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GS PAPER - I

Paper 1 Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Paryatan Parv

‘Paryatan Parv’ of the Ministry of Tourism has begun across the country.

What is Paryatan Parv?

The Paryatan Parv will showcase the cultural diversity of the country, with cultural performances, crafts bazaar, food court showcasing folk and classical dance & music, handicrafts & handlooms and cuisine from all regions and States of the country.

- The Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders is organizing “Paryatan Parv” across the country.
- The programme is being organized with the objective of drawing focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing the cultural diversity of the country and reinforcing the principle of “Tourism for All”.

Paryatan Parv will have three main components:

- **Dekho Apna Desh:** To encourage Indians to visit their own country. This includes Video, Photograph and Blog Competitions of sites visited during the Event, Stories of India through Travelers’ Eyes, on Social Media, Tourism related Quiz, Essay, Debate and Painting Competitions for Students, Television Campaigns to promote travel to J&K and N.E. States.
- **Tourism for All:** Tourism Events at sites across all States in the country. The activities at these sites include illumination in and around the Sites, Cultural Programmes of Dance, Music, Theatre, Story Telling, Sensitisation Programmes for Stakeholders around the Sites, Tourism Exhibitions etc. These will be “People’s Events” with large scale public participation.
- **Tourism & Governance:** Interactive Sessions & Workshops with Stakeholders on varied themes.

Sources: pib.

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

Commission to Examine Sub Categorization of other Backward Classes

The President of India, in exercise of the powers conferred by **article 340 of the Constitution**, has appointed a Commission to examine the sub-categorisation of Other Backward Classes.

Former Delhi High Court Chief Justice G. Rohini has been appointed by President of India as the head of the Commission.

Background:

The decision to appoint the commission follows an August 23 Cabinet decision to examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among caste and communities included in the broad list of OBCs. At present, **there is no sub-categorisation and 27% reservation is a monolithic entity.**

Need for subcategorization:

Sub categorization of the OBCs will ensure that the more backward among the OBC communities can also access the benefits of reservation for educational institutions and government jobs.

The terms of reference of the Commission are as under

- To examine the extent of inequitable distribution of benefits of reservation among the castes or communities included in the broad category of Other Backward Classes with reference to such classes included in the Central List.

- To work out the mechanism, criteria, norms and parameters in a scientific approach for sub-categorisation within such Other Backward Classes.
- To take up the exercise of identifying the respective castes or communities or sub-castes or synonyms in the Central List of Other Backward Classes and classifying them into their respective sub-categories.

Significance of this move:

This decision, taken on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, reinforces, in the spirit of his teachings, the Government's efforts to achieve greater social justice and inclusion for all, and specifically members of the Other Backward Classes.

Way ahead:

The Commission is required to present their Report to the President within a period of twelve weeks of assumption of charge by the Chairperson of the Commission. On receipt of the Report of the Commission, the Central Government will consider ways and means for equitable distribution of the benefits of the reservation in Central Government jobs and admission in Central Government Institutions amongst all strata of the Other Backward Classes.

Sources: pib.

Paper 1 Topic: *Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.*

World Habitat Day: 2 October

The United Nations designated the first Monday of October of every year as World Habitat Day to reflect on the state of our towns and cities, and on the basic right of all to adequate shelter. It is also intended to remind the world that we all have the power and the responsibility to shape the future of our cities and towns.

2017 theme: Housing Policies: Affordable Homes

Each year, World Habitat Day takes on a new theme to promote sustainable development policies that ensure adequate shelter for all. These themes often promote one of UN-Habitat's focal areas such as:

- Inclusive housing and social services.
- A safe and healthy living environment for all — with particular consideration for children, youth, women, elderly and disabled.
- Affordable and sustainable transport and energy.
- Promotion, protection, and restoration of green urban spaces.
- Safe and clean drinking water and sanitation.
- Healthy air quality.
- Job creation.
- Improved urban planning and slum upgrading.
- Better waste management.

Sources: the hindu.

Cleanest iconic place in the country

Sri Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple in Madurai has been adjudged the cleanest iconic place in the country under Swachhta Hi Seva (cleanliness is service) programme. The temple earned the top slot from among 10 iconic places selected under the Swachh Bharath Mission in the country.



Background:

Meenakshi Temple is a historic Hindu temple located on the southern bank of the Vaigai River in the temple city of Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India. It is dedicated to Meenakshi, a form of Parvati, and her consort, Sundareswar, a form of Shiva. The temple forms the heart and lifeline of the 2,500-year-old city of Madurai.

About Swachhta Hi Seva campaign:

It was a nation-wide, fortnight-long sanitation campaign launched to highlight the government's flagship cleanliness initiative Swachh Bharat Mission.

- The campaign was coordinated by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the convening Ministry for the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The objective of the campaign is to mobilise people and reinforce the "Jan Aandolan" for sanitation to contribute to Mahatma Gandhi's dream of a Clean India.

Sources: the hindu.

Is the Devadasi system still being followed in southern India?

Few media reports about a peculiar temple ritual of "offering" girl children to Goddess Mathamma in Chittor district of Andhra Pradesh have raised questions about the prevalence of the ancient Devadasi system, an oppressive practice of women and young girls being regarded as temple property and sexually exploited.



About the ritual:

- As part of the ritual, girls are dressed as brides and once the ceremony was over, their dresses are removed by five boys, virtually leaving them naked. They are then forced to live in the Mathamma temples, deemed to be public property, and face sexual exploitation.
- The Mathamma system has its equivalent in other regions of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The system is called 'Basivi' in Kurnool and Anantapur districts, 'Saani' in Krishna, East and West Godavari districts, and 'Parvathi' in Vizianagaram and Srikakulam districts. Women are unable to leave the exploitative system due to social pressures.

Concerns:

- Social activists say the girls are exploited, and forced to live as sex workers. Many die old and lonely and sick as they are forced to sleep in the Mathamma temples or outside the
- Besides, the state authorities have not been able to take up scientific rehabilitation measures due to lack of proper data and non-cooperation from the victims and village elders.
- As it is linked with the sentiments of the community, the official machinery and the political parties shy away from taking on the tradition. Moreover, the victimised community is largely viewed as a minority group, with no influence on vote-bank politics.

What is Devadasi system?

Devadasi system is a religious practice whereby parents marry a daughter to a deity or a temple. The marriage usually occurs before the girl reaches puberty.

In recent decades, the practice has been used to push young girls into prostitution. While various state governments have enacted laws to stop such practices, the tradition remains entrenched in some parts of the country, especially some southern states.

Laws prohibiting its practice:

The practice of Devadasi system in any form is in total contravention of the provisions of Section 370 and 370A as amended through Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 as well as Section 372 of Indian Penal Code. It is also against Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act.

Sources: the hindu.

Telangana launches IoT, e-waste management policy

The Telangana government has announced two new policies focussing on Internet of things and e-waste, which are part of the 10 major focus areas of the state's IT policy launched last year.

IoT policy:

The IoT policy is designed to attract Rs 10,000 crore worth of investments and the creation of five clusters each in three districts.

- The IoT policy is focussed on developing smart city solutions, medical health IoT, smart logistics and agri-tech.
- These will be propelled by TWorks, a hardware prototyping centre being developed by the state government.
- The centre will partner with corporates and laboratories to access testing tools and other prototyping equipment specific to IoT.

E waste policy:

E-Waste generation in India is rising at an alarming annual rate of 25%, with Hyderabad currently recording 25,000 MT per annum, the 6th largest generator in the country. The state's e-waste policy calls for earmarking industrial space or sheds for dismantling and recycling e-waste in existing and upcoming industrial parks, estates and industrial clusters.

- The government aims to promote management of e-waste through collaborations with bulk consumers of electronic products, major industry organisations and other stakeholders.
- The government would also provide incentives to boost refurbishing and recycling centres. A subsidy of Rs 1 crore will be provided for a minimum investment of Rs 5 crore for the first five recyclers and refurbishers.
- Apart from that, it also plans to give 25% subsidy on lease rentals for every company for the first three years of operation and provide Rs 1,000 as training subsidy per person every month for 1,000 people.
- With this, the government aims to provide employment for 50,000 people in five years.

Sources: et.

International Day of the Girl Child

The International Day of the Girl Child was celebrated by countries across the world on October 11.

This year the theme of the International Day of the Girl is '**EmPOWER girls: Before, during and after conflict**' in humanitarian emergencies gender-based violence increases which means girls are more likely to be subjected to sexual and physical violence, child marriage, exploitation and trafficking.

Background:

The United Nations established the day to bring attention to the needs and difficulties that girls face around the world. It also calls for empowerment and improved rights of the world's 1.1 billion girls. Since 2012, 11 October has been marked as the International Day of the Girl.



Issues and challenges:

- Child marriage is one of the most pressing issues facing the girl worldwide as an estimated one in three girls are married before they are 18, one in seven before they turn 15. There are 700 million women alive today who were married before 18 to men much older than themselves.
- Female genital mutilation is another problem that UNICEF estimates has affected 130 million girls worldwide.
- Sexual assault is another issue tackled by International Day of the Girl as up to 50% of all sexual assaults target girls under 16-years-old.

Sources: pib.

India could provide universal basic income of Rs 2,600 a year: IMF

In its '**Fiscal Monitor – Tackling Inequality**', the IMF has discussed UBI, "a proposal that has been widely debated recently and is being tested in several countries", devoting extensive space to its case for India.

IMF's observations on the idea of providing a UBI:

- IMF estimates India could provide a universal basic income (UBI) of Rs 2,600 a year to every person if it eliminates food and energy subsidies.
- Even such a modest level of UBI will incur a fiscal cost of about 3% of GDP, but would outperform the public food distribution and fuel subsidies on three counts.
- It will address the under coverage of the near 20% lower income groups in the PDS, address the issue of higher income groups cornering bigger subsidies and increase generosity benefits received by the lower income groups.
- In case of fuel subsidies, the IMF simulation goes beyond budget subsidy of cost-price difference to the extent prices are "below efficient levels that would internalize the negative externalities associated with fossil fuel consumption".
- The flip side of this is that eliminating the wider subsidies would require a sharper increase in prices than the case when budget subsidies are removed. The IMF cites a 2016 study that pegs the order of increase at gasoline (67%), diesel (69%), kerosene (10%), LPG (94%) and coal (455%).

What is UBI?

A basic income is an income unconditionally granted to all on an individual basis, without means test or work requirement.

Why UBI is needed?

- Can address poverty and inequality more effectively.
- Address income uncertainty due to impact of tech on jobs.
- Help garner support for unpopular structural reforms.

Arguments against UBI:

- Unnecessary benefits to higher income groups.
- High fiscal costs crowding out other spending.
- Discourages labour supply.

Sources: the hindu.

India 100th on global hunger index

Global Hunger Index for the year 2017 has been released.

Key facts on GHI:

- The report is released by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).
- The hunger index ranks countries based on undernourishment, child mortality, child wasting (low weight for height) and child stunting (low height for age).

- The GHI ranks countries on a 100-point scale. Zero is the best score (no hunger), and 100 is the worst, although neither of these extremes is reached in practice.

Performance of India:

- India has a “serious” hunger problem and ranks 100th out of 119 countries on the global hunger index. India stood at 97th position in last year’s rankings.
- The country’s serious hunger level is driven by high child malnutrition and underlines need for stronger commitment to the social sector.
- However, India has made considerable improvement in reducing its child stunting rate, down 29% since 2000, but even that progress leaves India with a relatively high stunting rate of 38.4.

India’s relative performance:

- India ranks below many of its neighbouring countries such as China (29th rank), Nepal (72), Myanmar (77), Sri Lanka (84) and Bangladesh (88). It is ahead of Pakistan (106) and Afghanistan (107).
- India ranked behind North Korea, Bangladesh and Iraq but ahead of Pakistan. North Korea ranks 93rd while Iraq is at 78th position.
- India has the third highest score in all of Asia — only Afghanistan and Pakistan are ranked worse.

Concerns:

- India’s high ranking on the Global Hunger Index again this year brings to the fore the disturbing reality of the country’s stubbornly high proportions of malnourished children.
- More than one-fifth of Indian children under five weigh too little for their height and over a third are too short for their age.
- Even with the massive scale up of national nutrition-focused programmes in India, drought and structural deficiencies have left large number of poor in India at risk of malnourishment in 2017.

Way ahead:

The on-going efforts are expected to make significant changes in improving the existing situation. India has developed and launched an action plan on ‘undernourishment free India’ by 2022. The plan shows stronger commitment and greater investments in tackling malnutrition in the coming years.

Sources: the hindu.

Universal social security plan

In an attempt to improve the life of the extremely poor people of India, the government has drafted a Rs 1.2 lakh crore plan to provide **universal social security coverage for the poorest people of the country**.

About the scheme:

- This broader programme envisages three categories** — the poorest 20%, who will get a government payout; those who subscribe on their own and formal sector workers who will need to set aside a fixed proportion of income toward the scheme.
- The scheme will have two tiers.** The first of these comprises mandatory pension, insurance (both death and disability) and maternity coverage and the second, optional medical, sickness and unemployment coverage.
- Funds collected under the universal social security scheme** will be divided into sub-schemes and be ringfenced, meaning the benefits and the contribution will be commensurate.

Need for the scheme:

India’s total workforce currently stands at 450 million. Though the statistics make it sound that a large fraction of the Indian population is employed, it is rather saddening that only a little over 10% are in the organised sector and get to enjoy the basic social security.

In fact, among the 10 million people who add on to the workforce every year, most of them don’t receive the minimum wage and lack any kind of social security coverage, the reason being that most them belong to the unorganised sector.

Way ahead:

While funding the scheme will be a challenge for the government, which has pledged to stick to the deficit target, it is seen as one that will gain broad popular support. The new policy will be part of the social security code, one of four codes that the labour ministry is finalising and will subsume 17 existing items of legislation governing social security coverage in the country.

Sources: et.

Campaign on 'women for women': #IamThatWoman



In an attempt to end Gender bias in women against women, the Ministry of Women and Child Development is undertaking an online campaign **#IamThatWoman**.

Key facts:

- Through the campaign, the Ministry seeks to highlight the various aspects of women standing 'by' and 'for' women.
- Ministry of WCD has urged people to shun stereotypes associated with women harming other women.
- Twitter and Facebook users have been encouraged to tag and share stories of women helping women with a photograph and post online with the hashtag #IamThatWoman.

Significance of this campaign:

When a woman has the support of her womanhood, she can be unstoppable. Through this campaign, the government aims to shed light on the enormous contributions made by women for women.

Sources: pib.

Call Swachh Bharat toilets 'Izzat Ghar': Centre to states

Every toilet constructed across the country under the Swachh Bharat Mission could now be called '**Izzat Ghar**', or something equivalent in a local language that means house of dignity, following a directive from the Centre to the states.

- The Centre has written to all states in this regard, advising Hindi-speaking states to call a toilet an 'Izzat Ghar' while urging other states to come up with other terms in the regional languages with the same meaning.
- This move aims to instil a sense of dignity and pride in the entire family for their toilet, and will also have a positive impact on usage.

About SBM:

Swachh Bharat Mission was officially launched on 2 October 2014 and is India's biggest ever cleanliness drive. It aims to eliminate open defecation by 2019. The goal also includes the elimination of open defecation, conversion of insanitary toilets to pour flush toilets, eradicating of manual scavenging and Municipal Solid Waste Management (MSWM).

The components of the programme are:

- Construction of individual sanitary latrines for households below the poverty line with subsidy (80%) where demand exists.
- Conversion of dry latrines into low-cost sanitary latrines.
- Construction of exclusive village sanitary complexes for women providing facilities for hand pumping, bathing, sanitation and washing on a selective basis where there is not adequate land or space within houses and where village panchayats are willing to maintain the facilities.
- Setting up of sanitary marts.
- Total sanitation of villages through the construction of drains, soakage pits, solid and liquid waste disposal.
- Intensive campaign for awareness generation and health education to create a felt need for personal, household and environmental sanitation facilities.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 1 Topic: Salient features of world's physical geography.**Northeast monsoon expected to set in by October 26**

Tamil Nadu is expected to receive rain from today; southwest monsoon is likely to withdraw completely from the State in two days

- With the weather conditions turning favourable, the northeast monsoon is expected to arrive by October 26, according to the Meteorological Department.
- The southwest monsoon is likely to withdraw completely in two days.
- The seasonal wind reversal is going to occur this week. Westerly winds are already weakening and giving way to easterly winds that would usher in the northeast monsoon.

NorthEast Monsoon:

Around September, with the sun fast retreating south, the northern land mass of the Indian subcontinent begins to cool off rapidly.

- With this air pressure begins to build over northern India, the Indian Ocean and its surrounding atmosphere still holds its heat.
- This causes cold wind to sweep down from the Himalayas and Indo-Gangetic Plain towards the vast spans of the Indian Ocean south of the Deccan peninsula. This is known as the Northeast Monsoon or Retreating Monsoon.
- Northeast Monsoon season is the major period of rainfall activity over south peninsula comprising of the Coastal Andhra Pradesh, Rayalaseema and Tamilnadu-Pondicherry
- For Tamilnadu this is the main rainy season accounting for about 48% of the annual rainfall.

Sometimes, the gap between the withdrawal of southwest monsoon and onset of northeast monsoon may be limited to one or two days.

Source: The Hindu

GS PAPER - II

Topic: Comparison of the Indian constitutional scheme with that of other countries.

Spain hit by constitutional crisis

Referendum on independence for Catalonia was recently held. Catalan officials have claimed that preliminary results of its referendum have shown 90% in favour of independence in the vote vehemently opposed by Spain.

- **The referendum, declared illegal by Spain's central government**, has thrown the country into its worst constitutional crisis in decades and deepened a centuries-old rift between Madrid and Barcelona.
- **The ballot will have no legal status as it has been blocked by Spain's Constitutional Court and Madrid for being at odds with the 1978 constitution.**

Why does the referendum matter?

Catalonia, an area in northeastern Spain of 7.5 million people, accounts for 15% of Spain's population and 20% of its economic output. About 1.6 million people live in Barcelona, Catalonia's capital, which is a major tourist destination.

The latest referendum was the region's second referendum on independence in three years. The previous ballot, a non-binding vote in November 2014, returned an 80% result in favour of an independent Catalan state. However, less than half of the 5.4 million eligible voters participated.

Demand for independence:

Catalonia has a distinct history, culture and language. First referenced in the 12th century, a defined region of Catalonia had existed for more than 250 years before it joined Spain during the country's formation in the 16th Century.

- As such, identity plays a large role in the debate surrounding independence. Under the military government of Francisco Franco, from 1939-1975, Catalan culture was suppressed.
- Symbols of Catalan identity such as the castells, or human towers, were prohibited and parents were forced to choose Spanish names for their children. The Catalan language was also restricted.
- The push for full autonomy appears to have gathered pace in recent years, most notably since Spain's 2008 debt crisis. In that moment, people in Catalonia demanded more self-government and control over what is done with their money.
- Pro-independence supporters claim Catalonia, which is one of Spain's wealthiest regions, offers more financial support to Spain than it receives from the central government in Madrid. Many view the region's strong economy as an indicator that it would be viable as a sovereign state.
- Following a ruling by Spain's constitutional court in 2010, which stated there is no legal basis for recognising Catalonia as a nation, independence appears to have taken preference over reform for a portion of the region's population.

What powers does Catalonia already have?

In 1931, when Spain became a republic, Catalonia was given greater political autonomy within the confines of the state. However, by 1939 its powers had been revoked following the Nationalists' victory in the Spanish Civil War.

- In 1979 a new Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia was issued, which restored the Catalan parliament. Elections for the 135-member body were held the following year.
- The region, which forms one of Spain's 17 "autonomous communities", has its own police force and powers over affairs such as education, healthcare and welfare. There are also provisions in place to protect Catalan identity, including joint language status for Catalan and Castilian and a law that requires teachers, doctors and public sector employees to use the Catalan language in their places of work.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these.

Karnataka needs its own flag

Chief minister of Karnataka Siddaramaiah has once again invoked Kannada pride, saying the government is firm on Karnataka having a state flag.

Background:

Some activists had urged the government to design a separate flag for Karnataka and accord statutory standing for that. Following this, the Karnataka State government had constituted a nine-member committee headed by Principal Secretary, Department of Kannada and Culture, to study and submit a report to the government on the possibility of “designing a separate flag for Karnataka and providing it a statutory standing.”



Are states permitted to have their own flags?

In **S.R. Bommai v/s Union of India (Supreme Court 1994) case**, the Supreme Court has declared that federalism is a basic feature of the Constitution and States are supreme in their sphere. This being the Constitutional position, there is no prohibition in the Constitution for the State to have its own flag. However, the manner in which the State flag is hoisted should not dishonour the national flag. It has to be always below the national flag. The national flag code specifically authorises use of other flags subject to the regulation by the court. So, State flag is not unauthorised.

Sources: the hindu.

Rajasthan law: No probe against judges, officers without sanction

Rajasthan government has passed an ordinance which seeks to protect both serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants in Rajasthan from being investigated for on-duty action without its prior sanction. **The Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017** has been promulgated in this regard.



Highlights of the ordinance:

- The ordinance amends the Criminal Code of Procedure, 1973 and also seeks curb on publishing and printing or publicising in any case the name, address, photograph, family details of the public servants.
- It seeks to bar the media from reporting on accusations till the sanction to proceed with the probe is obtained.
- No magistrate shall order an investigation nor will any investigation be conducted against a person, who is or was a judge or a magistrate or a public servant.
- If there is no decision on the sanction request post the stipulated time period, it will automatically mean that sanction has been granted.
- The Ordinance made additions to sections 156 (3) and 190 (1) of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) which empower a magistrate to take cognizance of an offence and order an investigation.
- Violation would call for two years imprisonment.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein.

Centre gets SC to freeze hearing on Article 35A

The Centre convinced the Supreme Court to defer hearing on petitions challenging the special status granted to Jammu and Kashmir.

Context:

The court is hearing a writ petition filed by NGO, We the Citizens, which challenges the validity of both Article 35A and Article 370.

Reason:

- The government has appointed Dineshwar Sharma, a former IB director, as interlocutor.
- He has started talks with stakeholders. If the court hears this case, it will affect dialogue process.

Article 35A

- It is a provision incorporated in the Indian Constitution giving the Jammu and Kashmir State Legislature to decide 'permanent residents' of the State.
- Grant those permanent resident special right and privileges in State public sector jobs, acquisition of property within the State, scholarships and other public aid and welfare programmes.

What is the issue with Article 35A?

- Article 35A was incorporated into the Indian Constitution in 1954 by an order of President.
- The provision mandates that no act of the State legislature coming under the ambit of Article 35A can be challenged for violating the Indian Constitution or any other law of the land.
- The Presidential Order was issued under Article 370 (1) (d) of the Indian Constitution to add Article 35A.
- Parliament was not consulted when the President incorporated Article 35A into the Indian Constitution through a Presidential Order issued under Article 370.
- Whereas, Article 368 (i) of the Constitution mandates that only the Parliament can amend the Constitution by introducing a new Article.

Source: Hindu

Paper 2 Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries and Departments of the Government;

Why finalisation of the Memorandum of Procedure (MoP) for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the high courts is delayed – asks SC

Background:

Constitution Bench's historic decision, in October 2015, to strike down the government's National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) law. The NJAC law had given politicians an equal say in judicial appointments to constitutional courts.

In December 2015, Apex Court directed the centre to iron out the do's and don'ts of judicial appointments to the Supreme Court and the high courts

Issues:

- Delay in the appointment of regular Chief Justices in high courts despite the recommendation of the Supreme Court.

Why the delay, asks court

Presently, seven of 24 HCs are without regular Chief Justices

- On December 16, 2015, the apex court directed the Centre to draft and finalise the procedure for appointment of judges to the Supreme Court and the High Courts

- SC wants to know from the Attorney-General why it has still not been done. It wants a mechanism to prevent delay in appointment of 'regular' Chief Justices of HCs

- SC refers to the judgment against Justice C.S. Karnan. Says the verdict talked of a need to re-visit the judicial appointments process and find an alternative to impeachment of erring judges



- Six of the 24 high courts have been without regular Chief Justices for months.
- Some High Courts like Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have acting Chief justice for more than a year now while such arrangement should not have continued for more than a month.
- No further delay in finalisation of MoP in larger public interest

Source: the hindu

Set up centres under all High Courts for vulnerable victims: SC

Context:

The Supreme Court while lauding the Delhi High Court for setting up vulnerable witnesses deposition complexes has asked other High Courts in the Country to follow suit in consonance with guidelines postulated in ***Sakshi v. Union of India and Ors.*** This case pertained to the rape of a deaf, dumb and mentally challenged minor girl.

Reason:

Victims often end up being ill-treated by the very system they had approached in the hope of justice. Delay and intimidating questions during trial in a hostile environment lead to fewer convictions.

Guidelines:

- A screen or some arrangement by which the victim does not see the body or face of the accused.
- Reducing cross-examination questions to writing and handing them over to the judge to be put to the victim in a language that is clear and not embarrassing.
- Sufficient breaks for victims of child abuse or rape while testifying.

Significance:

- Encourages a vulnerable victim to make a statement.
- Upholds the right of vulnerable witnesses to be protected while testifying in court.
- Order is in consonance with international norms in these matters.

Source: the hindu

Five-judge statute Bench to decide on Aadhaar validity

Background:

A nine-judge bench unanimously ruled that right to privacy was a fundamental right and formed an intrinsic part of right to life guaranteed under Article 21.

Key Facts:

- Several petitioners challenging the validity of Aadhaar had raised the issue that the scheme violates privacy rights.
- The court issued notice to the Centre on a separate plea filed by an individual challenging the linking of mobile phone numbers with Aadhaar for availing the benefits of social welfare schemes.
- The Supreme Court decided to constitute a five-judge Constitution Bench to hear petitions from November against the validity of the Aadhaar scheme.

Source: Hindu

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

5 new governors appointed

President Ram Nath Kovind has appointed new Governors to Tamil Nadu, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Assam and Meghalaya.

President appointed Banwarilal Purohit as the Governor of Tamil Nadu, Brig. (Dr.) B.D. Mishra (Retd.) as the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Satya Pal Malik as the Governor of Bihar, Jagdish Mukhi as the Governor of Assam and Ganga Prasad as the Governor of Meghalaya.

Appointment and tenure of governors: Quick look:

The governors and lieutenant-governors are **appointed by the president for a term of 5 years.**

Article 157 and Article 158 of the Constitution of India specify eligibility requirements for the post of governor.

- **The term of governor's office is normally 5 years but it can be terminated earlier by:** Dismissal by the president on the advice of the prime minister of the country, at whose pleasure the governor holds office or Resignation by the governor.
- **There is no provision of impeachment,** as it happens for the president.

Sources: the hindu.

Election Commission announces Assembly Poll Schedule to Himachal Pradesh, stalls announcement of Gujarat Poll Schedule.

PM slammed Opposition that it has no right for questioning the Election Commission's motives in delaying the announcement of the Assembly poll schedule for the Gujarat State.

Reason:



- Election Commission is bound by a 2001 Supreme Court judgement, which says there cannot be a gap of more than 3 weeks between the notification and the announcement of the election.
- The Relief and rehabilitation work in flood-hit Gujarat would get affected if polls were announced as model code of conduct would have come into immediate effect

Election Commission of India

Articles 324 – 329 mention the Election Commission of India and contain all the relevant provisions.

- The ECI Conducts Presidential, Vice Presidential, Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, State Legislative Assembly, and State Legislative Council elections.
- It also evaluates and verifies election applications.
- It also is responsible for administrative functions such as announcement preparation of electoral rolls.
- It prescribes Model Code of Conduct to prevent electoral malpractices.
- Any dispute relating to the conduct and management of elections have to be placed before the Election Commission of India. However, any dispute with respect of LS, RS, and State Elections have to be placed before respective High Courts.

Source: the hindu

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

IWAI raises Rs660 crore through bonds

The **Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI)** has raised Rs660 crore through a bond sale to finance the development of national waterways.

- It is the second time that the authority has raised money through a bond sale. Last year, it was allowed to issue infrastructure bonds worth Rs1,000 crore but the authority raised only Rs340 crore.
- The money raised from the bonds is intended to be used by IWAI for the development of national waterways.

Know about IWAI:

Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) is **the statutory authority in charge of the waterways in India**. Its headquarters is located in Noida, UP. It does the function of building the necessary infrastructure in these waterways, surveying the economic feasibility of new projects and also administration.



Inland Waterways Authority of India

Sources: pib.

Tea board proposes Rs 100 crore package for Darjeeling estates

The Tea Board has proposed a Rs 100-crore relief package for tea estates in the Darjeeling hills, where production has resumed after nearly three months of shutdown due to an agitation for a separate state. The relief package, however, has failed to bring cheer to the industry.

Background:

Plucking and other operations at the 87 tea estates in the region had come to a halt after the Gorkha Janmukti Morcha's strike call on June 9 demanding a separate state, called Gorkhaland. The growers of Darjeeling tea had sought Rs 325 crore as assistance to prune the overgrown bushes and prepare for production in April. But the demand was not accepted by the board which, on advice based on the Tea Research Association's survey of the problem, cut it to Rs 100 crore.

The strike, the first time in the history of Darjeeling tea industry, has wiped out almost 70% of the annual tea production.

About Tea Board of India:

The Tea Board is set up under **the Tea Act 1953**. It has succeeded the Central Tea Board and the Indian Tea Licensing Committee which functioned respectively under the Central Tea Board Act, 1949 and the Indian Tea Control Act, 1938 which were repealed.

- The Tea Board is functioning as **a statutory body** of the Central Government under the Ministry of Commerce.
- The Board is constituted of 31 members (including Chairman) drawn from Members of Parliament, tea producers, tea traders, tea brokers, consumers, and representatives of Governments from the principal tea producing states, and trade unions. The Board is reconstituted every three years.

Functions:

- The Tea Board India is responsible for the assignment of certification numbers to exports of certain tea merchants. This certification is intended to ensure the teas' origin, which in turn would reduce the amount of fraudulent labelling on rare teas.
- The Tea Board India's tasks include endorsement of the diverse production and productivity of tea, financial support of research organisations and the monitoring of advances in tea packaging as it relates to health beneficial aspects.
- It coordinates research institutes, the tea trade and government bodies, ensuring the technical support of the tea trade in the global industry.



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

Fix deadline for PMJDY insurance claims

Reviewing the performance of PMJDY, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently asked the finance ministry to fix a time limit for payment of insurance claims of Rs 30,000 to the family of the deceased who opened a bank account under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) in 2014-15.

- Although most claims so far have been given out expeditiously, the idea is to fix a time limit so that the poor do not have to wait without any certainty of time for getting the insurance amount.

Background:

Under the PMJDY, any person who opened his first bank account between August 15, 2014, and January 26, 2015, along with a RuPay card, is eligible for a life cover of Rs 30,000 on death due to any cause. The idea is to provide security to poor families in both urban and rural areas who cannot afford direct insurance and are not covered under any social security scheme. According to the government, crores of new bank accounts were opened in 2014-15 after the PM launched the scheme.

About PMJDY:

The primary aim of this scheme is to provide poor people access to bank accounts.

- The scheme covers both urban and rural areas of India. All bank accounts will be linked to a debit card which would be issued under the Ru-Pay scheme. Rupay is India's own unique domestic card network owned by National Payments Corporation of India and has been created as an alternative to Visa and Mastercard.
- Under this scheme, every individual who opens a bank account becomes eligible to receive an accident insurance cover of up-to Rs 1 Lakh for his entire family.
- The scheme also provides incentives to business and banking correspondents who serve as link for the last mile between savings account holders and the bank by fixing a minimum monthly remuneration of Rs 5000.

Sources: et.

BBBP Week

The Ministry of Women and Child Development will be celebrating the **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao** Week from 09th to 14th October, 2017. The week is being celebrated in view of the International Girl Child Day on 11th October, 2017.



The theme of the program will be “Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Week- The Daughters of New India”.

Key facts:

- The week-long celebration will witness various awareness generation activities and community engagement programmes such as Oath ceremonies, prabhat pherries, rallies, nukkad natraks, street plays, joint door to door campaigns by AWWs and ASHAs, etc.
- At the National level, the occasion will also be marked by a Panel Discussion coinciding with the theme for this year's International Day of the Girl –“Girls Progress=Goals Progress: What Counts for Girls” to engage key sport influencers and women and girls role models from the field, to generate support through their voice and reach.

What you need to know about BBBP?

Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) Scheme was launched in January, 2015 at Panipat in Haryana.

- The scheme is aimed at promoting gender equality and the significance of educating girls.

- The Scheme is targeted at improving the Child Sex Ratio through multi sectoral interventions including prevention of gender biased sex selection and promoting girls' education and her holistic empowerment.
- **It is a tri-ministerial effort** of Ministries of Women and Child Development, Health & Family Welfare and Human Resource Development.

Performance of the scheme:

The collective and coordinated efforts undertaken at national, state and districts level has been successful in establishing a substantial improvement in the number of girls being born in the target districts.

- As per the HIMS data for the 161 districts of BBBP, an increasing trend in Sex Ratio at Birth is visible in 104 BBBP Districts during 2016-17 as compared to the period 2015-16. Similarly, 119 districts have reported progress in registration of pregnancies in the first trimester during 2016-17 as compared to 2015-16.
- During the same period, Institutional deliveries against the total reported deliveries have improved in 146 districts in comparison to the previous year.

Sources: pib.

APY subscribers to touch 1 crore by March 2018

According to the estimates by Finance Ministry, the subscriber base of Atal Pension Yojana (APY), a guaranteed pension scheme for unorganised sector, is expected to increase to 1 crore by March next year.

- APY is being used as an important instrument for inclusion. Within three years, the scheme has been able to mobilise nearly 69 lakh accounts. Given the huge population, there is a long way to go as the pension coverage is very low in the country.

About APY:

The Atal Pension Yojana became operational from June 1, 2015 and **is available to all the citizens of India in the age group of 18-40 years.**

- Under the scheme, a subscriber would receive a minimum guaranteed pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, depending upon his contribution, from the age of 60 years.
- The same pension would be paid to the spouse of the subscriber and on the demise of both the subscriber and the spouse, the accumulated pension wealth is returned to the nominee.
- The Central Government would also co-contribute 50% of the total contribution or Rs. 1000 per annum, whichever is lower, to each eligible subscriber account, for a period of 5 years, that is, from 2015-16 to 2019-20, to those who join the NPS before 31st December, 2015 and who are not members of any statutory social security scheme and who are not Income Tax payers.

Sources: the hindu.

47.5 lakh domestic workers set to get legal status and minimum wages

Ministry of labour and employment is considering to formulate a **national policy for domestic workers** under which part-time, full-time and live-in workers, employers, private placement agencies will be clearly defined.

- With this, the ministry is set to give legal status to domestic workers in the country by formulating a national policy that will ensure minimum wages and equal remuneration for around 47.5 lakh domestic workers in India including 30 lakh women.

Key facts:

- **The policy aims** to promote right to fair terms of employment relating to minimum wages, protection from abuse/harassment and violence, access to social security benefits such as health insurance, maternity benefits and old age pensions as provided by existing and upcoming schemes of central and state government, which may include contribution from employer/workers.
- **An institutional mechanism** will be set up to provide for social security cover, fair terms of employment, grievance redressal and dispute resolution for domestic workers. Besides, the policy will seek to regulate recruitment and placement agencies to avoid any harassment.

- **Placement agencies** charge a certain proportion of domestic workers' salary every month, over and above one-time fees they charge from the employer for providing such help. The new policy, though, is likely to make it mandatory for placement agencies to charge a one-time 15-day salary from domestic workers and in turn provide them with social security cover, including medical and health insurance.

Sources: et.

Unprecedented community action in 'Gram Samridhi E�am Swachhata Pakhwada' from 1st to 15th October, 2017

In partnership with State Governments and other Departments, Department of Rural Development organized Gram Samridhi E�am Swachhata Pakhwada from 1st October to 15th October, 2017. Gram Sabhas were held in nearly all the Gram Panchayats of the Country on 2nd October.

During this period,

- DISHA Monitoring Portal and Gram Samvaad App were introduced on 11th October, 2017.
- Disha Monitoring Portal would enable Members of Parliament to track progress in implementation of various centrally sponsored schemes in their constituency.
- Gram Samvaad Mobile app allows a citizen to access information on and implementation of Rural Development schemes at Panchayat level.
 - As reported on the Swachh Gram Portal over 4.75 lakh cleanliness drives were taken up in villages.
- 38,283 villages were declared open defecation free,
- 5.98 lakh individual households latrines completed and initiatives for Solid and Liquid Waste Management undertaken across Gram Panchayats.
- Thrust was placed on skill development among youth and total of 1404 Skill Raths were launched in different parts of the country to register demand through the Kaushal Panji App for skill training.
- Public accountability thrust was seen at Panchayat offices, with complete disclosure of beneficiary lists and works under execution with details.
- Special efforts were made in the 50,000 Gram Panchayats that States have been selected purposively by State Governments for coverage under Mission Antyodaya.

Gram Samridhi E�am Swacchata Pakhwada

It is an effort to prepare the Gram Panchayat Development Plan through extensive community participation especially of women and youth.

The recommendations of this plan will be given top most priority in finalization of Annual Action Plan across schemes and programmes of various Ministries and Departments.

Source: PIB

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

Mudra Yojana promotions

The government has launched promotion campaigns for its flagship scheme Mudra Yojana. 50 promotion campaign will be organised in different parts of the country where the union ministers will be participating among others.

The promotion campaigns will be launched by the department of financial services and state level banking committee (SLBC) of different states will actively participate and coordinate all these campaigns.



The Union Finance Minister, in his Budget Speech for FY 2015-2016, had proposed the creation of a Micro Units Development Refinance Agency (MUDRA) Bank, with a Refinance corpus of Rs.20,000 crore, and credit guarantee corpus of Rs.3,000 crore.

MUDRA is to be set up through a statutory enactment and would be responsible for developing and refinancing all Micro-finance Institutions (MFIs) which are in the business of lending to micro / small business entities engaged in manufacturing, trading and service activities through a scheme namely "Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana".

Courtesy : pib.nic.in



About the Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana (PMMY) scheme:

The PMMY Scheme was launched in April, 2015. The scheme's objective is **to refinance collateral-free loans given by the lenders to small borrowers.**

- The scheme, which has a corpus of Rs 20,000 crore, can lend between Rs 50,000 and Rs 10 lakh to small entrepreneurs.
- Banks and MFIs can draw refinance under the MUDRA Scheme after becoming member-lending institutions of MUDRA.

Significance of this scheme:

- It will greatly increase the confidence of young, educated or skilled workers who would now be able to aspire to become first generation entrepreneurs.
- Existing small businesses, too, will be able to expand their activities.
- Under the scheme, by floating MUDRA bank, the Centre has ensured credit flow to SMEs sector and has also identified NBFCs as a good fit to reach out to them.
- People will now be able to get refinance at subsidised rate and it would be passed on to the SMEs. Moreover, it would enable SMEs to expand their activities.

There are three types of loans under PMMY:

- Shishu (up to Rs.50,000).
- Kishore (from Rs.50,001 to Rs.5 lakh).
- Tarun (from Rs.500,001 to Rs.10,00,000).

Sources: pib.

Group of Ministers set up to make GST composition scheme more attractive

The GST Council, chaired by finance minister Arun Jaitley and consisting of his state counterparts, has constituted a group of ministers or GoM under Assam finance minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to make **the composition scheme more attractive and to revisit the goods and services tax rates on restaurants.**

Background:

Businesses with turnover of up to Rs 1 crore can opt for the composition scheme and they can pay taxes in the range of 1-5% and file returns quarterly. However, only 15.5 lakh of the total 98 lakh businesses have registered under the GST regime opting for the composition scheme.

Terms of reference:

- The GoM has been tasked with revisiting tax structure of different categories of restaurants with a view to rationalising or reducing the rates. Currently, GST is levied at 12% on non-AC restaurants while it is 18% in case of airconditioned ones.
- The GoM will examine whether the AC restaurants pass on the benefit of cost reduction under GST to consumers and if they don't, whether they should be disallowed input tax credit claims.
- To make the composition scheme more attractive, the GoM will look into whether turnover of exempted goods can be excluded from the total turnover threshold for levying tax under the composition scheme.
- It will also examine whether the scheme can be extended to taxpayers dealing in inter-state supplies of goods and whether the manufacturers opting for it can be given the benefit of input tax credit.

What you need to know about the Composition scheme?

The composition scheme is **an alternative method of levy of tax designed for small taxpayers whose turnover is up to Rs 75 lakh — Rs 50 lakh in the case of eight north-eastern states and the hilly state of Himachal Pradesh.** The objective behind it is to bring simplicity and reduce the compliance cost for small taxpayers.

- **The scheme is optional** under which manufacturers other than those of ice cream, pan masala and tobacco products have to pay a 2% tax on their annual turnover. The tax rate is 5% for restaurant services and 1% for traders.
- As per the Central GST Act, businesses are eligible to opt for the composition scheme if a person is not engaged in any inter-state outward supplies of goods and not into making any supply of goods through an electronic commerce operator who is required to collect tax at source.
- While a regular taxpayer has to pay taxes on a monthly basis, a composition supplier is required to file only one return and pay taxes on a quarterly basis. Also, a composition taxpayer is not required to keep detailed records that a normal taxpayer is supposed to maintain.

Sources: pib.

Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme-Series-III

The government has launched **the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme 2017-18 – Series-III**, which will be issued by the Reserve Bank India on behalf of the Government of India.

About the Sovereign Gold Bond Scheme:

The sovereign gold bond was introduced by the Government in 2015. While the Government introduced these bonds to help reduce India's over dependence on gold imports, the move was also aimed at changing the habits of Indians from saving in physical form of gold to a paper form with Sovereign backing.

Key facts:

- **Eligibility:** The bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities, including individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities and charitable institutions.
- **Denomination and tenor:** The bonds will be denominated in multiples of gram(s) of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram. The tenor will be for a period of 8 years with exit option from the 5th year to be exercised on the interest payment dates.

MAIN FEATURES OF THE SOVEREIGN GOLD BOND

ISSUANCE To be issued by Reserve Bank of India on behalf of the Government	TAXATION Interest on the bonds shall be taxable as per the provision of Income Tax Act, 1961 (43 of 1961). Physical gold rules apply to capital gains tax too	SALES CHANNEL Bonds will be sold through banks and designated Post Offices, as may be notified, either directly or through agents
ELIGIBILITY The bonds will be restricted for sale to resident Indian entities including individuals, HUFs, trusts, universities, charitable institutions		
DENOMINATION The bonds will be denominated in multiples of grams of gold with a basic unit of 1 gram		
TENOR The tenor of the bond will be for a period of 8 years with exit option from 5th year to be exercised on the interest payment dates	MINIMUM SIZE Minimum permissible investment will be 2 units (i.e. 2 grams of gold)	MAXIMUM LIMIT Not more than 500 grams per person per fiscal year (April-March). A self-declaration to this effect will be obtained

- Minimum and Maximum limit:** The minimum permissible investment limit will be 1 gram of gold, while the maximum limit will be 4 kg for individual, 4 kg for HUF and 20 kg for trusts and similar entities per fiscal (April-March) notified by the government from time to time.
- Joint Holder:** In case of joint holding, the investment limit of 4 kg will be applied to the first applicant only.
- Collateral:** Bonds can be used as collateral for loans. The loan-to-value (LTV) ratio is to be set equal to ordinary gold loan mandated by the Reserve Bank from time to time.

Sources: the hindu.

Passive euthanasia already a law, says govt.

More than six years after sanctioning passive euthanasia as a legitimate option to end lives of people in a permanent vegetative state, the Supreme Court has decided to examine the more complex concept of a “living will” where removal of life support is authorised in case of an irreversible coma.

SC was hearing a plea by NGO Common Cause to declare ‘right to die with dignity’ as a fundamental right within the fold of right to live with dignity, which is guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution.

What is a “Living Will”?

A “living will” is a document prepared by a person in a healthy state of mind specifying that if s/he slides into a vegetative state because of an irreversible terminal illness, the debilitated existence should not be prolonged with the help of life support systems or other medical interventions.

In such a case, relatives will be spared the agonising decision of removing life support and doctors will be guided solely by the “living will”. In several cases, the reluctance to pull the plug on a loved one even when s/he is in a vegetative state prolongs the pain of the patient.

Active and passive euthanasia:

Active euthanasia, the intentional act of causing the death of a patient in great suffering, is illegal in India. It entails deliberately causing the patient’s death through injections or overdose.

- But passive euthanasia, the withdrawal of medical treatment with the deliberate intention to hasten a terminally ill patient’s death is “partially” allowed.
- The patient, family, friends and legal guardians can’t take the decision on their own, but need a high court’s approval bill for stopping treatment.

Euthanasia in law:

The government told the court on Tuesday there was already a law on passive euthanasia and it had drafted a ‘management of patients with terminal illness-withdrawal of medical life support bill’.

The issue of euthanasia was first examined by the health ministry in consultation with the experts in 2006, based on the 196th Law Commission of India report. However, it was decided to not make any laws on euthanasia.

Aruna Shanbaug case:

In 2011, the Supreme Court, while hearing the case of Aruna Shanbaug, who was in a vegetative state for nearly 30 years, had legalised passive euthanasia partially.

- A nurse at KEM Hospital in Mumbai, Shanbaug was in a vegetative state since 1973 after a brutal sodomisation and strangling with a dog-chain during a sexual assault. She died in 2015 while on a ventilator for several days after suffering from pneumonia.
- SC gave patients living in a vegetative state the right to have treatment or food withdrawn, and laid down guidelines to process passive euthanasia in the case of incompetent patients. The guidelines include seeking a declaration from a high court, after getting clearance from a medical board and state government.

Medical experts on euthanasia:

Doctors have a mixed reaction to legalising euthanasia. They say the government needs to take a careful approach before legalising passive euthanasia when the measures to prolong the life of the patient are withdrawn.

- Most doctors, however, agree that euthanasia should be made legal in cases where there is no scope of a patient recovering. But many feel that India is not yet ready for a decision like this which requires a mix of sensitivity and maturity.
- A major concern is the misuse of the law. If it is legal to passively allow or actively hasten death, what's to say an aged parent won't be hastened in favour of an inheritance, or a spouse have treatment withdrawn for the sake of a hefty insurance payout?

Euthanasia in other countries:

Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have been legal in The Netherlands and Belgium since 2001 and 2002. In the US, Switzerland and Germany, euthanasia is illegal but physician-assisted suicide is legal. Euthanasia remains illegal in the UK, France, Canada and Australia.

Sources: the hindu.

Sampoorna Bima Gram Yojana

In a bid to provide affordable life insurance services to people, particularly those living in rural areas of the country, the government has launched **Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana** and expanded the coverage of Postal Life Insurance (PLI).

With this, apart from government employees, PLI will now cover professionals also. The decision has been taken to enlarge the cover of social security and bring the maximum number of people under the protection of **Postal Life Insurance (PLI)**.

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Prime Minister

Government of India
Department of Posts

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About the Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana:

Under the Sampoorna Bima Gram (SBG) Yojana, *at least one village (having a minimum of 100 households) will be identified in each of the revenue districts of the country, wherein endeavour will be made to cover all households of that identified village with a minimum of one RPLI (Rural Postal Life Insurance) policy each*. Coverage of all households in the identified Sampoorna Bima Gram village is the primary objective of this scheme.

Rural Postal Life Insurance (RPLI), introduced on March 24, 1995 on the **recommendations of the Malhotra Committee**, provides insurance cover to people residing in rural areas, especially weaker sections and women living in rural areas.

Postal Life Insurance:

Postal Life Insurance (PLI) was introduced on 1st February 1884. In the beginning, the upper limit of life insurance was only Rs 4000, which has now increased to Rs 50 lakh. It covers employees of Central and state governments, Central and state public sector undertakings, universities, government-aided educational institutions, nationalized banks, local bodies, autonomous bodies, joint ventures having a minimum of 10% Govt./PSU stake, credit co-operative societies etc.

PLI also extends the facility of insurance to the officers and staff of the Defence services and para-military forces. Apart from single insurance policies, Postal Life Insurance also manages a group insurance scheme for the extra departmental employees (Gramin Dak Sevaks) of the Department of Posts.

Sources: pib.

Start-up Programmes for entrepreneurs in Oil and Gas sector

Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Skill Development and Entrepreneurship launched new Start-up Programmes for entrepreneurs in Oil and Gas sector and said that it is important to develop new business models, marketing plans, technology and innovations in the sector.

Steps Taken:

- Oil and gas PSUs have setup venture capital funds to encourage start-ups based on innovative ideas in the energy sector.
- 10 public sector undertakings under the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, including the IOCL, ONGC, EIL, OIL, NRL, BPCL, HPCL, GAIL and MRPL, have created a corpus of Rs. 320 crore to support start-up initiatives.
- The 10 oil PSUs have together selected nearly 30 start-up projects for support in the first round of the scheme which include
 1. Electronic leak detector for detecting body and bung leak of LPG cylinders
 2. Self – sustaining low-maintenances toilets, or eco-toilets
 3. Multi use Fuel from Agricultural Waste Biomass
 4. Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs) for underwater inspections
 5. Converting waste plastics to high value petroleum fuels
 6. Solar Stove- Revolutionary Day and Night Indoor Solar Cooktop System for all lifestyles

Significance:

- It will change the status of the youth of our country from job seeker to that of job provider.
- There has been a constant flow of applications and some extremely innovative ideas from a varying age group (from a fresh engineering graduate to a 70-year-old entrepreneur) from across the country.
- Business partnership between the start-ups and the PSUs of Petroleum Ministry will create a new benchmark for growth and job creation

Source: pib

Rajasthan passes bill increasing OBC quota to 26%

Background:

With the Rajasthan Special Backward Classes Act 2015, the state government had moved the five castes from OBC into a separate Special Backward Castes category. The Rajasthan High Court last year struck down five per cent reservation for these castes provided through The Rajasthan Special Backward Classes Act, 2015, pointing out flaws in the government's process of granting reservation. Following an agitation by Gujjars, the Bharatiya Janata Party government had assured them that the revised OBC quota would be split to grant 5% quota to the "most backward classes.

Current Scenario:

- The reservation in Rajasthan now stands at 54 per cent defying the set ceiling of 50 per cent by the Supreme Court.
- The Bill created a new "most backward" category within the OBCs for providing the quota benefit to Gujjars and four other nomadic communities.
- The Backward Classes (Reservation of Seats in Educational Institutions in the State and of Appointment and Posts in Services under the State) Bill, 2017, has provided 5% reservation to the Gujjar, Banjara, Gadia-Lohar, Raika and Gadariya communities

- State debates in favour of the Bill saying that the reservation had been enhanced in proportion to the increase in the State's OBC population, which was "legally permissible".

Source: the hindu

Seven shortlisted companies given 'Letters of Intent' for 14 monuments under 'Adopt a Heritage Scheme' of Ministry of Tourism

These companies will be the future 'Monument Mitras' who would associate pride with their CSR activities.

Adopted Monuments are :

- Jantar Mantar, Delhi.
- Sun Temple, Konark
- Raja Rani Temple, Bhubaneshwar
- Ratnagiri Monuments, Jajpur, Odisha
- Hampi, Karnataka
- Leh Palace, Jammu & Kashmir
- Qutub Minar, Delhi
- Ajanta Caves, Maharashtra
- Mattancherry Palace Museum, Kochi
- Safdarjung Tomb, Delhi
- Gangotri Temple Area and Trail to Gaumukh
- Mt. StokKangri, Laddakh, Jammu and Kashmir
- Agrasen ki Baoli, Delhi
- Purana Quila, Delhi.

Adopt a Heritage Scheme (Apni Dharohar Apni Pehchan Project):

- Scheme was launched on World Tourism Day i.e. 27th September, 2017 by Ministry of Tourism in close collaboration with Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) which envisages developing monuments, heritage and tourist sites across India and making them tourist friendly.
- Ministry of Tourism invited Private, Public Sector Companies and Corporate individuals to adopt the sites and to take up the responsibility for making our heritage and tourism more sustainable through conservation and development.

Significance:

The project primarily focuses on development and maintenance of world-class tourist infrastructure and amenities like Cleanliness, Public Conveniences, Ease of access, secure environment, illumination and night viewing facilities for an overall inclusive tourist experience that will result in more footfall from both domestic and foreign tourists.

Source: pib

The Government of India and World Bank sign \$200 Million Loan Agreement for the Assam Agribusiness and Rural Transformation Project.

Utility:

- The Project will support the Government of Assam to facilitate agri-business investments
- Increase agriculture productivity and market access
- Enable small farm holders produce crops that are resilient to recurrent floods or droughts in the state.
- Fulfils the State's vision of an agriculture-based rural transformation.

Use of geographic clustering of the production base:

- The focus on geographic clustering of the production base for certain commodities will help agro-enterprises take advantage of existing and future market opportunities that they may not necessarily achieve alone.
- The cluster approach will allow for combining efforts, making use of synergies, and pooling resources to increase the competitive advantage of these products, while at the same time share the risks involved in introducing improved products or entering previously untapped markets.
- Successful clusters will also continuously innovate and adapt ‘best practices’ across agricultural value chains

IBRD:

- The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) is an international financial institution that offers loans to middle-income developing countries.
- The IBRD is the first of five member institutions that compose the World Bank Group.
- It was established in 1944 with the mission of financing the reconstruction of European nations devastated by World War II.
- The IBRD provides commercial-grade or concessional financing to sovereign states to fund projects that seek to improve transportation and infrastructure, education, domestic policy, environmental consciousness, energy investments, healthcare, access to food and potable water, and access to improved sanitation.

Source: PIB

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

'Hypertension high in Kerala, low in Bihar'

According to the study, titled ‘Diet and Nutritional Status of Urban Population in India and Prevalence of Obesity, Hypertension, Diabetes and Hyperlipidaemia in Urban Men and Women’, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a growing threat to global health. The study assessed the diet and nutritional status of India’s urban population.

- The survey was carried out by the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau during 2015-16 by researchers from the National Institute of Nutrition.
- The study has brought to light the prevalence rates for non-communicable diseases as well as stunting, under-nutrition and obesity in children under 5 years in the 16 States surveyed.

Highlights of the study:

- Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have become a growing threat to global health. The increase in incidence of NCDs can be attributed to a change in food habits, sedentary behaviour and unhealthy lifestyles, among other risk factors.
- **Kerala has the highest prevalence of hypertension as well as high cholesterol** in urban men and women. **Puducherry tops the list of States with the highest prevalence of diabetes.** Diabetics were the highest in the age group of 60-70 and lowest in the age group of 18-30.
- **The southern States were among the 10 with the highest prevalence of obesity among urban adults.** Puducherry topped with almost 60% women and 42% men being overweight.
- Tamil Nadu was close behind with 54% men and 38% women recorded as obese. Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh recorded high levels of obesity among its urban men and women.
- Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala were among the top six States which had the most tobacco smokers among urban men.
- While U.P. had the highest (43.6%) proportion of underweight children followed by Madhya Pradesh (32.3%), Puducherry had the lowest (14.2%).

Sources: the hindu.

Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)

The government has launched **Intensified Mission Indradhanush (IMI)**. Through this programme, the Government aims to reach each and every child under two years of age and all those pregnant women who have been left uncovered under the routine immunisation programme. The special drive will focus on improving immunization coverage in select districts and cities to ensure full immunization to more than 90% by December 2018.



Key facts:

- Intensified Mission Indradhanush will have inter-ministerial and inter-departmental coordination, action-based review mechanism and intensified monitoring and accountability framework for effective implementation of targeted rapid interventions to improve the routine immunization coverage.
- IMI is supported by 11 other ministries and departments, such as Ministry of Women and Child Development, Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Urban Development, Ministry of Youth Affairs among others.
- The convergence of ground level workers of various departments like ASHA, ANMs, Anganwadi workers, Zila preraks under National Urban Livelihood Mission (NULM), self-help groups will be ensured for better coordination and effective implementation of the programme.

Monitoring of the scheme:

- Intensified Mission Indradhanush would be closely monitored at the district, state and central level at regular intervals. Further, it would be reviewed by the Cabinet Secretary at the National level and will continue to be monitored at the highest level under a special initiative 'Proactive Governance and Timely Implementation (PRAGATI)'.
- Under IMI, special strategies are devised for rigorous monitoring of the programme. States and districts have developed coverage improvement plans based on gap self-assessment. These plans are reviewed from state to central level with an aim to reach 90% coverage by December 2018.
- An appreciation and awards mechanism is also conceived to recognize the districts reaching more than 90% coverage. The criteria includes best practices and media management during crisis. To acknowledge the contribution of the partners/Civil Society Organization (CSOs) and others, Certificate of Appreciation will be given.

Background:

The achievement of full immunisation under Mission Indradhanush to at least 90% coverage was to be achieved by 2020 earlier. With the launch of IMI, achievement of the target has now been advanced.

About Mission Indradhanush:

Mission Indradhanush aims to immunize all children under the age of 2 years, as well as all pregnant women, against seven vaccine preventable diseases. The diseases being targeted are diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, measles and Hepatitis B. In addition to these, vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B are also being provided in selected states. In 2016, four new additions have been made namely Rubella, Japanese Encephalitis, Injectable Polio Vaccine Bivalent and Rotavirus.

Sources: pib.

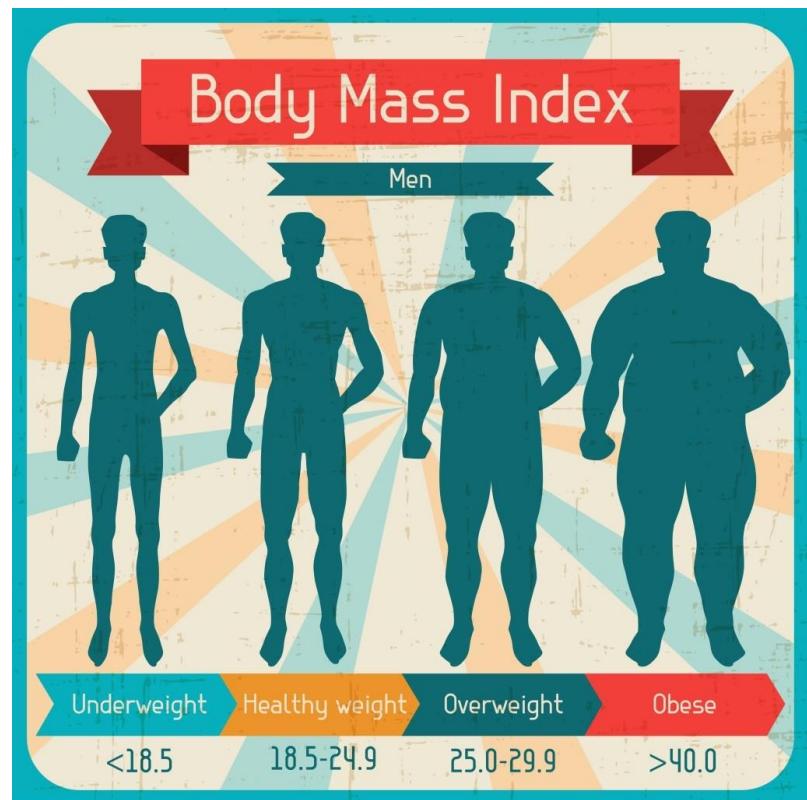
WHO releases guidelines to address overweight and obesity in children

As part of its response to the global epidemic of obesity, WHO has released guidelines to support primary healthcare workers identify and help children who are overweight or obese.

Need for intervention:

Assessing and managing children at primary health-care facilities to prevent overweight and obesity in the context of the double burden of malnutrition is part of a concerted effort to tackle the global epidemic in obesity including among children. This global epidemic affects all world regions. It is rising most rapidly in low- and middle-income countries.

- In 2016 an estimated 41 million children under 5 were affected by overweight or obesity. Of this, one half of all children overweight or obese lived in Asia and one quarter lived in Africa. Paradoxically, overweight and obesity is found in populations where undernutrition remains common – the term ‘double-burden of malnutrition’ is sometimes used to describe these settings.
- Without effective treatment, they are very likely to remain overweight and obese throughout their lives, putting them at risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and premature death, as well as suffering physical and psychological consequences in childhood.



Important guidelines:

- WHO recommends that all infants and children aged less than 5 years presenting to primary health-care facilities should have both weight and height measured in order to determine their weight-for-height and their nutritional status according to WHO child growth standards. Comparing a child's weight with norms for its length or height is an effective way to assess for both wasting and overweight.
- Where infants and children are identified as overweight, WHO recommends providing counselling to parents and caregivers on nutrition and physical activity including promotion and support for exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months and continued breastfeeding until 24 months or beyond.
- If children are obese, they should be further assessed and an appropriate management plan should be developed. This can be done by a health worker at primary health-care level, if adequately trained, or at a referral clinic or local hospital.
- Additionally, moderate wasting and stunting are potential risk factors for children becoming overweight or obese. Within these populations, and until there is a more definitive evidence base, to avoid increasing the risk of overweight and obesity WHO recommends not to provide formulated supplementary foods on a routine basis to children who are moderately wasted or stunted.

Significance of this move:

As well as helping Member States and their partners in their efforts to make evidence-informed decisions on assessing and managing children at primary health-care facilities, the guideline aims to support their efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, the global targets set by the Comprehensive implementation plan on maternal, infant and young child nutrition, and the Global strategy for women's, children's and adolescents' health 2016–2030.

Sources: the hindu.

SANKALP & STRIVE Schemes to boost Skill India Mission

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved two new World Bank supported schemes of Rs. 6,655 crore – **Skills Acquisition and Knowledge Awareness for Livelihood Promotion (SANKALP)** and **Skill Strengthening for Industrial Value Enhancement (STRIVE)**.

About SANKALP and STRIVE:

SANKALP is Rs 4,455 crore Centrally sponsored scheme including Rs. 3,300 crore loan support from World Bank whereas STRIVE is a Rs. 2,200 crore – central sector scheme, with half of the scheme outlay as World bank loan assistance.

- SANKALP and STRIVE are outcome focused schemes marking shift in government's implementation strategy in vocational education and training from inputs to results.
- SANKALP will provide market relevant training to 3.5 crore youth. STRIVE will focus to improve on the quality and the market relevance of vocational training provided in ITIs and strengthen the apprenticeship programme through industry-cluster approach.

Benefits of these schemes:

The schemes shall provide the required impetus to the National Skill Development Mission, 2015 and its various sub missions. The schemes are aligned to flagship Government of India programs such as Make in India and Swachhta Abhiyan and aim at developing globally competitive workforce for domestic and overseas requirements.

Sources: pib.

IISc & IIT Bombay among world's top 200 for engineering

The Indian Institute of Science (IISc) in Bangalore and IIT Bombay are among **the world's top 200 institutions for engineering and computer science**, the Times Higher Education subject-wise rankings have found.

Background:

TIMES rankings scored 500 institutions worldwide, as opposed to 100 last year, on performance parameters such as industry income, international outlook, teaching and research. It highlights the educational institutions that are leading in electrical, mechanical, civil, chemical and general engineering courses.

Performance of various institutions:

- While IISc occupied the 89th spot, IIT Bombay was pegged in the 126- 150 category, globally.
- IITs in Delhi, Kanpur and Kharagpur were placed in the 201-250 band, in that order, and IIT Madras and IIT Roorkee in the 251 – 300 category.
- IIT Guwahati was among institutes in the 301 – 400 ranks and Jadavpur University, NIT Rourkela and Tezpur University were pegged in the 401 to 500 band.
- Overall, Stanford University is number one, followed by California institute of Technology, Oxford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cambridge University.
- While India has a total of eleven institutions in the rankings, China has 35 institutions, which is more than any other country in Asia. China's Peking University and National University of Singapore are among the top ten and top performers from Asia.

Sources: the hindu.

GM cotton grown in 8.5 lakh ha, illegal market is Rs 472 crore

Delhi-based South Asia Biotechnology Centre (SABC) has claimed that the illegal market of **the herbicide tolerant (HT) genetically modified cotton** is worth about Rs 472 crore.

- As per the SABC, about 35 lakh packets of illegal HT cotton hybrids were sold this kharif season across Telangana, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra, Odisha, Karnataka and MP.
- Around 8.5 lakh hectares, or 7% of the total cotton growing area in the country, is under the illegal HT cultivation.

GM crop:

A GM or transgenic crop is a plant that has a novel combination of genetic material obtained through the use of modern biotechnology.



- For example, a GM crop can contain a gene(s) that has been artificially inserted instead of the plant acquiring it through pollination. The resulting plant is said to be “genetically modified” although in reality all crops have been “genetically modified” from their original wild state by domestication, selection, and controlled breeding over long periods of time.
- While Bt cotton has been cultivated in the country since 2002, Bt brinjal, the first GM food crop okayed by GEAC, never hit the fields as an indefinite moratorium was imposed on its commercial release in early 2010.

Sources: the hindu.

India's First Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra for Skilling in Smart Cities inaugurated at Mandir Marg, New Delhi

India's first Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK) has been set up under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with New Delhi Municipal Council

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKViY)

- It is an initiative of Indian government to make country's youth employable and strengthen them economically by providing them a meaningful, industry relevant, skill based training.
- The beneficiaries under the scheme are successfully trained, assessed, certified and awarded financially by the government.
- PMKViY is being run by the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) while National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is the implementing agency for the scheme.
- At present there are 221 job roles available with 34 skill councils for which the courses are being offered across the nation.

Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK), Mandir Marg, New Delhi

- Leverages NDMC infrastructure for skilling initiatives
- Has a capacity of skilling 4,000 youth annually
- Will be managed by Orion Edutech, which has an impeccable record of training nearly 3 lakh candidates through its network of over 275 skill development centres across the country.

Significance:

- Every year more than 13 million Indians enter the working age but the country has an annual training capacity of 3 million on adding up all the training and educational capacities. This gap of more than 10 million is very difficult to bridge considering long gestation training periods, capacity building lacunae etc. Addressing this issue is critical to realizing the demographic dividend potential of India.
- PMKViY has a crucial role to improve productivity through creation of a pool of industry and National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) aligned skilled workforce. Over time, the scheme should provide a comprehensive and holistic workforce training interventions by catering to current and anticipated future employment ecosystem.

Source: the hindu, pib

Paper 2 Topic: Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance-applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential; citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures.

Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently launched the **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA)** at Gandhinagar in Gujarat.

About PMGDISHA:

PMGDISHA is government initiative with an objective to impart digital literacy among the people residing in rural areas. It is an important initiative under Modi's vision of 'Digital India' that intends at making one person in every family digitally literate.

- This scheme will focus on making at least six crore people in rural areas (across States/UTs) digitally literate. By March 31, 2019, it is expected to reach around 40 per cent rural households in the country.
- Under free of cost PMGDISHA scheme, people in the rural area will be trained to operate a computer, tablet, smartphones, etc. They will be taught how to access the Internet, government services, undertake digital payment, compose e-mails, etc.
- The citizens of rural India will be taught to use applications related to digital payments so they can participate in the process of nation-building. This scheme will help to connect the digital divide.
- The marginalised sections of society like Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST), Minorities, Below Poverty Line (BPL), differently-abled, all will be a part of this scheme. The scheme aims to empower women in the rural India.
- **Illiterate people between the age group 14-60 years, nominated from every eligible rural household, are qualified for the scheme.**

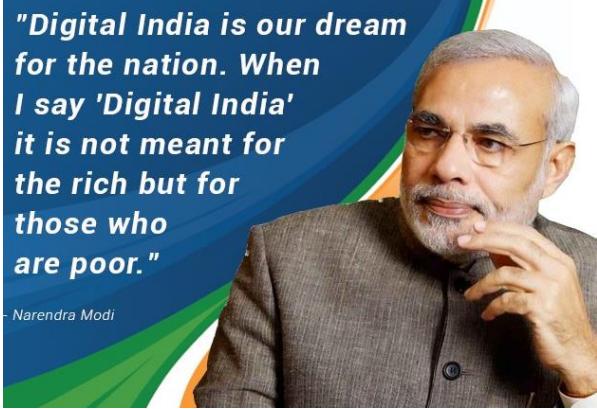
Significance of this programme:

As per the 71st NSSO Survey on Education 2014, only 6% of rural households have a computer. This highlights that more than 15 crore rural households (@ 94% of 16.85 crore households) do not have computers and a significant number of these households are likely to be digitally illiterate. The PMGDISHA being initiated under Digital India Programme would cover 6 crore households in rural areas to make them digitally literate. This would empower the citizens by providing them access to information, knowledge and skills for operating computers / digital access devices.

Sources: pib.

"Digital India is our dream for the nation. When I say 'Digital India' it is not meant for the rich but for those who are poor."

- Narendra Modi



Why Exempt CBI from RTI, Asks Petition

A plea has been filed in the Supreme Court for an early hearing of a petition challenging a 2011 government notification, which includes the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on the list of "intelligence and security organisations" exempted from disclosing information to the public under section 24 of the Right to Information Act. CBI is only an investigating agency and not a security or intelligence organisation.

"Such an administrative decision has a profound impact on the citizens of India as it restricts their fundamental right to information. By this method the government could keep adding organisations to the Second Schedule, which do not meet the express criteria laid down in Section 24(2) of the RTI Act and ultimately render the RTI Act ineffective," the application said.

What is CBI

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is a governmental agency belonging to Government of India that jointly serves as a criminal investigation body.
- The CBI is a premier investigating police agency in India. It is an elite force which plays a major role in preservation of values in public life and in ensuring the health of the national economy. It is also the nodal police agency in India which coordinates investigation on behalf of Interpol Member countries.

Section 24 of the RTI act is titled ‘act not to apply to certain organizations’. it provides exception to obtaining information from intelligence and security organisations specified in the second schedule to the **RTI act** or any information furnished by them to the government.

Source: the hindu

CVC to develop Integrity Index of 25 Organizations

Context:

- In line with the broader strategy and emphasis on preventive vigilance, the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) believes that the next level of systemic change can be through the tool of Integrity Index.
- The CVC has therefore decided to go in for development of the Integrity Index-based on bench-marking of internal processes and controls within an organisation as well as management of relationships and expectations of outside stakeholders.



The main objectives of Integrity Index:

- Define what constitutes Integrity of Public Organizations.
- Identify the different factors of Integrity and their inter-linkages.
- Create an objective and reliable tool that can measure the performance of organizations along these above factors.
- Validate the findings over a period of time to improve upon the robustness of the tool that measures Integrity.
- Create an internal and external ecosystem that promotes working with Integrity where public organizations lead the way.
- CVC has adopted a research-based approach for creating an integrity index that various organizations can use to measure themselves

Source: PIB

Phase 1 of Bharat Net project to be completed by December

Bharat Net project, which aims to deploy high-speed optical fibre cables across rural areas, will be completed by December this year, thus providing internet access to 100,000 gram panchayats,

Context:

‘i-Bharat 2017’ conference held in the New Delhi, based on the theme of ‘ICT Elucidations for Unserved and Unsolved’, organised by industry body FICCI in association with the ministry of electronics and information technology.

Challenges:

- India being the highest consumer of mobile data throws up as many challenges as opportunities.
- Public and private sector need to join hands in achieving the objective of doubling the reach of telecom fibre network in the country by 2020.
- Issues such as cyber security, data protection & privacy, regulation of data and, importantly, data monetisation need to be addressed.
- How India will leverage its Aadhaar and Election Commission data base.
- How the country will tackle the privacy debate after the Supreme Court ruling on privacy being a fundamental right

Source: indian express

Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

China ignores a yearly practice

Departing from past practice, the Chinese army did not send an invitation to its Indian counterpart for a ceremonial border personnel meeting (BPM) to mark China's National Day on October 1. This follows a no-show by the Chinese in response to an Indian invitation to attend a ceremonial BPM on Indian Independence Day on August 15.

This is the first time since 2005 that there was no BPM held on the India-China border. Although tensions between India and China have reduced following the disengagement between the two armies at the face-off site in Dolam plateau on August 28, relations between the two armies have not reverted to normal so far.

Background:

Ceremonial BPMs are held on National Days and, usually, the process of inviting and confirming is carried out a couple of days in advance. It is seen as an opportunity for each side to showcase its traditions and cultural diversity to the other.

- These ceremonial meetings include a small cultural show, a sporting contest and a meal. They are attended by officers, soldiers and families from both sides, and are different from flag-meetings, which are convened to discuss border issues.
- Both sides had agreed to two ceremonial meetings every year, starting from 2005, consequent to the signing of the Protocol on Modalities for the Implementation of Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field Along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas.
- There are five BPM points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) at Bum La and Kibithu in Arunachal Pradesh, Daulat Beg Oldi and Chushul in Ladakh, and Nathu La in Sikkim.

Sources: the hindu.

Nepal, India to conduct first joint tiger count

For the first time, Nepal and India will undertake a joint tiger census next month in their national parks, forests and protected areas adjoining the two countries using a globally-recognised method.



Key facts:

- This is the first time that both the countries are counting tiger heads using the same method that is recognised globally.
- Conservation authorities and experts would install cameras in various locations in tiger habitats as well as in buffer zones to capture and track the movements of the big cat.

Background:

The last tiger count conducted by Nepal in 2013 puts the number of adult tigers around 200 in the Himalayan country. Recent figures showed that since 2010, the estimated number of tigers across 13 tiger range countries including India and Nepal stood at 3,900.

- At the International Tiger Conference in Russia in 2010, participating countries including Nepal had made a commitment to double the tiger population by 2022. This means Nepal would have at least 250 tigers, 100% increase from its 2010 tiger count which had put the number of the big cat at 125.

Tiger range countries (TRCs) are those where the big cat roams freely. The 13 tiger range countries include Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Russia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Significance of this move:

Tiger is an endangered animal listed in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). According to the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), tigers have lost 93% of their historical range. Human and wildlife conflict, climate change and poaching and illegal wildlife trade are among the major reasons that has pushed the feline into the endangered category — facing risk of extinction in the wild — over the years.

Sources: the hindu.

Bangladesh backs China's OBOR

Bangladesh has come out in support of China's 'One-Belt-One-Road' (OBOR) initiative, also known as the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI). This is in absolute contradiction to India's stand on OBOR which it boycotted on grounds of violating India's territorial integrity as it runs through the disputed territory of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and because China has not been transparent leading to compromise on sovereignty.

Bangladesh defends its move saying that small countries need to overcome few limitations by weaving themselves with the rest of the world with the help of projects such as OBOR.



Background:

China's \$4 trillion OBOR initiative will span 65 countries with 70% of the world's population. Bangladesh formally declared joining China's OBOR initiative during the visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2016.

What is One Belt, One Road initiative?

The One Belt One Road initiative is the centrepiece of China's foreign policy and domestic economic strategy. It aims to rejuvenate ancient trade routes—Silk Routes—which will open up markets within and beyond the region. Through this initiative, China's plan is to construct roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure across Asia and beyond to bind its economy more tightly to the rest of the world.

Sources: the hindu.

'BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017'

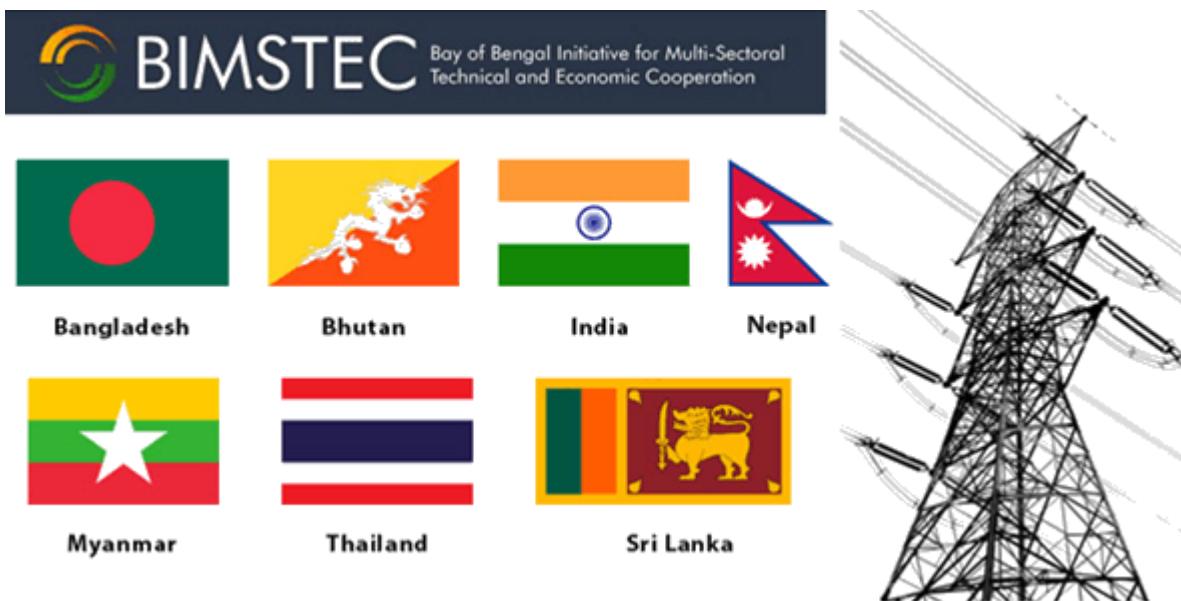
India is all set to hold the first 'BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise- 2017'. BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 will be conducted by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) as the lead agency.

Delegates from all seven nations of the 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' (BIMSTEC) grouping, – namely Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, representatives from Embassies/High Commissions of BIMSTEC nations in Delhi, National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), and Senior Officers from the Nodal Ministries will participate in the event.

Key facts:

- This Exercise will be a platform for sharing Best Practices on all aspects of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), strengthening regional response and coordination for Disaster Management among the BIMSTEC member countries.

- The main focus of the BIMSTEC DMEx-2017 will be on testing the region's preparedness and resilience towards effective activation of inter-Governmental interaction/dialogue/agreements for immediate deployment of regional resources for disaster response.
- It will help create synergy and synchronize efforts to institutionalize regional cooperation among the member countries.
- The exercise will help strengthen the effective utilization of the Search & Rescue Teams for Disaster Relief & Emergency Response, including Emergency Rapid Assessment Teams and Management of mass casualties especially in situations involving breakdown of infrastructure and communication.



Background:

India has been at the forefront of DRR efforts by hosting the South Asian Annual Disaster Management Exercise (SAADMEx) and the Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR). India has also offered its expertise and capabilities in DRR such as the South Asia satellite, GSAT-9, and the Tsunami Early Warning Centre to other countries. Disaster Management was one of the important Agenda items the BIMSTEC leaders deliberated upon during the Goa BRICS Summit in October last year where BIMSTEC leaders were the Special Invitees.

The BIMSTEC region is home to around 1.5 billion people, constituting around 22% of the global population with a combined GDP of US \$2.7 trillion economy. Majority of the BIMSTEC countries are situated in the South Asian Region (SAR), prone to natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, avalanches and drought.

Sources: pib.

Mitra Shakti 2017

The fifth India-Sri Lanka Joint Training Exercise MITRA SHAKTI 2017 is being held in Pune.

Key facts:

- The exercise is based on Counter Terrorist Operations and an Infantry company from both the countries is participating in the same.
- The aim of the joint training is to exchange the best of military practices of the two countries and build a strong military-to-military relation between the two armies.
- The exercise, the fifth in the series, also aims at developing joint strategies by sharing the expertise of conducting operations, especially in the counter-insurgency and counter terrorism (CI and CT) environment.
- The fourth chapter of the exercise was held at the Sinha Regimental Centre in Ambepussa, Sri Lanka, in 2016, when the main focus was to enhance inter-operability in CI and CT operations under the UN mandate.

Significance of this exercise:

The training exercise is considered an important effort in India's response to China's growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. It is expected to send a strong signal to the world that both India and Sri Lanka understand the emerging threat of terrorism and stand shoulder to shoulder in countering this menace.

Sources: pib.

India acts against bottom trawling

During the recently held meeting of the Joint Working Group, India informed Sri Lanka that it has taken measures to stop bottom trawling by its fishermen in the waters near the Sri Lankan coastline.

Background:

Bottom trawling by Indian fishermen had emerged as a major issue because of the disruptive impact it left on the coastal communities of Sri Lanka. Earlier in July, Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling, increasing the chances of interception of more Indian bottom trawlers.

Measures taken by India:

- The launch of a programme on diversification of bottom trawlers into deep-sea fishing vessels for tuna long lining under the Blue Revolution Scheme.
- Construction of Mookaiyur and Poompuhar fishing harbours, and capacity-building programmes for fishermen of the Palk Bay area in deep sea tuna long lining.
- Fresh registration for bottom trawlers in the Palk Bay area has been banned by the Government of Tamil Nadu.

What is bottom trawling?

Bottom trawling is a **destructive fishing practice which affects the marine ecosystem**. The practice, which involves trawlers dragging weighted nets along the sea floor, is known to cause great depletion of fishery resources, and curbing it is in the interest of sustainable fishing.

Sources: the hindu.

India starts on implementation of Motor pact

India has embarked on the implementation of the BBIN motor pact with Bangladesh and Nepal.

Background:

India in June 2015 had signed the major sub-regional transport project, Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA), for the seamless transit of passenger and cargo vehicles among them. However, Bhutan could not get public and parliamentary support for it. However, Bhutan has suggested that Bangladesh, India and Nepal may consider the implementation of the MVA.

About BBIN MVA:

The four SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries had in June 2015 signed the Motor Vehicle Agreement.

- The pact **aims at allowing motor vehicles of all categories registered in three countries to move freely in the region**.
- The pact aims to realise the ultimate objective of free movement of people and goods in the region and said that this would be supplemented through the building and upgrading roads, railways and waterways infrastructure.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre plans new Integrated Check Posts

A Cabinet proposal to set up 13 new **Integrated Check Posts (ICPs)** is being mooted by the Union Home Ministry to encourage India's engagement with its neighbours belonging to SAARC region.

Key facts:

- Among the 13 ICPs, seven will be along the India-Bangladesh border, apart from the three already operational there.
- The ICPs planned along the Bangladesh border will be at Hili, Changrabandha, Ghojadanga, Mahadipur, Fulbari in West Bengal, Kawripuichhuah in Mizoram and Sutarkandi in Assam.
- Among the new ICPs, only one will be on the India-Pakistan border while four will be on the India-Nepal border and one on the India-Myanmar border.
- Some of the other ICPs are at Dawki (Meghalaya), Akaura, (Tripura) Kawarpuchiah (Mizoram), Jobgani (Bihar), Sunauli (UP) and Rupaidiha/Nepalganj (UP).
- The cost of setting up 13 ICPs will be Rs 3,000 crore. The setting up of new ICPs was first proposed by the UPA government, which set up a separate body, **Land Port Authority of India (LPAI)**, in 2011 for their management.

What constitutes an integrated check post?

An ICP not only provides various services under one roof but is also equipped with cargo process building, cargo inspection sheds, warehouse, cold storage, currency exchange counters, Internet hubs, clearing agents, banks, vehicle scanners, isolation bay and parking.

Need for ICPs:

The borders need to be secured against interests hostile to the country. Putting in place systems that are able to interdict such elements while facilitating legitimate trade and commerce are among the principal objectives behind setting up the new ICPs. It is therefore necessary to undertake integrated development of infrastructure at the entry points on our land borders.

Sources: the hindu.

New U.S. policy is a game changer: Ashraf Ghani

Highlights of the visit:



- Regional counter-terror efforts and enhancing India's defence assistance to Kabul were discussed
- New South Asia policy of the U.S was appreciated by both the countries. It is viewed as an opportunity for lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan & South Asia.

New US South Asia policy:

- Deployment of additional US troops soldiers to train and buttress Afghan forces with gradual pull out plans at apt period as a hasty withdrawal would create a vacuum for terrorists.
- Strong focus on Pakistan to make sure it abides by its commitments. Pakistan being watched closely by his administration to keep check on the country becoming safe havens for terrorist organizations.
- US administration's South Asia policy is to further develop the US's strategic partnership with India. India was viewed as part of the problem and now Trump is arguing that India should be viewed as part of a solution to the Afghan imbroglio.

India – Afghanistan recent developments:

- Training of Afghan personnel at Indian military academies.
- India-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Show in New Delhi generated business worth over US \$ 200 million.
- Opening of the air freight corridor between Kandahar and Kabul and Delhi.
- Afghan cities of Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat have been connected directly by air to Delhi.

China's President Xi Jinping unveils new leadership line-up with no clear successor

Key Features:

- Premier Li Keqiang stays on, while additions to the top echelon are Li Zhanshu, Wang Yang, Wang Huning, Zhao Leji and Han Zheng.
- Given the ages of those now on the top committee, there's no clear successor to Xi in the new leadership lineup

Xi Jinping:

- The Chinese president has emerged as the country's strongest leader for a generation, due to a corruption campaign that has seen him defeat potential rivals in the party.
- He has silenced internet and media critics by cracking down on free speech, and has waged a war on civil society.
- He is seen elevated to the political level of Mao Tse-tung, after his ideology was enshrined into the constitution.

Significance:

- China's two centenary goals — a moderately prosperous society by 2021 and an advanced socialist country by 2050 — would guide policy and political conduct in the coming decades.
- Chinese investors are hoping that a stronger Xi will now be able to push through bold economic and financial reforms that will prevent the economy from a shock. Ongoing efforts for sweeping changes have been hindered by concerns about social stability and conflicts of interest.
- Xi's policies could benefit from leadership continuity. Goals such as improving the environment and transitioning the economy to a higher-value and service-based economy will take years to see through.

The seven mandarins

Chinese President Xi Jinping broke with tradition on Wednesday while naming members of the country's top body by not anointing a clear successor



Li Keqiang, 62, Premier: His position has been downgraded during Xi's tenure



Li Zhanshu, 67, head of Parliament: A long-time friend of Xi. Has played a key role in building stronger bilateral ties with Russia



Wang Yang, 62, Executive Vice-Premier: Top trade negotiator. A champion of private enterprise



Wang Huning, 62, director of the policy research office: Xi's top foreign policy adviser



Key principles in Xi's 'theory'

- a) Ensuring party leadership over all work areas
- b) Ensuring harmony between humans and nature
- c) Upholding absolute party leadership over the people's forces
- d) Upholding the principle of "one country, two systems" and promoting national reunification - a reference to Hong Kong and Taiwan
- e) Exercising full and rigorous governance over the party

Xi carries multiple titles – President, chairman of military and party's 'core leader' – and is often called the Chairman of Everything



Han Zheng, 63, Shanghai party chief: Was Xi's deputy during his brief stint as Party Chief in Shanghai in 2007. Credited with transformation of the city into an international financial hub. Favours market-oriented policies over centralised planning

India, Sri Lanka ink housing project deal in Hambantota

Sri Lanka signed an agreement with India to build 1,200 houses in the southern port city- Hambantota. Of the 1,200 houses to be built, 600 will be constructed in the Southern Province, while the remaining would be built across Sri Lanka, through one model village in each of the country's 25 districts.

Background:

The coastal city of Hambantota gained strategic significance after President Rajapaksa built a massive port and an airport with huge Chinese loans. In July this year, his successor government sold a majority stake of the port to China to service an outstanding \$8-billion debt it owes China, fanning concerns of countries with competing strategic interests, particularly India and the U.S. Local residents protested the selling of "national assets to foreign entities" leading to violent clashes.

Significance:

- Hambantota is right in the middle of vital energy supply lines in the Indian Ocean, connecting the Middle East and East Asia
- The signing of the MoU in Hambantota assumes significance not only in its timing, but also in taking India's housing project to the Sinhala-majority Southern Province.
- India has been taking steps to protect itself in the Indian Ocean by allying itself with the United States and Japan in a clear bid to counter growing Chinese influence

Hambantota:

Hambantota is the main town in Hambantota District, Southern Province, Sri Lanka. This underdeveloped area was hit hard by the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and is underwent a number of major development projects including the construction of a new sea port and international airport.

Source: the hindu

Do Not Deny Food To The Poor Due To Absence Of Aadhaar Says Center To States

Background:

As per the National Food Security Act, the States have been given time till December to link Aadhaar with ration cards. However the deadline for mandatory linking of Aadhaar for benefits of government schemes would be extended till March 31 next for those who do not have the biometric identification number. So far, 82% of the ration cards have been seeded with Aadhaar.

The instruction was issued this week to all the States, after an 11-year-old Jharkhand girl allegedly died of starvation recently after she was denied PDS rations.

Actions:

- Union Food Ministry clarified that deletion from the ration card database could happen only after a proper verification of the ration card holder establishes "beyond reasonable doubt" that an entry pertaining to the said ration card holder is not genuine.
- Until Aadhaar is assigned to the beneficiary, subsidised foodgrains will have to be given on production of ration card, enrolment slip and other stipulated documents.
- Even in the case of failure of biometric authentication due to a glitch or poor biometric quality, the beneficiary will have to be given the benefits on production of Aadhaar card along with the ration card.
- The States and the Union Territories will have to provide Aadhaar enrolment facilities to those without Aadhaar and link their Aadhaar numbers with ration cards

Source: the hindu

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

Cabinet approves the Extradition Treaty between India and Lithuania

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the signing and ratification of the **Extradition Treaty between India and Lithuania**.

Benefits of this treaty:



- The Treaty would provide a legal framework for seeking extradition of terrorists, economic offenders and other criminals from and to Lithuania.
- The Treaty would help in extradition of fugitive criminals including terrorists for criminal prosecutions from Lithuania who may have committed crimes against India.
- It will bring the criminals to justice, with a view to ensure peace and tranquility to public at large.

What is extradition?

Extradition is the surrender of a criminal to one country by another. It also helps in maintaining the territoriality of the penal code which says that a country should not apply its criminal law to a person who committed an offence outside its territories except when the crime is related to the country's national interest. The process is regulated by treaties between the two countries.

What are the internationally accepted conditions for extradition?

There is a general consensus about few conditions of extradition. The crime should fulfill the criterion of dual criminality, i.e. it is a punishable offence in both the countries. For instance homosexuality might be a crime in country A while it is accepted in B. The country A can not request B to extradite a person who is charged with a homosexuality related offence.

Persons charged for political reasons are generally not extradited. Some countries refuse to extradite if the kind of expected punishment is abolished or is not administered in their own territories. For instance Australia, Canada, Macao, Mexico, and most of the European nations refuse to extradite a criminal if the person in question might get capital punishment after his extradition.

What are the extradition laws of India?

In India the Extradition Act, 1962 regulates the surrender of a person to another country or the request for arrest of a person in a foreign land. The act specifies that any conduct of a person in India or in a foreign state that is mentioned in the list of extradition offence and is punishable with minimum one year of imprisonment qualifies for extradition request. The process has to be initiated by the central government.

- In the case of countries with which India does not have such a treaty, the central government can by notified order treat any convention to which India and the foreign country is a party as the extradition treaty providing for extradition with respect to the offences specified in that convention.
- If the extradition request has come from two or more countries then the government has the rights to decide which of them is the fittest for the request.

In what conditions can the government deny extradition?

- If the government finds the case trivial and if it thinks that the surrendering of the person is not being made in good faith or in the interests of justice or for political reasons, it can deny the request.
- If the surrender according to the requesting country's own law is barred by time then also the person cannot be extradited from India. If the government can also stop the process if it feels that the person will be charged with an offence not mentioned in the extradition treaty.
- The government can put the extradition on hold if it feels that the person will be charged for a lesser offence, which is disclosed by the requesting authorities so that they can have the possession of the person.

- Apart from this, if the person is serving a jail term or he/she is accused of an offence in Indian soil, which is different from the offence for which the person is wanted abroad, then also the extradition process can be stopped.
- Similarly if a fugitive criminal has committed an offence which is punishable with death in India while the laws of foreign state do not provide death for the same offence then criminal will get life imprisonment in India also.

Sources: pib.

Cabinet approves MoU between India and Belarus for Cooperation in the field of Vocational Education and Training

The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval for a Memorandum of Understanding between India and Belarus for cooperation in the field of Vocational Education and Training (VET).

- This is for the first time an MoU for cooperation in area of vocational education, training and skill development has been signed with Eurasian country.

Significance of this MoU:

Belarus has a large concentration of industries, mainly into manufacturing and heavy industries, which draw their strength from available skilled manpower and a highly developed skill training system. The transfer of knowledge of their skilling methodology will immensely help in our initiatives like "Make in India" and "Skill India". This MoU would pave the way for systematic transfer of their expertise and knowhow in skilling the manpower specially in manufacturing sector.

The areas of cooperation are as under:

- The Belarusian side shall provide comprehensive transfer of know-how of emerging technologies, training and evaluation methodologies, content development for regular / distance learning / e-learning/training of master trainers, competency building of the assessors in area of their competency and network building & industry linkage.
- Vocational education services for Indian citizens for skill development in the field of construction, electric-power production and distribution, manufacturing industry, trade, auto service and household goods repair and maintenance, transport, communication, hotels and restaurants as well as other fields being in high demand in India.
- Retraining, up-skilling, internship for Vocational Education and Training managers, teachers and trainers of India by the Belarusian Side.
- Advisory services in order to enhance planning, management and delivery of Vocational Education and Training and Skill Development.

Background:

Belarus is a landlocked country in Eastern Europe bordered by Russia to the northeast, Ukraine to the south, Poland to the west, and Lithuania and Latvia to the northwest.

Sources: pib.

India denounces call to give up nukes, sign NPT

India has denounced a call to give up its nuclear weapons and sign the **Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT)** while it "remains committed to universal, non-discriminatory and verifiable nuclear disarmament".

- This was in response to a call by a group calling itself the New Agenda Coalition that India – along with Israel and Pakistan – sign the NPT as NNWS (non-nuclear weapon states), which would effectively mean giving up its nuclear arsenal.
- However, India has reiterated its commitment "as a responsible nuclear power" to "a policy of credible minimum deterrence based on a No First Use posture and non-use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states".

Background:

The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was adopted by the General Assembly with 122 votes in July, and the pact itself was open to signatures in September. India, along with the other nuclear-armed nations, boycotted the negotiations on the treaty, although North Korea voted for it.

About NPT:

It is an international treaty whose objective is to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and weapons technology, to promote cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, and to further the goal of achieving nuclear disarmament and general and complete disarmament. The Treaty entered into force in 1970.

- Four UN member states have never joined the NPT: India, Israel, Pakistan and South Sudan. North Korea, which acceded to the NPT in 1985 but never came into compliance, announced its withdrawal in 2003.
- Recognized nuclear-weapon states: The treaty recognizes five states as nuclear-weapon states: the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and China.

The NPT is interpreted as a three-pillar system, with an implicit balance among them: the three pillars are:

- Non-proliferation.
- Disarmament
- The right to peacefully use nuclear technology.

Sources: the hindu.

NIIF gets first investor, Abu Dhabi fund brings in \$1 bn

The National Investment and Infrastructure Fund (NIIF) of India has signed an investment agreement worth \$1 billion with a wholly owned unit of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA).



- As part of the partnership **agreement, ADIA will become the first institutional investor** in NIIF's Master Fund and a shareholder in National Investment and Infrastructure Ltd, NIIF's investment management company.
- This agreement marks the culmination of an extensive process of collaboration with ADIA to develop an investment structure that is attractive to international investors, while remaining closely aligned with NIIF's objectives.

About NIIF:

NIIF was set up in 2015 as an investment vehicle for funding commercially viable greenfield, brownfield and stalled projects in the infrastructure sector.

- NIIF will invest in areas such as energy, transportation, housing, water, waste management and other infrastructure-related sectors in India.
- The corpus of the fund is proposed to be around Rs40,000 crore, with the government investing 49% and the rest to be raised from third-party investors such as sovereign wealth funds, insurance and pension funds, endowments etc.

Sources: the hindu.

India, Brazil, South Africa sign IBSA Trust Fund agreement

India, Brazil and South Africa have signed **the IBSA Trust Fund Agreement** that seeks to fight poverty in developing countries. The agreement was signed at the 8th IBSA trilateral Ministerial Commission Meeting in Durban.

About IBSA Trust Fund:

The IBSA Trust Fund brings together the three emerging economies of India, Brazil and South Africa to combat poverty in other developing countries. Each country contributes USD 1 million annually to this fund which is managed by the UN Development Programmes (UNDP) Special Unit for South-South Cooperation.

THE INDIA-BRAZIL-SOUTH AFRICA DIALOGUE FORUM:

Established in June 2003, IBSA is a coordinating mechanism amongst three emerging countries, three multi ethnic and multicultural democracies, which are determined to:

- Contribute to the construction of a new international architecture.
- Bring their voice together on global issues.
- Deepen their ties in various areas.

Key facts:

- IBSA also opens itself to concrete projects of cooperation and partnership with less developed countries.
- The establishment of IBSA was formalised by the Brasilia Declaration of 6 June 2003, which mentions India, Brazil and South Africa's democratic credentials, their condition as developing nations and their capacity of acting on a global scale as the main reasons for the three countries to come together.
- Their status as middle powers, their common need to address social inequalities within their borders and the existence of consolidated industrial areas in the three countries are often mentioned as additional elements that bring convergence among the members of the Forum.



Sources: the hindu.

First Ever Tri-Services India-Russia War Exercise – IndRa

India and Russia have begun their **first mega tri-services war game-Indra** involving their armies, navies and air forces with an aim to boost their operational coordination. The Indian contingent includes nearly 450 personnel while the Russian side is being represented by around 1,000 troops in the 10-day exercise Indra.

**Significance of the exercise:**

- The Indian Army, Navy and Air Force have been holding bilateral exercises separately with their Russian counterparts but it is for the first time that the two countries are carrying out a tri-services exercise.
- The joint tri-service exercise will be a demonstration of the increasing commitment of both nations to address common challenges across the full spectrum of operations.
- The first ever tri-service exercise between the two countries reflects the vibrancy of the continued Indo-Russian strategic partnership.
- With the rich operational experience of Russian and Indian armies in counter insurgency operations, both sides will gain immensely from each other to further develop their capabilities. The exercise will further strengthen the relationship between the two defence forces.

Sources: the hindu.

US secretary of state Rex Tillerson visits India**Issues India would seek Clarity on from US:**

- The US position on limiting H1B visas.
- US to decide whether to impose sanctions on Iran

Significance:

- US favours critical roles for India in South Asia as well as in the Indo-Pacific region.



- US demanding Pakistan to suspend cross-border terrorism and asking India play a larger role in stabilising Afghanistan.
- Tillerson speech distinguished between India, which adhered to international rules, and China, which is seen as undermining the international rules-based order. There is seen as an invitation to India to increase its role in the Indo-Pacific.

Source: the hindu, livemint

First BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine meeting held in New Delhi

The first-ever meeting of BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine (BITFM) was held at Parvasi Bhartiya Kendra in New Delhi

Key Features:

- It was organized by Union Ministry of AYUSH
- India being a major stakeholder in the field of Traditional Medicine plays an important role in influencing the policies and strategies related to the Traditional Medicine in the BIMSTEC Forum

Important Agenda:

- Implementation of Strategies of BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicines
- Identification of priority areas in traditional medicine for technical and research collaboration among member states
- Regional Strategy for protection of Genetic Resource associated with Traditional Medicine Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights
- Human Resource Development and Capacity Building among the BIMSTEC Member States
- New Initiative, proposals and programmes for cooperation on Traditional Medicine among the BIMSTEC Task Force on Traditional Medicine.

BIMSTEC:

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) is international organisation involving a group of countries in the South Asia and South East Asia namely, Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

Source: pib

India, France Decide To Boost Co-Operation In Indo-Pacific Region

Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her French counterpart Florence Parly held extensive talks covering a range of issues, including the regional security situation, joint development of defence platforms and expansion of military-to-military ties.

Context:

France is a major partner for India in developing various key military platforms including the Scorpene submarines. Parly attended foundation ceremony of an aerospace park being set up under a joint venture by French aircraft manufacturer Dassault Aviation and Anil Ambani-promoted Reliance Aerospace Ltd.

Highlights:

- Resolved to further ramp up the overall defence and security ties.
- Agreed to expand counter-terror cooperation at maritime side
- French side explored the possibility of a follow on order of additional Rafale fighter jets by India.
- Comprehensively reviewed developments in defence equipment and industry cooperation between the two countries.

Source: the hindu, ndtv

Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni visit to India

Background:

The period from 2012 to 2016 marked a difficult bilateral phase as the marines issue- fatal shootings of two Indian fishermen in 2012 by Italian marines became a national debate in Italy.

The case is now with the International Court of Justice is expected to be completed by 2018.

Issues to be discussed:

- India's global push for the Nuclear Suppliers Group membership and bilateral trade are likely to be on the agenda
- Italy's support for India's candidature at the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) in 2016
- Italian support at the FATF (Financial Action Task Force) meeting that begins on Monday in Buenos Aires, where India has been pushing for stringent measures against Pakistan on terror funding issues.

Significance:

Italian supportive role in the EU and NSG will help our cause with the EU-India FTA (Free Trade Agreement) and our bid for NSG membership

Source: the hindu

India ships wheat to Afghanistan via Chabahar

The Iranian port of Chabahar processed a maiden shipment of wheat from India's western seaport of Kandla to Afghanistan on Sunday. Chabahar port lies outside the Persian Gulf on the Gulf of Oman and can be easily accessed from India's western coast.

Context:

The shipment is a part of commitment made by India to supply 1.1 million tons of wheat for free to the people of Afghanistan and is the first shipment to Afghanistan through the Chabahar port since the Trilateral Agreement on Establishment of International Transport and Transit Corridor was signed during a visit to Iran by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in May 2016.

Significance:

- The use of Chabahar port is seen as a major boost to India's efforts to connect with Central Asia and Russia, and it could facilitate Indian imports of iron ore, sugar and rice as well as crude oil from Iran.
- India's development of Chabahar port has been seen as a move to counter China's presence in the Arabian Sea. China is working with Pakistan to develop Gwadar port which is less than 100 nautical miles from Chabahar by road.
- India to play a larger role in stabilizing war-torn Afghanistan



INSTC:

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the Chabahar-Zahedan-Zaranj corridor would connect South Asia on one hand and Europe on the other, Modi had said. INSTC is an ambitious multimodal transport system established in 2000 by Iran, Russia and India to promote transportation cooperation. It is planned to connect the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea through Iran and then onwards to St. Petersburg and northern Europe through Russia.

Source: the hindu

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

Catalonia crisis: Spain moves to suspend autonomy

Spain is planning to suspend Catalonia's autonomy, as the region's leader threatens to declare independence. The Spain government would soon meet to activate Article 155 of the constitution, allowing it to take over running of the region.

Article 155 of the constitution, which cemented democratic rule three years after the death of dictator General Francisco Franco in 1975, allows Madrid to impose direct rule in a crisis but it has never been invoked.

Where is Catalonia?

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

What is the history of the secession movement?

Catalonia was historically an autonomous region of the Iberian peninsula, which encompasses Spain and Portugal. However, it was never a disparate part of the region despite having its own language, laws, and customs. The marriage of Petronilia, the Queen of Aragon, and Ramon Berenguer IV, Count of Barcelona in 1150, led to the formation of a dynasty. All regions of the peninsula spanning Aragon and Catalonia were brought under unified rule which lasted until the reign of King Philip V.

- The war of Spanish Succession created modern Spain with the defeat of Valencia in 1707, and of Catalonia in 1714. Subsequent sovereigns tried to impose the Spanish language and laws in order to culturally unify the kingdom, but their attempts were abandoned in 1931 when the Generalitat (the national Catalan government) was restored.
- Catalan separatism was crushed under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco who took control of the region, killing 3,500 people and forcing many more into exile. Franco was ousted in 1977 and democracy was restored.
- Calls for complete independence continued to grow. In July 2010, the Constitutional Court in Madrid overruled part of the 2006 autonomy statute, stating that there is no legal basis for recognising Catalonia as a separate country in the framework of the Spanish nation state.
- The economic crisis which has embattled the Spanish economy with rising unemployment and spiralling inflation, only served to amplify separatist sentiments as the wealthy Barcelona region is seen as propping up the poorer provinces.

How would a secession affect the Spanish economy?

The Catalan region has long been the industrial heartland of Spain, with textile and shipbuilding, and more recently, finance, services, and technology. Barcelona has a thriving start-up culture, and plays host to the annual Mobile World Congress, where the bleeding edge of technology is on display.

- Catalonia is one of the wealthiest regions of Spain. It accounts for 20.07% of the Spanish GDP. Secession would therefore cost Spain almost a fifth of its economic output, and trigger a row on how to carve up the €836 billion of national debt.
- If Catalonia were to secede from Spain, it would have a GDP of \$314 billion, according to calculations by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That would make its economy larger than Singapore and South Africa, and on a par with Israel. Its GDP per capita would be \$35,000, which would make the average citizen of the Catalonian state wealthier than his counterparts from South Korea or Italy.

Sources: the hindu.

Japan PM Shinzo Abe's ruling bloc likely to win the election

According to TV exit polls, Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party led coalition could likely be the winner in Sunday election bolstering Shinzo Abe's chance of becoming the nation's longest serving premier.



Significance:

- “**Abenomics**” growth strategy centred on the hyper-easy monetary policy will likely continue.
- On the background of North Korea’s nuclear threat, Nationalist Mr. Abe could propose changes to pacifist Japan’s U.S.-imposed Constitution, which forces it to renounce war and effectively limits its military to a role of self-defence.

Source: the hindu

Spain sacks Catalan government after independence declaration

Background:

Catalonia is one of Spain's most prosperous regions and already has a high degree of autonomy. But it has a series of historic grievances, exacerbated during the 1939-1975 Franco dictatorship, when its culture and politics were suppressed.

Catalonia held an Independent referendum on Oct. 1, 2017 which was declared illegal by Madrid and marred by heavy-handed national police tactics to stop it.



Highlights:

- The Catalan parliament had voted to make a unilateral declaration of independence.
- Shortly afterwards the Spanish Senate in Madrid approved the imposition of direct rule.
- It sacked Carles Puigdemont as head of the autonomous region, also fired its police chief and said central government ministries would take over the Catalan administration.
- A new regional election will be held in Catalonia on Dec. 21
- Several European countries, including France and Germany, and the United States also rejected the independence declaration and said they supported Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy’s efforts to preserve Spain’s unity.

Source: the hindu

China to block UN bid to ban Azhar

Citing a lack of consensus, China said that it is once again not designating Masood Azhar, head of the Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad, as an international terrorist.

China raised the technical hold to allow for more time for all parties to deliberate on this matter.

Context:

The Chinese position came ahead of Thursday’s meeting of the 1267 committee of the U.N. Security Council, where the status of Azhar would be discussed.

UNSC 1267 Committee:

- The UNSC 1267 Committee was established pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999). It is also known as the AlQaida and Taliban Sanctions Committee.

- It was established for the purpose of overseeing the implementation of sanctions measures imposed on Taliban-controlled Afghanistan for its support of Osama bin Laden.
- However in course of time, the 1267 sanctions regime has been modified and strengthened by subsequent resolutions.
- If an individual or terrorist organisation is included in this list, it helps in restricting their movement, financial penalties and assets freeze among others.
- The Committee comprises all 15 members of the UNSC and makes its decision by consensus and secretly. If single member opposes it there is no consensus.
- That's why China opposition to India's bid is not allowing UNSC to designate Masood Azhar as an international terrorist and freeze his assets and travel ban.
- The committee is being criticised for being non transparent and in recent time there is demand for its reforms to address procedural shortcomings especially from India.

Source: Hindu

Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.

ADB \$500 million funding soon for private sector infrastructure in Asia and Pacific

Asian Development Bank (ADB) is actively processing USD 500 million (about Rs 3,275 crore) as debt and equity funding for private infrastructure projects in countries. This includes potential projects in India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Thailand.

- ADB has already approved two projects worth over USD 210 million in debt financing from the co-financing arm Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP) in its first year of operation.

The Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund LEAP--2016

- ADB & Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to established new fund to support private infrastructure investments across Asia-Pacific
- Capitalized by \$1.5 billion in equity from JICA & will help mobilize some \$6 billion in investments.
- Became operational in August 2016 and over \$200 million of LEAP funds were allocated through end-2016 in renewable energy projects in India and Indonesia.

Leading Asia's Private Infrastructure Fund (LEAP):

The Leading Asia's Private Sector Infrastructure Fund (LEAP) was established in March 2016. The fund is an infrastructure co-financing fund, expected to leverage and complement ADB's existing nonsovereign platform to fill financing gaps and increase access to finance for infrastructure projects in the region. Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has made a contribution to the fund.

What are the priorities?

The fund will provide cofinancing to nonsovereign infrastructure projects at different stages of development, including early stage, growth stage, and greenfield and brownfield projects. It will support projects with strong anticipated development impacts and alignment with the strategies of ADB and JICA. The fund will undertake project finance (nonrecourse or limited recourse) and corporate finance transactions, and will seek to support a range of private sector participation modalities including public-private partnerships, joint ventures, private finance initiative projects, and privatizations, as well as conventional project finance.

What kind of activities are eligible for the fund?

Eligible project types will include the following infrastructure subsectors:

- Energy, including renewable energy generation, energy efficiency and conservation, and natural gas transmission and distribution.
- Water and other urban infrastructure and services, including water, wastewater, and solid waste management.
- Transport, including road transport, water transport, rail transport, air transport, multimodal logistics, urban roads and traffic management, and urban public transport.

- Information and communication technology and health.

The fund will extend ADB's operations by deploying both commercial and concessional capital from the same fund, and cofinancing will be provided in the form of loans, equity investments, and mezzanine finance transactions.

Who is eligible to receive the fund?

The fund will provide financing to companies and projects, as well as to financial intermediaries (e.g., holding companies and local currency vehicles) where there is a link to Infrastructure (with the exclusion of private equity funds).

Eligible countries include ADB developing member countries that are also eligible for official development assistance (ODA) from Japan.

Sources: et.

India seeks greater role for troops contributing countries in UN peacekeeping missions

India has sought enhanced role for troops contributing countries in the decision-making process of UN peacekeeping missions. Also, India has asked the UN Security Council to revisit the way mandates are designed. It is because, according to India, the current system of excluding the troop and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) from the process of framing the mandates is not sustainable.

Background:

India is one of the largest contributors of troops and police to UN peacekeeping missions. However, it has no say in the process of formulation of the mandate.



Way ahead:

The current approach is not sustainable. It is hence an inescapable requirement to incorporate the troop and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs) in the decision making and mandate formulation from the very onset.

- There is also a need to ensure more effective triangular cooperation between the T/PCCs, Secretariat and Security Council on important policy and doctrinal issues being formulated in the field of peacekeeping.
- Today's peacekeeping operations pose complex challenges. Non-state actors have become the major players in many of these conflicts. Today's peacekeeping requires a political consensus among Security Council members, Troop Contributors and Secretariat on the cost, limits and dangers of operations in high-risk environments.

What you need to know about UN Peacekeeping?

United Nations Peacekeeping was created in 1948. Its first mission involved the establishment of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which served to observe and maintain ceasefire during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

- UN Peacekeeping maintains three basic principles: Consent of the parties, impartiality and non-use of Force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate.
- The UN Peacekeepers are led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO).
- There are currently 17 UN peace operations deployed on four continents.
- UN Peacekeepers are from diverse backgrounds, from areas all around the world. They include police, military and civilian personnel. They are often referred to as Blue Berets or Blue Helmets because of their light blue berets or helmets.
- The UN Peacekeeping Force won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988.
- The United Nations Charter gives the United Nations Security Council the power and responsibility to take collective action to maintain international peace and security. For this reason, the international community usually looks to the Security Council to authorize peacekeeping operations.

Sources: the hindu.

Anti-nuclear weapons group Ican wins Nobel Peace Prize

The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (Ican). Ican has been chosen for its “groundbreaking efforts to achieve a treaty prohibition” on nuclear weapons. The group will receive nine million Swedish kronor (\$1.1 million, £846,000) along with a medal and a diploma at a ceremony in December.

Significance of this decision:

The Nobel Committee’s decision provides a powerful and timely reinforcement of the opprobrium and concern attached to nuclear weapons.

- It comes at a moment when North Korea is actively developing its nuclear programme, the fate of the Iran nuclear deal is in the balance, and the US and Russia are both actively seeking to modernise their nuclear forces.
- There is of course already the Non-Proliferation Treaty under which most countries agreed never to develop nuclear weapons and those that already had them agreed progressively to disarm.
- But campaigners have long been unsatisfied with this process insisting that the nuclear “haves” have no intention of giving up their arsenals.



About Ican:

Ican, a coalition of hundreds of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), is 10 years old and is based in Geneva, Switzerland. Ican set about an alternative approach – to raise popular awareness of the issue and to pressure governments to open up a new treaty for signature earlier this year that would seek an outright ban on nuclear weapons.

In July, after pressure from Ican, 122 nations backed a UN treaty designed to ban and eventually eliminate all nuclear weapons. But none of the nine known nuclear powers in the world – including the UK and the US – endorsed it.

Sources: the hindu.

India invited to join SCO contact group meeting on Afghanistan

India following its rising profile in Afghanistan for the first time ever has been invited to join Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) contact group meeting on Afghanistan to discuss prevailing security situation and economic potential of the landlocked country.

- The meeting is being held in Moscow and comes as a feather in the cap for India’s Afghan strategy after successful US backed Indo-Afghan trade and investment show in Delhi. The development is viewed as acknowledgement of India’s stake in the war-torn country.

Background:

The SCO contact group on Afghanistan that became defunct in 2009 has been revived following intervention by Russian President Vladimir Putin from this year. India was invited to join maiden SCO contact group meeting on Afghanistan after it became a SCO member this June.

India’s increasing engagement with Afghanistan:

India is working with both US and Russia to contribute to stability of Afghanistan. SCO membership that put India into the heart of Eurasian geo-politics enabling a larger say in Afghanistan that has direct bearing on security situation here. However, India’s deeper engagement with Afghanistan has been opposed by Pakistan and its Army.

Pak-backed Taliban and Haqqani network continue to target Indian interests and assets in the landlocked country as it strives to achieve “strategic depth”.

SCO:

The SCO was established on June 15, 2001 in Shanghai by six countries. At the 2016 summit held in Uzbekistan, the SCO leaders signed memorandums on the accession of India and Pakistan to the organization.

Cabinet approves change of status for marine body IALA

Union Cabinet has given its approval for International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities (IALA) to change its status from Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) to Inter-Governmental Organization (IGO).

- The move will facilitate “to foster the safe, economic and efficient movement of vessels”. It will bring IALA at par with International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and International Hydrographic Organisation (IHO).

About IALA:

The IALA, having headquarters at St. Germainen Laye (France) was established in 1957 under French law. It is governed by a General Assembly having 83 National members, with its Council as the executive body.

- The IALA council consists of 24 National Members and India is one of the council members represented through the Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL), Ministry of Shipping.
- DGLL establishes and maintains Aids to Navigation in general waters along coast of India including A&N and Lakshadweep group of islands, as per Lighthouse Act 1927.

Sources: pib.

U.S., Israel quit UNESCO

The U.S. has announced its withdrawal from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), accusing it of “continuing anti-Israel bias.” Besides the US, Israel has also decided to pull out of UNESCO.



- As required by law, the U.S. has stopped funding UNESCO. The U.S. withdrawal will take effect on December 31, 2018. Until then, it will remain a full member.

Why the US is withdrawing?

The US and UNESCO have actually been at loggerheads since 2011.

- The key issue now, as with many US-UN disputes, is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In October 2011, UNESCO admitted the Palestinian territories to the organization as an independent member-state called Palestine. This triggered a US law which cut off American funding for any organization that recognized an independent Palestine. The US had previously paid for 22 percent (\$80 million) of UNESCO's annual budget.
- Finally, in 2013, after the US missed several rounds of payments to UNESCO, the organization suspended US voting rights in its core decision-making bodies. So the US hasn't been a real UNESCO member for a while.

UNESCO:

UNESCO is a United Nations organization that helps preserve historical and cultural sites worldwide.

- It is a special multi-country agency, formed in 1945 and based in France, that promotes sex education and literacy as well as improving gender equality in countries around the world.
- It is also known for its work to preserve cultural and heritage sites such as ancient villages, ruins and temples, and historic sites such as the Great Mosque of Samarra in Iraq, which at one point came under threat of being destroyed by the Islamic State.

Sources: the hindu.

Lawyers as Seniors: Supreme Court frames rules for itself, 24 High Courts

The Supreme Court of India has laid down guidelines for itself and 24 High Courts **to govern the exercise of designating lawyers as seniors** and has ordered setting up of a permanent committee headed by the Chief Justice of India assisted by a secretariat. The direction came based on a petition challenging the designation process.

Composition of the permanent committee:

- **In the case of the Supreme Court**, the permanent committee will comprise the Chief Justice of India and two seniormost companion judges, Attorney General of India and a representative from the bar nominated by the first four members.
- **For the HCs**, it will have the Chief Justice of the respective HC and the Advocate General of the state in place of CJI and Attorney General.

Selection procedure:

A permanent secretariat will be set up to which applications including proposals from the judges will be submitted.

- On receipt of such applications or proposals from Hon'ble Judges, the Secretariat will compile the relevant data and information with regard to the reputation, conduct, integrity of the Advocate(s) concerned including his/her participation in pro bono work; reported judgments in which the concerned Advocate(s) had appeared; the number of such judgments for the last five years.
- The Secretariat will publish the proposal of designation of a particular Advocate in the official website of the Court concerned inviting the suggestions and views of other stakeholders in the proposed designation. The cases will then be put up before the Permanent Committee for scrutiny.
- The Committee will interview the candidate and make an overall evaluation on the basis of his/her number of years of practice, judgments (reported and unreported) which indicate the legal formulations advanced by the Advocate concerned in the course of the proceedings of the case, pro bono work done by him/her, domain expertise of the applicant in various branches of law and publications by the advocate.
- The candidates will also have to take a personality test. After a name is considered and approved by the permanent committee, it will be put before the Full Court (involving SC/HC judges as the case may be) which will decide to accord senior designation to an advocate either unanimously or by majority, through secret ballot. The Full Court may also recall the senior designation of a lawyer if it feels he is guilty of conduct that disentitles him to the same.

Background:

Section 16(1) of the Advocates Act, 1961 recognises senior advocates. Section 16(2) says that “an advocate may, with his consent, be designated as senior advocate if the Supreme Court or a High Court is of opinion that by virtue of his ability (standing the Bar or special knowledge or experience in law) he is deserving or such distinction.”

Supreme Court rules say “*the Chief Justice and the judges may with the consent of the advocate, designate an advocate as senior advocate if in their opinion by virtue of his ability; standing at the Bar or special knowledge or experience in law the said advocate is deserving of such distinction.*” It was contended that this was not transparent.

Sources: the hindu.

World Food Day

World Food Day is celebrated on October 16 every year to raise awareness on the issues of poverty and hunger. World Food Day was established by **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)** in November 1979 and since then the day is celebrated worldwide by many organisations that are concerned with food security.

Theme: “Change the future of migration. Invest in food security.”

Significance of this event:

- World Food Day is a chance to show our commitment to **Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2** – to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030.

- It's also a day for us to celebrate the progress we have already made towards reaching #ZeroHunger.

About FAO:

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is a **specialised agency of the United Nations** that leads international efforts to defeat hunger. Serving both developed and developing countries, FAO acts as a neutral forum where all nations meet as equals to negotiate agreements and debate policy.

FAO is also a source of knowledge and information, and helps developing countries in transition modernize and improve agriculture, forestry and fisheries practices, ensuring good nutrition and food security for all.

Sources: the hindu.

'Decision on removal of fishing subsidies certain in WTO's Dec. meet'

Event:

WTO's Ministerial Conference meeting at **Buenos Aires (Argentina)** to be held in December 2017. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General, UN Conference on Trade and Development

Reason:

- Addressing government incentives that drive unsustainable fisheries practices is not just an environmental imperative.
- Government subsidies in the fisheries sector can have severe negative social and economic impacts for the most vulnerable countries and communities.
- Subsidies Weaken The Sustainability Of Global Fisheries While Increasing Inequality Among Fishers
- Harmful fishing subsidies (globally) that contribute to overfishing are estimated to be as high as \$35 billion.

Other issues:

- Permanent solution to the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes' would be a part of the outcomes
- 'No' to e-commerce talks as many developing countries are not ready to allow e-commerce to be negotiated. They want to ensure that e-commerce is an enabler for development, without going into rule-making at the WTO

UNCTAD:

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was established in 1964. UNCTAD is the principal organ of the United Nations General Assembly dealing with trade, investment, and development issues. The primary objective of UNCTAD is to formulate policies relating to all aspects of development including trade, aid, transport, finance and technology. The conference ordinarily meets once in four years; the permanent secretariat is in Geneva.

Sources: the hindu

GS PAPER - III

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

Odisha government creating land bank for industrial allocation

The state government of Odisha is creating a 1.2 lakh acre land bank across the state for allocation to the industrial sector to avoid a repeat of the Posco fiasco.

- In order to cut red tape and wrangling with local issues in the land acquisition process, the state government is acquiring government land for industrial use and proposes to offer it with all facilities in place.

Background:

Odisha government has created a huge land bank and has identified areas across the state to bring under one umbrella for the industrial sector. Already, the land bank has reached 57,655 acres. With the creation of the land bank, the industry department is looking for investment in various sectors including steel, aluminium, agro and food processing based units, apparel, IT and plastic units that will further create employment potential.

Significance of this move:

It is a plug-and-play kind of model wherein the facilities related to water, power, roads and all clearances are in place. The companies need to only make the payment of base premium upfront for the land and the annual rent for rest of the 90 years (their lease).

Crisil report on farm loan waiver

As per estimates by rating firm Crisil, if all affected states also announce farm loan waivers the Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Punjab did, then the **total cost to the exchequer could be upto Rs 2.5 lakh crore or 0.5% of GDP.**

Views of Crisil on farm loan waiver:

It has termed **farm loan waivers as a “paradox” in a year of normal monsoon.** The ratings firm has said that the cost of loan waiver could be significantly high for Tamil Nadu, which has the highest outstanding agricultural loans among states. Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, too, could feel some pressure.

What next?

The pain points for the farmers are all too visible. And unless measures to lower this pain are planned and implemented carefully, and soon, there could be a gaping hole in the exchequer as well.

Drawbacks of loan waivers:

- Firstly, it covers only a tiny fraction of farmers. The loan waiver as a concept excludes most of the farm households in dire need of relief and includes some who do not deserve such relief on economic grounds.
- Second, it provides only a partial relief to the indebted farmers as about half of the institutional borrowing of a cultivator is for non-farm purposes.
- Third, in many cases, one household has multiple loans either from different sources or in the name of different family members, which entitles it to multiple loan waiving.
- Fourth, loan waiving excludes agricultural labourers who are even weaker than cultivators in bearing the consequences of economic distress.
- Fifth, it severely erodes the credit culture, with dire long-run consequences to the banking business.
- Sixth, the scheme is prone to serious exclusion and inclusion errors, as evidenced by the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) findings in the Agricultural Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008.
- Lastly, schemes have serious implications for other developmental expenditure, having a much larger multiplier effect on the economy.

What needs to be done?

- **Proper identification:** For providing immediate relief to the needy farmers, a more inclusive alternative approach is to identify the vulnerable farmers based on certain criteria and give an equal amount as financial relief to the vulnerable and distressed families.
- **Enhance non-farm income:** The sustainable solution to indebtedness and agrarian distress is to raise income from agricultural activities and enhance access to non-farm sources of income. The low scale of farms necessitates that some cultivators move from agriculture to non-farm jobs.
- **Improved technology, expansion of irrigation coverage, and crop diversification** towards high-value crops are appropriate measures for raising productivity and farmers' income. All these require more public funding and support.

RBI panel pushes new rules so lenders pass on rate cuts more quickly

A RBI set- up panel has come out with a set of new rules to make lenders pass on rate cuts more quickly. The panel submitted its report recently to the RBI.

What's the issue?

The RBI has cut its policy rate by a total of 200 basis points from January 2015 to August 2017 to support economic growth, but to its frustration banks have lowered their lending rates by only about 120 bps.

Suggestions made by the panel:

- Remove some of the leeway that banks have enjoyed, including allowing lenders to use only one of three benchmarks to set their lending rates: the policy repo rate, Treasury bill rates or certificate of deposit rates. Currently, banks can use multiple market rates and each one is free to set its own benchmark.
- Adjust the key criteria used to set their lending rates once a quarter, rather than the current once a year.

Why are banks not willing to reduce lending rates?

Indian banks are struggling with a record \$140 billion in stressed assets, and have sought to protect their margins by trying to avoid lowering their lending rates.

What has RBI done so far in this regard?

The RBI last year unveiled the so-called marginal cost of funds-based lending rates (MCLR), which sought to remove much of the discretion commercial banks have to set lending rates and force them to base borrowing costs on prevailing money market rates. Banks were instructed to follow a specific formula in setting lending rates, although the RBI has since made some tweaks.

Sources: the hindu.

Nobel Economics Prize

US economist Richard Thaler won the 2017 Nobel Economics Prize for his contributions in the field of behavioural economics.

The economics prize, officially called the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, was established in 1968. It was not part of the original group of awards set out in dynamite tycoon Nobel's 1895 will.

Contributions of Richard Thaler:

His empirical findings and theoretical insights have been instrumental in creating the new and rapidly expanding field of behavioural economics, which has had a profound impact on many areas of economic research and policy.

- By exploring the consequences of limited rationality, social preferences, and lack of self-control, he has shown how these human traits systematically affect individual decisions as well as market outcomes.
- In total, Richard Thaler's contributions have built a bridge between the economic and psychological analyses of individual decision-making.

So, what is behavioural economics?

The field of behavioral economics blends insights of **psychology** and **economics**, and provides some valuable insights that individuals are not behaving in their own best interests. Behavioral economics provides a framework to understand when and how people make errors. Systematic errors or biases recur predictably in particular circumstances. Lessons from behavioral economics can be used to create environments that nudge people toward wiser decisions and healthier lives.

- This branch looks at the impacts of social, psychological and emotional factors in making decisions about money that aren't in a person's best interest. It's kind of the opposite to the rational decision makers that are usually described in economic theory.
- Thaler's research has expanded economic analysis by considering three psychological traits: limited rationality, perceptions about fairness and lack of self-control.

Sources: the hindu.

Against job reservation in private sector, says Niti VC

Joining the debate on job reservations, Niti Aayog vice chairman Rajiv Kumar has said he is against extending the policy to the private sector, while admitting that more efforts are needed to generate more employment.

Background:

60 lakh young people join the labour force every year. Many of them do not find any job. Many people used to find some kinds of jobs in informal sector but that has reached a point of saturation. However, the government is able to

provide employment to 10-12 lakh youths. Therefore, several political leaders are advocating job reservation for SC/ST in private sector.

However, several industry associations have maintained over the years that introducing reservations could create hurdles in growth due to dearth in skilled labour and hurt chances of attracting investments in the state.

Why reservation in private sector is not a good move?

- **Impacts innovation and performance:** The private sector is known for its innovation and performance and bringing the quota system in this sector would impede upon the progress of nation which is reliant on this sector for generation of new ideas and building a competitive advantage.
- **In conflict with international standards:** Reservation of such kind will create a workforce incapable of meeting international standards resulting in loss in competitiveness of industries and promotion inclusion at the cost of growth.
- **Existing gaps:** While there is reservation in government jobs, employment by government has fallen from 18.2 million in 2006 to 17.6 million in 2012. In contrast, private sector jobs have increased more than a third, from 8.77 million to 11.9 million over the period. While there has been 27% reservation for OBCs in government jobs since 1992, only around 12% got jobs. Hence, it is first necessary to fill this gap.

Way ahead:

Quotas are no silver bullet that deliver social justice. The only way to ensure that is to level the playing field, through better education and training, and a constant vigil that would ensure action against those who undermine the equality for all promised by the Constitution.

Sources: et.

Maharashtra govt rolls out loan waiver

Maharashtra government has rolled out the loan waiver scheme and announced the first list of 8.4 lakh beneficiaries across the state, for whom the government will pay banks Rs 4,000 crore under the scheme.

- The release of funds under the scheme, announced in June, will be a continuous process and by November 15, the government hopes that 75-80% of the disbursement will be completed.

Concerns:

According to the Economic Survey 2016-17, the burden of farm loan waivers could be as much as `2.2-2.7 lakh crore if all states start offering the relief and would stoke short-term deflationary shock in the economy.

- The survey estimates that loan waivers by all states could reduce aggregate demand by as much as 0.7% of GDP. This is because the states funding the loan waiver would have to prune spending and possibly raise taxes to improve revenue and stick to their fiscal deficit limits, although private demands tends to get a boost from the loan waivers.
- Even as the central government makes significant efforts toward fiscal consolidation, the higher debt burden of the states could push up general government debt.

Way ahead:

It appears that loan waiving can provide a short-term relief to a limited section of farmers; it has a meagre chance of bringing farmers out of the vicious cycle of indebtedness. There is no concrete evidence on reduction in agrarian distress following the first spell of all-India farm loan waiver in 2008. In the longer run, strengthening the repayment capacity of the farmers by improving and stabilising their income is the only way to keep them out of distress.

Sources: the hindu.

Ministry of Railways may ask Finance Ministry to fund its share towards Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)

With earnings deficit, the Ministry of Railways may find it difficult to contribute its share towards Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)

Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK)

- Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Rosh (RRSK) is a dedicated fund for critical safety-related works.
- In Budget 2017-18, Ministry had announced the setting up a special safety fund with a corpus of more than Rs. 1 lakh crore over a period of five years. Finance Ministry would contribute Rs. 15,000 crore annually towards the fund, the Ministry of Railways would fund the balance Rs. 5,000 crore every year.
- Finance Ministry advised the Ministry of Railways to prioritise deploying RRSK funds on areas that reduce chances of human error and ensure training of safety staff.

Significance:

Safety measures taken on Indian Railways is a continuous process which envisage accident prevention and mitigation directed towards continuous reduction in risk level to its customers.

This is done by adopting new technologies and bringing improvement in asset reliability to reduce human dependency. For example- Train Protection Warning System (TPWS)/ Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS) to prevent accident due to over speeding and passing signal at danger etc. RRSK funding is essential for carrying such safety works

Source: the hindu

SAFETY FIRST

Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh funding structure for 2017-18 (₹ crore)



₹2.11 lakh crore for PSU banks to boost lending

The Centre unveiled an ambitious plan to infuse ₹2.11 lakh crore capital over the next two years into public sector banks (PSBs).

Context:

- PSBs are burdened with high, non-performing assets(Asset Quality Review , RBI)
- Twin-Balance Sheet Problem
- Private investment is cut down

Steps Taken:

- Govt has taken massive step to capitalise PSBs in a frontloaded manner, to support credit growth and job creation.
- Govt plans to fund through budgetary provisions of 18,139 crore and the sale of recapitalisation bonds worth 1.35 lakh crore.
- The balance would be raised by the banks themselves by diluting the government's equity share.
- Cabinet also approved 5.35 lakh crore for massive road infrastructure investment under Bharat Mala Programme.

Conclusion:

These steps will boost flagging economic growth and create jobs. The effect of recapitalisation on the fiscal deficit would be determined by the type of bonds and as to who the issuing authority would be.

₹2.11 lakh crore of capital will be injected into NPA-hit Public Sector Banks (PSBs) over 2 years of which...



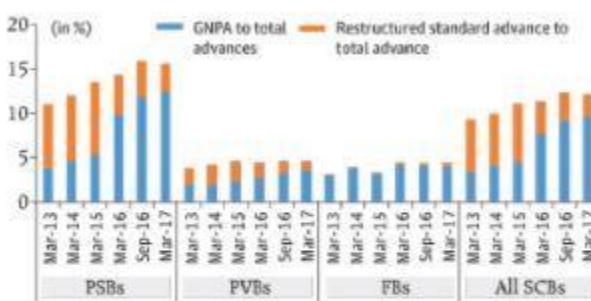
will be through sale of recapitalisation bonds

₹1.35 lakh cr.

will come from budgetary support and equity issuance

₹76,000 crore

According to Reuters, Indian banks' sour loans hit a record ₹9.5 lakh crore at the end of June 2017



The stressed advances (Gross non-performing assets + restructured standard advances) ratio stood at 12% for all Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) in March 2017

₹7 lakh crore worth road projects, which include BharatMala programme, on investment of **₹5.35 lakh crore**

₹2.09 lakh crore

will be raised as debt from the market

₹1.06 lakh crore

of private investments through PPP

₹2.19 lakh cr.

from accruals to the central road fund and toll collections

The net impact of all these (measures) is, private investment will be further strengthened. Infrastructure instantaneously creates jobs, lending to small and medium enterprises also adds to job creation

ARUN JAITLEY, Finance Minister



Twin-Balance Sheet Problem:

The balance sheets of both public sector banks (PSBs) and some corporate houses are in terrible shape and it has been seen as a major obstacle to investment and reviving growth. The problems faced by the Public Sector Banks are linked directly to that of the corporate sector. Companies borrowed a lot of money from banks to invest in infrastructure and commodity-related businesses, such as steel, power, infrastructure etc. But now, due to slump in both these sectors, the corporate profits have hit new lows. With low profits, the corporates are not able to repay their loans and their debts are rising and in turn cut down on investments.

BharatMala project:

The BharatMala project will include economic corridors (9,000 km), inter-corridor and feeder route (6,000 km), national corridors efficiency improvement (5,000 km), border roads and international connectivity (2,000 km), coastal roads and port connectivity (2,000 km) and Greenfield expressways (800 km).

- Further, the remaining road projects of 10,000 km under the National Highways Development Project will form a part of the programme.
- The government has identified new routes between economically important cities that would be 20% longer in terms of distance but take relatively less travel time.

Source: The Hindu

\$300 Million Loan to Promote Further Fiscal Reforms in West Bengal

Background:

The first ADB policy-based loan of \$400 million was sanctioned in 2012 for the first West Bengal Development Finance Program. It aimed to create the fiscal space necessary to sustain higher public investment in the state. The state government achieved full compliance on all policy actions under the first program, received several awards for e-governance in tax administration.

Objective:

- While the first program focused on augmenting public investment, the Second West Bengal Development Finance Program will support private investments more directly by creating an infrastructure facility to support project preparation, development, and appraisal, with emphasis on public-private partnerships in health and education.
- It also seeks to simplify the registration and licensing procedure for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises.
- It will carry forward reforms such as linking medium term expenditure plans to actual budgets, supported by strengthening internal audit system, and enhancements in the integrated financial management system (IFMS).



- The program include improved tax monitoring and continued support for information technology systems in strengthening tax and land administration.

Asian Development Bank (ADB):

Asian Development Bank (ADB) ADB is a regional development bank which aims to promote social and economic development in Asia. It was established on 19 December 1966. It is headquartered in Manila, Philippines. The ADB has been modelled closely on the World Bank. It has 67 members, of which 48 are from within Asia and the Pacific and 19 outside

Source: the hindu, adb

Centre to aid offshore e-commerce play

The Union government is working on a new policy to expand the footprint of the Indian e-commerce sector to tap potential markets outside the country, including Africa and Southeast Asia.

Targets:

- The e-commerce economy is currently pegged at \$30 billion, and the government expects it to grow at \$150 billion by 2024-25. It targets to make India a trillion-dollar digital economy in the next seven years.
- To expand the e-commerce economy in two aspects — one will focus on expansion within India, and the other on global expansion.
- To tap markets such as Southeast Asia, West Asia, SAARC countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and BRICS partners (Brazil, Russia, China and South Africa).
- To generate employment for about 30 million people by 2024-25. While electronics, telecom and IT/ITeS sector will be the top three contributors with 8.9 million, 8.8 million and 6.5 million jobs, respectively, e-commerce is expected to create jobs for 6 million people.

Progress made:

- Government is working on a strategy to make India a hub for data analytics, cloud computing and financial technology, besides encouraging development of Internet of Things, to push the digital economy
- Draft Data Protection Act is likely to be ready by December 2017. It will provide a policy framework on digital economy, including social media, security framework for mobile devices and the mobile application ecosystem by March 2018.

Source: the hindu

International Conference on Consumer Protection

PM inaugurates International Conference on Consumer Protection for East, South and South-East Asian Countries with the theme of “Empowering Consumers in New Markets” in New Delhi

About Conference:

- International Conference on Consumer Protection is being organised by the Department of Consumer Affairs, Government of India in association with UNCTAD.
- This is the first time an international conference on consumer protection is being organised by India for 22 countries from East, South and South-East Asia which account for a majority of the global consumers and share common challenges and experiences.

New Consumer Protection Bill:

- Main Objective is to Protect the rights of the consumers.
- It will replace the Consumer Protection Act of 1986 by incorporating the amended 2015 UN guidelines on consumer protection.
- It proposes to have Consumer Dispute Redressal Commissions, which will be set up at the district, state and national levels
- Central Consumer Protection Authority with executive powers will be constituted for quick remedial action.

- New BIS Act with specific emphasis on Hallmarking Scheme for ornaments.
- Provision of high quality ICT infrastructure at affordable prices
- Consumer safety from hazardous goods, complete disclosure of all information for guidance of consumers
- Regulations against identity theft and provision for data privacy protection.
- crack down on misleading advertisements

Some Measures Taken:

- Increased competition among companies due to the GST will lead to moderation in prices and this will directly benefit poor and middle class consumers.
- Bureau of Indian Standard Act – commodity or service is brought under compulsory certification. The Act has provisions to order recall of substandard products from the market.
- Ujala scheme – use of energy-efficient LED bulbs has not just brought down their prices but also helped save Rs. 20,000 crore in electricity bills
- Jan Aushadhi Pariyojna – affordable medicines to people, brought down prices of life-saving heart stent implants as well as knee implants
- “Give it up’ campaign under which more than one crore beneficiaries surrendered their LPG subsidy. The saved subsidy amount have been used to give free gas connections to 3 crore households
- Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) Scheme transferred transferring the money directly into the beneficiaries’ prevented leakage of more than Rs. 57,000 crores.
- Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act has been enacted to protect home buyers and the government is working to achieve the target of housing for all by 2022.

UNCTAD:

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was established in 1964. UNCTAD is the principal organ of the United Nations General Assembly dealing with trade, investment, and development issues. The primary objective of UNCTAD is to formulate policies relating to all aspects of development including trade, aid, transport, finance and technology. The conference ordinarily meets once in four years; the permanent secretariat is in **Geneva**.

Source: the hindu

International Conference on Green Initiatives & Railway Electrification

Indian Railways shall lead the world by achieving 100 % electrification with “an incentive cum penalty” framework scheme to transform Indian Railways truly into a world class, safe and modern transporter

Context:

Transport sector is the biggest consumer of energy, especially railway as the single largest consumer with share of about 2% of National energy consumption. Rail being the most energy efficient mode of transport is further working to change the energy mix towards greener sources

Electrification is a powerful measure to achieve cost effectiveness.

It improves mobility by use of high power energy efficient Locomotives, facilitate shift of traffic from road to rail and also to reduce carbon footprints. In addition electrification will also reduce traction energy bill substantially

Main objective:

- Bring green power project developers and other stakeholders on a common platform for making Indian Railways (IR) an efficient and Greener mode of transport
- Green initiatives including use of renewable energy, shift towards electric traction, development of new locomotive technology, high speed rail traction system and development in generation of Solar/Wind power as well as use of energy in efficient ways.

Action Plan:

- Electrification of Railway Tracks
- Harnessing Renewable Energy on Indian Railways to reduce energy cost and carbon footprints
- Production of Energy Efficient High Horsepower Locomotives
- Head On Generation (HOG) – electrical loads of passenger coaches would be fed directly from electric power drawn by locomotive from grid.

About IREE:

Institution of Railways Electrical Engineer (IREE) registered at Nasik in 1995 is a professional body of Railway Electrical Engineers. It is a technical body under the auspices of Ministry of Railways sharing knowledge and experience of various Railway engineers and others connected with Electrical Engineering.

Indian Railway's First set of Solar Power Plant of 5MW capacity launched:

- Indian Railway's first set of solar plants with total capacity of 5 megawatt peak (MWp) was launched on roof tops of Hazrat Nizamuddin, New Delhi, Anand Vihar and Delhi railway stations.
- This project was launched under ambitious National Solar Mission in which Indian Railways plans to commission 1000 MWp solar plants across its network.
- The first set of solar plant will generate 76.5 lakh units of solar power cumulatively per year and will meet about 30% of energy requirement of these stations.
- The project was awarded in 2016 to the developer under the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model. The developer will maintain it for 25 years and Railways will only pay energy consumed at Rs 4.14 per unit.

Source: pib, economic times

Public Finance Management System (PFMS)

Mandatory use of Public Finance Management System (PFMS) will help monitor the flow of funds to beneficiaries of different government welfare schemes.

Advantages:

- The actual status of utilization of funds by the multiple implementing agencies of the Central and the State Governments can be known.
- There will not be much paper work and it would go a long way in monitoring and tracking of any unnecessary parking of funds by the implementing agencies
- Minimizes the cases of delay and pending payments to a large extent.
- PFMS will progress towards a Government wide Integrated Financial Management System (GIFMIS) – as a comprehensive Payment, Receipt and Accounting System.
- PFMS would not only help in complete tracking of funds but would also ensure just in time transfer of funds.
- PFMS, with the capability of providing real time information on resource availability, flows and actual utilization has tremendous potential to improve programme/financial management, reduce the float in the financial systems by enabling 'just in time' releases and also the Government borrowings with direct impact on interest costs to the Government.

Public Financial Management System (PFMS):

Public Financial Management System (PFMS) initially started as a Plan scheme named CPSMS of the Planning Commission in 2008-09 as a pilot in four States of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Mizoram for four Flagship schemes e.g. MGNREGS, NRHM, SSA and PMGSY. After the initial phase of establishing a network across Ministries / Departments, it has been decided to undertake National rollout of CPSMS (PFMS) to link the financial networks of Central, State Governments and the agencies of State Governments. The scheme was included in 12th Plan initiative of Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance.

Source: pib

SIDBI revamps portal for easy credit access

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) has revamped its portal www.udyamimitra.in with enhanced features to provide easy access to credit and hand-holding services for micro small medium enterprises (MSME).

Key Features:

- The portal brings transparency and competition among lenders
- It removes the need to approach several banks individually
- The portal is mobile-enabled and provides a self-assessment module.
- It sends various information on registered MSMEs from time to time.
- It also allows loan applications to be perused and picked up by multiple lenders.



Introduction

- The Government of India set up the SIDBI under a special Act of the Parliament in October 1989.
- SIDBI commenced its operations from April 2, 1990 with its head office in Lucknow.
- SIDBI has been setup as a wholly owned subsidiary of IDBI.
- Its authorised capital is Rs.250 crore with an enabling provision to increase it to Rs.1000 crore.
- It is the apex institution which oversees, co-ordinates & further strengthens various arrangements for providing financial and non-financial assistance to small-scale, tiny, and cottage industries.

SIDBI:

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI), set up on April 2, 1990 under an Act of Indian Parliament, acts as the Principal Financial Institution for the Promotion, Financing and Development of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) sector and for Co-ordination of the functions of the institutions engaged in similar activities.

Source: the hindu

India emerging as a leader among milk producing nations

Context:

Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister said India is emerging as a leader among milk producing nations at Pashu Arogya Mela in Semwapur, Motihari. India produces 163.7 million tonne milk in 2016-17 worth over Rs.4 lakh crore. There are 19 crore cattle in the country, which amounts to 14% of the total cattle population of the world.

Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

- Rashtriya Gokul Mission, 2014 is a focussed project under National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development.
- It's objective is to conserve and propagate indigenous breeds in an organized and scientific manner.

Progress update:

- 1250 MAITRI centres are being set up to facilitate artificial insemination for cattle on the doorstep.
- One Gokul Gram (Integrated Indigenous Cattle Centres) will have 500 animals with high genetic quality, out of which 300 will be reproductive animals. The Gokul Grams will rear Lal Sindhi, Sahiwal and Gir breeds along with Bachaur.

Indigenous animals:

Indigenous animals are more suitable for the country particularly suitable for climate and environment of their reproductive areas. They are endowed with qualities of heat tolerance, resistance to diseases and the ability to thrive under extreme climatic stress and less than optimal nutrition.

Conclusion:

Dairy farming has been a traditional source of livelihood and it has a deep connection with the agricultural economy. It is essential to increase productivity of Indigenous breeds in the country through commercial farm management and balanced nutrition.

India and US Hold 11th Trade Policy Forum Meeting in Washington D.C

Context:

The Minister for Commerce and Industry noted that the Trade Policy Forum serves as a robust platform that contributes towards promoting bilateral trade and investment between India and the US. During the meeting, discussions were held on issues related to bilateral trade, areas of mutual cooperation, market access in agriculture, non-agricultural goods and services and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR).

Issues Discussed:

US concerns:

- Market access issues ground handling operations, import regulations relating to poultry, export of pork to India.
- Price controls on medical devices

India concerns:

- Easing of procedure for export of Indian mangoes and pomegranates and market access for table grapes from India.
- Problems faced by Indian services companies in obtaining H-1B and L-1 visas. It requested the US to ease the movement of skilled professionals as Indian IT companies contribute significantly to the American economy.
- Issue of mismatch between U.S. visa and U.S. social security regimes, wherein Indian professionals making social security contributions do not receive their due benefits upon their return to India

Greater opportunities for US exports to India:

- Draft Pharmaceutical Policy addresses many of the US concerns and sought comments from industry stakeholders on the draft policy.
- National IPR Policy 2016, lays down the roadmap for future development in the field of IPRs, and is a major step towards strengthening the IPR ecosystem in India, including improvements in procedures, timelines and resolution of disputes.
- India desires to address the concerns of providing affordable healthcare to its citizens and balancing it with the need to introduce high end technology. American manufacturers of medical devices are encouraged to establish manufacturing facilities in India.

Current Scenario:

- Trade between the two countries increased to USD 64.51 billion in 2016-17, from USD 62.11 billion in the previous fiscal. However, foreign direct investment from the US into India dipped to USD 2.37 billion in 2016-17 from USD 4.19 billion in 2015-16.
- India has already started to import crude oil and new Liquefied Natural Gas exports are expected to commence early next year
- Indian aviation companies such as Spicejet and Jet Airways have placed orders for over 300 aircrafts valued at several billions of dollars.

Source: pib

Paper 3 Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.

Inheritance tax on HNIs likely to be reintroduced

The government is considering the levy of an **inheritance tax on high net worth individuals**, some of whom are already preparing to insulate themselves from such a liability by forming family trusts. The tax could range from 5% to 10% and would apply only to families with a certain net worth.

- The government has sought feedback, including recommendations, on the proposed re-introduction of inheritance tax, also known as estate duty.

Background:

Also popularly **known as estate tax or estate duty**, Inheritance tax was a tax that was levied against a particular asset during the time of its inheritance. For example, the inheritance of ancestral land. Inheritance tax is no longer levied in India and was abolished during the time of the Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1985.

- Though its intentions were noble, the then finance minister, V.P. Singh was of the opinion that it had failed to bring about an equilibrium in society and reduce the wealth gap. During its stay, inheritance tax or estate duty was levied from the period between 1953 and 1985.
- There are certain countries that practice this form of taxation. Countries like USA, UK, Netherlands, Spain and Belgium all follow inheritance tax and China had gone to the extent of introducing rules for inheritance tax back in 2002 but was met with heavy opposition to the idea and were not able to implement it.

Sources: the hindu.

Why do we need external benchmarks while pricing loans?

An internal Study Group constituted by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has recommended **that banks should set interest rates based on an external benchmark and not as per internal benchmarks as is the practice now.**

What is the need for external benchmarks?

The present loan pricing regime, that is, the marginal cost of fund based lending rate (MCLR) or the base rate under the previous regime were both calculated based on banks' internal factors such as cost of funds. They are insensitive to changes in the policy interest rate or repo rate. Also, banks deviated in an ad hoc manner from the specified methodologies for calculating the base rate and the MCLR to either inflate the base rate or prevent the base rate from falling in line with the cost of funds.

What external benchmarks are available?

The study group has cited 13 possible candidates as external benchmarks including the weighted average call rate (WACR), collateralised borrowing and lending obligation (CBLO) rate, market repo rate. However, the report also said that no instrument in India met all the requirements of an ideal benchmark.

The group has shortlisted 3 candidates from these 13 — one of which could be selected by RBI as external benchmarks after receiving feedback from all stakeholders. The Study Group is of the view that the T-Bill rate, the CD rate and the RBI's policy repo rate are better suited than other interest rates to serve the role of an external benchmark.

Sources: the hindu.

MSME Delayed Payment Portal – MSME Samadhaan

Delayed Payment Portal – ***MSME Samadhaan*** was launched for empowering micro and small entrepreneurs across the country to directly register their cases relating to delayed payments by Central Ministries/Departments/CPSEs/State Governments.

Utility

- The portal will greatly facilitate the monitoring of the delayed payment in a more effective manner.
- The information on the portal will be available in public domain, thus exerting moral pressure on the defaulting organisations.
- The MSEs will also be empowered to access the portal and monitor their cases.

Background:

- The Portal will give information about the pending payment of MSEs with individual CPSEs / Central Ministries, State Governments, etc.
- The CEO of PSEs and the Secretary of the Ministries concerned will also be able to monitor the cases of delayed payment and issue necessary instructions to resolve the issues.

The Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development (MSMED) Act, 2006 contains provisions to deal with cases of delayed payment to Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs).

Source: PIB

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

Centre proposes three-year licence for contractors

The government has proposed a major overhaul in the contract labour law. It has proposed changes to the **Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, 1970**. The proposed law is in line with International Labour Organisation Convention 181 [on private employment agencies].

Proposed changes:

- Contractors will no longer require a licence for undertaking each project. No individual permits required for each project.
- A three-year licence will be given for contractors to work across the country instead of a separate one for new work orders.
- If the contractor wants to work in a single State for up to three years, the permit needs to be obtained from the State Government. However, the contractor will need to inform the government whenever it receives a work order from a company, failing which the licence may be cancelled.
- The proposed law also seeks to make a distinction between contractors who provide services and those who provide human resources. Contractors who provide human resources to a company will no longer be responsible for providing canteen and restroom facilities to the workers.
- If a work order is given to a contractor who has hired employees on payroll, then the workers will not be treated as contract workers under the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act.
- The government has also proposed to make wage payment “primarily” through electronic mode instead of cash payment.

Sources: the hindu.

Uday Kotak Committee suggests changes in corporate governance rules

A **corporate governance committee** was formed by the **Sebi** in June 2017, under the chairmanship of **Uday Kotak**, MD, Kotak Mahindra Bank, with a view to enhance the standards of this regime of listed entities in India. The committee recently submitted its report.

- In an attempt to support and enable sustainable growth of enterprise, while safeguarding interests of various stakeholders, the committee has come out with various recommendations.

Important recommendations made by the committee:

- **Minimum number of board of directors:** The Committee has proposed that now board of directors shall comprise not less than six directors. Also board of directors shall have an optimum combination of executive and non-executive directors with at least one woman as an independent director and not less than 50% of the board of directors shall comprise of non-executive directors.
- **Minimum number of board meetings:** These board shall meet at least 4-5 times a year, with a maximum time gap of one hundred and twenty days between any two meetings and at least once a year. Under this meeting, the board shall specifically discuss strategy, budgets, board evaluation, risk management, ESG (environment, sustainability and governance) and succession planning. Listed entity shall, at least once every year, undertake a formal interaction between the non-executive directors and the senior management.
- **Minimum compensation and remuneration:** Top 500 listed entities by market capitalisation shall pay compensation to each independent director as Rs 5 lakh per annum, whether through sitting fees or profit linked commissions. Provided that, this provision will not apply in case of inadequacy of profits in accordance with Section 197 of Companies Act, 2013 – minimum sitting fees for every board meeting of Rs 50,000 for top 100 entities by market capitalisation and Rs 25,000 for next 400 entities.

Way ahead:

If these proposals are implemented, at least 256 companies on NSE will need to increase their board size and 637 will have to appoint a woman director. Also, the ministry of corporate affairs (MCA) has opposed 12 out of the 24 key

proposals and said the changes are not feasible and in many instances will cause a regulatory overlap and unnecessarily make the functioning of boards tougher.

Sources: the hindu.

MHA gives a boost to “Make in India” in the field of manufacturing of arms

The Ministry of Home Affairs has liberalised the Arms Rules to boost “Make in India” manufacturing policy of the Government as also to promote employment generation in the field of manufacturing of arms and ammunition.

The salient features of the liberalised rules are:

- The licence granted for manufacturing shall now be valid for the life-time of the licensee company. The requirement of renewal of the license after every 5 years has been done away with.
- Condition that the small arms and light weapons produced by manufacturer shall be sold to the Central Government or the State Governments with the prior approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs has been done away with.
- Enhancement of capacity up to 15% of the quantity approved under licence will not require any further approval by the Government. The manufacturer will be required to give only prior intimation to the licensing authority in this regard.
- The licence fee has been reduced significantly. The licence fee will now range from Rs. 5,000/- to the maximum of Rs. 50,000/-.
- The fee for manufacturing licence shall be payable at the time of grant of license rather than at the time of application.
- Single manufacturing licence will be allowed for a multi-unit facility within the same State or in different States within the country.

Significance:

- Will encourage investment in the manufacturing of arms and ammunition and weapon systems as part of the “Make in India” programme.
- Encourage the manufacturing activity and facilitate availability of world class weapons to meet the requirement of Armed Forces and Police Forces in sync with country’s defence indigenization programme.

To whom rules will apply

- The liberalised rules will apply to licences granted by MHA for small arms & ammunition
- Licences granted by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), under powers delegated to them, for tanks and other armoured fighting vehicles, defence aircrafts, space crafts, warships of all kinds, arms and ammunition and allied items of defence equipment other than small arms.

Source: PIB

Paper 3 Topic: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.

Boosting horticulture through remote sensing

Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh has announced March 2018 as the deadline to complete the ambitious project of developing the horticulture sector using remote sensing technology and geo-informatics.

Background:

In a bid to develop India’s horticulture sector and help states identify suitable areas and crop types, the agriculture ministry is already working on a project which uses satellites and remote sensing technology. **The project is known as CHAMAN.**

About CHAMAN:

CHAMAN, or Coordinated Horticulture Assessment and Management using geoinformatics, is being implemented by the Delhi-based Mahalanobis National Crop Forecast Centre and is likely to be completed by March.

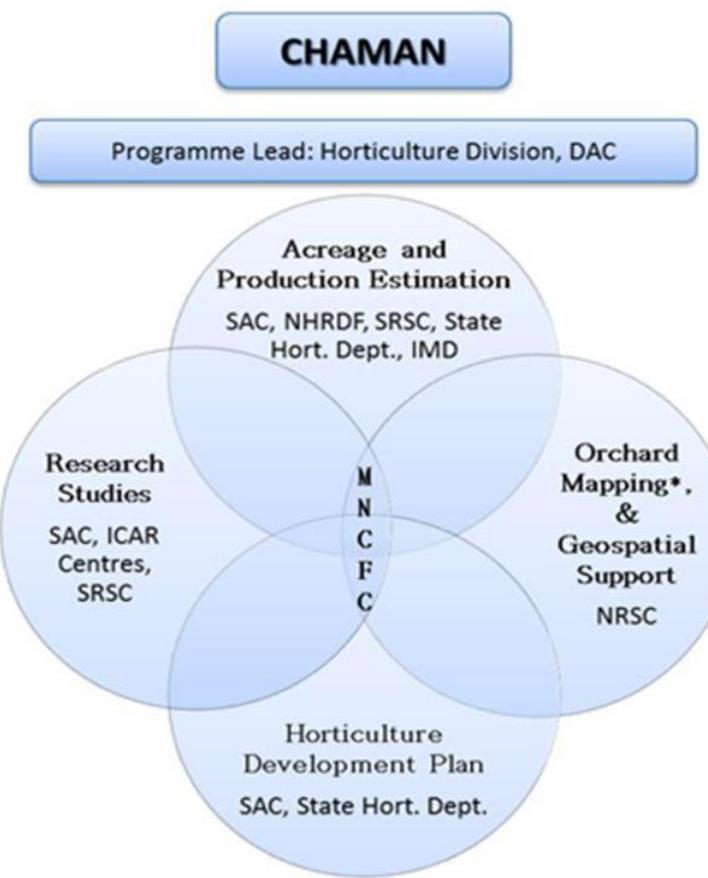
- Under the project, the ministry will use remote sensing and geoinformatics data to integrate information on weather, soil, land-use, and crop mapping to prepare horticulture development plans. The idea is to use space technology to identify crops suitable to different areas and raise production of horticulture crops.
- The project will help states develop horticulture clusters and related infrastructure like cold chains. It project will also help in accurate forecasting of area and production of seven major crops in about 185 districts across India. These crops are banana, mango, citrus, potato, onion, tomato and chilli.

Need for special focus:

Driven by consumer demand, farmers across India have rapidly adopted horticulture crops which ensure a quicker cash flow and can be grown in very small plots. In 2016-17, production of horticulture crops like fruits, vegetables and spices touched a record high of 300 million tonnes, outstripping production of foodgrains for the fifth year in a row. Currently, India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world, and a top producer of crops like banana, mango and lemons.

Sources: the hindu.

ORGANIZATION INVOLVED



Raw Jute demand falls, Farmers sell crop below MSP

Context:

West Bengal government has called for an urgent meeting this week to review the raw jute situation in the State. The meeting will also discuss the infrastructure gaps at the Jute Corporation of India (JCI) which is tasked with purchasing raw jute from farmers to raise the price.

Reason:

- Declining demand for the low grade TD-6 variety jute being grown by the farmers in West Bengal.
- Textile Ministry's specifications to the jute mills to make lighter bags in order to tackle competition. However, lightweight jute bags of 560 grams (replacing the earlier 665 grams) necessitates the use of better quality.
- Poor agricultural practices and lack of facilities for retting (a process of washing raw jute to get better fibre), has led to the farmers resorting to production of this variety

Conclusion:

The scenario could be changed if the mills were allowed to tweak the specifications for jute sacks, enabling higher use of TD-6 grade. Or else, the Jute Corporation could be asked to increase its purchases.

Source: the hindu

Muddle over nod for GM mustard

In May, the Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) cleared the controversial transgenic mustard, DMH-11, for commercial cultivation. However, the records of that meeting, held on May 12 and now made public, do not record any such approval.

Though cleared by the GEAC, a full release is contingent on approval by the Environment Minister.

What is Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC)?

- It is established under Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change
- It is the apex body for approval of activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants
- It is also responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products including experimental field trials

GM Mustard

- The GM mustard in question (DMH-11) has been developed by the Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants of Delhi University.
- If it gets the green light from the environment ministry's Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), it will be the first GM food crop to be commercially cultivated in India.
- Right now, only GM cotton is allowed.
- GEAC is the environment ministry's regulator for GMOs and transgenic products.

Source: The Hindu

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

A plan to stamp out animal TB

The first-ever road map to combat **animal tuberculosis (bovine TB)** and its transmission to humans, referred to as **zoonotic TB**, was recently launched at the 48th Union World Conference on Lung Health in Guadalajara, Mexico. The roadmap has been built on a '**One Health Approach**', addressing health risks across sectors for the animal tuberculosis known as bovine TB and its transmission to humans.

Four partners in health, the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) and the International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Disease (The Union) have joined forces to develop the road map and, address the major health and economic impact of this disease.

Concerns:

- New data released by the WHO estimates that over 140,000 people fall ill and more than 12,000 people lose their lives each year to zoonotic TB – mostly in the African and the South-East Asian regions.
- In India, consumption of raw milk and living in close proximity to cattle has been attributed to high incidence rates of bovine TB in the central Indian populations.
- **There is no cure for bovine TB** and it threatens animal welfare and those with livelihoods based on livestock.

About Zoonotic TB:

It is a type of TB in people caused by **mycobacterium bovis**. The disease can affect many other species surrounding cattle and become established in wildlife reservoirs.

- **Spread:** Bovine TB is most often communicated to humans through **food consumption**, usually non-heat-treated dairy products or raw, or improperly cooked meat from diseased animals. **Direct transmission** from infected animals or animal products to people can also occur.
- There is **no cure** for bovine TB and it threatens animal welfare and those with livelihoods based on livestock.

Way ahead:

Preventing and controlling bovine TB at its animal source is crucial to avoid its transmission to humans, improve food safety and protect the livelihood of many rural communities. To this aim, the implementation of strategies based on international standards and a cross-sectoral approach will enable improved surveillance and diagnosis of the disease in animals and consequently reduce the risks for humans.

For countries to achieve the global TB elimination targets, interventions addressing zoonotic TB must be introduced in the national programmes.

Sources: the hindu.

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

Embryo transfer technology to be used to carry out 440 embryo transfers in cattle in 9 days

In a bid to conserve indigenous breed of cattle, the government has undertaken a **Mass Embryo Transfer programme in Indigenous Breeds** under the scheme, National Mission on Bovine Productivity.

Key facts:

- The Department of Animal Husbandry, Dairying and Fisheries, in co-operation with 12 states has planned to carry out 440 embryo transfers during October 2 to 10, 2017 throughout the country.
- The programme is implemented with the objective of conservation and development of indigenous breeds under the Rashtriya Gokul Mission.
- Under this programme, embryos of higher genetic merit indigenous bovines are being transferred into surrogate cows.
- Embryos of indigenous breeds such as Sahiwal, Gir, Red Sindhi, Ongole, Deoni and Vechur have been proposed to be transferred under this programme.

About ETT:

Embryo transfer technology (ETT) has revolutionized the breeding strategies in bovines as a tool to optimise the genetic improvement in cattle.

Benefits of using ETT:

- A farmer can get a 5-6 fold increase in the number of offsprings.
- The calves so born will be of high genetic merit.
- The offsprings born will be free from diseases.

About Rashtriya Gokul Mission:

To conserve and develop indigenous bovine breeds, government has launched 'Rashtriya Gokul Mission' under the National Programme for Bovine Breeding and Dairy Development (NPBBD).

The Mission is being implemented with the objectives to: a) development and conservation of indigenous breeds b) undertake breed improvement programme for indigenous cattle breeds so as to improve the genetic makeup and increase the stock; c) enhance milk production and productivity; d) upgrade nondescript cattle using elite indigenous breeds like Gir, Sahiwal, Rathi, Deoni, Tharparkar, Red Sindhi and e) distribute disease free high genetic merit bulls for natural service.

Sources: the hindu.

Multi-grain meal to replace upma in tribal schools

In a major initiative, the district administration has readied a plan to introduce multi-grain meals in 64 tribal welfare residential educational institutions across the Khammam district of Telangana state.

Aim

- The targeted intervention aims at raising the nutritional status of students in the tribal areas.

Significance:

- It gains significance in the backdrop of prevalence of malnutrition particularly anaemia and other deficiencies among children in remote tribal pockets due to poor economic status of their families.

About Program:

- The nutrition intervention envisages introduction of millet-based snacks in the menu of as many as 46 Ashram High Schools and 18 Tribal Welfare hostels spread in 23 mandals of the district.
- The multi-grain meal containing sorghum and finger millet (ragi) as ingredients will replace the upma served as breakfast in the tribal welfare educational institutions.
- Fibre-dense millet-based snacks fortified with micro-nutrients will be served as evening snacks as per the new intervention.
- District administration to harness ICRISAT project.

ICRISAT:

- The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) is an international organization which conducts agricultural research for rural development, headquartered in Patancheru, Hyderabad.
- Its charter was signed by the FAO and the UNDP.
- The original goal was to use crop improvement research as the basis to improve food availability in drought-prone areas of the tropics.
- ICRISAT performs crop improvement research, using conventional as well as methods derived from biotechnology, on the following crops: Chickpea, Pigeonpea, Groundnut, Pearl millet, Sorghum, Finger Millet and Small millets.

Source: Hindu

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

EESL To Procure 10,000 Electric Vehicles From Tata Motors

State-run Energy Efficiency Services Ltd (EESL) has decided to procure 10,000 electric vehicles from Tata Motors after a competitive bidding. Tata Motors will supply the electric vehicles (EVs) in two phases with 500 e-cars in the first phase in November 2017 and the remaining 9,500 EVs in the second phase.

EESL claimed that its tender was for the world's largest single electric vehicle procurement. The company (Tata Motors) was selected through an international competitive bidding aimed at increased participation.

About EESL:

Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) is a joint venture of NTPC Limited, Power Finance Corporation, Rural Electrification Corporation and POWERGRID, **Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL)** was set up **under Ministry of Power (India)** to facilitate implementation of energy efficiency projects.



Sources: the hindu.

National Waterway-4



Vice president Venkaiah Naidu recently laid the foundation stone for the first phase of the 2,890-km National Waterway-4 (NW-4) at Amravati in Andhra Pradesh. The first phase involves development of a water channel from **Muktyala to Vijayawada** on Krishna river along with four floating terminals and three fixed terminals to handle cargo operations.

About National Waterway 4:

The inland waterway was declared National Waterway-4 in November, 2008 with a total length of 1,078 km. Under the National Waterway Act, 2016, this was increased to 2,890 km.

The NW-4 would be developed in three phases. In the first phase, the 82 km stretch from Muktyala to Vijayawada will be developed. This would be followed by the second phase where 233 km will be developed from Vijayawada to

Kakinada and Rajahmundry to Polavaram on Godavari river. The third phase will connect Commamur canal, Buckingham canal and the balance stretches of river Krishna and Godavari across 573 km.

Importance of National Waterway 4:

The project will provide an efficient logistics solution to boost the economic growth of the region and facilitate the development of Amravati during its early development stage as substantial construction material is expected to be transported on this stretch. It will also improve connectivity to important tourist and pilgrimage spots.

Sources: the hindu.

NHAI to get power to speed up Bharatmala programme

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is set to get the power to approve projects with a construction cost of more than Rs 1,000 crore to ensure faster implementation of the Bharatmala programme. Currently, all highway projects that entail a construction cost of more than Rs 1,000 crore, excluding land, need to be approved by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA).

- Under the proposal, **only public private partnership (PPP) projects under the build-operate-transfer (BOT) model, where viability gap funding (VGF) is to be provided by the government**, will need CCEA clearance.

About Bharatmala project:

Bharatmala envisions 44 economic corridors across the country at a cost of at least Rs 5 lakh crore. The programme, along with the proposal to enhance NHAI's powers, is likely to get Cabinet clearance soon.

- The Bharatmala corridors have been mapped as per traffic density and economic relevance of the cities that will be connected with the help of the Bhaskaracharya Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics. The project involves constructing 24,000km of fresh highways. The project is aimed at speeding up cargo movement and the development of multimodal logistics hubs and parks on the periphery of major commercial centres.
- The project includes construction of feeder routes alongside national highways. Around 80% of Bharatmala will be based on a government funded, engineering procurement and construction (EPC) model while the rest will be a hybrid-annuity public private partnership.

Sources: et.

ACI-ASQ Survey

The Jaipur and Srinagar Airport are ranked First and Second respectively in the category of 2-5 million passengers in ACI-ASQ Survey.



- This is for the second consecutive time that Jaipur Airport has been rated the Best Airport in the World in the traffic volume of 2 to 5 million passengers per year. Jaipur was ranked as the Best Airport in the World catering to a traffic volume of 2 to 5 million passengers per year in 2016 also.

About ASQ awards:

The Airport Service Quality (ASQ) Awards are the aviation industry's most prestigious accolades.

- The awards recognize the airports which have achieved the highest passenger satisfaction ratings in the ASQ Survey – the world's benchmark measure of airport excellence.
- It is the only worldwide programme to survey passengers at the airports on their day of travel.

- Every year, the programme delivers some 600,000 individual surveys in 41 languages in 84 countries. It measures passengers' views on 34 key performance indicators, including airport access, check-in, security screening, restrooms, stores and restaurants.
- Each airport uses the exact same survey, creating an industry database that allows airports to compare themselves to other airports around the world.
- The ASQ programme also has a feature that facilitates sharing of best practices among airport operators.

Sources: pib.

PM inaugurates Phase 1 of RO RO Ferry Service between Ghogha and Dahej

The Prime Minister, inaugurated Phase 1 of the RO RO (Roll on, Roll off) ferry service between Ghogha in Saurashtra, and Dahej in South Gujarat which shall reduce the travel time from eight hours to over an hour.

Key Facts:

- At present passenger movement is enabled, vehicle movement is possible once the ferry service is fully operational.
- This ferry service is a first of sorts, will save a lot of time and fuel as many people commute between these two regions frequently.
- Government aims to develop coastal infrastructure, integrate transport sector and improve state-of-the art to augment steps towards blue economy

What is Blue Economy:

It is the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health. It encompasses many activities

- Renewable Energy : Sustainable marine energy can play a vital role in social and economic development,
- Fisheries : More fisheries can generate more revenue, more fish and help restore fish stocks
- Maritime Transport
- Tourism : Ocean and coastal tourism can bring jobs and economic growth
- Waste Management: Better management of land based litter will help the ocean recover
- Climate Change: Oceans are an important carbon sink and can mitigate climate change

Source: pib

Comments sought on draft guidelines for groundwater extraction

The Central Groundwater Authority (CGWA) has sent Draft guidelines for "issuance of NOC" for ground water withdrawal and draft "Public Notice" to the Chief Secretaries of all the State and Administrators of Union Territories for their comments within 60 days.

Reasons for coming up with draft guidelines

Due to the increasing number of litigations in the National Green Tribunal, various branches of Tribunal are directing CGWA to ensure that the groundwater withdrawal in the country should be in accordance with law.

- These guidelines will ensure a uniform regulatory framework across the country so that the discriminatory practices in regulation are either mitigated or minimized.

Major Revisions

The major revisions in the guidelines are

- pan India coverage,
- decentralization of the No Objection Certificate (NOC) issuing authorities, dispensing with the provisions relating to submission of artificial recharge proposals and construction of artificial recharge structures by project proponents

- introduction of a water conservation fee in lieu of recharge mechanism;
- Funds raised through the water conservation fee to be used by States for effective groundwater management.

Central Grounder Water Authority

The CGWA constituted by Government of India under Section 3(3) of the *Environment (Protection) Act of 1986* has been regulating groundwater development and management in the country. The authority has been granting NOC for withdrawal of ground water by industries/infrastructure/mining projects.

Source: PIB

SAATHI: EESL to provide powerloom equipment to small units

The Ministry of Power along with the Ministry of Textiles have launched its new initiative named Sustainable and Accelerated Adoption of efficient Textile technologies to help small Industries.



Background:

The Powerloom sector in India is predominantly an unorganized sector and has a large number of micro and small units which produce 57 percent of the total cloth in the country. Most of Powerloom units in this country, use obsolete technology. Upgradation of Powerlooms as part of Power Tex India will lead to higher productivity, better quality and more than 50 percent additional value realisation.

Key Points:

- Under the initiative, Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL), a public sector entity under the administrative control of Ministry of Power, would procure energy efficient powerlooms, motors and repair kits in bulk and provide them to the small and medium powerloom units at no upfront cost.
- The SAATHI initiative of the Government will be jointly implemented by EESL and the office of the Textile Commissioner on a pan-India basis.
- To kick start the implementation, cluster wise demonstration projects and workshops will be organized in key clusters such as Erode, Surat.

Benefits:

- The government expects that the efficient equipment would result in energy savings and cost savings to the unit and the unit would repay in installments to EESL over a 4 to 5 year period.
- Unit owner neither has to allocate any upfront capital cost to procure these equipment nor does it have to allocate additional expenditure for repayment as the repayments to EESL are made from the savings that accrue as a result of higher efficiency equipment and cost savings.

BharatMala Project

Context:

Cabinet approved 5.35 lakh crore to build 34,800 km of roads nationwide, including in border and coastal areas. The Centre had announced road construction, called BharatMala Pariyojana, in a bid to encourage the economy as private investment remains moribund.

Reason:

- National Highways suffer from the deficiencies of inadequate capacity, weak pavement, poor riding quality, distressed bridges, unabridged level crossings, congested cities, lack of wayside amenities and other safety measures.
- There is very little participation of private sector in road development in India because of long gestation period and low-returns. Private investment in roads is not satisfactory.

- There was no stable policy on highway development in the country.
- There is shortage of funds for the construction and maintenance of roads.



BharatMala Pariyojana:

- It is a government's new umbrella programme to further optimise the efficiency of movement of goods and people across the country.
- The BharatMala Pariyojana, to be implemented on an outlay of ₹ 5,35,000 crore, will generate 14.2 crore mandays of jobs.

Bharat Mala Project:

- Bharatmala is a name given to road and highways project of Government of India.
- The total investment for the Bharatmala plan is estimated at Rs10 trillion, which is the largest ever outlay for a government road construction scheme.
- The BharatMala project will include economic corridors (9,000 km), inter-corridor and feeder route (6,000 km), national corridors efficiency improvement (5,000 km), border roads and international connectivity (2,000 km), coastal roads and port connectivity (2,000 km) and Greenfield expressways (800 km).
- Bharat Mala will provide easier access to border areas for armed forces and boost trade via the land route.
- Bharatmala will replace National Highways Development Project (NHDP) launched in 1998 as the scheme is expected to be completed by this year with just 10,000km of highway construction left under it.

Source: the hindu, pib

India has to spend 50 lakh crore on infra – CRISIL

Infrastructure investment in India is estimated to have risen to Rs 37 lakh crore or 5.6% of GDP between fiscals 2013 and 2017. India needs to spend at least Rs 50 lakh crore between over the next five years or close to Rs 3000 crore a day to build its infrastructure sustainably.

Challenges:

- Investments by the private sector and states are likely to remain subdued in the near term.
- Weak project preparation
- Poorly structured contracts with inappropriate risk allocation
- Irrational bidding exuberance

- CRISIL is:
- Global analytical company providing ratings, research, and risk and policy advisory services
- India's leading ratings agency
- Provides high-end research to the world's largest banks and leading corporations
- Majority shareholder - Standard and Poor's (S&P).
- Standard & Poor's, a part of The McGraw-Hill Companies (NYSE:MHP), is the world's foremost provider of credit ratings

- Over reliance on bank-led financing leading to deeply indebted developers and gargantuan stressed assets in banking.
- The takeover of distribution utility losses under the Ujjwal Discom Assurance Yojana (UDAY) and the recent agri-loan waivers have further strained state finances.

Measures to be taken:

- To resolve the issue of non-performing assets NPAs
- To revive stalled projects
- To facilitate easier exits
- Front-ending of bankable projects
- Comprehensive retooling of public-private partnership frameworks – introduce calibrated public-private partnership (PPP) models such as hybrid annuity and toll-operate-transfer in highway
- Deepening of the infrastructure financing ecosystem.

CRISIL rating:

- Crisil launched its infrastructure investability index that tracks, measures and assesses the development, maturity and investment attractiveness of infrastructure sectors.
- The index is based on four parameters – policy direction, institutional strength and regulatory maturity, financial sustainability, and implementation ease.
- Being an ascending scale, a score of 1 reflects least investment attractiveness and maturity, and a score of 10 highest investment attractiveness and maturity.
- The Crisil InfracInvex scores for 2017 show that the power transmission sector in India is the most attractive to invest in currently, followed by roads & highways, and renewable energy. The urban sector, which is the least attractive right now.

Source: the hindu, economic times

Topic: Investment models.

India's first Sewage Treatment Plant under Hybrid Annuity Mode to come up in Haridwar and Varanasi

A tripartite agreement has been signed between National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) and the state level executing agencies Uttarakhand Jal Nigam and Uttar Pradesh Jal Nigam, with concessionaires for setting up of **India's first Sewage Treatment Plants under Hybrid Annuity mode, at Haridwar and Varanasi**.

- The agreement is a major step forward in realizing the dream of Nirmal Ganga as it is the first time ever in India that Hybrid Annuity-based PPP mode is being applied in sewerage sector.
- Under this agreement the maintenance of the project will be the responsibility of the concessionaire for which there will be performance based phased manner of payment. This would ensure continued performance of the sewage infrastructure assets created due to better accountability, ownership and optimal performance.

What you need to know about the Hybrid Annuity Model?

The Government of India had accorded Cabinet approval to Hybrid Annuity-PPP model in January 2016 with 100% central sector funding.

- Under this model, the development, operation and maintenance of the sewage treatment STPs will be undertaken by a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to be created by the winning bidder at the local level. As per this model, 40% of the Capital cost quoted would be paid on completion of construction while the remaining 60% of the cost will be paid over the life of the project as annuities along with operation and maintenance cost (O&M) expenses.

- One of the most important features of this model is that both the Annuity and O&M payments are linked to the performance of the STP. This will ensure continued performance of the assets created due to better accountability, ownership and optimal performance.

Sources: pib.

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

US scientists awarded Nobel in medicine for body clock insights

Three US scientists have won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine “**for their discoveries of molecular mechanisms controlling the circadian rhythm**,” otherwise known as our biological clock.

- Jeffrey C. Hall, Michael Rosbash and Michael W. Young were awarded the prize for their research on how plants, humans and animals adapt their biological rhythm to synchronize with our planet’s day and night cycle, as the earth rotates, in order to control their daily life.

Background:

All living organisms on Earth have an internal clock, known as the circadian rhythm, which in humans underlies why we are awake during the day and sleep at night. But our biological clock also helps regulate eating habits, hormone release, blood pressure and body temperature.

- A person’s well-being is affected when there is a “temporary mismatch between our external environment and this internal biological clock.” For example, disruption to our clocks when someone travels across a number of time zones results in jet lag.
- An imbalance between lifestyle and rhythm could lead to increased risk for a number of diseases including metabolic diseases, such as diabetes and cancer, and neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer’s disease.

Significance of research in this field:

Research on the body clock has helped scientists improve health. Many drugs now on the market work best when taken at the right time. The cholesterol-cutting drug Mevacor, for example, is taken at night because levels of the enzyme it targets are highest then. The same is true for low-dose aspirin used to reduce blood pressure.

Sources: the hindu.

Nobel prize for gravitational wave detection

Three American scientists from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) have won the Nobel Prize in Physics for their contribution to detecting gravitational waves — ripples in the fabrics of spacetime which were predicted by Albert Einstein a hundred years ago.

- The scientists were awarded the Nobel prize “**for decisive contributions to the LIGO detector and the observation of gravitational waves**”.
- The 9 million Swedish kronor (825,000 British pounds) prize will be divided. One half was awarded to Rainer Weiss of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the other half jointly to Barry C. Barish and Kip S. Thorne — both from California Institute of Technology (Caltech).



What are gravitational waves?

In simple terms, gravitational waves can be explained as ripples in the fabric of space-time which can only be caused by massive astronomical events such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other so that these waves would finally radiate from them.

About LIGO:

The observatory, described as “the most precise measuring device ever built,” is actually two facilities in Livingston, Louisiana, and Hanford, Washington. They were built and operated with funding from the National Science Foundation, which has spent \$1.1 billion on LIGO over the course of several decades.

The project is led by scientists from the California Institute of Technology and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and is supported by an international consortium of scientists and institutions.

Sources: the hindu.

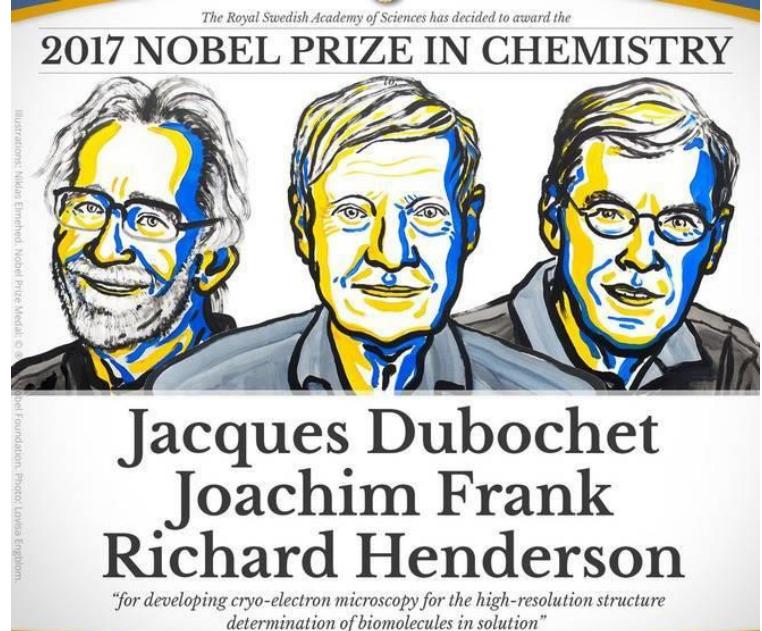
2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry

The 2017 Nobel prize in Chemistry has been awarded to Jacques Dubochet (University of Lausanne, Switzerland) Joachim Frank (Columbia University, New York) and Richard Henderson (MRC Laboratory of Molecular Biology, Cambridge, U.K.) “**for developing cryo-electron microscopy for the high-resolution structure determination of biomolecules in solution**”.

What is cryo-electron microscopy?

“Cryo”, short for cryogenic refers to very low temperatures. Though the actual temperature is not well defined, it is below minus 150°C. In the context of electron microscopy, it refers to the fact that the object to be imaged is frozen to such low temperatures to facilitate being studied under the beam of the electron microscope.

This method is so effective that even in recent times, it has been used to image the elusive Zika virus: When researchers began to suspect that the Zika virus was causing the epidemic of brain-damaged newborns in Brazil, they turned to cryo-EM to visualise the virus. Over a few months, three dimensional (3D) images of the virus at atomic resolution were generated and researchers could start searching for potential targets for pharmaceuticals.



Sources: the hindu.

INS kiltan

INS Kiltan (P30), third Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) stealth corvettes built under Project 28 (Kamorta Class) was recently commissioned into the Indian Navy.

Key facts:

- The ship gets her name from old INS Kiltan (P79), a Petya class ASW ship that served the nation for 18 years before being decommissioned in June 1987. It is named after the coral island belonging to the Lakshadweep group of islands.
- Regarded as a very prestigious acquisition, INS Kiltan is one of the most potent warships to have been constructed in India.
- More than 80 % of the ship is indigenous with state of the art equipment & systems to fight in Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) warfare conditions. INS Kiltan is the first major warship with superstructure entirely of composite material.

Main features:

- The sleek and magnificent ship is propelled by ‘Combination of Diesel and Diesel (CODAD)’ propulsion system of four diesel engines to achieve speeds in excess of 25 knots and has an endurance of around 3,500 Nautical Miles.
- The ship has enhanced stealth features resulting in a reduced Radar Cross Section (RCS) achieved by X-form of hull and superstructure along with optimally sloped surfaces.

- The very low under water acoustic signature makes it a 'silent killer on the prowl'. The ship's advanced stealth features make her less susceptible to detection by the enemy and help in effective employment of soft kill measure like the Chaff.

Sources: pib.

IIT teams use plant extract, heat to kill skin cancer cells

Two Teams from IIT Hyderabad and IIT Bombay are working on achieving promising results on skin cancer



- Nanoparticle formulation of a chlorophyll-rich biomolecular **extract** of an Indian medicinal plant *Anthocephalus cadamba* combined with a near-infrared **dye** has been found to selectively kill skin cancer cells.
- The plant extract is toxic to cancer cells as there is enhanced generation of **reactive oxygen species (ROS)** while the dye aids in the destruction of cancer cells through photothermal therapy..
- On being irradiated with near-infrared light, the dye gets heated up and facilitates the release of the extract from polymer membrane. After 4-5 minutes of irradiation, about 80% of cancer cells were killed

Source: the hindu

Ichthyosaur fossil discovered for first time in India

Scientists in India have discovered a 152 million-year-old fossil of an Ichthyosaur – an extinct marine reptile – in the western state of Gujarat.



Key Facts:

- The fossil (5.5 m) was found inside rocks from the Mesozoic Era, which ran between 252 and 66 million years ago, in the Kutch desert.
- Specimen can be identified with Ophthalmosauridae, a family of ichthyosaurs that lived in the oceans between 165 and 90 million years ago.
- Examination of the teeth of the fossil suggests that it was a top-tier predator in its ecosystem

Ichthyosaur:

- Often misidentified as "swimming dinosaurs", they first appeared in the early Triassic period.
- The name means fish-lizard, although the creature has been classified as a reptile since the mid-19th Century
- The creature was noted for its sharp, robust teeth.
- Ichthyosaurs became extinct before the dinosaurs, dying out in the early part of the late Cretaceous period

Significance of the discovery:

- It throws light on the evolution and diversity of ichthyosaurs in the Indo-Madagascan region and India's biological connectivity with other continents in the Jurassic.
- Identification of the new specimen may further throw light on whether there was any marine connection between India and South America about 150 million years ago.

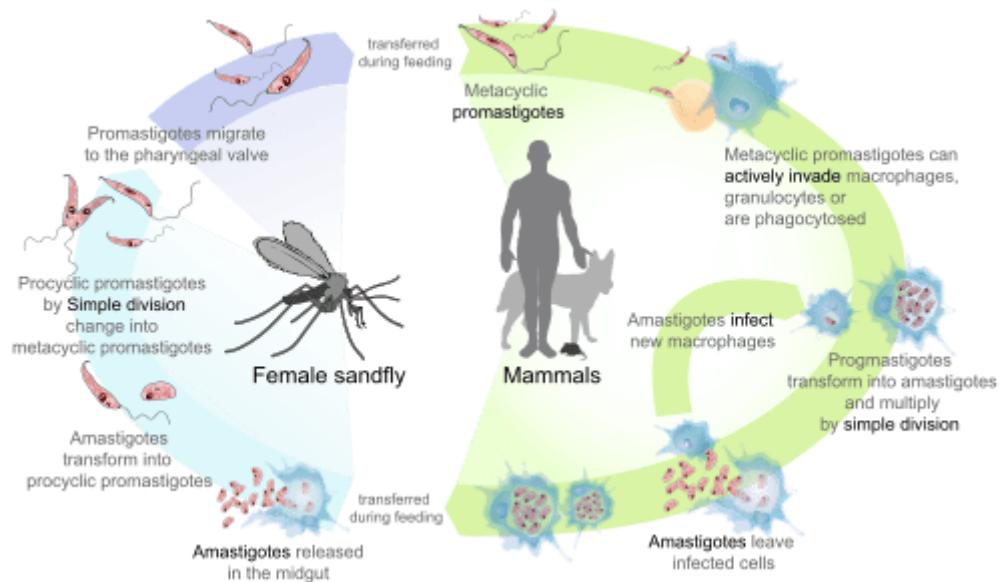
Source: the hindu, bbc

Scientists link new virus to kala-azar

Background:

Parasite ***Leishmania donovani*** is believed to be responsible for the dreaded infection.

People get infected when bitten by an insect called the sandfly, which harbours the disease-causing parasite.



Discovery:

Another parasite called ***Leptomonas seymouri*** may also be present

It's still early to pointedly blame the virus but its discovery portends a new kind of treatment regime and may aid attempts to eradicating the disease.

Kala-azar:

- ***Visceral leishmaniasis* (VL)**, also known as **kala-azar**, **black fever**, and **Dumdum fever**, is the most severe form of ***leishmaniasis*** and, without proper diagnosis and treatment, is associated with high fatality.
- Caused by protozoan parasites of the ***Leishmania* genus** migrates to the internal organs such as the **liver**, **spleen** (hence “visceral”), and **bone marrow**
- Signs and symptoms include fever, weight loss, fatigue, anemia, and substantial swelling of the liver and spleen.
- Kala-azar is endemic to the Indian subcontinent in 119 districts in four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal)
- This disease is the second-largest parasitic killer in the world

Source: the hindu

Faster, cheaper urinary tract infection (UTI) test

UTI second most common infectious disease that affects millions of people globally each year.

These resistant bacteria not only cause long lasting infection but also reduce effectiveness of the available antibiotics.

Problems with present testing method:

- Has 48-hour wait for urine test report
- It delays treatment
- Leads to inappropriate use of antibiotics
- Gives rise to multidrug-resistant pathogens

The new test strip contains 15 common antibiotics and helps in identifying the antibiotic sensitivity of the bacteria and deciding the most appropriate medicine to be used for the patient.

Advantages:

- The test does not require any other specialised equipment, dedicated space/lab or trained personnel.
- As the strip already has the panel of antibiotics, it is easier, faster and cheaper.
- Minimises the irrational use of antibiotics.

Source: the hindu

Paper 3 Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.

Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 brought into force

A new Bureau of Indian standards (BIS) Act 2016 which was notified on 22nd March, 2016, has been brought into force with effect from 12th October, 2017. Parliament had in March 2016 passed the law to replace the BIS Act of 1986.

Highlights of the act:

- **National standards body:** The Act establishes the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) as the National Standards Body of India.
- **Compulsory certification:** The Act has enabling provisions for the Government to bring under compulsory certification regime any goods or article of any scheduled industry, process, system or service which it considers necessary in the public interest or for the protection of human, animal or plant health, safety of the environment, or prevention of unfair trade practices, or national security.
- **Hallmarking:** Enabling provisions have also been made for making hallmarking of the precious metal articles mandatory.
- **Simplified conformity:** The new Act also allows multiple type of simplified conformity assessment schemes including self-declaration of conformity against a standard which will give simplified options to manufacturers to adhere to the standards and get certificate of conformity.
- **Authority for verification:** The Act enables the Central Government to appoint any authority/agency, in addition to the BIS, to verify the conformity of products and services to a standard and issue certificate of conformity.
- **Repair or recall:** There is also a provision for repair or recall, including product liability of the products bearing Standard Mark but not conforming to the relevant Indian Standard.

Significance of the new law:

The new Act will further help in ease of doing business in the country, give fillip to Make In India campaign and ensure availability of quality products and services to the consumers.

Sources: pib.

Dawn Mission Extended at Ceres

NASA has authorized a second extension of the Dawn mission at Ceres, the largest object in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. During this extension, the spacecraft will descend to lower altitudes than ever before at the dwarf planet, which it has been orbiting since March 2015. The spacecraft will continue at Ceres for the remainder of its science investigation and will remain in a stable orbit indefinitely after its hydrazine fuel runs out.

Key facts:

- A priority of the second Ceres mission extension is collecting data with Dawn's gamma ray and neutron spectrometer, which measures the number and energy of gamma rays and neutrons. This information is important for understanding the composition of Ceres' uppermost layer and how much ice it contains.
- The spacecraft also will take visible-light images of Ceres' surface geology with its camera, as well as measurements of Ceres' mineralogy with its visible and infrared mapping spectrometer.

- The extended mission at Ceres additionally allows Dawn to be in orbit while the dwarf planet goes through perihelion, its closest approach to the Sun, which will occur in April 2018. At closer proximity to the Sun, more ice on Ceres' surface may turn to water vapor, which may in turn contribute to the weak transient atmosphere detected by the European Space Agency's Herschel Space Observatory before Dawn's arrival.

Dawn mission:

NASA's Dawn mission will study the asteroid Vesta and dwarf planet Ceres, celestial bodies believed to have accreted early in the history of the solar system. The mission will characterize the early solar system and the processes that dominated its formation.

Dawn is the only mission ever to orbit two extraterrestrial targets. It orbited giant asteroid Vesta for 14 months from 2011 to 2012, then continued on to Ceres, where it has been in orbit since March 2015.

Sources: et.

China plans to build gigantic DNA database platform

China plans to build a \$1 billion super-sized DNA sequencing platform in the Jiangsu Province.

Aim:

Store genetic information of millions of its ethnic Chinese population

Use:

- Researchers will use big data created in the database to study genetic mutations related to major diseases,
- look for the impact of interaction between genes and environmental concerns on human health,
- Provide statistical support for diagnosis and treatment of major diseases

Source: Hindu

Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.

Government launches wildlife action plan for next 15 years

The government has released the **third National Wildlife Action Plan (NWAP) for 2017-31**. The plan was released at the recently held meeting of Global Wildlife Program (GWP) that involves 19 Asian and African countries, United Nations, World Bank and other leading global organisations to deal with the wildlife crime.

Highlights of the plan:

- The NWAP 2017-31, under which there are 250 projects, is India's road map to conserve wildlife for the next 15 years. The plan is woven around the **agenda of the United Nations' 15th Sustainable Developmental Goal — "Life on Land".**
- The key strategic changes in the new plan is adopting a "landscape approach" in conservation of all the wildlife — uncultivated flora (plants) and undomesticated fauna (animals) — rather than the areas where they occur.
- This means that while till now programmes and plans related to wildlife were focused on and around national parks and sanctuaries, now the strategies would be based on the landscape of the region that may not be limited to a reserve forest system alone.
- The plan has been divided into five components, which are further divided into 17 themes carrying 103 conservation actions. Each theme has a set of conservation actions and projects — 250, in all.
- Man-animal conflict mitigation, adapting to the climate change, managing eco-tourism, ensuring public participation in the conservation, developing human resources, strengthening research and monitoring through modern technology like radio collars and drones and ensuring funds for the wildlife sector have been given special thrust in the planning.
- The plan adopts a "landscape approach" in conservation of all wildlife — uncultivated flora and fauna — that have an ecological value to the ecosystem and to mankind irrespective of where they occur. It gives special emphasis to recovery of threatened species of wildlife while conserving their habitats.

- The government has also underlined an increased role of private sector in wildlife conservation. The plan lays down that the Centre would ensure that adequate and sustained funding including Corporate Social Responsibility funds are made available for the National Wildlife Action Plan implementation.

Background:

India is jointly hosting the Global Wildlife Programme (GWP) with World Bank and United Nations Development Programme. The GWP will address issues related to illegal wildlife trade across 19 countries in Asia and Africa. It will act as a platform to exchange knowledge and coordinate in on-ground action for combating illegal poaching of wildlife and improve governance on wildlife conservation.

Sources: pib.

SECURE Himalaya

The Centre has launched a **six-year project- called SECURE Himalaya**– to ensure conservation of locally and globally significant biodiversity, land and forest resources in the high Himalayan ecosystem spread over four states in India.

Key facts:

The project – called SECURE Himalaya – was launched by the Union environment ministry in association with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

- The SECURE – securing livelihoods, conservation, sustainable use and restoration of high range Himalayan ecosystems – is meant for specific landscapes. It includes Changthang (Jammu and Kashmir), Lahaul – Pangi and Kinnaur (Himachal Pradesh), Gangotri – Govind and Darma – Byans Valley in Pithoragarh (Uttarakhand) and Kanchenjunga – Upper Teesta Valley (Sikkim).
- Protection of snow leopard and other endangered species and their habitats is one of the key components of the project which will also focus on securing livelihoods of the people in the region and enhancing enforcement to reduce wildlife crime.
- Enhanced enforcement efforts and monitoring under the project will also curb illegal trade in some medicinal and aromatic plants which are among the most threatened species in these landscapes.



Sources: the hindu.

Turtle Sanctuary to be set up in Allahabad

In order to protect the rich aquatic biodiversity of river Ganga from escalating anthropogenic pressures, development of a **Turtle sanctuary in Allahabad along with a River Biodiversity Park at Sangam have been approved under Namami Gange programme**.

Key facts:

- The project at an estimated cost of Rs 1.34 crore would include development of River Biodiversity Park at Sangam (confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and mythical Sarasvati), establishment of a Turtle Rearing Centre (Permanent nursery at Triveni Pushp and makeshift annual hatcheries) and awareness about the importance of river Ganga and imperativeness of its conservation has been approved.
- This project will provide much needed platform to make the visitors aware of their place in the ecosystem, their roles and responsibilities, improve their understanding of the complexity of co-existence with the environment and help generate awareness for reducing the impact of human activities on critical natural resources.



- The task of dissipating knowledge about river Ganga will be taken up ardently in this project, which is 100% centrally funded.

Background:

Rivers Ganga and Yamuna at Allahabad are home to some of the most endangered fauna like turtles (Batagur kachuga, Batagur dhongoka, Nilssonia gangetica, Chitra indica, Hardella thurjii etc.), the National Aquatic Animal – Gangetic dolphin (Platanista gangetica), the Gharial (Gavialis gangeticus) and numerous migratory and resident birds. The sustenance of more than 2000 aquatic species including threatened gharials, dolphins and turtles in river Ganga exemplifies the rich biodiversity of this lifeline to over 40% of the country's population.

Sources: pib.

Committee for proper management of water resources in North Eastern Region

The Government has constituted a high-level committee for proper management of the water resources in the North Eastern Region (NER) under the Chairmanship of Vice-Chairman, Niti Aayog.

Key facts:

- The Committee would facilitate optimising benefits of appropriate water management in the form of hydro-electric power, agriculture, bio-diversity conservation, reduced flood damage erosion, inland water transport, forestry, fishery and eco-tourism.
- Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) will serve as the coordinating point. The Committee will submit its report, including Plan of Action, by June, 2018.

The terms of reference of the Committee include:

- Appraisal of existing mechanism/institutional arrangements for management of water resources of the North Eastern Region.
- Identification of gaps in the existing mechanism/institutional arrangements for optimal management of water resources of the NER.
- Suggest policy interventions required for optimally harnessing the water resources for accelerating development in the NER
- Spelling out of actionable measures required for optimizing the management of water resources in the North-East.
- Chalking out a Plan of Action for dovetailing of the schemes/programmes of concerned Union Ministries, their attached offices and autonomous bodies as well as the schemes of the respective North-Eastern State Governments.

Sources: pib.

Snow leopard photographed in Arunachal

Scientists have obtained the first evidence of the elusive snow leopard in Arunachal Pradesh. Camera traps have captured images of the big cat at **Thembang village's Community Conserved Area**, a community-owned reserve, in West Kameng district.

The presence of the species outside protected areas highlights the importance of community support for conservation as well as landscape-scale planning.

Background:

Arunachal Pradesh is one of the 22 priority landscapes of the Global Snow Leopard Ecosystem Protection Program and while locals and researchers knew that there were snow leopards in the area, scientists had not been able to get photographs thus far.



What is a Community Conserved Area (CCA)?

In 2004, WWF-India introduced the concept of CCAs in the State to empower local communities to become active decision-makers and implement conservation initiatives.

- Local communities in these CCAs form committees to undertake wildlife monitoring, patrolling and community-based tourism activities.

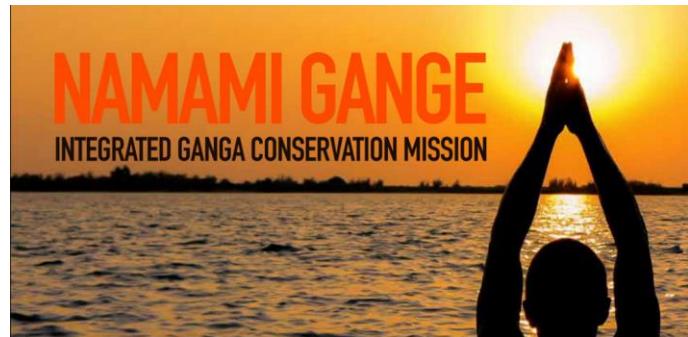
Snow Leopards – Quick Facts:

- The conservation status of snow leopard was recently improved from “endangered” to “vulnerable”.
- They inhabit alpine and subalpine zones at elevations from 3,000 to 4,500 m (9,800 to 14,800 ft). In the northern range countries, they also occur at lower elevations.
- Their habitat extends through twelve countries: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. China contains as much as 60% of all snow leopard habitat areas.
- In India, their geographical range encompasses a large part of the western Himalayas including the states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh in the eastern Himalayas.
- The snow leopard, like all big cats, is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES), which makes trading of animal body parts (i.e., fur, bones and meat) illegal in signatory countries. It is also protected by several national laws in its range countries.

Sources: the hindu.

Namami Gange Programme

National Mission for Clean Ganga has approved eight projects worth Rs. 700 crore, out of which four pertain to sewage management in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal, three are related to treatment of drains through bio-remediation and one of inventorization and surveillance of river Ganga.

About Namami Gange Programme:

- Namami Gange programme was launched as a mission **to achieve the target of cleaning river Ganga in an effective manner with the unceasing involvement of all stakeholders**, especially five major Ganga basin States – Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.
- **The programme envisages:** River Surface Cleaning, Sewerage Treatment Infrastructure, River Front Development, Bio-Diversity, Afforestation and Public Awareness.

Implementation:

The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).

- In order to improve implementation, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of a) High level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary assisted by NMCG at national level, b) State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary assisted by SPMG at state level and c) District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- The program emphasizes on improved coordination mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.

Sources: pib.

SC bans sale of crackers in Delhi

The Supreme Court has suspended the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and NCR till November 1, 2017 in a bid to test whether a Deepavali without firecrackers this year will have a “positive effect” on the health of citizens and a steadily deteriorating air quality.



Background:

There are evidences of deterioration of air quality at alarming levels in Delhi. Burning of these firecrackers during Deepavali in 2016 had shot up pm [particulate matter] levels by three times, making Delhi the worst city in the world, insofar as air pollution is concerned. Direct and immediate cause thereof was burning of crackers during Deepavali.

Opposing view:

Few experts see court’s decision to re-impose a ban on the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and surrounding towns till November 1 as extreme, unjustified and, perhaps, inadequately thought move.

- To begin with, the ban is on the sale of firecrackers, not their use. So those who already have firecrackers, or, presumably, are able to obtain them from outside Delhi would be free to let them off.
- Equally importantly, the Supreme Court decision only applies to Delhi and nearby towns. The rest of India is exempt. For now Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad are not of equal concern.
- Also, has the court considered what this will do to the firecracker industry and, more importantly, to the livelihood of thousands of shopkeepers and traders, many of whom are small roadside vendors or corner shops? It could very well bankrupt and impoverish them.
- This raises the moral question: Is the court right to experiment with Diwali? Firecrackers do create an environmental and health hazard. For those with asthma and other breathing problems, this can be very serious. Therefore, the case for controlling and restricting is undeniable. But the Supreme Court has gone further and attempted a ban.

Why not have a blanket ban on firecrackers’ sale in Delhi?

However, a total ban on firecrackers’ sale in Delhi NCR is too “radical a step” and a graded, gradual approach to a complete ban should be adopted — would be effective from November 1.

What can be done?

The problem of firecrackers in Delhi has been around for decades. That’s ample time for the Court to have devised a more thoughtful response than a last minute arbitrary ban. It could have imposed a stricter timeframe, reducing the 10 pm limit to 9 or even 8 pm. It could have asked the government to stage firework displays in a handful of strategic locations, broadcast by TV channels, so people can do without their own. London does this on New Year’s Eve. Finally, it could have asked the government to pay for those who suffer from firecracker displays to leave the city for 48 hours and add the cost as an additional tax on firecrackers.

Sources: the hindu.

India Water Week (IWW)-2017

The India Water Week 2017 is going to be held between October 10 – 14, 2017 at Vigyan Bhavan, New Delhi. Various conferences and exhibitions involving stakeholders will be held during this week.

Based on the theme “**Water and Energy for Inclusive Growth**,” India Water Week-2017 is a platform to elicit ideas and opinions from global-level decision makers, politicians, researchers and entrepreneurs in the field of water resources development and management for mutual benefit and goodwill.

Need for conservation of water:

Water is the harbinger and sustainer of all life on the planet, especially the humankind. With the growing population and improvement in economic status, the demand for available water resources is also increasing. As a result, there is

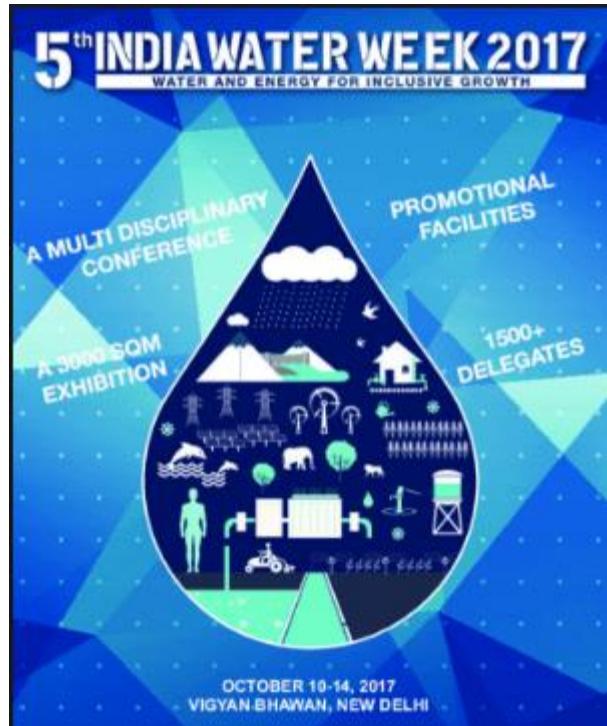
an urgency to conserve and utilize the limited availability of water resources in an optimum and efficient manner to satisfy larger needs.

Background:

India water week is a unique platform for deliberating all the related issues and better management of water resources created by the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation.

- The government has involved all stakeholders including decision makers, politicians, researchers and entrepreneurs of water resources from India as well as abroad to discuss strategies for managing the demands and supplies in the right manner.
- The first event was organised in New Delhi in 2012 and the theme was 'Water, Energy and Food Security: Call for Solutions'.

Sources: pib.



Pondicherry Shark, Red Sea Torpedo and Tentacled Butterfly Ray may have become extinct, fear scientists

Three marine species, the **Pondicherry Shark**, the **Red Sea Torpedo** and the **Tentacled Butterfly Ray** might have become possibly extinct in the oceanic waters of the Arabian Seas Region (ASR) since no evidence of its existence has surfaced in the last three decades.

- Scientists are also worried about the possible disappearance of other species from the region even before they were known to science.

Status:

- The first ever assessment of the conservation status of sharks, rays, and chimaeras (collectively called chondrichthyans) in the region has left the scientists grim-faced as 78 of the 153 species revived were found fighting for survival.
- The Guitar fish found in coastal waters of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and the Ganges Shark found in Arabian Sea were classified as Critically Endangered, among others.
- The assessment also revealed that 27 species were Near Threatened and 19 others were of least conservation concerns. It was also known that less was known about 29 to evaluate their risk of extinction.

Threats:

- By-catch was found to be the biggest threat to the majority of chondrichthyan fishes besides the "pressure from artisanal and industrial fisheries."
- Also, increasing decline in the extent and quality of habitat as a result of coastal development and other anthropogenic disturbances, particularly for those critical habitats that many species depend on coral reefs, mangroves, sea grasses pose a serious threat to the survival of many species.



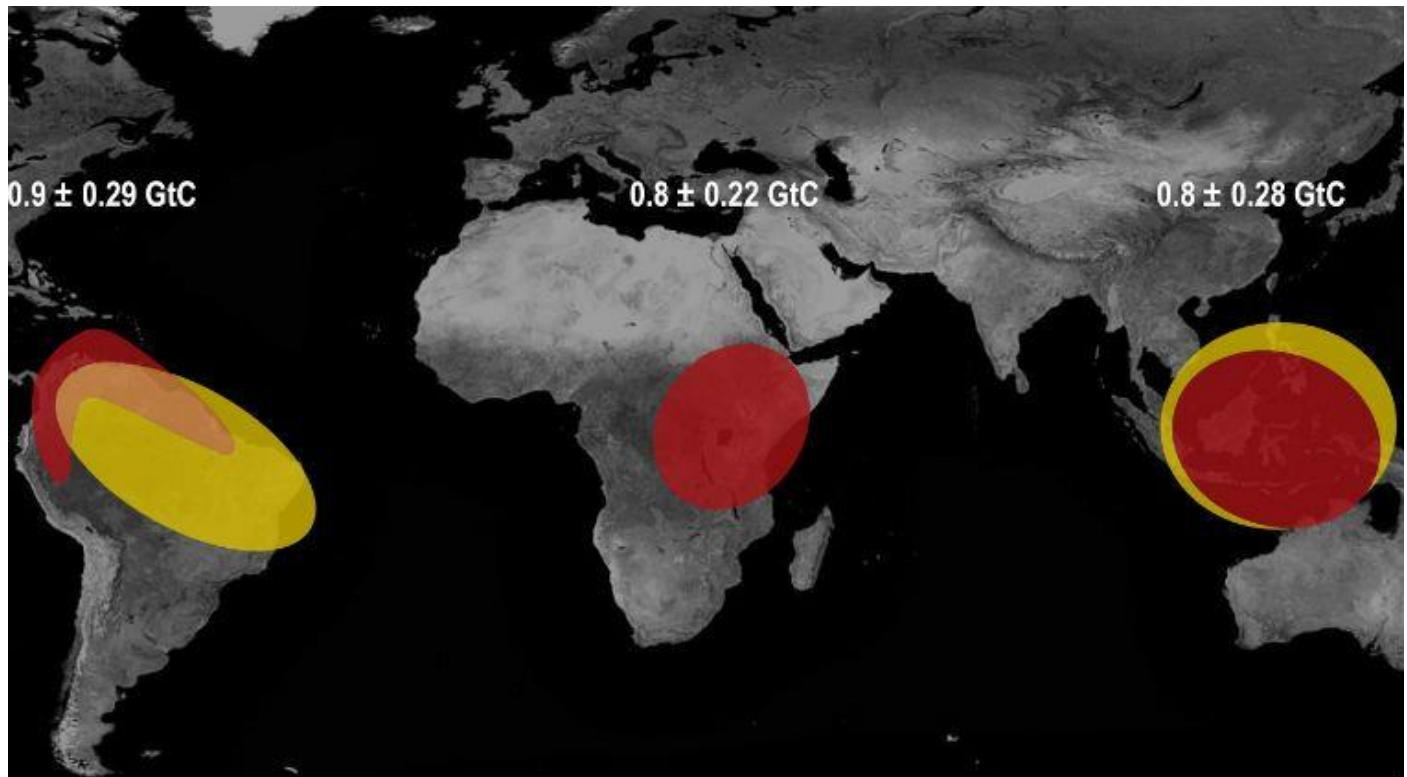
ASR:

The ASR covers the waters of the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Sea of Oman, and the Gulf. The region is also bordered by 20 countries including India, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Israel and Pakistan.

Sources: the hindu.

El Nino caused record CO₂ spike in 2015-16: NASA

Scientists have found that **the impact of the 2015-16 El Nino-related heat and drought occurring in tropical regions of South America, Africa and Indonesia was responsible for the largest annual increases in atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentration seen in at least 2,000 years.**



The findings are based on analysis of the first 28 months of data from NASA's Orbiting Carbon Observatory-2 (OCO-2) satellite.

Findings:

- In 2015 and 2016, OCO-2 recorded atmospheric carbon dioxide increases that were 50% larger than the average increase seen in recent years preceding these observations.
- That increase was about three parts per million of carbon dioxide per year — or 6.3 gigatonnes of carbon. In recent years, the average annual increase has been closer to two parts per million of carbon dioxide per year — or four gigatonnes of carbon.
- These record increases occurred even though emissions from human activities in 2015-16 are estimated to have remained roughly the same as they were prior to the El Nino.
- South America, Africa and Indonesia released 2.5 gigatonnes (a billion tonnes) more carbon into the atmosphere than they did in 2011. In 2011, weather in the three tropical regions was normal and the amount of carbon absorbed and released by them was in balance.

Way ahead:

Understanding how the carbon cycle in these regions responded to El Nino will enable scientists to improve carbon cycle models, which should lead to improved predictions of how our planet may respond to similar conditions in the future. These findings imply that if future climate brings more or longer droughts, as the last El Nino did, more carbon dioxide may remain in the atmosphere, leading to a tendency to further warm Earth.

About El Nino:

El Nino, Spanish for 'The little boy', is a weather disturbance first noticed (and named) by fishermen off the coast of South America centuries ago.

- Under normal weather conditions, trade winds ferry warm ocean currents westwards, from the eastern and central Pacific towards Indonesia and Australia. Warmer ocean waters in these regions then heat up the air above, leading to cloud formation and triggering the prodigious monsoon.
- But in the years where the El Nino takes shape, eastern and central Pacific regions experience abnormal warming of the sea.
- This leads to increased cloud formation and torrential rains in Peru and some sections of America. The ocean currents in the western Pacific remain cool, which means weak monsoon rains in Indonesia and Australia and sometimes in India.

Sources: et.

Graded plan to combat air pollution

The Graded Response Action Plan, Delhi-NCR's answer to combat air pollution that assumes apocalyptic proportions during this time of the year, will come into force for the first time from October 17th.

How it will be implemented?

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) will monitor air quality from various stations located across Delhi-NCR. Daily reports will be sent to the Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA), the implementing authority of the plan, which will take a decision on the future course of action.

- If data of any station shows a sudden spike in pollution level, a team will rush to the spot and try to analyse the reason. Accordingly, action would be taken and instructions issued.
- The CPCB has directed all state pollution control boards of NCR states to form teams that will fan out and flag violations. The CPCB has formed around 40 teams that are visiting various parts of Delhi alone.
- The chief secretaries of NCR states have been designated as nodal officers. We will direct them to take immediate action if any particular area shows a spike in air pollution.

Background:

As per a Supreme Court order, the Graded Response Action Plan for the NCR involves stringent measures against burning of waste, industrial pollution and transport sector emissions. Notified by the Union Ministry of Environment and Forest in January.

Sources: the hindu.

Sawfish more threatened than tigers, say scientists

World Sawfish day was observed on October 17th. The sawfish have been sighted off the Indian coast less than 10 times in over a decade and they appear to be more threatened than tigers and elephants, as per the scientists.

- The sawfish today may be the most endangered fish species in India. Anecdotal evidence suggested they were once common along the Indian coast.

Key facts:

- The sawfish has been included in **Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972** enacted to save them from exploitation.
- There are only five species of the sawfish ever identified — dwarf sawfish, knifetooth sawfish, smalltooth sawfish, largetooth sawfish and green sawfish.
- **Sawfish are elasmobranchs**, meaning their skeleton is made of cartilage. They are closely related to sharks and have shark-shaped bodies and, hence, are also called flat sharks.



- The sawfish family has been assessed either 'Endangered' or 'Critically Endangered' in the International Union for Conservation of Nature Global Red List, considering their threatened status, high extinction risk and observed population decline.

Sources: the hindu.

India tops list of pollution-linked deaths: Study

India has topped the list of countries with pollution-related deaths in 2015, with 2.51 million people dying prematurely in the country that year due to diseases linked to air, water and other forms of pollution, according to a new study published in the reputed medical journal, The Lancet.

- The study is part of a two-year project that involved more than 40 international health and environmental authors, and the secretariat of the Global Alliance on Health and Pollution.
- The aim of the Lancet Commission is to raise global awareness on pollution, end neglect of pollution-related diseases, and mobilise resources and political will to effectively confront pollution.

Highlights of the study:

- India accounted for about 28% of an estimated 9 million pollution-linked deaths worldwide in 2015. It also topped the list of deaths linked to polluted air (1.81 million) and water (0.64 million).
- Most of the pollution-related deaths — 92% — were reported in low and middle income countries, and in rapidly industrialising nations such as India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Madagascar and Kenya.
- China, with 1.8 million pollution-linked deaths in 2015, followed India on The Lancet list. Most of these deaths were due to non-communicable diseases caused by pollution, such as heart disease, stroke, lung cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).
- Of the 2.51 million deaths in India, 1.81 were related to air pollution, 0.64 million to water pollution, 0.17 million to occupational exposure and 95,000 linked to lead pollution.
- China (1.58 million) was placed after India in deaths linked to air-pollution, followed by Pakistan (0.22 million), Bangladesh (0.21 million) and Russia (0.14 million). In deaths linked to water pollution, Nigeria (0.16 million) and Pakistan (74,000) were placed after India.

Way ahead:

The Lancet study concluded that pollution is now the largest environmental cause of disease and death in the world today — three times more those from HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria put together.

It is "time to wake up" and start finding innovative solutions. For this, the government will need to take a lead role and formulate strategies on an urgent basis. Otherwise, the growing economy in the country will be a curse to the common man because this is coming at the cost of suffering and death.

Sources: the hindu.

New species of large gecko discovered from Eastern Ghats

Scientists have discovered new species of large gecko from Eastern Ghats. The **Kanger valley rock gecko Hemidactylus kangerensis** is the newest addition to India's lizard species.



Key facts:

- The gecko was discovered from Chhattisgarh's Kanger Ghati National Park. Though named after this park, the species is also found in Jagdalpur and Sukma in Chhattisgarh and in Khamman in the adjoining State of Telangana, which are part of the Eastern Ghats.
- Growing to over eight inches long, the adult Kanger valley rock gecko is fairly large.
- The distinct black-bordered beige bands that the new species sports right from its neck to its tail tip and specific scales on its thighs (which are visible only on closer inspection) set the Kanger valley rock gecko apart from the commonly-found rock gecko.

- According to the researchers, the discovery highlights the need for dedicated surveys across the Eastern Ghats, where biodiversity has not been quantified too well. Most areas here also need protection from various anthropogenic pressures.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre eases norms for sewage plants

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has relaxed standards for upcoming sewage treatment plants (STP)

- Biochemical oxygen demand (Bod) had to be no more than 10 mg/litre according to 2015 CPCB proposal. STPs coming up after June 2019 — except in major State capitals and metropolitan cities — need only conform to 30 mg/litre of BoD.. These include proposed STPs to treat sewage in stretches of the river downstream of Haridwar.
- Bod < 10mg/litre is difficult to achieve as it required advanced technology that was too costly for most States. However, It is a step forward, because now we have standards for faecal coliform, which was not part of standards earlier.

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB):

Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), statutory organisation, was constituted in September, 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. Further, CPCB was entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

Functions:

- to promote cleanliness of streams and wells in different areas of the States by prevention, control and abatement of water pollution
- to improve the quality of air and to prevent, control or abate air pollution in the country.

Biochemical oxygen demand (Bod):

- Biochemical oxygen demand is the amount of oxygen required for microbial metabolism of organic compounds in water.
- BOD value is most commonly expressed in milligrams of oxygen consumed per litre of sample during 5 days of incubation at 20 °C
- BOD can be used as a gauge of the effectiveness of wastewater treatment plants

Provisions of Rules

- One of the points of the government's ₹20,000 crore push to clean the river was a 2015-proposal to have higher standards for STPs. That is, they would have to ensure that the biochemical oxygen demand (Bod) — a marker for organic pollutants — in the treated water had to be no more than 10 mg/litre. Existing laws permit BoD up to 30 mg/litre.
- However, a notification by the Union Environment Ministry this month has junked the 10 mg/litre target.
- It says that STPs coming up after June 2019 — except in major State capitals and metropolitan cities — need only conform to 30 mg/litre of BoD.
- These include proposed STPs to treat sewage in stretches of the river downstream of Haridwar, including Kanpur and Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh.
- New STPs in State capitals, have to cap BoD at 20 mg/litre.
- Plants in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Jammu and Kashmir, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Dadra and Nagar Haveli don't need to stick to higher sewage-treatment criteria.

Reason for easing the norms:

The 10 mg criteria would require advanced technology that was too costly for most States. That kind of quality can be achieved in a phased manner.

Source: the hindu

SC bans dirty pet-coke, furnace oil in Haryana, Rajasthan, UP

Supreme Court banned the use of dirty furnace oil and pet-coke in Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh from November 1, 2017. This ban is already in place in Delhi. Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) lauds this directive as a big win for Delhi and NCR as well as the rest of the country fighting a tough battle against toxic pollution.



Context:

The order comes in response to the recommendations of the Environment Protection (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) that has found very high sulphur levels more than 20,000 PPM to 74,000 PPM as opposed to only 50 PPM sulphur in BSIV(Bharat Stage-IV) transport fuels

Highlights:

- It has further directed the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change (MOEFCC) to notify the standards for nitrogen oxide (NOx) and sulphur oxides (SOx) for the industry sector and the industry has to comply with the standards by December 31, 2017.
- MOEFCC will have to pay a fine of Rs 200,000 to the Supreme Court delaying the process of setting and notifying emissions standards

Significance:

- It eliminates dirtiest industrial fuels in Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and mandates first ever stringent NOx and SOx standards for the industry sector nationwide
- It has enormous pollution reduction potential from the industrial sector.
- Order will have nationwide impact as the entire industrial sector will have to comply with the new standards for SOx and NOx that are not regulated currently in India.

Source: down to earth

Singapore caps car numbers

Singapore, one of the most expensive places in the world to buy a vehicle, will freeze the number of private cars on its roads for at least two years, a rare move in Asia where many cities are increasingly gridlocked.

Key Points:

- It applies to private cars and motorcycles, but not to goods vehicles and buses.
- New multi-billion-dollar investment in the public transport network.
- Tough controls on vehicle ownership to address High Traffic Congestion and air pollution problems
- City-state has a largely efficient public transport system, including buses, trains and a metro. However it faced criticism recently after the metro suffered a series of breakdowns.

Source: the hindu

Arctic sea ice waning faster than predicted, says study

Findings:

- Arctic sea ice, a key indicator of climate change, could be dwindling faster than predicted.
- Research undertaken by the Cryosphere Climate Research Group, Canada found that satellite measurements over the years have overestimated the thickness of Arctic sea ice by as much as 25% because of the presence of salty snow.



- Salty snow formed when brine is expelled upward from the ice surface does not allow radar waves from satellites to penetrate, leading to skewed measurements.

Significance:

- Dwindling ice cover hastens the warming of oceans, and has an impact on weather phenomena like the El Nino that influences the Asian monsoon.
- The thinning ice would make it difficult for animals like polar bears and seals and organisms like phytoplankton to survive

Source: the hindu

Concentration of CO₂ in atmosphere hits record high: UN

Concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere surged at a record-breaking speed in 2016. Globally averaged concentrations of CO₂ reached 403.3 parts per million in 2016, up from 400.00 ppm in 2015.

The last time Earth experienced similar CO₂ concentration rates was three to five million years ago, when the sea level was up to 20 metres (66 feet) higher than now.



Causes:

A combination of human activities and a strong El Nino event – as per World Meteorological Organization.

Need of the hour

- Drastic action is needed to achieve targets set by the Paris climate agreement
- Rapid cuts in CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions.

Issue with Paris climate agreement

- The historic agreement approved by 196 countries two years ago is facing renewed pressure following U.S. President's decision to quit the accord.
- But nations are set to press on with the task of implementing it at climate talks in Bonn next week.

Source: Hindu

India to host UN Summit on Conservation of Migratory Species in 2020

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has announced that India will host next Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Conference of Parties 13 (CMS COP13) in year 2020.

CMS COP is also known as Global Wildlife Conference.

Key Facts

- An announcement in this regard was made on the last day of the week-long 12th session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals or CMS COP12, the only international treaty devoted exclusively to migratory animal species held in Philippines.



► CMS (Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals).

► The Convention was signed in 1979 in Bonn, Germany and entered into force in 1983.

► Its membership has grown steadily to include 92 (as of 1 August 2005) Parties from Africa, Central and South America, Asia, Europe.

Outcomes of last summit (COP12)

- Governments agreed to cooperate on reducing the negative impacts of marine debris, noise pollution, renewable energy and climate change on migratory species.
- A vulture multi-species action plan to better protect 15 species of Old World Vulture in more than 120 countries, comprising four that are critically endangered in

Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS)

- CMS is an international treaty concluded under aegis of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), concerned with conservation of wildlife and habitats on a global scale.
- It is commonly abbreviated as Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) or the Bonn Convention.
- CMS aims to conserve terrestrial, marine and avian migratory species throughout their range.

Source: Hindu

Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.**Capacity building in dam safety areas**

Central Water Commission (CWC) has signed MoUs with IIT Roorkee and MNMIT Allahabad to support dam rehabilitation efforts of various implementing agencies and CWC.

Background:

Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has taken on board selected premier academic and research institutes, for capacity building in the areas of dam safety through World Bank assisted Dam Rehabilitation and Improvement Project (DRIP). The scope includes strengthening the testing laboratories, enhancing analytical capabilities, exposure visits to best global institutions and on ground exposure to dam safety concerns to the faculty of these institutions.

CWC has already signed MoUs with IIT Madras, IISc Bangalore, NIT Calicut and NIT Rourkela for supporting these institutes for the procurement of specified equipment and software for enhancing their testing and modeling capabilities.

About DRIP:

The Ministry of Water Resources (MoWR), Government of India, with assistance from the World Bank, is implementing the DAM REHABILITATION AND IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (DRIP), which would be a six-year project.

- The project originally envisaged the rehabilitation and improvement of about 223 dams within four states namely, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu and later Karnataka, Uttarakhand (UNVNL) and Jharkhand (DVC) joined DRIP and total number of dams covered under DRIP increased to 250.
- The project will also promote new technologies and improve Institutional capacities for dam safety evaluation and implementation at the Central and State levels and in some identified premier academic and research institutes of the country.
- The Central Dam Safety Organisation of Central Water Commission, assisted by a Consulting firm, is coordinating and supervising the Project implementation.

The project development objectives of DRIP are: (i) to improve the safety and performance of selected existing dams and associated appurtenances in a sustainable manner, and (ii) to strengthen the dam safety institutional setup in participating states as well as at central level.

Sources: pib.

Calamities displace 23 lakh every year in India

According to the study, '**A Global Disaster Displacement Risk Model**', conducted by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre of the Norwegian Refugee Council and the **UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)**, calamities displace 23 lakh people every year in India.

Highlights of the report:

- India ranks the highest among the world's most disaster-prone countries for displacement of residents, with 23 lakh, on average, uprooted due to calamities such as floods, cyclones and earthquakes. Rise in homelessness will continue, according to the report.
- The report however notes that the estimation of displaced people in India may be on the lower side considering that, in the recent Bihar floods alone, about 1.75 crore were affected and 8.55 lakh evacuated. Floods hit at least half a dozen other states this year.
- Most of this displacement is being driven by flooding, which is on the increase in a warming world where population growth in hazard-prone parts of the globe has increased exposure.

About UNISDR:

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

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

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

China swears by 1890 border treaty with Britain

China has pointed to an 1890 treaty between Sikkim and Tibet to bolster its claims to the Doklam plateau at the trijunction. However, India believes Beijing is misrepresenting Delhi's position as well as prior agreements between the two countries acknowledging differences at the India-China-Bhutan trijunction.

About 1890 UK- China treaty:

The Convention was signed between Great Britain and China on March 17, 1890, at Calcutta.

- **As per Article (1) of Convention of 1890**, it was agreed that the boundary of Sikkim and Tibet shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents, from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu and northwards into other rivers of Tibet. The line commences at Mount Gipmochi, on the Bhutan frontier, and follows the above-mentioned water-parting to the point where it meets Nepal territory.
- However, Tibet refused to recognise the validity of Convention of 1890 and further refused to carry into effect the provisions of the said Convention. In 1904, a treaty known as a Convention between Great Britain and Tibet was signed at Lhasa.

- As per the Convention, Tibet agreed to respect the Convention of 1890 and to recognise the frontier between Sikkim and Tibet, as defined in Article (1) of the said Convention. On April 27, 1906, a treaty was signed between Great Britain and China at Peking, which confirmed the Convention of 1904 between Great Britain and Tibet.

Is it recognised by India?

The Convention of 1890 was entered by the King of Great Britain on behalf of India before independence and around the time of independence, the Indian Independence (International Arrangement) Order, 1947 was notified by Secretariat of the Governor-General (Reforms) on August 14, 1947.

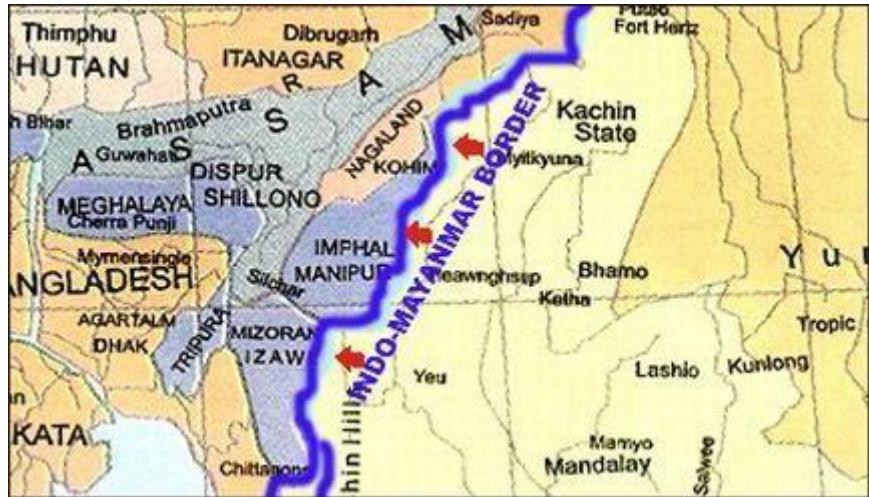
The Order provided, inter alia, that the rights and obligations under all international agreements to which India is a party immediately before the appointed day will devolve upon the Dominion of India. Therefore, in terms of Order of 1947, the government of India is bound by the said Convention of 1890. However, India's affirmation of the Convention of 1890 was limited to the alignment of the India-China border in Sikkim, based on watershed, and not with respect to any other aspects.

Sources: the hindu.

'Free movement' along Myanmar border

The Centre is putting in measures to facilitate free movement of Indian and Myanmarese citizens within 16 km along the Myanmar border. In this regard, the Home Ministry recently held consultations with four States — Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh — on the Free Movement Regime (FMR).

- The move comes in the wake of large-scale displacement of Rohingya people from Rakhine State in Myanmar.



In June, the Ministry had constituted a committee to examine various methods to curb the misuse of free movement along the Myanmar border, a friendly country, with which it shares unfenced borders and unhindered movement of people across the border.

Free movement regime:

India has a 1,643-km border with Myanmar and it is unique in many ways as it has a visa-free movement regime for people living within 16 km on either side of the border. “Free movement regime” is a bilateral agreement with Myanmar that allows free movement of Indian and Myanmarese citizens within 16 km of the border

- They can stay up to 72 hours with effective and valid permits issued by the designated authorities on either side. This regime has been in place keeping in view the traditional social relations among the border people. It helps genuine people living in close proximity of the border.
 - This regime has been in place keeping in view the traditional social relations among the border people. It helps genuine people living in close proximity of the border. However, it is misused by militants and criminals who smuggle weapons, narcotics, contraband goods and Fake Indian Currency Notes (FICN).

Sources: the hindu.

INS Sukanya at Indonesia for Coordinated Patrol of IMBL

INS Sukanya arrived at Belawan Indonesia to participate in the 30th edition of CORPAT (Coordinated Patrol) and 3rd bilateral exercise between the Indian Navy and the Indonesian Navy. The exercise is aimed to foster closer maritime ties with countries located on the rim of the Indian Ocean.

CORPAT:

CORPAT is a bilateral maritime exercise between India and Indonesia. Both countries have been carrying out maritime exercise twice a year since 2002. The CORPAT exercise between the two navies aims to enhance mutual understanding and inter-operability between the navies, carries search and rescue operations, institutes measures for vessels indulged in unlawful activities as well as control pollution.



Significance:

- It demonstrates India's commitment to its ties with Indonesia and to the maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.
 - The exercise seeks to strengthen the existing bonds of friendship between India and Indonesia
 - As part of the Indian Government's vision of [SAGAR](#) (Security and Growth for All in the Region), Indian Navy has also been involved in assisting countries in the Indian Ocean Region with EEZ surveillance, Search and Rescue and other capability enhancement activities

RUSSIAN TEAM IN VIZAG TO INSPECT DAMAGED SUBMARINE

A Russian technical team is in Vizag for a joint investigation into the mysterious damage suffered by INS Chakra, the nuclear submarine leased to India in 2011,

Context:

- Russia had leased the submarine to India for a 10-year period in 2011. There has been a speculation that the submarine met with an accident while negotiating the narrow channel to enter the harbour.
 - Sources say nuclear reactor on INS Chakra is intact; Russia not fully convinced of Indian findings. Damage to the submarine was not very serious, and did not impact the nuclear reactor, because it was all contained to the outer hull.

INS Chakra:

- INS Chakra is a Russia-made, nuclear-propelled, hunter-killer submarine.
- The Akula class submarine is an SSN, and is to provide escort to INS Arihant, the indigenously constructed ballistic missile submarine that would carry nuclear missiles.
- INS Chakra has been taken on lease from Russia for 10 years to provide the Navy the opportunity to train personnel and operate such nuclear-powered vessels.

India is already engaged in negotiations for the second nuclear submarine from Russia, which could join service when INS Chakra returns after its 10-year lease.

Source: the hindu

Paper 3 Topic: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.**SC asks Centre to strike a balance on Rohingya issue**

The Supreme Court has asked the government to strike a balance between humanitarian concern for Rohingya community staying in India and the country's national security and economic interests. With this, the status quo continues even though the court gave the community the liberty to approach it in case of "any contingency."

Background:

A plea was filed in the supreme court by Rohingyas for protection of the life and liberty of their community. Petitioners say, the Centre's move to deport them violated the constitutional guarantee that the Indian state should "protect the life and liberty of every human being, whether citizen or not."

As per the petitioners, "*The proposed deportation is contrary to the constitutional protections of Article 14 (equality), Article 21 (right to life) and Article 51(c) (respect for international law and treaty obligations) of the Constitution.*"

Who are the Rohingya?

Few years ago, religious and ethnic tensions between the Rohingya Muslims and the Rakhine Buddhists (who make up the majority of the population in Myanmar) escalated into widespread, deadly rioting. Hundreds of thousands were forced to flee. Since then, ongoing violent attacks have forced even more people to leave their homes.

- The Myanmar Government says that Rohingya people are not Burmese citizens – but the Rohingya have been living in Myanmar for generations. Today, they are a people with no home or citizenship.
- Rohingya people are being widely abused and exploited. They are one of the most persecuted minorities in the world.
- According to estimate, there are around 40,000 Rohingya in India, of which around 5,700 are in Jammu. Of these, only 16,000 are said to be registered with the U.N. body.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.**Navika Sagar Parikrama – Tarini Enters Fremantle**

INSV Tarini entered Fremantle (Australia) port today during its maiden voyage to circumnavigate the globe. This is the first-ever Indian circumnavigation of the globe by an all-women crew.

INSV Tarini:

- INSV Tarini is a 56 foot sailing vessel built in India by M/s Aquarius Shipyard Pvt Ltd, Goa
- It was inducted into the Indian Navy recently in February 2017
- It has Raymarine navigation suite and an array of satellite communication systems for perfect navigation anywhere in the world
- It showcases the 'Make in India' initiative on the International forum.

Navika Sagar Parikrama is the first circumnavigation attempt by **Asian women** and the first such attempt by an all-women naval team. They will set sail from **Goa** in **September** and are expected to be back in **March 2018**. The voyage will have **five legs**, with stopovers in **Fremantle** (Australia), **Lyttelton** (New Zealand), **Port Stanley** (The Falklands) and **Cape Town** (South Africa)

INSV Tarini

- 55ft vessel, with a suite of six sails
- Built by **Aquarius Shipyard, Goa**
- Inducted into the navy in **February**
- Has an **RO plant** that will give **30 litres** of water an hour
- **130hp Volvo Penta D5 engine** for auxiliary power
- **Inmarsat** network system
- **Superwind** wind generator
- **Raymarine** electronic autopilot and one wind-driven autopilot
- **Emergency position indicating radio beacon**, and a search and rescue transponder
- **HF/VHF radio** with digital selective calling

Navika Sagar Parikrama:

- The voyage of Navika Sagar Parikrama began from Goa coast in September 2017 and will be finishing around March 2018
- The expedition will be covered in five legs, with stop-overs at 4 ports: Fremantle (Australia), Lyttleton (New Zealand), Port Stanley (Falklands), and Cape Town (South Africa).
- The project is considered essential towards promoting Ocean Sailing activities in the Indian Navy along with showcasing the Government's support for empowering women.

Significance:

- It also aims to showcase 'Nari Shakti' on the world platform and help revolutionise societal attitudes and mindset towards women in India by raising visibility of their participation in challenging environs.
- The voyage aims to show case the 'Make in India' initiative by sailing onboard the indigenously built INSV Tarini.
- The crew would monitor and report marine pollution on the high seas.

Source: pib

IAF show scorches Lucknow-Agra highway

A major touchdown exercise of the Indian Air Force was held on the Agra Lucknow expressway at Bangarmau in Unnao district of Uttar Pradesh today. As many as 20 fighter aircraft took part in the special exercise.

- The drill witnessed the participation of a C-130J transport aircraft with Garud commandos for assault landing as well as three Jaguars, six Mirages, six SU 30s in touch down and take off operations.
- This is the second time that a touchdown exercise was held at Agra Lucknow expressway.



Objective of this exercise:

- The exercise was conducted to test the capability of the Indian Air Force to land its fighter jets and transport aircrafts on highways in the event of an emergency or in a war-like situation.
- This operation has boosted the IAF's capability to undertake unhindered operations even during non-availability of standard runways.
- It has demonstrated the expert flying skills of its fighter and transport aircrew, and the capability of its ground crew in activating such expressway airstrips on short notice.

C-130J Super Hercules:

- The C-130J Super Hercules, which is of U.S. origin, is utilised for special operations and relief work during HADR (Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief) operations.
- They supply relief material during calamities such as floods and earthquakes, and are also used for evacuation.

Source: The Hindu

Bi-annual Naval Commanders' Conference

Hon'ble Raksha Mantri complimented all personnel of the Indian Navy for securing the maritime interests of the nation.

Achievements mentioned:

- Regular deployment of ships, submarines and aircraft in all directions (South China Sea, Sea of Japan, Persian Gulf, the Atlantic Ocean and Australia shores)
- Deter piracy attempts off the Gulf of Aden.
- Participation in a number of bilateral exercises
- Success of the Exercise MALABAR with the US and the Japanese Navy.
- Lead taken by Indian Navy in indigenisation and self-reliance.
- Engagement with the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) littorals to build their capacities and enhance their capabilities through practical training of Naval personnel on regular basis

Issues to be addressed:

- Indian Navy is facing shortfalls in ship-borne multi-role helicopters, conventional submarines and mine counter measure vessels, which need urgent redressal.
- Govt and Industry should encourage development of equipment and systems in India and to reduce import dependence in the Defence sector.

Upcoming Programmes:

- Goa Maritime Conclave -Institutionalising a full-fledged regional-forum to help find collective solutions to matters maritime in the IOR and facilitate projection of India's and Indian Navy's strategic and operational vision to a wider regional and global audience through
- MILAN 2018 at Port Blair early next year would be an excellent forum to get the littoral Navies on a common platform to discuss regional maritime issues and security challenges.

Indian Ocean Region (IOR):

The IOR, a large maritime area that extends from coastal Africa through the Middle East and South Asia and on to Australia, is a major conduit for global trade, a littoral zone of developing powers.

Conclusion:

Indian Navy – to be strong at sea, and be ever ready and vigilant to counter any challenges in the maritime domain. Maritime interests of a nation have a vital relationship with its economic growth and these shall be protected at all costs by ensuring a strong and credible Indian Navy.

Source: pib

Army finalises plan to modernise weapons

The army is set to launch a fresh hunt for 7 lakh assault rifles, 44000 light machine guns (LMGs) and 44600 carbines to replace its ageing and obsolete weapons.

Reason:

- fault lines found in the entire range of small arms except the AK-47
- Our casualties in counter-terror operations can be reduced by half if soldiers are provided better assault rifles

Reason for delay:

- Army's failure to finalise the specifications
- single-vendor situation

Significance:

Modernisation of the Army must be in tune with the evolving security threat facing the country. All its "deficiencies" will be addressed to strengthen its combat capability.

Some terminologies:

- **RFI** (request for information) is a process whose purpose is to collect information about capabilities of various vendors.
- A **lightweight rifle** developed from the sub-machine gun, which may be set to fire automatically or semi-automatically.
- A **light machine gun (LMG)** is a machine gun designed to be employed by an individual soldier, with or without an assistant, as an infantry support weapon. Light machine guns are often used as squad automatic weapons.
- A **carbine** is a long arm firearm but with a shorter barrel than a rifle or musket. Many carbines are shortened versions of full-length rifles, shooting the same ammunition, while others fire lower-powered ammunition, including types designed for pistols.

Source: the hindu

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

Information utility under the IBC

National e-Governance Services Ltd (NeSL) has become India's first **information utility (IU) for bankruptcy cases under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016**. NeSL is owned by State Bank of India and Life Insurance Corporation Ltd., among others. Recently, the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) eased ownership norms for setting up such utilities.



What is an information utility?

Information utility is **an information network which would store financial data like borrowings, default and security interests among others of firms**. The utility would specialise in procuring, maintaining and providing/supplying financial information to businesses, financial institutions, adjudicating authority, insolvency professionals and other relevant stakeholders.

Why is it important? How useful is it?

The objective behind information utilities is to provide high-quality, authenticated information about debts and defaults. Information utilities are expected to play a key role as they allow storage of financial information of registered users and expeditiously process and verify information received.

Moreover, the database and records maintained by them would help lenders in taking informed decisions about credit transactions. It would also make debtors cautious as credit information is available with the utility. More importantly,

information available with the utility can be used as evidence in bankruptcy cases before the National Company Law Tribunal.

What are the rules governing these utilities?

Information utilities are governed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy code 2016 and IBBI (Information Utilities) Regulations 2017. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) oversees aspects such as registration and cancellation of these entities, their shareholding and governance among others. Recently, IBBI eased norms for information utilities, allowing Indian firms listed on stock exchanges to hold 100% in such firms. It also allowed individuals to hold 51% in the utility for a period of three years.

How will the utilities help stakeholders in the insolvency process?

It is mandatory for financial creditors to provide financial information to the information utility. When they initiate insolvency proceedings against the defaulting firm (known as corporate debtor), the utilities may help as they would act as a centralised platform for accessing data. Unlike financial creditors, it is optional for the operational creditor to provide financial information to the utility.

What are the key challenges for these utilities?

While the onus is on financial creditors, operational creditors and corporate debtors to provide the required information, procuring authentic information might be a challenge due to the sensitivity involved. There may also, be resistance in sharing information. Since it is a digital database, there is the risk of exposure to data piracy and data theft.

Sources: the hindu.

Govt sets up expert group for suggestions on artificial intelligence policy

The Union ministry of electronics and information technology has set up an internal committee to advise the government on a **policy on artificial intelligence (AI)**. The expert committee will advise the IT ministry on the most apt technologies for India.



- The government's main focus is to reduce cyber attacks with AI. The main policy will be drawn up once the committee gives its report.

Need for a policy on AI:

The artificial intelligence market is estimated to touch \$153 billion in 2020 and expected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 45.4% from 2016 to 2022. However, AI is widely seen as a major challenge in generation of employment as many companies are likely to depend more on it to cut down on human resources.

Globally too, there is a growing interest in AI. In 2016, the White House initiated work on Preparing for the future of artificial intelligence; in the UK, the House of Commons committee on S&T looked at robotics and artificial intelligence while in 2017, the State Council of China started work on the next generation artificial intelligence development plan.

Seven- point strategy:

The government has recently drawn up a seven-point strategy that would form the framework for India's strategic plan to use AI.

- The strategy includes developing methods for human machine interactions; ensuring safety and security of AI systems; creating a competent workforce in line with AI and R&D needs, understanding and addressing the ethical, legal and societal implications of AI, measuring and evaluating AI technologies through standards and benchmarks, among others.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre appoints Shri Dineshwar Sharma as its Representative in J&K

Former Intelligence Bureau (IB) chief Dineshwar Sharma is appointed as Representative of Government of India to initiate and carry forward a dialogue with the elected representatives, various organizations and concerned individuals in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Background:

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

Tasks ahead for the Interlocutor:

- He will have rank equivalent to a Cabinet Secretary and complete independence in deciding who to hold talks with.
- He is likely to hold talks with mainstream local political workers of the PDP, National Conference and Congress, heads of various religious seminaries in the Valley, local student unions etc
- He would try to know how things are panning out on the ground for and against India and try to understand the legitimate aspirations of the people of the state.

About Dineshwar Sharma:

- He has worked as mediator for talks with various insurgent groups based in Assam.
- He has Worked as director of the IB include 2015 Gurdaspur attack, Uri attack in 2016, rise of ISIS recruitment in Kerala
- He has served as DIG of the Border Security Force (BSF) and as the IG of CRPF in charge of Jammu and Kashmir.

Significance:

If a political dialogue, towards a lasting solution, were to begin between all the stakeholders, it would help in confidence-building measures between the government, civil society and dissidents.

Source: the hindu, first post

Facts for Prelims

Man Booker Prize: George Saunders wins for Lincoln in the Bardo

George Saunders has won the Man Booker prize for his novel *Lincoln in the Bardo* – becoming the second US author to take home the £50,000 fiction award.

- The book tells the story of Abraham Lincoln's grief after the death of his young son, and his visits to his tomb.

About Man Booker Prize:

The leading **literary award** in English, The Man Booker Prize was launched in 1969. It aims to promote the ‘finest in fiction’ and is awarded each year to the book adjudged as the best novel of the year written in English and published in the United Kingdom.



- The winner of The Man Booker Prize receives £50,000. Sponsored by Man Group, the foundation also awards £2,500 and a designer bound copy of their book to each of the six shortlisted authors. The winner and shortlisted authors are also guaranteed a worldwide readership as well as a dramatic spike in book sales.
- The judges of The Man Booker Prize are chosen from a wide range of disciplines including critics, writers, academics, poets, politicians, actors and ‘all with a passion for quality fiction’. Subject to widespread speculation before the official announcement, the prize usually brings the winner a huge boost in sales and profile.

Sources: the hindu.

Thumri

- Thumri is a common genre of semi-classical Indian music.
- The term ‘*thumri*’ is derived from the Hindi verb *thumakna* which means “to walk with dancing steps so as to make the ankle-bells tinkle.”
- The form is, thus, connected with dance, dramatic gestures, mild eroticism, evocative love poetry and folk songs of Uttar Pradesh, though there are regional variations.
- The text is romantic or devotional in nature, and usually revolves around a girl’s love for Krishna. *Thumri* is characterized by its sensuality, and by a greater flexibility with the *raag*.

Xi crowned as ‘linxiu’

China’s ruling Communist Party has dusted off a Mao-era honorific for President Xi Jinping, cementing his status as the most powerful ruler.

What is linxiu?

The term, a honorific for a leader, was once used for Mao

- The term “lingxiu” has not been used since the time of Mao’s successor Hua Guofeng.
- But it has begun to pop up again in state media and in government meetings.

Source: Hindu

PM flags off “Run For Unity”



The Prime Minister later flagged off the “Run For Unity” from Major Dhyan Chand National Stadium.

- The Prime Minister recalled the contributions of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, especially in uniting the nation.
- The Prime Minister said India is proud of its diversity, and occasions such as “Run For Unity” offer us an opportunity to reinforce that sense of pride and oneness.

Source: PIB

Polavaram Project

Polavaram Project is a multi-purpose irrigation project which has been accorded national project status by the union government. This dam across the Godavari River is under construction located in West Godavari District and East Godavari District in Andhra Pradesh state and its reservoir spreads in parts of Chhattisgarh and Odisha States also.

BITS

1. **India won Asia Cup Hockey Championship 2017** held in Dhaka defeating Malaysia. Pakistan stood third in the game. This is the Third Asia Cup Hockey title won by India which had won the Asia Cup Hockey previously in 2003 (Kuala Lumpur) and 2007 (Chennai).
2. **Gaganjeet Bhullar** won Macao Open golf trophy 2017 and bagged his eighth Asian Tour title.
3. To highlight tribal way of agriculture in '**Janjatiya Kisan Swaraj Yatra**' in south Rajasthan laid focus on sustainable farming through rain-fed agriculture and indigenous tribal practices
4. 69 species of Butterflies were recorded in a study by the Zoological Survey of India in the Singur, a rural block in West Bengal's Hooghly district. Five of the species found in Singur are rare and to be protected under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.



Winged beauties: (From left) Striped Albatross, Indian Skipper, Peacock Pansy and Pea Blue. *SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

5. Indian Badminton Player **Kidambi Srikanth**, won Denmark Open Super Series Premier 2017 by defeating South Korea's Lee Hyun Il. This is his third super series title for the year. He had won Singapore Super Series 2017(Second Place) and Indonesia Super Series 2017(Premier) previously
6. **Bhitarkanika National Park** in Odisha's Kendrapara district is one of the best natural abode for the estuarine crocodile. The park is home to Saltwater Crocodile, White Crocodile, Indian python, leopards, wild boars, fishing cats, hyenas, sambar deer, Gangetic dolphins and Olive ridley sea turtles besides 11 mangrove species with elevated threat of extinction are also found here.
7. **India Post Payments Bank (IPPB)** has appointed **Suresh Sethi**, (former MD, Vodafone M-Pesa Ltd) as its Managing Director & Chief Executive Officer. **IPPB is a Public Limited Company under the Department of Posts with 100% GOI equity.**
8. "**Paryatan Parv**", a nation-wide celebration of Tourism (21 day programme) was organized by Ministry of Tourism in collaboration with other Central Ministries, State Governments and Stakeholders. It's objective is to draw focus on the benefits of tourism, showcasing nation's cultural diversity and reinforcing the principle of "Tourism for All".
9. '**Paika Bidroha**' (*Paika rebellion*) of 1817 to be named **first war of Indian Independence**. Paikas were peasant militia under the Gajapati rulers of Odisha. They rebelled against the British rule under the leadership of Bakshi Jagabandhu Bidyadhara.
10. 24 October has been celebrated as **United Nations Day** since 1948 marks the anniversary of the entry into force in 1945 of the UN Charter.
11. World's oldest astrolabe that guided ships to India found in shipwreck of a ship called the Esmeralda. Navigation tool may have been used in Vasco da Gama expedition. **Astrolabe** is an elaborate inclinometer, historically used by astronomers and navigators to measure the inclined position in the sky of a celestial body, day or night.
12. CPC General Secretary, **Xi Jinping becomes the third Chinese leader to have his name and ideology enshrined in the Constitution** besides two other former Presidents — Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" and The "Belt and Road" initiative, an ambitious programme to build infrastructure linking China with its neighbours and beyond, was also included in the party Constitution.
13. Website for the Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (**CIPAM**) was launched by Commerce Ministry. CIPAM is set up under the aegis of DIPP with a mandate to effectively implement the National Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) Policy. The website is interactive providing regular updates on all upcoming events including awareness and sensitization programs being conducted, as also information on all Intellectual Property Rights

14. Eminent classical singer and Padma Vibhushan awardee **Girija Devi** passed away. A legendary singer of the Benaras gharana, Girija Devi was awarded the Padma Shri in 1972, the Padma Bhushan in 1989 and the Padma Vibhushan in 2016.
15. India's passport was ranked 75th among 94 countries in recently released ***Global Passport Power Rank 2017***. Singapore has world's most powerful passport, making it first Asian country to top it. Singapore is followed by Germany, Sweden and South Korea.
 - The Global Passport Power Rank is released by Canada based global financial advisory firm Arton Capital.
 - It has become most popular interactive online tool to display, sort and rank world's passports.
 - The index ranks national passports by cross-border access they bring, assigning visa-free score according to number of countries passport holder can visit visa-free or with visa on arrival.
16. **Special Centre for Disaster Research** was inaugurated at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) by **Ministry of state for home affairs**
17. An ancient human skull discovered in Papua New Guinea likely belonged to the world's oldest-known tsunami victim. The partially preserved Aitape Skull was discovered in 1929 from the northern coast of the Pacific nation. This work reinforces a growing recognition that tsunamis have had a significant influence on coastal populations throughout Pacific prehistory.
18. Scientists from Florida State University, US – have developed new tool for objectively defining onset and demise of **Indian Summer Monsoon (ISM)** . The new method uses rainfall rates to mark span of ISM at any given location. The new system ties onset of monsoon to location-specific rainfall thresholds and can work to clear confusion and frustration due to lack of clear, granular and objective benchmark for ISM onset and demise for all areas of country.
19. **Vigilance Awareness Week** to be observed from 30th October to 4th November, 2017 with theme "My Vision-Corruption Free India".
 - Purpose of observing Vigilance Awareness Week is to educate the public at large about the corruption related practices and also educating them how to report about it.
 - Activities to be conducted within the organisation include taking of Integrity Pledge by all employees, distribution of pamphlets/handouts on preventive vigilance activities, whistle blower mechanism and other anti-corruption measures, conducting workshops and sensitization programmes for employees and other stakeholders on policies/procedures of the organization and preventive vigilance measures
 - "Awareness Gram Sabhas" are being organized for dissemination of awareness in Gram Panchayats (in rural and semi-urban areas) to sensitise citizens on the ill-effects of corruption.
 - A new feature is the establishment of 'Integrity Clubs' in schools and colleges as children are the future assets of the country and it is important to cultivate moral values in them.
20. In a major boost to coastal shipping, the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) has received Rs 25 crore from the government for development of coastal berth and another Rs 50 crore to the Karwar port in Karnataka under the Coastal Berth Scheme of its flagship Sagarmala project.
 - Sagar Mala project is a strategic and customer-oriented initiative of the Government of India to modernize India's Ports so that port-led development can be augmented and coastlines can be developed to contribute in India's growth.
 - The Coastal Berth Scheme aims to provide financial support to ports or state governments for the creation of infrastructure for movement of cargo and passenger by sea or national waterways.
21. **National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE)** set up under the administrative control of **Ministry of New & Renewable Energy (MNRE)** at Gwalpahari Village, Distt. **Gurgaon** (Haryana).
22. Establishment of permanent campus of six new IITs at Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), Palakkad (Kerala), Dharwad (Karnataka), Jammu (Jammu and Kashmir), Bhilai (Chhattisgarh) and Goa will have a facility for housing 1,200 students from the academic year 2020-2021
23. **The Infantry Day** is observed every year in India on **27 October** to commemorate supreme sacrifices made by Indian Army's infantry against Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) in 1947. It was first infantry action by Indian

- Army after independence. Observance of the day also commemorates infantry's exceptional courage and dedicated service to nation.
- 24. President of India launched the **Technocity project** in Thiruvananthapuram, **Kerala** on October 27, 2017 and laid the foundation stone for the first government building in Technocity.
 - 25. **Burundi** on Friday became the First ever nation to leave the International Criminal Court (ICC), the **world's only permanent war crimes tribunal**. International Criminal Court, set up in July 2002, headquartered at Hague, Netherlands to prosecute those behind the world's worst atrocities.
 - 26. Australian court disqualifies Barnaby Joyce, deputy PM for dual citizenship. Critics have condemned the outdated constitutional ban saying half the people are immigrants or have an overseas-born parent. Critics argued for exemption from the ban because he had not voluntarily acquired or retained citizenship of another country.
 - 27. **Valve annuloplasty** is a new heart implant that is expandable and stretches out as the child grows. This will stop children requiring more surgeries to repair or replace heart valves as they grow up.
 - 28. Vice Admiral **Ajit Kumar P**, assumes charge as the Vice Chief of Naval Staff (VCNS)
 - 29. New Railway Line between Bidar – Kalaburagi in Karnataka opened.
 - 30. Javed Akhtar Receives **Hridaynath Mangeshkar Award** on 80th birthday of veteran music composer Hridaynath Mangeshkar.
 - 31. Scientists have developed a novel vaccine candidate that may prevent HIV infection by stimulating an immune response against sugars that form a protective shield around the virus. The protein fragment of the vaccine candidate comes from **gp120**, a protein that covers HIV like a protective envelope. A sugar shield covers the gp120 envelope, bolstering HIV's defences. The rare HIV-infected individuals who can keep the virus at bay without medication typically have antibodies that attack gp120.
 - 32. Scientists have developed a novel smartphone-based portable ultrasound machine that can help detect cancer easily at home. The machine called **Butterfly IQ** is a pocket-sized **ultrasound device**, which is the size and shape of an electric razor, works by shooting sound waves into the body and capturing the echoes.
 - 33. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has announced that India will host next Convention on the **Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Species of Wild Animals (CMS) Conference of Parties 13 (CMS COP13)** in year **2020**. CMS COP is also known as a **Global Wildlife Conference**. The announcement was made during 12th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties 12 (COP12) to CMS held in Manila, Philippines in October 2017

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