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GENERAL STUDIES-1

INDIAN CULTURE

HUNAR HAAT

Why In news?

The fourth Hunar Haat exhibition was recently organised by the Ministry of Minority Affairs at India International Trade Fair (IITF) in New Delhi.

What are they?

Hunar Haats are organised by Ministry of Minority Affairs under USTTAD (Upgrading the Skills & Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme. The USTTAD scheme aims at preserving & promoting the rich heritage of the traditional arts & crafts of the Minority communities. This is one of the flagship programmes of the Ministry.

Significance of Hunar Haats:

Hunar Haats have become a successful mission to provide employment and income generation opportunities with platforms for marketing the products of master artisans, craftsmen and culinary experts belonging to the minority communities.

It envisages at boosting the skill of craftsmen, weavers and artisans who are already engaged in the traditional ancestral work

SANGAI FESTIVAL

Where? Manipur

What is it?

Sangai Festival is an annual cultural extravaganza in Manipur. The festival is labelled as the grandest festival of the State today and helps promote Manipur as a world class tourism destination.

Every edition of the festival showcases the tourism potential of the state in the field of Arts & Culture, Handloom, Handicrafts, Indigenous Sports, Cuisine, Music and Adventure sports of the state etc.

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Backgrounder:

The 'Festival' is named after the State animal, Sangai, the brow-antlered deer found only in Manipur. It started in the year 2010 and has grown over the years into a big platform for Manipur to showcase its rich tradition and culture to the world.

The festival will reflect the State's proud cultural heritage and the love for art which is inherent amongst various tribes inhabiting the State of Manipur.

The State's classical dance form, 'Ras Leela' is quite famous all over the world for its distinctiveness from any other dance forms in India.

Other folk dance performances like the Kabui Naga dance, Bamboo dance, Maibi dance, Lai Haraoba dance, Khamba Thoibi dance etc. will also be showcased at the festival.

Indigenous sports will also be a major highlight of the State's biggest tourism festival this year. Manipur's famous martial arts-

- Thang Ta (a combination Spear & Sword skills),
- Yubi-Lakpi (a game played with greased coconut like rugby),
- Mukna Kangjei (a game that combines hockey and wrestling), and
- Sagol Kangjei- Modern Polo (believed to have evolved in Manipur)

SWACHH ICONIC PLACES

Initiative by: Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission.

Aim

Initiated as a project to implement Prime Minister's vision to take iconic places and their surroundings to higher standards of Swachhata, so that all visitors benefit and also take away home the message of cleanliness, Swachh Iconic Places is now in its second phase.

Implementation of the project:

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SIP is a truly collaborative project with three other central Ministries: Urban Development, Culture, Tourism; all levels in the concerned States and more importantly, Public Sector and Private companies as partners.

Ten New Iconic sites under Phase II

1. Gangotri, 2. Yamunotri, 3. Mahakaleshwar Temple, 4. Charminar, 5. Church and Convent of St. Francis of Assisi, 6. Kalady, 7. Gomateshwar, 8. Baijnath Dham, 9. Gaya Tirth and 10. Somnath temple.

SOCIAL ISSUES AND INDIAN SOCIETY

THE SCOURGE OF MANUAL SCAVENGING

Despite launching many initiatives and forcing an act to eradicate manual scavenging, death of laborers during scavenging manually has become very common.

What is manual scavenging?

Manual scavenging refers to the practice of manually cleaning, carrying, disposing or handling in any manner, human excreta from dry latrines and sewers.

The practice of manual scavenging is linked to India's caste system prevalent since ancient times where so-called lower castes were expected to perform this job.

Present status in India

- There are possibly over 12 lakh manual scavengers across India.
- There are 22 states where not a single person has self-declared to be a manual scavenger
- India has 2.6 million "insanitary" latrines, which require human excreta to be handled manually, according to Census 2011.

Laws, regulations and scheme against manual scavenging

Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act, 1993

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- This act banned employment of people as manual scavengers.
- The act made employing a manual scavenger a cognisable offence with imprisonment and fine.
- The 1993 Act made it the responsibility of citizens, organisations and the state to maintain sanitary toilets.

Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act, 2013

- It Prohibits the engagement or employment of anyone as a manual scavenger
- Act made the states responsible for identifying and rehabilitating manual scavengers by providing them training, giving assistance, loans and even houses.
- It further prohibits dry latrines and other forms of insanitary latrines.
- It is the responsibility of the local authority to identify dry latrines in the area and demolish and convert them into sanitary latrines

Self-Employment Scheme for the Rehabilitation of Manual Scavengers

- One-time cash assistance of Rs 40,000 each to the identified manual scavengers.
- Loan for undertaking livelihood projects upto Rs 15 lakh at concessional rate of interest.
- Credit linked capital subsidy upto Rs 3,25,000.
- Skill development training upto two years with stipend of Rs 3000 per month.

Swacch Bharat Abhiyaan

Some of the features of mission that promotes prohibition on manual scavenging are:

- Conversion of insanitary toilets to pour flush toilets,
- Eradication of manual scavenging,
- Spreading awareness among the citizens about sanitation and its linkages with public health.

Why does it still exist?

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There are many reasons behind prevalence of manual scavenging, such as:-

- *Presence of insanitary latrines:* Majority of this type of latrines require cleaning by hand.
- *Disinterest of state governments:* Despite legal obligations, state governments are not keen to demolish or rebuild old facilities lacking sanitation. State governments have not conducted a full census of both the latrines and the people engaged in clearing such waste.
- *Budget crunch:* Central government has reduced fund allocation for rehabilitation of manual scavengers from 448 crore in the 2014-15 budget to Rs. 5 crore this year.
- *Social norms:* Many communities still regard the inclusion of a sanitary toilet as ritual and physical pollution of the house.
- *Denial to change by manual scavengers:* Some official data shows that manual scavengers are reluctant to leave their present occupation and take up the self-employment because of illiteracy and lack of confidence in running self-employment projects.
- *No administrative accountability:* 2013 act does not outline administrative measures beyond conduct rules, that can be imposed if officials do not implement the Act.
- *Presence of informal ways:* Contractors that are being provided with the sanitary projects are employing manual scavengers off the official record.

What should be done?

1. Without community participation and awareness this dehumanizing practice cannot be abolished. Government must try to create a favorable environment through community awareness and sensitization of local administration.
2. Strict enforcement of criminal penalties of 2013 act must be undertaken.
3. As long as open defecation and dry latrines continue, manual scavenging is not likely to die, thus government must fasten the process of identification of insanitary toilets, their demolition and rebuilding.
4. Build the capacity of the community to promote rehabilitation efforts and self-reliance and also build leadership in the community with a particular focus on Dalit women

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5. Alternate means of employment should be generated for the impoverished people who are forced to become manual scavengers due to lack of alternatives means of livelihood.
6. Breaking caste barriers through education and economic uplift.
7. Compensation sanctioned for the families of those who died in the course of the humiliating and hazardous work should be paid immediately.

NEED FOR AN ANTI-SUPERSTITION LAW

Why in news?

Recently, the Maharashtra State Legislature passed the Anti- Superstition Bill. Maharashtra became the first state in the country to pass a bill to combat practices like black magic.

What the act entails?

The act criminalises practices related to black magic, human sacrifices, use of magic remedies to cure ailments and other such acts which exploit people's superstitions.

A police officer of any rank has the power to investigate cases of black magic.

Different types of Superstitions practiced

- Faith healers, inflict physical injury to exorcise spirits or cure ailments.
- Branding children with heated objects and using spurious surgical methods to change the sex of a foetus.
- Practising witchcraft.
- Made-snana, a ritual where devotees from across castes roll over the leftover food of Brahmins in certain temples to cure themselves of skin diseases
- Godmen abusing disciples by calling it his blessing
- Practices, like throwing children on thorns, parading women naked, etc., obviously harm others and can't be allowed in the name of religion.

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All in the name of Religion

Inhuman practices in the name of religion in the country are a cause of worry. In Maharashtra, there were several cases where people murdered or brutally injured others and held them responsible for some deaths in their families, merely on suspicion.

There were several groups which tilted the conversation by projecting it as a law against religion. Opponents to the legislation in Maharashtra had claimed that the law would affect the religious practices of Hindus; that it was anti-Hindu.

But after examining more than 350 FIRs lodged across Maharashtra in the last four years, it is found that these claims were unfounded and show that the accused persons belong to various religions.

Historical backgrounder

Bigger challenges to religion have come from mutually reinforcing, external sources.

- Religions in India came under the scrutiny of Modern science, secular statecraft and liberal legal principles. In asking for a ban on Sati in the early 19th century, Raja Ram Mohan Roy argued that it did not have approval from within Hindu religious texts. This was a commonly heard refrain in later decades too that vested social interests and not Hindu dharma were responsible for these practices.
- Rationalists debunked religion as superstition, and the communists, who felt religion distorted reality. Driven by more modest aims, many rationalists laboured tirelessly to denounce miracles and astrology as cheap tricks.
- Over recent decades, around 800 women in Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Odisha have been killed for practising witchcraft. Laws that aim to prevent this practice exist.

It is argued that a substantive law of such a nature is not required

An anti-superstition law may seem necessary, but it cannot take cognisance of all realities. The domain of an anti-superstition law is to curb superstition, associated primarily with religious and occult practices.

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However, the question of whether we need a separate law to curb such practices has to be debated. This is because the substantive legal framework of our country is sufficiently adequate to address such crimes. For instance, throwing a child on thorns is an offence under Sections 307 and 323 of the IPC. Similarly, parading a woman naked can also be addressed specifically by Section 354B of the IPC.

Critics argue that a substantive law of such a nature is not required; it works to the detriment of the larger objective it seeks to work for.

- Law and order is a State subject, so States are free to enact specific criminal laws. In the same way, States are also free to make amendments to Union laws. Therefore, ideally, Karnataka or any other State is free to amend the IPC, to accommodate specific requirements.

Why do we need a separate law for preventing Black Magic?

Around seven instances of human sacrifice have been reported since the passing of this law in 2013. Two such instances could have been prevented through timely intervention.

Before this law, acts involving human sacrifice could not be stopped as they were preceded by some puja and offerings — not banned under any law. Now they are.

- The cognisance of human sacrifice is in the Indian Penal Code (IPC) only after the murder is committed.
- The present IPC is not equipped to take care of all crimes committed on account of black magic and other superstitious practices. Thus, legislation has a capacity to act as a deterrent.

There is a section in the Maharashtra legislation which specifically addresses and checks claims made by 'godmen' who say they have supernatural powers. Once something is made illegal in the eye of the law, it will not be possible for anyone to openly support fraudulent godmen.

In conclusion

Lacking access to proper health care and poverty will also make victims fall to such methods.

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If the executive is serious about curbing such practices, active implementation and enforcement of existing laws need to be made more effective. Studies in criminology have already established that certainty of punishment curbs the rate of crime and not the type or the quantum of punishment.

India needs legislation on superstition, though what should go into it requires debate. Every superstition cannot be removed by the force of law. For that, a mental change is necessary. However, superstitious practices that are utterly dehumanising, brutal and exploitative need to be dealt with by a law that specifically addresses them.

'SAFE CITY' PLAN FOR WOMEN

The Central government recently began a process of formulating a comprehensive safe city plans for women in eight metropolitan cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Lucknow and Hyderabad. The process was started in the Steering Committee meeting constituted by the Home Ministry under the chairmanship of Union Home Secretary and attended by Municipal Commissioners, Police Commissioners, senior state government officials and civil society representatives.

During the meeting, a comprehensive review of the progress made and steps taken by the police and civil administration of these eight metropolitan cities regarding women's safety was taken up.

Initiatives taken so far:

Various initiatives have been taken by these cities for women's safety. These initiatives include Himmat App, All Women Patrol Van, Shishtachar programme of Delhi Police, SHE teams, Hawkeye Mobile App and Bharosa programme of Hyderabad police, Suraksha App of Bengaluru police and Power Angels of Uttar Pradesh Police.

The steps taken by other metro cities include mobile counselling vans for hearing the grievances of women, lighting in the suburban railway station areas, complaint boxes in the colleges, dedicated helpline for women, awareness programmes organised by the police, setting up of shelter homes for women and making provisions for street lighting.

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What else is needed?

Independent analysis and feedback system should be institutionalised to assess the perception of women on ground regarding their safety issues and emphasised on “targeted intervention” by police and civil administration for larger impact on women’s safety.

Also, there is a need for Integrated Command and Control Centres and collaborative monitoring by police and privately installed CCTV cameras. This integration should be in a time-bound and phased manner.

Way ahead:

At the end of the meeting, it was decided that police and municipal corporations of these eight cities will frame a plan of action. The plan will be forwarded by the respective state-level committee headed by the Chief Secretary of the state and the plan of action to be submitted by these cities within a month will be assessed by the Steering Committee, which will make suitable recommendations.

GENERAL STUDIES-2

POLITY

DISCUSSING PUNCHHI COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS

Home Minister will chair a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Inter-State Council (ISC) to discuss the recommendations made by the Punchhi Commission on Centre-State relations.

The discussion involves the examination of significant issues, including the role of Governors, Centrally-sponsored schemes and financial

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transfers from the Centre to the states and creation of a unified agricultural market for the nation.

Punchhi Commission:

The Punchhi Commission, notified in 2005, submitted its report in 2010.

- The Commission, in its report had said that 'National Security' as a subject was not specifically listed in any of the three Lists: The Union, the State or the Concurrent List.
- The subject of security under the Article 352 and under the Emergency Provisions in Part XVIII of the Constitution has been assigned to the Union Government.
- Though it is an overriding executive power of the Union, in Constitutional practice, 'Security' is a subject in which the States and the Union have a common interest and are expected to act in a coordinated manner," the report noted.
- The Commission also said that in case of communal riots, which has a potential of causing widespread violence within a territory, "the use of Article 355 may be in order."

Major Recommendations

The Punchhi commission provided 312 recommendations in a seven volume report comprising:

1. Evolution of Centre-state relations
2. Constitutional scheme of relations, covering recommendations regarding Article 19, Article 355 and 356 and Article 263.
3. Economic and financial relations and recommendations include upgrading of the planning model to remove regional imbalances.
4. Recommendations regarding 73rd and 74th amendments and the Sixth Schedule.
5. Internal security, covering issues like terror, Naxalism, insurgency and communal violence.
6. Environment issues and resource-sharing, particularly of rivers and minerals
7. Social development and good governance.
8. Appointment of Governor: The Punchhi commission recommended that the person who is slated to be a Governor should not have participated in active politics at even local level for at least a couple of years before his appointment.

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9. Removal of Governor: For office of Governor, the doctrine of pleasure should end and should be deleted from the constitution. Governor should not be removed at whim of central government. The report supported the right of the Governor to give sanction for the prosecution of ministers against the advice of the state government.

Inter-State Council:

The Inter State Council (ISC) is a constitutional body created under the Article 263 of the Constitution in pursuance of the Sarkaria Commission. It is a forum to discuss problems between center and states.

Composition:

- Prime Minister-Chairman
- Chief Ministers of all States –Member
- 3-Chief Ministers of Union Territories having a Legislative Assembly and Administrators of UTs not having a Legislative Assembly – Member
- 4-Six Union Ministers of Cabinet rank in the Union Council of Ministers nominated by the Prime Minister

Relevance of Inter-State Council:

The Inter State Council has also become significant in the backdrop of tensions brewing between Centre and some states regarding resource allocation and disputes related to jurisdiction.

- It can act as a forum for ironing out these disputes in pursuance of cooperative federalism.
- The Council can also play a role in exerting moral pressure on the executive to implement some recommendations of the Punchii Commission.
- It can reach a consensus on role of Governor. It can decide upon the use of article 356 and other such constitutional matters.
- Promote healthy competition between states.

Efforts to improve the centre-states relations

The central government took many steps to encourage a federal character to its functioning.

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- A National Development Council was set up in 1952 and a National Integration Council was similarly set up in 1962.
- Annual conferences are held between the centre and state chief ministers on finance, labour, food and other functional areas.
- The first constitutional body—called the Inter-State Council (ISC)—was set up in 1990 following the initial recommendation of the First Administrative Reforms Commission (1969), which was endorsed by the Sarkaria Commission on centre-state relations (1988).

During the intervening years, there was a gradual centralization that diminished the political, legislative and administrative power of the states.

In conclusion

The interstate council should be further strengthened to become the critical forum for not merely administrative but also political and legislative give and take between the centre and states.

It should function in such a manner that it reflects the equal status of states and the centre. Even though the ISC's mandate is very broad, its aspiration has generally been limited to discussing affirmative action, welfare subjects and administrative efficiency and coordination.

India's true potential will be achieved only when both the centre and the state are strong. India needs as many forums as it can get to improve implementation efficiency, the Inter-State Council should be one of them. Along with another constitutionally sanctioned entity, the Finance Commission- the Inter-State Council should be the body that puts the "federation" back in the definition of the Indian nation.

GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND POLICIES

UMANG APP

The government has launched a new all-in-one application called Umang which offers 100+ center and state government services under a one-single platform.

What is it?

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Umang is an initiative to promote Digital India program. The term — Umang stands for Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance and is envisaged to make e-governance.

Developed by: Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and National e-Governance Division (NeGD).

Key goal

To allow the citizens of India do everything online, at just a click – be it making a passport, Aadhaar or Pan, book a gas cylinder, know about your Provident fund account or resolving an Aadhaar related. Umang app basically provides a unified approach where you can install one application to avail multiple government services — almost over 100 of them.

WHY ABBA MUST GO?

Why in news?

The public distribution system (PDS) and its disbursement of rations to the poor have come under the scanner in Jharkhand after three persons died recently, allegedly owing to lack of food and ensuing hunger, as the family was not getting rations under the State-run PDS for the past several months because of a biometric mismatch.

Government agencies claimed that the family was removed from the list of PDS beneficiaries as their ration cards were not linked to Aadhaar. The death triggered widespread criticism and it drew attention to the glitches in the PDS.

Earlier, Supreme Court order has held that Aadhaar cannot be made compulsory for social welfare schemes.

Why were names deleted?

The Chief Secretary had directed the district administration to delete the names of PDS beneficiaries whose ration cards were not linked to Aadhaar.

In their zeal to achieve 100% Aadhaar-seeding targets, some field functionaries just deleted the names of those who did not submit Aadhaar

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details. Others waited till the deadline and then struck off names. The government claims that all of these were “fake”, detected due to Aadhaar, thus saving crores of rupees.

What is ABBA?

For months, the Central government has been insisting on 100% Aadhaar “seeding” across schemes such as the PDS, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and pensions.

Seeding refers to the practice of entering Aadhaar numbers for each household member on the ration card. It is a pre-requisite for the Aadhaar-based Biometric Authentication (ABBA) system. The government has made seeding and the ABBA mandatory in the PDS.

The ABBA system in PDS outlets is built around a set of “fragile technologies” that need to work simultaneously for successful transaction. These are:

1. Seeding of Aadhaar numbers: An eligible individual can become a beneficiary and access the PDS system only if her Aadhaar number is correctly seeded onto the PDS database and added to the household ration card.
2. Point of Sale (PoS) machines: The entire process at the PDS outlet is dependent on the PoS machine. If it malfunctions, no transaction can be made. The first step in the process requires the dealer to enter the ration card number of the beneficiary’s household onto the PoS machine.
3. Internet connection: Successful working of the PoS machine depends on internet connectivity as verification of the ration card number and the beneficiary’s biometric fingerprint is carried out over the internet.
4. Remote Aadhaar servers: Remote Aadhaar servers verify the ration card number and initiate fingerprint authentication.
5. Fingerprint recognition software: The beneficiary proves her identity by submitting to fingerprint recognition in the PoS machine. Upon verification, the PoS machine indicates that the beneficiary is genuine and that foodgrains can be distributed to her household.

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The stated purpose of introducing ABBA in the PDS is to eliminate identity fraud and reduce siphoning of grains by the dealers, thereby improving the delivery of welfare schemes “to the benefit of the poor.”

Several reasons for Exclusions

- Many of the aggrieved are unaware of the seeding requirement.
- When pensions in Jharkhand suddenly stopped for many pensioners, they had no idea why.
- Seeding process is not as simple as it sounds. In some cases, the middlemen had seeded it wrongly.
- The ABBA requires that family members be enrolled for Aadhaar and with correct seeding. At the time of purchase, the ABBA requires power supply, a functional PoS machine, mobile and Internet connectivity, State and Central Identities Data Repository (CIDR) servers to be ‘up’, and for fingerprint authentication to be successful.
- The Finance Ministry’s latest Economic Survey based on micro-studies, reports high biometric failure rates.

What are the issues that crop up with the introduction of ABBA?

The identification of eligible households involves two kinds of possible errors:

- Inclusion of an ineligible household on the NFSA list (“inclusion errors”)
- Exclusion of an eligible household from the NFSA list (“exclusion errors”).

While inclusion errors increase the financial burden of the state, exclusion errors can often leave poor families vulnerable to hunger.

Since the PDS was introduced to overcome chronic hunger and malnutrition, exclusion errors should be of greater concern. Though Aadhaar is technically not an eligibility criterion, ABBA is systematically leading to exclusion at two levels.

- The lack of an Aadhaar number automatically disqualifies eligible individuals from being listed in the household ration card.
- Beneficiaries face persistent and pervasive issues related to ABBA due to issues with one or more of the five technological

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components of the system such as reported fingerprint authentication errors, Aadhaar seeding issues, and poor connectivity.

- Several surveys revealed a fact that 10% of households are excluded due to ABBA and two-thirds reported errors with one or more of its five technological components.
- It raises Privacy issues.
- It is flexibility (an elderly person asking a neighbour to fetch their grain would count as identity fraud) that is lost when the ABBA is made mandatory.
- ABBA has minimum role in reducing corruption in the short time.
- Aadhaar endeavours of government are in violation of several Supreme Court orders that had ruled (even after the passage of the Aadhaar bill in Lok Sabha) that Aadhaar cannot be mandatory to access welfare services.

In conclusion

The results suggest that the ABBA system is neither as efficient nor as dependable as it is made out to be, even in a seemingly best-case environment.

The Food and Public Distribution Department has directed officials to adopt a humane approach by giving rations to even those who are not on the list yet. The Department is also trying to provide compensation as per the National Food Security Act to those who have not got PDS supplies.

It is essential to deal with issues of duplication, less disruptive methods than Aadhaar such as food coupons, smart cards, and last-mile tracking can be used to produce the same effectiveness with far less administrative burden

NATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL PRICING AUTHORITY (NPPA)

National drug pricing regulator NPPA has capped prices of 51 essential formulations, including those used for the treatment of cancer, pain, heart conditions and skin problems.

Pricing mechanism

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NPPA fixes ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013. In respect of medicines that are not under price control, manufacturers are allowed to increase the maximum retail price by 10 per cent annually.

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA):

NPPA is an organization of the Government of India which was established, inter alia, to fix/ revise the prices of controlled bulk drugs and formulations and to enforce prices and availability of the medicines in the country, under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 1995.

The organization is also entrusted with the task of recovering amounts overcharged by manufacturers for the controlled drugs from the consumers. It also monitors the prices of decontrolled drugs in order to keep them at reasonable levels.

Functions

- To implement and enforce the provisions of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order in accordance with the powers delegated to it. To deal with all legal matters arising out of the decisions of the Authority.
- To monitor the availability of drugs, identify shortages, if any, and to take remedial steps. To collect/ maintain data on production, exports and imports, market share of individual companies, profitability of companies etc, for bulk drugs and formulations.
- To undertake and/ or sponsor relevant studies in respect of pricing of drugs/ pharmaceuticals.
- To recruit/ appoint the officers and other staff members of the Authority, as per rules and procedures laid down by the Government.
- To render advice to the Central Government on changes/ revisions in the drug policy.
- To render assistance to the Central Government in the parliamentary matters relating to the drug pricing.

NORTH EAST DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT

Where? Imphal, Manipur

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What is it for?

It is the first ever summit. It seeks to boost trade and investment in the underdeveloped region. Various international finance agencies will lay down their plan for development in the region.

It is aimed at “building confidence” and altering the “perception” among visiting delegates and investors.

Organizers: India Foundation, a Delhi-based think tank, is organising the summit in collaboration with the Centre and Manipur government.

Significance

North Eastern states have lot of potential which is still unexplored. There is a need to explore this unexplored potential for the development of the region and the development of the country as a whole. The summit will contribute to the making of ‘New India’ and help explore the unexplored potential of the region.

Key Focus Areas:

- Trade & Investment.
- Connectivity & Infrastructure Development.
- Tourism Development in North-East India.
- Skill Development, Capacity Building and Entrepreneurship.

WELFARE SCHEMES AND DEVELOPMENTAL GROUPS

ACCESSIBLE INDIA CAMPAIGN

Why in news?

On the occasion of Children’s Day, the winners of ‘Drawing and Painting Competition on Accessible India Campaign’ were awarded at a felicitation event organised by Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (Divyangjan) under M/o Social Justice and Empowerment.

What is the campaign about?

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Accessible India Campaign (AIC) is the nationwide flagship campaign of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Divyangjans all over the country

The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.

Implementation:

For creating universal accessibility for Persons with Disabilities, the campaign has been divided into three verticals: Built Environment; Transport and Information & Communication Technology (ICT) ecosystem.

Accessible India Campaign is in line with the Article 9 of UNCRPD (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) to which India is a signatory since 2007. The scheme also comes under Persons with Disabilities Act, 1995 provides for equal Opportunities and protection of rights and non-discrimination in Transport to Persons with Disabilities.

PRADHAN MANTRI MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA (PMMSK)

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for setting up of the Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra (PMMSK) with an aim to reach the 115 most backward districts.

Objective

It is envisioned as a one-stop convergence support service for empowering rural women with opportunities for skill development, employment, digital literacy, health and nutrition.

It will aim to improve declining child sex ratio, ensure survival and protection of the girl child, ensuring her education and empowering her to fulfil her potential. It will provide an interface for rural women to

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approach the government for getting their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.

Multiple level intervention

At the national level, the Mahila Shakti Kendra will provide domain-based knowledge support while at the state level, it will cater to the State Resource Centre for Women that will provide technical support to the respective government on issues related to women, the district and block level centres, and will provide support to the PMMSK and also give a foothold to Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao in 640 districts.

PRADHAN MANTRI KHANIJ KSHETRA KALYAN YOJANA (PMKKKY)

The Prime Minister recently reviewed the progress in implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY).

He said that funds accruing to the District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) should be utilized to strategically focus upon and eliminate major development issues or deficits that these districts currently face. He said this should be done in a focused way, so as to achieve the greatest possible, tangible results by 2022, which marks 75 years of independence.

What is it?

The programme is meant to provide for the welfare of areas and people affected by mining related operations, using the funds generated by District Mineral Foundations (DMFs).

The scheme aims to implement various developmental and welfare projects/programs in mining affected areas that complement the existing ongoing schemes/projects of State and Central Government.

It also seeks to minimize/mitigate the adverse impacts, during and after mining, on the environment, health and socio-economics of people in mining districts, to ensure long-term sustainable livelihoods for the affected people in mining areas.

Focus areas

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High priority areas like drinking water supply, health care, sanitation, education, skill development, women and child care, welfare of aged and disabled people, skill development and environment conservation will get at least 60 % share of the funds.

For creating a supportive and conducive living environment, balance funds will be spent on making roads, bridges, railways, waterways

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About District Mineral Foundations (DMFs):

The Mines and Minerals (Development & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2015, mandated the setting up of District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) in all districts in the country affected by mining related operations. In case of all mining leases executed before 12th January, 2015 (the date of coming into force of the Amendment Act) miners will have to contribute an amount equal to 30% of the royalty payable by them to the DMFs. Where mining leases are granted after 12.01.2015, the rate of contribution would be 10% of the royalty payable.

BACKWARD DISTRICTS AND PRABHARI OFFICERS

In a significant step towards realisation of the Prime Minister's vision for creation of a New India by 2022, Government has identified 115 backward districts for rapid transformation by 2022.

For each of the Districts, a senior official in the rank of Additional secretary and Joint secretary has been nominated as Prabhari officer. The First meeting of the Prabhari Officers was recently held under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary. The meeting was attended by Secretaries of the important central Ministries.

Role of Prabhari officers

20th Nov to 26th Nov

Prabhari officers would take it up as a challenge and succeed in their mission by making a difference in the lives of millions of citizens in these districts. Prabhari officers would form a team with State representatives and bring convergence in their effort. Prabhari officers will assist the District administration in sharing the vision for 2022

Funding:

Funds are not a constraint in this program since large funds are available under different Schemes. The officers will explore the availability of funds in District Mineral funds, wherever available for this purpose. In addition, they will also use flexi-fund which are significant in amount and are available under different Schemes of the Government.

Significance

If these districts are transformed, there would be tremendous improvement in the internal security environment of the country. While most districts have been selected on the basis of their vulnerability to Left Wing Extremism and rest in J&K and North East affected by terrorism.

If Prabhari officers can bring convergence in the development efforts of different Ministries and state Governments and the schemes specially launched by Home Ministry in these districts, it would serve as a great opportunity to ensure rapid development in the country.

For success

For the program to succeed, third party validation of key performance indicators in the field of education, health and nutrition, basic infrastructure including roads, electricity, household toilets, agriculture and irrigation is necessary.

INDIA AND ITS INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BRICS BANK

Where is it? Shanghai

Why in news?

20th Nov to 26th Nov

BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) has approved two infrastructure and sustainable development projects in India and Russia.

The loans will be used to rehabilitate the Indira Gandhi canal system in India and to build a toll transport corridor connecting Ufa city centre to the M-5 federal highway in Russia.

NDB:

It is a multilateral development bank operated by the BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). It is seen as an alternative to the existing US-dominated World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

- The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013.
- The bank is set up to foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets.

Voting: Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

Functions

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

INDIA REFUSES TO BUDGE ON FOOD SECURITY

What's the issue?

At the upcoming WTO's Ministerial Conference, India has decided not to agree to severe restrictions on its right to give price subsidies to farmers through the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to procure grains from them for food security purposes.

Food security and protection of low-income and resource-poor farmers are top priority items for India at the WTO meet.

An interim mechanism

20th Nov to 26th Nov

Currently, an interim mechanism called the 'Peace Clause' is in place, as per which WTO members had agreed not to challenge developing nations at the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism if they breached the cap of the product-specific domestic support (which is 10% of the value of production). The 'Peace Clause' is available to developing nations, including India, till a permanent solution is found to public stockholding for food security purposes.

Problems with peace clause

The 'Peace Clause' is difficult to invoke even in its current form because prior to using it, the country concerned will have to first admit that it 'is breaching' or 'is about to breach' the ceiling entitlement to give product-specific domestic support.

Also, the 'Peace Clause' can be used only for public stockholding programmes that have been in existence on the date at which it was agreed upon at the Bali Ministerial Conference in December 2013, and not for new programmes on public stockholding for food security purposes.

Challenges going forward

The prospects of an agreement on a permanent solution are not that bright due to three roadblocks.

- First, the U.S. has not been engaging actively on the matter till recently, and if the U.S. does not give its nod, it will be difficult to arrive at a decision.
- Second, the European Union has tried to link the permanent solution with outcomes including stringent disciplines on domestic support given by developing nations.
- Lastly, most WTO members are of the opinion that there should be a commitment on prohibition of exports from public stockholding saying such exports would be trade-distorting.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

MEDIATING ON ROHINGYA ISSUE

Who will act as a mediator? China

20th Nov to 26th Nov

Dispute between: Bangladesh and Myanmar over the Rohingya refugee crisis

The three- stage solution

Recently, a three-stage solution to the humanitarian calamity was announced

- First stage: Myanmar should impose a ceasefire and stop the persecuted Rohingyas from fleeing into Bangladesh.
- Second stage: Bangladesh and Myanmar should strengthen exchanges and find a solution “on the basis of equality”.
- The third stage involves asking the international community to help develop the backward Rakhine state in Myanmar, which is the home of Rohingyas.

Cause for dispute

The Rohingya people are a Muslim minority group residing in the Rakhine state, formerly known as Arakan and are considered to be a variation of the Sunni religion. The Rohingya people are considered “stateless entities”, as the Myanmar government has been refusing to recognise them as one of the ethnic groups of the country. For this reason, the Rohingya people lack legal protection from the Government of Myanmar, are regarded as mere refugees from Bangladesh, and face strong hostility in the country.

They are often described by Amnesty International as one of the most persecuted people on earth. To escape the dire situation in Myanmar, the Rohingya try to illegally enter Southeast Asian states like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia, begging for humanitarian support from potential host countries.

INDIA WINS A SLOT AT ICJ, AGAIN

Justice Dalveer Bhandari won the election to the International Court of Justice with 183 of 193 votes in UN General Assembly and all 15 at UNSC voting in his favour.

As it happened

20th Nov to 26th Nov

The process of India getting re-elected reflected respect for its constitutional integrity and independent judiciary. The UN Security Council and the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly in support of India.

Justice Dalveer Bhandari won the votes in the UN General Assembly to make it to the International Court of Justice after UK pulled out the race. Mr Bhadari will fill the fifth vacancy for the 2018-2027 term.

Significance for India:

The election shows how the exclusive club of few in the UN is now begun to yield space to new emerging economies. This is also the first time that one sitting member of the ICJ lost to another sitting member.

Analysts say the election result was crucial for India to gauge the support it enjoys in the world body where New Delhi has been campaigning for reforms, including a permanent seat for itself in the powerful Security Council.

The re-election is also crucial as it ensures India's continued influence at the ICJ where the Kulbhushan Jadhav case against Pakistan will come up next month. India has moved the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Pakistan, accusing the latter of violating the Vienna Convention in the case of Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was handed a death sentence.

The re-election was a positive affirmation of Indian diplomacy. This was the first time that a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) was in direct contest with a non-member for the post of a judge at the ICJ. And India clinched the deal in the end.

Why Britain withdrew from the election?

India is emerging as a top economic partner and a potential market for a post-Brexit United Kingdom could also have played a role in Britain's decision.

Further, the UK hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government summit meeting in April 2018 is significant for it wants India to play a lead role and to shed the image of being a "white man's club".

20th Nov to 26th Nov

With Justice Bhandari's re-election, this will be at first time in the 70-year history of the U.N. that the U.K. will not be on the world judicial body. The U.K chose to withdraw after it became clear that it would not win the contest in the General Assembly (GA) and it did not have adequate support in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for its attempts to derail the voting process itself.

On what basis are judges elected?

It is held that all nominees should have a 'high moral character and credentials commensurate with those expected from the highest judicial officials of those countries.

The Charter also makes it mandatory for judges to have recognized competence in international law. In order to keep the ICJ insulated from political influence, it is enshrined in the Charter that no judge can be dismissed, unless in the unanimous opinion of all peers, he is deemed to no longer fulfill the required conditions.

Presidency of the ICJ:

The President and the Vice-President are elected by the Members of the Court every three years by secret ballot.

About ICJ:

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) referred to as the World Court, ICJ or the Hague court, is the primary judicial branch of the United Nations(UN).

Seated in the Peace Palace in the Hague, Netherlands, the court settles legal disputes submitted to it by states and provides advisory opinions on legal questions submitted to it by duly authorized international branches, agencies, and the UN General Assembly.

Composition of ICJ:

- The ICJ has a bench of 15 judges, five of whom are elected every three years for a nine-year term.
- The judge to the ICJ is elected by the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council, where polling takes place simultaneously but independent of each other, from the list of people nominated by the national group in the Permanent Court of Arbitration.
- To be appointed, the candidate needs a majority in both the chambers, the UN General Assembly as well as the UN Security Council.
- In order to be elected, a candidate must have an absolute majority in both bodies, which often leads to much lobbying, and a number of rounds of voting.

20th Nov to 26th Nov

An absolute majority is required and there are no conditions with regard to nationality. The President and the Vice-President may be re-elected.

- The President presides at all meetings of the Court; he/she directs its work and supervises its administration, with the assistance of a Budgetary and Administrative Committee and of various other committees, all composed of Members of the Court.
- During judicial deliberations, the President has a casting vote in the event of votes being equally divided.
- In The Hague, where he/she is obliged to reside, the President of the Court takes precedence over the doyen of the diplomatic corps.

How does ICJ work?

The International Court of Justice entertains two kinds of cases viz. legal disputes between States submitted to it by them (contentious cases) and requests for advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by United Nations organs and specialized agencies (advisory proceedings).

- Only States (States Members of the United Nations and other States which have become parties to the Statute of the Court or which have accepted its jurisdiction under certain conditions) may be parties to contentious cases.
- The Court is competent to entertain a dispute only if the States concerned have accepted its jurisdiction by entering into a special agreement to submit the dispute to the Court.
- The country can also enter into its jurisdiction through the reciprocal effect of declarations made by them under the Statute whereby each has accepted the jurisdiction of the Court as compulsory in the event of a dispute with another State having made a similar declaration.
- Advisory proceedings before the Court are open solely to five organs of the United Nations and to 16 specialized agencies of the United Nations family.
- The United Nations General Assembly and Security Council may request advisory opinions on “any legal question”. Other United Nations organs and specialized agencies which have been authorized to seek advisory opinions can only do so with respect to “legal questions arising within the scope of their activities”.

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PACIFIC OCEAN'S 11

What is it all about?

11 Pacific Rim countries reached a deal to proceed with the free-trade Trans-Pacific Partnership deal that was in doubt after US President abandoned it.

The revival of the Trans-Pacific Partnership minus the U.S. opens opportunities for India, too

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

Reasons behind United States withdrawal

US President argued that the agreement would “undermine” the U.S. economy and their independence. Instead he introduced an economic strategy of “putting America first”, stating that he would negotiate “fair, bilateral trade deals that bring jobs and industry back onto American shore s.

What is TPP?

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

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.

But all 12 nations needed to ratify it, before it could come into effect. US participation was the major linchpin for the deal.

US under the Former President Barack Obama treated this particular deal would have bolstered America’s position in the Asia-Pacific region, where China is growing in influence. But US opponents have characterised the TPP as a secretive deal that favoured big business and other countries at the expense of American jobs and national sovereignty.

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TPP has been resurrected

When US President was visiting Vietnam, trade ministers from the remaining 11 nations agreed in Danang in principle to a new pact, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), revising some of the features of the TPP.

For the agreement to take effect, the pact requires domestic ratification, which is expected to be complete by 2019. This major step taken by the 11 countries of the Pacific Rim excluding the U.S. is a reflection of two things.

1. These countries recognise that multilateral free trade, contrary to any misgivings, is beneficial in the long run. The TPP in its current form has significant protections for labour and environment and is in this regard an advance over other free trade agreements.
2. The U.S.'s self-exclusion reflects a failure on the part of the Trump administration; studies have shown significant benefits in comparison to minor costs — in terms of jobs — to the U.S. on account of the pact.

Figure 1 Countries Participating in the TPP Negotiations



Countering China

Countries like Japan are eager to use the salvaged TPP to counter China's growing sway. Beijing is increasingly seeking to influence the region, notably through its Belt and Road Initiative that aims to foster greater trade across Asia and Europe through huge investments in things like roads, railways and ports.

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Major Asian powers will continue to seek opportunities to balance against China — with or without the U.S. and despite Trump's withdrawal from TPP, China won't necessarily find it easy to draw countries fully into its orbit.

Suspicious about American commitment

US President couches his regime's policies as populist nationalism — 'protecting labour' in the case of the abandonment of the TPP, promoting jobs in fossil fuel-intensive sectors to justify the repudiation of the Paris Accord, and retaining American exceptionalism in West Asian policy in scrapping the Iran nuclear deal.

US President's agenda to pull his country out of multilateral agreements has coincided, ironically, with the rise of China as the leading world power promoting globalisation. The actual effect of going through with these actions has been to create a suspicion among America's allies about his reliability when it comes to standing by old commitments.

Effect on India

The pressure on New Delhi to fast-track on-going free-trade negotiations with countries that were part of the TPP, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, is going to increase.

The eagerness of members to conclude the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) — the ambitious free trade pact that India is negotiating with the 10-member ASEAN, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand — will also intensify as seven of its 16 members are also part of TPP.

India must utilise this opportunity to win concessions on services trade liberalisation as part of the plan.

YEMEN CRISIS

Yemen was already reeling from a humanitarian catastrophe when Saudi Arabia imposed a land, sea and air blockade on the country. The poorest Arab nation has now plunged into further crisis, with the UN warning of

20th Nov to 26th Nov

“the largest famine the world has seen for many decades” there if the blockade is not lifted.

Yemen Crisis

Yemen, historically divided between Shiites, who live mostly in the northeast, and the majority Sunni population who live in the southeast, is important to regional players and the United States.

The country has been devastated by a war between forces loyal to the internationally-recognised government of President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi and those allied to the Houthi rebel movement.

The conflict and a blockade imposed by the coalition have also left 20 million people in need of humanitarian assistance and created the world's



largest food security emergency.

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The conflict has its roots in the failure of a political transition supposed to bring stability to Yemen following an uprising that forced its long time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to Mr Hadi, his deputy, in 2011.

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Mr Hadi struggled to deal with a variety of problems, including attacks by al-Qaeda, a separatist movement in the south, the continuing loyalty of many military officers to Mr Saleh, as well as corruption, unemployment and food insecurity.

The Houthi movement, which champions Yemen's Zaidi Shia Muslim minority and fought a series of rebellions against Mr Saleh during the previous decade, took advantage of the new president's weakness by taking control of their northern heartland of Saada province and neighbouring areas.

Alarmed by the rise of a group they believed to be backed militarily by regional Shia power Iran, Saudi Arabia and eight other mostly Sunni Arab states began an air campaign aimed at restoring Mr Hadi's government. The coalition received logistical and intelligence support from the US, UK and France.

A 'Catastrophic' Famine in the offing

The Saudis say the blockade, imposed after a long-range missile from Yemen was intercepted near Riyadh airport on November 4, was aimed at preventing the Houthi rebels from smuggling in weaponry. But in effect, Riyadh is starving millions of people who are already dependent on international aid for food and drugs.

For almost three years, Saudi Arabia has been bombing Yemen with impunity. King Salman launched the war with the aim of defeating the Houthis, who the Saudis see as Iranian proxies. The U.S. offered support for the Saudi campaign.

Now the war has entered a stalemate, with the Saudis seeing no face-saving exit. The country doesn't have a functional government. Large parts, including Sanaa, the capital city, are controlled by the Houthis, while the Saudi-backed government is operating from Aden, a southern city. Al-Qaeda has become stronger in the chaos triggered by the war.

Never-ending bombing and the failure to provide basic services have resulted in a food crisis and a medical emergency. At present, 17 million people in Yemen are dependent on external aid for survival. The country has also seen a cholera outbreak.

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There has been no meaningful effort from the international community to put pressure on Riyadh to end the war either.

Regional power play

The problem is that Saudi Arabia and its allies look at Yemen as a theatre for regional power play. The Saudis don't want the Houthis to control the country as they fear it would extend Iran's influence right to its backyard.

But Saudi Arabia lacks the strategic depth and resources to shape Yemen's future and yet, driven by geopolitical ambitions, it is resorting to excessive use of air power. But that is not enough to defeat the Houthis, who have the support of both the country's Shia community and the loyalists of the deposed President Ali Abdullah Saleh.

As a result, the Houthis still remain powerful even as Saudi Arabia continues to attack Yemen's cities. From the blockade, it is evident that Saudi Arabia will not wind down this war.

What is the international community saying?

Eighteen humanitarian agencies penned a joint letter condemning the closure and demanding that humanitarian operations are allowed to resume immediately.

The group also requested clarity on how long the blockade was intended to be in place; right now it appears indefinite and no aid has entered the country for days.

What is needed?

Access for humanitarian personnel and cargo into Yemen is essential to deliver desperately needed assistance to a population already severely affected by more than two and a half years of conflict.

It is absolutely essential that the operation of the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) be allowed to continue unhindered.

UN and other international bodies should deal with Saudi Arabia in the way aggressor nations are dealt with and bring some real pressure on the kingdom to end this brutal war.

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IMD WORLD TALENT RANKINGS

World Talent Ranking covers 63 countries and assesses the methods countries use to attract and retain the talent their businesses need to thrive.

Parameters for ranking

The IMD World Talent Ranking is based on countries' performance in three main categories – investment and development, appeal and readiness.

The three categories assess how countries perform in a wide range of areas. These include education, apprenticeships, workplace training, language skills, cost of living, quality of life, remuneration and tax rates.

Performances

India has improved its ranking by three notches to 51 globally.

- Switzerland, Denmark and Belgium remain the most competitive countries.
- Among the BRICS countries, South Africa ranks in the middle position, performing better than India and Brazil comes last, with China at the top and Russia following it.
- Among Asian economies, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan took the top positions by attracting and retaining high skilled workers.

Lessons for India

As per the IMD rankings, India has not been successful in terms of investment in education as a percentage of GDP. Therefore, India needs to

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emphasise the education system as a key to prosperity. It also needs to prevent brain drain by providing better opportunities to local talent.

EUROPEAN BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT

Why in news?

The Union Cabinet has approved India's Membership for European Bank for Reconstruction & Development (EBRD).

Potential benefits for India

Membership of EBRD would enhance India's international profile and promote its economic interests. It will also give access to EBRD's Countries of Operation and sector knowledge.

India's investment opportunities would get a boost. It would increase the scope of cooperation between India and EBRD through co-financing opportunities in manufacturing, services, Information Technology, and Energy.

EBRD's core operations pertain to private sector development in their countries of operation. The membership would help India leverage the technical assistance and sectoral knowledge of the bank for the benefit of development of private sector.

What is the EBRD?

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is an international financial institution that supports projects in over 30 countries, from eastern Europe to central Asia and the southern and eastern Mediterranean. Investing primarily in private sector clients whose needs cannot be fully met by the market, the EBRD promotes entrepreneurship and fosters transition towards open and democratic market economies.

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Mandate

The mandate of the EBRD stipulates that it must only work in countries that are committed to democratic principles. Respect for the environment is part of the strong corporate governance attached to all EBRD investments.

Support it provides

The EBRD provides project financing for banks, industries and businesses, both new ventures and investments in existing companies. It also works with publicly owned companies, to support privatisation, restructuring state-owned firms and improving municipal services. It uses close relationship with governments in the region to promote policies that will bolster the business environment.

Ownership

The EBRD is owned by 65 countries and two intergovernmental institutions: the European Union and the European Investment Bank (EIB).

Governance structure

The powers of the EBRD are vested in the Board of Governors to which each member appoints a governor, generally the minister of finance.

The Board of Governors delegates most powers to the Board of Directors, which is responsible for the EBRD's strategic direction.

The President is elected by the Board of Governors and is the legal representative of the EBRD. Under the guidance of the Board of Directors, the President manages the EBRD's work.

INDIA FOR INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF MILLETS

Why in news?

20th Nov to 26th Nov

India has sent a proposal to United Nations for declaring the year 2018 as 'International Year of Millets'. The proposal, if agreed, will raise awareness about millets among consumers, policy makers, industry and R&D sector.

Why is it important?

Promotion of production and consumption of millets through conscious efforts at global level is likely to contribute substantially in the fight against targeted hunger and mitigate the effect of climate change in long run. Popularizing millets would benefit future generations of farmers as well as consumers.

What are Millets?

Millet is a common term to categorize small-seeded grasses that are often termed nutri-cereals or dryland-cereals, and includes sorghum, pearl millet, ragi, small millet, foxtail millet, proso millet, barnyard millet, kodo millet and other millets.

Benefits of Millets:

An important staple cereal crop for millions of small holder dryland farmers across sub-saharan Africa and Asia, millets offer nutrition, resilience, income and livelihood for farmers even in difficult times.

They have multiple untapped uses such as food, feed, fodder, biofuels and brewing. Therefore, millets are Smart Food as they are Good for You, Good for the Farmer and Good for the Planet.

- Nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their higher levels of protein with more balanced amino acid profile, crude fiber & minerals such as Iron, Zinc, and Phosphorous, millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.
- The anaemia (iron deficiency), B-complex vitamin deficiency, pellagra (niacin deficiency) can be effectively tackled with intake of less expensive but nutritionally rich food grains like millets.
- Millets can also help tackle health challenges such as obesity, diabetes and lifestyle problems as they are gluten free, have a low glycemic index and are high in dietary fibre and antioxidants.

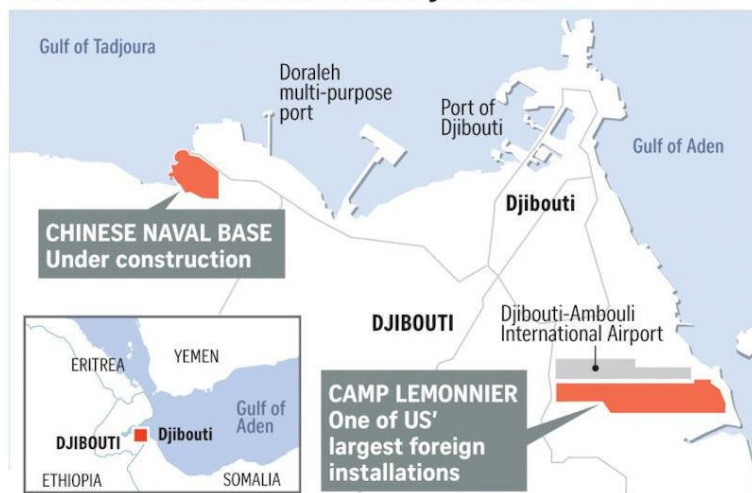
20th Nov to 26th Nov

- Adapted to low or no purchased inputs and to harsh environment of the semi-arid tropics, they are the backbone for dry land agriculture.
- Photo-insensitive & resilient to climate change, millets are hardy, resilient crops that have a low carbon and water footprint, can withstand high temperatures and grow on poor soils with little or no external inputs. In times of climate change they are often the last crop standing and, thus, are a good risk management strategy for resource-poor marginal farmers.

CHINA'S BASE AT DJIBOUTI

China and Djibouti have agreed to elevate their nations' diplomatic relations to form a "strategic partnership".

Chinese and US bases in Djibouti



Source: THE NEW YORK TIMES STRAITS TIMES GRAPHICS

Backgrounder:

China is constructing its first overseas military base in Djibouti — just a few miles from Camp Lemonnier, one of the Pentagon's largest and most important foreign installations. With this, United States and China will become neighbours in this sun-scorched patch of East African desert.

Base at Djibouti:

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The establishment of the People's Liberation Army Djibouti base was a decision made by the two countries after friendly negotiations, and accords with the common interest of the people from both sides. The base is aimed at ensuring China's performance of missions, such as escorting, peace-keeping and humanitarian aid in Africa and West Asia.

The base will also conduct overseas tasks, including military cooperation, joint exercises, evacuating and protecting overseas Chinese and emergency rescue, as well as jointly maintaining security of international strategic seaways.

About Djibouti:

Djibouti, officially the Republic of Djibouti, is a country located in the Horn of Africa. It is bordered by Eritrea in the north, Ethiopia in the west and south, and Somalia in the southeast. The remainder of the border is formed by the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden at the east.

GENERAL STUDIES-3

INDIAN ECONOMY

NEW DIRECT TAX LAW

Government has set up a task force to draft a new direct tax law that aims widening the tax base, improving compliance and ease of doing business. The panel is to submit the report in 6 months

Income-tax Act, 1961

The Income-tax Act, 1961 is the charging Statute of Income Tax in India. It provides for levy, administration, collection and recovery of Income Tax.

The act basically aims to consolidate and amend the rules related to taxation in the country. The Income tax Act contains a long list of sections, each of which deal with different aspects of taxation in the country.

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The Government of India brought a draft statute called the “Direct Taxes Code” intended to replace the Income Tax Act, 1961 and the Wealth Tax Act, 1957.

Amendments to the law

The Taxation Laws (Second Amendment) Act, 2016 is an amendment Act to Income-tax Act, 1961 and the Finance Act, 2016.

The Taxation Laws (Second Amendment) Bill, 2016 was passed in Lok Sabha as a money bill enabling people to declare their undisclosed incomes after Indian 500 and 1000 rupee note demonetization

What is Direct Tax Code?

DTC main aim is to simplify, revise and consolidate the structure of direct taxes laws in India. Direct Tax Code was formulated to replace the five-decade-old Income-Tax Act.

The Bill had proposed annual I-T exemption limit at Rs 2 lakh, and levying 10 per cent tax on income between Rs 2 lakh and Rs 5 lakh, 20 per cent on Rs 5-10 lakh and 30 per cent above Rs 10 lakh. For domestic companies, it suggested tax rate of 30 per cent of business income.

Is it really needed to alter the existing law?

It might not be a wise decision to unsettle the settled law, especially in present environment where entities are endeavoring their best to implement India’s biggest tax reform, GST in its true spirit

A simpler code with fewer tax breaks and lower tax rates is, in theory, a good idea. However, there is a dilemma out on whether there is a need for a new code or to fine-tune the existing law. Any decision should be not be hurried in order to push the agenda

In conclusion

Instead of changing the entire law, the government should consider modifying the existing law so that the disputable provisions and litigations could be minimized.

20th Nov to 26th Nov

It is heartening to note that the new law will be drafted keeping in view the economic needs of the country.

DTC advocated removal of profit-linked deductions, which have already been announced under I-T Act. It would be helpful if the new tax law emphasizes more reasonable and fair administration of the tax laws to address the concerns of uncertainties and needless tax litigations

PREVENTION OF MONEY LAUNDERING ACT (PMLA)

Why in news?

The Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional Section 45 (1) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002, which imposed stringent conditions on the grant of bail. The court also ordered fresh trial in all cases in which bail was denied because of these conditions. The court said the section to be unconstitutional as it violates Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India.

What is Section 45(1)?

It imposes two conditions for grant of bail in offences punishable with a jail term of more than three years. It requires that the public prosecutor must be given an opportunity to oppose any application for release on bail and in cases where the public prosecutor opposes the bail plea, the court must be satisfied that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the accused was not guilty and was unlikely to commit an offence if granted bail.

PMLA 2002:

Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 is an Act of the Parliament of India enacted to prevent money-laundering and to provide for confiscation of property derived from money-laundering.

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The Act and Rules notified impose obligation on banking companies, financial institutions and intermediaries to verify identity of clients, maintain records and furnish information.

MERCHANDISE EXPORTS FROM INDIA SCHEME (MEIS)

Why in news?

The government has doubled the incentive for exporters of garments and made-ups under the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS) to support declining textile exports.

Scripts:

Under the programme, exporters are given duty exemption scrips that are pegged at a certain percentage of total value of their exports. These scrips can be used to pay duties on inputs including customs.

What is MEIS?

Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) under Foreign Trade Policy of India (FTP 2015-20) is one of the two schemes introduced in Foreign Trade Policy of India 2015-20, as a part of Exports from India Scheme.

Objective: To offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness.

AGRICULTURE AND CROPPING PATTERNS

INDIAN FOREST AMENDMENT ORDINANCE, 2017

In a landmark initiative, Centre has promulgated the Indian Forest (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 to exempt bamboo grown in non-forest

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areas from definition of tree, thereby dispensing with the requirement of felling/transit permit for its economic use.

Backgrounder

For 90 years Bamboo-taxonomically a grass-was registered as a tree in the Forest Act, but the recent amendment has axed bamboo from a list of plants that also included palms, skumps, brush-wood and canes.

Before this amendment, cutting and transport of bamboo grown in forest as well as non-forest land was illegal.

Significance

The government hopes to promote cultivation of bamboo in non-forest areas to achieve the “twin objectives” of doubling the income of farmers by 2022 and also increasing the green cover of the country.

However, Bamboo grown in the forest areas would continue to be governed by the provisions of the Indian Forest Act.

Objectives

- ✓ Conservation and Sustainable development.
- ✓ Enhance supply of raw material to the traditional craftsmen of rural India.
- ✓ The amendment will encourage farmers and other individuals to take up plantation/ block plantation of suitable bamboo species on degraded land, in addition to plantation on agricultural land and other private lands under agro forestry mission.
- ✓ The amendment will greatly aid the success of recently constituted National Bamboo Mission.
- ✓ The amendment will therefore, help in harnessing this great potential and enhance the scope to increase the present level of market share and improve the economy of the entire country, particularly the North Eastern region.
- ✓ Encourage growth of small and medium industries in the villages and smaller towns also, and reduce our dependence on imports

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Need of enhancing Bamboo sector:

The current demand of bamboo in India is estimated at 28 million tonnes. Though the country has 19% share of the world's area under bamboo cultivation, its market share in the sector is only 6%. At present, it imports timber and allied products, such as pulp, paper, and furniture.

India has the largest area under bamboo cultivation and is the second richest in terms of bamboo genetic resources after China.

Challenges faced so far

India's massive potential was not utilised all these years to increase the country's share in the global bamboo market because of the restrictive regulatory regime

- Requirement of permission for felling
- Transit and processing
- Export restrictions
- Royalty and transit fee on the products

As a result, India is currently importing timber and allied products such as

Reserved Forest:

Reserved Forest is an area mass of land duly notified under the provisions of Indian Forest Act or the State Forest Acts having full degree of protection. In Reserved Forests all activities are prohibited unless permitted. Reserved Forest is notified under section 20 of the Indian Forest Act, 1927.

Indian Forest Act, 1927

It is an act to consolidate the laws relating to forest, the transit of forest-produce and the duty leviable on timber and other forest-produce.

It seeks to consolidate and reserve the areas having forest cover, or significant wildlife, to regulate movement and transit of forest produce, and duty leviable on timber and other forest produce.

It also defines the procedure to be followed for declaring an area to be a Reserved Forest, a Protected Forest or a Village Forest. It defines what is a forest offence, what are the acts prohibited inside a Reserved Forest, and penalties leviable on violation of the provisions of the Act.

pulp, paper and furniture, etc.

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INDUSTRY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND INVESTMENT

UIWAL DISCOM ASSURANCE YOJANA (UDAY)

Why in news?

The Government of India has signed four Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under the UDAY Scheme with the State of Nagaland and with Union

National Bamboo Mission:

The National Bamboo Mission was launched in 2006-07 as a Centrally Sponsored Scheme to promote the growth of bamboo sector. The programmes address four major areas of bamboo development as follows:

- Research and Development for sustainable development and new Bamboo Agri-forestry technique for technology generation
- Plantation Development: Establishment of new Nurseries to raise bamboo seedlings. Raising high yielding bamboo plantations on commercial basis in Forest as well as Non-Forest areas
- Pest and Disease Management of bamboo.
- Handicrafts Development
- Marketing and exports
- Capacity building and Human Resource Development of farmers, field functionaries and others
- Meticulous monitoring, evaluation and reporting, Database generation, compilation and analysis

Territories (UTs) for operational improvements.

These State/UTs have joined only for operational improvement and shall not undergo financial restructuring/issue of bonds under the scheme. With the above, UDAY club has now grown to 27 states and 4 UTs.

Significance

Net financial benefit would accrue to the State of Nagaland & UTs of Andaman & Nicobar, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu by opting to participate in UDAY, by way of cheaper funds for capex, reduction in AT&C and Transmission losses, interventions in energy efficiency, etc. during the period of turnaround.

The MoU paves way for improving operational efficiency of the Electricity Departments/DISCOM of the State/Union Territory. AT&C losses and

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transmission losses would be brought down, besides eliminating the gap between cost of supply of power and realisation.

While efforts will be made by the States/UTs to improve their operational efficiency, and thereby reduce the cost of supply of power, the Central Government would also provide incentives to the State/UTs for improving power infrastructure and for further lowering the cost of power.

UDAY scheme:

UDAY or Ujwal Discom Assurance Yojna was launched in 2015 to help loss-making discoms turn around financially, with support from their State governments.

The UDAY scheme is aimed at bringing ailing power distribution companies (discoms) to a state of operational efficiency, with state governments taking over up to 75% of their respective discoms' debt and issuing sovereign bonds to pay back the lenders.

UDAY envisages a permanent resolution of past as well as potential future issues of the sector. The scheme seeks to achieve this through several simultaneous steps including reducing the interest burden on the discoms by allowing the states to take over the bulk of their debt, reducing the cost of power, and increasing the operational efficiencies of the discoms by providing capital and infrastructure like coal linkages.

SAGARMALA PROGRAMME

Why in news

A world class Center of Excellence in Maritime and Ship Building (CEMS) is being set up by Ministry of Shipping in collaboration with Siemens and Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) under the Ministry's flagship Sagarmala Programme.

Where? Vishakhapatnam and Mumbai.

What Do these centers do?

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CEMS will provide industry-relevant skill development, equip students with employable engineering and technical skills in the port and maritime sector and contribute to the Government of India's ambitious Sagarmala programme.

CEMS is being set up to meet the domestic skill requirement in ship design, manufacturing, operating and maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO).

This initiative also adds to the Make in India and Skill India efforts in the maritime sector. CEMS will provide skilled manpower to make vessels for inland waterways, ships, fishing boats and other ancillary manufacturing sectors.

Sagarmala:

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

Aim: To develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.

Nodal ministry: The Union Ministry of Shipping has been appointed as the nodal ministry for this initiative.

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

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

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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BRAHMOS

Why in news?

The Brahmos supersonic cruise missile has been successfully test fired for the first time from the Indian Air Force's frontline Sukhoi-30 MKI combat jet.

Details

BrahMos is the heaviest weapon to be deployed on India's Su-30 fighter aircraft. It has been modified by HAL to carry weapons.

- It is a world-class weapon with multi-platform, multi-mission role and is capable of being launched from land, sea and air.
- BrahMos is a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) of India and NPOM of Russia.
- The name Brahmos has been taken from two rivers – Brahmaputra and Moskva.
- They have an effective strike range of around 290-300 km.

PILL TALK — ON ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE

World Antibiotic Awareness Week, a World Health Organisation campaign to focus attention on antibiotic resistance was organised recently. The global threats of climate change and antibiotic resistance have much in common. In both cases, the actions of people in one region have consequences across the globe. Also, tackling both requires collective action across multiple focus areas.

Theme of the event: "Antibiotics: Handle with Care".

What is antibiotic resistance?

Antibiotics are medicine used to treat infections caused by bacteria. Antibiotic Resistance refers to resistance developed by bacteria against antibiotics or the ability of bacteria to mutate or change so as to resist the effects of antibiotics. The more we use them, and the more we abuse them, the less effective they become.

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Antibiotics are unquestionably useful against bacterial infections. However, indiscriminate use and prescription has resulted in development of resistance in patients with bacterial infections thereby leading to long lasting illnesses.

Negative effects:

Antibiotic resistance causes people to be sick for longer and increases the risk of death. It also increases the cost of health care with lengthier stays in hospital and more intensive care required.

Few new antibiotics are being developed, which is exacerbating the situation as more antibiotic resistant bacteria adapts and arises. Therefore, rational use of antibiotics is essential in order to minimize antibiotic resistance.

Antimicrobial Resistance in India

AMR is of particular concern in developing nations, including India, where the burden of infectious disease is high and healthcare spending is low. The country has among the highest bacterial disease burden in the world. Antibiotics, therefore, have a critical role in limiting morbidity and mortality in the country. The 2015 WHO multi-country survey revealed widespread public misunderstanding about antibiotic usage and resistance.

There is a need to have in place a good comprehensive AMR National Action Plan in line with the Global AMR action plan.

Many of the 410,000 Indian children who die of pneumonia each year do not get the antibiotics they need, while others misuse drugs, buying them without prescription and taking them for viral illnesses like influenza. Sometimes this irrational use is driven by quacks. But just as often, qualified doctors add to the problem by yielding to pressure from patients or drug-makers.

When policymakers did propose such a ban in 2011, it was met with strong opposition. Instead, India turned to fine-edged tools such as the Schedule H1, a list of 24 critical antibiotics such as cephalosporins and carbapenems, whose sale is tightly controlled.

What are Schedule H drugs?

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Schedule H is a class of prescription drugs in India appearing as an appendix to the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 introduced in 1945.

1. These are drugs which cannot be purchased over the counter without the prescription of a qualified doctor.
2. The manufacture and sale of all drugs are covered under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act and Rules.

Why hasn't Schedule H1 accomplished much?

Enforcement of Schedule H laws in India is lax, compared to the more restrictive Schedule X, for which a mandatory documentation trail must be maintained.

- Pharmacists often flout rules, and drug controllers are unable to monitor them. Thus, the power to purchase antibiotics still remains in the hands of the consumer.
- Losing these drugs would mean that even minor illnesses could become killers, and the cost of health care will soar.

It is important to understand that, although they are very useful drugs, antibiotics designed for bacterial infections are not useful for viral infections such as a cold, cough, or the flu.

- Do not repeat the same antibiotic for the next time you get sick.
- Do not stop antibiotic before complete prescribed course of treatment.
- Do not skip doses.
- Do not copy the antibiotic with the same diseases which is prescribed for someone else.

In conclusion

Consumers need to remember that not all illnesses need antibiotics and the decision on when to take them and for how long are best left to a doctor.

Multi-resistance in some tertiary-care hospitals to bugs like *Staphylococcus aureus* has grown to dangerous levels. But the experience of countries like Australia shows that cutting down on

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antibiotics can reverse such trends. The National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance aims to repeat such successes in India.

Meanwhile, awareness must be built among consumers so that they see the coming crisis and take up the baton.

ENVIRONMENT

M-STRIPES

In the forthcoming All-India Tiger Estimation, to be taken up in December-January, the authorities are planning to use an app named M-STRiPES (Monitoring System For Tigers-Intensive Protection and Ecological Status)

Developed by: Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun.

Significance of this move:

Though the app has already been in place in some national parks, its usage and application has been made mandatory only now, for the fourth All-India Tiger Estimation.

All these years, data pertaining to carnivore signs, pellets and status of habitat was manually recorded in the prescribed format on a paper by the field staff, but this exercise was prone to errors. With the availability of M-STRiPES, human error will be eliminated.

Tiger estimates:

The national tiger estimates are conducted once in four years, with the first conducted in 2006.

- The Western Ghat landscape, comprising Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa, accounted for 776 tigers in 2014, with the Bandipur-Nagarahole-Mudumalai-Wayanad complex harbouring 570 tigers — reckoned to be the world's single largest tiger population in a landscape.

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- The last nationwide assessment, held in 2014, pegged the tiger figures across the country at 2,226. Karnataka alone was home to 400 tigers, a bulk of them in Bandipur and Nagarahole.

CHILIKA LAKE

Why in news?

Lakhs of migratory birds have made their way to the Chilika Lake. Major bird congregations have been spotted in the wetlands of the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary inside Chilika and Mangalajodi, a major village on the banks of the lake.

Migratory birds fly across continents from Caspian Sea, Baikal Lake and remote parts of Russia, Mongolia and Siberia and flock to the marshy lands of the Nalabana Bird Sanctuary inside the Chilika Lake, which is spread across over 1000 sq. km.

Chilika Lagoon:



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- It is the largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest lagoon in the world after The New Caledonian barrier reef in New Caledonia. It is Asia's largest brackish water lagoon.
- It is the largest wintering ground for migratory waterfowl found anywhere on the Indian sub-continent.
- It is one of the hotspot of biodiversity in the country, and some rare, vulnerable and endangered species listed in the IUCN Red List of threatened Animals inhabit in the lagoon for atleast part of their life cycle.
- On account of its rich bio-diversity and ecological significance, Chilika was designated as the 1st "Ramsar Site" of India.
- The Nalaban Island within the lagoon is notified as a Bird Sanctuary under Wildlife (Protection) Act, the National Wetlands, mangroves and coral reefs Committee of Ministry of Environment & Forests, Government of India, have also identified the lagoon as a priority site for conservation and management.
- Chilika Lagoon lies in the districts of Puri, Khurda and Ganjam of Odisha State along the eastern coast of India.
- It is well connected to the Chennai and Kolkata through National Highway No 5, and the Chennai Kolkata rail line

A NEW SPECIES OF GECKO

Where? Eastern Ghats in northern Andhra Pradesh.



Details

- The reptile is endemic to the area.

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- Named after eminent herpetologist Sushil Kumar Dutta from Odisha, Hemidactylus sushilduttai or Dutta's Mahendragiri gecko
- It is among the largest in its genus.
- Other endemics in the region are — Jeypore Indian gecko (Cyrtodactylus jeyporensis) and Gegeneophis orientalis — caecilian amphibian.
- It is nocturnal and lives on rocks, large trees and coffee plantations at altitudes between 250-1,100 m above sea level.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

IMBAX

It is a Bilateral Army Exercise (IMBAX) between the armies of India and Myanmar, held at Umroi in Meghalaya.

Objective

Conceived with an aim to build and promote closer relations, while exchanging skills and experiences between the two armies, IMBAX is the first India-Myanmar exercise to be held on Indian soil.

The training exercise aims to train the officers of Myanmar Army in various United Nations Peacekeeping roles and tasks.

DANX

The five- day crucial Defence of Andaman and Nicobar Islands Exercise (DANX) recently concluded.

What is it?

The exercise conducted under the aegis of Andaman and Nicobar Command, is India's only operational tri-services command.

The main objective of the exercise is to practice & validate procedures and drills of all the Command forces aimed at defending Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

NATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNAL HARMONY (NFCH)

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Why in news?

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH) is observed the Communal Harmony Campaign and Fund Raising Week, recently.

What is it?

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH) is an autonomous organisation with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Its work

It organises the Communal Harmony Campaign coinciding with the Qaumi Ekta Week and also observes the Communal Harmony Flag Day. The Foundation promotes Communal Harmony and strengthens National Integration.

Under its Project 'Assist', the NFCH also provides financial assistance for relief and rehabilitation of children rendered orphan or destitute in communal, caste, ethnic or terrorist violence.