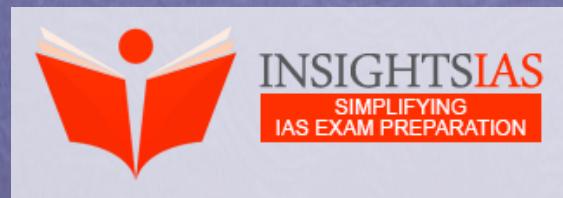


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DAILY CURRENT EVENTS

MAY 2017



INSIGHTS DAILY CURRENT EVENTS MAY-2017

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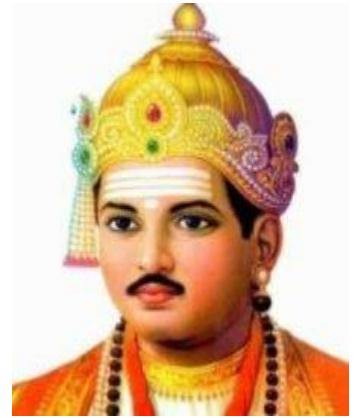
Paper 1 Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Basava Jayanthi 2017

On the occasion of Basava Jayanti 2017, PM Modi released the translated volumes of Vachanas in 23 Indian languages.

About Basava:

- Basavanna was a **12th-century philosopher, statesman, Kannada poet and a social reformer** during the reign of the Kalachuri-dynasty king Bijjala I in Karnataka, India.
- Basavanna spread social awareness through his poetry, popularly known as **Vachanaas**. Basavanna rejected **gender or social discrimination, superstitions and rituals**.
- He introduced new public institutions such as **the Anubhava Mantapa** (or, the “hall of spiritual experience”), which welcomed men and women from all socio-economic backgrounds to discuss spiritual and mundane questions of life, in open.
- As a leader, he developed and inspired a new devotional **movement named Virashaivas**, or “ardent, heroic worshippers of Shiva”. This movement shared its roots in the ongoing Tamil Bhakti movement, particularly the Shaiva Nayanars traditions, over the 7th- to 11th-century.
- Basava championed devotional worship that rejected temple worship and rituals led by Brahmins, and replaced it with personalized direct worship of Shiva through practices such as individually worn icons and symbols like a small linga.
- Basaveshwara is **the first Kannadiga in whose honour a commemorative coin has been minted in recognition of his social reforms**.
- In November 2015, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi inaugurated the statue of Basaveshwara along the bank of the river Thames at Lambeth in London.



Sources: pib.

Now, Victoria Memorial on Google Arts & Culture

Victoria Memorial Hall (VMH) is introducing facilities of exploring its galleries at the click of a button, courtesy the Google Arts and Culture project to commemorate the occasion of International Museum Day.

- The project offers viewers a 360-degree walk through traversing the galleries, in Google Street View mode.
- The galleries with The Art of Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore: Painter and Personality, and The Magnificent Heritage of India as seen by the Daniells can be explored.



What you need to know?

Abanindranath Tagore was the principal artist and creator of “Indian Society of Oriental Art”. He was also the first major exponent of Swadeshi values in Indian art, thereby founding the influential Bengal school of art, which led to the development of modern Indian painting.

- He was also a noted writer, particularly for children. Popularly known as ‘Aban Thakur’, his books Rajkahini, Budo Angla, Nalak, and Khrir Putul are landmarks in Bengali language children’s literature.
- His famous paintings include ‘Bharat Mata’, the ‘Passing of Shah Jahan’, the ‘Chandi Mangal’ collection and ‘Krishna Leela’.

Karmapa's travel curbs to go

Urgyen Trinley Dorje, the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, may be allowed to visit any place in the country, except Sikkim, without seeking the government's permission. The Home Ministry has moved the proposal before the Cabinet Committee on Security, a senior government official said here on Tuesday.

The move assumes significance in the wake of China's repeated warnings over the recent Northeast visit of the Dalai Lama, who Beijing describes as a "separatist" for spearheading the Tibetan freedom movement.



Background:

The entry of all three Karmapa claimants has been banned at the Rumtek monastery in East Sikkim since 1994, following objections by some prominent teachers of the Kagyu school to recognising Dorje as the 17th Karmapa.

In 2011, the police had recovered ₹1.2 crore of unaccounted-for foreign currency, including Chinese ones, from Gyuto Tantric University and Monastery in Dharamsala. The police registered a case against the Karmapa and the then government put more restrictions on his travel.

About Karma Kagyu school:

The Karma Kagyu lineage belongs to one of the 4 main schools of Tibetan Buddhism. As a lineage of direct oral transmission it places particular emphasis on meditation and the realization of the direct experience of mind gained through the guidance of a teacher.

- The Karma Kagyu lineage has its roots in the teachings of the historical Buddha and developed into a practical way to enlightenment in India and Tibet.
- For over a 1000 years Buddhist Masters (Mahasiddhas) such as Naropa and Maitripa in India as well as the famous Tibetan Yogis Marpa and Milarepa shaped the lineage as a practical everyday practice for lay people.

Karmapa:

Since the 12th century the Karmapas have been the heads of the Karma Kaygü lineage and responsible for the continuation of this direct transmission lineage. The present 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Thaye Dorje was born in 1983 and in 1994 he managed to flee the oppression of Tibet and came to India.

Sources: the hindu.

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

Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims worst off: report

The 2016 Indian Exclusion Report (IXR) was recently released by the Centre for Equity Studies (CES).

- The 2016 Report reviews exclusion with respect to **four public goods**: pensions for the elderly, digital access, agricultural land, and legal justice for undertrials. It also profiles four highly vulnerable groups in terms of their access to these goods.

Important findings:

- **Disadvantaged groups:** Despite the diverse public goods reviewed, the groups most severely and consistently excluded from provisioning tend to the same historically disadvantaged groups: Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims, and persons with disabilities and age-related vulnerabilities.
- **Land holding:** Pattern of land distribution "broadly reflects the socio-economic hierarchy — large landowners invariably belong to the upper castes, cultivators to the middle castes, and agricultural workers are largely Dalits and Adivasis." The rate of landlessness was highest among Dalits, at 57.3%. Among Muslims, it was 52.6%, and 56.8% of women-headed households were landless. Around 40% of all those displaced by "development activity" were Adivasis. Where Dalits, Muslims and women owned land, the holdings were meagre in size, with only 2.08% of Dalit households owning more than two hectares of land. Also, the quality of land owned by Dalits was very poor, with 58% of it having no irrigation facility.

- **Land reform** efforts have not benefited Dalits, women or Muslims significantly, according to the IXR. Land allotments to SC/ST households were often only on paper, as allottees were forcefully evicted or not allowed to take possession, noted the report.
- **Digital exclusion:** Almost 1.063 billion Indians were offline even though India ranks among the top five nations in terms of the total number of Internet users. Poverty and geographic location were the two major barriers to digital access, with urban locations enjoying better Internet penetration rates. Government initiatives to improve IT access have been riddled with implementation problems like poor infrastructure, a lack of adequate institutional frameworks, low literacy in the targeted areas, and poor cooperation from government officials.

Sources: the hindu.

New book celebrates the Reang of Tripura

In an attempt to document and preserve the cultural and social diversity of the Reang, a unique and detailed publication by Lincoln Reang, titled '**Mapping with respect to Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in Tripura**', is being published by the Tribal Research and Cultural Institute, Government of Tripura.



What you need to know?

- Reang is a tribal community residing in Tripura.
- They practise Jhum cultivation and reside in 'tong ghar' (bamboo huts) that are built on a raised platform.
- Reang (also known as Riang) are among the 19 tribes of Tripura, the only one to be classified as a 'Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)' in the State. The classification is based on their pre-agricultural level of technology and the low levels of literacy in the community. As per the 2011 census, the Reang population in Tripura numbers about 1,88,220.
- One of the main concerns today is the limited access to education.
- Traditionally, jhum (shifting) cultivation has been one of the primary agricultural activities of the Reang tribe. However, with land rights being granted, many members of the community have taken to ploughing or settled cultivation.
- Members of the Reang tribe are generally known to be shy and hardly ever depart from their traditional way of life. Till a few decades ago, they did not mix with people of other communities. However, over the past few years, changes have slowly started creeping into their way of life.

Sources: the hindu.

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

Measurement of Liveability Index

Ministry of Urban Development is planning to launch measuring of Liveability Index of cities based on indigenously evolved Index. The Ministry has already invited bids for selecting the agency for carrying out the assessment based on the parameters evolved by the Ministry.

- To start with, Liveability Standards of 140 cities including 53 cities with population of one million and above and Smart Cities will be assessed.

What you need to know?

- The Ministry of Urban Development has come out with a detailed document on "Methodology for Collection and Computation of Liveability Standards in Cities" for the benefit of States and Cities.
- Cities will be assessed on 15 core parameters relating to Governance, social infrastructure pertaining to education, health and safety and security, economic aspects and physical infrastructure like housing, open spaces, land use, energy and water availability, solid waste management, pollution etc.
- Cities will be ranked based on Liveability Index that would cover a total of 79 aspects.

Significance of this move:

This promotes a sense of healthy competition among cities and towns in the country to focus their attention on improving governance and infrastructure availability.

Sources: pib.

Swachh Survekshan-2017

[Swachh Survekshan](#) rankings for the year 2017 have been released.

What you need to know about Swachh Survekshan 2017?

Swachh Survekshan-2017 commissioned by the Ministry of Urban Development during January – February, 2017 aimed at capturing the improvement in sanitation scenario, primarily based on making cities and towns Open Defecation Free and improvement in processing of municipal solid waste. Accordingly, it is outcome oriented.

Criteria and weightages for different components of sanitation related aspects used for the Survey are:

- Solid Waste Management including Door-to-Door collection, Processing and Disposal, ODF status etc: 45% of total 2,000 marks i.e 900 marks.
- Citizen feedback: 30% i.e 600 of total marks.
- Independent observation: 25% i.e 500 marks.

Performance of cities:

- Top 10 clean cities of India in 2017 are: Indore -1, Bhopal-2, Visakhapatnam-3, Surat-4, Mysuru-5, Tiruchirapally-6, New Delhi Municipal Council-7, Navi Mumbai-8, Tirupati-9 and Vadodara-10.
- Bottom 10 clean cities/towns of India in 2017 are: Gonda (UP)-434, Bhusawal (Maharashtra)-433, Bagaha (Bihar)-432, Hardoi (Uttarakhand)-431, Katihar (Bihar)-430, Bahraich (UP)-429, Muktsar (Punjab)-428, Abohar (Punjab)-427, Shahjahanpur (UP)- 426 and Khurja (UP)-425.
- Four of the bottom 10 clean cities are from UP, two each from Bihar and Punjab and one each from Uttarakhand and Maharashtra.
- Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh account for 31 of the top 50 clean cities with 12 in Gujarat, 11 in MP and 8 in AP. Telangana and Tamil Nadu account for 4 cities each in top 50, followed by Maharashtra with 3.
- Chandigarh, Chattisgarh, Delhi, HP, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Sikkim and UP account for one city each in top 50 clean cities of the country.
- Rajasthan and Punjab have 5 towns each in the bottom 50, followed by Maharashtra-2 and one each from Haryana, Karnataka and Lakshadweep.
- Faridabad in Haryana has emerged as the ‘Fastest Mover Big City’. At the national level, Tirupati was ranked the ‘Cleanest Medium City’ while Ambikapur, Chattisgarh bagged this honour in Small Cities category.
- Rewa, Madhya Pradesh emerged as the ‘Faster Mover’ in medium cities category, Khargone, Madhya Pradesh moved the fastest by significantly improving its rank this year over that of 2014 Survey in small cities category.

Sources: pib.



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

Curious case of dip, rise in Indian seas

A team of scientists have found decadal variations in temperatures of North Indian Ocean waters.

- The NIO consists of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal and part of the Indian Ocean up till the 5°S latitude.

Highlights of the study:

- From 1993 to 2003 — the first decade when satellites started to consistently track the rise and fall of ocean heights and global temperatures soared — the North Indian Ocean (NIO) sea levels fell.
- After 2004, sea levels began an unprecedented, accelerated spike till 2014.
- This rise and fall was even as global temperatures steadily climbed and registered their largest two-decadal jump in more than a century.
- Scientists associated with the study said that such a “decadal swing” in the North Indian Ocean was unique and never observed in either the Pacific or Atlantic oceans.
- Scientists say wind flows, which welled warm water on the Indian Ocean surface, changed directions every decade and probably influenced sea level patterns. It could be that coming decades — in spite of rapid, rising temperatures — will see a fall in sea levels but that’s still hypothetical.

Reasons for rise in sea level temperatures in NIO:

Sea levels primarily rise due to **water expanding from atmospheric heat and, more water being added** from, for instance, melting ice sheets and glaciers. In this case, 70% of the NIO's warming could be explained by expansion.

Unlike the Pacific and Atlantic, the NIO is hemmed in all sides, except for an outlet on the southern side. This influenced the rate at which heat was absorbed and flushed out from within the system.

Significance of these findings:

This inter-decadal trend is an extremely important factor and underlines why we need to plan coastal management better.

Sources: the hindu.

In news- Indian Ocean rise and fall

Since 2004, it has been known that the Indian Ocean has been rising particularly rapidly. However, it turned out that this was specific to a smaller stretch called the North Indian Ocean, which consists of the Bay of Bengal, the Arabian Sea and a large part of the Indian Ocean until the 5 degree S latitude. This is an imaginary line cutting through Indonesia, central Africa and Peru. More surprisingly, as a team of oceanographers recently observed, the North Indian Ocean sea levels actually dipped between 1993 and 2004, at about 0.3 mm per year, but after 2004, the rise was 6 mm annually. Such a fluctuating trend hasn't been observed for the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean.

Why did this happen?

Unlike the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean, the North Indian Ocean is hemmed in on all sides, except an outlet on the southern side. This influences the rate at which heat is absorbed and flushed out from within the system. According to calculations, heat was moving out slower after 2004 than during the 1990s. Moreover, wind flows, which led to warm water welling up on the Indian Ocean surface, changed directions every decade and probably influenced sea level patterns.

What does this imply?

This means a rise in average global temperature doesn't mean a concurrent rise in sea levels everywhere. Every year in the last decade has broken temperature records that have held for over a century but researchers associated with this study are willing to wager that North Indian Ocean levels may see a fall over the next decade (like seen between 1993 and 2004). This points to a need for more research to understand the inherent variability of the Indian Ocean.

This could help sharpen monsoon forecasts and predicting coastal erosion patterns. Better understanding of sea level undulations could also inform future reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Sources: the hindu.



INSIGHTS TEST SERIES FOR UPSC PRELIMINARY EXAM 2017 (GS PAPER-1)

HIGHLIGHTS

- NCERT and other Standard Books based highly conceptual Tests for General Studies Paper - 1
- Emphasis on **Self Study** by providing practical Timetable for whole year that can be followed on a regular basis
- 32 Full Length Tests Each with 100 High Quality Questions
- Focus on enabling you to get 130+ score in Paper - 1
- Analysis of your Performance in different categories after Each Test
- All India Ranking of Individual and Cumulative Tests
- Duration of test series is for one year. Date of your ranking and performance in tests will be removed before the beginning of 2018 Test Series.
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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.

Haryana House passes motion for separate HC

Haryana Assembly has unanimously passed a resolution, urging the Parliament to effect an appropriate amendment in the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966 to provide for the creation of a separate High Court for the State in Chandigarh.

Need for a separate HC:

- While Haryana has completed 50 years of its existence as a separate state, a separate HC has still not been provided for the state. This has led to delays in the disposal of cases due to heavy workload in the common HC.
- Also, there are only 18 judges from Haryana against a total sanctioned strength of 85. There are 13 Judges from Haryana under direct quota drawn from advocates of the HC, against a sanctioned strength of 23, leading to under-representation of the advocates from Haryana.

Sources: the hindu.

NSCN-IM on recruitment spree

According to a recent finding, in last two years that the Centre signed a framework agreement with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) to find a solution to the decades-old Naga sovereignty issue, the outfit has recruited 5,000 cadres.

- NSCN-IM, one of the largest groups representing the Nagas, has been recruiting locals on the ground that they would be absorbed in the central armed police forces once the final agreement is signed. The details of the framework agreement are yet to be made public.

Background:

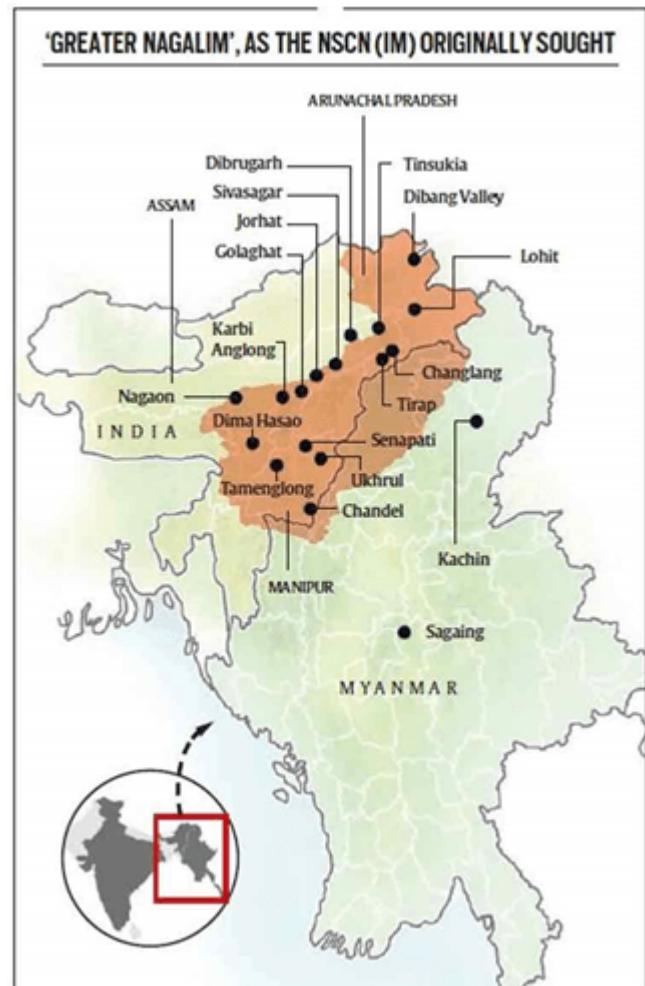
In August 2015, the government had signed the framework agreement with the NSCN-IM for finding a final solution to the vexed Naga issue.

How old is the Naga political issue?

The British annexed Assam in 1826, and in 1881, the Naga Hills too became part of British India. The first sign of Naga resistance was seen in the formation of the Naga Club in 1918, which told the Simon Commission in 1929 "to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times". In 1946 came the Naga National Council (NNC), which, under the leadership of Angami Zapu Phizo, declared Nagaland an independent state on August 14, 1947. The NNC resolved to establish a "sovereign Naga state" and conducted a "referendum" in 1951, in which "99 per cent" supported an "independent" Nagaland.

Origin of NSCN:

On November 11, 1975, the government got a section of NNC leaders to sign the Shillong Accord, under which this section of NNC and NFG agreed to give up arms. A group of about 140 members led by Thuingaleng Muivah, who were at that time in China, refused to accept the Shillong Accord, and formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland in 1980. Muivah also had Isak Chisi Swu and S S Khaplang with him. In 1988, the NSCN split into NSCN (IM) and NSCN (K).



after a violent clash. While the NNC began to fade away, and Phizo died in London in 1991, the NSCN (IM) came to be seen as the “mother of all insurgencies” in the region.

What are the demands now?

A “Greater Nagalim” comprising “all contiguous Naga-inhabited areas”, along with Nagaland. That included several districts of Assam, Arunachal and Manipur, as also a large tract of Myanmar. The map of “Greater Nagalim” has about 1,20,000 sq km, while the state of Nagaland consists of 16,527 sq km. The claims have always kept Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh wary of a peace settlement that might affect their territories. The Nagaland Assembly has endorsed the ‘Greater Nagalim’ demand — “Integration of all Naga-inhabited contiguous areas under one administrative umbrella” — as many as five times: in December 1964, August 1970, September 1994, December 2003 and as recently as on July 27, 2015.

Sources: the hindu.

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

Rail regulator to define performance standards

As per a resolution approved recently by the Railways Board, India’s first rail regulator, Rail Development Authority (RDA), would not just look at tariff structures for passenger and freight operations but also set standards of performance and efficiency that would be enforceable under the Railways Act.

Key facts:

- The resolution authorises RDA to define standards of performance and efficiency; such standards would be notified as rules under the Railway Act to give a binding force upon acceptance. It will also be “authorised to check for deviations and suggest remedial measures.”
- The regulator will also provide guidance on quantity and quality of service provided to passengers. These may include setting standards including hours of service, frequency of trains, capacity per coach, cleanliness level, and quality of water, food, furnishing and linen.
- The regulator will, however, not involve itself in policy making of the Indian Railways, operations and maintenance of the rail system, financial management, setting technical standards and compliance of safety standards. The regulator would only make recommendations on tariff and not impose a tariff on the Indian Railways.

Background:

The Union Cabinet had last month approved setting up the rail regulator responsible for recommending passenger fares, setting performance standards for rail operations and creating a level playing field for private sector participation. The RDA will be an independent body with separate budget. The independence is ensured through separate budget, appointment and removal process.

Composition of RDA:

The Authority will have a **Chairman and three members with a fixed term of five years and will be allowed to engage experts from various fields.**

The Chairman and members of the Authority will be **appointed by a Search and Selection Committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary with members including the Railway Board Chairman, Department of Personnel and Training Secretary and Chairman of any regulatory body of the Central Government nominated by the Cabinet Secretary.**

Sources: the hindu.

Northern Zonal Council meeting

Zonal Council	Member States/Union Territories
Northern Zonal Council	Haryana, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jammu & Kashmir, National Capital Territory of Delhi and the Union Territory of Chandigarh
Central Zonal Council	Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh
Eastern Zonal Council	Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha
Western Zonal Council	Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and the Union Territories of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu
Southern Zonal Council	Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Telangana and the Union Territory of Puducherry

The 28th meeting of the Northern Zonal Council consisting of the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh was recently held at Chandigarh under the Chairmanship of Shri Rajnath Singh, Union Home Minister.

- The Zonal Council discussed and deliberated upon 18 items of common interest among the member states. The major items discussed were 'Need for fiscal and infrastructural harmony in Northern States; Joint efforts for export of fruits, flowers and vegetables from the States; Sharing of Water of various rivers of the region and also hydropower among States.

What you need to know about zonal councils?

Zonal councils have been established by the Parliament to promote interstate cooperation and coordination. They are statutory bodies established under the States Reorganisation Act 1956 and not constitutional bodies. They are only deliberative and advisory bodies.

There are 5 five Zonal councils namely:

- The Northern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, National Capital Territory of Delhi and Union Territory of Chandigarh.
- The Central Zonal Council, comprising the States of Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh.
- The Eastern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, and West Bengal.
- The Western Zonal Council, comprising the States of Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra and the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.
- The Southern Zonal Council, comprising the States of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and the Union Territory of Puducherry.

The North Eastern States i.e. (i) Assam (ii) Arunachal Pradesh (iii) Manipur (iv) Tripura (v) Mizoram (vi) Meghalaya (vii) Sikkim and (viii) Nagaland are not included in the Zonal Councils and their special problems are looked after by the North Eastern Council, set up under the North Eastern Council Act, 1972.

Composition:

- Chairman – The Union Home Minister is the Chairman of each of these Councils.
- Vice Chairman – The Chief Ministers of the States included in each zone act as Vice-Chairman of the Zonal Council for that zone by rotation, each holding office for a period of one year at a time.
- Members- Chief Minister and two other Ministers as nominated by the Governor from each of the States and two members from Union Territories included in the zone.
- Advisers- One person nominated by the Planning Commission (which has been replaced by NITI Ayog now) for each of the Zonal Councils, Chief Secretaries and another officer/Development Commissioner nominated by each of the States included in the Zone.

- Union Ministers are also invited to participate in the meetings of Zonal Councils depending upon necessity.

The main objectives of setting up of Zonal Councils are:

- Bringing out national integration.
- Arresting the growth of acute State consciousness, regionalism, linguism and particularistic tendencies.
- Enabling the Centre and the States to co-operate and exchange ideas and experiences.
- Establishing a climate of co-operation amongst the States for successful and speedy execution of development projects.

Sources: the hindu.

NBT to host diaspora meets

[National Book Trust](#) is planning to introduce a new element: a conference for the Indian diaspora. The trust has planned Beijing Book Fair in August, the Frankfurt Book Fair in October and Sharjah Book Fair in November as venues to host such meets.

Need for such conferences:

- The conferences will encourage overseas Indians — the “cultural ambassadors” of India abroad — to write literature on themes related to Indian values. The NBT will also offer to publish such works.
- The vision behind such conferences is two-fold: to bring Indian diaspora writers on one platform so that they can engage with one another and develop a common thought, and to encourage them to write literature that represents Indian values to reach out to the next generation of Indians in that country.

About NBT:

National Book Trust (NBT) is an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education of the Government of India. NBT now functions under aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development.

India's first Prime Minister Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru envisioned that NBT would be a bureaucracy-free structure that would publish low-cost books.

Sources: the hindu.

IB-like secrecy norms to be imposed on NTRO staff

National Technical Research Organisation ([NTRO](#)), the Central agency looking after technical surveillance, will now be bound by secrecy norms just like Intelligence Bureau (IB) and Research & Analyses Wing (RAW), with its staff restricted from speaking about the structure and functioning of the organisation.

- In this regard, the Home Ministry has issued a notification listing NTRO under The Intelligence Organisations (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1985, a demand being made by the organisation for over a decade now.

Implications of this move:

The inclusion of NTRO in the Schedule under the Intelligence Organisations (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1985 will insulate it from answering queries under the Right to Information Act. The agency can decline RTI queries on its structure, functioning, personnel and organisation affairs by invoking Section 6 of the Act.

- Under Section 6 of the Intelligence Organisations (Restriction of Rights) Act, 1985, no member of a scheduled intelligence agency can communicate with the press or publish or cause to be published any book, letter, pamphlet, poster or other document except with the prior permission of the head of the intelligence organisation.
- The member also cannot use the name of his organisation for purposes not authorised by the head or in any other manner except for purposes relating to the official work and functioning of the organisation itself.



- Any person who contravenes the aforesaid provisions will be punished with imprisonment for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine which may extend to Rs 2,000 or with both.

What you need to know about NTRO?

The NTRO was created after the 1999 Kargil conflict as a dedicated technical intelligence agency. It has been fighting tooth and nail to get included in the list as it has the right to lawfully intercept and monitor communications externally. It reports to the PMO and the NSA.

Sources: the hindu.

Cabinet approves phasing out Foreign Investment Promotion Board

The Union Cabinet has given its approval to the phasing out of Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB). The proposal entails abolishing the FIPB and allowing administrative Ministries/Departments to process applications for FDI requiring government approval.

Who will perform FIPB's duties?

Henceforth, the work relating to processing of applications for FDI and approval of the Government thereon under the extant FDI Policy and FEMA, shall now be handled by the concerned Ministries/Departments in consultation with the Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion(DIPP), Ministry of Commerce, which will also issue the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for processing of applications and decision of the Government under the extant FDI policy.

Significance of this move:

With this, Foreign Investors will find India more attractive destination and this will result in more inflow of FDI. The move will provide ease of doing business and will help in promoting the principle of Maximum Governance and Minimum Government.

About FIPB:

The Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB), housed in the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance, is an inter-ministerial body, responsible for processing of FDI proposals and making recommendations for Government approval.

Main tasks:

- It considers and recommends foreign direct investment (FDI) which does not come under the automatic route.
- It provides a single window clearance for proposals on FDI in India.

FIPB comprises of the following Secretaries to the Government of India:

- Secretary to Government, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance – Chairperson
- Secretary to Government, Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion, Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- Secretary to Government, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce & Industry
- Secretary to Government, Economic Relations, Ministry of External Affairs
- Secretary to Government, Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs.

On what basis decisions on FDI are taken by the FIPB?

The extant FDI Policy, Press Notes and other related notified guidelines formulated by Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry are the bases of the FIPB decisions.

Sources: pib.

National Commission for Women holds Interactive Meeting with State Commissions for Women

The National Commission for Women recently organised an Interactive Meeting of the State Commissions for Women with a view to strengthening the process of NCW's networking with State Commissions for Women and to gain from each other's experience. The meeting was attended by Chairpersons, Members and Member secretaries of various State Commissions for Women.

After the meeting, NCW came up with the following recommendations:

- State Commissions for Women should take up with their respective State Government for setting up of Hostels for girls and women.
- State Commission should pro-actively coordinate and send feedback on the complaint matters forwarded to them by NCW in the last six months.
- SCWs may pursue with the state Government on the implementation of the Supreme Court judgment on ban of un-regulated sale of acids with a view to prevent horrific crimes against women specifically acid attacks.

What you need to know about NCW?

The National Commission for Women was set up as statutory body in January 1992 under the National Commission for Women Act, 1990.

The primary mandate of the National Commission for Women and State Commissions for Women Commission is to safeguard and protect the interests of women. It has wide responsibility covering almost all aspects of women development.

Sources: pib.

RBI Dy. chief selection norms eased

The government has relaxed the selection criteria for Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor's appointment and opened the post for private sector candidates.

Who can apply?

As per the latest notification by the RBI, applications for the post can just be a board member or a full time director having 15 years of experience in banking and financial market operations.

- The eligibility criteria show that the government is seeking candidates from beyond its traditional recruitment base. Besides practicing bankers from both private and public sectors, it makes even consultants who have worked closely with banks eligible for the post.
- As per the notification, the appointment will be for a term of three years in the pay scale of Rs 2,25,000 pr month and the age limit has been capped at 60, which could be relaxed in exceptional cases.

Background:

The RBI has traditionally appointed four deputy governors: Two of them are from within the central bank, one is an economist generally from the government, and the other is from the banking sector. So far, the deputy governor from the banking sector has been from the public sector banks.

Sources: the hindu.

COMMISSIONS

• National Commission for Women

- Set-up in 1992 to safe guard the interests of women.
- Has a wide mandate covering all aspects of women's development and includes:–
 - Investigating and examining the legal safeguards provided for women under the constitution and other laws.
 - Reviewing existing provisions in various laws and recommend amendments to fulfill any gap.
 - Looking into complaints and take suo-moto notice.
 - Taking up research/studies on issues related to women.

Prices of 31 more drugs capped

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) has capped the prices of 31 more drugs.

- The notification brings under price control intrauterine devices used for birth control; Factor VIII, a life-saving medicine for haemophilic patients; morphine, a pain killer; and rifampicin, a powerful antibiotic used to treat infections such as tuberculosis and leprosy.
- With these 31 drugs, the NPPA has brought 791 medicines under price control. There are 829 drugs on the National List of Essential Medicines, 2015, all of which will be brought under price control.

Background:

The NPPA periodically revises prices of essential medicines under the Drug (Pricing Control) Order (DPCO) that has about 650 formulations under it. These prices can be increased by companies by a maximum of 10% depending on inflation.

National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA):

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

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

Functions of National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority:

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

Sources: the hindu.

New Chairman for National Commission for Minorities

Syed Ghayorul Hasan Rizvi has been appointed as the new Chairman of the National Commission for Minorities.

What you need to know about NCM?

The NCM was set up under the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 to look into complaints from members of five religious communities — Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and Zoroastrians (Parsis). Jain community was notified as a minority community in 2014.



NATIONAL PHARMACEUTICAL PRICING AUTHORITY (NPPA)

- ❖ The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA), an independent body of experts in the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers was formed by the Govt. of India at 1997.
- ❖ Resolution published in the Gazette of India No.159 dated 29.08.97.
- ❖ The Resolution mentioned that the Government had been experiencing that the present mechanism for the fixation and revision of prices of bulk drugs and formulations was cumbersome, complicated and time consuming.

National Commission for Minorities

- Besides NCM, 15 states, including Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra and Assam, which are home to sizeable minority populace, have set up commissions at their respective levels.
- Aggrieved persons belonging to the communities may approach the state minorities commissions concerned for redressal of their grievances or send their representations to the NCM after exhausting all avenues of remedies available.
- The functions of the state commissions, inter-alia, are to safeguard and protect the interests of minorities provided in the Constitution and laws enacted by Parliament and state legislatures.

UN Declaration

The NCM adheres to the UN Declaration of 18 December 1992 which states that "“States shall protect the existence of the National or Ethnic, Cultural, Religious and Linguistic identity of minorities within their respective territories and encourage conditions for the promotion of that identity.” [1]

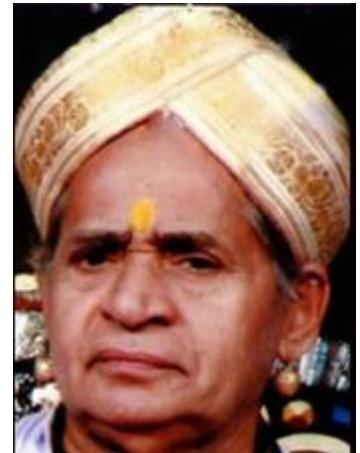
Sources: pib.

Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Govinda Bhat

Yakshagana artiste Surikumeri K. Govinda Bhat has been chosen for the Kendra Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for 2016. He is among the nine artistes chosen for the award in theatre category.

Know about the Sangeet Natak Akademi:

- The Sangeet Natak Akademi – India’s national academy for music, dance and drama – is the first National Academy of the arts set-up by the Republic of India. It was created by a resolution of Government of India.
- It was set up in 1952.
- The academy functions as the apex body of the performing arts in the country to preserve and promote the vast cultural heritage of India expressed in music, dance and drama.
- It also works with governments and art academies in states and territories of the country.
- The academy Renders advice and assistance to the government of India in the task of formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the field. It carries a part of the responsibilities of the state for fostering cultural contacts between regions in the country, as well as between India and the world.
- The Akademi Awards are the highest national recognition conferred on eminent artistes.
- Each year the Academy awards Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowships, Ratna Sadasya, to distinguished individuals for their contribution to the field of arts, music, dance and theatre.
- Ustad Bismillah Khan award is given to young artists for their talent in the fields of music, dance and drama.



Sources: the hindu.

North Eastern Council

Plenary of the [North Eastern Council](#) was recently held under the chairmanship of Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Dr. Jitendra Singh.

Know about North Eastern Council:

In 1971, the Indian Central government set up the North Eastern Council by an Act of Parliament. The eight States of North East India viz. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim, are members of the council, with their respective Chief Ministers and Governors representing them. Sikkim was added to the council in the year 2002.

- The headquarters of the council is situated in Shillong and functions under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region of the (Government of India).
- The Council is an advisory body and may discuss any matter in which the North Eastern States have a common interest and advise the Central Government as to the action to be taken on any such matter. This was done so as to take care of the economic and social planning of these states, as well as to provide mediation in the event of inter-State disputes.

Sources: pib.

Important Decision of NCST

National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) has asked the Department of Personnel and Training **to constitute a committee having minimum of two members from ST community to investigate any matter requiring penalty on employees belonging to Scheduled Tribes community.**

- As per the recommendations of the commission **if ST officers are not available in the Department or Ministry then ST officers from other Departments may be included in the committee.**
- The commission has also asked the Department of Personnel and Training to issue instructions to all Departments and Ministries so that they take necessary action on the recommendations of NCST. If the Department face any problem than before approaching the High Court they should take permission of the concerned Ministry.

About NCST:

[NCST](#) was established by amending Article 338 and inserting a new Article 338A in the Constitution through the Constitution (89th Amendment) Act, 2003. By this amendment, the erstwhile National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was replaced by two separate Commissions namely- (i) the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC), and (ii) the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST).

- The term of office of Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and each member is three years from the date of assumption of charge. The Chairperson has been given the rank of Union Cabinet Minister and the Vice-Chairperson that of a Minister of State and other Members have the ranks of a Secretary to the Government of India.
- NCST is empowered to investigate and monitor matters relating to safeguards provided for STs under the Constitution or under other laws or under Govt. order. The Commission is also authorized to inquire into specific complaints relating to rights and safeguards of STs and to participate and advise in the Planning Process relating to socio-economic development of STs and to evaluate the progress of their development under the Union and States.
- The commission submits its report to the President annually on the working of safeguards and measures required for effective implementation of Programmers/ Schemes relating to welfare and socio-economic development of STs.

Sources: pib.

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

RERA, 2016 comes into force

The [Real Estate Regulatory Act, 2016 \(RERA\)](#) is a landmark development in the history of the sector. The Act comes into force on May 1, 2017. It is aimed not only at bringing in more transparency and accountability but also provide mechanisms to simplify and regulate the buying and selling of all types of properties. The Act will give a major facelift to the methodology in which this sector works, right from builders to end-users to investors to lending institutions and government agencies involved.

Key facts:

- Ahead of the Act coming into force, the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation has formulated and circulated Model Real Estate Regulations** for adoption by the Regulatory Authorities in the States/UTs.

- Under these Regulations, developers are required to display sanctioned plans and layout plans of at least 3 feet X 2 feet size at all marketing offices, other offices where properties are sold, all branch offices and head office of the promoters in addition to the site of project.
- **Real Estate Regulatory Authorities may take decisions on all issues preferably through consensus failing which through voting with Chairman using Casting Vote in case of a tie.**
- There shall be **quorum for the meetings of the Regulatory Authorities** and if a meeting is adjourned due to lack of such quorum, such meeting can take place without quorum. Members of Regulatory Authorities shall declare interest if any in the matters coming up for discussion and shall not participate there in.

Some of the major provisions of the Act, besides mandatory registration of projects and Real Estate Agents include:

- Depositing **70% of the funds collected from buyers in a separate bank account** in case of new projects and 70% of unused funds in case of ongoing projects.
- Projects with plot size of **minimum 500 sq.mt or eight apartments** shall be registered with Regulatory Authorities.
- Both developers and buyers to pay **the same penal interest** of SBI's Marginal Cost of Lending Rate plus two percent in case of delays.
- **Liability of developers for structural defects for five years.**
- Imprisonment of up to three years for developers and up to one year in case of agents and buyers for violation of orders of Appellate Tribunals and Regulatory Authorities.

Main features of the Real Estate Bill

1. To bring in single-window clearance for all approvals
2. A minimum of 70% collections from buyers to be deposited in separate escrow account to cover cost of construction and land
3. State-level Real Estate Regulatory Authorities (RERAs) to be set up, to regulate transactions related to both residential and commercial projects
4. Appellate Tribunals to adjudicate cases in 60 days

Sources: the hindu.

One IP- Two Dispensaries scheme

"One IP- Two Dispensaries" scheme was launched by the government on the occasion of International Labour Day.

What is it for?

Under this scheme, ESIC has given an option to an Insured Person (IP) **to choose two dispensaries, one for self and another for family through an employer.**

Significance of this scheme:

Because of non-availability of option of second dispensary, the dependant members of family are often deprived of medical benefits. By introducing the concept of 'One IP- Two Dispensaries', IP as well as their family members would now be able to get treatment from either of the dispensaries and in case of emergency from any ESI Institution. This will benefit all IPs, especially migrant workers who are working in other than home State, while their families are living in their native States.

Background:

As of now, around 3 crores IPs are covered under ESIC and total number of beneficiaries i.e. IPs and their family members is over 12 crores.

Sources: pib.

Patna HC sets aside ban on ENA

The Patna High Court has set aside the Bihar government's decision to ban production of **Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA)** by several distillery and liquor companies in the State.

What's the issue?

After imposing total prohibition last year in April, the government on January 24 this year issued a notification saying the licences of ENA manufacturers would not be renewed. However, a petition was filed in the court challenging the notification. The petitioners submitted they had been given the licence to produce ENA, also known as industrial alcohol, after the government imposed total prohibition through its notification dated October 2, 2016.

ENA (EXTRA NEUTRAL ALCOHOL) PURITY
96.4%

What has the court said?

The court observed that the government had no right to ban production of ENA as it is used in various other industries apart from making liquor.

The court said: "The State does not have legislative competence to deal with the subject of alcohol unfit for human consumption. We see no reason to hold the provisions of Sections 13, 23 and 24(1) of the Prohibition Act as unconstitutional or ultra vires, as in the light of the declaration with respect to including ENA within the definition of Intoxicant to be not permissible, the applicability of these provisions to alcohol unfit for human consumption does not arise now."

Significance of this decision:

The verdict meant that investment to the tune of Rs. 100 crore had been safeguarded.

Background:

The Extra Neutral alcohol or ENA is a **high distilled alcohol without any impurities and others destined to be used in the high cosmetic industry, perfumeries** as well as for the production of alcoholic beverages such as whisky, vodka, gin, cane, liqueurs and alcoholic fruit beverages and aperitifs.

Sources: the hindu.

National Steel Policy 2017

CABINET APPROVES NATIONAL STEEL POLICY 2017 (1/2)

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for National Steel Policy (NSP) 2017. The new Steel Policy enshrines the long term vision of the Government to give impetus to the steel sector. It seeks to enhance domestic steel consumption and ensure high quality steel production and create a technologically advanced and globally competitive steel industry.

Background:

Steel is one of the most important products in the modern world and forms the backbone to any industrial economy. India being one of the fastest growing economies in the world, and steel finding its extensive application right from construction, infrastructure, power, aerospace and industrial machinery to consumer products, the sector is of strategic importance to the country. The Indian steel sector has grown exponentially over the past few years to be the third largest producer of steel globally, contributing to about 2% of the country's GDP and employing about 5 lakh people directly and about 20 lakh people indirectly. Untapped potential with a strong policy support becomes the ideal platform for growth.

Highlights of the policy:

- The New Steel Policy, 2017 aspires to **achieve 300MT of steel-making capacity by 2030**. This would translate into additional investment of Rs. 10 lakh Crore by 2030-31.
- The Policy seeks to **increase consumption of steel** and major segments are infrastructure, automobiles and housing. New Steel Policy seeks to increase per capita steel consumption to the level of 160 Kgs by 2030 from existing level of around 60 Kg.
- Potential of MSME steel sector has been recognised. Policy stipulates that adoption of energy efficient technologies in the MSME steel sector will be encouraged to improve the overall productivity & reduce energy intensity.
- Steel Ministry will facilitate R&D in the sector through **the establishment of Steel Research and Technology Mission of India (SRTMI)**. The initiative is aimed to spearhead R&D of national importance in iron & steel sector utilizing tripartite synergy amongst industry, national R&D laboratories and academic institutes.
- Ministry through policy measures will ensure availability of raw materials like Iron ore, Coking coal and non-coking coal, Natural gas etc. at competitive rates.

Way ahead:

With the roll out of the National Steel Policy-2017, it is envisaged that the industry will be steered in creating an environment for promoting domestic steel and thereby ensuring a scenario where production meets the anticipated pace of growth in consumption, through a technologically advanced and globally competitive steel industry. This will be facilitated by Ministry of Steel, in coordination with relevant Ministries, as may be required.

Sources: pib.

Policy for providing preference to domestically manufactured iron & steel products in government procurement

The Union Cabinet has approved the policy for providing preference to domestically manufactured iron & steel products on Government procurement.

- This policy seeks to accomplish the PM's vision of 'Make in India' with objective of nation building and encourage domestic manufacturing.

What you need to know about the new policy?

- The policy **mandates to provide preference to Domestically Manufactured Iron & Steel Products (DMI&SP), in Government Procurement.**
- The policy is **applicable on all government tenders** where price bid is yet to be opened.
- The policy provides a **minimum value addition of 15% in notified steel products** which are covered under preferential procurement.
- In order to provide flexibility, Ministry of Steel may review specified steel products and the minimum value addition criterion.
- While implementing who shall provide the policy, it poses **trust on each domestic manufacturer who shall provide self-certification** to the procuring Government agency declaring that the iron & steel products are domestically manufactured in terms of the domestic value addition prescribed.
- It shall not normally be the responsibility of procuring agency to verify the correctness of the claim. In few cases, the onus of demonstrating the correctness-of the same shall be on the bidder when asked to do so.

POLICY PREFERENCE TO DOMESTICALLY MANUFACTURED IRON & STEEL

- **Cabinet approves Policy for providing preference to domestically manufactured iron & steel in products in government procurement**
- **Objective: to accomplish PM's vision of 'Make in India' and encourage domestic manufacturing**
- **Mandates preference to Domestically Manufactured Iron & Steel Products, in Government Procurement**
- **Applicable on all government tenders where price bid is yet to be opened**
- **A minimum value addition of 15% in notified steel products covered under preferential procurement**
- **Reposes trust in each domestic manufacturer who shall provide self-certification to the procuring Government agency on domestic manufacturing**
- **To promote growth and development of domestic steel Industry**

- In case any manufacturer is aggrieved, a **grievance redressal committee** set up under the Ministry of Steel shall dispose of the complaint in a time bound manner, in four weeks.
- There are provisions in the policy for waivers to all such procurements, where specific grades of steel are not manufactured in the country, or the quantities as per the demand of the project cannot be met through domestic sources.

Significance of this policy:

The policy is envisaged to promote growth and development of domestic steel Industry and reduce the inclination to use, low quality low cost imported steel in Government funded projects.

Sources: pib.

Kambala Bill to be sent again to President with minor modifications

The Union Home Ministry has asked Karnataka to modify the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Karnataka Amendment) Bill, 2017, and resend it for legalising kambala, the traditional buffalo slush race.

What's suggested?

Union Home Ministry has suggested to the government to modify or omit the phrase "*subject to such other conditions as may be prescribed*" in sub-section 2 of section 3, in the Bill. The phrase opens the window for inclusion of more such sports involving animals through government notifications in the future, as the Centre was keen to prevent such powers to the State government.

As per the modification sought, State government's powers to include more sports or races involving animals by notifications in future will be clipped.

Background:

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly had cleared the Bill in February 2017. Governor had referred the Bill to the President for his assent. The Bill seeks to exempt kambala and bullock-cart racing from the ambit of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960.

About Kambala:

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

Over the years, it has however become an organised sport with animal rights activists claiming that the buffaloes run in the race due to fear of being beaten, which the organisers dismiss, saying no violence is involved and that several modifications had been made to ensure that it is an animal friendly event.

Sources: the hindu.

No-fly list: Soon, unruly flyers could be grounded for up to 2 yrs

The government plans to empower domestic airlines to ban unruly passengers for up to two years. In this regard, the civil aviation ministry has released draft rules for a "national no-fly list" of rowdy passengers — the first of its kind in the world — which allow an airline to bar an individual from three months to a maximum of two years, depending on the nature of the offence.

The ministry has categorised "disruptions" by flyers into three levels:

- Level 1 is for disruptive behaviour like physical gestures.
- Level 2 is for physically abusive behaviour like pushing, kicking, and sexual harassment.
- Level 3 for life-threatening behaviour and damage to aircraft operating systems.

Key facts:

- For offences under level 1, a passenger can be grounded for three months, while for level 2 and level 3 offences, he or she can be banned for six months and two years, respectively.

- International airlines, too, could use these guidelines if they wanted to. Airlines can ban a passenger from flying immediately but that passenger won't come on the national no-fly list immediately.

But, what happens when a passenger feels that he has been wrongly barred from flying?

To address this issue, the government has proposed to form two redress committees — at the airlines-level to be headed by a retired district judge, and at the national level with a retired high court judge as its head. All such grievances will be addressed within 10 days.

Montreal protocol 2014:

The global airline lobby group International Air Transport Association (IATA) urged India to ratify the Montreal Protocol 2014, which deals with the safety of flights and passengers.

To address the increase in unruly passenger issues, the **International Air Transport Association (IATA)** conducted a detailed analysis of such incidents and, in 2009, made a formal request to the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to review and enhance the Tokyo Convention of 1963. The Tokyo Convention, which took effect in 1969, governs criminal offenses and other acts committed on board aircraft that jeopardize the safety of flights. A diplomatic conference with 100 governments participating resulted in ICAO's adoption of the Protocol to Amend the Convention on Offences and Certain Other Acts Committed on Board Aircraft, done at Montreal on April 4, 2014 (Montreal Protocol 2014).

Montreal Protocol 2014 makes several key improvements to the Tokyo Convention that strengthen an airline's position when addressing unruly passengers. These include:

- The Protocol notably extends the jurisdiction to try the unruly passenger from the state of aircraft registration to also include the states in which the operator is located and that is the destination of the flight (including a state to which a flight may be diverted).
- This will greatly facilitate the prosecution of unruly passengers upon disembarkation.
- It also clarifies what constitutes unruly behavior by simply requiring reasonable grounds to believe that a serious offense has been committed. Such offenses include physical assault, or the threat thereof, and failure to follow crew instructions.
- Importantly, Montreal Protocol 2014 expressly recognizes an airline's right to seek compensation for expenses caused by unruly behavior.

When will the protocol come into force?

The Protocol requires the ratification, acceptance, approval or accession of 22 nations to take effect. At present, there are 30 signatories and eight ratifications and accessions.

Sources: the hindu.

Labour meet to focus on social security

The Standing Labour Committee will shortly meet to decide the agenda of the ILC, also known as the 'labour parliament' of the country. Providing social security cover for the entire workforce may be the central theme of the upcoming **47th Indian Labour Conference (ILC)**.

Background:

The Labour Ministry had earlier this year proposed a law on social security which will provide social security cover to the entire workforce in the country, including self-employed and agricultural workers. Factories employing even a single worker will have to contribute towards social security benefits, as per the proposed social security code.

What you need to know about ILC?

The ILC is the apex level **tripartite forum in the Labour Ministry which includes representatives from trade unions, employers and state governments**.

- It advises the Government on the issues concerning working class of the country.

- As recommended by the National Labour Conference held in September 17-18, 1982, only **Trade Union Organisations, which have, a membership of more than five lakhs spread over four States and four industries are given representation in the ILC.**
- All the 12 Central Trade Union Organisations, Central Organisations of employers, all State Governments and Union Territories and Central Ministries/Departments concerned with the agenda items, are the members of the ILC.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre mulls financial assistance to fisherfolk

Why is IUU fishing a problem?

- Significantly disadvantages honest “authorized” fishers
- Contributes to.....
 - resource decline, overfishing
 - loss of rent (e.g. access agreements in developing/neighbouring countries)
- Globally estimated to be worth \$10 - 23.5 billion
 - Within the S.Asia / SE Asia region it has been estimated at >8% of fisheries catch (2.5 million tonnes, \$2.5 billion)
 - 3.4 – 8.1 million tonnes (SE Asia MRAG)
 - Suluwesi sea ~30% of total value of fishery = \$227 million
- Undermines....
 - management of fisheries on the high seas
 - effective management of national fisheries
 - conservation measures
- Developing countries most at risk
 - 50% of IUU catch by foreign “large scale” vessels
 - 36% domestic large scale
- Now recognized as international environmental crime
 - Linked to other forms of crime (e.g. fuel smuggling)
 - Organized crime linkages – crime syndicates



With about four million people — mainly small-scale and artisanal fishers — in India depending on marine fisheries resources for livelihood, the Centre plans to provide them financial assistance and introduce norms to improve labour conditions in the sector.

- However, it will ensure that the Indian fishing fleet does not engage in ‘Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated’ (IUU) fishing, according to the National Policy on Marine Fisheries, 2017.

Need for financial assistance:

The Indian marine fisheries account for an economic wealth of about Rs. 65,000 crore, according to the policy — meant to guide the coordination and management of India’s marine fisheries during the next 10 years.

- However, fishermen are having difficulties in availing institutional credit to buy fishing implements and crafts, and that the risky nature of returns has led to many fishermen falling into the debt trap of private financiers and middlemen.
- Therefore, the Centre, with the help of National Bank of Agriculture and Rural Development, will provide financial assistance to fishermen with liberal terms and conditions.

What is IUU fishing?

“IUU” stands for illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. IUU fishing includes all fishing that breaks fisheries laws or occurs outside the reach of fisheries laws and regulations. An important part of IUU fishing is illegal fishing, which usually refers to fishing without a license, fishing in a closed area, fishing with prohibited gear, fishing over a quota, or the fishing of prohibited species.

- Most of the world’s fish is caught in the national waters of coastal States. Illegal fishing in such areas can range from a licensed vessel fishing more than its allowed catch to a vessel coming into the zone with no fishing license at all, or even a vessel crew not reporting or underreporting their catch—even if the vessel is licensed to catch that species.
- A lot of unregulated fishing occurs on the high seas. The high seas are international waters beyond the exclusive economic zone, which extends 200 nautical miles from the shoreline, of a coastal state. Patchy regulation, little enforcement, and the vast expanse of the ocean—the high seas cover almost 45 percent of our planet—combine to allow rampant illegal and unregulated fishing in those areas.
- Even when unregulated fishing on the high seas does not break any national law, it can have a significant harmful impact on marine life in the world’s oceans. So, the international community needs to develop and implement policy solutions that both forbid and eradicate these activities.

What are the impacts of illegal fishing?

Illegal fishing adversely affects legitimate commercial fishers as well as fish populations. Illegal fishers avoid overhead costs, such as licensing fees. They fish without the constraints accepted by legal fishers, often falsify documentation, and effectively “launder” their ill-gotten catch. Illegal fishers’ actions constitute a clear case of unfair competition since they operate without the costs of doing business legally or the strictures of following established policies and laws.

- Also, because illegal fishers do not report catch, their fishing activities affect the accuracy of official fish catch and stock estimates. This adversely affects how fisheries are managed because regulatory bodies use reported catches and stock estimates to set catch limits and otherwise manage fish populations. Thus, because the real volume of fish caught is unknown, it is very difficult to effectively manage fisheries where illegal fishing is taking place.
- Finally, illegal fishing often causes grave environmental damage, especially when vessels use prohibited gear, such as driftnets, that catches nontarget species (including sharks, turtles or dolphins) or physically damages or destroys reefs, seamounts, and other vulnerable marine ecosystems.

Sources: the hindu.

Govt. regulator gives nod for GM mustard

India’s central biotech regulator, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) has cleared the genetically modified (GM) Mustard for commercial cultivation and recommended its approval to the environment ministry.

What next?

The fate of this transgenic variety of oil-seed will now be in the hands of the MoS environment Anil Madhav Dave who may either accept it, reject it or sit over the file till the Supreme Court takes its call on a pending application on the matter.

What you need to know about this move?

The GM mustard, developed by a Delhi University institution, is only the second food crop which got its clearance from the central regulator. The GEAC had earlier in 2010 cleared the Bt Brinjal but the decision was not accepted by then environment minister Jairam Ramesh. Currently, only Bt Cotton – a non-food GM crop – is commercially cultivated in the country.

- An application for commercial release of the GM Mustard was filed in December 2015. The GEAC had subsequently set up a sub-committee to examine the safety aspect of the use of transgenic variety of the mustard. The sub-committee had last year given its safety clearance while noting that the GM Mustard is safe for human consumption and environment.
- Decision of the GEAC was, however, vehemently opposed by environmentalists and anti-GM groups.

What is a 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.

Know about GEAC:

The Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) is the apex body **constituted in the Ministry of Environment and Forests under ‘Rules for Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms/Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells 1989’**, under the Environment Protection Act, 1986. It approves activities involving large scale use of hazardous microorganisms and recombinants in research and industrial production from the environmental angle. The GEAC is also responsible for approval of proposals relating to release of genetically engineered organisms and products into the environment including experimental field trials (Biosafety Research Level trial-I and II known as BRL-I and BRL-II).

The Rules of 1989 also define five competent authorities i.e. the Institutional Biosafety Committees (IBSC), Review Committee of Genetic Manipulation (RCGM), Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC), State Biotechnology Coordination Committee (SBCC) and District Level Committee (DLC) for handling of various aspects of the rules.

Sources: the hindu.

Measures announced by the Government to curb the menace of online Child Sexual Abuse Material

Based on the consultations of the Inter-Ministerial Committee, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) in collaboration with Ministry of Women and Child Development has issued immediate interim measures to curb the menace of Online Child Sexual Abuse Material. MEITY has issued this Order under Section 79(2) (c) of the Information Technology Act 2000 to curb online child sexual abuse material (CSAM).

Background:

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has been making several efforts to deal with the problem of online Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). In a major step, a stakeholder Consultation was held last year on this issue wherein it was decided that the Ministry will establish a National Alliance against Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation, focusing primarily on the online content. Subsequent to this decision, an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) was constituted on request of the WCD Ministry. The IMC includes MHA, MEITY, Ministry of Law, Ministry of External Affairs and Department of Telecom.

What's the interim measure?

Under this order, the Internet Service Providers (ISPs) shall be required to adopt and implement the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) Resources by 31st July 2017. This foundation maintains a dynamic global list of websites and URLs which contain CSAM. Implementation of IWF Resources will result in the relevant content being blocked/removed on an ongoing basis.

Way ahead:

This is an interim measure till the IMC puts in place a centralized mechanism to monitor online CSAM. The Order of MEITY also reiterates that the ISPs will continue to observe due diligence requirements described under the IT Act for removing and disabling any content which is in violation of the extant rules and regulations.

Sources: pib.

New series WPI, IIP released with base year 2011-12

The government has released the new series of WPI and IIP with new base year of 2011-12, a long pending demand of the economists and experts.

Need for the new base year:

The Central Statistics Office (CSO), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, revises the base year of the macroeconomic indicators, as a regular exercise, to capture structural changes in the economy and improve the quality and representativeness of the indices. Revisions in the IIP are necessitated to maintain representativeness of the items and producing entities and also address issues relating to continuous flow of production data. In the past, such changes were effected at the time of a revision in the base year.

What you need to know?

WPI:

(Published by the Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.)

- In the revised series, WPI will continue to constitute three major groups namely primary articles, fuel & power and manufactured products. There is increase in number of items from 676 to 697. In all 199 new items have been added and 146 old items have been dropped.
- In the new series of WPI, prices used for compilation do not include indirect taxes in order to remove impact of fiscal policy. This is in consonance with international practices and will make the new WPI conceptually closer to 'Producer Price Index', the government said.
- A new "WPI Food Index" will be compiled to capture the rate of inflation in food items.
- Seasonality of fruits and vegetables has been updated to account for more months as these are now available for longer duration.
- Item level aggregates for new WPI are compiled using geometric mean (GM) following international best practice and as is currently used for compilation of All India CPI.
- The government has also set up a high-level technical review committee for dynamic review in order to keep pace with the changing structure of the economy.

IIP:

(It is compiled and published monthly by the Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) six weeks after the reference month ends.)

- To facilitate a dynamic revision of the item list of products and the panel of factories, a technical review committee has been set up. The committee will be chaired by secretary, ministry of statistics & programme implementation. According to the government release, the committee will meet at least once a year for identifying new items that need to be included in the item basket and removing those that have lost its relevance in the industrial sector or are no longer being produced.
- The new IIP series has a total of 809 items occurring in the manufacturing sector in the item basket (405 item groups), where 149 new items have been added and 124 items have been deleted from the 2004-05 series. The earlier series had 620 items (397 item groups) in the manufacturing sector.
- The growth rates of the old and new series are not strictly comparable, the government press release said.
- In the new series, there has been an increase in number of factories in panel for reporting data and closed ones have been removed.
- The electricity sector now includes data from renewable energy sources. The coverage of the mining sector has undergone a change on account of the MCDR Amendment Rules, 2016.
- The number of source agencies reporting data for compilation of IIP in the new series will be 14 as compared to 15 in the current series. This is on account of the fact that data on 'Iodised Salt' in the new series will be provided by the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

Wholesale Price Index(WPI)

- The Wholesale Price Index or WPI is the price of a representative basket of wholesale goods.
- The Indian WPI figure is released every 10 days and influences stock and fixed price markets.
- The Wholesale Price Index focuses on the price of goods traded between corporations, rather than goods bought by consumers, which is measured by the Consumer Price Index.
- The purpose of the WPI is to monitor price movements that reflect supply and demand in industry, manufacturing and construction.
- In India WPI is the indicator for inflation rate.

Sources: pib.

Aquatic animal diseases revisited

The national surveillance programme for aquatic animal diseases in India, one of the largest fish disease surveillance programme implemented in the country, is all set to begin a new phase.

- A road map proposed for taking the surveillance programme to the next level includes developing disease-free zones and targeted active surveillance for fish pathogens in India. The programme is led by the [ICAR-National Bureau of Fish Genetic Resources](#) (ICAR-NBFGR).

What you need to know about the programme?

The programme includes monitoring of the disease status of susceptible populations and would provide a general picture of prevalence of diseases in the country. It will also provide a means for rapid detection of new and exotic infectious diseases through advanced diagnostic techniques; help in certifying freedom from diseases of concern within a defined geographical area or a specific population and give boost to our aquatic animal exports.

- The programme would also result in assessing the efficiency of disease control programmes. It will also help in developing appropriately trained and dedicated personnel who can understand normal health patterns and describe the abnormalities. Finally, this programme will help in providing scientifically accurate and cost-effective information for assessing and managing risks of pathogen transfer associated with trade in aquatic animals and improve production efficiency.
- The programme is currently being implemented in 16 States and three Union Territories.

There are mainly five objectives of disease surveillance programme.

- To provide means for rapid detection of new and exotic infectious disease.
- To provide evidence of freedom from diseases of concern within a defined geographical area or a specific population.
- To collect the information on distribution and occurrence of diseases of concern.
- To assess the efficiency of disease control programmes with a defined geographical area.
- To improve reporting requirements to World organization for Animal Health(OIE) and regional Quarterly Aquatic Animal Disease Reporting System and enhance compliance to OIE standards.

Sources: the hindu.

Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in Naxal-affected districts

The Centre will soon begin work on a Rs. 11,000-crore project to provide road connectivity to 44 Naxal-affected districts, including Sukma in Chhattisgarh, which had recently witnessed one of the deadliest Maoist attacks. The project will be implemented **under the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana** in the districts that are critical from a security and communication point of view.

- Under the project, there will be construction or upgradation of 5,411 km of roads and 126 bridges.
- Odisha, Jharkhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra are the other States that will be covered under the scheme.

Know about PMGSY:

PMGSY was launched on 25th December 2000 as a fully funded Centrally Sponsored Scheme to provide all weather road connectivity in rural areas of the country. The programme envisages connecting all habitations with a population of 500 persons and above in the plain areas and 250 persons and above in hill States, the tribal and the desert areas.

Sources: the hindu.

Sagarmala- DDUGKY Convergence for Skill Development in Coastal Districts

For skills development of youth in coastal areas, the Ministry of Shipping signed an MoU with the Ministry of Rural Development.

Key facts:

- The MoU is for convergence of the Ministry' prestigious project Sagarmala and Ministry of Rural Development's flagship programme Deen Dayal Upadhyay Grameen Kaushalya Yojana ([DDU GKY](#)).
- DDU-GKY is expected to bring in its skilling expertise to provide skilling for the coastal communities, thereby preparing them to take advantage of the job opportunities that are expected to come up in the maritime sector following port led development under Sagarmala.
- This MoU will meet the exact skill needs of industries in the port and maritime sector and provide the coastal communities right skills for better opportunities emanating from the large scale impact of Sagarmala projects.
- With skill development, there will be close involvement of the coastal communities in Sagarmala and will make them contributors in the economic development and will ensure inclusive growth of the coastal districts of the country.

What you need to know about Sagarmala?

The Sagarmala project seeks to develop a string of ports around India's coast. The objective of this initiative is to promote "Port-led development" along India's 7500 km long coastline. It aims to develop access to new development regions with intermodal solutions and promotion of the optimum modal split, enhanced connectivity with main economic centres and beyond through expansion of rail, inland water, coastal and road services.

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

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

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

Know about DDU GKY:

The Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD) announced the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) Antyodaya Diwas, on 25th September 2014. DDU-GKY is a part of the National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), tasked with the dual objectives of adding diversity to the incomes of rural poor families and cater to the career aspirations of rural youth.

DDU-GKY is uniquely focused on rural youth between the ages of 15 and 35 years from poor families. As a part of the Skill India campaign, it plays an instrumental role in supporting the social and economic programs of the government like the Make In India, Digital India, Smart Cities and Start-Up India, Stand-Up India campaigns.

Sources: pib.

Cabinet approves Pan-India implementation of Maternity Benefit Program

The Union Cabinet has given ex-post facto approval to Pan-India implementation of Maternity Benefit Program which now has been extended to all districts of the country.

- The total cost of the proposal for the period from 01.01.2017 to 31.03.2020 including Central and State Government share is Rs.12,661crore.

What you need to know about the Maternity Benefit Program?

The Maternity Benefit Program will provide compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives so that the women can take adequate rest before and after delivery and not be deprived of proper nutrition.

It is a centrally sponsored scheme and the cost sharing between Centre and states is 60:40 for all the states and union territories (with legislature), 90:10 for NER and Himalayan States and 100% Centre share for union territories without legislatures.

Objective of the Scheme:

- To provide partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives so that the woman can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child.
- The cash incentives provided would lead to improved health seeking behaviour amongst the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mother (PW&LM) to reduce the effects of under-nutrition namely stunting, wasting and other related problems.

Target Group:

All eligible Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers (PW&LM), excluding the Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers who are in regular employment with the Central Government or State Government or Public Sector Undertakings or those who are in receipt of similar benefits under any law for the time being. It has been decided to give the benefit of Rs.5000/- to PW&LM in three installment for the birth of the first live child by MWCD and the remaining cash incentive as per approved norms towards Maternity Benefit under existing programmes after institutional delivery so that on an average, a woman will get ₹6000/-.

Significance of this scheme:

India's maternal and infant mortality indicators are very poor. Every third woman is undernourished and every second woman is anaemic, government statistics show. An undernourished woman would likely give birth to a low-weight baby. As per the UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2014, India recorded the highest number of maternal deaths in the preceding year, and accounted for 17% of global deaths due to pregnancy- and childbirth-related complications (some 50,000 of 2.89 lakh such deaths worldwide).

Less than 40% of births in India are institutional deliveries. Data from the Registrar General of India, Sample Registration System (RGI-SRS) show a recent decline in Maternal Mortality Ratios (MMR) — from 212 per 100,000 live births in 2007-09 to 167 per 100,000 live births in 2011-13 — but there's a long way to go still. The Infant Mortality Rate is 40 per 1,000 live births, according to SRS 2011-13.

Sources: pib.

Cabinet approves amendment of the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1971

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for amendment in Section 2 and Section 3 of the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act, 1971 (PPE Act, 1971), by inserting definition of 'residential accommodation occupation' in a new clause in section 2 of the Act and inserting provisions relating to eviction from 'residential accommodation occupation' in a new sub-section 3B below sub-section 3A of Section 3 of the Act.

What you need to know?

The amendment will facilitate smooth and speedy eviction of unauthorised occupants from government residences. The Amendment will enable the Estate officer to apply summary proceedings for evicting unauthorised occupants from residential accommodations allotted for a fixed tenure or for a period he/she holds office on the basis of an order of allotment on licence basis, as non-vacation of such residences leads to unavailability of houses to new incumbents.

- As a consequence to these amendments, Government of India can now ensure that the unauthorised occupants are evicted from government residence in a speedy and smooth manner and the vacated accommodations are made available to eligible Govt. employees thus reducing the waiting period.
- The beneficiaries include the employees of the Central Government offices who are eligible for General Pool Residential Accommodation (GPRA) and waiting for the maturity of their turn.

PAN-INDIA IMPLEMENTATION OF MATERNITY BENEFIT PROGRAM

- **Cabinet approves Pan-India implementation of Maternity Benefit Program, to be implemented across the country, effective from 01.01.2017**
- **Aims to provide partial compensation for the wage loss in terms of cash incentives**
- **So that women can take adequate rest before and after delivery of the first living child**
- **Would lead to improved health seeking behaviour amongst Pregnant Women and Lactating Mothers**
- **So as to reduce effects of under-nutrition, namely stunting, wasting and other related problems**
- **Would lead to better health status for the mother and child**

Background:

The Government of India has to evict unauthorized occupants from Government accommodations under the provisions of PPE Act, 1971. However, the eviction proceedings take unusually long time, thereby reducing the availability of govt. accommodations to new incumbents.

Sources: pib.

Industry-Academia Collaborative Mission for accelerating discovery research to early development for biopharmaceuticals

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for Industry-Academia Collaborative Mission for accelerating discovery research to early development for biopharmaceuticals – “**Innovate in India (13) empowering biotech entrepreneurs & accelerating inclusive innovation**” to be funded by the Government of India.

What you need to know?

The Mission will be **implemented by Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC)** – a Public Sector Undertaking of Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

- The Mission Program would be a Pan-India program. The key focus areas of the program would aid in preparing India’s technological and product development capabilities in the biopharmaceutical sector to a level that it is globally competitive over the next 10-15 years and will transform the health standards of India’s population through affordable product development.
- Total project cost to be funded by Government of India is Rs. 1500 crore for five years. 50% cost for the Mission Programme will be arranged through the World Bank loan.
- For the implementation, a Programme Management Unit will be set up at BIRAC which will work as an operational and functional arm that oversees and monitors program implementation and progress.
- The Mission will focus on Development of specific products – vaccines, biotherapeutics, medical devices and diagnostics; establishment of shared infrastructure and facilities; building and strengthening domain specific knowledge and management skills; creating and enhancing technology transfer capabilities in public and private sector.
- The Mission will provide a holistic and integrated approach to strengthen and support the entire product development value chain for accelerating the research leads to product development. This will help not only in immediate product development addressing public health needs, but will also help to create an ecosystem which will facilitate development of a continuous pipeline of products.

What are Biopharmaceuticals

- Biopharmaceuticals are defined as pharmaceuticals manufactured by biotechnology methods, with the products having biological sources, usually involving live organisms or their active components
- Biopharmaceuticals are protein or nucleic acid based pharmaceuticals (substance used for therapeutic or in vivo diagnostic purpose), which are produced by mean other than direct extraction from a native biological source.

Sources: pib.

Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2017 to deter offenders' escape

The government has invited comments on ‘Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2017’ that seeks to deter economic offenders from fleeing the country by attaching and confiscating properties owned by them in India.

- The Bill makes provisions for a special court under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to declare a person a ‘Fugitive Economic Offender’.

Background:

The issue of loan defaults has been stressed as a critical issue burdening the Indian economy. The proposed ‘Fugitive Economic Offenders Bill, 2017’ comes against the background of India seeking the extradition of liquor baron Vijay Mallya from the U.K. for defaulted loans to banks.

Need for a law in this regard:

There have been several instances of economic offenders fleeing the jurisdiction of Indian courts, anticipating the commencement, or during the pendency, of criminal proceedings. The absence of such offenders from Indian courts has several deleterious consequences— first, it hampers investigation in criminal cases; second, it wastes precious time of courts of law; third, it undermines the rule of law in India.

Who is a fugitive economic offender?

A Fugitive Economic Offender is a person who has an arrest warrant issued in respect of a scheduled offence and who leaves or has left India so as to avoid criminal prosecution, or refuses to return to India to face criminal prosecution.

Sources: the hindu.

AFSPA gets six-month extension in Manipur

The Manipur Cabinet has decided to extend the Disturbed Areas Act for another period of six months to facilitate the imposition of the AFSPA except in seven Assembly segments in Imphal. The government had lifted the AFSPA from these segments on August 12, 2004.

What you need to know?

In exercise of the powers conferred by Section 3 of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, the Governor of Manipur declares the entire state of Manipur, excluding the Imphal Municipal Area, as “Disturbed Area”.

What is AFSPA?

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

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

What are ‘disturbed’ areas?

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

Sources: the hindu.

Karnataka child marriage Bill finally gets President’s nod

President Pranab Mukherjee has given his assent to the long-pending Prohibition of Child Marriage (Karnataka amendment) Bill, 2016, giving greater powers to the police and increasing the penalty for child marriage.

What you need to know about the bill?

The amended Bill seeks to ensure zero tolerance towards child marriage, granting powers to policemen and enhancing penalties for those attending wedding ceremonies of minors. While the original legislation does not prescribe a minimum punishment for offenders, the amendment proposes rigorous imprisonment of one year. It also enables any police officer to take cognizance of the offence.

The Bill was drafted based on the recommendations of a core committee headed by Shivaraj V. Patil, former Supreme Court judge. Karnataka is among the States that record a high number of child marriages in the country (about 23% of the total, according to a recent survey).

Background:

The Bill was amended last year by the State Assembly and sent to the Centre. The Home Ministry, which acts as an administrative ministry for State Bills and legislation, after consulting other Central ministries, forwarded the Bill to the Presidential secretariat, sources in the State secretariat said. The State had been urging the Centre to pass the Bill at the earliest, in order to help it to eradicate the menace of child marriage in the next few years.

A large number of child marriage cases are reported from north Karnataka, including Dharwad, Belagavi, Bagalkot, Koppal, Raichur and Vijayapura districts.

Sources: the hindu.

Cabinet approves setting up of new AIIMS in Kamrup, Assam

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for establishment of new AIIMS at Kamrup (North Guwahati Revenue circle). The cost of the project is Rs.1123 crore and it will be set up under the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY).

- The establishment of new AIIMS is aimed at serving the dual purpose of providing super speciality health care to the population while also help create a large pool of doctors and other health workers in this region that can be available for primary and secondary level institutions / facilities being created under National Health Mission (NHM).

What you need to know about PMSSY?



The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) was announced in 2003 with objectives of correcting regional imbalances in the availability of affordable/ reliable tertiary healthcare services and also to augment facilities for quality medical education in the country.

- The scheme has two components: Setting up of new AIIMS and upgradation of government medical colleges.
- Under this scheme, AIIMS have been established in Bhubaneshwar, Bhopal, Raipur, Jodhpur, Rishikesh and Patna while work of AIIMS Rae Bareli is in progress. Also, three AIIMS in Nagpur (Maharashtra), Kalyani (West Bengal) and Mangalagiri in Guntur (Andhra Pradesh) have been sanctioned in 2015 and two AIIMS have been sanctioned at Bathinda and Gorakhpur in 2016.

Sources: pib.

Preference to 'Make in India' in Government procurements

The Union Cabinet has approved a policy for providing preference to 'Make in India' in government procurements.

What you need to know about the new policy?

- The policy will be implemented through an Order pursuant to Rule 153(iii) of the General Financial Rules, 2017 to provide purchase preference (linked with local content) in Government procurements.
- Under the policy, preference in Government procurement will be given to local suppliers. Local suppliers are those whose goods or services meet prescribed minimum thresholds (ordinarily 50%) for local content. Local content is essentially domestic value addition.
- In procurement of goods for Rs. 50 lakhs and less, and where the Nodal Ministry determines that there is sufficient local capacity and local competition, only local suppliers will be eligible.
- For procurements valued at more than Rs. 50 lakhs (or where there is insufficient local capacity/ competition) if the lowest bid is not from a non-local supplier, the lowest-cost local supplier who is within a margin of 20% of the lowest bid, will be given the opportunity to match the lowest bid.

Cabinet Decision
May 24, 2017

Preference to 'Make in India' in Public Procurements

- Cabinet approves policy for providing preference to 'Make in India' in public procurements
- Reflection of the Government of India to encourage 'Make in India' and promote manufacturing and production of goods and services in India
- To enhance income and employment
- Will give a substantial boost to domestic manufacturing and service provision, thereby creating employment
- Will also stimulate flow of capital and technology into domestic manufacturing and services
- Will also provide further thrust towards manufacture of parts, components, sub-components etc. of these items, in line with the 'Make in India' vision

- If the procurement is of a type that the order can be divided and given to more than one supplier, the non-local supplier who is the lowest bidder will get half of the order and the local supplier will get the other half if it agrees to match the price of the lowest bid. If the procurement cannot be divided, then the lowest cost local supplier will be given the order if it agrees to match the lowest bid.
- Small purchases of less than Rs.5 lakhs are exempted. The order also covers autonomous bodies, government companies/ entities under the government's control.
- The policy also requires that specifications in tenders must not be restrictive e.g. should not require proof of supply in other countries or proof of exports in respect of previous experience. They must not result in unreasonable exclusion of local suppliers who would otherwise be eligible, beyond what is essential for ensuring quality or creditworthiness of the supplier.
- The policy lays down a procedure for verification of local content relying primarily on self-certification. There will be penal consequences for false declarations. In some cases, verification by statutory / cost auditors etc. will be required.
- A Standing Committee in Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion will oversee the implementation of this order and issues arising therefrom, and make recommendations to Nodal Ministries and procuring entities.

Significance of this move:

- The new policy will give a substantial boost to domestic manufacturing and service provision, thereby creating employment.
- It will stimulate the flow of capital and technology into domestic manufacturing and services.
- It will also provide a further thrust towards manufacture of parts, components, sub-components etc. of these items, in line with the vision of 'Make in India'.

Sources: pib.

Defence buys model comes into force

The government's ambitious Strategic Partnership (SP) model for promoting Indian private industry participation in defence manufacturing has come into effect.

What you need to know about SP model?

Under the "Strategic Partnership" model, the government will shortlist and then pick Indian companies to join forces with foreign firms to supply fighter jets, helicopters, armoured vehicles and submarines. For each platform, one private sector strategic partner will be chosen.

Seen as a major initiative, the strategic partnership model aims to create a vibrant defence manufacturing ecosystem in the country through involvement of both the major Indian corporates as well as the MSME sector.

Sources: the hindu.

Start Up -Definition changes

In order to promote entrepreneurship in the country, the Government of India has amended the definition of a Startup. The changes are an effort to ensure ease of starting up new businesses to promote the Startup ecosystem and build a nation of job creators instead of job seekers.

Background:

Startup India was launched by the Government of India on 16th January, 2016 to build a strong eco-system for nurturing innovation and Startups in the country to drive economic growth and generate large scale employment opportunities.

The following significant changes have been made to the definition of Startups:

- **Age of Startup increased:** Taking into account the long gestation period by Startups to establish, an entity shall be considered as a Startup up to seven years from the date of its incorporation/ registration (from earlier 5 years).

However, in the case of Startups in the Biotechnology sector, the period shall be up to ten years from the date of incorporation/ registration.

- **No Letter of Recommendation required:** No letter of recommendation from an incubator/industry association shall be required for either recognition or tax benefits
- **Potential of Job and Wealth Creation:** The scope of definition has been broadened to include scalability of business model with potential of employment generation or wealth creation.

Sources: the hindu.

In-flight Wi-Fi Net access soon

On-board Wi-Fi may soon become a reality as the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has sent a revised proposal that will enable in-flight access to voice, data and video services.

Background:

The idea was initially floated by the communications ministry. The Home Ministry had raised concerns about security agencies being able to monitor data and voice transmission in the initial proposal floated by DoT under the Communication Ministry. However, the revised proposal has addressed the issue of flight data monitoring.

At present, both domestic and international passengers are unable to use in-flight Internet services over Indian airspace. Even international airlines that offer such a facility to its passengers have to discontinue the service while the aircraft is flying over the Indian airspace.

Which laws need to be amended?

The Centre will need to amend the Telegraph Act, 1885, as well as the related Indian Telegraphy Rules to provide on-board Wi-Fi services.

Sources: the hindu.

Atal Pension Yojana reaches 53 lakh subscribers

The subscriber base of the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) that aims at old age income security for the working poor from mostly the unorganised sector has reached 53 lakh. Over 230 banks and the Department of India Post have been involved in the implementation of the government's flagship social security scheme that focuses on encouraging and enabling the subscribers to save for their retirement.

What you need to know 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.

ATAL PENSION YOJNA

Purpose Pension	Discontinuation of payment Closed after 24 months
Age Minimum 18 years and maximum 40 years	Nominee Mandatory
Fixed pension ₹1,000-₹5,000 per month at age of 60 years	How much to invest monthly to get ₹1,000 as pension a month? ₹42 to ₹291 per month, depending on age
Your contribution Depends on your age and the amount of pension you want	Withdrawal procedure At 60 years, exit permitted with 100% annuitization of pension wealth In case of death, the pension will go to spouse. If both are dead, the corpus to go to nominee
Government contribution 50% of your contribution or ₹1,000 , whichever is lower, for 5 years	Exit before 60 years possible in exceptional circumstances
Bank account Mandatory	Source: Ministry of Finance
Payment process Auto-debit facility	
Penalty for delay in payment ₹1 to ₹10 depending on your monthly contribution	

New curbs on cattle slaughter

In a surprise gazette notification, the environment ministry has banned cattle slaughter and introduced restrictions on the sale of cattle to prevent their killing. A gazette notification, **titled Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules, 2017 by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change** states that no one can bring cattle to an animal market unless he or she has furnished a written declaration that the cattle will not be sold for the purpose of slaughter. Further, upon sale of cattle, the animal market committee will take an “undertaking” that the animals are for agricultural purposes and not for slaughter.



Key highlights:

- The Rule applies to the whole of India, except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.
- Cattle cannot be brought to an animal market for sale for slaughter.
- Animal Market consists of: Marketplaces where animals are brought from other places for sale or auction. It includes animal fairs, or areas adjoining a market or a slaughterhouse.
- Cattle as defined: A bovine animal including bulls, bullocks, cows, buffalos, steers, heifers and calves and includes camels.
- All existing animal markets will have to be registered within three months with the District Animal Market Monitoring Committee by making an application to the Committee.
- Cruel and harmful practices have been prohibited for animals including, painting of horns, ear cutting buffaloes, making animals lay on hard ground without proper bedding.
- Purchaser of cattle cannot sell animal for slaughter or sacrifice the animal for religious purposes.
- The rule mandates the appointment of Veterinary inspectors who shall screen the animals before they enter the market. The inspector shall also check whether animals are being transported in trucks which are authorised by law to carry animals.
- The new rules apply only to animal markets and not to individual cattle buying and selling by people.

Implications of this move:

- Experts predict that the worst hit from the rules will be Muslim meat and leather traders who are increasingly facing violence from aggressive cow vigilante groups.
- Farmers will also be affected as they will be deprived of the compensation they get from selling aged or non-milch cattle. Farmers may now have to spend on feeding their aged cattle or the animals will have to be abandoned.

Background:

For years, the Supreme Court has struggled for consistency in its judicial pronouncements regarding cattle, leaving it ultimately to the Centre and States to devise an appropriate policy. While Supreme Court banned the bull-running sport jallikattu as cruel, it refused to intervene with States to frame a uniform policy on cattle slaughter. Neither did the court deem it fit to examine a plea to ban animal sacrifices for religious purposes.

Sources: the hindu.

Cattle trade rules go against 1960 law

Experts say, the recently notified Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules of 2017 contravene the provisions of the very law — Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act of 1960 — under which it has been notified.

What's the issue?

The government recently placed restrictions on the sale of cattle in a livestock market for purposes of slaughter and religious animal sacrifices.

- The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Markets) Rules of 2017 permit the sale of cattle in markets only to verified "agriculturists", who have to give an undertaking to authorities that cattle will not be sold or slaughtered for meat. Nor shall the animal be used for sacrifices. The animal will be used only for farming.
- The rules take away the rights of the owner to even sell the carcass of an animal dying of "natural causes" in the market. The rules prescribe that the carcass will be incinerated and not be sold or flayed for leather.

Provisions in this regard in the original act:

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, enacted on December 26, 1960, however, does not impose any such restriction. It does not ban a cattle owner to sell the carcass of his animals for leather. The legislative intent of the 1960 Act is to "prevent the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering on animals".

- In fact, the very proof that neither slaughter nor sale for that purpose is banned by the Act is found in Section 9 (e) of the statute. One of the functions of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) under the Act is to "advise the government or any local authority or other person in the design of slaughter-houses or the maintenance of slaughter houses or in connection with slaughter of animals so that unnecessary pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is eliminated in the pre-slaughter stages as far as possible, and animals are killed; wherever necessary, in as humane a manner as possible."
- The Act further recognises slaughter for food. Section 11 of the Act does not categorise slaughter of animals for food as cruelty. It makes a specific exemption for "destruction of any animal as food for mankind unless such destruction or preparation was accompanied by the infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering."

Observations made by the supreme court:

When a PIL petition came up for hearing before the SC to ban animal sacrifices for religious purposes, the court had specifically noted how Section 28 of the Act mandates that "nothing contained in this Act (1960 Act) shall render it an offence to kill any animal in a manner required by the religion of any community."

The restriction on trade of cattle or carcasses in livestock markets will have to be tested on the touchstone of the fundamental right to occupation, trade or business under Article 19 (1) (g) to see whether it is "reasonable."

Challenges ahead for the centre:

Though Section 38 of the 1960 Act confers the Centre the power to make rules, several judicial precedents hold that this rule-making power does not allow going "beyond the scope of enabling Act or which is inconsistent therewith or repugnant." Rules cannot be used to bring within its purview a subject — in this case, restriction on sale of cattle for slaughter or animal sacrifices —that has been specifically excluded by the statute.

Besides, many states have questioned the centre's unilateral decision on **cattle**, which is a **state subject**.

Sources: the hindu.

"Bicycle Patrols"

As a 'green' initiative for patrolling the parks, congested lanes and by-lanes, the cooperative societies etc, **the Delhi Police has introduced bicycle patrols** to complement and supplement its existing motorcycle and PCR patrols which focus mainly on crime prevention along the arterial and main roads of Delhi.

What you need to know about Bicycle Patrols?

- Cycle patrols can go where traditional patrol vehicles cannot. The bicycle patrols will reach the narrow and heavily congested areas where mechanized vehicles find it difficult to reach and maintain a steady presence. They will also be utilized for patrolling during odd hours when the residents are taking rest, since they are less disturbing.



- One of the main areas of focus of these bicycle patrols will be parks where citizens including senior citizens and women go for morning and evening walks. The bicycle patrols will also be introduced in the University campus areas and near schools/colleges where the police officers can have a friendly interface with the student community.
- With zero environmental costs and additional health benefits for the riders, the bicycle patrol parties will also bring the concept of ‘Policing by community involvement’ close to the largely immigrant and working class population.
- The bicycle patrols will mostly be in ‘buddy pairs’ and will normally cover a distance of 2 to 5 kilometres per patrol. The patrolling officers are equipped with standard police communication equipment which will operate in ‘hands-free mode’ and function like mobile police posts of the local Police Station. Each bicycle has been fitted with cell phone docks and equipment for keeping other accessories.

Significance of this move:

While focusing on the ‘Policing by community involvement’ model, the bicycle patrols will, apart from assuring the law abiding citizenry of their friendly and protective presence, also play the role of area domination, sending out a message of deterrence to the law breakers in the vicinity. Being slow paced, the spectrum of observation of bicycle patrol officers will be qualitatively much more meaningful in detecting unwarranted movements and questionable/suspicious presence in the areas of patrol. The officers are being specifically trained to make a note of the happenings around them for sharing and validation.

Sources: pib.

Darwaza Band for open defecation

The centre has launched an aggressive new campaign titled **‘Darwaza Band’ to promote toilet use and freedom from open defecation across the country’s villages.**



What you need to know about the campaign?

The campaign is produced by the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission.

- The campaign has been supported by the World Bank and is being rolled out countrywide immediately after the launch.
- It is designed to encourage behaviour change in men who have toilets but are not using them.

Background:

Behaviour change has been the focus of Swachh Bharat Mission, which is being pursued through a countrywide comprehensive IEC(Information-Education-Communication) programme. Communication campaigns have been taken up both, at the central and State levels, for promoting sustained use of toilets and for sustaining the Open Defecation Free status achieved.

Sources: pib.

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

NITI Aayog for less teaching, more research

NITI Aayog has proposed reforms to ensure that investments in research better translate to more products and bolster “innovation and development”.

Background:

The NITI Aayog suggestions stem from a three-year vision document that outlines targets and goals the Ministries — from railways to environment — ought to achieve by 2020.

What's proposed?

- It has recommended that faculty at “world class” institutions prioritise research and be allowed to “reduce their teaching responsibility,” if required.
- Such universities also ought to be allowed to recruit research staff from abroad and be encouraged to compete for research projects from industry.
- The so-called ‘world class universities’ are part of a government-outlined plan to raise funding for 10 public and 10 private universities and mould them into institutions that rank among the world’s best.
- The names of these institutions are expected to be made public later this year.

Other proposals by NITI Aayog:

- The NITI Aayog also pitches for a new ‘National Science, Technology and Innovation Foundation’ headed by a distinguished scientist. This will coordinate with science and technology departments, ministries, governments and private sector bodies and deliberate on national issues and recommend interventions. Such an organisation will review progress of projects every six months and propose “course corrections” for achieving these goals.
- It also proposes a database of all existing schemes related to science and technology across ministries and departments. This will have information on the coordinating ministry, its objectives and available funds. Its key purpose would be to avoid “duplication of efforts, reduce approval times, increase accountability and collaboration between entities and measured outcomes.

Sources: the hindu.

Set up database of children in orphanages, SC tells govt.

The Supreme Court has passed a slew of directions, including setting up of a database of children living in orphanages and child care institutions to ensure their safety and welfare.

Background:

The verdict came on a PIL petition filed on the basis of a 2007 newspaper report alleging that orphanages in Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu, run by NGOs as well as government institutions, were reportedly involved in systematic sexual abuse of children.

Directions include:

- The Centre, States and union territories (UTs) should complete the registration of all child care institutions by year-end. The registration process should also include a database of all children in need of care and protection and update it every month.
- Authorities concerned should ensure confidentiality and privacy in maintaining the database.
- Every child in need of care and protection must not be necessarily placed either in a child care institution and alternative option like adoption and foster care could seriously be considered.
- The Union government and the governments of States and UTs must concentrate on rehabilitation and social re-integration of children in need of care and protection.
- Centre’s schemes such as skill development and vocational training must be taken advantage of keeping in mind the need to rehabilitate such children.
- States and UTs should set up ‘Inspection Committees’ before July 31 to conduct regular inspections of child care institutions and prepare reports of such inspections so that the living conditions of kids there undergo positive changes. The first report after conducting the inspection should be filed before the government concerned by December 31.
- The process for preparing individual child care plans must be initiated immediately and an individual plan must be prepared for each child in each such centre on or before December 31.
- The process of conducting a social audit must be taken up in right earnest by the National Commission for the Protection of Child Rights as well as by each State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights.

Sources: the hindu.

'Quality of water has improved'

The [World Water Council](#) recently carried out a major survey on water awareness in major parts of the world, including India. Based on its observations, the council has observed that the standard of drinking water in India has improved in the last five years but a lot of work still remains to be done.

- The survey was done ahead of **the 8th World Water Forum that is scheduled to take place in the Brazilian capital Brasilia in March 2018.**

Highlights of the survey:

- As per the survey, more than one-third of Indians think that not enough is being done to achieve the UN's sustainable development goals to make water and sanitation for all a reality by 2030.
- According to the survey, 31% of Indians said they had been in a situation where it was unsafe to drink water but they had no other choice and suffered from diseases like diarrhoea and gastroenteritis.
- A majority (71%) of Indians said that safe drinking water had improved over the last five years.
- The survey stated that 62% of the Indians said they believed that the government was doing enough to support access to safe drinking water.
- The council praised the Swachh Bharat Campaign.

About the World Water Council:

The World Water Council is an international multi-stakeholder platform. It was established in 1996 on the initiative of renowned water specialists and international organisations, in response to an increasing concern about world water issues from the global community.

- It has 341 members which include organizations from the UN and intergovernmental organizations, the private sector, governments and ministries, academic institutions, international organizations, local governments, and civil society groups.
- **Founders and constituent members** of the World Water Council include the International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the International Water Association (IWA), Suez Lyonnaise des Eaux, the United Nations agencies UNDP and UNESCO, and the World Bank.
- The World Water Council's mission is to promote awareness, build political commitment and trigger action on critical water issues at all levels, including the highest decision-making level, to facilitate the efficient conservation, protection, development, planning, management and use of water in all its dimensions on an environmentally sustainable basis for the benefit of all life on earth.
- By providing a platform to encourage debates and exchanges of experience, the Council aims to reach a common strategic vision on water resources and water services management amongst all stakeholders in the water community. In the process, the Council also catalyses initiatives and activities, whose results converge toward its flagship product, the World Water Forum.
- Every third year the World Water Council organizes the World Water Forum in close collaboration with the authorities of the hosting country. The Forum is the largest international event in the field of water.

Sources: [the hindu](#).

Tax processed foods: FSSAI panel

An expert panel set up by food regulator FSSAI recently submitted its report to the government. The FSSAI had constituted the panel consisting of experts from different fields like medicine, nutrition and dietetics from well-known medical research and academic institutions.

- The report by the 11-member panel on 'Consumption of Fat, Sugar and Salt (FSS) and its health effects on Indian population' suggests ways to cut consumption of unhealthy food products and reduce rising burden of chronic diseases like cancer and diabetes.

- This report will serve as a guideline document for all the stakeholders, including the industry, the FSSAI and consumers, in reducing consumption of fat, sugar and salt through processed food products.

Important recommendations made by the committee:

- Additional tax on highly processed commodities and sugar sweetened beverages. Imposing additional tax on the purchase of commodities such as pre-packaged foods with high salt and fat content, sugar sweetened beverages, etc can be a pragmatic approach to reduce their intake.
- Imposition of excise tax on unhealthy eating products would lead to positive health effects among population. The nutrition-related programmes of the government can be supported through profit from taxing unhealthy food products.
- Advertisement ban for foods high in FSS during children TV shows or kids TV channels is urged. In fact, the country should progress towards a total ban law as being done in a few other countries like Chile.
- Celebrity endorsements of such foods need to be discouraged, adding that online social media websites should also comply with advertising ban for unhealthy foods.
- Reliable monitoring systems should be there to examine FSS intake periodically at the national level. The industry should be encouraged for “voluntary reformulation” of food products to cut down FSS intake in packaged food items.
- Like total calories, amount of carbohydrates, sugar, fat, protein, sodium, dietary fibre, amount of trans-fat added in food should be mandatory for labelling in food products.
- On nutrient-specific recommendations, the panel said fats should be largely consumed in the unsaturated form. The consumption of unsaturated fatty acids, especially the long chain mono- and poly unsaturated-fatty acids, should be encouraged in everyday diets.

What necessitated this move?

In India, the rising burden of mortality and morbidity due to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular, respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancers is alarming. In the next 25 years, the burden of chronic diseases will tend to increase continuously as a ramification of the rapidly transitioning food intakes, changing dietary patterns and other lifestyle factors.

A salient finding was that Low Income Groups (LIG) reportedly consumed more fried snacks and sweets than High Income Groups (HIG) and, the highest consumption of bakery items was in slums, said a study on urban populations.

Sources: the hindu.

Multidrug-resistant TB will rise in India, says new study

According to a study, Multidrug Resistant-Tuberculosis (MDR-TB), a version of the disease where patients do not respond to first-line drugs, will become more common than it is now.

- The report projects that, by 2040, the percentage of MDR-TB will make up 32.5% of all TB cases in Russia, 12.4% of the TB cases in India, 8.9% of the TB cases in the Philippines, and 5.7% of all TB cases in South Africa.

What's the concern?

The findings are alarming as India is home to the most serious ‘hotspots’ of MDR-TB transmission, especially overcrowded cities such as Mumbai. Not only does India shoulder the highest TB burden in the world, with over 2 million of the 10 million reported cases, it also accounts for the most drug-resistant patients — nearly 1.3 lakh people who do not respond to first-line drugs.

- Besides, access to medicines is also worrying. Two new TB drugs, Bedaquiline and Delamanid are being used in Europe and the U.S. for several years. But they are yet to be made available in India’s national healthcare system. The drug is available only in six sites across the country, and according to the Health Ministry’s TB report, only 207 of the 79,000 patients who need the drug have access to it.
- It is estimated that each year there are 10.4 million new cases of TB, leading to 1.8 million deaths globally. Nearly 40% of all drug-resistant cases occur in Russia, India, the Philippines, and South Africa — accounting for more than 230,000 cases of drug-resistant disease in 2015.

What are MDR-TB & MDR/RR-TB?

MDR-TB is an abbreviation of Multi Drug Resistant TB and it is a specific type of drug resistant TB infection. It means that the TB bacteria that a person is infected with, are resistant to at least two of the most important TB drugs, isoniazid (INH) and rifampicin (RMP). If bacteria are resistant to certain TB drugs this means that the drugs won't work. Other drugs then need to be taken by the person if they are to be cured.

There are multiple forms of Drug Resistant Tuberculosis that includes:

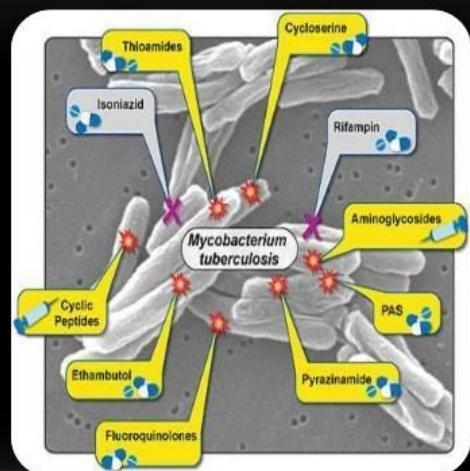
- Multi Drug Resistant Tb or MDR-TB shows resistance to the most effective anti-TB used drugs: Isoniazid and Rifampicin.
- Extensively-Drug Resistant Tb or XDR-TB is a more severe form of MDR-TB which is additionally resistant to the 2nd line drugs that includes atleast one of the 3 injectable anti-TB drug
- Extremely drug resistant TB or XXDR-TB shows resistance to all the 12 drugs making it virtually untreatable.

DR.T.V.RAO MD

7

WHAT IS MULTIDRUG-RESISTANT TUBERCULOSIS (MDR TB)?

- Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR TB) is TB that is resistant to at least two of the best anti-TB drugs, isoniazid and rifampicin. These drugs are considered first-line drugs and are used to treat all persons with TB disease.



Sources: the hindu.

Ebola resurfaces

The World Health Organization has declared an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Africa.

Ebola virus disease

Ebola, which first appeared in outbreaks in Sudan and DR Congo in 1976, is a severe and often fatal disease with no known specific treatment or vaccine. It has since killed more than 1,500 people in parts of Africa.

SOURCE

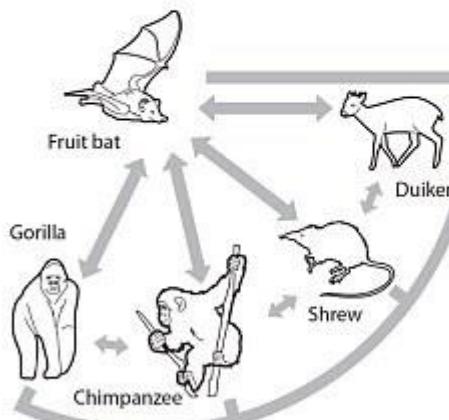
In Africa, particular species of fruit bats are considered possible natural hosts for Ebola virus.

TRANSMISSION

Infected bats are thought to transmit the disease to humans, or indirectly through other animals which are hunted for their meat.

DAMAGE

Incubation period is from two to 21 days. Death from the disease is often caused by multiple organ failure and tissue death.



- Possible routes
- Close contact with the blood, secretions, organs or other bodily fluids of infected or dead animals
 - Consumption of infected bushmeat
 - Touching objects that have come in contact with the virus.



Targets in the body
Hepatocytes, functional cells of the liver
Endothelial cells, which form the linings of the blood vessels
Phagocytes, blood cells that absorb foreign particles

- Symptoms
- Fever
 - Sore throat
 - Severe headache
 - Muscle pain
 - Intense weakness
 - Vomiting
 - Diarrhea
 - Impaired liver and kidney function
 - Internal and external bleeding

Note: List of animals is not exhaustive.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; World Health Organisation

G.Cohen, 28/03/2014

REUTERS

Background:

More than 11,000 people died in the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014-2015, mainly in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The last outbreak in the DRC was in 2014 and killed more than 40 people. The region affected lies 1,300 km north-east of Kinshasa, close to the border with the Central African Republic.

What next?

While this outbreak will be worrying for communities in this remote part of the DRC, health workers say the country is experienced in fighting the virus. Experts say an experimental vaccine could be used if needed.

What you need to know about Ebola?

Ebola virus disease (EVD), formerly known as Ebola haemorrhagic fever, is a severe, often fatal illness in humans.

- **Transmission:** The virus is transmitted to people from wild animals and spreads in the human population through human-to-human transmission.
- The average EVD case fatality rate is around 50%. Case fatality rates have varied from 25% to 90% in past outbreaks.
- **Prevention:** Community engagement is key to successfully controlling outbreaks. Good outbreak control relies on applying a package of interventions, namely case management, surveillance and contact tracing, a good laboratory service and social mobilisation.
- Early supportive care with rehydration, symptomatic treatment improves survival. There is as yet no licensed treatment proven to neutralise the virus but a range of blood, immunological and drug therapies are under development.

Sources: the hindu.

Pneumonia vaccine to be part of immunisation drive

India has rolled out the long-awaited anti-pneumonia vaccine as part of the government's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP). The vaccine will protect children against severe forms of pneumococcal disease, such as pneumonia and meningitis.

- The three-dose pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) will be rolled out in Mandi, Himachal Pradesh, six districts of Uttar Pradesh and 17 districts of Bihar as a part of the first phase. The vaccine will give protection against 13 types of pneumococcal bacteria which cause pneumonia disease.

Pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV):

- The first PCV was approved in the USA in 2000 for use in infants and young children aged six weeks to 5 years for the prevention of pneumococcal disease.
- This vaccine is commonly known as PCV7.

What you need to know about Pneumonia?

Pneumococcal disease is the leading cause of vaccine-preventable deaths in children under five years of age globally and in India. India accounts for nearly 20% of global pneumonia deaths in this age group. There are over 90 different types of pneumococcal bacteria which cause a range of problems.

Background:

Every year, 59 lakh children die worldwide before their fifth birthday, of them 9% die due to diarrhoea, 16% due to pneumonia. India shoulders the highest burden of child pneumonia and diarrhoea deaths with Nigeria, Pakistan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola taking up the next four spots.

Know about UIP:

Universal Immunization Programme is a vaccination program launched by the Government of India in 1985. It became a part of Child Survival and Safe Motherhood Programme in 1992 and is currently one of the key areas under National Rural Health Mission(NRHM) since 2005.

The program now consists of vaccination for 12 diseases- tuberculosis, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), tetanus, poliomyelitis, measles, Hepatitis B, Diarrhoea, Japanese Encephalitis, rubella, Rotavirus and Pneumonia.

Sources: the hindu.

Survival of newborns: India ranks lower than Somalia

Healthcare access and quality index (HAQ), part of the Global burden of diseases has been released. The HAQ Index is based on death rates from 32 ailments that could be avoided by timely medical intervention.

What you need to know about GBD?

The Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors study is put together by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), an independent population health research centre associated with the University of Washington, along with a consortium of 2,300 researchers in more than 130 countries.

Performance of India:

- India is at 154th among 195 countries.
- India's healthcare access and quality (HAQ) index has increased by 14.1, up from 30.7 in 1990 to 44.8 in 2015.
- India lags behind Sri Lanka (72.8), Bangladesh (51.7), Bhutan (52.7) and Nepal (50.8) and ranks above Pakistan (43.1) and Afghanistan (32.5).
- As per the study, India has performed poorly in tackling cases of tuberculosis, diabetes, chronic kidney diseases and rheumatic heart diseases.
- The journal lists India among the biggest underachievers in Asia in health care access.
- The top five performers were Andorra (94.6), Iceland (93.6), Switzerland (91.8), Sweden (90.5), and Norway (90.5).
- Among the developed nations, those who did not perform well include the US and the UK.

Sources: the hindu.

In NTD fight, the end in sight

Around the world, nearly 1.6 billion people are affected by a group of diseases so ignored that the term used to refer to them is called neglected tropical diseases (NTDs).

What you need to know about NTDs?

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) are a diverse group of **communicable diseases** that prevail in tropical and subtropical conditions in 149 countries and affect more than one billion people, costing developing economies billions of dollars every year. They mainly affect populations living in poverty, without adequate sanitation and in close contact with infectious vectors and domestic animals and livestock.

Concerns:

Neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) affect over 1.5 billion of the world's most impoverished people, including 875 million children. They cause severe pain, long-term disability, and are the cause of death for over 170,000 people per year. Amongst children, infection leads to malnutrition, cognitive impairment, stunted growth, and the inability to attend school. Adults suffer from social isolation and are unable to work, and anemia caused by NTDs increases the risk of maternal mortality.

What needs to be done?

The Indian government has set itself the target of eliminating kala-azar and filariasis by 2017, and leprosy by 2018. With such ambitious targets, sustained research must remain an integral component of disease elimination programmes. Besides basic research — the discovery of new facts about a disease, vaccines and drugs — new strategies are needed to make an impact.

- For programmes to succeed, it is important to maintain constant vigilance through robust surveillance and reporting mechanisms. Partnerships with diverse stakeholders including the private sector, community-based

organisations, and community leaders are specifically useful in creating awareness, improving case detection, treatment completion and, most importantly, managing stigma associated with these diseases.

- While tackling NTDs, it will be important to remember that along with timely diagnosis and treatment access in unreach areas, focussing on the fundamentals of preventive interventions, nutrition, safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene are essential in fast-tracking the ultimate goal of elimination.

Sources: the hindu.

Reader titled “Raising Happy Children and Providing Safe Childhoods” released

The Ministry of Women and Child Development has developed a reader titled “Raising Happy Children and Providing Safe Childhoods”.

What you need to know about the reader?

- It provides advisory guidelines to parents, teachers and community to protect children from being involved in delinquent behavior through early detection, counselling and positive engagement.
- It draws upon basic principles laid down in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015 which provides a strong formal framework for dealing with children in conflict with the law throughout the criminal justice process.
- The reader draws upon good practices across the world which have proved to be successful in keeping children safe and away from delinquent behavior.
- The reader suggests a broad framework for imbibing positive skills such as conflict resolution and violence prevention to keep them protected and help them achieve their full potential.
- The reader is divided into three parts wherein part-I is for parents and what they can do to prevent violence and crimes by children, followed by part-II and III for teachers and community members respectively. Each part briefly discusses few major problems that can push children on the wrong side of law, the early signs of this, what can be done to strengthen protection or intervene to reduce risks.

Need for special attention:

Young children experience their world through their relationships with parents, teachers, peers and other caregivers. Therefore, there is a need to create a warm, loving and nurturing environment where their physical, emotional and spiritual needs are recognized and honored by their family, school and community so as to allow them to reach their full potential.

Sources: pib.

Centre confirms 3 Zika cases in Gujarat

Infographic: <https://i1.wp.com/www.insightsonindia.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Zika-Virus.jpg>

The Union Health Ministry has confirmed that three cases of Zika were reported from Ahmedabad in January. The information was made public five months after the cases were reported, as the World Health Organization (WHO) has now published a ‘member state report’ on its website. The health ministry, however, has said the outbreak has been contained.

- An Inter-Ministerial Task Force set up under the Chairmanship of Health Secretary C.K. Mishra and a Joint Monitoring Group are already reviewing the global situation on Zika.

What you need to know about Zika?

Zika is spread mostly by the bite of an infected Aedes species mosquito (Ae. aegypti and Ae. albopictus). These mosquitoes bite during the day and night.

- Zika can be passed from a pregnant woman to her fetus. Infection during pregnancy can cause certain birth defects.
- There is no vaccine or medicine for Zika.

Sources: the hindu.

First-ever Induction Training Programme for new recruits of CHS

The first-ever induction training programme for the newly appointed General Duty Medical Officers (GDMOs) of the **Central Health Service (CHS) Cadre** was recently inaugurated. This is the first time such a foundation training programme is being undertaken.

- The nine week course especially designed for the new recruits will enable the medical officers to broaden their knowledge base, confidence level and experience in public health facilities.

Need for training:

On an average, every year around 400 to 600 doctors are recruited through UPSC. Incidentally, throughout the under-graduate and post-graduate education and thereafter, these doctors are not been trained in the areas of management, supervision, leadership, communication, conduction of office procedures, etc. The training module is designed to fill this gap so that they can look after the administration of the organization and implementation of various national health programmes for which they have very limited exposure.

What you need to know about CHS?

Central Health Service (CHS) Cadre is a **cadre governed by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare** and its doctors are working all over the country providing health care services to a large number of people.

CHS has four sub-cadres, namely, GDMOs, Teaching, Non-Teaching Specialists and Public Health, with a sanctioned strength of more than 4000 of which the GDMOs constitute the largest chunk, more than 2000.

Sources: 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.

'Skill councils have conflict of interests'

The Government may soon review the public report of **Sharda Prasad committee**, that suggested the challenges in vocational education and training system of the country and convergence, synergy and rationalization of sector skill councils (SSCs).



- The committee has advised the skill development ministry to drastically reduce the number SSCs from 40 to around 20 by merging identical sector councils and curtail their powers of assessment of skill training centers. It is because these SSCs are overlapping in nature, and were unnecessarily floated without giving proper thought, making it difficult to manage a large number of them.

What are SSCs?

Sector Skill Councils are set up as autonomous industry-led bodies by NSDC. They create Occupational Standards and Qualification bodies, develop competency framework, conduct Train the Trainer Programs, conduct skill gap studies and Assess and Certify trainees on the curriculum aligned to National Occupational Standards developed by them.

Till date, the NSDC Board has approved proposals for 38 Sector Skill Councils. There are approximately 450 Corporate Representatives in the Governing Councils of these SSCs.

Sources: the hindu.

eVIN Project of Health Ministry becomes global best practise in immunisation

India's electronic vaccine intelligence network project also known as eVIN project has got the attention of five countries. Philippines, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal and Thailand are mulling to replicate India's immunisation project.

About the eVIN project:

eVIN is an indigenously developed technology system in India that digitizes vaccine stocks and monitors the temperature of the cold chain through a smartphone application. The eVIN is presently being implemented across twelve states in India.

eVIN aims to support India's 'Universal Immunisation Programme' by providing real-time information on vaccine stocks and flows, and storage temperatures across all cold chain points in states. The project is being implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

eVIN project focus on three things – technology, governance and human resources:

- Under this project, technology enable an evidence-based decision-making by making available online real-time information on vaccine stocks and storage temperature through the eVIN application software and temperature loggers.
- To ensure efficient vaccine logistics management by systemising record keeping through standardising stock and distribution registers; identifying gaps and improving clarity on vaccine cold chain network; drawing attention to infrastructure upgrades; developing standard operating procedures; and encouraging good practices.
- To empower the state cold chain network by building the capacities of government cold chain handlers; and deploying vaccine and cold chain managers in every district for constant support to estimate vaccine requirements, supervise cold chain handlers and coordinate with cold chain technicians across the district.

Sources: pib.

World Press Freedom Index 2017



World Press Freedom Index for the year 2017 has been released.

What you need to know about the index?

World Press Freedom Index is published annually by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) since 2002. It measures the level of freedom available to journalists in 180 countries using the following criteria – pluralism, media independence, media environment and self-censorship, legislative environment, transparency, infrastructure, and abuses.

Performance of various countries:

- India is ranked 136, three points down from last year. India's previous rank was 133. The report blames the rise of Hindu nationalism for the drop in ranking.
- Norway is at the apex and North Korea at the bottom of the 180-strong list of nations.
- After six years at the top, Finland has surrendered its No. 1 position due to political pressure and conflicts of interests.
- Sweden has risen six places to take 2nd position.



- The Index's bottom five also include Turkmenistan (178th), one of the world's most repressive and self-isolated dictatorships, which keeps increasing its persecution of journalists, and Syria (177th), riven by a never-ending war and still the deadliest country for journalists, who are targeted by both its ruthless dictator and Jihadi rebels.

Important observations made by the report:

- RSF's latest World Press Freedom Index highlights the danger of a tipping point in the state of media freedom, especially in leading democratic countries.
- The obsession with surveillance and violations of the right to the confidentiality of sources have contributed to the continuing decline of many countries previously regarded as virtuous.
- Media freedom has never been so threatened and RSF's "global indicator" has never been so high (3872). This measure of the overall level of media freedom constraints and violations worldwide has risen 14% in the span of five years.
- The Middle East and North Africa region, which has ongoing wars in Yemen (down 4 at 166th) as well as Syria, continues to be the world's most difficult and dangerous region for journalists.
- Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the second worst region, does not lag far behind. Nearly two third of its countries are ranked below or around the 150th mark in the Index.
- The Asia-Pacific region is the third worst violator overall but holds many of the worst kinds of records. Two of its countries, China (176th) and Vietnam (175th), are the world's biggest prisons for journalists and bloggers.
- It has some of the most dangerous countries for journalists: Pakistan (139th), Philippines (127th) and Bangladesh (146th).

Sources: the hindu.

Supreme Court's Integrated Case Management Information System

Supreme Court's Integrated Case Management Information System (ICMIS) was recently launched by the PM.

What you need to know about ICMIS?

The Integrated Case Management Information System or ICMIS is described as the next generation hybrid database which is used to better enable litigants to access and retrieve information online.

- The new system, aimed at serving as a digital repository for case-related information, can be accessed at sci.gov.in.
- Its functions include the option of e-filing cases, checking listing dates, case status, online service of notice/summons, office reports and overall tracking of progress of a case filed with the apex court registry.
- It is also proposed that it will operate as an online gateway for payment of court fee and process fee. Other features offered under the new system include an online court fee calculator. This is expected to streamline the filing process for both the advocates and the registry.
- All records of a particular case—at various stages—at the district court or high court will be integrated with the system to offer the complete record in digital form. In the future, linking of information on jail inmates and under-trials may be integrated into the system.

Sources: the hindu.

Public affairs index

Public affairs index (PAI) for the year 2017 has been released. The PAI aims to rank the states of India objectively in the field of governance based on various focus subjects and indicators and is an initiative of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC).

- The survey was based on 10 themes, 26 focus subjects and 82 indicators. The report was based on a wide range of themes such as essential infrastructure, support to human development, social protection, women and children, crime, law and order, delivery of justice, environment, transparency and accountability, fiscal management and economic freedom.

- The PAC is a not-for-profit think-tank focussed on good governance, which was established in 1994.

Performance of various states:

- For the second year running, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have maintained their positions as the states with the best governance in the country. They are followed by Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka.
- Among 12 small States (population less than two crore), Himachal has wrested the first rank, followed by Goa and Mizoram. Delhi slipped from third position in 2016 to 9th position in 2017. Meghalaya (12th), Arunachal Pradesh (11th) and Jammu Kashmir (10th) are at the bottom of the table.
- Punjab is the best performer among all States in the category of essential infrastructure. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat secured second, third and fourth positions, respectively.
- In human development, Kerala, Maharashtra, and Punjab are top of the table while Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam are the worst performers.
- Kerala, Assam and Madhya Pradesh secured top three ranks in implementation of social protection policies, while Telangana, Haryana and Punjab are lagging in execution of various State and Central government schemes.
- In the category of women and children, Kerala topped the list followed by Odisha and Karnataka while Jharkhand, Haryana and Maharashtra are poor performers.
- Tamil Nadu secured first rank in maintaining law and order, delivery of justice and environment categories and secured last rank in transparency and accountability in the administration.
- Telangana is the best performer in fiscal management while its neighbour Andhra Pradesh is the poor performer and secured last rank.
- In the category of economic freedom, Gujarat secured top rank while Bihar secured the last rank.



Sources: the hindu.

'SEVA' App

The government has launched the Saral Eindhan Vitaran Application (SEVA), developed **in-house by Coal India Limited (CIL)** for power sector consumers.

What you need to know about the app?

- SEVA is a part of 'Digital India' initiative, which is **aimed at increasing the Consumer Connect as well as the Transparency and Accountability in Coal dispatch**.
- The SEVA Dashboard provides summary of quantity of coal dispatched along with grades for the given day, month, and the latest yearly updates as well. It also provides information on rake movement including latest status of indents of rake, allotment and loading. This would help consumers making advance logistics planning.
- The app has a dedicated backend team to monitor the status of specific grievances from consumers and take action on the feedback received on the app. While much of the information on the SEVA Dashboard is available in open access, consumer specific data would be password protected.



Significance of this app:

The consumer friendly mobile app helps in tracking of coal dispatch to 118 Power Plants through Fuel Supply Agreement (FSA) of around 500 MT besides, dispatch through Special Forward E-Auction and Bridge Linkage from more than 200 dispatch points spread over eight states of the country.

By using this app the common man would be able to hold the Government accountable for the coal linkage allocations and would be able to check any pilferage or inefficiencies in coal consumption for power generation. This would, in

turn, lead to rationalization of coal linkages and finally reduction in the power prices in the country. In near future, non-power sector mines would also be added in this App.

Sources: pib.

International Comparison Programme (ICP)

India is participating in the current phase of International Comparison Programme (ICP) with reference to 2017.

What you need to know about International Comparison Programme?

The ICP is a worldwide statistical initiative led by the World Bank under the auspices of the United Nations Statistical Commission, with the main objective of providing comparable price and volume measures of gross domestic product (GDP) and its expenditure aggregates among countries within and across regions. Through a partnership with international, regional, sub-regional and national agencies, the ICP collects and compares price data and GDP expenditures to estimate and publish purchasing power parities (PPPs) of the world's economies.



In India, Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation (MOSPI) will take up the price collection work in rural and urban areas shortly all over the country.

Know about PPPs:

PPPs measure the total amount of goods and services that a single unit of a country's currency can buy in another country. The PPP between countries A and B measures the number of units of country A's currency required to purchase a basket of goods or services in country A as compared to one unit of country B's currency to purchase a similar basket of goods in country B. PPPs can thus be used to convert the cost of a basket of goods and service into a common currency while eliminating price level differences across countries. In other words, PPPs equalize the purchasing power of currencies. Due to large differences in price levels across economies, market exchange rate-converted GDP does not accurately measure the relative sizes of economies and the levels of material well-being. PPPs make it possible to compare the output of economies and the welfare of their inhabitants in 'real' terms, thus controlling for price level differences across countries.

Uses of PPPs:

- Sustainable Development Goals and Millennium Development Goals (United Nations).
- Human Development Index (United Nations Development Programme).
- Poverty rates at international poverty line, size of the economy, and price levels in the World Development Indicators (World Bank).
- Country group aggregates and growth rates in the World Economic Outlook and country quota formula (International Monetary Fund).
- Allocation of the European structural and investment funds (European Union).

Sources: pib.

Legalising gambling: law panel in moral quandary

The Law Commission has sought views from the public and stakeholders on whether or not gambling and betting are "morally correct in the Indian circumstances". Primarily, it wants public inputs on the question of legalising gambling and betting — conducted clandestinely across the country and the cause of ruin for many families.

The various questions the commission wants to generate opinion on include:

- Whether legalising betting and gambling will help in curbing illegal activities.
- Will licensing gambling and betting help the government earn substantial revenue and generate employment.
- Is legalising betting and gambling morally correct in the Indian circumstances.
- What can be a possible model by which people engaging in such activities can be safeguarded against bankruptcy.

- If legalised, should foreign betting and gambling companies be allowed to have a foothold in the country.

Background:

Because of gambling, families are rendered bankrupt and many people are behind bars. Online gambling and betting is another area which has become very difficult to curb. It is understood that a lot of money is involved in illegal gambling business, creating almost a parallel economy, converting legally earned money into black money that is drained to gambling operators in other countries online.

Need for new law in this regard:

Gambling is covered under an archaic law, **the Public Gambling Act of 1867**. The Constitution has enabled the States to enact their own gambling legislation. However, there is no uniformity in the various State laws and most of these laws pertain to physical gambling and not online or virtual gambling, which is seen to be a route to crime, corruption and money laundering. Section 67 of the **Information Technology Act of 2000 vaguely prohibits online transmission and publication of material which “corrupt” persons**.

Way ahead:

Views would be compiled for a report to be handed over to the government. The question came up after the Supreme Court asked the commission to study the possibility of legalising betting in the backdrop of the IPL betting scandal.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.

National Award for Social Understanding and Upliftment of Weaker Sections

The President of India Shri Pranab Mukharjee presented the “Dr. Ambedkar National Award for Social Understanding and up-liftment of Weaker Sections for the year 2011, 2012 and 2014” at a function here today. The function was organized by The Ambedkar Foundation under Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

Awardees:

- The award for the year 2011 was presented to Professor S.K. Thorat on New Delhi for his contributions towards the upliftment of the downtrodden.
- The award for the year 2012 was presented to Samta Sainik Dal for its extraordinary services.
- The award for the year 2014 was jointly presented to Shri Babu Lal Nirmal of Rajasthan for his extraordinary contributions in upholding the rights of poor persons in rural and urban areas of Baran District and to Amar Sewa Sangam of Tamil Nadu for its extraordinary services being extended for the welfare of the marginalized population of the society including the physically and mentally challenged persons.

Know about the award:

Dr. Ambedkar National Award for Social Understanding and Upliftment of Weaker Sections was instituted by the Government of India in the year 1992, in pursuance of a decision of the Centenary Celebrations Committee of Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar headed by the then Prime Minister of India.

- As per its Code of Procedure, the Award is given for outstanding contribution to the promotion of Social Understanding and for the Upliftment of the Weaker Sections in India.
- A Jury constituted for the purpose considers the achievements of the individuals and organizations nominated / recommended for the Award by the prescribed authorities.
- The efforts made towards integrating the weaker sections into the mainstream of Indian society, working for their socio-economic and educational upliftment is the primary consideration in identifying the Awardee.
- As per the Code of Procedure of the National Award, one Award each year is presented to individuals or organizations. The Award is presented jointly or shared by more than one recipient or organization as may be considered by the Jury to be equally deserving of recognition in the year. The award consists of a citation and Rs. 10.00 lakh as cash prize.

Sources: pib.

Slum Yuva Daud

It was recently organized in Delhi to mark the beginning of the Adopt Slum Campaign.

Who initiated?

It was initiated by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports and Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS).



- Participation: the campaign will involve groups like NSS, public schools, RWAs, NGOs, rotary clubs etc.
- The NYKS has adopted slums across 11 districts and will work for their overall development with young volunteers.

Know about NYKS:

Nehru Yuva Kendras were established in the year 1972 with the objective of providing rural youth avenues to take part in the process of nation building as well providing opportunities for the development of their personality and skills.

- In the year 1987-88, **Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) was set up as an autonomous organization under the Government of India, Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports**, to oversee working of these Kendras.
- NYKS is the largest grassroots level youth organization; one of its kind in the world. It channelizes the power of youth on the principles of voluntarism, self-help and community participation.
- The basic objective for creation of youth clubs is to render community support through developmental initiatives involving activities with particular focus on youth empowerment.

Sources: pib.

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

Project “LOcal Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse) (LOTUS HR)

Department of Biotechnology (DBT) and NWO, the Netherlands Science Agency have announced a joint call for proposals for cleaning the Barapullah drain. Accordingly, work has begun on Cleaning the Barapullah Drain in New Delhi under the Project “Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUS HR).

What you need to know about LOTUS HR?

The project Local Treatment of Urban Sewage Streams for Healthy Reuse (LOTUS HR) is an Indo-Netherlands joint project funded by Department of Biotechnology(DBT), Govt of india and NWO/STW, The Govt of Netherlands.

- The project has stakeholders from both Academia and Industry from India and Netherlands. It is coordinated by Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi with participation of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), New Delhi and National Environment Research Institute, Nagpur from India while Technical University Delft is coordinating it from The Netherlands, with participation of Environmental Engineering and Water Technology Department, UNESCO, Wageningen University and its Aquatic Ecology Department. There is also commitment from industry, especially from The Netherlands, in terms of both cash and kind towards the project.
- The project aims to demonstrate a novel holistic (waste-) water management approach, that will produce clean water that can be reused for various proposes (e.g. industry, agriculture, construction etc.), while simultaneously recovering nutrients and energy from the urban waste water, thus converting drain into profitable mines. Special attention will be paid to pathogen removal and removing conventional and emerging pollutants.
- The project will develop an innovative pilot scale plant, suitable to cope with Indian conditions in a location specific manner. The final design of the pilot plant will be scalable and modular, to fit into the highly populated urban terrain.

Sources: pib.

29th India- Indonesia Co-Ordinated Patrol (Corpat) Commences

The 29th series of India-Indonesia CORPAT has begun at Port Blair under the aegis of Andaman and Nicobar Command.

What you need to know about Corpat?

The Indonesian Navy and the Indian Navy have been participating in coordinated patrol (CORPAT) twice a year since 2002 to keep this vital part of the Indian Ocean Region safe and secure for commercial shipping and international trade.

Apart from securing the trade sea route, the coordinated patrol also serves to enhance mutual understanding and inter-operability between the two navies. The CORPAT thus reflects the shared concern between the two countries for a peaceful Indian ocean for the benefit of international community.

Sources: pib.

Xi evokes Panchsheel as India skips meet

Despite India's decision to skip the two-day Belt and Road Forum (BRF), the once special relationship between New Delhi and Beijing echoed during the opening session of the conclave. Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed five principles of peaceful co-existence or Panchsheel — the brainchild of China, India and Myanmar in the 1950s — as the mantra for advancing the Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI), and as a vehicle for achieving sustainable globalisation.

Background:

India's had decided to boycott the BRF, as a mark of protest against the infringement of its sovereignty by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). India's decision to stay away has raised eyebrows here, as other countries such as Japan and Vietnam, which have serious maritime disputes with China, have sent high-level official delegations, to the BRF.

Know about Panchsheel:

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, known in Nepal and India as the Panchsheel Treaty, are a series of principles which formed the bedrock of the relationship between India and the People's Republic of China. Their first formal codification in treaty form was in an agreement between China and India in 1954. They were enunciated in the preamble to the "Agreement (with exchange of notes) on trade and intercourse between Tibet Region of China and India", which was signed in Peking on 29 April 1954. This agreement stated the five principles as:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Mutual non-aggression.
- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.
- Peaceful co-existence.

An underlying assumption of the Five Principles was that newly independent states after decolonization would be able to develop a new and more principled approach to international relations.

Sources: the hindu.

India's 'Ujala' to light up UK homes

Union Power Minister Piyush Goyal recently launched the **Ujala Scheme** related to the energy efficient LED bulbs in London.



What you need to know about Ujala?

Ujala is **globally one of the largest efficiency programmes and being run by Energy Efficiency Services Ltd**, an energy services company promoted by Indian state-run power majors.

- Through this initiative, the government plans to replace all 770 million inefficient incandescent and CFL (compact fluorescent lamps in the country with LED (light emitting diode) bulbs.

- The programme has already turned India into the world's LED capital, accounting for 10-12% of the global market 4 billion bulbs.
- The Ujala scheme uses economy of scale and a sustainable market mechanism.

Sources: pib.

Study on Common Risk Mitigation Mechanism for Solar Power Generation Projects

Argentina, Burkina-Faso, Chad, France, **India**, Ivory Coast, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Sénégal, Uganda and Yemen have jointly supported commissioning of a study to define and structure a **Common Risk Mitigation Mechanism (CRMM)** for solar power generation projects in solar rich countries.

- This is a major step in the implementation of the Paris Declaration of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) adopted on 30 November 2015 and of the ISA Programme aimed at mobilising "Affordable finance at scale".

Significance of this move:

Today, the cost of capital represents a substantial amount of the final costs of renewable energy, in particular solar PV. The Council on Energy, Environment and Water calculates that in India it represents 70% of the total cost of solar power. The proposed CRMM will offer a simple and affordable tool that will create a secure environment for private institutional investment in solar assets. The instrument will help diversify and pool risks on mutualized public resources and unlock significant investments. This instrument will dramatically lower the cost of finance for renewable energy and the overall price of electricity.

Know about ISA:

The International Solar Alliance is an initiative jointly launched by the Prime Minister of India and the President of France on 30 November 2015 at Paris, in the presence of the Secretary General of the UN, on the side lines of COP21. Under the ISA, solar rich countries lying fully or partially between the Tropics are invited to share and aggregate data regarding their needs and objectives; emulate successful practices; and set up common mechanisms and instruments, in order to address obstacles to deployment at scale of solar energy.

Sources: pib.

Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the Multilateral Convention to Implement Tax Treaty Related Measures to Prevent Base Erosion and Profit Shifting.

What you need to know about the convention?

The Convention is an outcome of the OECD / G20 BEPS Project to tackle base erosion and profit shifting through tax planning strategies that exploit gaps and mismatches in tax rules to artificially shift profits to low or no-tax locations where there is little or no economic activity, resulting in little or no overall corporate tax being paid.

- The Convention implements two minimum standards relating to prevention of treaty abuse and dispute resolution through Mutual Agreement Procedure. The Convention will not function in the same way as an Amending Protocol to a single existing treaty, which would directly amend the text of the Covered Tax Agreements. Instead, it will be applied alongside existing tax treaties, modifying their application in order to implement the BEPS measures.
- The Convention ensures consistency and certainty in the implementation of the BEPS Project in a multilateral context. The Convention also provides flexibility to exclude a specific tax treaty and to opt out of provisions or parts of provisions through making of reservations.
- A list of Covered Tax Agreements as well as a list of reservations and options chosen by a country are required to be made at the time of signature or when depositing the instrument of ratification.

Benefits for India:

Signing of the Multilateral Convention will enable the application of BEPS outcomes through modification of existing tax treaties of India in a swift manner. It is also in India's interest to ensure that all its treaty partners adopt the BEPS

anti-abuse outcomes. Signing of the Convention will enable curbing of revenue loss through treaty abuse and base erosion and profit shifting strategies by ensuring that profits are taxed where substantive economic activities generating the profits are carried out and where value is created.

Sources: pib.

RCEP trade ministers to meet

Trade ministers of 16 countries, including India and China, are all set to meet in Vietnam to discuss progress in the ongoing negotiations of proposed trade deal, RCEP. So far, negotiators of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) have held 18 rounds of negotiations.

What you need to know about RCEP?

The RCEP is among the proposed three mega FTAs in the world so far – the other two being the TPP (Trans Pacific Partnership, led by the US) and the TTIP (Trans -atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the US and the EU).



- The agreement (FTA) is proposed between the ten member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Brunei, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam) and the six states with which ASEAN has existing FTAs (Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand).
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia.
- RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the TPP trade agreement, which includes the United States but excludes China.

Sources: the hindu.

Joint Declaration of Intent between Germany and India regarding cooperation in the sector of alternative medicine

The Union Cabinet has approved the Joint Declaration of Intent (JDI) between Germany and India regarding cooperation in the sector of alternative medicine.

- The financial resources necessary to conduct research, training courses, conferences / meetings will be met from the existing allocated budget and existing plan schemes of Ministry of AYUSH.

Significance of this move:

The signing of the JDI will enhance bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the areas of traditional/alternative medicine. Initiation of collaborative research, training and scientific capacity building in the field of alternative medicine under the JDI between the two countries would contribute to the enhanced employment opportunities in the AYUSH sector.

Sources: pib.

Minesweeper deal to be inked soon

After repeated delays and protracted negotiations, **India and South Korea are set to be close to finalising the deal for 12 minesweepers for the Indian Navy**. Commercial negotiations are in the final stages and should be concluded in the next two months. The technical negotiations have long been completed which also involves the Indian Navy.

Key facts:

- The deal for 12 minesweepers or Mine Counter Measure Vessels is worth about ₹32,640 crore and the ships would be manufactured in India under Transfer of Technology.



- The first ship is expected to be delivered three years after the contract is signed. Minesweepers are crucial to detect mines and explosives planted by the enemy targeting our ships as they enter or leave harbours.

Need for Minesweepers:

Minesweeper ships use sonar systems to detect mines planted on the seabed or mines that float at predetermined depths.

- They are used to keep seas mine-free.
- The Navy is presently left with four ageing minesweepers which will be retired by 2018 end. However, efforts to procure new MCMVs have been repeatedly delayed.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Expedite work on Kishanganga Project: PMO directs power ministry and J&K government

Notwithstanding Pakistan's challenge to Jammu and Kashmir's 330 mw Kishanganga hydro-electric project, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has directed the power ministry and the J&K government to expedite work on the two major Kishanganga transmission lines that are to be commissioned along with the first unit of the crucial project.

- Two transmission lines — the Kishanganga-Amargarh and the Amargarh-Wagoora lines — are to be commissioned by the power ministry.

Background:

Pakistan has been consistently objecting to the Kishanganga hydro-electric project which is to be completed by India in three units of 110MW each, the first of which is set to be commissioned in the coming months. Last month, India had put on hold a World Bank-facilitated initiative for water secretary-level talks with Pakistan in Washington, owing to differences of opinion on technical issues on the Indus river hydro-projects like Kishanganga.

In January, Pakistan had reportedly asked India to suspend the ongoing construction of the Kishanganga project and asked the World Bank to set up a court of arbitration to mediate the dispute over the Indus Waters Treaty between India and Pakistan.

About the Project:

The Kishanganga Hydroelectric Plant is an \$864 million dam which is part of a run-of-the-river hydroelectric scheme that is designed to divert water from the Kishanganga River to a power plant in the Jhelum River basin.

- It is located 5 km north of Bandipore in Jammu and Kashmir, India and will have an installed capacity of 330 MW. Construction on the project began in 2007 and is expected to be complete in 2016.
- Construction on the dam was temporarily halted by the Hague's Permanent Court of Arbitration in October 2011 due to Pakistan's protest of its effect on the flow of the Kishanganga River (called the Neelum River in Pakistan). In February 2013, the Hague ruled that India could divert a minimum amount of water for power generation.

Sources: the hindu.

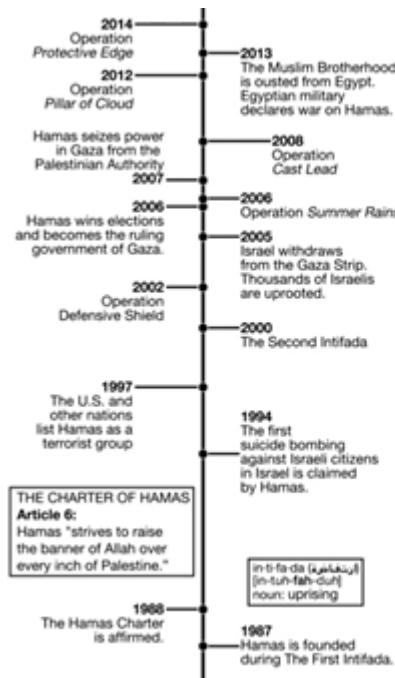
Paper 2 Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.

Hamas softens language, accepts pre-1967 border

Hamas, the Islamist movement, which runs the Gaza Strip, has unveiled a new policy document ahead of a first face-to-face meeting between U.S. President Donald Trump and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas, whose Fatah party remains at loggerheads with Hamas.

- The document accepts for the first time pre-1967 armistice lines as a matter of "national consensus" — in what many interpreted as implicitly accepting the existence of Israel.

- Some analysts see the move as an attempt by Hamas to ease tension with regional allies and assuage hostilities with global powers.



Hamas حماس (zeal)
حركة المقاومة الإسلامية Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades
Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya
"Islamic Resistance Movement"

WHAT IS HAMAS
And Why is it Considered a
TERRORIST ORGANIZATION?
with Buck Sexton

HAMAS TERRORIST TACTICS AGAINST ISRAEL

SUICIDE BOMBINGS
FIRED ROCKETS AND MORTARS AT CIVILIANS
KIDNAPPINGS
KNIFE ATTACKS
CAR BOMBINGS
SEEKS OUT CIVILIAN CASUALTIES



What Is Gaza and Who Controls It?

The Gaza Strip is a Detroit-sized area on the border with Egypt up against the Mediterranean Sea that is one of the most densely packed places on Earth with 1.8 million people living in just 139 square miles. Technically part of the Palestinian Authority, it has been governed since 2007 by the militant group Hamas.

Background:

Hamas is a Palestinian Islamist political organization and militant group that has waged war on Israel since the group's 1987 founding, most notably through suicide bombings and rocket attacks. It seeks to replace Israel with a Palestinian state. It also governs Gaza independently of the Palestinian Authority.



Sources: the hindu.

Japan pitches for Chabahar port

Japan has shown interest in collaborating with India on projects in Asia and Africa as a counter to China's Belt and Road initiative (B&RI). Categorically, it has shown interest in Chabahar port development.

Where is Chabahar port?

It is located on the Makran coast, Chabahar in southeastern Iran. Its location lies in the Gulf of Oman. This coast is a relatively underdeveloped free trade and industrial zone, especially when compared to the sprawling port of Bandar Abbas further west. Also, it is the only Iranian port with direct access to the ocean.

For India, Chabahar is of strategic importance for the following reasons:

- It is the nearest port to India on the Iranian coast, which provides access to the resources and markets of Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- It is located 76 nautical miles (less than 150km) west of the Pakistani port of Gwadar, being developed by China. This makes it ideal for keeping track of Chinese or Pakistani military activity based out of Gwadar.
- Also, Chabahar port is suitably located to serve India's outreach in the region to Afghanistan and beyond as well as link with International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to which India is one of the initial signatories.

- The port will cut transport costs/time for Indian goods by a third.
- From Chabahar, the existing Iranian road network can link up to Zaraj in Afghanistan, about 883 kms from the port. The Zaraj-Delaram road constructed by India in 2009 can give access to Afghanistan's Garland Highway, setting up road access to four major cities in Afghanistan — Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif.



Sources: the hindu.

eMigrate violates our sovereignty: UAE envoy

The United Arab Emirates, one of the largest employers of Indians in the Gulf, has raised a red flag with the Ministry of External Affairs over the government's flagship eMigrate programme over what it terms as "sovereignty issues."

What is eMigrate programme?

After hundreds of complaints from workers about mistreatment, the MEA's Overseas Affairs department (then a separate ministry) had in 2015 set up a database initiative called the eMigrate programme, that gathers extensive information on emigrants as well as foreign employers, their companies and recruiting agents.

What's the issue now?

This collection of data is being termed as violation of sovereignty by the UAE. The concerns are not restricted to India's database of foreign employers in that country, but includes the eMigrate programme's mandate to inspect premises of UAE companies, which they want stopped immediately.

Other Gulf countries, including Saudi Arabia, had also raised issues with the eMigrate system as soon as it was launched in July 2015.

Why India should be worried?

Concerns are only one part of a much larger worry for the government as India has seen a job crunch in the Gulf markets in the past few years. According to a World Bank study on emigrants and remittances worldwide, published in April 2017, while India retained the top position as a recipient of remittances, it saw the biggest year-on-year decline of 8.9% in 2016. In 2014 India received \$69.6 billion in remittances, which dipped to \$68.9 billion in 2015 and fell to \$62.7 billion last year.

Sources: the hindu.

DIPP & WIPO to set up Technology and Innovation Support Centers

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) have signed an agreement to establish **Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISC)**.



What you need to know about TISC?

These centres will be set up under WIPO's **Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISC)** programme. The programme provides innovators in developing countries with access to locally based, high quality technology information and related services, helping them to exploit their innovative potential and to create, protect, and manage their intellectual property (IP) rights.

Services offered by TISCs may include:

- Access to online patent and non-patent (scientific and technical) resources and IP-related publications.
- Assistance in searching and retrieving technology information.
- Training in database search.
- On-demand searches (novelty, state-of-the-art and infringement).
- Monitoring technology and competitors.
- Basic information on industrial property laws, management and strategy, and technology commercialization and marketing.

Key facts:

- The **Cell for IPR Promotion and Management (CIPAM)** is designated as the National Focal point for the TISC national network.
- As the national focal point, CIPAM will identify potential host institutions, assess their capacities and support them in joining the TISC project.
- **CIPAM will also act as the main intermediary between WIPO and TISC host institutions** and coordinate all the activities of the national TISC network.

About WIPO:

The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is **one of the 17 specialized agencies of the United Nations**.

- It was created in 1967 “to encourage creative activity, to promote the protection of intellectual property throughout the world.”
- It has currently 188 member states, administers 26 international treaties, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland.
- Non-members are the states of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Solomon Islands, South Sudan and Timor-Leste. Palestine has observer status.
- India is a member of WIPO and party to several treaties administered by WIPO.

Sources: pib.

India unanimously elected to head UN-Habitat

India has been unanimously elected as the President of the **UN-Habitat**, an organ of the United Nations' Organisation (UNO) that promotes socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements across the world, after 10 years.

What you need to know?

- Since the UN-Habitat came into being in 1978, it is only the third time that India has been elected to lead this important organization after 2007 and 1988.

- India will be represented by the **Union Minister of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation**. Currently, the minister will chair the ongoing meeting of the 58 member **Governing Council of UN-Habitat in Nairobi, Kenya**.
- The **theme of the 26th Meeting of the Governing Council** is “Opportunities for effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda” with focus on inclusive, sustainable and adequate housing for a better future and planning and financing sustainable urbanization and integrated human settlements. The New Urban Agenda was adopted by the world community at Quito, Ecuador last year.

About UN Habitat:

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme ([UN-Habitat](#)) is the United Nations agency for human settlements and sustainable urban development. It was established in 1978 as an outcome of the First UN Conference on Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat I) held in Vancouver, Canada in 1976.



- It is mandated by the United Nations General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. It is a member of the United Nations Development Group.
- The mandate of UN-Habitat derives from the Habitat Agenda, adopted by the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) in Istanbul, Turkey, in 1996. The twin goals of the Habitat Agenda are adequate shelter for all and the development of sustainable human settlements in an urbanizing world.
- As an inter-governmental policy making and decision making body, the Governing Council of UN-Habitat seeks to promote integral and comprehensive approach to human settlements, assist the countries and regions in addressing human settlement problems and strengthen cooperation among all countries on human settlement issue.
- UN-Habitat reports to the United Nations General Assembly.

Sources: pib.

India wins stay at International Court of Justice in Kulbhushan Jadhav case

In a major breakthrough for the government's efforts in the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, the former naval officer sentenced to death in Pakistan, the government received a stay order from the International Court of Justice at The Hague, in a petition that accused Pakistan of gross violations of international laws.

- Ordering the stay, President of the International Court of Justice Ronny Abraham directed Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to “act in such a way so as to enable the court to enforce any decision it takes on the Indian plea,” effectively staying Mr. Jadhav’s execution until the court hears the matter and passes orders.

Background:

In its petition, India had listed out the details of the Jadhav case and the “egregious violations” of the Geneva convention that deals with Consular relations, including Pakistan’s refusal to give any details of Mr. Jadhav’s arrest and trial until after the death sentence was passed, failure to provide consular access to India despite 15 attempts, and suggesting access would be given only in exchange for information about Mr. Jadhav from India.

In its petition explaining the urgency, India said that “without the provisional measures requested, Pakistan will execute Mr. Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav before the Court can consider the merits of India’s claims and India will forever be deprived of the opportunity to vindicate its rights”, indicating that a final appeal filed by Mr. Jadhav’s mother in the Pakistan Supreme Court could be adjudicated at any time, unless the International court acted.

What you need to know about ICJ?

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It was established in June 1945 by the Charter of the United Nations and began work in April 1946.

- The seat of the Court is at the Peace Palace in The Hague (Netherlands).
- Of the six principal organs of the United Nations, it is the only one not located in New York (United States of America).

- The Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by authorized United Nations organs and specialized agencies.
- The Court is composed of 15 judges, who are elected for terms of office of nine years by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. It is assisted by a Registry, its administrative organ. Its official languages are English and French.
- Its judgments have binding force and are without appeal for the parties concerned.

Jurisdiction:

As stated in the UN Charter, all 193 UN members are automatically parties to the Court's statute. Non-UN members may also become parties to the Court's statute. Once a state is a party to the Court's statute, it is entitled to participate in cases before the Court. However, being a party to the statute does not automatically give the Court jurisdiction over disputes involving those parties.

Sources: the hindu.

Officials from Arctic nations to meet amid drilling concerns

High-level officials from the world's eight Arctic nations are meeting in Alaska amid concerns about the future of the sensitive region after United States President Donald Trump called for more oil drilling and development.

- No formal discussions were set in Alaska on key issues such as climate change, development and drilling. But those issues will provide a backdrop as the chairmanship of the council passes from the US to Finland.

What it does?

It does not make policy or allocate resources, and its decisions must be unanimous. In terms of being a reflection of a nation's priorities, it can only go so far since all eight have to agree to the same thing.

Composition:

- Eight member countries constitute the council: **Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States** as these are the eight countries with sovereignty over the lands within the Arctic Circle.
- Observer status is open to non-Arctic states approved by the Council at the Ministerial Meetings that occur once every two years. Observers have no voting rights in the Council. Presently, there are 12 observer states including India and China.

What is the Arctic Council?

The Arctic Council is an advisory body that promotes cooperation among member nations and indigenous groups. Its focus is on sustainable development and environmental protection of the Arctic.

Sources: the hindu.

Indian bags key post in UNFCCC

Ovais Sarmad, a senior Indian official, has been appointed as the deputy executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)), under which the landmark Paris agreement was negotiated and adopted. He was appointed by U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Know about UNFCCC:

With 197 Parties, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has **near universal membership and is the parent treaty of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol**. The Kyoto Protocol has been ratified by 192 of the UNFCCC Parties. The ultimate objective of both treaties is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that will prevent dangerous human interference with the climate system.

- UNFCCC treaty was negotiated at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, then entered into force on 21 March 1994. The **framework set no binding limits on greenhouse gas emissions for individual countries and contains no enforcement mechanisms**. Instead, the framework outlines how specific international treaties (called "protocols" or "Agreements") may be negotiated to set binding limits on greenhouse gases.

Sources: the hindu.

India working with World Gold Council to create a spot exchange

The World Gold Council is working with the Indian government on plans to create a local physical spot-gold exchange that may start up as soon as next year. This is expected to bring more order and structure to the market.

- The plans still face many hurdles including that the state-level rather than central government has responsibility for gold-related matters in India. Increased infrastructure such as gold vaults and reliable receipts for metal are also needed.

About World Gold Council:

The [World Gold Council](#) is the market development organisation for the gold industry. It works across all parts of the industry, from gold mining to investment, and their aim is to stimulate and sustain demand for gold.



- The World Gold Council is **an association whose members comprise the world's leading gold mining companies**. It helps to support its members to mine in a responsible way and developed the Conflict Free Gold Standard.
- Headquartered in the UK, they have offices in India, China, Singapore, Japan and the United States.

Sources: et.

Annual Meeting of African Development Bank

The 52nd Annual Meetings of the African Development bank are being held in **Gandhinagar**. This is the **first time that the Annual Meetings of AfDB are being held in India**. These Meetings are the Bank's largest annual event and serve to raise the profile of the institution on the global stage.

- In addition to the Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors, these Meetings will bring together about 3000 delegates and participants, and will feature a number of official, knowledge, and side events. The Governors of the Bank are from the 54 African regional member countries and 27 non-regional member countries (including India).
- The Annual Meetings provide a unique forum for representatives of government, business, civil society, think-tanks, academia and the media – from Africa and beyond – to debate key issues on Africa's development, and to discuss the Bank's performance in delivering on its mandate.
- Reflecting the significance of agriculture in Africa and in the Bank's development work, the 2017 Annual Meetings will be held on the **theme: "Transforming Agriculture for Wealth Creation in Africa."**

What you need to know about AfDB?

The African Development Bank Group ([AfDB](#)) is a multilateral development finance institution established to contribute to the economic development and social progress of African countries.

- The AfDB was founded in 1964 and **comprises three entities**: The African Development Bank, the African Development Fund and the Nigeria Trust Fund.
- The AfDB's mission is to fight poverty and improve living conditions on the continent through promoting the investment of public and private capital in projects and programs that are likely to contribute to the economic and social development of the region.
- **Governing**: The AfDB is controlled by a Board of Executive Directors, made up of representatives of its member countries.
- **Voting**: The voting power on the Board is split according to the size of each member's share, currently 60%-40% between African (or "regional") countries and "non-regional" member countries ("donors"). The largest African Development Bank shareholder is Nigeria with nearly 9% of the vote.
- **Representation**: All member countries of the AfDB are represented on the AfDB Board of Executive Directors. Member governments are officially represented at the AfDB by their Minister of Finance, Planning or Cooperation who sits on the AfDB Board of Governors. The AfDB Governors meet once a year to take major decisions about the institution's leadership, strategic directions and governing bodies.

- **Unit of account:** The African Development Bank is using a Unit of Account which is registered as XUA as ISO 4217 standard currency code. It is not exchanged directly by individuals, it is used for accounting between state members.

India and AfDB:

India joined the African Development Fund in 1982, and became a member of the Bank in 1983. India is a non-regional member of the Bank. India and Africa share a great relationship, and have great degree of commonalities in terms of a shared history, and current challenges.

Sources: the hindu.

Smallest nation joins solar alliance

The world's **smallest republic, the tiny island nation of Nauru** — has become the sixth country to ratify the International Solar Alliance (ISA) Framework pact initiated by the Indian and French Governments at the climate change summit held at Paris in 2015.

- Five more nations, from Africa, — Comoros, Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, Ghana and Djibouti — have committed to sign the pact during the ongoing meeting of the African Development bank in India.



What you need to know about Nauru?

Formerly known as Pleasant Island, Nauru is an island country in Micronesia in the Central Pacific. With 10,084 residents in a 21-square-kilometre area, Nauru is the smallest state in the South Pacific and third smallest state by area in the world, behind only Vatican City and Monaco.

Know about ISA:

India launched the International Solar Alliance (ISA) at the CoP21 Climate Conference in Paris. The alliance brings together developed and developing countries, governments and industries, laboratories and institutions in a common enterprise.

- The main aims of ISA include reducing financial risk across a larger global market, encouraging cooperation on technology, building capacity, and increasing energy access.
- All the countries, located fully or partly between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, have been invited to join the Alliance.
- The new body will function from the National Institute of Solar Energy in India, Gurgaon. The Union Government of India has announced that it will provide land and \$30 million to form a secretariat for the Alliance, and also support it for five years.

Sources: the hindu.

G7 summit

The leaders of the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — countries collectively known as the Group of Seven (G7) — recently held a two-day summit in Taormina, Italy. The bloc meets annually to discuss a wide range of issues, including global economy, security and energy — and this year will be no exception.



- The leaders issued a collective statement at the close of the talks, saying that they have committed to "strengthening our collective energy security and ensuring open, transparent, liquid, and secure global markets for energy resources and technologies."

What you need to know about G7?

The Group of Seven (G7) is an informal bloc of industrialised democracies. Its current members make up nearly 50% of the world economy, and represent more than 60% of net global wealth.

- It consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. EU is also represented.
- The G7 takes no mandatory decisions, and the meeting is billed as an opportunity to allow leaders to exchange ideas in key issues. A leaders' declaration at the end of summit is not binding in nature.
- The presidency, which rotates among member states, is responsible for setting the agenda and arranging logistics.

Sources: the hindu.

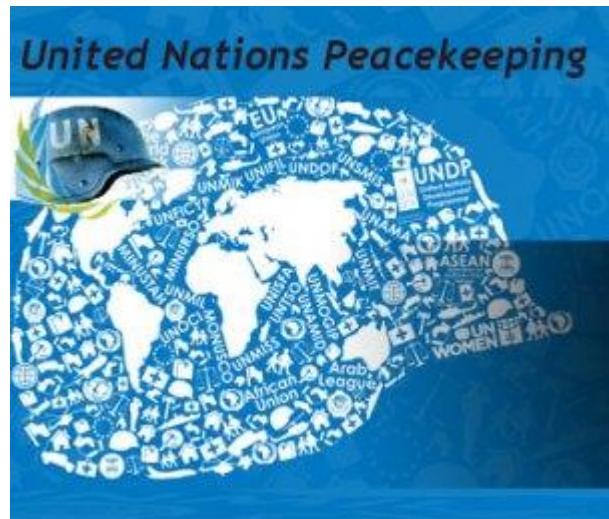
International Day of UN Peacekeepers

May 29th is the International Day of UN Peacekeepers. The International Day of Peacekeepers serves to honor the memory of UN Peacekeepers who have lost their lives, and pay tribute to all the men and women who have served and continue to serve in UN peacekeeping operations for their high level of professionalism, dedication and courage.

The **theme** for the 2017 International Day of UN Peacekeepers is "**Investing in Peace Around the World**".

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 (DKPO).
- 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: pib.



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SUBSCRIBE

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

SEBI finalizes norms for listing of Green Bonds

Regulator Sebi has finalized norms for issuance and listing of [green bonds](#), which will help in raising funds from capital markets for investment in the renewable energy space.

- The rules have been finalised by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) after taking into account inputs from the finance and environment ministries, as also from the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).

Why are green bonds important for India?

India has embarked on an ambitious target of building 175 gigawatt of renewable energy capacity by 2022. This requires a massive \$200 billion in funding. However, higher interest rates and unattractive terms under which debt is available in India raise the cost of renewable energy by 24-32% compared to the U.S. and Europe. Budget allocations have also been insufficient and the market is also very limited. Therefore, green bonds help raise funds for the projects in this sector.

What are its benefits?

Green bonds enhances an issuer's reputation, as it helps in showcasing their commitment towards sustainable development. It also provides issuers access to specific set of global investors who invest only in green ventures. With an increasing focus of foreign investors towards green investments, it could also help in reducing the cost of capital.



What are Green bonds?

Green bonds are like any other debt instrument but the **funds raised from such a bond sale are used exclusively for renewable energy projects**.

Sources: the hindu.

Employment under PMEGP falls 9.5%

A study by ASSOCHAM has found that job opportunities under the **Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)** fell over 9.5% year-on-year to 3.2 lakh in FY16 from more than 3.5 lakh in FY15.

Highlights of the study:

- The number of projects set up under the PMEGP have reduced from over 48,100 in FY15 to about 44,300.
- Uttar Pradesh topped with over 43,000 jobs generated under the PMEGP in FY16, but the number of jobs reduced from more than 48,600 that was generated in FY15 thereby registering a year-on-year decline of more than 11%.
- While the number of credit proposals approved under the Credit Guarantee Fund Trust for Micro and Small Enterprises (CGTMSE) increased significantly from just over four lakh to over 5.1 lakh between 2014-15 and 2015-16, the approved amount under this scheme fell 6% from ₹21,200 crore in FY15 to more than ₹19,900 crore in FY16.
- The number of MSMEs which benefited from the Marketing Assistance and Technology Upgradation programme also fell from 359 in FY15 to 303 in FY16.
- The number of trainees under the Entrepreneur Development Programmes Scheme fell significantly from more than 1.4 lakh in FY15 to just over 66,000 in FY16.
- The number of new ideas approved as part of Entrepreneurial Development of SMEs through Incubators rose marginally from 143 in FY15 to 145 in FY16, according to ASSOCHAM.

About PMEGP:

The PMEGP is an effective scheme aimed at reducing unemployment and generating sustainable employment opportunities in rural and urban India. This is credit linked Scheme of Govt. of India by merging erstwhile REGP and PMRY scheme. KVIC is the Nodal Agency at National Level.

Key features of the scheme:

- The Scheme is implemented through KVIC and State/UT Khadi & V.I. Boards in Rural areas and through District Industries Centres in Urban and Rural areas in ratio of 30:30:40 between KVIC / KVIB / DIC respectively.
- No income ceiling for setting up of projects.
- Assistance under the Scheme is available only to new units to be established.
- Existing units or units already availed any Govt. Subsidy either under State/Central Govt. Schemes are not eligible.
- Any industry including Coir Based projects excluding those mentioned in the negative list.
- Per capita investment should not exceed Rs. 1.00 lakhs in plain areas and Rs. 1.50 lakhs in Hilly areas.
- Maximum project cost of Rs. 25.00 lakhs in manufacturing sector and Rs. 10.00 lakhs in Service Sector.

Sources: the hindu.

Package to resolve NPAs gets Cabinet nod

The government has cleared a package to resolve the persistent rise in non-performing assets that is plaguing public sector banks and denting credit growth.

- The package includes an ordinance to amend the Banking Regulation Act of 1949 to empower the Reserve Bank of India to take more actions to check bad loans.

Need for reforms:

Bad loans in the Indian banking system have gone up sharply in the last one year. According to Reserve Bank of India data, gross NPA, as a percentage of gross advances went up to 9.1% in September 2016 from 5.1% in September 2015. During the same period, stressed assets (which is gross NPA plus standard restructured advances and write-offs), moved up from 11.3% to 12.3% and some estimates suggested it had doubled since 2013.

Share of public sector banks:

Public sector banks share a disproportionate burden of this stress. Stressed assets in some of the public sector banks have approached or exceeded 20%. Some estimates suggest the total stress in the Indian banking system is about Rs. 14 lakh crore.

Sources: the hindu.

President's nod for law on RBI taking action against loan defaulters

President Pranab Mukherjee has approved an ordinance with amendments to the Banking Regulation Act, 1949, allowing the Reserve Bank of India to take timely action against loan defaulters. This comes after the Union cabinet recently approved the proposal to amend Section 35 of the BR Act and sent the ordinance for the President's approval.

Key measures proposed in the ordinance:

- The government may authorise the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to issue directions to banks to initiate insolvency proceedings against defaulters under the bankruptcy code.
- RBI on its own accord can issue directions to banks for resolution of stressed assets.
- RBI may form committees with members it can choose to appoint to advise banks on resolution of stressed assets.

Significance of this move:

Earlier banks couldn't invoke the insolvency and bankruptcy code due to fear of being questioned. Now with RBI directing banks to initiate insolvency this will be a transparent and market-determined approach.

Besides, banks that were part of a consortium found it difficult to trigger bankruptcy proceedings. This ordinance attempts to solve that problem.

Sources: the hindu.

NHAI's Masala Bond expected to list on the LSE shortly

National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has decided to access the Masala Bond Market. Towards this objective NHAI has been conducting a global investor engagement exercise targeted at the world's largest Supra Nationals and Sovereign Wealth Funds, Global Macro Funds and International Asset Managers. This exercise is expected to culminate in London.

What are Masala bonds?

Masala bonds are bonds issued **outside India** but **denominated in Indian Rupees**, rather than the local currency. The term was used by IFC to evoke the culture and cuisine of India. Unlike dollar bonds, where the borrower takes the currency risk, masala bond makes the investors bear the risk.

The first Masala bond was issued by the **World Bank** backed **International Finance Corporation** in November 2014 when it raised 1,000 crore bond to fund infrastructure projects in India. Later in August 2015 International Financial Corporation for the first time issued green masala bonds and raised Rupees 3.15 Billion to be used for private sector investments that address climate change in India.

Sources: pib.

Voluntary unemployment rising

NITI Aayog member Bibek Debroy has flagged a dramatic rise in voluntary unemployment across the country, where people choose not to work below a certain income level after 'investing' in education.

What's the concern?

The trouble with current official data on labour and employment is that they can be used to claim 'jobless growth' as well as 'growth-less jobs' — and fail to capture the predominantly informal and unorganised nature of the Indian economy. In reality, India needs to create 10 to 12 million new jobs.

What you need to know?

This remark assumes significance as a task force led by the Aayog vice chairman Arvind Panagariya was recently formed on employment data. While the government attaches highest priority to job creation, policy making and analysis is conducted in a data vacuum, so the task force has been tasked with coming up with reliable and timely data solution for tracking employment trends.

Need for comprehensive data on employment:

The data compiled by the Labour Bureau from enterprises for select sectors on a quarterly basis is not amenable to finding out what is really happening to labour and employment thanks to its sample size and design.

Know about types of unemployment:

- **Frictional Unemployment:** Frictional unemployment is a temporary phenomenon. It may take place in various ways. When some workers are temporarily out of work while changing jobs, it is called "frictional unemployment." Similarly, strikes and lockouts may result in the suspension of work, and there may exist some frictional unemployment for the time being. To some extent, frictional unemployment is also caused by the imperfect mobility of labour. Factors inhibiting the geographical or occupational movement of unemployed workers into vacant jobs, thus, cause frictional unemployment.
- **Casual Unemployment:** In industries such as building construction, catering or agriculture, where workers are employed on a day- to-day basis, there are chances of casual unemployment occurring due to short-term contracts, which are terminable any time. Thus, when a worker's contract ends after the completion of work, he has to find a job elsewhere, which he is likely to get depending on circumstances or he may get a fresh contract with the same firm when some new work is started.

Voluntary Unemployment

- There are some people who are unwilling work at the prevailing wage rate,or
- There are some people who get a continuous flow income from their property or other sources and need not work.

Voluntary Unemployment is a National waste of human energy.

- **Seasonal Unemployment:** There are some industries and occupations such as agriculture, the catering trade in holiday resorts, some agro-based industrial activities, like sugar mills and rice mills, etc., in which production activities are seasonal in nature. So, they offer employment for only a certain period of time in a year. For instance, work in sugar mills lasts for about six months. Rice mills work for only a few weeks.
- **Structural Unemployment:** Due to structural changes in the economy, structural unemployment may take place. Structural unemployment is caused by a decline in demand for production in a particular industry, and consequent disinvestment and reduction in its manpower requirements.
- **Technological Unemployment:** A kind of structural unemployment may take place in an economy as a result of technological improvement. Such unemployment may be described as technological unemployment. Due to the introduction of new machinery, improvement in methods of production, labour-saving devices etc., some workers tend to be replaced by machines. Their unemployment is termed as “technological unemployment.” Technological unemployment is basically created by introduction of machinery. But, it is a temporary phenomenon. In the long run, the development effectuated by the use of more capital leads to diversification of activities and promotion of many allied industries which would create additional job opportunities so that the unemployed workers will be absorbed in a more remunerative way.
- **Cyclical Unemployment:** Capitalist-biased, advanced countries are subject to trade cycles. Trade cycles — especially recessionary and depressionary phases — cause cyclical unemployment in these countries. During the contraction phase of a trade cycle in an economy, aggregate demand falls and this leads to disinvestment, decline in production, and unemployment. Lerner calls it “deflationary unemployment.” Keynes emphasised that depressionary unemployment is caused by the insufficiency of effective demand.
- **Chronic Unemployment:** When unemployment tends to be a long-term feature of a country it is called “chronic unemployment.” Underdeveloped countries suffer from chronic unemployment on account of the vicious circle of poverty. Lack of developed resources and their underutilisation, high population growth, backward, even primitive state of technology, low capital formation, etc. are the major causes of chronic unemployment in underdeveloped economies.
- **Disguised Unemployment:** The term “disguised unemployment” commonly refers to a situation of employment with surplus manpower, in which some workers have zero marginal productivity so that their removal will not affect the volume of total output.
- **Classical unemployment:** Classical unemployment is caused when wages are ‘too’ high. This explanation of unemployment dominated economic theory before the 1930s, when workers themselves were blamed for not accepting lower wages, or for asking for too high wages. Classical unemployment is also called real wage unemployment.

Sources: the hindu.

Unemployment on rise

According to Chief Economic Advisor Arvind Subramanian, India's current employment challenge is particularly difficult as sectors that did well in generating jobs in the country's previous economic boom years — information technology (IT), construction and agriculture – are in trouble now.

Concerns:

- The IT sector, which was so far very dynamic, has hit a new low. The job losses in the IT sector are due to the (recent) policy announcements by the American government.
- Also, the whole industry is going ahead with automation as a result of which the manpower requirement is going down.



What's the way out?

The economy needs to clock 8% to 10% growth for greater job creation.

Worrying trend:

The pace of job creation fell to a six-year low in 2015 with 1.35 lakh new jobs being created compared with 4.21 lakh new jobs in 2014 and 4.19 lakh in 2013. Unemployment rate is rising to a five-year high of 5% in 2015-16 compared with 4.9% in 2013-14 and 4.7% in 2012-13.

Sources: the hindu.

RAIL-CESS

Plagued by repeated derailments, the Railways is considering imposing safety cess on train tickets to be utilised for strengthening accident prevention measures.

- The Railways will have to generate additional revenue of Rs. 5,000 crore in the current fiscal as its contribution to the safety fund created in the budget. For this, the Railways is looking for support from the people.

What is it?

A cess is a tax that is levied by the government to raise funds for a specific purpose. Collections from the Education Cess and the Secondary and Higher Education Cess, for instance, are supposed to be used for funding primary and higher and secondary education respectively. Likewise, money collected from the newly introduced Krishi Kalyan Cess is to be used for funding agri development initiatives.

- A cess is also different from the usual taxes such as personal income tax, excise duty and customs duty in another respect. All the taxes collected by the government usually go into the Consolidated Fund of India (CFI) which can be spent on any legitimate activity. But **the collections from a cess are required to be kept outside of the CFI to be spent only on the specific purpose for which it was levied.**
- If there is an unspent amount, it is simply carried forward for use in the following year. While the Centre has to mandatorily share the revenue from other taxes with the States, it gets to retain the entire kitty with a cess.
- Cesses are not supposed to be relied upon as a regular source of revenue. They are resorted to only for a particular purpose and are to be discontinued after the objective is met, though this often doesn't happen in practise.

Why is it important?

Governments love to rely on cesses because they are an easy way to raise tax revenue. Unlike taxes, cesses can be introduced, modified and removed any time without much trouble. As long as the government has a specific reason for imposing a cess, all that it has to do is to put out a notification to this effect. However, even a small modification in a tax rate has to be followed by accompanying amendments in the tax rules and regulations.

Sources: the hindu.

GST rates could have aided green goods

Experts say, GST Council has missed an opportunity to back environmentally friendly goods.

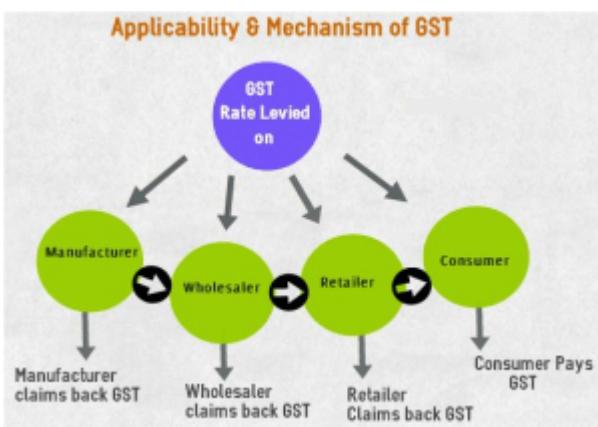
What's the issue?

The GST Council has finalised the rates and cess for most of the goods under the purview of the tax. Among these, it set a rate of 18% for commercial LPG, and 5% for all renewable energy devices and spare parts, although the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy had requested exemption for these items. Experts term this as a missed opportunity regarding auto LPG.

Domestic LPG is taxed at 5%. This would also encourage theft, since people already transfer LPG from domestic cylinders to commercial containers to avoid the higher tax.

What you need to know about LPG?

LPG, also known as propane and autogas, is a by-product of crude oil extraction and the refining process. Many people who consider LPG as an alternative to petrol do so because they believe that the combustion of propane results in



lower CO₂ emissions. LPG burns cleaner than petrol and therefore emissions of particulates is very low. Moreover, LPG is non-toxic, non-corrosive and free of tetra-ethyl lead and additives. It also has a high octane rating.

Sources: the hindu.

Paytm Payments Bank

Paytm has finally rolled out its Payments Bank, which is an almost-complete banking solution offered by the company. The digital wallet and e-commerce service provider received the final license from RBI for the bank last week. With the launch, Paytm is transferring all wallets to the new Paytm Payments Bank.



- Under the new banking system, wallets and accounts will be two separate entities. In order to be a part of the banking system, the user will have to open a bank account with Paytm.

Key facts on payment banks:

- Customers can deposit only up to Rs 1,00,000.
- Payments bank can issue ATM/debit cards but not credit cards.
- Payments and remittance services through various channels can be done.
- Customers will be able to buy insurance and mutual funds.
- Bank would not carry out lending activities.
- With this, the network of 1,54,000 post offices (including 1,30,000 rural post offices) will be offering banking services to the masses in the country.
- Payments banks are targeting migrant labourers, low income households, small businesses, and other unorganised sector entities.
- Initial capital required for a Payments bank is Rs 100 crore.
- Eligibility: Existing pre-paid payment instrument issuers, individuals, professionals, NBFCs, corporate business correspondents, telecom companies, super-market chains, real estate sector cooperatives that are owned and controlled by residents and public sector entities may apply.
- Promoter's contribution initially must be 40% for the first 5 years. For foreign holding, it is up to 74% of paid-up capital, on a par with private banks.
- The banks must maintain CRR, minimum 75% of demand deposits in government bonds of up to one year and maximum 25% in current and fixed deposits with other scheduled commercial banks for operational purposes and liquidity management.

What is a Payments Bank?

A Payments bank is similar to any other bank except it operates on a smaller scale. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) introduced it in 2014 to increase the scope of financial inclusion to small savings account holders, low income households, small businesses, unorganised sector entities and migrant labour force.

Sources: the hindu.

SEBI targets participatory note norms

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) plans to further tighten norms for issuance of offshore derivative instruments (ODIs) and participatory notes (PNs) as part of its overall effort to reduce the exposure investors take via such instruments in the Indian equity market.

Proposals:

- SEBI has proposed levying a regulatory fee of \$1,000 on every foreign portfolio investor (FPI) that issues ODIs or PNs. SEBI-registered FPIs will have to pay this fee once every three years for each of their ODI subscribers.
- The regulator has also proposed to prohibit ODIs from being issued against derivatives for speculative purposes. Currently, ODIs are issued against derivatives along with equity and debt.

What you need to know about P-notes?

Participatory notes are the financial instruments through which individual foreign investors or hedge funds who do not want to disclose their identity can invest in Indian markets.

Registered foreign institutional investors (FIIs), foreign banks and brokerages based in India issue P-notes to foreign investors and invest in Indian stocks on their behalf. Any dividends or capital gains collected from the underlying securities go back to the investors.

What are govt & regulator's concerns?

The primary reason why P-Notes are worrying is because of the anonymous nature of the instrument as these investors could be beyond the reach of Indian regulators. Further, there is a view that it is being used in money laundering with wealthy Indians, like the promoters of companies, using it to bring back unaccounted funds and to manipulate their stock prices.

Keeping a Close Watch		IMPACT
Current Provisions	Proposed Provisions	
FPIs have adopted jurisdiction of end-beneficiaries or jurisdiction of ODI issuer or Indian AML norms for KYC	FPIs shall put in place a written procedure for compliance with Indian AML norms	Indian KYC norms shall be applicable to subscriber offshore
There is no requirement for reporting names of beneficial owners of subscriber entities	FPIs shall be required to identify and verify the persons	ODI Issuers will be in compliance with Indian AML norms
Further transfer of ODI only to a person regulated by a foreign regulatory authority	Transfer only after obtaining prior consent of FPIs to entities which are eligible to invest in ODIs	The audit trail of the end-beneficiaries can be captured by FPIs

Sources: the hindu.

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

Start-up firms may get idle land from PSUs

The Heavy Industries Ministry is deliberating on a proposal to use large tract of unutilised land owned by central public sector companies, which government plans to divest or sell, as ready-to-move-in industrial space for start-up companies.

- The idea is to “create a landscape for ready-to-move-in businesses” so that start-up companies do not have to face hurdles for setting up business and they can start work “immediately on the business opportunity without lag.”

How will this help start-ups?

Various companies under the government of India are sitting over huge tracts of land. Instead of transferring land to other public sector units and state governments, it could be utilised to create industrial space for start-up companies. These lands will be readily available to companies looking to set up quickly. Land acquisition is one of the biggest problems for the enterprises.

Sources: the hindu.

Centre to raise with U.S. non-tariff barriers

India is planning to take up with the Trump administration the “barriers” imposed by the U.S., which are hurting Indian goods exports to that country in sectors including agriculture, pharmaceuticals and other industrial products.

What are non-tariff barriers imposed by the US?

The U.S. “non-tariff/Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) barriers” include those imposed under laws concerning bio-terrorism, child-labour, national security, ‘Buy America’ norms preferring U.S.-made items and American suppliers in U.S. Government purchases, registration fee hikes (in sectors such as pharma), food safety as well as animal and plant health regulations.

Concern areas:

- The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has “arbitrarily” listed 23 items produced in India on the ‘List of Goods Produced by Child Labour or Forced Labour’ — which is in effect a ban on their import. Indian industry is worried as the reports that the DOL relies upon are “not always accurate.”
- Also worrying is the U.S. Government measures envisaged within an initiative to counter potential terrorist threats to the international maritime container trade system. This included X-ray scanning of containers exported to U.S., a measure that would cause additional costs for Indian exporters across sectors.
- In addition, a law (the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 of the U.S.) allows American manufacturers to petition for curbing imports from third nations on national security grounds without providing proof from industry. This is a major Non-Tariff Barrier (NTB) of the U.S. affecting Indian exports across sectors as the law — allowing invocation of ‘national security exceptions’ without having to apply any detailed criteria — in effect restricts foreign competition.

Way ahead:

India will raise this issue soon after the new U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) takes charge, official sources said. They said this issue would also be on the agenda of the next India-U.S. Trade Policy Forum (TPF) — the main bilateral platform for discussing and resolving trade and investment issues. The date for the next TPF meeting will be fixed after the new USTR assumes office.

Sources: the hindu.

Anti-dumping duty imposed on clear float glass imports from Iran

The Finance Ministry has imposed definitive anti-dumping duty on ‘clear float glass’ imports from Iran. The definitive anti-dumping duty, imposed by the Revenue Department and which will be valid for five years, ranged from ‘nil’ to \$55.59 per tonne, depending on the producer and exporter.



- **Clear float glass**, which is a **superior quality of glass**, is used in the construction, refrigeration, mirror and solar energy industries.

What you need to know about Anti-dumping duty?

Anti dumping is a measure to rectify the situation arising out of the dumping of goods and its trade distortive effect.

- **Purpose:** The purpose of anti dumping duty is to rectify the trade distortive effect of dumping and re-establish fair trade.
- **Is it permitted?** The use of anti dumping measure as an instrument of fair competition is permitted by the WTO. It provides relief to the domestic industry against the injury caused by dumping. It is levied on distrustfully low-priced imports, so as to protect the domestic manufacturers.
- **Need for anti-dumping duty:** Dumping is an unfair trade practice of exporting goods to another country at a price lesser than what is paid in the exporting nation or their normal production cost, thereby distorting international trade and causing injury to the domestic manufacturers of the goods in the importing country.

Sources: the hindu.

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

New Central Sector Scheme – SAMPADA

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, chaired by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has given its approval for re-structuring the schemes of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) under new Central Sector Scheme – **SAMPADA (Scheme for Agro-Marine Processing and Development of Agro-Processing Clusters)** for the period 2016-20 coterminous with the 14th Finance Commission cycle.

Background:

Food Processing Sector has emerged as an important segment of the Indian economy in terms of its contribution to GDP, employment and investment. During 2015-16, the sector constituted as much as 9.1 and 8.6% of GVA in Manufacturing and Agriculture sector respectively.

What you need to know about the scheme?

SAMPADA is an umbrella scheme incorporating ongoing schemes of the Ministry like Mega Food Parks, Integrated Cold Chain and Value Addition Infrastructure, Food Safety and Quality Assurance Infrastructure, etc. and also new schemes like Infrastructure for Agro-processing Clusters, Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages, Creation / Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities. The objective of SAMPADA is to supplement agriculture, modernize processing and decrease agri-waste.

The SAMPADA is a comprehensive package to give a renewed thrust to the food processing sector in the country. It includes new schemes of Infrastructure for Agro-processing Clusters, Creation of Backward and Forward Linkages and Creation / Expansion of Food Processing & Preservation Capacities aim at development of modern infrastructure to encourage entrepreneurs to set up food processing units based on cluster approach, provide effective and seamless backward and forward integration for processed food industry by plugging gaps in supply chain and creation of processing and preservation capacities and modernization/ expansion of existing food processing units.

Expected outcomes of the scheme:

The implementation of SAMPADA will result in creation of modern infrastructure with efficient supply chain management from farm gate to retail outlet. It will not only provide a big boost to the growth of food processing sector in the country but also help in providing better prices to farmers and is a big step towards doubling of farmers' income. It will create huge employment opportunities especially in the rural areas. It will also help in reducing wastage of agricultural produce, increasing the processing level, availability of safe and convenient processed foods at affordable price to consumers and enhancing the export of the processed foods.

Sources: pib.

SAMPADA (SCHEME FOR AGRO-MARINE PROCESSING AND DEVELOPMENT OF AGRO-PROCESSING CLUSTERS)

- Cabinet approves new Central Sector Scheme – SAMPADA (Scheme For Agro-Marine Processing And Development Of Agro-Processing Clusters)
- Objective: to supplement agriculture, modernize processing and decrease agri-waste
- Upon re-structuring schemes of the Ministry of Food Processing Industries
- With an allocation of Rs. 6,000 crore, SAMPADA is expected to leverage investment of Rs. 31,400 crore, handling of 334 lakh MT agro-produce valuing Rs. 1,04,125 crore, benefit 20 lakh farmers and generate 5,30,500 direct/ indirect employment in the country by the year 2019-20

Fortified foods to tackle malnutrition

Infographic: [Link](#)

To tackle the issue of malnutrition, the **Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)** released a set of standards and a logo last year. Since then, a number of enterprises have begun adding premixes of micronutrients to launch fortified foods.

Various efforts in this regard:

- Milk cooperatives in Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Assam and Maharashtra are fortifying their products.
- Targeting children, the Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana and Himachal Pradesh governments have begun using fortified oil for their mid-day meal schemes.
- West Bengal and Andaman and Nicobar Islands are now distributing fortified **wheat flour** through the public distribution system, and the Maharashtra government has started a pilot project.
- The FSSAI is also working with small local suppliers, for instance local flour grinding mills, to get them to add premixed micronutrients.

What you need to know about food fortification?

- **Fortification requires neither changes in existing food patterns, habits nor individual compliance.** It is socio-culturally acceptable and does not alter the characteristics of the food. It can be introduced quickly and can produce nutritional benefits for populations in a short period of time. It is safe and cost effective, especially if advantage is taken of the existing technology and delivery platforms.
- Food fortification reinforces and supports existing nutrition improvement programmes and is part of a broader, integrated approach to prevent micronutrient deficiencies, thereby complementing other approaches to improve health and nutrition.

What is food fortification?

Food fortification or enrichment is the process of adding micronutrients (essential trace elements and vitamins) to food. Food fortification is a proven and effective strategy to meet the nutritional needs of a large number of people across various sections of the society, including the poor and underprivileged as well as the vulnerable, such as pregnant women and young children.

Sources: the hindu.

Banganapalle mango gets GI tag

The succulent **Banganapalle mango** has received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, making Andhra Pradesh the proprietor of the variety known for its sweetness.



What you need to know about these mangoes?

- Banganapalle mangoes have been grown for over 100 years in Andhra Pradesh.
- It is also known as Beneshan, Baneshan, Benishan, Chappatai and Safeda. Besides, they are also called Banaganapalli, Banginapalli, Banaganapalle.
- The fruits can retain their quality under cold storage even up to three months.
- The prominent characteristic of Banganapalle mangoes is that their skin has very light spots, stone is oblong in shape and has very thin seed with sparse and soft fibre all over.

- The primary centre of origin of the fruit is **Kurnool** district comprising Banaganapalle, Paanyam and Nandyal mandals.

About GI tag:

A GI tag indicates that the product comes from a specific region.

- GI is **covered under the Intellectual Property Rights and the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights**.
- A GI tag certifies the origin of a product or produce from a particular region as the quality or other features of the product is attributable only to the place of its origin.
- The tag helps farmers or manufacturers, as the case may be, to get a better price in the market.

Sources: the hindu.

e-Krishi Samvad

e-Krishi Samvad, an online interface, was recently launched by the government.

What you need to know about e-Krishi Samvad?

- e-Krishi Samvad is **internet-based interface and is a unique platform that will provide direct and effective solutions to the problems faced by farmers and stakeholders** in the agriculture sector.
- With this, people can get the appropriate solutions from the subject matter specialists and institutes through web or SMS. Stakeholders can upload photographs related to diseases of the crops, animals or fishes for diagnostics and remedial measures instantly from the specialists.
- The platform is helpful to get information pertaining to welfare and development of agricultural stakeholders.

Sources: pib.

Bengal to set up 'cage culture' for rearing fish in deep sea

A new method of deep-sea pisciculture is soon going to be introduced in Bengal – cage culture.



What you need to know about cage culture?

As the name suggests, the practice **consists of culturing fish inside big floating cages in the middle of the sea**.

- This type of fish culture is being successfully practised in Norway, Thailand, Japan, Philippines and some other countries.
- The cages are covered with nets to prevent sea birds from feeding on the fish. They are tied down with buoys to provide stability.
- This is also being encouraged to bring down the pressure on the lakes and inland hatcheries; culture in the open seas would have no environmental impact.

Sources: et.

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

Infrastructure Investment Trusts

The initial public offering (IPO) for IRB InvIT, India's first infrastructure investment trust fund will shortly be opened for subscription. Sponsored by road developer IRB Infrastructure Developers Ltd., the trust aims to raise up to ₹4,035 crore.

Significance of InvITs:

Infrastructure projects suffer from lack of availability of long-term capital and have depended on bank finance which typically has a short tenure. InvITs are designed to attract low-cost, long term capital and the underlying focus is to reduce the funding pressure on the banking system as well as generating fresh equity capital for infrastructure projects. InvITs allow developers of infrastructure assets to monetise their assets by pooling multiple projects under a single entity (trust structure).

How do InvITs work?

InvITs raise funds from a large number of investors and directly invest in infrastructure projects or through a special purpose vehicle. Two types of InvITs have been allowed: one, which invests in completed and revenue generation infrastructure projects; the other, which has the flexibility to invest in completed or under-construction projects. InvITs which invest in completed projects take the route of public offer of its units, while those investing in under construction projects take the route of private placement of units. Both forms are required to be listed on stock exchanges.

What are InvITs?

InvITs are similar to mutual funds. While mutual funds provide an opportunity to invest in equity stocks, an InvIT allows one to invest in infrastructure projects such as road and power.

- InvITs are registered as trusts with SEBI and there are four parties — trustee, sponsors, investment manager and project manager.
- As per present regulations, InvIT investments are not open for small and retail investors. The minimum application size for InvIT units is ₹10 lakh. The main investors could be foreign institutional investors, insurance and pension funds and domestic institutional investors (like mutual funds, banks) and also super-rich individuals.

Sources: the hindu.

Driving towards safer roads

In the WHO South East Asia Region, it is estimated that approximately 3,16,000 people die every year on roads, which is around 865 fatalities each day. Twenty to 50 times that number are injured or disabled and require long-term care. Road fatalities are the leading cause of death among young persons, while road safety incidents cost upwards of 3% of GDP. That's before accounting for medical expenses.

Who is to be blamed?

Though the behaviour of road users matters, poor public policy is at the root of the problem. The vast majority of 'accidents' could have been avoided by better use of road safety technology such as barriers, rumble strips or signage. Their impact could also have been lessened by safer vehicles. Good policy can also bring about immediate change.

What needs to be done now?

Action in four key areas can diminish injury and death on roads across the South East Asia Region, and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of halving the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents by 2020. These include:

- First, road safety authorities must have the data needed to act efficiently. Good data allow authorities to analyse and understand the factors causing road crashes, as well as to devise and implement cost-effective solutions. This could be as minor as installing a guardrail on a switchback, or as substantial as demolishing a high-risk road and building it anew. Clear lines of responsibility and partnership among government agencies and stakeholders can help this process, especially given the problem's multi-sectoral nature.
- Second, infrastructure must be tailored to the needs of vulnerable road users. On average 50% of road deaths occur among pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. In some countries, this figure rises to more than 80%. Bicycle lanes, pedestrian crossings and enforcement of helmet laws among other interventions can dramatically reduce these numbers. And they can do so in a way that makes our cities less car dependent.
- Third, motor vehicles must be manufactured to higher safety standards. Just two of the region's countries currently apply any of the seven priority international vehicle safety standards, such as seat belts and electronic stability control. These are India which implements two of the seven priorities, and Thailand which implements one of the seven. Not a single country applies all.
- Finally, the response to post-crash emergencies must be increased. When every second counts, a nationwide emergency phone service is critical. So too are efficient pre-hospital response and hospital trauma care systems.

In addition, steps should be taken to enhance early rehabilitation and support for road crash victims. This will help avoid long-term complications and enhance quality of life. It will also reduce health-care usage over the life-course.

What is expected from citizens?

Each one of us can limit the prospect of an incident and protect ourselves and our loved ones by slowing down, by desisting from drink-driving, by using seat belts and child restraints, and, when riding a motorcycle, by wearing a helmet. These actions will reinforce government-led initiatives, and will also promote society-wide change.

Sources: the hindu.

European XFEL generates its first laser beam

The [European XFEL](#) is going to be **the world's biggest X-ray laser** when it launches in September, but the science team is already celebrating as the device just completed its last major test, shining its powerful X-ray beam for the first time.

About XFEL:

The European XFEL is a research facility in Hamburg and Schenefeld. Eleven countries are involved in the European XFEL. XFEL stands for free-electron lasers for X-ray light.

- The facility is 3.4 kilometers (2.1 miles) long and produces X-rays through the acceleration of electrons, the so-called synchrotron radiation. The tiny particles are first pushed to almost the speed of light in a 2.1-kilometer (1.3-mile) accelerator tunnel and then 17,290 permanent magnets with alternating poles get them on a slalom course, forcing them to release short X-ray bursts.
- These X-rays have a wavelength of 0.8 nanometers, about the width of an atom and 500 times smaller than visible light. Their size makes the European XFEL an important instrument, as it can create pictures and movies with atomic resolution. Powerful X-ray lasers around the world have already been used to look at biological and chemical reactions, peering further and further into the nano world.

Potential applications:

The X-ray laser light of the European XFEL is extremely intense and a billion times brighter than that of conventional synchrotron light sources. The achievable laser light wavelength corresponds to the size of an atom, meaning that the X-rays can be used to make pictures and films of the nanocosmos at atomic resolution – such as of biomolecules, from which better understandings of the basis of illnesses or the development of new therapies could be developed. Other opportunities include research into chemical processes and catalytic techniques, with the goal of improving their efficiency or making them more environmentally friendly; materials research; or the investigation of conditions similar to the interior of planets.

Sources: the hindu.

Rail Connectivity for Chardham Pilgrimage

Taking forward the vision to link the Chardham pilgrimage centres through rail connectivity and in keeping with its budgetary commitment, the Indian Railways is taking the significant step to commence the Final Location survey for a single BG line rail connectivity for the Chardham Pilgrimage.

- **Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), a Public Sector Enterprise under Ministry of Railways** has been entrusted to undertake the Final Location Survey for rail connectivity to Chardham and Chardham Yatra (Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath & Kedarnath via Dehradun & Karanprayag) in the State of Uttarakhand.



What you need to know about Chardham?

Chardham, is one of the unique cornerstones of Hindu pilgrimage which is intertwined to mystical and spiritual aspirations of every devout Hindu. Large number of pilgrims flock to Chardham while foreign and domestic tourist are attracted to trekking & sightseeing in the state of Uttarakhand.

'Char Dham' which means the four holy abodes of the almighty, **mainly comprise of four pilgrim destinations namely, Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath.**

Sources: pib.

India to learn from London transport

India is set to draw on the lessons from the strong public transport system in place in London under an MoU signed recently between Transport for London (TfL) and India's Ministry of Road Transport and Highways.

Key facts:

- The agreement will involve sharing expertise on the mobility and efficiency of India's transportation systems, as well as around logistical issues such as planning and delivery.
- It will also cover TfL's experience in ticketing, providing information, financing and infrastructure maintenance work, as well as promotion of the use of public transport.
- Other areas of cooperation in the future were likely to include innovation around buses, including electric buses, and the use of water transport in urban centres.

Background:

London's transport system is considered one of the best equipped in the world, deploying a wide range of options from the Underground train network to an extensive bus network, the Dockland Light Railway, trams, ferries and even a cable car. During the visit, Mr. Gadkari was given a presentation on strategy and policy reforms around the bus system, as well as other forms of transport.

Sources: the hindu.

Ease of getting electricity in India

World Bank's electricity accessibility ranking for the year 2016 has been released.

Parameters:

The ranking was based on **ten parameters**, including the ease of getting electricity. Some other parameters were: number of procedures involved, time taken to obtain a new connection, cost for obtaining a commercial connection (up to 140KVA), and reliability of power supply.

Performance of India:

- India moved up to the 26th spot. India was at the 99th position in 2014; it jumped 73 ranks in 2016.
- The Centre has taken several initiatives that have improved India's ranking for 2016. The government's rural electrification program has mainly contributed to the improvement.

Some of the initiatives include:

Amendment of the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) regulations for installing transformers (up to 500KVA) on double-pole structures; waiving off electrical inspector approval for 11kV installations by Distribution Companies (DISCOMs) and allowing self-certification by DISCOM engineers; changing tariff regulations, rationalizing LT (low tension) tariff, and changing supply codes.

Some of the administrative measures are:

- Providing online portals enabling customers to apply for connections without the need for physical documents,
- Reducing the procedures for the release of a new connection to only three: online application and site inspection, demand note generation (if required), and external connection and meter installation,

- Providing connections (up to 150KVA) within 7/15 days if there is a necessity.

Sources: the hindu.

Boost to transform domestic nuclear industry

In a significant decision to fast-track India's domestic nuclear power programme, and give a push to country's nuclear industry, the Union Cabinet has given its approval for construction of 10 units of India's indigenous Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors (PHWR).

- The 10 PHWR project will result in a significant augmentation of nuclear power generation capacity. With this, the total installed capacity of the Plants will be 7000 MW.
- The ten reactors will be part of India's latest design of 700 MW PHWR fleet with state-of-art technology meeting the highest standards of safety.

Background:

India has current installed nuclear power capacity of 6780 MW from 22 operational plants. Another 6700 MWs of nuclear power is expected to come onstream by 2021-22 through projects presently under construction.

Significance of this move:

- This Project will bring about substantial economies of scale and maximise cost and time efficiencies by adopting fleet mode for execution.
- It is expected to generate more than 33,400 jobs in direct and indirect employment.
- With manufacturing orders to domestic industry, it will be a major step towards strengthening India's credentials as a major nuclear manufacturing powerhouse.
- It also supports India's commitment to sustainable development, energy self-sufficiency and bolsters global efforts to combat climate change.

Sources: pib.

Fund for development and maintenance of National Waterways (NWs)

The Union Cabinet has accorded its approval today to a proposal jointly mooted by the Ministry of Shipping and the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH) for amendment of Central Road Fund Act, 2000 to allocate 2.5% of the proceeds of Central Road Fund (CRF) for development and maintenance of National Waterways (NWs) and a reduction in the share provided for development of National Highways.

- In this regard, the Central Road Fund (Amendment) Bill, 2017 would be moved by the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways in the ensuing Monsoon Session, 2017 of the Parliament.

Significance of this move:

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has estimated that approximately Rs. 25,000 crores would be required for development of identified projects on NWs till 2022-23. An allocation of 2.5% of CRF proceeds would provide approximately Rs.2000 crore per annum for the development and maintenance of NWs at existing rates of duties funding the CRF.

What you need to know about Central Road Fund?

The Central Road Fund was established by the government as per the Central road fund act 2000 to fund the development and maintenance of National Highways, State Highways and Rural roads.

- In order to mobilise the fund, the Central Road Fund Act 2000 proposed to levy and collect by way of cess, a duty of excise and duty of customs on petrol and high speed diesel oil.
- The fund is utilised for the development and maintenance of National highways, State roads, Rural roads and for provision of road overbridges/under bridges and other safety features at unmanned Railway Crossings.

National Waterways

TOTAL LENGTH:

4,503 KM

TOTAL STATES SERVED

15

Arabian Sea

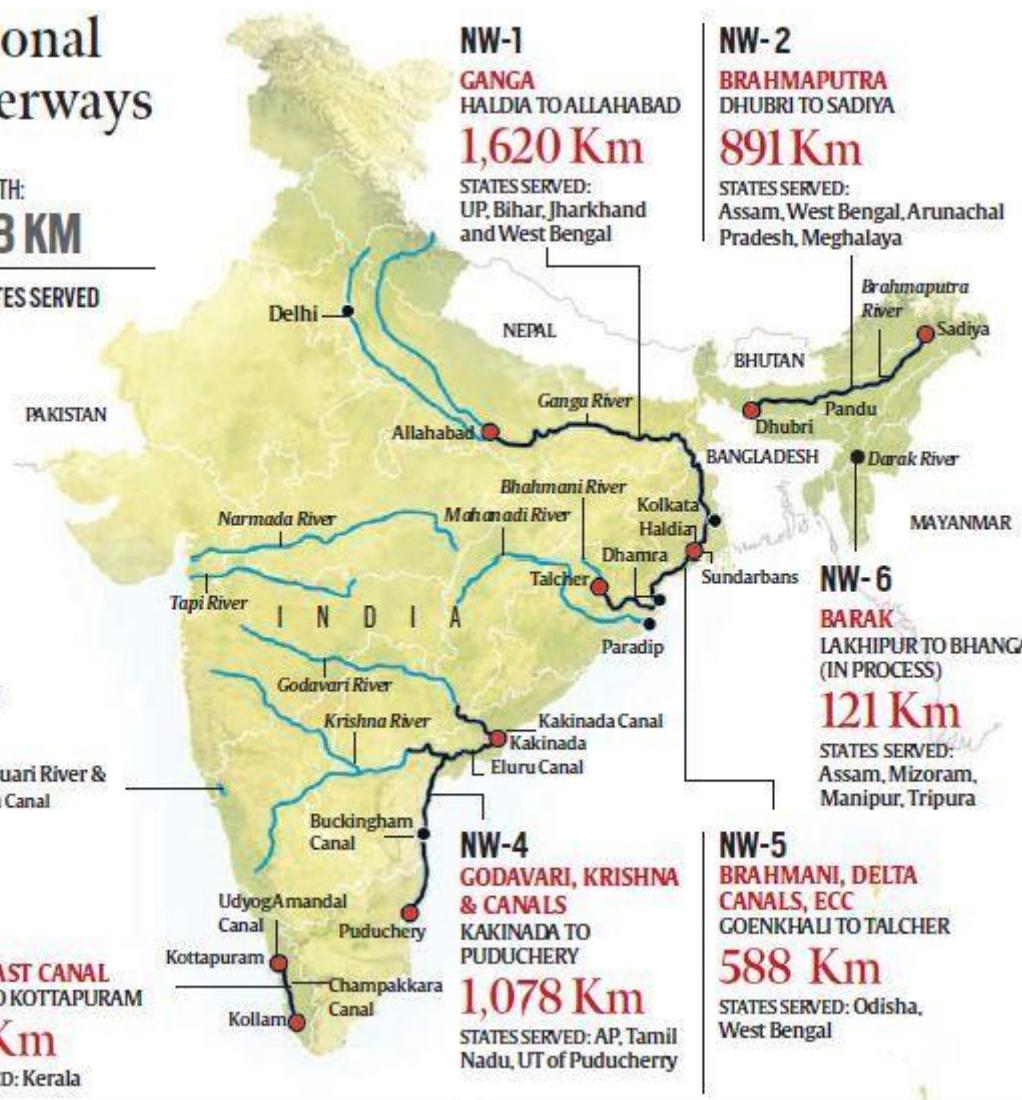
Mandovi, Zuari River & Cumberjua Canal

NW-3

WEST COAST CANAL
KOLLAM TO KOTTAPURAM

205 Km

STATE SERVED: Kerala



Sources: pib.

IWAI holds Road Show in Guwahati

The Inland Waterways Authority of India recently organized a road show in association with the Ministry Of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) in Guwahati to brainstorm on the major issues linked with developing the rivers of the North East as viable and sustainable means for cargo and passenger transportation.

Proposed NE waterways:

Of the 106 new National Waterways that were notified in April 2016 under the National Waterways Act, 2016, 19 are in the North East. These include NW- 16 (river Barak), NW- 95 (river Subansiri), NW- 39 (river Ganol), NW- 93 (river Simsang), NW- 101 (river Tizu and Zungki), NW- 31 (Dhansiri), NW- 62 (river Lohit), NW- 106 (river Umngot), NW- 18 (river Beki), among others.

Background:

The Government of India is making constant endeavours to promote waterways as a more cost effective, economically viable and environment friendly mode of transport in the country. In this context, a lot of work has already been carried out to develop IWT in the North East Region.

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.

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.

3D printed cartilage to treat osteoarthritis

Researchers have successfully generated cartilage tissue using a 3D bioprinter, an advance that could lead to new treatments for **osteoarthritis**. The advance represents a giant step forward in the ability to generate new, endogenous cartilage tissue.

How was it developed?



- The team used cartilage cells harvested from patients who underwent knee surgery, and these cells were then manipulated in a laboratory, causing them to rejuvenate and revert into “pluripotent” stem cells — cells that have the potential to develop into many different types of cells.
- The stem cells were then expanded and encapsulated in a composition of nanofibrillated cellulose and printed into a structure using a 3D bioprinter.
- Following printing, the stem cells were treated with growth factors that caused them to differentiate correctly, so that they formed cartilage tissue.
- Each individual stem cell is encased in nanocellulose, which allows it to survive the process of being printed into a 3D structure.

This bioprinted tissue can be used to repair cartilage damage, or to treat osteoarthritis, in which joint cartilage degenerates and breaks down.

Sources: the hindu.

BrahMos missile achieves rare feat

The Army recently carried out a successful test of the advanced BrahMos Block III Land Attack Cruise Missile (LACM) in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.



- This is the fifth consecutive time when the Block-III version of BrahMos LACM has been successfully launched and hit the land-based target in “top-attack” mode, an incredible feat not achieved by any other weapon system of its genre.
- These tests were carried out in full operational land-to-land configurations from Mobile Autonomous Launchers (MAL) at full-range.

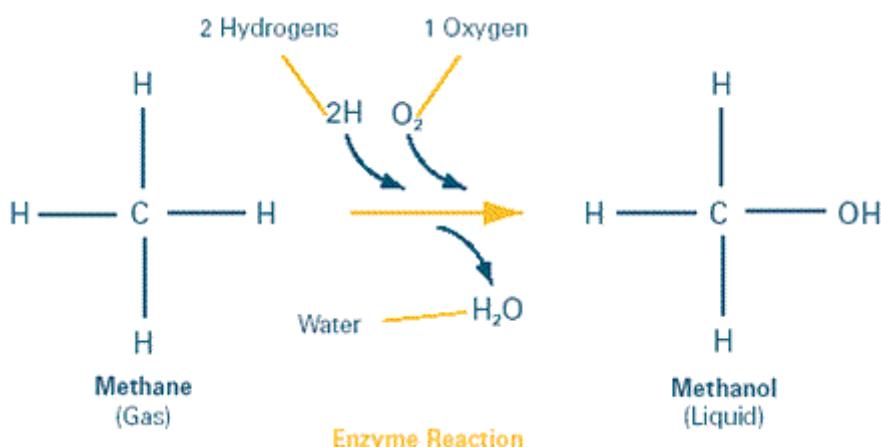
What you need to know about BrahMos?

BrahMos is a product of **joint collaboration between India and Russia and is capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets.**

- The range of the supersonic missile was initially capped at 290 km as per the obligations of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR).
- Since India's entry into the club, the range has been extended to 450 km and the plan is to increase it to 600km.

Sources: the hindu.

A way to use water to convert methane into methanol



A team of researchers has developed a one-step process that uses water to convert methane to methanol. This method in addition to offering a simple and relatively cheap way to make methanol, offered hydrogen as the only byproduct.

Significance of this move:

Methane has been identified as a greenhouse gas, one that is perhaps more of a problem even than carbon dioxide because it traps more heat (some studies have suggested 25 times as much)—fortunately, not nearly as much of it is emitted by humans into the atmosphere. It makes its way into the atmosphere due to animal flatulence and some industrial processes. It is also a byproduct at gas wells, where it is generally burned.

Methanol, on the other hand, has been considered a good alternative to gasoline for use in automobile engines. It is currently made using a variety of techniques and basic materials including coal, natural gas and even municipal waste.

How was it converted?

Water is used to oxidize methane over a bed of copper containing zeolite—the unique structure of the mineral lets the water behave as an oxidant. The team claims the process is 97 percent efficient, emitting only methanol and hydrogen. The method, the researchers note, is simple and easy enough that it could be used at drilling sites and the resulting methanol could be used as a liquid fuel or as an ingredient in making resins or plastics. The hydrogen could be used in any number of ways, including in fuel cells.

Sources: the hindu.

Now, turn any surface into touchscreen with a spray paint

Scientists have developed a new technology that can turn any surface — including walls, furniture and steering wheels — into a touchscreen using tools as simple as a can of spray paint. for this, the scientists used a well-known technique called electric field tomography.

What you need to know?

With the new technology dubbed Electrick, conductive touch surfaces can be created by applying conductive paints, bulk plastics or carbon-loaded films among other materials.

The “trick” is to apply electrically-conductive coatings or materials to objects or surfaces, or to craft objects using conductive materials. By attaching a series of electrodes to the conductive materials, researchers showed they could use a well-known technique called electric field tomography to sense the position of a finger touch.

Sources: the hindu.

National Technology Day

National Technology Day was celebrated across India on May 11.

What you need to know?

Based on tremendous breakthrough achievements by the country's scientists, engineers, and technicians, Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared May 11 as the National Technology Day. Every year since 1999, the Technology Development Board (TDB) commemorates the day by honouring technological innovations that have positively impacted the nation.

The TDB also selects a theme for each year's event, and the 2017 National Technology Day theme is 'Technology for inclusive and sustainable growth'.

May 11 events:

- On May 11, 1998, India successfully test fired the Shakti-I nuclear missile at the Indian Army's Pokhran Test Range in Rajasthan in an operation led by aerospace engineer and late President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam.
- The country also successfully tested two more nuclear weapons as a part of the same Pokhran-II/Operation Shakti initiative (Pokhran-I was the 1974 test firing of the 'Smiling Buddha' missile).
- Following this, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared India a nuclear state, making it the sixth country to join the 'nuclear club' of nations and the first one that was not party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – an international treaty signed by the US, Russia, the UK, France, and China which aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and hopes to achieve nuclear disarmament.
- Becoming the world's sixth nuclear state wasn't the only feat India achieved on that day. The country's first indigenous aircraft, the Hansa-3, was flown in Bengaluru while the nuclear tests were being conducted in Rajasthan. Developed by the National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL), a Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) lab, the Hansa-3 was a light two-seater general aviation plane used in flying institutes for pilot training, sports, surveillance, aerial photography, and environment-related projects.
- May 11, 1998 was also the day on which the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) completed the final test-fire of the Trishul missile after which it was inducted into service by the Indian Army and Indian Airforce. A short-range, quick-reaction, surface-to-air (SAM) missile, Trishul was a part of India's Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme – a Ministry of Defence initiative that has resulted in the creation of the Agni, Prithvi, and Akash missile systems.

Sources: the hindu.

Boost for defence manufacturers

Defence Minister Arun Jaitley recently held consultations with representatives of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (CII) on the proposed Strategic Partnership (SP) model meant to promote the private sector in defence manufacturing.

What you need to know about the SP model?

The proposed strategic partner model is intended to enhance competition, increase efficiencies, facilitate faster and more significant absorption of technology, create a tiered industrial ecosystem, ensure development of a wider skill base, trigger innovation and enable participation in global value chains as well as promote exports.

- Under the model, the government intends to boost private sector participation and create domestic expertise in four key areas, namely, fighter aircraft, helicopters, submarines, and armoured vehicles and main battle tanks.
- One company would be selected for each area based on its competence, which would then tie up with the foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer selected through the procurement process, to build the platform in India with significant technology transfer.



Concerns expressed by armed forces:

The Armed Forces are apprehensive over the overall model as they feel the SP model will block new technology and new players coming to the defense sector. On the other hand, existing defense players argue for committed orders for the next 30 years to give them the economies of scale as defense involves large investments.

Sources: the hindu.

India's first uterine transplant performed

India's first uterine transplant performed was recently performed by Pune doctors. First successful transplant in the world was done in 2012 in Sweden.

Background:

In India, infertility prevalence is between 3.9%- 16.8% of the population of child bearing women. Among the reasons, uterine factor is the cause in 20% of cases. The uterine factor can be due to causes like congenital absence of uterus, uterine malformations, genital tuberculosis and surgical removal of uterus for cancers.

However, few are opposed to such surgeries because of the ethical issues involved in it:

- Removing the uterus from a live donor exposes the person to surgical risk.
- Involves too many surgical steps for the recipient.
- The transplant is not a life saving procedure.
- It also discourages other methods like adoption and surrogacy.

Sources: the hindu.

Ecological concerns over combustible ice

Commercial development of the globe's huge reserves of a frozen fossil fuel known as "combustible ice" has moved closer to reality after Japan and China successfully extracted the material from the sea floor off their coastlines.

What you need to know about combustible ice?

Combustible ice is a frozen mixture of water and concentrated natural gas. Technically known as methane hydrate, it can be lit on fire in its frozen state and is believed to comprise one of the world's most abundant fossil fuels.

- **Where its found?** Methane hydrate has been found beneath seafloors and buried inside Arctic permafrost and beneath Antarctic ice. Estimates of worldwide reserves range from 280 trillion cubic metres up to 2,800 trillion cubic metres, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. That means methane hydrate reserves could meet global gas demands for 80 to 800 years at current consumption rates.
- Yet efforts to successfully extract the fuel at a profit have eluded private and state-owned energy companies for decades.

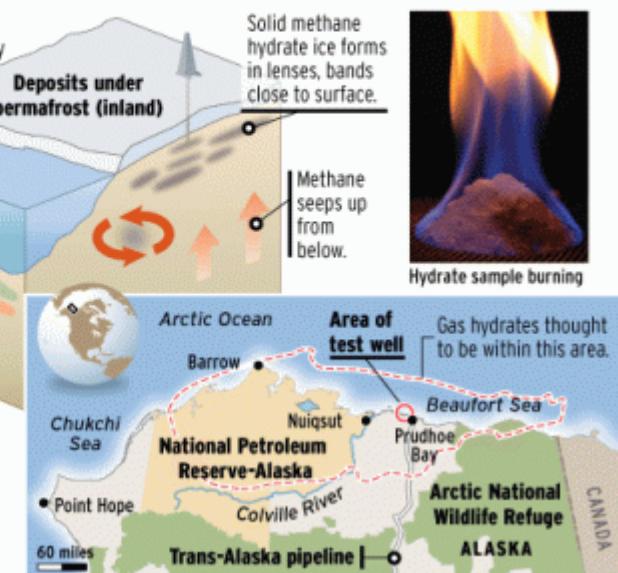
A new fuel source? From ice, fire

Methane hydrates, ice-like chunks loaded with combustible methane, are considered the world's largest untapped source of fossil fuel. A new lab at UC Irvine will investigate the largely mysterious physics of these hydrates. An unrelated test last year on Alaska's North Slope successfully collected methane from hydrates.

Factors affecting accumulation

Hydrate formation is influenced by the porosity and permeability of enclosing materials.
Ocean deposits
Layers of hydrates embedded in mud.
Gas forms from organic decay.
Deep cold, pressure turns sediments into methane hydrates bound in ice.

Sources: McClatchy Washington Bureau, National Energy Technology Laboratory, Department of Energy, ConocoPhillips, UCI
McClatchy-Tribune



- Methane hydrate is an attractive energy source due to its high energy density: one cubic meter of combustible ice contains about 164 cubic meters of regular natural gas. This high energy density is due to the fact that methane is trapped within the hydrate crystal structure and greatly compressed.

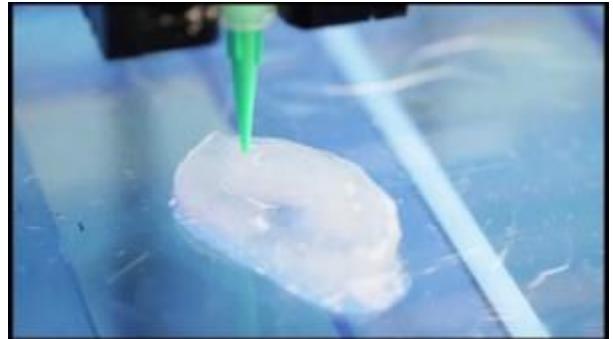
Concerns:

There are environmental concerns. If methane hydrate leaks during the extraction process, it can increase greenhouse gas emissions. The fuel also could displace renewables such as solar and wind power.

Sources: the hindu.

Indian researchers develop 3D bioprinted cartilage

For the first time, Indian researchers have been able to achieve a measure of success in developing cartilages that are molecularly similar to the ones seen in human knees. Scientists have printed cartilage using bioink.



What you need to know?

The bioink has high concentration of bone-marrow derived cartilage stem cells, silk proteins and a few factors. The chemical composition of the bioink supports cell growth and long-term survival of the cells. The cartilage developed in the lab has remained physically stable for up to six weeks. Just like cells are surrounded by proteins inside our body, the cells in the engineered cartilage are also surrounded by bioink that has a similar composition.

Benefits of 3D printed cartilage:

While the cartilage found in the knee is an articular cartilage that is typically sponge-like and has a huge load-bearing capacity, the ones produced in the lab so far are of a different kind — transient cartilage. Unlike articular cartilage, transient cartilage becomes bone cells and, therefore, brittle within a short time. As a result, the engineered cartilage loses its capacity to bear huge load that is typically encountered in the knee.

But the 3D bioprinting approach adopted by the researchers allows the high concentration of bone-marrow derived cartilage stem cells present in the bioink to gradually convert to chondrocyte-like cells (specialised cells which produce and maintain the extracellular matrix of cartilage).

Sources: the hindu.

More Akash systems for Army

The Defence Ministry has decided to cancel the Army's global contest for Short Range Surface to Air Missile (SR-SAM) systems and instead procure two additional regiments of the indigenously developed Akash missile systems.

- The decision was taken at a recently held meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by Defence Minister Arun Jaitley.



Know about Akash Missile:

The Akash missile is India's first indigenously designed, developed and produced air defence surface-to-air missile system.

- Akash is a supersonic short range surface-to-air missile capable of neutralising aerial threats.
- The asset of this missile system is its capability to neutralise multiple aerial targets coming from different directions at the same time.
- The maximum range of this missile is 25 kilometres and can neutralise targets at a maximum altitude of 20 kilometres. It is meant for neutralising medium range air targets flying at low or medium height.

- An Akash missile regiment has six launchers with three missiles each. This defence system consists of surveillance and tracking radars, control centres and ground support systems. This all weather missile system can work from both static and mobile platforms.
- Akash has been indigenously built. It is a result of 96% indigenisation, with the design being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation and built by Bharat Dynamics Limited along with the involvement of Bharat Electronics Limited.

Sources: 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.

South Asia Satellite

The South Asia Satellite, proposed by Prime Minister Modi, is all set to be launched into orbit on May 5, 2017, on board the Indian Space Research Organisation's rocket GSLV-09 from the Second Launch Pad (SLP) at Satish Dhawan Space Centre SHAR (SDSC SHAR), Sriharikota.



What you need to know about the satellite?

- GSAT-9 is a **Geostationary Communication Satellite** with the objective to provide various communication applications in **Ku-band** with coverage over South Asian countries.
- The main structure of the satellite is cuboid in shape built around a central cylinder with a mission life of 12 years.
- The satellite weighs a massive 2,230-kg and it has 12 Ku-band transponders, which India's neighbours can utilise to increase communications.
- The total cost of launching the satellite is estimated to be about ₹2,350,000,000 (₹235 crore). The cost associated with the launch will be met by the Government of India.
- According to ISRO, GSLV-F09 mission is the eleventh flight of GSLV and its fourth consecutive flight with the indigenous Cryogenic Upper Stage (CUS).

Applications:

- The satellite is meant for providing communication and disaster support, connectivity among the countries of South Asia region.
- The satellite will provide a significant capability to each of the participating countries in terms of DTH, certain VSAT capacity plus linking among the states for both disaster information transfer and also in terms of library type of things.

Participating countries:

Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are already on board of the mission. **Afghanistan** is in the process of inking the deal. That means seven out of eight SAARC countries are a part of the project **except Pakistan**, which opted out of the program.

Sources: the hindu.

Large Hadron Collider restarts for 2017 run

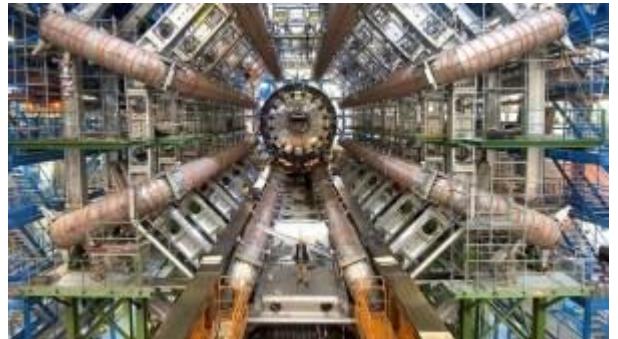
The **world's largest and most powerful particle smasher Large Hadron Collider (LHC)** has restarted circulating beams of protons for the first time this year, following a 17-week-long extended technical stop.

- Each year, the machines shut down over the winter break to enable technicians and engineers to perform essential repairs and upgrades, but this year the stop was scheduled to run longer, allowing more complex work to take place.

- Work this year included the replacement of a superconducting magnet in the LHC, the installation of a new beam dump in the Super Proton Synchrotron (SPS) and a massive cable removal campaign.
- Among other things, these upgrades will allow the collider to reach a higher integrated luminosity — the higher the luminosity, the more data the experiments can gather to allow them to observe rare processes.

Large Hadron Collider:

The Large Hadron Collider (LHC) is the world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator.



- **Built by:** European Organization for Nuclear Research (**CERN**)
- **Aim:** to allow physicists to test the predictions of different theories of particle physics and high-energy physics, and particularly prove or disprove the existence of the theorized Higgs boson and of the large family of new particles predicted by supersymmetric theories.
- The LHC consists of a 27-kilometre ring of superconducting magnets with a number of accelerating structures to boost the energy of the particles along the way.

How it operates?

- Inside the accelerator, two high-energy particle beams travel at close to the speed of light before they are made to collide.
- The beams travel in opposite directions in separate beam pipes – two tubes kept at ultrahigh vacuum. They are guided around the accelerator ring by a strong magnetic field maintained by superconducting electromagnets.
- The electromagnets are built from coils of special electric cable that operates in a superconducting state, efficiently conducting electricity without resistance or loss of energy. This requires chilling the magnets to -3°C – a temperature colder than outer space. For this reason, much of the accelerator is connected to a distribution system of liquid helium, which cools the magnets, as well as to other supply services.
- Just prior to collision, another type of magnet is used to “squeeze” the particles closer together to increase the chances of collisions. The particles are so tiny that the task of making them collide is akin to firing two needles 10 kilometres apart with such precision that they meet halfway.

Sources: the hindu.

Researchers develop synthetic soft retina

Scientists from the University of Oxford have developed a synthetic, soft tissue retina that closely mimics the natural retinal process.

What you need to know about the synthetic soft retina?

- The synthetic, double-layered retina replica **consists of soft water droplets (hydrogels) and biological cell membrane proteins.**
- Designed like a camera, the cells act as pixels, detecting and reacting to light to create a grey scale image.
- The synthetic material can generate electrical signals, which stimulate the neurons at the back of our eye just like the original retina.

Significance of this discovery:

Until now, artificial retinal research has used mostly rigid, hard materials. The human eye is incredibly sensitive, which is why foreign bodies like metal retinal implants can be so damaging, leading to inflammation and/or scarring. But a biological synthetic implant is soft and water-based, so much more friendly to the eye environment.

The researchers believe this could lead to the development of less invasive products that closely resemble human body tissues, helping to treat degenerative eye conditions such as retinitis pigmentosa. The condition changes how the retina responds to light, causing people to slowly lose vision.

Background:

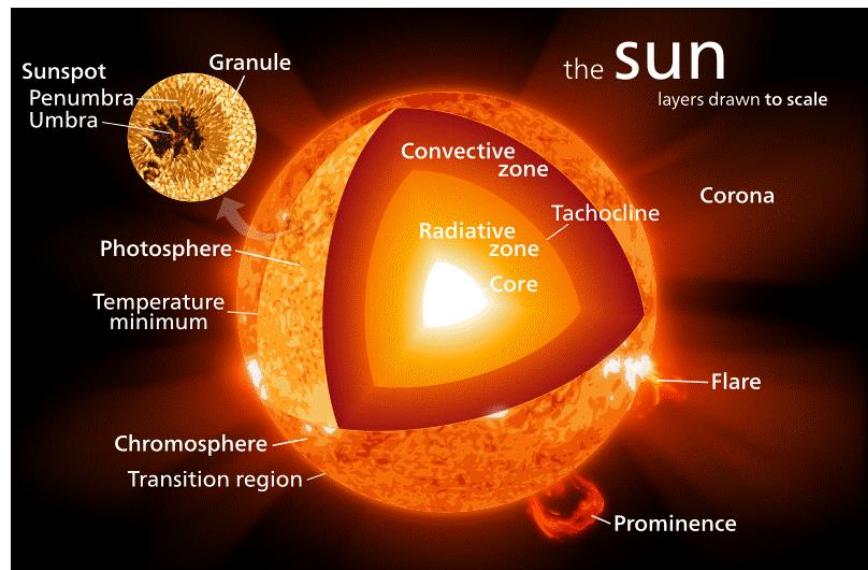
Just as photography depends on camera pixels reacting to light, vision relies on the retina performing the same function. The retina sits at the back of the human eye, and contains protein cells that convert light into electrical signals that travel through the nervous system, triggering a response from the brain, ultimately building a picture of the scene being viewed.

Sources: the hindu.

A century of looking at our closest star, the sun

Data from the **Kodaikanal Solar Observatory** in Tamil Nadu, spanning a hundred years and more, has now been digitised by astrophysicists from the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, Bengaluru, and opened up to the public.

- Apart from use in academic studies of long-term behaviour of the sun, the data can be used to better understand sunspot activity which impacts climate and affects telecommunication systems.
- It also throws light on major events that had an impact on the earth's magnetic field.



Significance of this data:

- The 100-year data is unique also for its three sets of images, taken using different filters – **White light, H-alpha and Calcium-K**. It is known that the sun has a layered structure, and each of the data sets exposes a different layer.
- Under white light filtering, the sun's photosphere and the sunspots are visible, while the Calcium-K light can show layers some 2,000 km above this, in the chromosphere.
- The H-alpha images show up layers a little above the Calcium-K images. Features called “filaments” which are related to large expulsions of material from the sun’s surface can be viewed in the Calcium-K sets.

About IIA:

The Indian Institute of Astrophysics is a premier institute devoted to research in astronomy, astrophysics and related physics. It traces its origins back to an observatory set up in 1786 at Madras which from the year 1792 began to formally function at its Nungambakkam premises as the Madras Observatory. In 1899, the observatory moved to Kodaikanal. **In the year 1971, the Kodaikanal Observatory became an autonomous society**, the Indian Institute of Astrophysics.

Funded by the Department of Science and Technology, the Institute ranks as a premier institution devoted to research and education of astronomy and physics in the country.

Sources: the hindu.

China tests ‘Lunar Palace’ as it eyes moon mission

China has started its experimental tests of “Yuegong-1”, or “Lunar Palace”.

What you need to know?

- As part of this experiment, four Chinese students have entered the 160-square-metre (1,720-square-foot) cabin. They will live there for 200 days.
- The volunteers will live in the sealed lab to simulate a long-term, self-contained space mission with no input from the outside world.

- The “Lunar Palace” has two plant cultivation modules and a living cabin: 42 square metres containing four bed cubicles, a common room, a bathroom, a waste-treatment room and a room for raising animals.
- The Lunar Palace is **the world’s third bioregenerative life-support base, and the first developed in China**. It is the **only such facility to involve animals and microorganisms as well as plants and humans**.
- Human waste will be treated with a bio-fermentation process, and experimental crops and vegetables grown with the help of food and waste byproducts.
- The project seeks to help the country prepare lunar explorers for longer stays on the surface.

Sources: the hindu.

Mapping the universe with quasar positions

Astronomers have created the first map of the large-scale structure of the universe based entirely on the positions of quasars.

What you need to know about quasars?

Quasars are the incredibly bright and distant points of light powered by super-massive black holes.

- Quasars, also called quasi-stellar radio sources, are **the most energetic and distant members of a class of objects called active galactic nuclei (AGN)**.
- Their spectra contain very broad emission lines, unlike any known from stars, hence the name “quasi-stellar.” Their luminosity can be 100 times greater than that of the Milky Way.
- They are very bright objects. The amazing brightness of quasars is due to the supermassive black holes found at their centres.
- **Quasars also emit visible light, ultraviolet rays, infrared waves, X-rays, and gamma-rays.**



How was mapping done?

To make their map, scientists used the Sloan Foundation Telescope to observe an unprecedented number of quasars.

- During the first two years of the Sloan Digital Sky Survey’s Extended Baryon Oscillation Spectroscopic Survey (eBOSS), astronomers measured accurate three-dimensional positions for more than 147,000 quasars.
- The telescope’s observations gave the team the quasars’ distances, which they used to create a three-dimensional map of where the quasars are. However, to use the map to understand the expansion history of the universe, they had to go a step further, using a clever technique involving studying “baryon acoustic oscillations” (BAOs).
- BAOs are the present-day imprint of sound waves which travelled through the early universe, when it was much hotter and denser than the universe we see today. However, when the universe was 380,000 years old, conditions changed suddenly and the sound waves became “frozen” in place. These frozen waves are left imprinted in the three-dimensional structure of the universe.

Significance of these findings:

The results of the new study confirm the standard model of cosmology that researchers have built over the last 20 years. In this standard model, the universe follows the predictions of Einstein’s General Theory of Relativity but includes components whose effects we can measure, but whose causes we do not understand.’

Sources: the hindu.

Juno Spacecraft Reveals Spectacular Cyclones At Jupiter’s Poles

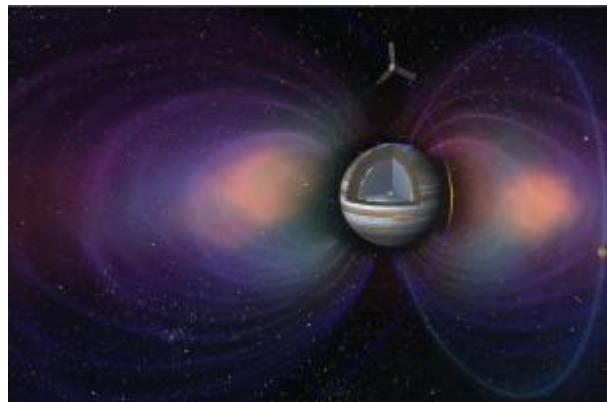
NASA’s Juno spacecraft has spotted giant cyclones swirling at Jupiter’s north and south poles.

- During the flybys, observations and data showed Jupiter’s previously unseen poles. Bright ovals at the poles were revealed to be gigantic cyclones spanning 870 miles. Juno was also able to probe the cloud cover and discover wells of ammonia that form giant and violent weather systems in the deep atmosphere.

- The giant cyclones at the poles are also new to researchers. Further study could reveal whether these are like the Great Red Spot, which has been observable for at least 300 years, or more ephemeral.
- Juno also revealed that Jupiter's magnetic field is 10 times stronger than the strongest magnetic field on Earth and twice as strong as anticipated, exceeding researchers' expectations.

About Juno:

Juno was launched in 2011 on a mission to study Jupiter's composition and evolution. It's the first spacecraft to orbit Jupiter since Galileo. Juno spacecraft successfully entered Jupiter's orbit recently, after a five year journey.



- The primary goals of the \$1.1 billion mission are to find out whether Jupiter has a solid core, and whether there is water in the planet's atmosphere — something that may not only provide vital clues to how the planet formed and evolved, but also to how the solar system we live in came into existence.
- At the end of its mission, Juno will dive into Jupiter's atmosphere and burn up — a "deorbit" manoeuvre that is necessary to ensure that it does not crash into and contaminate the Jovian moons Europa, Ganymede and Callisto.

Other details:

- The Juno spacecraft – named after the Roman goddess and wife of Jupiter – is packed with nine instruments capable of peering into the planet's heart.
- It will fly 2,600 miles above the cloud tops – 3,000 miles closer to the surface than any other mission has ever achieved.
- Juno became the first spacecraft to cruise this far out into the solar system powered solely by the sun, beating Europe's Rosetta spacecraft. A trio of massive solar wings sticks out from Juno like blades from a windmill, generating 500 watts of power to run its nine instruments.
- Juno, built by Lockheed Martin, is an armored spacecraft – its computer and electronics are locked in a titanium vault to shield them from harmful radiation. Even so, Juno is expected to get blasted with radiation equal to more than 100 million dental X-rays during the mission.

Sources: [toi](#).

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

Climate & Clean Air Coalition

The Climate & Clean Air Coalition (of UNEP) is the only global effort that unites governments, civil society and private sector, committed to improving air quality and protecting the climate in next few decades by reducing short-lived climate pollutants across sectors. Complementary to mitigating CO₂ emissions, the Coalition acts as a catalyst to create, implement and share immediate solutions addressing near-term climate change to improve people's lives rapidly, and to ensure sustainable development for future generations.

The Coalition's initial focus is on **methane, black carbon, and HFCs**. At the same time, partners recognize that action on **short-lived climate pollutants (SLCP)** must complement and supplement, not replace, global action to reduce carbon dioxide, in particular efforts under the UNFCCC. The Coalition's objectives are to address short-lived climate pollutants by:

- Raising awareness of short-lived climate pollutant impacts and mitigation strategies
- Enhancing and developing new national and regional actions, including by identifying and overcoming barriers, increasing capacity, and mobilizing support
- Promoting best practices and showcasing successful efforts
- Improving scientific understanding of short-lived climate pollutant impacts and mitigation strategies

The Coalition serves as a forum for assessing progress in addressing the challenge of short-lived climate pollutants and for mobilizing resources to accelerate action. It works to catalyse new actions as well as to highlight and bolster existing efforts on near-term climate change and related public health, food and energy security, and environmental issues.

Centre to tap MGNREGA funds to make Saraswati flow again

The Centre plans to tap rural employment guarantee funds to recharge remnants of ancient rivers — including the mythical Saraswati — in a bid to boost groundwater reserves.

- Reviving such palaeo-channels may not be useful for irrigation but it could improve groundwater storage.

Background:

Palaeo-channels are old rivers that have dried up and filled with sediment. Last October, a committee of hydrologists, geologists and archaeologists — as part of study commissioned by the Water Resources Ministry — reported evidence on the course of the Saraswati, mentioned in the Rigveda and Hindu mythology.

K.S. Valdiya, who led the team, concluded that the Sutlej river “represented the western branch of the Saraswati.”

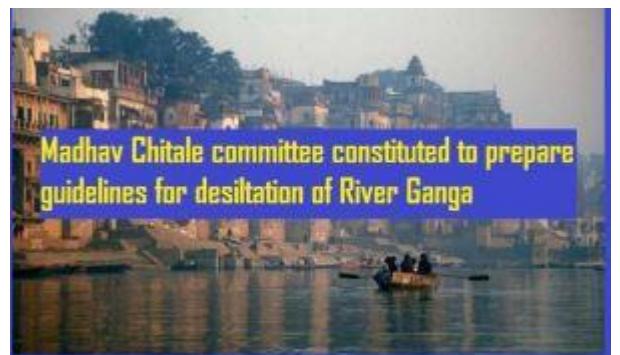
About Saraswati:

- Saraswati river **flowed through Haryana, Rajasthan and North Gujarat**. It also flowed through Pakistan before meeting Western Sea through Rann of Kutch and was approximately 4,000 km in length.
- One-third of the river stretch fell in present-day Pakistan. The longer, two-third stretch measuring nearly 3000 km in length fell in India.
- The river **had two branches: western and eastern**. The Himalayan-born Satluj “of the PAST”, which flowed through the channels of present-day Ghaggar-Patialiwali rivulets, represents the western branch of the ancient river.
- On the other hand, Markanda and Sarsuti represented the western branch of Saraswati, known as Tons-Yamuna.
- The confluence of the branches was near Shatran, 25 km south of Patiala. And suddenly, it flows crossing the dessert (Rann of Kutch) and meet gulf of western sea.

Sources: the hindu.

Chitale Committee recommends several measures for Desiltation of Ganga

Chitale committee on Desiltation of Ganga submitted its report to the government recently. The committee was constituted in July 2016 by the Ministry of Water Resources River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation to prepare guidelines for desiltation of river Ganga from Bhimgauda (Uttarakhand) to Farakka (West Bengal).



Important recommendations made:

- Study reach wise sediment transport processes.
- Establish annual sediment budgets to guide de-silting activities.
- Prepare annual reports (Sand registry) describing the previous de-silting/ dredging activity and a technical institute may be entrusted to conduct the sediment budget.
- Morphological and flood routing studies should be carried out to examine and confirm the necessity of the de-silting of the reach under consideration.
- It is necessary to provide the river sufficient areas of flood plain and lakes along the river to moderate the flood level.
- The de-silting of lakes, etc., should be in such a manner that the sediment continuity is maintained and should not lead to head cut that creates safety issues for the river crossings, water intakes or river training works locally, downstream or upstream.

- The area freed from the development in the form of oxbow lakes should be used for flood moderation rather than reclaiming it for other purposes.
- Embankments, spurs and river training measures provided to protect the banks should not encroach upon the flood plains and delink the lakes, flood plains and other riverine environment from the river.
- De-silting of the confluence points, especially with huge silt carrying tributaries, such as Ghagra, Sone, etc., may be necessary to make confluence hydraulically efficient.
- The proposed de-silting of any river reach need to be justified bringing out clearly the flooding caused due to siltation along with technical comparisons of the alternative flood mitigation measures with “do nothing” or “proposed de-silting/ dredging” being other options.
- Agricultural practices along the river flood plains should be such that it does not disturb the passage of flood by increasing the resistance to flow causing aggradations.
- Any bridges across River Ganga which are causing large afflux (more than 1% of normal depth) should be modified to reduce the afflux, which in turn will also reduce the sediment deposition and erosion of banks on the upstream.

Why it is hard to study desiltation process?

The committee in its report says erosion, sediment transport and siltation are very complex phenomena. It is impossible to apply a “one-size-fits-all” approach to sediment management and control, because the issues involved are frequently very regionally-specific. Local factors such as topography, river control structures, soil and water conservation measures, tree cover, and riparian land-use or land disturbance (for example agriculture, mining, etc.) can have a large impact on sediment loads in rivers. River control structures (such as reservoirs), soil conservation measures and sediment control programmes can cause downstream sediment loads to decrease, while factors such as land disturbance (clearing of vegetation, for example) or agricultural practices can cause increased sediment loads. At the same time, indiscriminate de-siltation works may result into more harm to ecology and environment flow. Thus, there is a need to evolve Guidelines, better broad principles, which should be kept in mind while planning and implementing de-silting works.

Sources: pib.

Action plan for Pampa conservation

A seven-point action plan for the conservation of pampa has been chalked out. The document, named Pampa Declaration, delineates a comprehensive plan to be implemented with the active involvement and support of the government and the public.

Highlights of the action plan:

- The salient features of the declaration include bestowing living entity status to river Pampa; the constitution of a River Management Board for the governance of the river; documentation of livelihood along the river basin; publication of periodic status report of flood plains and wetlands and formation of tributaries, micro watersheds, and ponds linked to the river every five years.
- It also calls for digitising biodiversity reports with the support of students from institutions and colleges affiliated to Mahatma Gandhi University, implementation of green protocol for containing the pollution of the river and for the conservation of the Pampa ecosystem.
- The declaration calls upon the government to create an additional standing committee on environment at the local bodies to ensure participation of local government institutions in the governance of the river.

 PROJECT Sewerage system ■ Sewage treatment plants ■ Bathing ghats ■ Community toilets	sanctioned in 2015 UTILISATION CERTIFICATE for 12 years approved CENTRAL SHARE SLASHED to 50% of project cost
 PROJECT TO BE COMPLETED by March 2017	GRANT-IN-AID of Rs.5 crore

Know about pampa river:

Pampa is the third longest river in Kerala after Periyar and Bharathappuzha and the longest river in the erstwhile princely state of Travancore. Sabarimala temple dedicated to Lord Ayyappa is located on the banks of the river. The river is also known as ‘Dakshina Bhageerathi’ and ‘River Baris’.

Sources: the hindu.

After 84 years, cobra lily blooms again

The incredibly rare **Arisaema translucens**, more commonly remembered as the cobra lily, was recently rediscovered in the western Nilgiris after 84 years. It was last collected in 1932.

What you need to know about cobra lily?

- Barely a few hundred cobra lily plants are left in the wild and they **can be found only in a small area measuring less than 10 square kilometres in the Nilgiris**.
- This is probably the **only member of the Arisaema family to have a translucent spathe**.
- The **Toda tribals of the Nilgiris** have an embroidery motif known as the 'podwarshk', which resembles it.



Threats:

Likely to have been quite common once, cobra lilies have vanished in the past decades along with the disappearance of the shola tree patches in which they were found. Prized for their beauty around the world, cobra lilies are at even greater risk of extinction from the commercial trade in exotic plants.

Sources: the hindu.

"Ozone2Climate" Technology Roadshow

In a first, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, along with the UN Environment OzonAction's Compliance Assistance Programme, recently organized an "**Ozone2Climate**" Technology Roadshow, post Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, on the sidelines of the South Asia National Ozone Officers Annual Network Meeting – 2017 in Agra. Over 200 refrigerant technicians, ozone officers, business representatives and government officials attended the Roadshow.

- The Technology Roadshow was organized for the first time as part of the annual network meeting for Ozone Officers of South Asia.
- The "Ozone2Climate Technology Roadshow" had 13 exhibitors that promoted ozone and climate-friendly alternative technologies to HCFCs and HFCs in the refrigeration and air-conditioning (RAC) sector.
- The Technology Roadshow showcased current refrigeration and air conditioning equipment designed to be more energy efficient, hence with a double benefit of saving money for consumers, and with a much lower impact on the environment.

Kigali conference:

The negotiations at Kigali were aimed at including Hydrofluoro Carbons (HFCs) in the list of chemicals under the Montreal Protocol with a view to regulate their production and consumption and phase them down over a period of time with financial assistance from the Multilateral Fund created under the Montreal Protocol.

- The Kigali amendments to the Montreal Protocol will, **for the first time, incentivise improvement in energy efficiency in case of use of new refrigerant and technology**. Funding for R&D and servicing sector in developing countries has also been included in the agreed solutions on finance.
- The Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol is **legally binding** and will **come into force from 1 January 2019**. Under Kigali Amendment, in all 197 countries, including India have agreed to a timeline to reduce the use of HFCs by roughly 85% of their baselines by 2045.

All signatory countries have been divided into three groups with different timelines to go about reductions of HFCs. These include:

- Wealthy, developed countries, such as the United States and the European Union, will start to limit their use of HFCs within a few years and make a cut of at least 10% from 2019.
- Rapidly developing countries, including many in Latin America, will freeze their use of HFCs starting in 2024.
- Developing countries, specifically India, Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and the Gulf states, will freeze their use starting in 2028.

Dual onslaught on earth: Global warming and local urban heating

According to a recent study, the world's cities may be as much as eight degrees Celsius warmer by 2100 due to **a dual onslaught of global warming and localised urban heating**.

- The projection is based on the worst-case-scenario assumption that emissions of planet-warming greenhouse gases continue to rise throughout the 21st century. For the latest study, researchers used data from the world's 1,692 largest cities for the period 1950 to 2015.

Highlights of the study:

- The top quarter of most populated cities, in this scenario, could see the mercury rise 7 degrees Celsius or more by century's end, said a study in the journal Nature Climate Change.
- For some, nearly 5 degrees Celsius of the total would be attributed to average global warming.
- The rest would be due to the so-called urban heat island (UHI) effect, which occurs when cooling parks, dams and lakes are replaced by heat-conducting concrete and asphalt — making cities warmer than their surrounds.
- The top 5% (of cities per population) could see increases in temperatures of about 8 degree Celsius and larger.

Effects of this temperature rise:

Such a temperature spike can have dire consequences for the health of city-dwellers, robbing companies and industries of able workers, and putting pressure on already strained natural resources such as water.

UHI "significantly" increases city temperatures and economic losses from global warming. With the warming of cities, the median city, right in the middle of the range, stands to lose between 1.4% and 1.7% of GDP per year by 2050 and between 2.3% and 5.6% by 2100. For the worst-off city, losses could reach up to 10.9% of GDP by 2100.

Background:

Cities cover only about 1% of the earth's surface but produce about 80% of gross world product and account for around 78% of energy consumed worldwide. They produce more than 60% of global carbon dioxide emissions from burning coal, oil and gas for fuel.

Way ahead:

Local actions to reduce UHI — such as planting more trees or cooling roofs and pavements, can make a big difference in limiting warming and minimising costs.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.

National Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction

The second meeting of National Platform for Disaster Risk ([NPDRR](#)) will be attended by over 1000 distinguished guests including Union Ministers, State Ministers, Parliamentarians, Heads of Local Self Government, Heads of specialized disaster management agencies, academicians, representatives from private sector organizations, media and civil society organizations.



Reduction

**NATIONAL PLATFORM FOR
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**
SECOND MEETING

Theme: "Disaster Risk Reduction for Sustainable Development: Making India resilient by 2030".

What you need to know about NPDRR?

The NPDRR is a **multi-stakeholders National Platform headed by the Union Home Minister** and it promotes participatory decision making in disaster management, and strengthens federal policy of our country. It was set up through a resolution in 2013.

The National Platform aims to bring together the whole range of India's disaster risk community from **Government, Parliamentarians, Mayors, Media, International Organisations, NGOs, local community representatives, scientific and academic institutions and corporate businesses** etc. It will help in sharing of experiences, views and ideas, present findings of research and action and explore opportunities for mutual cooperation in the field of Disaster Risk

Reduction. The output from the National Platform will offer a strategic direction and a road map for the formulation of our future national action plans on DRR.

Functions of the national platform:

- To review the progress made in the field of disaster management from time to time.
- To appreciate the extent and manner in which the Disaster Management Policy has been implemented by the Central and State Governments, and other concerned agencies, and to give appropriate advice in the matter.
- To advise on coordination between the Central and State Governments/UT Administrations, local self-governments and civil society organisations for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- To advise suo-moto or on a reference made by the Central Government or any other State Government or a Union Territory Administration on any question pertaining to disaster management.
- To review the National Disaster Management Policy.

Sources: pib.

Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

The 2017 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is being held in Cancun, Mexico. The Global Platform is the most important international forum dedicated to the disaster risk reduction agenda, and this will be the first time it has been staged outside Geneva.

- The 2017 Global Platform will mark the first opportunity for the international community to review global progress on the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, which was adopted in Japan in 2015. More than 5,000 participants are expected, including policy makers and disaster risk managers.

What you need to know about the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction?

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is a biennial forum for information exchange, discussion of latest developments, knowledge and partnership-building across sectors, with the goal of improving implementation of disaster risk reduction through better communication and coordination amongst stakeholders.

Its core function is to enable governments, NGOs, scientists, practitioners, and UN organizations to share experience and formulate strategic guidance for the implementation of global disaster risk reduction agreements: the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action and its post-2015 successor the Sendai Framework.

About Sendai Framework:

The “Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030” was adopted during the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held in Sendai, Japan in March, 2015.

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

GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

22-26 May 2017



FROM SENDAI TO CANCUN • FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION

#MEXICOGP2017

The Seven Global Targets:

- Substantially reduce global disaster mortality by 2030, aiming to lower average per 100,000 global mortality rate in the decade 2020-2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
- Substantially reduce the number of affected people globally by 2030, aiming to lower average global figure per 100,000 in the decade 2020 -2030 compared to the period 2005-2015.
- Reduce direct disaster economic loss in relation to global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2030.
- Substantially reduce disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, among them health and educational facilities, including through developing their resilience by 2030.
- Substantially increase the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.
- Substantially enhance international cooperation to developing countries through adequate and sustainable support to complement their national actions for implementation of this Framework by 2030.
- Substantially increase the availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments to the people by 2030.

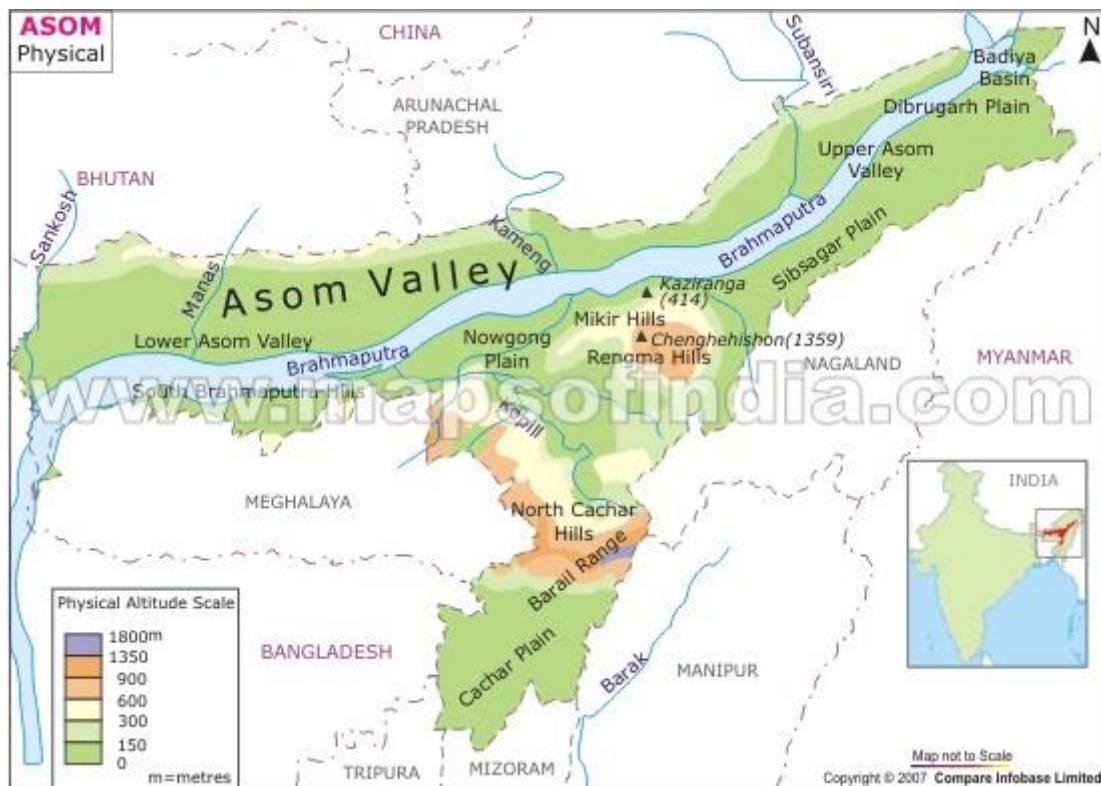
The Four Priorities for Action under the Framework:

- 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: pib.

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

Entire Assam declared 'disturbed'



Following the repeated violent incidents, the Centre has declared the entire State of Assam a “disturbed” area under the **Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act** for three more months, citing various violent activities by insurgent groups ULFA, NDFB and others. This will be in effect for three months. The AFSPA has been continuing in Assam since November 1990.

What is AFSPA?

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

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

What are ‘disturbed’ areas?

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

How is a region declared ‘disturbed’?

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

What is state government’s role?

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

Sources: the hindu.

Doctrine of “SAMADHAN” for use in security operations

The Home Minister has enunciated an operational strategy ‘SAMADHAN’ to fight Left Wing Extremism.

The elements of this strategy are:

- S for Smart Leadership.
- A for Aggressive Strategy.
- M for Motivation and Training.
- A for Actionable Intelligence.
- D for Dashboard-based Key Result Areas and Key Performance Indicators.
- H for Harnessing Technology.
- A for Action Plan for Each Theatre.
- N for No access to Financing.

Significance of this strategy:

- Alongside aggressive operations, road construction works, setting up of telecommunication, power and railway facilities in the remote areas will be expedited. The home minister has also stressed for befitting strategies during the security operations and enhanced intelligence in tackling the Maoists.



- Economic resources play an important role in any war — only when money is available is it possible to buy, eat, drink and possess ammunition and weapons. Therefore, choking the financial resources of the left wing extremists is the most basic mantra in this fight.

Need for the doctrine:

There are 10 LWE affected states- Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh. As many as 12,000 citizens had lost their lives in Maoist violence over the last two decades. Of these, 2,700 were jawans of security forces and 9,300 were innocent common people.

Sources: pib.

Ransomware- WannaCry

The IT Ministry has reached out to key stakeholders like RBI, National Payments Corporation of India, NIC and UIDAI (Aadhaar) to advise them to protect their systems against 'WannaCry' ransomware to ensure that the digital payments ecosystem in the country is protected.

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has also instructed cyber security unit CERT-In to gather information of 'WannaCry' ransomware that has wreaked havoc across sectors like healthcare and telecommunications in more than 100 countries.

Background:

The ransomware has hit systems in over 100 countries, including Russia and the U.K., in one of the most widespread cyber attacks in history. It infected computers running on older versions of Microsoft operating systems like XP, locking access to files on the computer. The cyber criminals have demanded a fee of about \$300 in crypto-currencies like Bitcoin for unlocking the device.

Know about CERT-In:

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

It's purpose:

- The purpose of CERT-In is to respond to computer security incidents, report on vulnerabilities and promote effective IT security practices throughout the country.
- According to the provisions of the Information Technology Amendment Act 2008, CERT-In is responsible for overseeing administration of the Act.
- CERT organizations throughout the world are independent entities, although there may be coordinated activities among groups. The first CERT group was formed in the United States at Carnegie Mellon University.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security.

Armymen favour political intervention in Kashmir

A significant number of military officers have asked the centre to intervene immediately politically if the level of violence has to come down anytime soon in Jammu and Kashmir without changing the aggressive security posture taken in Kashmir.

Need for Centre's intervention:

Several military officers are pointing out to the drying up of genuine intelligence from locals in the Kashmir Valley in recent months. They say it was a gradual slowdown over the past couple of years, but today most units have nothing dependable coming in. Without credible intelligence, the security forces are "blinded" and "fumbling". The present



situation is also from those of past. With even school students coming out to throw stones and protest against security forces, the security forces are actually operating in extremely tricky situation.

Background:

The widespread assessment within the Army on the need for political intervention seems to run counter to the aggressive stand taken by the Central government, which is yet to show any willingness for a political outreach towards Kashmiris, despite the worsening situation.

Sources: the hindu.

Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

2,000-strong CoBRA force for Sukma

The CRPF will soon deploy a fresh squad of about 2,000 commandos from its special guerrilla warfare CoBRA (Commando Battalion for Resolute Action) battalions in and around the Sukma district of Chhattisgarh to defang the Maoists and their arsenal.

- The paramilitary has prepared a blueprint to mobilise at least 20 to 25 companies of the CoBRA from their present locations in West Bengal, Bihar, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh to the Bastar region that has some of the worst Maoist violence-hit districts.



Background:

Sukma and its adjoining areas have witnessed some of the deadliest ambushes on security forces recently like the one where 25 CRPF men were killed in the Burkpal area of the district on April 24.

What you need to know about CoBRA force?

COBRA (backronym for [Commando Battalion for Resolute Action](#)) is a **specialised unit of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF)** of India proficient in guerrilla tactics and jungle warfare. Originally established to counter the Naxalite problem, CoBRA is deployed to address any insurgent group engaging in asymmetrical warfare.

Currently numbering ten battalions, CoBRA is ranked among one of India's more experienced and successful law enforcement units.

Sources: the hindu.



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SUBSCRIBE

Places in news- Bhitarkanika National Park

- Bhitarkanika National Park authorities have imposed restrictions on entry of tourists into the park for three months to provide undisturbed environment for breeding by estuarine crocodiles.
- Bhitarkanika is one of the largest sanctuaries of crocodiles in the region with 1,671 reptiles.

Places in news- Buxa tiger reserve

- Six tigers would be relocated to Buxa Tiger Reserve (BTR) in north Bengal from neighbouring Assam as part of a plan for augmentation of tiger population in the reserve which was approved by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA).
- The forest department had taken up tiger augmentation plan in Buxa-Jaldapara for which detailed project report was prepared in consultation with Wildlife Institute of India and Global Tiger Forum.
- **Location:** Northern boundary of Buxa Tiger Reserve runs along the international border with Bhutan. The Sinchula hill range lies all along the northern side of BTR and the eastern boundary touches that of the Assam state.
- It is the eastern most extension of extreme bio-diverse North-East India and represents highly endemic Indo-Malayan region.
- The fragile “Terai Eco-System” constitutes a part of this reserve.
- The Phipsu Wildlife Sanctuary of Bhutan is contiguous to the north of BTR.
- Manas National Park lies on east of BTR. BTR, thus, serves as international corridor for Asian elephant migration between India and Bhutan.

Places in News- Men only Island

- It is a Japanese island where women are not allowed to set foot. It has been recommended for listing as a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- The home to the Munakata Taisha Okitsumiya shrine, which honours a goddess of the sea, Okinoshima was the site of rituals for the safety of ships, and successful exchanges with the people of the Korean Peninsula and China between the fourth and ninth centuries.

In news- Chinnar wildlife sanctuary

- An ambitious project of the Kerala Forest Department at the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary (CWS) to rehabilitate Indian star tortoises (*Geochelone elegans*) seized from smugglers has turned into a major success. This makes **the CWS the only rehabilitation centre for star tortoises in the country.**
- The CWS is the only place in Kerala where star tortoises are known to occur in the wild. The sanctuary is now a haven for at least 450 such tortoises seized from poachers in less than two years.
- Indian star tortoises are considered auspicious for gaining wealth. It is the reason why Indian star tortoises, which are protected under the Wildlife Act, are poached and smuggled. It is classified as vulnerable by the IUCN.

In news- Amur Falcon

- Amur falcons are the longest travelling raptors in the world. They weigh just 150 grams.
- Males are mostly grey in colour and the females have dark-streaked cream or orange underparts.
- The species flies non-stop from Mongolia to northeast India covering 5,600 km in five days and nights, a small part of its 22,000 km circular migratory journey. The birds halt briefly in Myanmar. After a month or so, they reach central and western India en route to South Africa.
- Until recently, Naga tribesmen used to hunt thousands of Amur falcons for meat. But, after a vigorous campaign by wildlife activists, they have pledged to protect the bird and since then, not a single bird has been hunted in the area.

In news- Albino orangutan

- The public are being asked to name a rare albino orangutan rescued in the Indonesian part of Borneo island, with conservationists saying she has become an “ambassador” for the threatened species.
- The Bornean orangutan, which along with the Sumatran orangutan are Asia’s only great apes, is classified by the International Union for Conservation of Nature as “critically endangered”.
- Around 100,000 are estimated to live on Borneo, which is divided between Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia, down from 288,500 in 1973. Their numbers are expected to shrink to 47,000 by 2025, according to the IUCN.
- Their habitat has shrunk dramatically as the island’s rain forests are increasingly turned into oil palm, rubber or paper plantations, and they are sometimes targeted by villagers who view them as pests.

In news- Bhishtis

- They are a Muslim tribe or biradari found in North India, Pakistan and the Terai region of Nepal. They are also known as (Shaikh Abbasi) Dhund Abbasi and Saqqa.
- In Maharashtra, the tribe is often referred to as Pakhalis.
- Bhishtis are **the traditional water carriers**. They have been supplying businesses, pilgrims and passersbys with swigs from their swollen canteens since the Mughals ruled India, an era before piped water sounded the death knell for their trade.

In news- Zoji La

- The Srinagar-Leh highway connecting Ladakh region with the rest of Jammu and Kashmir has been officially re-opened for traffic.
- The over 500-km highway passes through the Zojila Pass — 3,528 metres above the mean sea level — which remains annually closed during winter months as it receives heavy snowfall. Zoji La pass, located on NH 1D connects a valley of Kashmir with Ladakh.

In news- Henderson island

- Henderson island, located in south Pacific Ocean, has been classified as the most polluted place on the earth by Tasmania’s Institute for Marine and Aquatic Studies. The island contained 37.7 million pieces of debris.
- The island is a world heritage site. It lies between Chile and New Zealand.
- It is one of the world’s last two raised coral atolls.

The Armoured Corps Celebrates ‘79th Armour Day’

- The Armoured Corps celebrated its ‘79th ARMOUR DAY’ on 01 May 17. The event commemorates the mechanization of the erstwhile Indian Cavalry on 01 May 1938, when the SCINDE HORSE became the first Indian Cavalry Regiment to stable its horses and convert to the Vickers Light Tank and Chevrolet Armoured Cars.
- Organized, equipped and trained to effectively accomplish assigned mission in all types of conventional operations in varied terrain, the Armoured Corps also contributes substantially to the Army’s counter insurgency effort with a large representation in the Rashtriya Rifles and Assam Rifles.
- It has a standing Contingent in the UN Peace Keeping Mission in Lebanon as its representatives amidst the blue beret fraternity.

Chennai Snake Park gets green iguanas

- A pair of American green iguanas have been procured by the Chennai Snake Park.
- The gigantic lizard is native to the Amazon forests of South America.

AEROTROPOLIS to come up in Assam

- The Union Ministry of Civil Aviation has proposed to build an aerotropolis in Assam, which would bring huge benefits to the region in terms of civil aviation and air connectivity.
- What is aerotropolis? an aerotropolis is an airport centric metropolitan hub where infrastructure and economy are all based on the access to the airport which serves as a commercial point like any traditional metropolis which contains a central city commercial core area and commuter-linked suburbs.

Stamp on Ramanujacharya's 1,000th birth anniversary

- A commemorative stamp has been released on the 1,000th birth anniversary of Saint Ramanujacharya.
- Ramanuja was a Hindu theologian, philosopher, and one of the most important exponents of the Sri Vaishnavism tradition within Hinduism.
- He is famous as the chief proponent of Vishishtadvaita subschool of Vedānta.
- He wrote influential texts, such as bhāṣya on the Brahma Sutras and the Bhagavad Gita, all in Sanskrit.

Tarang Sanchar

- It is a portal launched by telecom department.
- **What is it for?** It allows people to track radiation emitted from mobile towers within a locality and check their compliance with the stipulated norms.
- It is aimed at clearing “myths and misconceptions” about mobile towers and emissions from them.

M.P. shifts fiscal year

- Madhya Pradesh will be the **first State** to switch to the **January-December financial year** from the present April-March cycle.
- The change will mean the financial year will coincide with the calendar year.

'Second-tallest' flag post comes up in Kolhapur

- 300-foot flag post, said to be the country's second-tallest, was recently inaugurated at Kolhapur in western Maharashtra.
- Kolhapur Street Beautification Project (KSBP), a trust, has installed this flag post.
- The 360-foot flag post inaugurated on March 6 at Attari on Indo-Pak border is said to be the tallest in the country.

"Southern Sojourn" and "Southern Jewels"

- The Indian Railway PSU, Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation Ltd (IRCTC) has decided to start two new circuits of their flagship luxury train Maharajas' Express, this year.
- These two new trips have been named as "Southern Sojourn" and "Southern Jewels" which will cover prominent destinations in West and South India.
- The **Southern Sojourn** will cover Goa, Hampi, Mysore, Ernakulam, Kumarakom and Trivandrum.
- The **Southern Jewels** will cover Chettinad, Mahabalipuram, Mysore, Hampi and Goa.

Cabinet approves Vijayawada Airport as International Airport

- The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the declaration of Vijayawada Airport as International Airport, as per the provisions of Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014.
- Declaration of an airport as International Airport depends upon traffic potential and demand from airlines for operation of international flights.

Urea manufacturing Plant in Malaysia

- The Union Cabinet has given its ex-post facto approval to the signing of Memorandum of Understanding with Malaysia on development of a Urea and Ammonia manufacturing plant in Malaysia with off take to India and/or off take of existing surplus Urea from Malaysia to India.
- The project is expected to cost US\$ 2.1 billion with capacity to produce 2.4 million tonnes of Urea and 1.35 million tonnes of Ammonia per annum and dedicated supplying to Indian market.
- The signing of MoU will ensure consistent supply of Urea and Ammonia to cater the need of the country at a lower price, if agreed to by both the participants.

World Press Freedom Day

- The **United Nations General Assembly** declared **May 3** to be World Press Freedom Day or just World Press Day to raise awareness of the importance of freedom of the press.
- This was also to remind governments of their duty to respect and uphold the right to freedom of expression enshrined under Article 19 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and marking the anniversary of the Declaration of Windhoek a statement of free press principles put together by African newspaper journalists in 1991.
- World Press Freedom Day was **first** organized by the United Nations General Assembly in **1993** in an effort to reflect upon press freedom in the world.
- This day acts as a reminder of the importance of a free press in a functioning and safe society and serves to commemorate the journalists who have lost their lives in support of free press.
- UNESCO marks World Press Freedom Day by conferring the UNESCO/Guillermo Cano World Press Freedom Prize on a deserving individual, organisation or institution that has made an outstanding contribution to the defence and/or promotion of press freedom anywhere in the world, especially when this has been achieved in the face of danger.
- **Theme 2017:** “Critical Minds for Critical Times: Media’s role in advancing peaceful, just and inclusive societies”.

Chenab to get tallest rail bridge

- The **world's highest railway bridge** that is expected to be 35 metres taller than Paris' Eiffel Tower will be built in Jammu and Kashmir.
- The massive arch-shaped structure, being constructed at a cost of around Rs. 1,100 crore, will use over 24,000 tonnes of steel and will rise 359 m above the river bed.
- Designed to withstand wind speeds of up to 260 km per hour, the 1.315-km-long “engineering marvel” will connect Bakkal (Katra) and Kauri (Srinagar).
- The bridge forms a crucial link in the 111-km stretch between Katra and Banihal, which is part of the Udhampur-Srinagar-Baramulla rail link project.
- The bridge will be made of 63-mm thick special blast-proof steel as the region is prone to frequent terror attacks. Its concrete pillars will be designed to withstand explosions.
- Slated to be completed by 2019, it is expected to become a tourist attraction.

Molecule Disarib

- **What is it?** It is a novel small molecule, designed and synthesised by Indian researchers. It has shown promise in targeted **killing of cancer cells**.
- It works by binding itself to a protein called BCL2, which suppresses the death of cancerous cells. While BCL2 protein is produced in excess in cancer cells, its expression is almost undetectable in normal cells. Hence, Disarib targets and kills only cancer cells while sparing normal cells.

Scientists use satellites to count endangered birds from space

- Scientists have started counting individual Northern Royal Albatrosses from space, the first time ever that the global population of a species has been assessed from orbit.

- Using the highest-resolution satellite images available, scientists from Britain and New Zealand are calculating the number of the endangered albatrosses, which breed on New Zealand's remote and virtually inaccessible Chatham Islands.
- The study used the DigitalGlobe WorldView-3 satellite, which can observe objects as small as 30 cm across, to locate and count the birds.

Panchayat Pustak Mela

- The NBT is set to launch an ambitious scheme called the Panchayat Pustak Mela (Panchayat Book Fair), whose aim would be to organise regular book fairs in rural areas across the country.
- National Book Trust (NBT) is an Indian publishing house, founded in 1957 as an autonomous body under the Ministry of Education of the Government of India. NBT now functions under aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India.

Buddha Jayanti

- May 10, 2017 marks the 2561st Buddha Jayanti, the birthday of the Buddha, and Buddha Purnima.
- It is an important day charted by Buddhist monks and all followers of the message of Gautam Buddha.
- Interestingly, Buddha Purnima, celebrated in May every year, is even more special because the Buddha's enlightenment and mahaparinirvan also happened during the Purnima in the month of May.
- The world over, the day is observed through dhana, sila and bhavana.
- On this day, monks, or the Buddha's disciples, from Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Thailand and other countries gather to discuss world peace. The Buddha's message is one of peace, compassion and non-violence.
- To mark the day that is also known as Vesak, in some countries such as Vietnam, China and Japan the Buddha's idol is bathed in water and flowers.

Indian Navy ships: INS Karwar and Kakinada decommissioned

- Indian Naval Ships Karwar and Kakinada were recently decommissioned.
- INS Karwar (M67), was the first of the 'Natya' class minesweepers acquired from the erstwhile USSR. She was commissioned on 14 July 1986 at Riga (Russia) under the command of commander R K Sinha. The ship operated from Vishakhapatnam till 2013 after which, the ship was based at Mumbai. Manned by a crew of six officers and 90 sailors, INS Karwar had her motto 'Hamesha Tayyar'.
- INS Kakinada (M70), was the second of the same class and also commissioned at Riga on 23 December 1986. Like her sister ship, Kakinada also operated from Vishakhapatnam till 2013 before shifting base port to Mumbai.
- With the decommissioning of the two minesweepers, the Navy is now left with a fleet of four Soviet-origin minesweeping ships will also be decommissioned by the end of 2018.

Darbar Move

- Leaders in Jammu and Kashmir have floated the idea of abrogation of the 146-year-old Dogra-era practice of 'Darbar Move'.
- What is it? Under this the State's civil secretariat shuttles between summer capital Srinagar and winter capital Jammu bi-annually. It was introduced by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1872.
- Terming this as a costly affair, leaders have asked for bifurcation of the offices. Every year, over 7,000 employees of the civil secretariat shuttle between Srinagar and Jammu along with the files, which are ferried in buses and tracks. It costs the State over ₹40 crore.

'Spyder' surface-to-air missile

- India recently test fired a surface-to-air missile 'Spyder' from a test range in Odisha as part of missile launch practice of a series of tests of the short-range quick reaction.
- Spyder (Surface-to-air PYthon and DERby) is an acquired missile system from Israel which is a short-range, quick reaction surface-to-air missile to neutralise enemy targets up to a distance of 15 km and at heights between 20-and-9,000 metres.

- Spyder is however, shorter than India's indigenously developed surface-to-air 'Akash' missile, which has a strike range of 25 km.
- Spyder is an all-weather missile which has an automatic process of engaging an aggressive aircraft or missile. Besides aircraft and UAVs, it can also neutralise low-level cruise missiles.

Florence Nightingale Awards

- The President recently conferred Florence Nightingale Awards to 35 Nurses.
- The Florence Nightingale awards are given to the outstanding nursing personnel employed in Central, State/UTs.
- Nurses working in Government, Voluntary Organizations, Mission institutions and the private institutions can apply with the due recommendation of concerned State Government.
- The Florence Nightingale Awards carries Rs.50,000/- cash, a certificate, a citation certificate and a Medal.

Derby Air-to-Air Beyond Visual Range Missile

- Tejas, the Light Combat Aircraft successfully demonstrated an Air-to-Air Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missile firing capability by releasing Derby Air-to-Air BVR missile in RADAR guided mode.
- The missile launch was performed in Lock ON after Launch mode for a BVR target in the look down mode and the target was destroyed.
- Derby is developed by Israeli defence company Rafael Advanced Defense Systems to meet the combat needs of the armed forces.
- The Derby AAM can be integrated onto a variety of fighter aircraft and Mirage and is capable of engaging aerial threats from short ranges and near-beyond visual range. Derby can also be configured as a surface-to-air missile (SAM).

Karnataka gets State butterfly

- The **Southern Bird Wing** has been designated as the '**State butterfly**' of **Karnataka**. It is the **largest butterfly** in India and is endemic to south India, particularly Karnataka.
- Karnataka is second state in the country to adopt a state butterfly. Maharashtra had chosen the Blue Moron in 2015.
- It should be noted here that state butterfly tag does not come with additional protection.

Yellow-eyed penguins could be wiped out in 25 years

- Researchers have predicted that New Zealand's iconic Yellow-eyed penguins may go extinct within the next 25 years due to rising ocean temperatures and climate change.
- The study highlights where conservation efforts could be most effective in building penguins' resilience against climate change.
- It is classified as **endangered** by the IUCN.

India's first technological park for ornamental fishery at Chennai

- India's first Aquatic Rainbow Technology Park (ARTP) in Chennai, an ultra modern exclusive facility for ornamental fish equipped with multi-species hatchery and live feed culture units, will become operational in the next three months, fulfilling a major requirement of the industry for mass production of high-value aquarium fish.
- The facility is being developed by Fisheries College and Research Institute (FCRI), Ponneri in Tamil Nadu, the second largest exporter of ornamental fish after West Bengal.
- After the completion, it will be handed over to ornamental fish breeders and farmers on lease for three years.

IARI at Assam

- The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the setting up of Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI) in Assam.
- IARI-Assam would be a Post-Graduate Institution of higher learning in Agricultural Education.
- It will have the hallmark identity of an IARI including all sectors of agriculture like field crops, horticultural crops, agro-forestry, animal husbandry, fisheries, poultry, piggery, silk rearing, honey production, etc.
- It will be an off-campus of IARI, New Delhi and integrated multi-disciplinary research would be undertaken in school mode i.e. Schools of Crop Sciences, Natural Resource Management, and Animal Sciences & Fisheries.

ISRO gets Indira Gandhi Prize for 2014

- The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was recently presented with the Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development for the year 2014.
- The ISRO was selected for the prize in 2014 by a jury headed by Vice-President Hamid Ansari.
- It consists of a trophy made of banded Haematite Jasper, with a portrait of the late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in Jaipur miniature paintings, a cash award of ₹1 crore and a citation.

Joint HADR Exercise

- The Annual Joint Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise involving multiple agencies and being conducted by Indian Navy's Western Naval Command has commenced at Naval Station Karwar.
- Named as "KARAVALI KARUNYA", the exercise, which involves both professional exchange and actual disaster response mechanisms is set on a Tsunami disaster scenario.

First Tejas Express

- Indian Railways has introduced India's first high speed, air-conditioned Tejas Express between Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus Mumbai and Karmali.
- Tejas Express is a state of the art train capable of running at the speed of 200 kmph with ultra modern amenities run between Mumbai and Karmali.

Iran's presidential election

Hassan Rouhani has been re-elected as the President of Iran. He was elected as president for his first term in 2013. He won 2013 elections by pledging to end Iran's isolation and improve civil rights at home.

NASA tribute: New species named after Abdul Kalam

- NASA scientists have named an organism discovered by them after APJ Abdul Kalam. Researchers at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) discovered the bacteria on the filters of the International Space Station and named it *Solibacillus kalamii* to honour the late Indian President, who was a renowned aerospace scientist.
- Even as it orbits the earth some 400 kilometres above, the ISS is home to many types of bacteria and fungi which co-inhabit the station with the astronauts who live and work on the station.

International Day for Biodiversity

- The International Day for Biodiversity (IDB) 2017 was celebrated all over the country on May 22, by different States and various organisations.
- The International Day for Biological Diversity was first established in 1993, when the 29th of December was selected to serve as the day to educate the world of the importance of Biodiversity. This was later changed to the 22 of May in 2000. Too many winter holidays were interfering with countries holding meaningful celebrations.
- 2017 Theme: "Biodiversity and Sustainable Tourism".

India is no. 2 stainless steel producer in the world

India has emerged as the second largest stainless steel producer in the world after China. India toppled Japan in the year 2016 according to the figures disclosed by International Stainless Steel Forum at a conference held in Tokyo, Japan, recently.

A women-only tour package unveiled

- In what is being touted as the first of its kind by a State-run tourism corporation in the country, the Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation (KSTDC) has decided to offer a ‘women’s special’ tour package.
- The package, a three-day, two-night tour of Mysuru and Kodagu, promises to be a unique experience for women travellers.

Google Unleashes AlphaGo in China

- AlphaGo is a narrow AI, computer program developed by Alphabet Inc.’s Google DeepMind in London to play the board game Go. In October 2015, it became the first Computer Go program to beat a human professional Go player without handicaps on a full-sized 19×19 board.
- AlphaGo’s algorithm uses a **Monte Carlo tree search** to find its moves based on knowledge previously “learned” by machine learning, specifically by an artificial neural network (a deep learning method) by extensive training, both from human and computer play.

WHO elects Ethiopia's Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus as its new director general

- Ethiopia's former health minister has been elected to serve as the next director-general of the World Health Organization — the first African picked to lead the global health agency.
- Appointment: The World Health Assembly is the legislative and supreme body of WHO. Based in Geneva, it typically meets yearly in May. It appoints the Director-General every five years.

Airlander 10, World's Largest Aircraft, Completes Test Flight

- The world's largest aircraft has successfully completed a test flight, bringing the massive helium-filled airship one step closer to commercial use.
- The hybrid aircraft dubbed the Airlander 10 combines technology from airplanes, helicopters and airships.
- It is designed to fly at altitudes of 6,100 meters for up to five days when manned. With a length of 92 metres, it is the largest aircraft currently flying.

SBI launches national hackathon

- State Bank of India (SBI) has launched a national hackathon for developers, start-ups and students to come up with innovative ideas and solutions for the banking sector.
- The hackathon, named ‘Code For Bank’, will focus on the business value driven by technologies like predictive analytics, fin-tech/blockchain, digital payments, IOT, artificial intelligence, machine learning, BOTS and robotic process automation.

Dhola Sadiya

- It is the **country's longest bridge** located in **Assam**. It was recently inaugurated by PM Modi.
- This new, three lane, 9.15 kilometre bridge has been built over river Lohit, a tributary of the Brahmaputra, linking Dhola to Sadiya in Assam.
- It has been constructed on BOT Annuity basis at a total cost of Rs 2,056 crore, as part of the Arunachal Package of Roads and Highways under the Ministry's Special Accelerated Development Programme for North East (SARDP-NE). The objective was to bring the people of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh closer to each other.

- The bridge will also reduce the distance from Rupai on NH- 37 in Assam to Meka/Roing on NH-52 in Arunachal Pradesh by 165 KM. The travel time between the two places will come down from the current six hours to just one hour – a total five hour reduction. This will result in saving of petrol and diesel worth Rs 10 Lakh per day.

India's First Fleet of 200 Electric Vehicles Launched in Nagpur

- India's first multi-modal electric vehicle project was recently launched at Nagpur.
- This unique project brings together e-buses, e-cabs, e-rickshaws and e-autos on a single platform, the Ola App, which will enable commuters in Nagpur to book them.
- The fleet of 200 vehicles consists of 100 of Mahindra's new e20 Plus vehicles, besides those from other manufacturers like Tata Motors, Kinetic and TVS.

Siam Bharat

- It is the Indo-Thailand Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Table Top Exercise 2017 held recently in Chiang Mai, Thailand between the Indian Air Force and Royal Thailand Air Force (RTAF).
- The aim of the bilateral exercise is to evolve SOPs for planning and executing relief missions during unforeseen natural calamities like Tsunami, earthquakes, cyclones, floods etc. The objective is to enhance interoperability between both the Air Forces, while conducting combined air operations triggered by a crisis. The exercise would assist in laying down procedures and establish decision support system at various stages of relief operations.

'See-through' frog is at risk of extinction

A newly identified frog species — with transparent skin through which its beating heart is visible — is under threat of extinction.

What you need to know?

- The frog (*Hyalinobatrachium yaku*), discovered in the Amazonian lowlands of Ecuador, has unique physical and behavioural traits.
- Males guard the eggs, which are attached below a tree's leaves, until they hatch and fall on the water stream below.
- Not all glass frogs have hearts that are visible through the chest. In some, the heart itself is white, so you don't see the red blood.
- What's the threat? Drying and polluting streams. If the stream dries up, or becomes polluted, the frogs can't survive, and other more resilient creatures may be next.

A gene that staves off heart disease

Scientists have identified a unique gene variant in people living in isolated Greek villages that protects them from heart diseases despite enjoying a high-fat diet.

What you need to know?

- The cardioprotective variant was found in Mylopotamos in northern Crete, where the population is isolated and live a long life despite having a diet rich in animal fat.
- The variant, rs145556679*, is associated with lower levels of both 'bad' natural fats

A fish that can father a near clone of itself

Scientists have discovered a fish carrying genes only from its father in the nucleus of its cells.

What you need to know?

- These genes are found in a type of fish called *Squalius alburnoides*. They are thought to have arisen from hybridisation between females of one species, *Squalius pyrenaicus*, and males of another species, now extinct, that belonged to a group of fish called Anaecypris.

- To sustain its population, *Squalius alburnoides* mates with several other closely related species belonging to the *Squalius* lineage.
- These fishes normally inhabits rivers in Portugal or Spain.
- This is the first documented instance in vertebrates of a father producing a near clone of itself through sexual reproduction — a rare phenomenon called androgenesis.

ATR of DRDO

- The Defence Minister Shri Arun Jaitley recently inaugurated the newly built Aeronautical Test Range (ATR) of the Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) at Chitradurga in Karnataka.
- It is aimed at creating conditions for research, which will in turn develop the type of human resource in the country required in the field of aeronautical testing. The range will cater to the needs of DRDO for testing of indigenously developed aeronautical systems.
- The ATR is the first of its kind range in the country exclusively meant to conduct flight-tests of indigenous unmanned and manned aircrafts, developed by the DRDO.
- This outdoor testing and evaluating facility has been set up by the Aeronautical Development Establishment (ADE), one of the premier laboratories of the DRDO.

Cyclone Mora

- Cyclone Mora has formed in the east-central part of Bay of Bengal and it is expected to move towards the north-east part of India. According to the Indian Meteorological Department, it is expected to intensify into a ‘severe cyclonic storm’ over the next 24 hours. According to the IMD, wind speeds will be in the range of 100-150 kilometres per hour.
- According to an Accuweather report, the coastal region of Bangladesh is prone to storm surges and that the topography along with high population density has earlier resulted in eight out of the top ten ‘deadliest’ cyclones to originate in the Bay of Bengal.

Sankhyiki Bhawan

It is the newly inaugurated office of the NSSO. The new building houses all divisions under one roof. Now, with all Divisions under one roof, it will improve coordination of various work at a very closer level resulting speedier and better output.

Established in 1950, the National Sample Survey Office conducts nation-wide large-scale sample surveys to obtain comprehensive and continuing information relating to social, economic, demographic, industrial and agricultural aspects.

‘BlessU-2’

It is a robot priest that beams lights from its hands and grants automated ‘blessings’ to people. It was recently launched in Germany.
