal, it will be directly sent to the Internal complaint Committee (ICC)/ Local Complaint Committee (LCC) of the concerned employer. Through this portal, the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare as well as complainant can monitor the progress of inquiry conducted by the ICC/LCC.

Details

It offers the facility of making online complaints at workplace to all women employees in the country including government and private employees.

- Those who have already filed a written complaint with the concerned ICC or LCC are also eligible to file their complaint through this portal.
- SHe-Box will also provide a platform to various empanelled institutes/organisations to share their capacity building activities with the Ministry, which in turn will be able to monitor the activities of these institutes/organizations so empanelled from across the country.

ISLAND DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Why in news?

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Second meeting of Island Development Agency (IDA) was chaired by the Union Home Minister. The Island Development Agency reviewed the concept development plans and detailed master plans for holistic development of 09 islands – four in A&N Islands i.e. Smith, Ross, Long, Avis and five in Lakshadweep i.e. Minicoy, Bangaram, Thinnakara, Cheriya, Suheli

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What is IDA?

The IDA was set up on June 1 this year. The meetings of the agency are chaired by the Union Home Minister.

Composition:

Members of the IDA include cabinet secretary, home secretary, secretary (environment, forests and climate change), secretary (tourism) and secretary (tribal welfare).

NATIONAL RURAL DRINKING WATER PROGRAMME

Why in news?

The Central govt. gave an approval for continuation and restructuring of National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) to make it outcome-based, competitive and better monitored with increased focus on sustainability (functionality). This is in the view to ensure good quality service delivery to the rural population. The programme will cover all the Rural Population across the country.

Conception: 2009

Funding: Centrally Sponsored Scheme with 50: 50 fund sharing between the Centre and the States.

The aim and objective

To provide every rural person with adequate safe water for drinking, cooking and other basic domestic needs on a sustainable basis, with a minimum water quality standard, which should be conveniently accessible

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at all times and in all situations. Achieving this aim and objective is a continuous process.

NATIONAL TESTING AGENCY (NTA)

Backgrounder

The Union budget of 2017-18 had made an announcement to create an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct entrance examinations for higher educational institutions. Accordingly, the Union Cabinet has approved creation of National Testing Agency (NTA) as a Society registered under the Indian Societies Registration Act, 1860.

Important details

The NTA would initially conduct those entrance examinations which are currently being conducted by the CBSE.

- The entrance examinations will be conducted in online mode at least twice a year, thereby giving adequate opportunity to candidates to bring out their best.
- In order to serve the requirements of the rural students, it would locate the centres at sub-district/district level and as far as possible would undertake hands-on training to the students.

Composition

NTA will be chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by MHRD.

- The CEO will be the Director General to be appointed by the Government.
- There will be a Board of Governors comprising members from user institutions.

Significance

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It will relieve CBSE, AICTE and other agencies from responsibility of conducting these entrance examinations, and also bring in high reliability, standardized difficulty level for assessing the aptitude, intelligence and problem solving abilities of the students.

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“PEOPLE FIRST” CAMPAIGN

Organizing agency: Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA)

What is it about?

These are State specific Atal Pension Yojana (APY) mobilization Campaigns to increase APY outreach.

APY

The Atal Pension Yojana became operational from 2015 and is available to all the citizens of India in the age group of 18-40 years.

Significant features

Under the scheme, a subscriber would receive a minimum guaranteed pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, depending upon his contribution, from the age of 60 years.

The same pension would be paid to the spouse of the subscriber and on the demise of both the subscriber and the spouse, the accumulated pension wealth is returned to the nominee.

Contribution

The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.

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NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TEACHER EDUCATION (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2017

Why in news?

Cabinet gave its approval for introduction of the National Council for Teacher Education (Amendment) Bill, 2017 in Parliament which will amend the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) Act, 1993.

NCTE Act, 1993

The NCTE Act, 1993 envisages setting up of NCTE to achieve planned and coordinated development of teacher education system, regulation and ensure proper maintenance of norms and standards. Further, the act recognizes teacher education courses and lays down guidelines for compliance by recognized Institutions/Universities

Amendment features

- ✓ The amendment will ensure that students studying in these Institutions/Universities, or already passed out from here, find employment as teacher.
- ✓ The amendment will grant retrospective recognition to all such Central/State/Universities which were found to be conducting teacher education courses without NCTE permission.
- ✓ This retrospective recognition is being given only as a onetime measure so as to not to jeopardize the future of students who have either passed out or are enrolled in these institutions.
- ✓ All institutions running Teacher Education Courses such as B.Ed. and D.Ed. have to obtain recognition from the National Council for Teacher Education.

ALL ABOUT TB

Why in news?

WHO's Global Tuberculosis Report 2017 (published since 1997) posits India to have stood out as a country in which the budget for TB was

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substantially increased in 2017. It also mentions political commitment from the Prime Minister to the goal of ending TB by 2025.

A major cause of concern

TB is the ninth leading cause of death worldwide and the leading cause from a single infectious agent, ranking above HIV/AIDS.

Caused by: Bacillus Mycobacterium tuberculosis.

Spread

It typically affects the lungs (pulmonary TB) but can also affect other sites. The disease is spread when people who are sick with pulmonary TB expel bacteria into the air, for example by coughing. Without treatment, the mortality rate from TB is high.

Other factors

Broader influences on the TB epidemic include levels of poverty, HIV infection, under nutrition and smoking.

Diagnostic tests for TB disease include – Rapid molecular test, Sputum smear microscopy, Culture-based methods

Multi Drug-resistant TB(MDR-TB)

The bacteria that cause tuberculosis (TB) can develop resistance to the antimicrobial drugs used to cure the disease.

Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) is TB that does not respond to at least isoniazid and rifampicin, the 2 most powerful anti-TB drugs.

Ending TB

From 2000 to 2015, global and national efforts to reduce the burden of tuberculosis (TB) disease were focused on achieving targets set within the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) established by United Nations. In 2016, the MDGs were succeeded by a new set of goals, known as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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- The consolidated goal on **health is SDG 3**. One of these targets, explicitly mentions TB.
- The 2030 targets are a 90% reduction in TB deaths and an 80% reduction in the TB incidence rate, compared with levels in 2015
- Two new TB drugs, bedaquiline and delamanid, have already received accelerated or conditional regulatory approval based on trial results and is now in next stage trials.

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What is needed?

Provision of TB care and prevention within the broader context of universal health coverage. A multi-sectoral action to address the social and economic determinants and consequences of TB. A host of technological breakthroughs by 2025 so that incidence can fall faster than rates achieved historically.

Status of TB in India as per Global tuberculosis report, 2017

India registered a slight drop in the number of new tuberculosis cases and TB deaths in 2016 compared with 2015.

- ✓ India still continues to be the largest contributor to the global burden with up to a quarter of the 6.3 million new cases of TB (up from 6.1 million in 2015).
- ✓ Funding Source to tackle TB: 74% domestic funding and 26% international funding.
- ✓ More men above the age of 15 suffer from TB than women.

Issues of concern

The government has committed to achieve a '*90-90-90 target*' by 2035 (*90% reductions in incidence, mortality and catastrophic health expenditures due to TB*).

However, much work needs to be done on improving diagnostics, shorter treatment courses, a better vaccine and comprehensive preventive strategies.

- Improvement in case notifications has to be seen. Though notification was made mandatory in 2012, multiple surveys and surveillance data still show large under-reporting of detected TB cases, especially in the private sector.

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- Top-line drugs are still inadequate to treat people who suffer from the drug-resistant forms of the disease. The number of estimated multi-drug-resistant TB cases increased marginally.
- For the first time, steps have been taken to offer preventive TB treatment to a small (5%) number of people who are HIV-positive
- The surveillance systems remain inadequate.

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In conclusion

Efforts are on for new diagnostics, drugs, treatment regimens and vaccines, but the progress is slow. Increased investment in research and development is needed for there to be any chance of achieving the technological breakthroughs needed by 2025.

WORLD CONGRESS OF MENTAL HEALTH

Where? New Delhi, for the first time in India

Indian scenario in mental health

Our National Mental Health Survey 2016 found that close to 14 per cent of India's population required active mental health interventions. About two per cent suffered from severe mental disorders.

Biggest obstacle that mental health patients have to encounter is stigma and denial. This leads to the issue being ignored or simply not discussed.

A second biggest obstacle is that of human resources. There are only about five thousand psychiatrists and less than two thousand clinical psychologists in our country.

How to deal with this?

India's National Mental Health Programme is building 22 centres of excellence in the field of mental health. The District Mental Health Programme has already covered over 500 districts across the country.

We need to talk about mental health issues and treat ailments such as depression and stress as diseases that can be cured

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- To spread awareness, it is important to build partnerships between the public and private sectors and between the government and civil society organisations.
- It would also be valuable to stitch together community support networks.
- As the World Congress showed, it is helpful if concerned institutions organise sessions on yoga, meditation and traditional approaches to mental health. It will tap into our wealth of traditional knowledge and link it's learning to modern research on mental health. This will promote a holistic approach to mental health-care and can combine the best of different fields of practice.
- Information Technology and telemedicine are also coming of aid. Such technologies are linking doctors and counsellors in cities to mental health patients in rural areas. As Internet penetration expands in our country, this holds much potential.

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INDIA AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA AND BHUTAN: "INDIVISIBLE AND MUTUAL"

The face-off between India and China was a result of China's refusal to call back Chinese military building a road on the plateau in Bhutanese territory. Indian troops—stationed in the area under a special security pact between India and Bhutan—intervened. The Chinese road construction plans also had India worried because Beijing could cut off the Indian mainland's access to its northeastern states.

The reciprocal relationship

India and Bhutan enjoy unique ties of friendship, which are characterized by deep understanding and mutual trust.

- Bhutan is also key for India's plans to push subregional cooperation. It will help accelerate regional integration within BIMSTEC

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- A transport agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal was mooted in 2014 but is yet to take shape given Bhutan's worries about the impact of pollution and loss of businesses if trucks and cars from India, Bangladesh and Nepal roll into the country.
- The Himalayan country has a hydel power potential of 30,000 megawatt (MW) of which 23,000MW can be tapped. India is involved in developing a number of hydel power projects in Bhutan already and is keen to deepen the cooperation.

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Importance of Bhutanese's stance

Recently, the Bhutan King's personal and active role in ending Doklam issue was endorsed.

It is a signal that Bhutan's India first policy is intact against the backdrop of China trying to make inroads into a country seen as firmly within India's sphere of influence in South Asia. It is significant as it seeks to end speculation over India's decision to send troops into land caught in a dispute between Bhutan and China. It signals a tacit endorsement of India's actions during the Doklam crisis, as well as a reaffirmation of ties.

THE 'QUADRILATERAL' MEETING

India responded in a positive tone to Japan's move to include Delhi in a Quadrilateral dialogue with U.S., Australia.

This marks a significant turn in its policy for the subcontinent by accepting an invitation to join the Japan-proposed, U.S.-endorsed plan for a "Quadrilateral" grouping to provide alternative debt financing for countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Reviving the quad

The idea of Quad was conceived by Japan for Asian democracies to join forces in 2006. The call emphasised the shared values of freedom and democracy amongst the nations

Abe hoped that an India-Japan strategic partnership will help construct a "broader Asia", which could integrate US and Australia. This grouping

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would evolve an immense network to allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely.

New Delhi, however, seemed reluctant and was content with trilateral engagement with the US and Japan at one forum, and with Australia and Japan at another. The current Indian government has changed its stance and signalled little more flexibility to the Japanese proposal to revive the quad.

China's response

When proposal came for the first time, Beijing has attacked it as the first step towards the formation of an "Asian NATO". The proposal was seen by China as an attempt to counter its influence in the region.

Impact analysis

It is necessary that India analyse the impact of this admission on all our relations. Because,

1. As a growing economy with ambitious domestic targets, India's own needs often clash with those of its neighbours.

Even as Indian and Chinese troops were facing off at Doklam on land claimed by Bhutan, a very different sort of tension regarding its external debt was claiming the attention of the government in Thimphu. Its government report points out that construction delays, mainly due to Indian construction issues, were taking the debt up higher.

2. *'India's big game hunting attitude'*: "India chases its neighbours to cooperate on various projects, but once they have 'bagged the game', it forgets its neighbours. As a result, crises grow until they can no longer be ignored, and the hunt begins again."

Over the past decade, since the defeat of the LTTE, India passed up offers to build the port in Hambantota, Colombo. With the U.S. and other Western countries taking strident positions over human rights issues and the reconciliation process, and with India supporting them, Chinese companies stepped in and won these projects.

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This year, the government decided to bid for the *Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport at Hambantota* and a *flight training school at Mattala*. India is also hoping to win the bid to develop *Trincomalee port*.

3. India has also been ambivalent on tackling political issues in its region, often trapped between the interventionist approach championing concerns over 'democratic values' and human rights in Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bangladesh, and the approach of building a strong, strategic and economic backyard.
 - In Nepal, India lost out to China when it allowed a five-month-long blockade at the border, calling for a more inclusive constitution to be implemented by Kathmandu
 - In the case of Myanmar, it lost precious ground in Bangladesh when PM refused to mention the Rohingya refugee situation during a visit to Nay Pyi Taw.

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Geopolitical outlook

In Sri Lanka, the U.S. and Japan will now partner with India to counter China's influence. While India has been objecting to Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean, it will not be able to do so with U.S. naval warships and Japanese presence there.

The emergence of new players like the U.S., Europe and Japan has increased regional rivalries. This does partly benefit India in terms of finances but this should not come at the cost of India's leverage in its own backyard.

In conclusion

From Indian perspective, India must demonstrate the will to influence geopolitical outcomes in Asia and beyond. The willingness to participate in the quad is a good start in this regard. There is no doubt that the construction of Quad will face many challenges, given the deep divisions in all countries on how best to deal with China. Yet, India's engagement suggests that India is now confident enough to embark on complex geopolitical engaging in Asia.

AVOIDANCE OF DOUBLE TAXATION

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Why in news?

The Indian govt. is all set to enter into an Agreement with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of China for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion.

What's the need?

Such an agreement would stimulate the flow of investment, technology and personnel from India to HKSAR & vice versa, prevent double taxation and provide for exchange of information, thereby improving transparency in tax matters.

Hong Kong is an autonomous territory in China. It is the world's fourth most densely populated country or territory. Under the principle of "one country, two systems", Hong Kong maintains a separate political and economic system from China. Except in military, defence and foreign affairs, Hong Kong maintains its independent executive, legislative and judiciary powers.

How DTAA's work?

A DTAA is a tax treaty signed between two or more countries. Its key objective is that tax-payers in these countries can avoid being taxed twice for the same income.

DTAAs are intended to make a country an attractive investment destination by providing relief on dual taxation. Such relief is provided by exempting income earned abroad from tax in the resident country or providing credit to the extent taxes have already been paid abroad. DTAAs also provide for concessional rates of tax in some cases.

A DTAA applies in cases where a tax-payer resides in one country and earns income in another. India has DTAAs with more than eighty countries

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

FATF PUTS PAKISTAN ON NOTICE

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti- money laundering watchdog has put Pakistan on notice for terror financing to groups such as LeT and JuD, notwithstanding opposition from China.

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The decision was taken at the recently held Buenos Aires plenary of the FATF, where India raised the issue of Pakistan's support for terror groups.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF)

It is an inter-governmental body established in 1989 on the initiative of the G7. It is a "policy-making body" which works to generate the necessary political will to bring about national legislative and regulatory reforms in various areas.

Objectives:

The objectives of the FATF are to set standards and promote effective implementation of legal, regulatory and operational measures for combating money laundering, terrorist financing and other related threats to the integrity of the international financial system.

What it does?

The FATF monitors the progress of its members in implementing necessary measures, reviews money laundering and terrorist financing techniques and counter-measures, and promotes the adoption and implementation of appropriate measures globally. In collaboration with other international stakeholders, the FATF works to identify national-level vulnerabilities with the aim of protecting the international financial system from misuse.

TPP WITHOUT US

Eleven Pacific Rim countries have reached a deal to proceed with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) deal for free trade, that was in doubt after the US President Donald Trump abandoned it.

What is TPP?

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Initially, twelve countries that border the Pacific Ocean signed up to the TPP in February 2016, representing roughly 40% of the world's economic output. The pact aimed to deepen economic ties between these nations, slashing tariffs and fostering trade to boost growth. Members had also hoped to foster a closer relationship on economic policies and regulation.

The agreement was designed so that it could eventually create a new single market, something like that of the EU.

Member states:

Japan, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore, Brunei, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Chile and Peru.

Why US is against this deal?

President Trump thinks such deals will hurt American workers and undercut US companies' profits. His stance on trade is protectionist: he has vowed to shield Americans from the effects of globalised trade by slapping hefty tariffs on cheap Chinese imports of up to 45%.

INDIAN CONTRIBUTION TO UN PARTNERSHIP FUND

With the zeal to support sustainable development projects across the developing world, India has pledged an additional USD 100 million towards the UN partnership fund.

India-UN Development Partnership Fund: This fund was set up as a partnership between India and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC). The UNOSSC manages the fund.

The fund supports transformational sustainable development projects across the developing world, with focusing on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States, by partnering with respective governments.

UNOSSC:

Aim: To promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system.

Hosted by: UNDP since 1974 and was established by the UN General Assembly

Functions: UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and it submits its strategic planning frameworks to the UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS for approval and funding.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Reducing poverty and hunger, improving health, education and equality, and expanding access to clean water and energy are amongst the Fund's interest areas.

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INTERNATIONAL ENERGY AGENCY (IEA)

Why in news?

The 2017 IEA Ministerial Meeting was recently held in Paris. The focus of the meeting was on global energy challenges and how they can be overcome.

What is IEA?

Founded in 1974, the IEA was initially designed to help countries co-ordinate a collective response to major disruptions in the supply of oil, such as the crisis of 1973/4. While this remains a key aspect of its work, the IEA has evolved and expanded significantly.

Four main areas

1. Energy Security by Promoting diversity, efficiency and reliability for all fuels and energy sources;
2. Economic Development by supporting free markets to foster economic growth and eliminate energy poverty;
3. Environmental Awareness by analysing policy options to offset the impact of energy production and use on the environment, especially for tackling climate change and air pollution; and
4. Working closely with partner countries, especially major emerging economies, to find solutions to shared energy and environmental concerns.

Functions:

- The IEA examines the full spectrum of energy issues including oil, gas and coal supply and demand, renewable energy technologies, electricity markets, energy efficiency, access to energy, demand side management and much more.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

- Through its work, the IEA advocates policies that will enhance the reliability, affordability and sustainability of energy in its member countries and beyond.

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GENERAL STUDIES-3

INDIAN ECONOMY

INSOLVENCY AND BANKRUPTCY BOARD OF INDIA (IBBI)

Why in news?

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has amended its Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process Regulations to ensure that some parameters- like creditworthiness, the antecedents, credibility of resolution applicant- are taken into consideration, prior to approval of a

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Resolution Plan by the Committee of Creditors. Only this would lead to a credible and viable Resolution Plan.

IBBI:

Set up under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (Code), it regulates a profession as well as transactions.

Functions:

1. It has regulatory oversight over the Insolvency Professionals, Insolvency Professional Agencies and Information Utilities.
2. It writes and enforces rules for transactions, namely, corporate insolvency resolution, corporate liquidation, individual insolvency resolution and individual bankruptcy under the Code.
3. It is a key pillar of the ecosystem responsible for implementation of the Code that consolidates and amends the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals.
4. This is done in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons, to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit and balance the interests of all the stakeholders.

Organizational structure

A ten-member board:

- One Chairperson.
- Three members from Central Government officers not below the rank of Joint Secretary or equivalent.
- One nominated member from the RBI.
- Five members nominated by the Central Government; of these, three shall be whole-time members.

PLOTTING SOCIAL PROGRESS

The scene after India got Independence was that of a country saddled with hunger and poverty. Today, India's accomplishments are recognised around the world, after being transformed into one of the fastest growing major economies.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Searching for a new measure

GDP is the measure on which we base the growth of economies. It has been so for the last 8 decades. However, GDP cannot, as a measure, capture our well-being.

A measure for quantifying the societal reach of this economic growth and well-being, across Indian states, still remains missing. Such a measure would surely aid in pinpointing the achievements and challenges in social progress.

Computing development and well-being is an on-going project. Introducing the Social Progress Index at the sub-national level can be a game changer

Approaches that go beyond GDP

- A. GINI coefficient which was introduced in 1912 by Corrado Gini and adopted by World Bank, and measures the income inequality among a country's citizens — but it fails to measure social benefits or interventions that reduce the gap or inequality between rich and poor.
- B. GNH (Gross National Happiness)
- C. HDI (Human Development Indicator)
- D. NITI Aayog has rolled out the health, education and water index.

The next stage in the measurement of well-being went into creating what is termed as the Social Progress Index (SPI). It goes beyond the traditional measure of GDP and has most parameters that are required to fulfil SDGs.

Social Progress Index:

The SPI begins by defining what it means to be a good society based around three dimensions.

1. Basic Human needs (Nutrition and Basic Medical care, Water and Sanitation, Shelter, Personal Safety)
2. Foundation of wellbeing (Access to basic knowledge, Access to info and Communication, Health and Wellness, Ecosystem sustainability)
3. Opportunity (Personal Rights, Personal freedom and choice, Tolerance and inclusion, Access to Advanced education)

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

It does not measure how much a country spends on health care; it measures the length and quality of people's lives. SPI focuses on outcomes rather than inputs that are used in GDP. It does not measure whether governments pass laws against discrimination; it measures whether people experience discrimination.

SPI can best be described as a complementary index to GDP and can be used along with GDP to achieve social progress.

Social Progress Index – 2017

The global Social Progress Index ranks India at the 93rd position. However, the country-level insights are not sufficient to devise a plan of action as the conditions vary significantly within the country. Therefore, a regional study is conducted. States are ranked using social and environmental indicators on the basis of

The study released by Institute for Competitiveness, India in collaboration with Social Progress Imperative is the first edition of a sub-national Social Progress Index for India.

Highlights

The overall social progress score for the country now stands at 57.03 (on a 0-100 scale), approximately eight points higher than in 2005. The country performs better in the provision of basic human needs rather than opportunities for its citizens.

Kerala emerges as the top performer by making remarkable progress across social indicators. Other states that demonstrate strong social progress performance include –Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and Goa.

- The top performers on social progress reveal that there are several ways to achieve world-class social progress, economic growth being one of them.
- Social progress over the period of eleven years has improved in every state. The group of states that have registered the highest

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

improvement are the ones that were categorized as Very Low Social Progress States in 2005.

In conclusion

Countries need to prioritize social progress in its development plan and see that it's not just growth alone, its growth with social progress.

SPI can bring substantial betterment in the policy discourse on development. With the move to getting it introduced at a sub-national level, the index is expected to help development practitioners and other stakeholders in analysing well-being in a better manner.

RBI EASES FEMA NORMS

Why in news?

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has simplified the Foreign Exchange Management Regulations, by putting all the amendments under one notification, a move that will significantly make it easier for foreign investors to invest in the country.

The new notification combines two regulations on foreign investments — one which is popularly called investment in an Indian company or a partnership, or in a limited liability partnership, or FEMA 20, and the

FEMA:

The Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 (FEMA) is an Act of the Parliament of India "to consolidate and amend the law relating to foreign exchange with the objective of facilitating external trade and payments and for promoting the orderly development and maintenance of foreign exchange market in India". It replaces the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA).

This act seeks to make offenses related to foreign exchange civil offenses. It enables a new foreign exchange management regime consistent with the emerging framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It also paved way to Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002, which is effective from 2005.

other — FEMA 24, which is investment in a partnership firm.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

NEW OUTSOURCING NORMS FOR NBFCs

Why in news?

New directions were issued by the RBI on managing risks and code of conduct in outsourcing of financial services by NBFCs.

What are these New directions?

- Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) cannot outsource core management functions like internal audit, strategic and compliance functions for know your customer (KYC) norms, sanction of loans and management of investment portfolio.
- Access to customer information by staff of the service provider shall be on 'need to know' basis
- NBFCs also have been asked to constitute a grievance redressal machinery with the name and contact details of the redressal officer displayed prominently at their branches.
- It shall be clearly indicated that NBFCs' grievance redressal machinery will also deal with the issue relating to services provided by the outsourced agency.
- NBFCs would also be responsible for making currency transaction reports and suspicious transactions reports to the financial intelligence unit for activities carried out by the service providers.

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What are NBFCs?

These are financial institutions that provide banking services without meeting the legal definition of a bank, i.e. one that does not hold a banking license.

The do's and don't's

These institutions typically(not always) are restricted from taking deposits from the public depending on the jurisdiction. Nonetheless, operations of these institutions are often still covered under a country's banking regulations.

- NBFC cannot accept demand deposits.
- NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on itself.
- Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

Who supervises them?

The Reserve Bank of India is entrusted with the responsibility of regulating and supervising them under Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

CENTRE PLANS TO SET UP MORE COMMERCIAL COURTS

The Union government has proposed to establish commercial courts in districts to further improve the ease of doing business parameters. Legal remedy to commercial disputes and enforcement of business contracts are amongst the parameters of the World Bank ranking.

India's performance has been varied within the legal framework. For example, the World Bank's ranking marked "court system and proceedings in India" being pretty high, but in management of cases, it scored lower. India also fared well in alternative dispute redress mechanism.

About commercial courts:

The Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts Act, 2015 envisages setting up commercial courts at the district level and commercial divisions

Commercial dispute

A commercial dispute is defined to include any dispute related to transactions between merchants, bankers, financiers, traders, etc. Such transactions deal with mercantile documents, partnership agreements, intellectual property rights, insurance, etc.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

and appellate divisions at the high court level. It seeks to completely transform the manner in which commercial cases are heard and tried in India.

Functions of various stakeholders:

All state governments have to ensure that adequate infrastructure is provided for commercial courts and commercial divisions so that modern methods like electronic filing and video conferencing can be implemented without delay.

Chief justices have the responsibility to set up commercial courts in various districts and by designating or setting up commercial divisions in the high courts, which also need to issue practice directions to implement the provisions of this Act.

GI TAG FOR ETIKOPPAKA TOYS

What are Etikoppaka toys?

Location: Andhra Pradesh

The Etikoppaka toys, popularly known as Lakkapidathalu, are not only popular in Andhra Pradesh but also gained their popularity all over the country and abroad over the years.

A problem

But this art form suffered a setback in the last decade. The exports to the US and Europe were stopped in 2007 when the importers insisted on GI certification and heavy metal analysis, both not in the hands of the villagers.

- The artisans are yet to get heavy metal analysis certificate for exporting to the US and European countries.
- Facing a new threat from dumping of identical Chinese wooden toys into the markets

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

BANAGANAPALLE MANGOES

Why in news?

They have been granted GI tag

Where are they found? Andhra Pradesh

GI tags given so far this year

1. Tulaipanji rice of West Bengal
2. Pochampally Ikat of Telangana
3. Gobindobhog rice of West Bengal
4. Durgi stone carvings of Andhra Pradesh
5. Etikoppaka toys of Andhra Pradesh
6. Chakshesang shawl of Nagaland.

GI tag:

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

Such a tag 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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AGRICULTURE AND CROPPING PATTERNS

RKVY-RAFTAAR EXTENDED TILL 2019-20

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) has extended the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY) as Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana – Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied sector Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR) for three years till 2019-20.

Objectives

It aims to make farming a remunerative economic activity through risk mitigation and promoting agribusiness entrepreneurship

- The scheme will incentivise states for increasing allocation to agriculture and allied sectors.
- This will also strengthen farmer's efforts through creation of agriculture infrastructure that will help in supply of quality inputs and market facilities.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

RKVY-RAFTAAR has sub-schemes with national priorities where outlays are made for administrative costs for innovation and agri-entrepreneur development through creating end-to-end solution, skill development and

Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana:

Launched in: 2007-08

Aim: To achieve 4% annual growth in agricultural sector by ensuring holistic development.

It has provided considerable flexibility and autonomy to states in planning and executing programmes for incentivizing investment in agriculture and allied sectors. It has also enabled adoption of national priorities without affecting autonomy and flexibility of states' availability of appropriate technology and natural resources.

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financial support for setting up the agri-enterprise.

WORLD FOOD INDIA 2017

What is it?

It is a three-day event, which is organised by the Food Processing Industries Ministry, will see investors, manufacturers, producers, food processors, policy makers and organisations from all over the world.

Aim: Facilitating participation between domestic and international businesses

Details

This is the first time that India is hosting such an event for the food processing sector.

The idea is to transform food economy and realize the vision of doubling of farmers' income by establishing India as a preferred investment destination and sourcing hub for the global food processing industry.

Why is it important?

India has geared up for a revolution in the food processing sector and it was clear that the global companies were eagerly looking towards India for collaboration. World Food India platform will strengthen India's

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

position as a global food factory and is a positive step towards making the country food secure.

India is expected to attract an investment of \$10 billion in food processing sector and generate one million jobs in the next three years.

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Schemes to achieve Doubling of Farmers' Income by 2022:

- Special focus on irrigation with sufficient budget, with the aim of "Per Drop More Crop".
- Provision of quality seeds and nutrients based on soil health card of each field.
- Large investments in Warehousing and Cold Chains to prevent post-harvest crop losses.
- Promotion of value addition through food processing.
- Creation of a National Farm Market, removing distortions and establishing e-platform.
- Introduction of a New Crop Insurance Scheme to mitigate risks at an affordable cost.
- Promotion of ancillary activities like poultry, beekeeping, and fisheries.

CCEA GIVES A GO AHEAD TO SBA FOR FERTILISER SUBSIDY

Govt gave clearance to implementation of the Special Banking Arrangement (SBA) for payment of outstanding claims of fertiliser companies towards fertiliser subsidy in 2016-17.

The government is making available urea and 21 grades of P&K (phosphate and potassium) fertilisers to farmers at subsidised prices through fertiliser manufacturers and importers.

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA):

Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) is one of the standing committees of cabinet constituted by government of India.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Functions:

- To review economic trends on a continuous basis especially the problems and prospects, with a view to devise a consistent and integrated economic policy framework for the country.
- Matters regarding fixing of prices of agricultural products as well as reviewing progress of activities related to rural development including those concerning small and marginal farmers are in CCEA's competence.
- Price controls of industrial raw materials and products, industrial licensing policies including industrial licensing cases for establishment of Joint Sector Undertakings,
- Reviewing the performance of Public Sector Undertakings including their structural and financial restructuring are also within the purview of CCEA
- All matters relating to disinvestment including cases of strategic sale, and pricing of Government shares in Public Sector Undertakings (except to the extent entrusted to an Empowered Group of Ministers).
- It also facilitates finalization of factual reports on the accomplishments of the Ministries, Agencies and Public Sector Undertakings involved in implementation of prioritized schemes or projects for evaluation by the Prime Minister.

The CCEA also considers cases of increase in the firmed up cost estimates/revised cost estimates for projects etc. in respect of the business allocated to the CCEA.

INDUSTRY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

7th Asian Energy Ministers' Round Table organised by International Energy Forum (IEF) in Bangkok

Organised by: International Energy Forum (IEF)

Where? Bangkok

Importance: India is the current Chair of the IEF

Details of the meet

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

It discussed ways to overcome market and policy hurdles as also importance of a flexible, transparent and non-discriminatory global LNG trading regime. It also stressed the need to move to a gas based economy and the avenues for FDI in building infrastructure for gas including LNG terminals, pipelines etc.

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International Energy Forum (IEF):

IEF is the largest inter-governmental organisation in the field of oil and gas comprising 72 member countries, accounting for 90% of global supply and demand of oil and gas. Members include developing, developed, OPEC, Non-OPEC and G20 countries. 18 of the G20 countries are members of IEF.

'CREATING AND SUSTAINING MARKETS FOR ENERGY EFFICIENCY' PROJECT

India's generation capacity

Currently around two-thirds of total power generation capacity in India is based on fossil fuels. By 2030, India is committed to achieve 40% of the installed capacity based on clean energy sources.

Implementing agency: Energy Efficiency Services Limited(EESL)

Funding:

The aforesaid project will receive a composite funding comprised of the GEF grant and co-financing in the form of loans and equity, including a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). EESL further proposes Energy Efficiency Revolving Fund (EERF) for sustainable funding mechanism of energy efficiency projects in the country.

Initiatives:

New technologies of super-efficient ceiling fans, tri-generation technologies & smart grid-applications will be financed for proof testing

- Energy efficiency programmes like street lighting, domestic lighting, five-star rated ceiling fans and agricultural pumps will be undertaken.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

- EESL has partnered with UN Environment's District Energy in

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is a joint venture of NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation and POWERGRID.

- It was set up under the Ministry of Power to facilitate implementation of energy efficiency projects.
- EESL is an energy service company (ESCO) that seeks to unlock the energy efficiency market in India. This can potentially result in energy savings of up to 20 per cent of current consumption, by way of innovative business and implementation models.
- EESL also acts as the resource centre for capacity building of state DISCOMs (distribution companies), Electricity Regulatory Commissions (ERCs), State Designated Agencies (SDAs), upcoming ESCOs, financial institutions, etc.
- It is the largest public ESCO in the world – 100% government owned - in sync with national priorities
- Implementing largest Energy Efficiency Portfolio in the world achieving actual energy savings

Important initiatives

- ✓ UJALA (Unnat Jyoti by Affordable LEDs for All)- in 2015 with an objective to provide people with affordable energy efficient appliances in comparison to the market price.
- ✓ Street Light National Programme (SLNP), also Atal Jyoti Yojana(AJAY)
- ✓ National Energy Efficient fan distribution programme
- ✓ Efficient Buildings programme.
- ✓ World's largest Agricultural Demand Side Management programme (AgDSM) wherein the Energy Efficient Pumpsets (EEPS) with Smart control Panel are being distributed to farmers free of cost.

The uniqueness of EESL's programmes are paving the roadmap for making energy efficiency more accessible, affordable and safer for cities and dwellings. EESL through its procurement model has brought about a market transformation in terms of LED bulbs pricing and production. The rates have dropped to one-tenth of what it was couple of years back. Global Environment Facility (GEF), an international partnership of 183 countries, International development banks, United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) will provide funding for energy-efficiency projects run by Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL).

Cities Initiative across five cities in India.

Significance and conclusion:

It is a significant step considering India's efforts towards a low emission-economy and focusing on energy efficiency programmes. It is imperative to create awareness in the citizens, especially among youth, to encourage energy efficiency measures like use of electric vehicles, energy efficient building codes etc. To facilitate sustainable growth by addressing climate change issues, boosting the economy and generating greater employment in the country.

GRID CONNECTIVITY TO LEH-LADAKH REGION

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Why In news?

This is the first time in the country that any 220kV voltage level substation is built at such a high altitude of over 11,500 feet.

It is a prestigious project of Indian government to extend grid connectivity to difficult geographical areas of Leh- Ladakh Region in Jammu and Kashmir.

Implementing agency: Power Grid Corporation of India Limited.

POWERGRID is an Indian state-owned electric utility company headquartered in Gurugram, India. POWERGRID transmits about 50% of the total power generated in India on its transmission network.

- A “Navaratna” Central Public Sector Enterprise.
- India’s largest Electric Power Transmission Utility
- Third Largest Public Sector Enterprise in terms of Gross Block

LADAKH RENEWABLE ENERGY INITIATIVE

Why in news?

The 1.5 MW Small Hydro Power Plant in Biaras Drass, Kargil (J&K) has become the first project to be commissioned under Prime Minister’s Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative.

The project has been developed by Kargil Renewable Energy Development Agency (KREDA) under Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council.

Prime Minister’s Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative

Ministry: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy

Aim: To minimize dependence on diesel in the Ladakh region and meet power requirement through local renewable sources.

Approach: Meet power requirements through small / micro hydel and solar photovoltaic power projects /systems and use solar thermal systems for water heating / space heating / cooking requirements. The project also envisages setting up of 10 solar photovoltaic power plants in defence establishments.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Benefits: Such projects would be able to replace use of diesel to a great extent and reduce green house emissions in the region.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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'NIRBHAY' MISSILE

Why in news?

A successful test flight of 'NIRBHAY' missile was recently conducted by the DRDO from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha.

SUBSONIC CRUISE MISSILE



➤ Nirbhay is a **subsonic cruise missile**

- Capable of **delivering conventional and nuclear weapons**
- Range | About **1,000 km**
- **Blasts off like a rocket** for initial 100 metre, and **turns horizontal** to fly like an aircraft
- Weight | **1,000 kg**;
Length | 6 metre
- India has a **super-sonic cruise missile**, Brahmos, jointly produced with Russia

Details

It is India's first indigenously designed and developed Long Range Sub-Sonic Cruise Missile which can be deployed from multiple platforms.

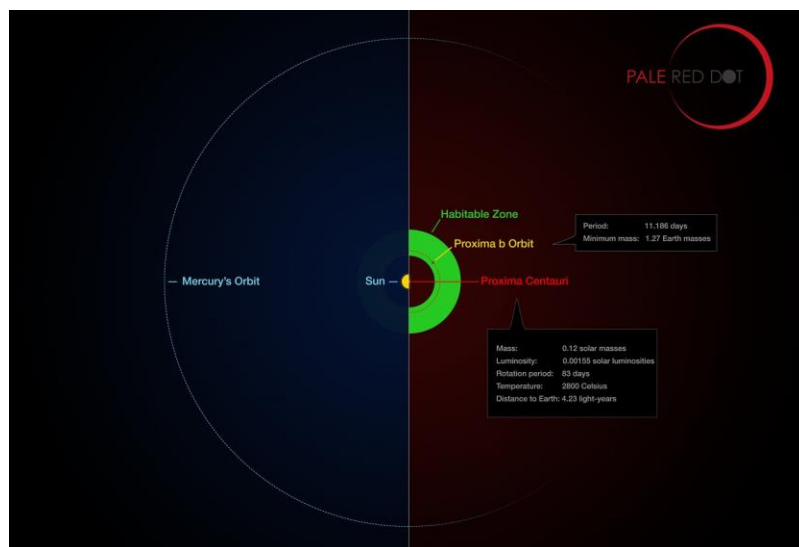
- All-weather low-cost missile with stealth and high accuracy.
- Range of more than 1000 km.
- Cruises at 0.7 Mach, at altitudes as low as 100 m.
- Relatively slow flight speed allows it to navigate its way precisely to the target.
- Indian version of the American Tomahawk.

SIGNS OF PLANETARY SYSTEM IN CENTAURI

What signs?

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Scientists have detected dust belts, which indicate the presence of planetary system around Proxima Centauri



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How was the discovery made?

These new observations were made by the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA) observatory in Chile. The new ALMA observations reveal emission from clouds of cold

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Proxima Centauri:

Proxima Centauri is the closest star to the Sun. It is a faint red dwarf lying just four light years away in the southern constellation of Centaurus. It is orbited by the Earth-sized object Proxima b, discovered in 2016 and the closest exoplanet to the solar system.

Proxima b orbits its star at a distance which is well within the habitable zone.

ALMA telescope:

ALMA -the largest astronomical project in existence- is a single telescope located on the Chajnantor plateau, 5000 meters altitude in northern Chile.

It is an international partnership of the European Southern Observatory (ESO), the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Natural Sciences (NINS) of Japan among others, in cooperation with the Republic of Chile.

ALMA allows scientists to unravel longstanding and important astronomical mysteries, in search of our Cosmic Origins.

CHINA'S NAVIGATION SYSTEM

As a part of building its own navigation system to rival United States' GPS, China has launched two BeiDou satellites into space, aboard a Long March-3B carrier rocket.

BeiDou project:

The project was formally initiated in 1994. It began to serve China in 2000 and the Asia-Pacific region at the end of 2012. If everything goes according to the plan, China will become the third country in the world after the US and Russia to operate its own navigation system.

Operational area:

Beidou currently consists of 10 satellites and covers most of Asia-Pacific region from Australia in the south to Russia in the north. The system is accurate to within 82 feet (25 meters).

Other navigation systems

- Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)- India
- GPS (Global Positioning System)- US
- Glonass- Russia
- Galileo- Europe.

ENVIRONMENT

BLACKBUCK CONSERVATION

Why in news?

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

A wildlife conservation reserve dedicated exclusively to the blackbuck is coming up over 126 hectares in the trans-Yamuna region of Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh.

Location: Meja forest division that is known for its rocky, undulating and arid terrain.

Other fauna in the area include Blue bull, and carnivores like jackals and striped hyena.

Significance:

- The conservation of blackbuck can be done in an effective way.
- It will also create awareness about biodiversity conservation and provide opportunities for people's participation.
- Eco-tourism will be encouraged and locals will get opportunities for employment.



Facts

Blackbucks, known for their majestic spiral horns and coat colour contrasts, are found in grasslands and open forests.

- They are now restricted to just a few patches and habitats, primarily due to human population growth, ecosystem degradation and hunting.
- There are a few national parks and sanctuaries inhabited by blackbuck in the country, like the Velavadar Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat and the Ranibennur Blackbuck Sanctuary in Karnataka.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

- However, there are not many conservation reserves exclusively dedicated to the antelope.

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CARNIVOROUS PLANTS USE CO₂ TO LURE PREY

Why in news?

Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Gardens and Research Institute here have come up with evidence that some carnivorous plants use carbon dioxide (CO₂) to attract insects and ants to their prey traps.

Modus operandi

Carnivorous plants have been known to employ a variety of techniques like nectar, smell, colour and ultraviolet florescence to lure and capture prey.

- The Indian pitcher plant (*Nepenthes khasiana*) uses the gas, both to attract prey and to aid the digestive process. The open *Nepenthes* pitchers were found to emit CO₂ in greater amounts constantly. CO₂ inside the pitchers was produced by the respiration of tissues within the cavity.
- CO₂ is found to trigger the release of antifungal compounds into the pitcher fluid, preventing infections from incoming prey. It might also act as a tranquilliser for the trapped prey

Nepenthes pitchers have the potential to be used as natural models mimicking an anticipated elevated CO₂ scenario on earth.

Some important carnivorous plants in India

1. Pitcher plant (*Nepenthes khasiana*)
2. Alice Sundews (*Drosera*)
3. Butterworts (*Pinguicula*)
4. Venus Flytrap (*Dionaea Muscipula*)

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

5. Stinking Passion flower



(Passiflora



Foetida)

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OLIVE RIDLEY TURTLES

Why in news?

Olive Ridley turtles have started arriving at Gahirmatha beach in Odisha's Kendrapara district, known as world's largest rookery of this endangered species.

Olive Ridley turtles:

Other name: Pacific ridley sea turtle



IUCN status: Vulnerable, also listed in Appendix 1 of CITES

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Natural habitat: Warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Details

They are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in mass numbers.

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

SECURITY CHALLENGES

BLUE FLAG AERIAL TRAINING EXERCISE

Blue Flag is a bi-annual multilateral exercise, conducted by Israel, which aims to strengthen military cooperation amongst participating nations.

- The exercise is designed to strengthen Israel's military cooperation internationally.
- This is the first time India is participating in the drill, along with the US, France, Germany, Italy, Greece and Poland.

GOA MARITIME CONCLAVE

The first Goa Maritime Conclave saw the participation of Ten Indian littoral states.

Aim

It was aimed at "Addressing Regional Maritime Challenges", thus focusing deliberations on emerging maritime threats, maritime awareness, security architecture in IOR (Indian Ocean Region) among other things.

It endeavors to bring together like minded nations to evolve and formulate collective responses to emerging challenges in the maritime domain even as they communicate viewpoints in a forthright manner. This would help shape a favourable maritime environment collectively.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

Key takeaways from GMC

Every participant acknowledged the centrality and importance of the Indian Ocean as a key gateway to connect the East and the West. They stressed the dependence of the global economy on the sea lanes of communication.

Identifying common security threats, the countries realized the importance of coordination and information sharing, to take things forward to provide maritime security and safety of the global commons of the Indian Ocean.

India already has co-ordination mechanisms and architectures available with several island nations. India also does coordinated patrols and joint patrols with nations who are our maritime neighbours. As part of conclave, coordinated patrols are planned with a number of countries who are participating.

Security challenges in IOR

Though globalisation have enabled economics to shape transactional relationships between nations, incoherent behaviour by certain nations are preventing these very relationships from evolving beyond their transactional nature.

The regional dynamics in IOR has cast a large shadow over international geo-politics, thus occupying a centre-stage.

Here are a few instances, which point to concern:

- Increasing Chinese presence in Djibouti and the Indian Ocean.
- The unresolved borders and riparian disputes which are predominantly a legacy of the colonial era.
- A stalemate in international relationships, is a product of many causes such as ideological differences, political insecurities, economic dependency, technological dependencies, inequitable access to resources, geographical imperatives etc.

The net impact of these differences is that the trust deficit and tensions between nations continue to persist, on account of perceived challenges to sovereignty, despite positive economic interactions between them.

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Common security threats identified are non-traditional threats in the form of maritime terrorism, unregulated fishing, and illegal fishing in the global commons, pollution, at sea piracy, drug and human trafficking.

Extra-regional navies

There is permanent presence of a large number of extra-regional navies in the IOR especially in the Northern Indian Ocean where at any given time there over 100 multilateral ships in the vicinity. We need to deploy surveillance missions so that we are aware of what is happening.

Measures to safeguard littoral states' interests in IOR

1. Increasing the footprint of the Indian navy under the Mission Based Deployment so that our areas of interest can be kept under permanent surveillance.

It started off by having a ship deployed permanently in Andaman Sea and approaches to the Malacca straits. Now, it has expanded to North Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf, Northern part of Bay of Bengal and near Sri Lanka was increased.

We are also sending ships to the Lombok and Sunda straits. So, the ingress and egress routes of Indian Ocean region are being kept under surveillance so that we have better maritime domain awareness and know what is happening.

2. Capacity building: India has been working in close liaison with island nations Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka to assist them in capacity and capability enhancements in the form of training to their personnel.

India is also working with them in coordinated patrols, keeping surveillance of EEZ on their request.

3. Information exchange: India has been examining signing of technical agreements and sharing of white shipping information. Through these agreements information has already started to flow in and it is resulting in greater awareness.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

UNSAFE BOILERS

Why in news?

There was a boiler explosion at NTPC's Unchahar power plant in Rae Bareli. It underscores the importance of inspections and protocols for hazardous industrial operations.

The accident was entirely preventable because boilers are designed to provide warnings as soon as dangerous pressure builds up and trigger automatic safety devices at a critical point. They should undergo periodic inspections to ensure that all these features are working and intact.

How are they regulated?

High pressure boilers are strictly regulated with the Indian Boilers Act, 1923 to ensure the safety of life and protection of property by mandating uniform standards in the quality and upkeep of these units.

What can be the reasons?

The state government failed miserably in meeting the objective of ensuring the safety and quality checks.

To enhance the ease of doing business in India, the government has relaxed crucial safety checks. Self-certification and third-party certification of facilities has received support from policymakers even in the case of boilers.

Solutions

- The Unchahar accident shows it is in everyone's interest to have a transparent regulatory mechanism for hazardous industrial activity.
- The safety and welfare of workers and the public at large cannot be compromised. A rigorous approach to accident reporting must become part of the process if the weak spots in regulation are to be addressed.

2nd Nov to 12th Nov

- It must be the Centre's endeavour to see that measures taken to make it easy to do business do not translate into lack of regulation, and putting lives at risk.
- Administrative reform can eliminate the corruption of inspector raj and achieve transparent regulation, while keeping the workplace safe.
- The incident calls for an inquiry into the quality of the equipment and the fuel used. Ideally, these aspects should be investigated by an external agency and not the NTPC.

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FB TOOLS FOR DISASTER RESPONSE

A partnership

Facebook has partnered with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and a non-profit body, SEEDS in India, to offer tools to these agencies to help them respond more effectively to natural disasters.

Disaster maps data

Disaster Maps was introduced globally in June and uses aggregated location information that users have chosen to share with Facebook. These tools have been deployed in Peru and the US.

Facebook will offer 'disaster maps data' that illustrate aspects like people's movement and concentration of Facebook users in the given area before and after a calamity. The programme will be piloted in two disaster-prone States — Assam and Uttarakhand.

How will this help?

During and after these crises, response organisations need accurate information to help communities. Traditional communication channels are often offline and it can take significant time and resources to understand where help is desperately needed. In case there is an area which has a high concentration of Facebook users that suddenly goes offline, even that data insight can be used to rush services to the area.