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## Table of Contents

<b>GS PAPER - I</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Paper 1 Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.</b>	<b>8</b>
Etikoppaka toys get GI tag, artisans cheer	8
Hindi writer Krishna Sobti chosen for Jnanpith Award	8
UNESCO award for Srirangam temple	9
Kambala	9
Chennai now part of UNESCO's 'creative cities network'	9
Hunar Haat	10
Manipur Sangai Festival 2017	10
Swachh Iconic Places	11
<b>Paper 1 Topic: Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present- significant events, personalities, issues.</b>	<b>12</b>
Birsa Munda	12
<b>Paper 1 Topic: Role of women and women's organization, population and associated issues, poverty and developmental issues, urbanization, their problems and their remedies.</b>	<b>12</b>
SHe-Box Online Complaint Management System	12
Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra (PMMSK)	13
'Safe city' plan for women	13
Program to train Elected Women Representatives of PRIs	14
Shah Bano law	15
<b>Paper 1 Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.</b>	<b>15</b>
World Toilet Day 2017	15
<b>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.</b>	<b>16</b>
2017 'very likely' in top three warmest years on record	16
National Rural Drinking Water Programme	16
Climate Change Performance Index	17
<b>GS PAPER - II</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Paper 1 Topic: Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.</b>	<b>18</b>
National Law Day	18
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.</b>	<b>18</b>
Cauvery Tribunal Gets Six Months Extension	18
Centre plans to set up more commercial courts	19
Overreach: on the T.N Governor meeting govt. officials	20
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Parliament and State Legislatures – structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers &amp; privileges and issues arising out of these.</b>	<b>20</b>
Bill on quota in private sector in RS	20
<b>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.</b>	<b>21</b>
EK BHARAT-SHRESHTHA BHARAT	21
North East Development Summit	21

15th Finance Commission _____	22
Inter-State Council _____	22
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Structure, organization and functioning of the Executive and the Judiciary Ministries and Departments of the Government; _____</b>	<b>23</b>
Centre asks states to speed up trial against tainted politicians _____	23
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies. _____</b>	<b>24</b>
Public credit registry to speed up digitisation _____	24
Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) _____	24
Island Development Agency _____	25
National Green Tribunal _____	25
National Testing Agency (NTA) _____	26
International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) _____	27
National Anti-profiteering Authority _____	27
National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) _____	28
NPPA _____	29
National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH) _____	29
National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) _____	30
Competition Commission of India (CCI) _____	30
Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA) _____	31
National anti-profiteering authority _____	31
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Government policies and interventions for development in various sectors and issues arising out of their design and implementation. _____</b>	<b>32</b>
CCEA nod for extending Rs 15,722cr RKVY-RAFTAAR till 2019-20 _____	32
FEMA norms eased to spur investment from overseas _____	32
"People First" campaign _____	33
Land Bill _____	33
Bill banning superstitious practices tabled _____	34
Rajasthan conversion Bill _____	35
Insolvency law _____	36
Scheme on Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs _____	37
Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY) _____	37
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States and the performance of these schemes; mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections. _____</b>	<b>38</b>
Accessible India Campaign _____	38
Sub-schemes under Umbrella Scheme "Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)" _____	39
Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill _____	40
WHO releases guidelines on responding to child sex abuse _____	40
Atal scheme _____	41
Meeting of Asia and Pacific Decade for Persons with Disabilities _____	42
<b>Paper 2 Topic: Issues relating to development and management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources. _____</b>	<b>42</b>
Threefold rise in domestic budget for fight against tuberculosis _____	42
Holistic Learning is the need of hour in our Present Education System _____	43
President of India inaugurates Global Clubfoot Conference _____	44
Cabinet approves National Council for Teacher Education (Amendment) Bill, 2017 _____	44
President inaugurates 21st World Congress of Mental Health, calls for fighting stigma _____	45
Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana _____	45
India's Second Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC) _____	46
Project Saksham _____	46

Hausala 2017	47
Measles & Rubella	48
India Youth Development Index and Report 2017	49
World Diabetes Day 2017	50
Moscow declaration	50
IMD World Talent Rankings	51
WTO: India resolute on food security	52
India Hypertension Management Initiative (IHMI)	52

**Paper 2 Topic: Development processes and the development industry the role of NGOs, SHGs, various groups and associations, donors, charities, institutional and other stakeholders.** 53

Transformation of 115 Backward Districts	53
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**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.** 54

Controversial Rajasthan bill sent to Assembly select committee	54
Grahak Sadak Koyla Vitaran App	54
An app to get tiger numbers right	55
PRAGATI	55
Umang app	56
YONO	57

**Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.** 57

Belt and Road Initiative	57
South China sea dispute	58
Sampriti 2017	58
IMMSAREX	59
Chabahar port	59

**Paper 2 Topic: Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.** 60

Cabinet approves agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance between India and Armenia in custom matters	60
UNESCO launches Strategic Framework for Education in Emergencies in the Arab Region	60
COP23	61
India to contribute USD 100 million to UN partnership fund	61
China launches 2 navigation satellites	62
Joint Interpretative Declaration between India and Colombia	62
International Solar Alliance	63
South Asia Economic Summit	63
Asia Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (Apcert)	64
Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)	65
UN Convention against Torture	65

**Paper 2 Topic: Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests, Indian diaspora.** 66

200 die at N. Korean n-test site	66
Zimbabwe crisis	66
China to mediate on Rohingyas between Myanmar and Bangladesh	67
China forges 'strategic' ties with Djibouti after opening base	67

**Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.** 68

7th Asian Energy Ministers' Round Table organised by International Energy Forum (IEF) in Bangkok	68
Odisha Higher Education Programme for Excellence and Equity (OHEPEE) Project	68
International Energy Agency (IEA)	69

India demands transparency in UN Security Council reform	70
11 Trade ministers reach deal on Pacific trade without US	71
Bank of International Settlement (BIS)	71
South Asia Regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (SARTTAC)	72
Shanghai Cooperation Organization	73
International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO)	74
International Committee of Military Medicine (ICMM)	74
International Court of Justice (ICJ)	75
BRICS bank	76
European Bank for Reconstruction & Development	77
International Geological Congress	78
G 20 Sherpa	79
International Maritime Organization	79
<b>GS PAPER - III</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment.</b>	<b>80</b>
India's rank rises to 100 in World Bank's Doing Business Report, 2018	80
Crypto currencies now come under SEBI lens	80
EESL launches \$454 million 'Creating and Sustaining Markets for Energy Efficiency' project in partnership with the GEF	81
Composition scheme	82
Credit ratings and how are they given	82
Bad bank to deal with stressed assets	84
GES 2017 in Hyderabad	84
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth.</b>	<b>85</b>
Avoidance of Double Taxation	85
Reservation in private sector	85
Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)	86
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Inclusive growth and issues arising from it.</b>	<b>86</b>
RBI release new outsourcing norms for NBFCs	86
Not to pursue Islamic banking: RBI	87
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Major crops cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints; e-technology in the aid of farmers.</b>	<b>88</b>
Part-time jobs could fix India's farming crisis: Analysts	88
World Fisheries Day	89
2018 as International Year of Millets	89
Indian Forest (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017	90
<b>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.</b>	<b>91</b>
CCEA gives nod to Rs10,000 crore SBA for fertiliser subsidy	91
DBT helps states save Rs 1,557 crore till November 2017	91
National Milk Day	92
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Food processing and related industries in India- scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management.</b>	<b>93</b>
World Food India 2017	93
Fish tourism circuit	93
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.</b>	<b>94</b>

PowerGrid completes extending grid connectivity to Leh-Ladakh region	94
INDIA SET TO BECOME AN AVIATION HUB: VICE PRESIDENT	94
Coastal Berth Scheme	94
Postmen to collate data on homes still without electricity	95
Prime Minister's Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative	95
Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP)	96
Ram Setu	97
National Power Portal (NPP)	97
India's first mega coastal economic zone (CEZ)	98
'Saubhagya' Web-Portal	99
Logistics Sector granted Infrastructure Status	99
Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY)	100
Sagarmala Programme	101
SAUBHAGYA Scheme	101
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Science and Technology- developments and their applications and effects in everyday life Achievements of Indians in science &amp; technology; indigenization of technology and developing new technology.</b>	<b>102</b>
Carnivorous plants use CO <sub>2</sub> to lure prey	102
Holy sites 'may offer clues to antibiotic resistance'	102
'NIRBHAY' Sub-Sonic Cruise Missile	103
BrahMos	104
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology and issues relating to intellectual property rights.</b>	<b>105</b>
Banaganapalle mangoes get GI tag	105
Proxima Centauri may host planetary system	105
Cobots	106
Rasogolla hits sweet spot, gets GI tag	106
NOAA's JPSS-1 satellite	107
World's smallest data recorder made of bacteria	107
Aditya-L1	108
Net neutrality	108
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.</b>	<b>110</b>
Climate change and ill-health	110
There's a huge gap between the Paris climate change goals and reality	111
Blackbuck conservation reserve to come up in U.P.	112
How much can India learn to fight pollution from China?	112
BS -VI Norms	113
Furnace oil and pet coke	113
Chilika Lake	114
INSPIRE 2017	114
Clean Ganga mission	115
Arunachal's Siang river turns black	116
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.</b>	<b>116</b>
Unsafe boilers	116
Facebook brings in disaster response tools to India	117
Second warning to humanity	117
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.</b>	<b>118</b>
For year-round border security, India plans tunnels on China border	118

Sagar Kavach _____	119
Navy gets access to Singapore's Changi naval base _____	119
<b>Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate. _____</b>	<b>119</b>
Nod for buying 111 Navy copters _____	119
The security of India and Bhutan is “indivisible and mutual” _____	120
India offers to share real-time maritime data _____	120
PAN Indian Army Release of Integrated Quarter Master Package (IQMP) Software Application _____	121
Narcotics Control Bureau _____	121
<b>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. _____</b>	<b>122</b>
Global watchdog FATF puts Pakistan on notice _____	122
Global Conference on Cyber Space 2017 _____	122
Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) _____	123
Defence of A&N Islands Exercise _____	124
<b>Facts for Prelims _____</b>	<b>124</b>
Competition Commission of India (CCI) _____	124
‘Ex Blue Flag-17’ _____	124
7th Asia Ministerial Energy Roundtable (AMER) in Bangkok, Thailand _____	124
BadRabbit ransomware _____	125
“Quadrilateral” grouping _____	125
National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA) _____	125
Paradise papers _____	125
Women’s Asia Cup hockey title _____	125
ICIJ _____	125
New ant species discovered in the Western Ghats _____	125
Musa paramjitiana _____	126
Asian Boxing Championships _____	126
Blue Flag aerial training exercise _____	126
Olive ridley turtles _____	126
Urdu as second official language of Telangana _____	126
Cornelia Sorabji _____	126
China launches world’s first fully electric cargo ship _____	127
IndiaRAP programme _____	127
Aadi Mahotsav _____	127
Namami Barak festival _____	127
Indira Gandhi Prize _____	127
Gleadovia konyakianorum _____	128
World’s biggest toilet pot model unveiled at ‘Trump village’ _____	128
IMBAX _____	128
World Conference on Access to Medical Products and International Laws for Trade and Health _____	128
New species of gecko _____	128
World’s first Artificial Intelligence politician developed _____	129
Mount Agung _____	129
Hwasong-15 _____	129
Karnataka first state where women head police, bureaucracy _____	129
India donates 500 tonnes of rice to Lesotho _____	129
Miscellaneous Points _____	130



**GS PAPER - I**

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

### Etikoppaka toys get GI tag, artisans cheer

#### Background:

The Etikoppaka toys are not only popular in Andhra Pradesh but also gained their popularity all over the country and abroad over the years. But this art form suffered a setback in the last decade. The exports to the US and Europe, which were to the tune of Rs 50 to 80 lakh per annum, were stopped in 2007 when the importers insisted on GI certification and heavy metal analysis, both not in the hands of the villagers.



#### Key Points:

- Etikoppaka toys, popularly known as *Lakkapidathalu*, finally received Geographical Indication by the Registration of Geographical Indication.
- The artisans are yet to get heavy metal analysis certificate for exporting to the US and European countries.
- Facing a new threat from dumping of identical Chinese wooden toys into the markets
- Getting little help from the government, the artisans are now looking for online trading agencies to sell their products.

#### Geographical Indications (GI):

Geographical Indications of Goods are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product. Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country.

Source: hans india

### Hindi writer Krishna Sobti chosen for Jnanpith Award

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



#### About Jnanpith awards:

- The Jnanpith Award is one of the prestigious literary honours in the country. The award was instituted in 1961.
- **Eligibility:** Any Indian citizen who writes in any of the official languages of India is eligible for the honour.

Sources: the hindu.

## UNESCO award for Srirangam temple

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

### Key facts:

- Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple is the only religious centre in the whole of South India to bag the award in 2017.
- The famous **Christ Church in Mumbai** and **Royal Bombay Opera House** are the other historic Indian monuments that received the Award of Merit this year, in addition to the temple.
- The temple was lauded by the international body for undertaking renovation and beautification work worth over Rs 20 crore without harming its centuries-old heritage.



### About the award:

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

- The awards are classified under four categories — Award of Excellence, Awards of Distinction, Awards of Merit and Award for New Design in Heritage Context.
- They are being given to encourage the efforts of all stakeholders and the public in conserving and promoting monuments and religious institutes with rich heritage in the Asia-Pacific region.

Sources: the hindu.

## Kambala

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

### Background:

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

### About Kambala:

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

Kambala 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.



#### **Why it has become controversial?**

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 organizers 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.

## Chennai now part of UNESCO's 'creative cities network'

**Chennai has been included in the UNESCO Creative Cities Network for its rich musical tradition.** Including Chennai, a total of 64 cities from 44 countries have joined the UNESCO Creative Cities Network. **Jaipur and Varanasi are the other Indian cities that feature on the list.**

**180 Cities in 72 Countries**

## **UNESCO Creative Cities Network**

- Literature ■ Film ■ Music ■ Crafts & Folk Art
- Design ■ Media Arts ■ Gastronomy

**About Creative Cities Network:****What is it?**

The UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN) was created in 2004 to promote cooperation with and among cities that have identified creativity as a strategic factor for sustainable urban development.

**Objective:**

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

***The Network covers seven creative fields:*** Crafts and Folk Arts, Media Arts, Film, Design, Gastronomy, Literature and Music.

Sources: the hindu.

## Hunar Haat

**Context:**

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

**Hunar Haats:****What are they?**

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

**Significance of Hunar Haats:**

- Hunar Haats have become a successful mission to provide employment and income generation opportunities with platforms for marketing the products of master artisans, craftsmen and culinary experts belonging to the minority communities.
- It envisages at boosting the skill of craftsmen, weavers and artisans who are already engaged in the traditional ancestral work

Sources: pib.

## Manipur Sangai Festival 2017

Every year the State of Manipur celebrates the "Manipur Sangai Festival" from 21st to 30th November.

**About the Sangai festival:**

**What is it?** Sangai Festival is an annual cultural extravaganza in Manipur. The festival is labelled as the grandest festival of the State today and helps promote Manipur as a world class tourism destination. Every edition of the festival showcases the tourism potential of the state in the field of Arts & Culture, Handloom, Handicrafts, Indigenous Sports, Cuisine, Music and Adventure sports of the state etc.



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

**Focus areas:** The festival will reflect the State's proud cultural heritage and the love for art which is inherent amongst various tribes inhabiting the State of Manipur. The State's classical dance form, 'Ras Leela' is quite famous all over the world for its distinctiveness from any other dance forms in India. The Ras Leela will form an important part of the dance performances at the Manipur Sangai Festival 2017 besides the various other folk dance performances like the Kabui Naga dance, Bamboo dance, Maibi dance, Lai Haraoba dance, Khamba Thoibi dance etc. which will be showcased at the festival.

**Indigenous sports** will also be a major highlight of the State's biggest tourism festival this year. Manipur's famous martial arts- Thang Ta (a combination Spear & Sword skills), Yubi-Lakpi (a game played with greased coconut like rugby), Mukna Kangjei (a game that combines hockey and wrestling), and Sagol Kangjei- Modern Polo (believed to have evolved in Manipur) will all form part of the festival.

## Swachh Iconic Places

**Context:** A National Consultation of Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) was recently held at New Delhi. Representatives from 20 Iconic Sites including central and State officials, representatives of iconic places and Corporate and development partners including World Bank took part in the consultations.



### About Swachh Iconic Places (SIP):

**What is it?** Swachh Iconic Places (SIP) is an initiative of Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation under Swachh Bharat Mission. Initiated as a project to implement Prime Minister's vision to take iconic places and their surroundings to higher standards of Swachhata, so that all visitors benefit and also take away home the message of cleanliness, Swachh Iconic Places is now in its second phase.

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

**Ten New Iconic sites** identified under Phase II are: 1. Gangotri, 2. Yamunotri, 3. Mahakaleshwar Temple, 4. Charminar, 5. Church and Convent of St. Francis of Assisi, 6. Kalady, 7. Gomateshwara, 8. Baijnath Dham, 9. Gaya Tirth and 10. Somnath temple.

**Paper 1 Topic:** Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues.

## Birsa Munda

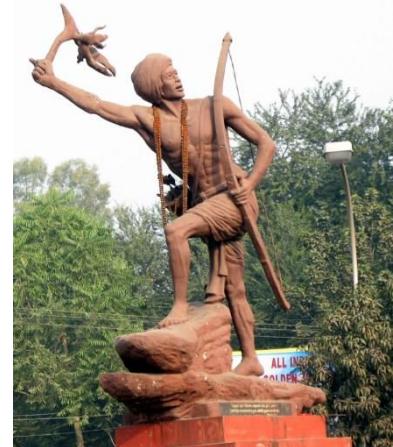
### Context:

Birth anniversary of Birsa Munda was observed on November 15<sup>th</sup>. In recognition of his impact on the national movement, the state of Jharkhand was created on his birth anniversary in 2000.

### About Birsa Munda:

#### Who was he?

Bisra Munda was a folk hero and a tribal freedom fighter hailing from the Munda tribe. He was a spearhead behind the Millenarian movement that arose in the Bihar and Jharkhand belt in the 19th century under the British colonisation. He is also known as 'Dharti Abba' or the Earth Father.



#### Birsait:

Bisra wanted to reform the tribal society and so, he urged them to let go of beliefs in witchcraft and instead, stressed on the importance of prayer, staying away from alcohol, having faith in God and observing a code of conduct. Based on these, he started the faith of 'Birsait'.

#### Achievements:

Bisra started a movement called 'Ulgulan', or 'The Great Tumult'. His struggle against the exploitation and discrimination against tribals led to a big hit against the British government in the form of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act being passed in 1908. The act restricted the passing on of land from the tribal people to non-tribals.

Sources: pib.

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

## SHe-Box Online Complaint Management System

To ensure the effective implementation of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act (the SH Act), 2013, the government has launched a comprehensive SHe-Box.

### About SHe- Box:

#### What is it?

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

#### How it operates?

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

### Key features:

- The new SHe-Box portal offers the facility of making online complaints of sexual harassment at workplace to all women employees in the country including government and private employees.
- Those who have already filed a written complaint with the concerned Internal Complaint Committee (ICC) or Local Complaint Committee (LCC) constituted under the SH Act are also eligible to file their complaint through this portal.
- SHe-Box will also provide a platform to various empanelled institutes/organisations to share their capacity building activities with the Ministry which in turn will be able to monitor the activities of these institutes/organizations so empanelled from across the country.

## Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra (PMMSK)

### **Context:**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for setting up of the Pradhan Mantri Mahila Shakti Kendra (PMMSK). The government plans to reach the 115 most backward districts in the country with 920 Mahila Shakti Kendra. The government plans to reach the 115 most backward districts in the country with 920 Mahila Shakti Kendra.

### **About Mahila Shakti Kendra:**

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

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

#### **What it does?**

It will aim to improve declining child sex ratio, ensure survival and protection of the girl child, ensuring her education and empowering her to fulfil her potential. It will provide an interface for rural women to approach the government for getting their entitlements and for empowering them through training and capacity building.

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

Sources: the hindu.

## ‘Safe city’ plan for women

### **Context:**

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

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

### **Initiatives taken so far:**

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

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

### **What else is needed?**

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

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

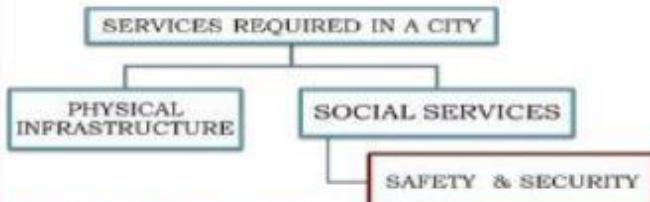
### **Way ahead:**

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

## SAFE CITY CONCEPT/CONCERN & INDICATORS

### Safe City Objectives:

- Enhance overall quality of life & better living.



### Safe City Concept:

To create safe urban areas that provide better social and economic environments by preparing for both natural and man-made disasters.



### Safe City Indicators:

#### Crime & Violence:

- Women Safety
- Crime
- Police
- Terrorism/mafia

They improve social and better living conditions in cities & empower women.

#### Road Safety

- Accidents
- Pedestrian Safety

To ensure road safety & enable free pedestrian flow.

#### Security of Tenure:

- Forced evictions
- Land Security

Enable security of tenure and sense of ownership.

#### Disaster resilience

- Natural & Manmade
- Fire Safety
- Structural Safety.

Lessen the adverse impacts of hazards and the possibility.

#### Public Health

- Health facilities
- Diseases.

Improves health & living conditions in cities.

Sources: pib.

## Program to train Elected Women Representatives of PRIs

### Context:

The government has launched an intensive training program for Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Master Trainers, in New Delhi.

This capacity building program is being organized by National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development (NIPCCD) of the WCD Ministry which will ultimately train approximately twenty thousand EWRs covering nearly 50 EWRs from each district by March, 2018.

### Need for training:

Not many women sarpanches and EWRs in the country come forward to take up their responsibilities and mostly allow their husbands to take the lead. So, they remain 'sarpanchanis' in name only. Therefore, the Capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) is critical to empower women to participate effectively in the governance processes. This will help them assume the leadership roles expected of them and guide their villages towards a more prosperous future.

### Significance of this move:

This is an historic step since for the first time ever an initiative of this scale has been taken up to train EWRs who will go out and administer the villages professionally. Training two lakh women sarpanches across the country will help bring following important changes:

- It will help to create model villages.
- It will help prepare women as political leaders of the future.

Sources: pib.

## Shah Bano law

**Context:** Moving to make instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat a criminal offence, the government is considering, among changes in existing laws, amendments to The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986.

**About the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986:**

Commonly known as the Shah Bano Act, the 1986 law was enacted by the Rajiv Gandhi government under pressure from the Muslim clergy to overturn the Supreme Court ruling in the Shah Bano case. This law allowed, in line with Muslim personal law, maintenance to a divorced woman only during the period of iddat, or three menstrual cycles/three lunar months after divorce.

**Need for changes:**

In August, the Supreme Court, in a landmark 3-2 verdict, "set aside" the centuries-old practice of instant triple talaq in which Muslim men divorce their wives by uttering talaq three times in quick succession. Three of the five judges on the Constitution Bench called the practice un-Islamic and "arbitrary" and disagreed with the view that triple talaq was an integral part of religious practice.

But the minority ruling of then Chief Justice J S Khehar and Justice S Abdul Nazeer underlined the primacy of Muslim personal law and said the practice enjoyed constitutional protection and was beyond the scope of judicial scrutiny. They were of the view that Parliament should consider an "appropriate" law to deal with the issue of talaq-e-biddat.

**Implications of this move:**

Once the law outlawing triple talaq is enacted, the Muslim clergy will have no role in cases of talaq-e-biddat and women can directly approach police for redressal.

**Way ahead:**

The 'preamble' of the Shah Bano Act will have to be re-drafted since the existing law applies only after the divorce of a Muslim woman. Other than changes to the Shah Bano Act, the government is considering amendments to provisions of Section 125 Code of Criminal Procedure (order for maintenance of wives, children and parents) to provide further safeguards to Muslim women and their wards if they are abandoned via instant triple talaq.

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 1 Topic: Urbanization, their problems and their remedies.**

## World Toilet Day 2017

**Context:** World Toilet Day was celebrated on November 19<sup>th</sup>.

**About the World Toilet Day:**

**What is it?**

In 2013, the United Nations General Assembly officially designated November 19 as World Toilet Day. World Toilet Day is coordinated by UN-Water in collaboration with governments and partners. World Toilet Day is about inspiring action to tackle the global sanitation crisis.

**SDG:**

By 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG #6, aim to reach everyone with sanitation, and halve the proportion of untreated wastewater and increase recycling and safe reuse.

**2017 theme:** Wastewater.

The global sanitation crisis is reflected in the following facts, according to reports from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF):

- Around 60% of the global population – 4.5 billion people – either have no toilet at home or one that doesn't safely manage excreta.
- 862 million people worldwide still practise open defecation.
- Billions of people use an unimproved source of drinking water with no protection against contamination from faeces.
- Globally, 80% of the wastewater generated by society flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused.
- Only 39% of the global population (2.9 billion people) use a safely-managed sanitation service, that is, excreta safely disposed of in situ or treated off-site.

### World Toilet Day 2017

Not everyone gets to "go" the same way



**2.3 billion** people do not have access to a clean and safe toilet.

- Combined with safe water and good hygiene, improved sanitation could prevent around 842,000 deaths each year.

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.

### 2017 'very likely' in top three warmest years on record

**The year 2017 is "very likely" to be in the top three warmest years on record,** according to provisional figures from the World Meteorological Organization.

Factors responsible for this:

- The long-term trend of warming driven by human activities continues unabated.
- Concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere are the highest on record.

About WMO:

#### What is it?

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to meteorology (weather), climatology (climate), operational hydrology (water) and other related geophysical sciences such as oceanography and atmospheric chemistry.

#### What does WMO do?

- WMO coordinates the activities of National Meteorological and Hydrological Services in 191 States and Territories so that basic weather, climate and water services are made available to anyone who needs them, when they need them.
- WMO guarantees the publication of observations and statistics and furthers the application of meteorology and hydrology (including the monitoring and predictions of climate change and ozone) to all aspects of human activities such as aviation, shipping, water management and agriculture.
- WMO also encourages research and training in meteorology and hydrology and their related applications and contributes towards reducing the impact of weather- and climate-related hazards. This is accomplished through regular, reliable forecasts and early warnings on flooding, drought, tropical cyclones, tornadoes and other extreme events.
- Predictions concerning locust swarms and the transport of pollutants (nuclear and toxic substances, volcanic ash) are also provided by WMO Members.

Sources: the hindu.

### National Rural Drinking Water Programme

The Union Cabinet has accorded its approval for continuation and restructuring of National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) to make it outcome-based, competitive and better monitored with increased focus on sustainability (functionality) of schemes to ensure good quality service delivery to the rural population. The programme will cover all the Rural Population across the country.

- A sum of Rs. 23,050 crore has been approved for the programme for the Fourteenth Finance Commission (FFC) period 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The restructuring will make the programme flexible, result-oriented, competitive, and will enable the Ministry towards to reach the goal of increasing coverage of sustainable Piped Water Supply.

About NRDWP:

What is it?

The NRDWP was started in 2009, with a major emphasis on ensuring sustainability (source) of water availability in terms of potability, adequacy, convenience, affordability and equity. NRDWP is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme with 50: 50 fund sharing between the Centre and the States.

**The aim and objective** of National Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP) is to provide every rural person with adequate safe water for drinking, cooking and other basic domestic needs on a sustainable basis, with a minimum water quality standard, which should be conveniently accessible at all times and in all situations. Achieving this aim and objective is a continuous process.

Sources: pib.

## Climate Change Performance Index

**Context:**

Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) 2018 has been released by environmental organisation Germanwatch. The report was made public on the sidelines of the UN Climate Change negotiations (COP23) in Bonn.

**About CCPI:**

The Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI) is an instrument covering 58 countries and supposed to enhance transparency in international climate politics. Its aim is to encourage political and social pressure on those countries which have, up to now, failed to take ambitious actions on climate protection as well as to highlight countries with best-practice climate policies.

On the basis of standardised criteria, the index evaluates and compares the climate protection performance of 58 countries that are, together, responsible for more than 90% of global energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. 80% of the evaluation is based on objective indicators of emissions trend and emissions level. 20% of the index results are built upon national and international climate policy assessments by more than 200 experts from the respective countries.

**Performance of various countries:**

- India is ranked 14th, an improvement from its 20th position last year. China, with its high emissions and growing energy use over the past five years, still ranks 41st.
- The bottom three of the index is formed by Korea (58), Iran (59) and Saudi Arabia (rank 60), all of which are showing hardly any progress or ambition in reducing its emissions and energy use.

**Highlights of the report:**

- As per the report, fifty-six countries and the EU are together responsible for about 90% of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- The report notes that global energy transition is taking up speed but no country is doing enough. For this, the countries have to strengthen targets and implementation.
- The data show encouraging growth in renewable energy, ever cheaper prices for solar and wind energy and successes in saving energy in many countries. This was responsible for stabilising global energy CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the last three years.
- But progress is achieved much too slow for a fully renewable energy based world economy in a few decades, because growing oil and gas consumption is higher than the welcomed reduction in coal use.

Sources: ET.

## GS PAPER - II

**Paper 1 Topic:** Indian Constitution- historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure.

### National Law Day

#### **Context:**

November 26 is regarded as the second Constitution Day in the modern history of India. It is also celebrated as the National Law Day. This year, the National Law Day was celebrated jointly by the Law Commission of India and NITI Aayog.

#### **About National Law Day:**

##### **Why November 26<sup>th</sup>?**

Sixty-eight years ago on November 26, the Constitution of India was adopted by the Constituent Assembly. However, the Constitution was only partially adopted that day. The full adoption came two months later on January 26, 1950 – the day is celebrated as the Republic Day to mark the anniversary of occasion.



#### **Background:**

It was in 1979, when the first proposal was mooted to celebrate November 26 as an anniversary of the adoption of Constitution and assess the state of law in the country as envisaged by the framers of the legal document. Noted jurist and former parliamentarian LM Singhvi proposed to the Supreme Court Bar Association that National Law Day should be celebrated to mark the adoption of Constitution on November 26. A resolution was passed by the Supreme Court Bar Association in 1979. The National Law Day was celebrated thereafter till 2015.

#### **Constitution Day or National Law Day?**

The government in October 2015 decided that November 26 would be celebrated as the Constitution Day in the memory of Dr BR Ambedkar. On November 19 that year, the government issued a gazette notification declaring that November 26 as the Constitution Day.

#### **SOME UNIQUE FACTS ABOUT CONSTITUTION:**

- The Constitution was prepared over 2 years, 11 months and 17 days. The session of the Constituent Assembly was held on December 9, 1946.
- A total of 11 sessions of the Constituent Assembly was held including those by the drafting committee under the chairmanship of BR Ambedkar.
- The drafting committee was one of the 17 such bodies set up under the Constituent Assembly.
- Dr Rajendra Prasad, who went on to become the first President of India, was the chairman of the Constituent Assembly. The Constitution making committees held meetings on 165 days to hold deliberations and debate provisions to be incorporated.
- There were 299 members, including 15 women, of the Constituent Assembly. Of them 284 members finally signed the Constitution, when it was adopted in 1949.

Sources: pib.

**Paper 2 Topic:** Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions.

### Cauvery Tribunal Gets Six Months Extension

Union Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation has extended the term of **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal** by six months upto May 02, 2018.

#### **Why was CWDT constituted?**

Cauvery is an inter-State basin having its origin in Karnataka and flowing through Tamil Nadu and Puducherry before outfalling in Bay of Bengal. The sharing of waters of the Cauvery has been the source of a serious conflict between the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The genesis of this conflict rests in two agreements in 1892 and 1924 between the erstwhile Madras Presidency and Kingdom of Mysore.

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

### Constitutional provisions on inter-state river water sharing:

River waters use / harnessing is included in states jurisdiction (**entry 17 of state list**, Schedule 7 of Indian Constitution). However, union government can make laws on regulation and development of inter-State rivers and river valleys when expedient in the public interest.



- Whenever the riparian states are not able to reach amicable agreements on their own in sharing of an interstate river waters, **section 4 of The Interstate River Water Disputes Act, 1956 (IRWD Act) provides dispute resolution process in the form of Tribunal.**
- In case the constitutional rights of states are ingressed upon by the tribunal award in any manner, central government, for extending purview of its enactment to implement the tribunal order, **is obliged to take the consent of all riparian states under Article 252 of the constitution** before publishing the tribunal awards in the official gazette.

#### Powers of the tribunal:

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

**Verdict:** When the tribunal final verdict issued based on the deliberations on the draft verdict is accepted by the central government and notified in the official gazette, the verdict becomes law and binding on the states for implementation. When pronounced in the ambit of IRWD Act, the tribunal's verdict after its publication in the official gazette is equivalent to Supreme Court verdict as per section 6 of IRWD Act.

#### About IRWD Act:

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

- **Article 262 of the Indian Constitution provides a role for the Central government in adjudicating conflicts surrounding inter-state rivers** that arise among the state/regional governments.
- Recently, a permanent water dispute tribunal with its members from sitting judges of Supreme Court or High courts, is proposed to resolve the growing number of interstate river water disputes expeditiously.

#### Way ahead:

Over the years, the Cauvery water dispute has influenced the politics of the region with political parties stirring emotions of people as the river has a deep cultural, economic and religious significance for them. This has now led to a situation where public opinion has become more rigid, making it difficult for political outfits to find a common ground.

#### Facts for Prelims:

Cauvery river originates in Talakaveri in Kodagu district of Karnataka. It flows 800 km in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and reaches the Bay of Bengal through Poompuhar in Tamil Nadu. The Cauvery basin covers about 81155 sq km area. Out of this 43,856 sq km is in Tamil Nadu, 34,273 sq km in Karnataka, 2866 sq km in Kerala and 160 sq km in Puducherry.

Sources: pib.

### Centre plans to set up more commercial courts

The Union government has proposed to establish **commercial courts** in districts to further improve the ease of doing business parameters.

#### Background:

**Legal remedy to commercial disputes and enforcement of business contracts are parameters of the World Bank ranking.** In terms of ease of enforcing contracts, India jumped from 172 to 164. Though the jump in the ranking sounds small, it is substantial given the diversities of laws in our country and the complex demography.

India's performance has been varied within the legal framework. For example, the World Bank's ranking marked "court system and proceedings in India" 4.5 out of a total of 5, but in management of cases, it was 1.5 out of 6. India also fared well in alternative dispute redress mechanism and scored 2.5 out of a total of 3 marks.

#### About commercial courts:

On January 1, 2016, the Commercial Courts, Commercial Division and Commercial Appellate Division of High Courts Bill, 2015 received Presidential assent.

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

**Functions of various stakeholders:** It stipulates various functions to be performed by three key players, namely state governments, chief justices of high courts and lawyers/litigants. All state governments have to ensure that adequate infrastructure is provided for commercial courts and commercial divisions so that modern methods like electronic filing and video conferencing can be implemented without delay.

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

#### What is a commercial dispute?

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

Sources: the hindu.

### Overreach: on the T.N Governor meeting govt. officials

#### **Context:**

Breaking convention, Tamil Nadu governor Banwarilal Purohit recently held a meeting with officials of various government departments. The Governor has attempted to explain his interactions, saying he was seeking to familiarize himself with the administration and that he could appreciate its work in implementing schemes only if he got to know all details first hand.

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

The move invited criticism from some political parties, which accused the governor of interfering in the state government's functioning. Experts say, it is an act of constitutional impropriety for the Governor of a State to review the work of government officials when an elected regime is in place.

#### **What the constitution says?**

**Article 167 of the Constitution** says it is the Chief Minister's duty to communicate to the Governor all decisions of the Council of Ministers relating to the administration and proposals for legislation. It enjoins the Chief Minister to furnish such information relating to the administration as the Governor may call for.

There may be occasions when the Governor may need to ask a top bureaucrat or the head of the police force for a report on a major incident or development, but even that should be for the limited purpose of getting an accurate picture before sending a report to the Centre. So, according to experts, If the Governor wanted to understand how schemes are being implemented, he could have sought details from the Chief Minister instead of holding meetings in the districts.

#### **Way ahead:**

Governor should not refrain from taking an independent view of any matter or legislative proposal. But his functioning should be within the bounds of established norms and conventions.

Sources: the hindu.

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

### Bill on quota in private sector in RS

#### **Context:**

A private member's resolution on job reservations for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes in the private sector is listed for discussion in the winter session of Parliament. The resolution, tabled in the last Parliament session by CPI Rajya Sabha member D. Raja, could not come up for discussion.

#### **About Private Member's Bill:**

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

A private member's bill is introduced by an individual member of the legislative, as opposed to a party. He/ She may belong to the party in power or the Opposition.

**Key facts:**

A member who wants to introduce a bill has to give prior notice of one month, with a copy of the Statement of Objects and Reasons, unless the speaker permits a shorter notice. If the bill accompanies the President's recommendation, if necessary, the period of notice is calculated from the date of receipt of the recommendation in Lok Sabha Secretariat.

Once the bill is drafted, it is circulated among members of the Lok Sabha two days before its introduction. When the bill is tabled in the house, by convention, the motion is not opposed. There have been exceptions, however. A member cannot introduce more than four bills during a session. And while a bill is pending, a similar bill cannot be admitted.

Sources: the hindu.

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

## EK BHARAT-SHRESHTHA BHARAT

**Context:**

Under 'Ek Bharat-Shreshtha Bharat' Yojana, Madhya Pradesh has been made partner of Manipur and Nagaland. The Higher Education Department of Madhya Pradesh has been made nodal department to implement the scheme.



- As part of this, Madhya Pradesh will participate in Sangai Mahotsav being organized in Manipur from November 21 to 30. Similarly, teams of Manipur and Nagaland will take part in Lok Rang and Bal Rang programmes to present their cultural programmes and to apprise people with their culture.
- Besides, translation work of Nagaland's books has also been started in Madhya Pradesh to introduce people of the state with their activities and cultural heritage. Other activities are also being conducted in this regard.

**About Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat:****What is it?**

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

**What is it for?**

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

**Implementation:**

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

**Significance:**

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

Sources: the hindu.

## North East Development Summit

**Context:** Manipur is hosting the first ever North East Development Summit (NEDS) 2017 in Imphal from November 21.

**About the North East Development Summit:**

**What is it for?** The summit seeks to boost trade and investment in the underdeveloped region. Various international finance agencies will lay down their plan for development in the region.

**Aim:** It is aimed at "building confidence" and altering the "perception" among visiting delegates and investors.

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

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

#### Key Focus Areas:

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

Sources: pib.

## 15th Finance Commission

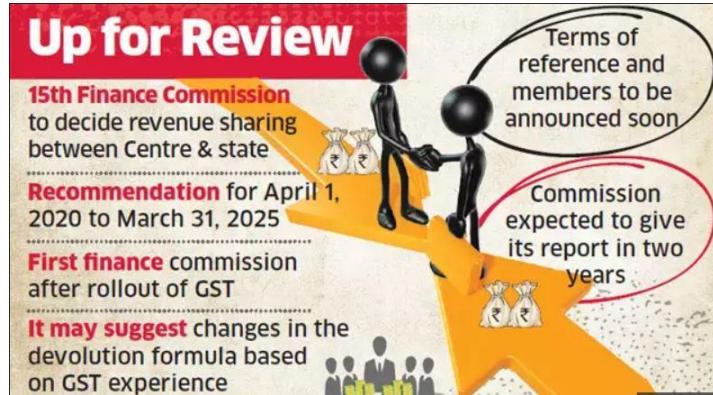
#### Context:

The Union Cabinet has approved the setting up of the 15th Finance Commission. Under Article 280 (1) of the Constitution, it is a Constitutional obligation. The Terms of Reference for the 15th Finance Commission will be notified in due course of time.

#### About the Finance Commission:

##### What is a Finance Commission?

It is a body set up under Article 280 of the Constitution. Its primary job is to recommend measures and methods on how revenues need to be distributed between the Centre and states.



**Constitutional provisions:** Article 280(1) of the Constitution lays down that a Finance Commission (FC) should be constituted "...within two years from the commencement of this Constitution and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year or at such earlier time as the President considers necessary...". In keeping with this requirement, the practice has generally been to set up next Finance Commission within five years of the date of setting up of the previous Finance Commission.

#### Composition of Finance Commission:

- The Constitution provides that Finance Commission shall consist of a Chairman and four other members to be appointed by President. The Chairman or members are eligible for reappointment.
- The Constitution authorizes Parliament to make provisions related to qualifications, conditions of service of members or powers of Finance Commission. So Parliament enacted Finance Commission Act in 1951 to determine provisions related to qualifications or disqualifications, conditions of service or miscellaneous powers to perform functions provided under constitution.
- Qualifications: The Chairman shall have vast experience in Public affairs and other four members shall be selected among persons who a) have qualifications as par with a judge of HC, b) has special knowledge of Finance and Accounts of govt, c) have vast experience in financial matters and d) have special knowledge of economics.

Sources: pib.

## Inter-State Council

#### Context:

The Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh chaired the recently held 12th meeting of the Standing Committee of Inter-State Council (ISC). Recommendations of the Punchhi Commission on Centre-State Relations were discussed during the meeting.

#### Background:

The Punchhi Commission was set up by the Government under the chairmanship of Justice (Retd.) Madan Mohan Punchhi, former Chief Justice of Supreme Court of India in 2005. The Punchhi Commission submitted its report in 2010. The Central government constituted the Punchhi Commission to look into the new issues of Centre-state relations keeping in view the changes that have taken place in the polity and economy.

**About the inter-state council:****What is it?**

The Council is a recommendatory body to investigate and discuss subjects, in which some or all of the states or the union government have a common interest.

**Key facts:**

- Article 263 of the Constitution of India provides for the establishment of an Inter-State Council.
- It considers recommendations for the better coordination of policy and action, and also matters of general interest to the states.
- The inter-state council is not a permanent constitutional body for coordination between the states and union government. It can be established 'at any time' if it appears to the President that the public interests would be served by the establishment of such a council.

**The Council shall consist of:**

- Prime minister who is the chairman.
- Chief ministers of all states who are members.
- Chief ministers of union territories and administrators of UTs as members.
- Six union ministers of cabinet rank in the union council of ministers nominated by the prime minister are also members.

Sources: pib.

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

### Centre asks states to speed up trial against tainted politicians

**Background:**

March 10, 2014 order to complete the trial in all these cases within a year's time had been complied with or not.

**Key Points:**

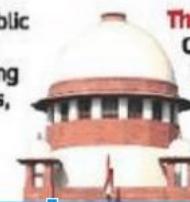
- The Supreme Court asked the government to frame a central scheme for setting up special courts across the country to exclusively try criminal cases involving 'political persons.'
- The Centre has written to the chief ministers and chief justices of high courts to fix responsibility on district administrations to expedite probe and trial of MPs and MLAs facing charges for serious crimes.
- If for some extraordinary circumstances, the court concerned is not able to conclude the trial within one year from the date of framing of charges, such court shall submit a report to the CJs of high courts indicating reasons for not adhering to the time limit.
- A report card to be submitted by December on the status of the 1,581 criminal cases pending against Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies at the time of the 2014 elections.
- While the trial in cases against MPs/MLAs has to be completed within a year, the investigating officer and the senior superintendent of police may be held personally responsible for any lapse and may be liable for disciplinary proceedings for non-compliance.

### Tackling graft

This is the SC's "third chapter" in its fight against criminalisation of politics

**First chapter (July 2013):** In Lily Thomas verdict, it held that legislators will incur immediate disqualification on conviction. It struck down a provision protecting their membership if they filed an appeal against their conviction within 90 days

**Second chapter (March 2014):** In Public India Foundation case, SC ruled that criminal trials, especially those dealing with corruption and heinous offences, involving elected representatives should be completed in a year, thus putting a deadline on trial process



**Third chapter (Nov. 2017):** On a petition seeking a life ban on convicted lawmakers, it said the Centre should set up a mechanism for speedy trial of lawmakers

**Significance:**

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

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

**Paper 2 Topic: Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies.****Public credit registry to speed up digitisation****Context:**

Reserve Bank deputy governor N.S. Vishwanathan recently said the introduction of a public credit registry will further speed up digitisation that has already changed the way banking is done in the country.

**About Public Credit Registry:****What is it?**

The PCR will be an extensive database of credit information for India that is accessible to all stakeholders. The idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower and, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

**Management of PCR:**

Generally, a PCR is managed by a public authority like the central bank or the banking supervisor, and reporting of loan details to the PCR by lenders and/or borrowers is mandated by law. The contractual terms and outcomes covered and the threshold above which the contracts are to be reported vary in different jurisdictions, but the idea is to capture all relevant information in one large database on the borrower, in particular, the borrower's entire set of borrowing contracts and outcomes.

**Benefits of having a PCR:**

- A PCR can potentially help banks in credit assessment and pricing of credit as well as in making risk-based, dynamic and counter-cyclical provisioning.
- The PCR can also help the RBI in understanding if transmission of monetary policy is working, and if not, where are the bottlenecks.
- Further, it can help supervisors, regulators and banks in early intervention and effective restructuring of stressed bank credits.
- A PCR will also help banks and regulators as credit information is a 'public good' and its utility is to the credit market at large and to society in general.

Sources: the hindu.

**Public Credit Registry**

When lenders know more about borrowers, their credit history, or other lenders to the firm, they are not as concerned about the lemons problem of financing nonviable projects and therefore extend more credit.

*Public credit-registries* are databases managed by a government agency, usually the central bank or the superintendent of banks that collect information on the standing of borrowers in the financial system and make it available to actual and potential lenders.

Dependent variable is the introduction of Public credit Registry. Before 2008 it was 0 and after the introduction it became 1. We simulate the effect on Albanian private credit of the public Credit Registry.

For this we use the Table 642 of the result in the study of S. Djankov et.al. (2007), the parameter is 9.9 which means the Public Credit Registry increase credit by 9.9 % of GDP on average.

Therefore,  $1 \times 9.9\% = 9.9\%$  of private credit to GPD is the effect of the introduction of Public Credit Registry in Albania.

**Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI)****Context:**

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) has amended its Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process Regulations to ensure that as part of due diligence, prior to approval of a Resolution Plan, the antecedents, credit worthiness and credibility of a Resolution Applicant, including promoters, are taken into account by the Committee of Creditors.

This move is aimed at ensuring that the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process results in a credible and viable Resolution Plan.

**About IBBI:****What is it?**

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India was set up on 1st October 2016 under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (Code). It is a unique regulator: regulates a profession as well as transactions.

**Functions:**

- It has regulatory oversight over the Insolvency Professionals, Insolvency Professional Agencies and Information Utilities.
- It writes and enforces rules for transactions, namely, corporate insolvency resolution, corporate liquidation, individual insolvency resolution and individual bankruptcy under the Code.

- It is a key pillar of the ecosystem responsible for implementation of the Code that consolidates and amends the laws relating to reorganization and insolvency resolution of corporate persons, partnership firms and individuals.
- This is done in a time bound manner for maximization of the value of assets of such persons, to promote entrepreneurship, availability of credit and balance the interests of all the stakeholders.

#### **Organizational structure of IBBI:**

The IBBI has a ten-member board including a Chairman. Following is the structure of the IBBI:

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

Sources: pib.

## Island Development Agency

#### **Context:**

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



#### **About the Island Development Agency (IDA):**

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

The IDA was set up on June 1 this year following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's review meeting for the development of islands. The meetings of the agency are chaired by the Union Home Minister.

##### **Composition:**

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

Sources: pib.

## National Green Tribunal

#### **Context:**

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

The NGT also directed the authorities and the civic bodies to sprinkle water where PM 10 is found to be in excess of 600 micrograms per cubic metre.

#### **Background:**

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

#### **About the National Green Tribunal (NGT):**

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

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

## Do You Know?

- ▶ India is the third country following Australia and New Zealand to have a Green Tribunal.
- ▶ The Tribunal is India's first dedicated environmental court.
- ▶ It functions with an objective of disposing off the case within six months of filing.
- ▶ The Principle Bench is based at New Delhi with circuit benches at Chennai, Bhopal, Pune and Kolkata so that it can reach remote parts of India.

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

#### Other facts:

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

#### Members:

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

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

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

## National Testing Agency (NTA)

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

#### Background:

In view of the need to have a specialized body in India like the most advanced countries, the Finance Minister in the Budget speech of 2017-18 had announced setting up of a National Testing Agency (NTA) as an autonomous and self-sustained premier testing organization to conduct all entrance examinations for higher educational institutions.

#### Features:

- The NTA would initially conduct those entrance examinations which are currently being conducted by the CBSE. Other examinations will be taken up gradually after NTA is fully geared up.
- The entrance examinations will be conducted in online mode at least twice a year, thereby giving adequate opportunity to candidates to bring out their best.
- In order to serve the requirements of the rural students, it would locate the centres at sub-district/district level and as far as possible would undertake hands-on training to the students.

#### Constitution:

- NTA will be chaired by an eminent educationist appointed by MHRD.
- The CEO will be the Director General to be appointed by the Government.
- There will be a Board of Governors comprising members from user institutions.
- The Director General will be assisted by 9 verticals headed by academicians/ experts.

#### Finances:

NTA will be given a one-time grant of Rs.25 crore from the Government of India to start its operation in the first year. Thereafter, it will be financially self-sustainable.

#### Significance of this move:

Establishment of NTA will benefit about 40 lakh students appearing in various entrance examinations. It will relieve CBSE, AICTE and other agencies from responsibility of conducting these entrance examinations, and also bring in high reliability, standardized difficulty level for assessing the aptitude, intelligence and problem solving abilities of the students.

Sources: pib.

## International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)

**Context:**

A 'rice field laboratory' named after Prime Minister Modi was recently inaugurated by Prime Minister himself at IRRI in Los Banos in Philippines.

**About IRRI:**
**What is it?**

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) is an international agricultural research and training organization known for its work in developing rice varieties that contributed to the Green Revolution in the 1960s.

**Aim:**

The Institute, established in 1960 aims to reduce poverty and hunger, improve the health of rice farmers and consumers, and ensure environmental sustainability of rice farming.

**CGIAR:**

IRRI is one of 15 agricultural research centers in the world that form the CGIAR Consortium of International Agricultural Research centres, a global partnership of organizations engaged in research on food security. It is also the largest non-profit agricultural research centres in Asia.

**India and the IRRI:**

IRRI has successfully collaborated with Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR) to introduce drought-tolerant, flood-tolerant and salt-tolerant varieties of rice in India. The Indian government is also setting up a regional centre of the IRRI in Varanasi, the Prime Minister's constituency, to develop high-yielding rice varieties. The Varanasi Centre would help increase farmers' income by enhancing and supporting rice productivity, reducing cost of production, value addition, diversification and enhancement of farmers' skills.

Sources: the hindu.

## National Anti-profiteering Authority

**Context:**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for the creation of the posts of Chairman and Technical Members of the National Anti-profiteering Authority (NAA) under GST. This paves the way for the immediate establishment of this apex body.

**About the National Anti-profiteering Authority:**
**What is it?**

The National Anti-profiteering Authority is tasked with ensuring the full benefits of a reduction in tax on supply of goods or services flow to the consumers. The National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be responsible for applying anti-profiteering measures in the event of a reduction in rate of GST on supply of goods or services or, if the benefit of input tax credit is not passed on to the recipients by way of commensurate reduction in prices.

**Composition:**

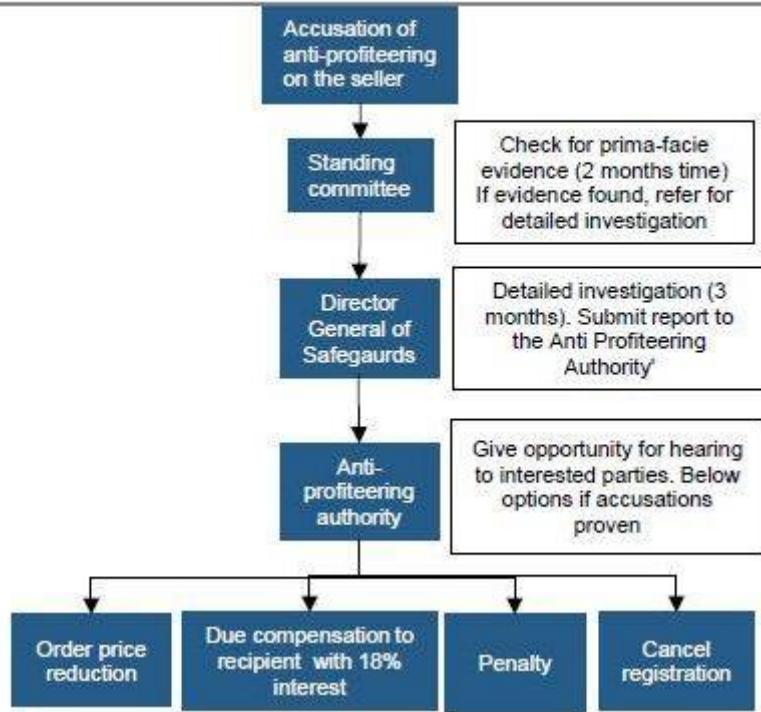
The National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be headed by a senior officer of the level of a Secretary to the Government of India and shall have four technical members from the Centre and/or the States.

**Powers and functions of the authority:**

- In the event the National Anti-profiteering Authority confirms the necessity of applying anti-profiteering measures, it has the power to order the business concerned to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed along with interest to the recipient of the goods or services.
- If the undue benefit cannot be passed on to the recipient, it can be ordered to be deposited in the Consumer Welfare Fund.

- In extreme cases the National Anti-profiteering Authority can impose a penalty on the defaulting business entity and even order the cancellation of its registration under GST.

## Anti-profiteering mechanism under GST



### **What are anti- profiteering measures?**

The “anti-profiteering” measures enshrined in the GST law provide an institutional mechanism to ensure that the full benefits of input tax credits and reduced GST rates on supply of goods or services flow to the consumers. This institutional framework comprises the NAA, a Standing Committee, Screening Committees in every State and the Directorate General of Safeguards in the Central Board of Excise & Customs (CBEC).

Sources: pib.

## National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC)

### **Context:**

Following the impasse over the Bill to grant constitutional status to the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC) in the last session of Parliament, the Union government is set to reintroduce the Bill in the Lok Sabha in the forthcoming Winter Session.

### **Background:**

The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Third Amendment) Bill, 2017 to bring NCBC, set up in 1993, on a par with National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) and National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST), was passed by the Lok Sabha. But, in Rajya Sabha, a crucial amendment to Clause III was moved. The amendment expanded the three-member commission to five so as to give representation to a woman and a person from minority community and mandated that all five members should necessarily be from Other Backward Classes (OBC). Another amendment sought to protect the federal structure by giving states a significant role in making recommendations to the list.

In the end, the government decided to put the Bill to vote after dropping Clause III. With separate versions of the Bill being passed in the two Houses, it will now have to be passed once again in Lok Sabha.

### **The Constitution Amendment Bill is for:**

- Constitution of a Commission under Article 338B for socially and educationally backward classes by name of National Commission for Backward Classes.
- Insertion of Clause (26C) under Article 366 with modified definition viz. “socially and educationally backward classes” means such backward classes as are so deemed under Article 342A for the purpose, this Constitution.

### **Functions:**

Under the Constitution Amendment Bill, the duties of the NCBC will include: (i) investigating and monitoring how safeguards provided to the backward classes under the Constitution and other laws are being implemented, (ii) inquiring

into specific complaints regarding violation of rights, and (iii) advising and making recommendations on socio-economic development of such classes. The central and state governments will be required to consult with the NCBC on all major policy matters affecting the socially and educationally backward classes.

#### **Significance of this move:**

The NCBC currently plays a recommendatory role to the government on inclusion or exclusion of a community in the Central list of OBC. The proposed legislation will allow the NCBC to look at grievance redressal and safeguarding the interest of OBCs, powers that until now vested with the SC Commission.

Sources: the hindu.

## NPPA

#### **Context:**

National drug pricing regulator **NPPA** has capped prices of 51 essential formulations, including those used for the treatment of cancer, pain, heart conditions and skin problems. The prices have been slashed in the range of 6 to 53%.

#### **Background:**

NPPA fixes ceiling price of essential medicines of Schedule I under the Drugs (Prices Control) Order (DPCO) 2013. In respect of medicines that are not under price control, manufacturers are allowed to increase the maximum retail price by 10 per cent annually. The calculation for essential drugs is based on the simple average of all medicines in a particular therapeutic segment with sales of more than 1%.

#### **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.



National Pharmaceuticals Pricing Authority  
( NPPA )

#### **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.

## National Foundation for Communal Harmony (NFCH)

#### **Context:**

The National Foundation for Communal Harmony (**NFCH**) is observing the Communal Harmony Campaign and Fund Raising Week from November 19-25, 2017.

#### **About NFCH:**

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

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



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

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

Sources: pib.

## National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC)

### Context:

A tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was recently signed between National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Tourism and Hospitality Sector Skill Council (THSC) with Airbnb, the world's leading community-driven hospitality company. The MoU will provide hospitality skills training to hospitality micro-entrepreneurs in India.

- Building on Airbnb's commitment to support Skill India Mission by creating 50,000 hospitality entrepreneurs in India, the MoU signed aims to empower more citizens, including those in rural and underserved areas to join the 'alternate accommodation' sector and pursue new livelihood opportunities by sharing their homes.
- The signing of MoU is in line with the Government's endeavor to promote entrepreneurship under the Government's Skill India Programme. NSDC is the implementation arm of Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.

### About NSDC:

**What is it?** The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) is a one-of-its-kind, Public Private Partnership (PPP) model in India, under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE). A not-for-profit company set up by the Ministry of Finance, under Section 25 of the Companies Act, it has an equity base of Rs.10 crore, of which the Government of India holds for 49%, while the private sector has the balance 51%.

**It aims** to promote skill development by catalyzing creation of large, quality and for-profit vocational institutions.

**Functions:** NSDC provides funding to build scalable and profitable vocational training initiatives. Its mandate is also to enable support system which focuses on quality assurance, information systems and train the trainer academies either directly or through partnerships. NSDC acts as a catalyst in skill development by providing funding to enterprises, companies and organisations that provide skill training. It will also develop appropriate models to enhance, support and coordinate private sector initiatives.



Sources: the hindu.

## Competition Commission of India (CCI)

**Context:** For having assured the broadcasters of Indian Premier League (IPL) that BCCI shall 'not organise, sanction, recognise or support another professional domestic Indian T20 competition that is competitive to IPL, for a sustained period of 10 years", Competitions Commission of India (CCI) has found the Indian cricket board to be in contravention of the provisions of Section 4(1) to be read with Section 4(2)(c) of the Competition Act, 2002.

Citing it as abuse of dominant position, for imposing restriction that denies access to the market for organisation of professional domestic cricket league / events, CCI has imposed a penalty of Rs 52.24 crore on BCCI for "anti-competitive conduct".

### Background:

The Competition Act, 2002 prohibits anti-competitive agreements, abuse of dominant position by enterprises and regulates combinations (acquisition, acquiring of control and Merger and acquisition), which causes or likely to cause an appreciable adverse effect on competition within India.

### About CCI:

Competition Commission of India is a body responsible for enforcing The Competition Act, 2002 throughout India and to prevent activities that have an adverse effect on competition in India. It was established on 14 October 2003. It became fully functional in May 2009.

**Composition:** CCI consists of a Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.

### Functions:

- The duty of the Commission is to eliminate practices having adverse effect on competition, promote and sustain competition, protect the interests of consumers and ensure freedom of trade in the markets of India.

- The Commission is also required to give opinion on competition issues on a reference received from a statutory authority established under any law and to undertake competition advocacy, create public awareness and impart training on competition issues.

Sources: the hindu.

## Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA)

**Context:** For providing additional funds for research and related infrastructure, Higher Education Funding Agency (HEFA), has started its operations. The HEFA Board recently approved projects for Rs. 2,066.73 Cr for six institutions – IITs Bombay, Delhi, Madras, Kharagpur, Kanpur and NIT Suratkal. These funds would be used to improve the research infrastructure in these institutions to further improve their standing at the global level.

### About HEFA:

**What is it?** The Union Cabinet had approved HEFA in September 2016 as a Special Purpose Vehicle with a public sector bank (Canara Bank). It would be jointly funded by the promoter/bank and the MHRD with an authorised capital of ₹2,000 crore. The government equity would be ₹1,000 crore.

**Functions:** HEFA will leverage the equity to raise up to ₹20,000 crore for the funding of world-class infrastructure at the IITs, IIMs, the National Institutes of Technology (NITs) and such other institutions. The agency is also expected to mobilise Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds from public sector units (PSUs) and corporates. These would be released as grants to eligible institutions for promoting research and innovation.

**Modi government approves creation of the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA)**

**HEFA :Authorized Capital: Rs. 2,000 crore**

- Government equity: Rs. 1,000 crore
- Residual Funding :Would be mobilised from CSR funds from PSUs/Corporates on grant basis.

**Fund would be used**

- To finance Civil & Lab infrastructure projects through 10 year loan.
- For the development of world class labs in IITs/IIMs/higher education institutes.

**Significance of HEFA:** Funding from HEFA is expected to boost infrastructure, especially state-of-the-art laboratories, in key institutions such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), the Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), and the Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIITs).

Sources: pib.

## National anti-profiteering authority

**Context:** Senior bureaucrat Badri Narain Sharma has been appointed as the chairman of the national anti-profiteering authority under the GST regime.

### About the National Anti-profiteering Authority:

#### What is it?

The National Anti-profiteering Authority is tasked with ensuring the full benefits of a reduction in tax on supply of goods or services flow to the consumers. The National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be responsible for applying anti-profiteering measures in the event of a reduction in rate of GST on supply of goods or services or, if the benefit of input tax credit is not passed on to the recipients by way of commensurate reduction in prices.

#### Composition:

The National Anti-profiteering Authority shall be headed by a senior officer of the level of a Secretary to the Government of India and shall have four technical members from the Centre and/or the States.

#### Powers and functions of the authority:

- In the event the National Anti-profiteering Authority confirms the necessity of applying anti-profiteering measures, it has the power to order the business concerned to reduce its prices or return the undue benefit availed along with interest to the recipient of the goods or services.
- If the undue benefit cannot be passed on to the recipient, it can be ordered to be deposited in the Consumer Welfare Fund.
- In extreme cases the National Anti-profiteering Authority can impose a penalty on the defaulting business entity and even order the cancellation of its registration under GST.

Sources: the hindu.

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

### CCEA nod for extending Rs 15,722cr RKVY-RAFTAAR till 2019-20

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

#### Aims:

- It is aimed at making farming a remunerative economic activity through strengthening the farmer's effort, risk mitigation and promoting agribusiness entrepreneurship
- The scheme will incentivise states in enhancing more allocation to agriculture and allied sectors.
- This will also strengthen farmer's efforts through creation of agriculture infrastructure that help in supply of quality inputs and market facilities.
- This will further promote agri-entrepreneurship and support business models that maximise returns to farmers.

There is allocation for special sub-schemes of RKVY-RAFTAAR of national priorities for 20 percent of the annual outlay; and 10 per cent of annual outlay including two per cent of administrative costs for innovation and agri-entrepreneur development through creating end-to-end solution, skill development and financial support for setting up the agri-enterprise.

#### Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana:

RKVY was launched during 2007-08 to achieve 4% annual growth in agricultural sector by ensuring holistic development. The scheme was under implementation from XI Five Year Plan. It has provided considerable flexibility and autonomy to states in planning and executing programmes for incentivizing investment in agriculture and allied sectors. It also has enabled adoption of national priorities without affecting autonomy and flexibility of states availability of appropriate technology and natural resources. DAPs and SAPs ensured accommodation of local needs, cropping pattern, priorities etc.

Source: pib

### FEMA norms eased to spur investment from overseas

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has simplified the Foreign Exchange Management (Transfer or Issue of Security by a Person Resident outside India) Regulations, by putting all the 93 amendments under one notification, a move that will significantly make it easier for foreign investors to invest in the country.

- The new notification combines two regulations on foreign investments — one which is popularly called investment in an Indian company or a partnership, or in a limited liability partnership, or FEMA 20, and the other — FEMA 24, which is investment in a partnership firm.
- Another significant change is the introduction of a late submission fee that could allow an investor to regularise any contravention due to non-reporting, by paying the fee.

#### About FEMA:

##### What is it?

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

##### What it does?

This act seeks to make offenses related to foreign exchange civil offenses. It enables a new foreign exchange management regime consistent with the emerging framework of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). It also paved way to Prevention of Money Laundering Act 2002, which was effected from 1 July 2005.

### Objective of the FEMA, 1999

- To consolidate and amend the law relating to foreign exchange;
- Facilitating external trade and payments and
- Promoting orderly development and maintenance of forex market in India
- Introduced after repulsion of FERA, an Act to control, regulate, restrict or prohibit foreign exchange keeping in view the interest of economic development of the country

Sources: the hindu.

## “People First” campaign

Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) has planned to conduct State specific Atal Pension Yojana (APY) mobilization Campaigns under the title “People First”. The People First campaign will be a series of campaigns conducted at various states across the country to increase APY outreach.

### **About APY:**

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

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.

#### **Features:**

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

Sources: pib.

## Land Bill

### **Land Bill: Six facts you need to know**

The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Bill, 2015 seeks to Amend the Act of 2013 (LARR Act, 2013)

The Bill creates five special categories of land use:

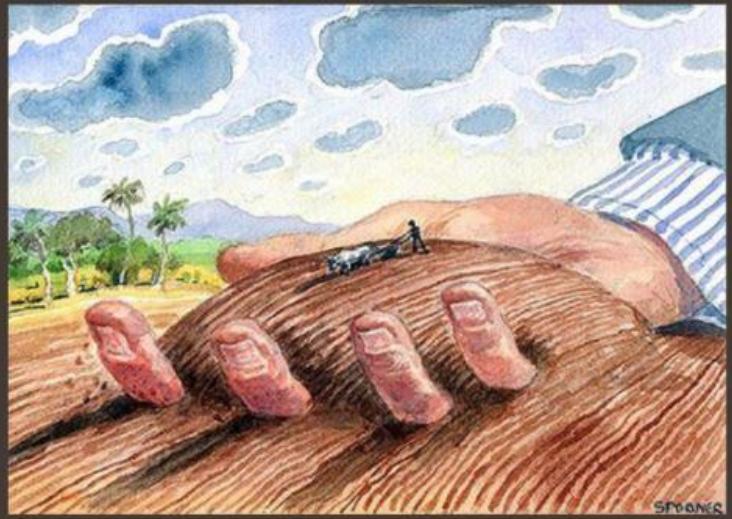
1. defence, 2. rural infrastructure, 3. affordable housing, 4. industrial corridors, and 5. infrastructure projects including Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects where the central government owns the land

The Bill exempts the five categories from provisions of the LARR Act, 2013 which requires the consent of 80 per cent of land ownersto be obtained for private projects and that of 70 per cent of land owners for PPP projects.

The Bill allows exemption for projects in these five categories from requiring Social Impact Assessment be done to identify those affected and from the restrictions on the acquisition of irrigated multi-cropped land imposed by LARR Act 2013.

The Bill brings provisions for compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement under other related Acts such as the National Highways Act and the Railways Act in consonance with the LARR Act

The Bill changes acquisition of land for private companies mentioned in LARR Act, 2013 to acquisition for ‘private entities’. A private entity could include companies,corporations and nonprofit organisations.



#### **Context:**

The Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) on the Land Acquisition Bill, 2015, is planning to seek the eighth extension in the upcoming Parliament session. The JPC was set up in May 2015 to examine the Bill after it was opposed by many political parties.

#### **About the Land Acquisition Bill:**

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

The Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement (Amendment) Bill, 2015 seeks to Amend the Act of 2013 (LARR Act, 2013).

**The Bill creates five special categories of land use:** 1. defence, 2. rural infrastructure, 3. affordable housing, 4. industrial corridors, and 5. infrastructure projects including Public Private Partnership (PPP) projects where the central government owns the land.

**Key provisions:**

- The Bill exempts the five categories from provisions of the LARR Act, 2013 which requires the consent of 80% of land owners to be obtained for private projects and that of 70% of land owners for PPP projects.
- The Bill allows exemption for projects in these five categories from requiring Social Impact Assessment be done to identify those affected and from the restrictions on the acquisition of irrigated multi-cropped land imposed by LARR Act 2013.
- The Bill brings provisions for compensation, rehabilitation, and resettlement under other related Acts such as the National Highways Act and the Railways Act in consonance with the LARR Act.
- The Bill changes acquisition of land for private companies mentioned in LARR Act, 2013 to acquisition for 'private entities'. A private entity could include companies, corporations and nonprofit organisations.

**Facts for Prelims:**

What is a JPC?

A Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) is an ad-hoc body. It is set up for a specific object and duration. Joint committees are set up by a motion passed in one house of Parliament and agreed to by the other. The details regarding membership and subjects are also decided by Parliament.

Sources: the hindu.

### Bill banning superstitious practices tabled

The much-delayed and hotly debated **Karnataka Prevention and Eradication of Inhuman Evil Practices and Black Magic Bill, 2017**, popularly known as **the 'Anti-Superstition Bill'**, was recently tabled in the Legislative Assembly. The Bill, if cleared by the State legislature, is expected to put an end to various inhuman practices.

#### Practices on the way out



Facilitating any person or persons to roll over (*urulu seve*) on the leaves of leftover food or similar practices that violate human dignity, also known as 'made snana'

Coercing any person to perform fire-walk, causing physical injury

Practice of piercing cheeks or tongues with rods

Pelting stones in the name of banamathi, mata-mantra

Prohibiting and preventing a person from taking medical treatment in case of dog, snake or scorpion bites

Forcing person to carry on evil

Preventing person from taking medical treatment and making him or her to practise *aghori* acts

Claiming to perform surgery by fingers or claiming to change the sex of a foetus in the womb

Persuading, propagating or facilitating rituals involving harm inflicted on children in the name of curing them, such as throwing them on thorns or from heights, and branding them

Forcing women into isolation during menstruation or pregnancy

Subjecting women to inhuman and humiliating practices such as parading them naked in the name of worship

practices such as killing of an animal by biting its neck

Performing inhuman, evil acts and black magic in search of precious things, bounty and hidden treasure

Under the pretext of expelling ghost, assaulting a person and causing physical harm

#### The bill bans the following:

- Performing any inhumane act, evil practices and black magic in search of treasure, bounty.
- Tantric acts including physical and sexual assault.
- Parading anyone naked.
- Ostracising anyone in the name of ritual and encouraging inhumane acts.
- Creating impression of 'possession' and exorcism.
- Assaulting people under the garb of exorcism.
- Spreading misinformation and creating panic in the garb of ghosts, black magic.
- Making claims of healing power.
- Propagating practices that involve self-mutilation.
- Coercing people to perform fire-walking.

**What is not banned?**

- The form of the worship such as Pradakshina, Yatra, Parikrama performed at religious places.
- Harikata, Keerthana, Pravachana, Bhajana, teaching of ancient and traditional learning and arts, practice, propagation and circulation.
- Miracles of the deceased saints propagation, publicity and circulation of the same and the propagation, publicity and distribution of literature about miracles of the religious preachers which do not cause physical injury.
- Performance of prayers, upasana and religious rituals at home, temple, darghas, gurdwara, pagoda, church, and other religious places which do not cause physical injury.
- All religious celebrations, festivals, prayers, procession and other act relating other rituals.
- Piercing of ears and nose of children in accordance with rituals and performance of religious ritual such as Kesh Lochan by the Jains.
- Advice in regard to vaastu shashtra, and advice by jyothishya and other astrologers.

Sources: the hindu.

## Rajasthan conversion Bill

**Context:**

The Religious Freedom Bill passed by the Rajasthan Assembly in 2008, aimed at banning forcible religious conversions, was returned by the Union government as it deviated from the national policy. According to the Union Home Ministry, the Bill was sent back for “further clarifications.”

**About the Bill:**

The Rajasthan Dharma Swatantraya Vidheyak was passed by the Assembly in 2008.

**Highlights of the Bill:**

- The legislation seeks to stop conversions through use of “force or allurement or by fraudulent means”.
- An offence under the Act is cognizable and non-bailable. The punishment for violation of the provisions of the Act can be a minimum two years simple imprisonment, which may be extended up to five years and a fine of up to Rs.50000.
- It also contains a clause for cancellation of registration of organisations held guilty of abetting conversions.
- The Bill defined “conversion” as “renouncing one’s own religion and adopting another” through “fraudulent means” or any other “fraudulent contrivance.”

Sources: the hindu.

## Insolvency law

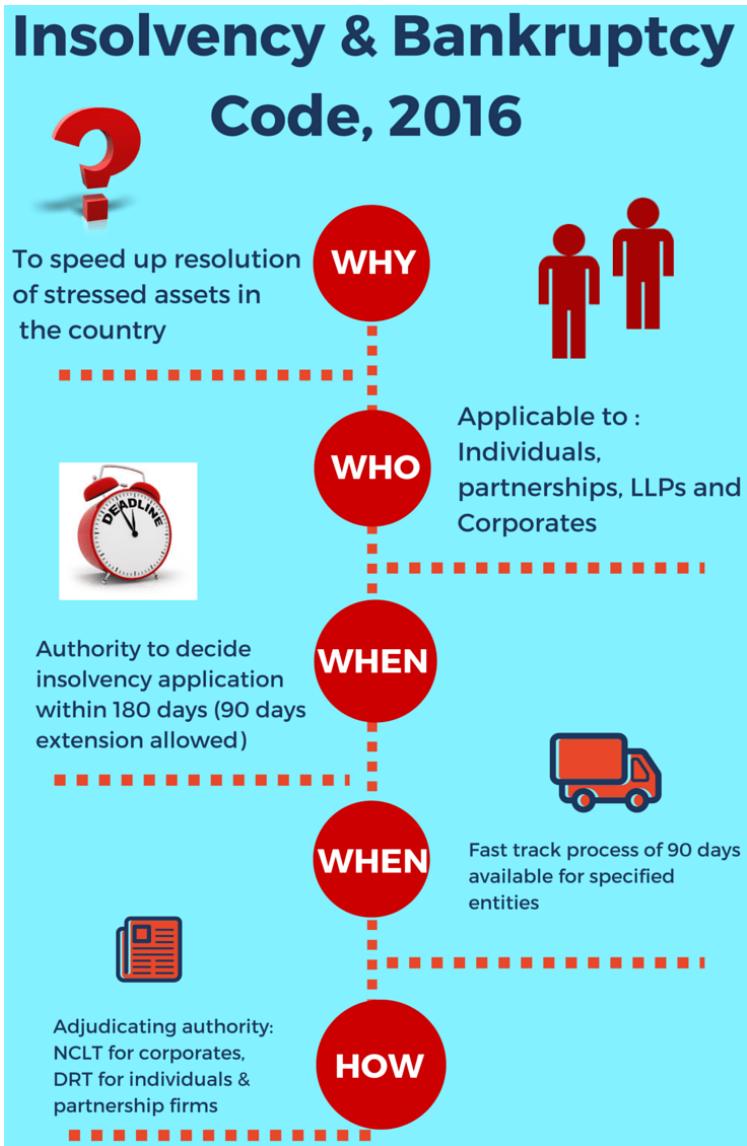
**Context:**

With rising number of cases under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, the government has set up a 14-member panel to identify and suggest ways to address issues faced in implementation of the law. The move also comes against the backdrop of concerns in certain quarters about various aspects of the law including the possibility of promoters wresting back control of a company under insolvency process.

**The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016:**

It is considered as the biggest economic reform next only to GST. It offers a market determined, time bound mechanism for orderly resolution of insolvency, wherever possible, and orderly exit, wherever required.

The Code envisages an ecosystem comprising National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT), National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), Debt Recovery Appellate Tribunal (DRAT), Debt Recovery Tribunal (DRT), Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Board), Information Utilities (IUs), Insolvency Professionals (IPs), Insolvency Professional Agencies (IPAs) and Insolvency Professional Entities (IPEs) for implementation of the Code.



Sources: the hindu.

## Scheme on Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs

**Context:**

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for continuation of the scheme on Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA) for another three financial years (FYs 2017-18 to 2019-20) and providing Grants-in-aid of Rs.18 crore to the Institute. It will make the Institute self-sustainable by the end of FY 2019-20.

**About IICA:**
**Objective**

1. To develop and establish a new discipline of 'Corporate Affairs' for holistic treatment of matters impacting on corporate functioning and provide instruction and capacity building in the subject to a wide range of stakeholders drawn from the government, regulators, professionals and public.
2. To establish the Academy for the Indian Corporate Law Service for training and capacity building of officials of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs and its attached bodies and organizations;
3. To provide special focus on ethical corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, inclusive growth and sustainable development with emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship in SME's;
4. To provide a platform to the Government, business, academia, professionals, and civil society to converge and interact to enable responsible corporate governance.
5. To act as a Think-Tank to advise Government on various issues impacting corporate functioning including e-governance initiatives;
6. To take up action research, consultancy, incubation, hand-holding and problem-solving to enable innovative governance solutions for inclusive growth and entrepreneurial excellence with focus on ethical business management practices.
7. To establish partnerships with other Universities, educational and capacity building institutions and think tanks for sharing of knowledge expertise and taking up joint programmes for capacity building for responsible corporate governance, regulation and inclusive growth.

**What is it?**

IICA is a think-tank and repository of data and knowledge to support rational decision-making for the policy makers, regulators as well as other stakeholders working in areas related to the corporate sector.

**What it does?**

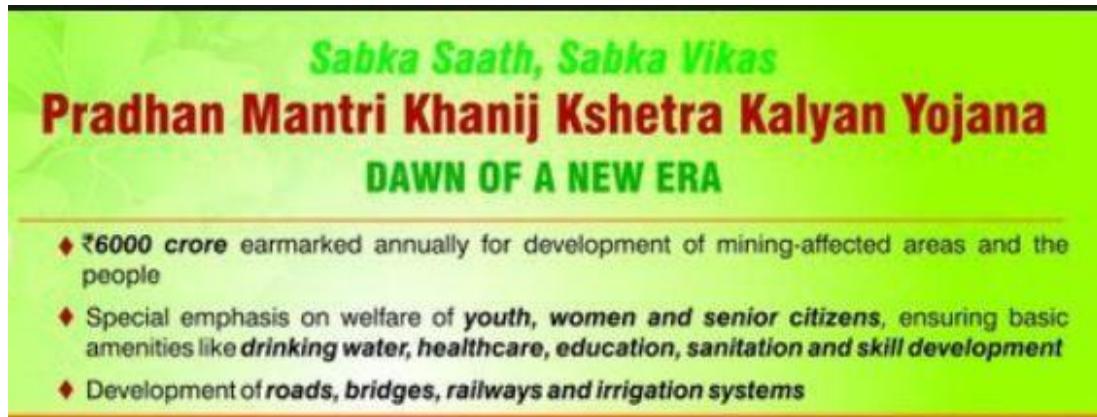
It offers services to stakeholders in the field of corporate laws, corporate governance, CSR, accounting standards, investor education, etc. Various activities of IICA also help first-generation entrepreneurs and small business for imparting multi-disciplinary skills as they are unable to afford to employ separate experts in management, law, accountancy, etc.

Sources: pib.

## Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY)

**Context:**

The Prime Minister recently reviewed the progress in implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Khanij Kshetra Kalyan Yojana (PMKKKY). He said that funds accruing to the District Mineral Foundations (DMFs) should be utilized to strategically focus upon and eliminate major development issues or deficits that these districts currently face. He said this should be done in a focused way, so as to achieve the greatest possible, tangible results by 2022, which marks 75 years of independence.

**About PMKKKY:****What is it?**

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

**Objectives of the scheme:**

- To implement various developmental and welfare projects/programs in mining affected areas that complement the existing ongoing schemes/projects of State and Central Government.
- To minimize/mitigate the adverse impacts, during and after mining, on the environment, health and socio-economics of people in mining districts.
- To ensure long-term sustainable livelihoods for the affected people in mining areas.

**Areas of focus:**

- High priority areas like drinking water supply, health care, sanitation, education, skill development, women and child care, welfare of aged and disabled people, skill development and environment conservation will get at least 60 % share of the funds.
- For creating a supportive and conducive living environment, balance funds will be spent on making roads, bridges, railways, waterways projects, irrigation and alternative energy sources.

**About District Mineral Foundations (DMFs):**

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

Sources: pib.

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

### Accessible India Campaign

**Context:**

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

**About Accessible India Campaign:****What is it?**

Accessible India Campaign (AIC) is the nationwide flagship campaign of the **Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD)**, Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment.

**Aim:**

The aim of the Campaign is **to make a barrier free and conducive environment for Divyangjans all over the country**. The campaign has the vision to build an inclusive society in which equal opportunities are provided for the growth and development of Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) so that they can lead productive, safe and dignified lives.

**Implementation:**

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

**The Built Environment Accessibility component of Accessible India Campaign entails following targets:**

- (i) Completing accessibility audit of at least 25-50 most important government buildings in 50 cities and making them fully accessible by the end of this year;
- (ii) Making 50% of all the government buildings of NCT and all the State capitals fully accessible by December 2018;
- (iii) Completing accessibility audit of 50% of government buildings and making them fully accessible in 10 most important cities/towns of States not covered in targets (i) and (ii) by December 2019.

**Facts for Prelims:**

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

Sources: pib.

## Sub-schemes under Umbrella Scheme “Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)”

**Context:**

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for continuation of Anganwadi Services, Scheme for Adolescent Girls, Child Protection Services and National Crèche Scheme till 30.11.2018 with an outlay of over Rs.41,000 crore. These are the sub-schemes under Umbrella Scheme “Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS)”.

**The aims of these schemes are as under:**

**Anganwadi Services** (ICDS) aims at holistic development of children under the age of six years and its beneficiaries are children of this age group and Pregnant Women & Lactating Mothers.

**The objective of the Scheme for Adolescent Girls** is to facilitate, educate and empower Adolescent Girls so as to enable them to become self-reliant and aware citizens through improved nutrition and health status, promoting awareness about health, hygiene, nutrition, mainstreaming out of school AGs into formal/non formal education and providing information/guidance about existing public services.

**The objectives of Child Protection Services** are to provide safe and secure environment for children in conflict with law and children in need of care and protection, reduce vulnerabilities through a wide range of social protection measures, prevent actions that lead to abuse, neglect, exploitation, abandonment and separation of children from families etc., bring focus on non-institutional care, develop a platform for partnership between Government & Civil Society and establish convergence of child related social protection services.

**National Creche Scheme** aims at providing a safe place for mothers to leave their children while they are at work, and thus, is a measure for empowering women as it enables them to take up employment. At the same time, it is also an intervention towards protection and development of children in the age group of 6 months to 6 years.

**Impact:**

The sub-schemes listed above are not new schemes but are continuing from the XII Five Year Plan. The programme through targeted interventions will strive to reduce the level of malnutrition, anaemia and low birth weight babies, ensure empowerment of adolescent girls, provide protection to the children who are in conflict with law, provide safe place for day-care to the children of working mothers, create synergy, ensure better monitoring, issue negative alerts for timely action, encourage States/UTs to perform, guide and supervise the line Ministries and States/UTs to achieve the targeted goals and bring more transparency.

#UmbrellaICDS

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA APPROVES CONTINUATION OF SUB-SCHEMES UNDER UMBRELLA SCHEME 'INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (ICDS)' FOR THE PERIOD 01.04.2017 TO 30.11.2018

1 The approved Schemes:

- Anganwadi Services 01
- Scheme for Adolescent Girls 02
- Child Protection Services 03
- National Creche Scheme 04

**Background:**

**Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme:** ICDS was launched in 1975 in accordance to the National Policy for Children in India. The scheme aims at holistic development of under-six children and providing nutritional and health support to pregnant and lactating mothers.

Sources: pib.

## Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill

**Context:**

The Union Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has decided to junk the recommendations of a parliamentary committee report which was the first ever government document to recognize the rights of transgender persons to partnerships and marriage, so that they were no longer criminalized under IPC Section 377, apart from offering other rights.

The ministry is set to re-introduce its original version of The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, in the next session of Parliament.

**Recommendations made by the Parliamentary panel:**

- The parliamentary panel report had faulted the government's Bill for its failure to address several crucial issues. Noting that "Transgender persons remain at risk of criminalisation under Section 377", it asked that the Bill must recognise their civil rights such as marriage, divorce, adoption, whether under personal or secular laws.
- It had also recommended to accord legal recognition and protection from Section 377 to, if not all sexual minorities, at least transgender persons whose welfare comes under the Social Justice Ministry.
- The panel had also asked for reservations, strong provisions against discrimination, penalties on government officials who subject transgender persons to any kind of violence, skill training to wean them off begging, and separate public toilets for them.
- Going beyond rights and welfare, the panel report also addressed the issue of sexual identity. It asked for provisions that provide "penal action against abortions of intersex foetuses and forced surgical assignment of sex of intersex infants."
- Most importantly, it redefined several terms in the Bill. To recognise alternative family structures such as adoptions of transgender children by the the Hijra or Aravani communities, it defined family in the Bill as "a group of people related by blood, marriage or by adoption of a transgender person".

**Background:**

The transgender community is one of the most marginalized in the country because they don't fit into existing gender categories. Consequently, they face problems ranging from social exclusion to discrimination, lack of education facilities, unemployment, and lack of medical facilities. Census 2011 records the population of 'others (people who do not identify themselves either as male or female)' at 4.87 lakh while a 2011 survey by NGO Salvation of Oppressed Eunuchs put their number at 19 lakh.

Sources: the hindu.

## WHO releases guidelines on responding to child sex abuse

For the first time, WHO has published guidelines to help (primarily) front-line healthcare providers give high-quality, compassionate, and respectful care to children and adolescents (up to age 18) who have or may have experienced sexual abuse, including sexual assault or rape.

**Need for comprehensive guidelines:**

Girls and boys who experience abuse often face a number of short and long term negative consequences for their mental, physical, sexual, and reproductive health and well-being. Boys and girls who are sexually abused face higher risks of lifetime diagnoses of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, externalizing symptoms, sleep disorders, and having thoughts of suicide and self-harm. They are more likely to engage in unsafe-sex, abuse of drugs and misuse of alcohol, placing them at higher risk for STIs and HIV and for other negative health outcomes that last into adulthood. For girls there is also increased risk of pregnancy and gynaecological disorders.

# RESPONDING TO CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WHO HAVE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

## WHO CLINICAL GUIDELINES



**About the new guidelines:**

The new guidelines address an important gap in providing quality and trauma-informed care to survivors by placing emphasis on the safety, wishes, autonomy of children and adolescents.

**Health care providers are recommended to:**

- Provide first line support that is child or adolescent-centred and gender sensitive in response to disclosure of sexual abuse.
- Minimize additional trauma and distress while taking medical history, conducting the examination and documenting the findings.
- Offer HIV post-exposure prophylaxis and adherence support to those who have been raped and who present within 72 hours.
- Offer emergency contraception to girls who have been raped and who present within 120 hours/ 5 days.
- Consider STI presumptive treatment or prophylaxis in settings where laboratory testing is not feasible.
- Offer Hepatitis B and HPV vaccination as per national guidance.
- Consider cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) with a trauma focus for those have PTSD symptoms and diagnosis and where safe and appropriate to do so involve at least 1 non-offending caregiver.
- Where required to report child sexual abuse to designated authorities, health care providers should inform the child or adolescent and their non-offending caregivers about the obligation to report the abuse and the limits of confidentiality before interviewing them.

**Way ahead:**

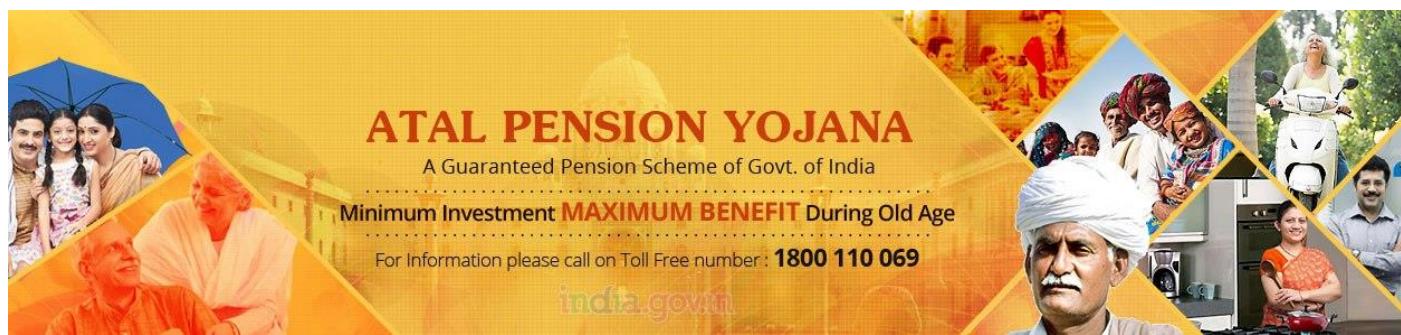
The presence of guidelines and following them is extremely essential. But, there is more than just guidelines required in the country. These should be followed with ground training of all first line respondents. However, guidelines and training is not the end of the issue. The victims and their families face the worse in terms of investigation and its outcome. It is not adequate to pass on the burden on the healthcare sector. The government needs to adopt a policy that will streamline all the other aspects as well.

Sources: the hindu.

## Atal scheme

**Context:**

The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is stepping up its initiative to achieve the target of one crore accounts under the Atal Pension Yojana (APY) by the fiscal-end. Focused on the workers in the unorganised sector, PFRDA has already been able to open 73 lakh such accounts so far. The regulator is going all out to promote pension scheme in the rural areas with the help of regional rural banks.

**About APY:****What is it?**

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.

**Features:**

- Under the scheme, a subscriber would receive a minimum guaranteed pension of Rs 1,000 to Rs 5,000 per month, depending upon his contribution, from the age of 60 years.
- The same pension would be paid to the spouse of the subscriber and on the demise of both the subscriber and the spouse, the accumulated pension wealth is returned to the nominee.
- 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.

#### PFRDA:

**What is it?** The Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) is a pension regulatory authority which was established in 2003. It is authorized by Ministry of Finance, Department of Financial Services.

**What it does?** It promotes old age income security by establishing, developing and regulating pension funds and protects the interests of subscribers to schemes of pension funds and related matters. It is also responsible for appointment of various intermediate agencies such as Central Record Keeping Agency (CRA), Pension Fund Managers, Custodian, NPS Trustee Bank, etc.

Sources: the hindu.

## Meeting of Asia and Pacific Decade for Persons with Disabilities

#### Context:

The High Level Inter-Governmental Mid-Point review meeting of Asia and Pacific Decade for Persons with Disabilities, 2013-2022 is being held in Beijing. A number of countries in the Asia-Pacific region are participating and will finalise a Declaration which will address the gaps and challenges in empowerment and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

**The main objective of the meeting** is to review the progress made by the member States during the Decade at the mid-point in 2017 with regard to Incheon Strategy 'to make the right real' for persons with disabilities in Asia and Pacific.

**Another objective of the meeting** is to discuss the future policy action for building disabilities-inclusive societies in the region, bearing in mind the synergies between the Incheon Strategy and 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

#### What is Incheon strategy?

The Incheon Strategy to "Make the Right Real" for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific provides the Asian and Pacific region, and the world, with the first set of regionally agreed disability-inclusive development goals.

**The Incheon Strategy goals cover a range of development areas** from poverty reduction and employment to political participation, accessibility, social protection, education, gender equality, disaster risk reduction, data collection, CRPD ratification and international cooperation. To ensure that the 10 goals are successfully met, the Strategy identifies 27 targets as well as 62 related indicators for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the 10 goals. These targets and indicators are essential for developing practical implementation strategies, ensuring success and identifying areas where significant challenges remain.

The ESCAP secretariat is mandated to report every three years until the end of the Decade in 2022, on progress in the implementation of the Ministerial Declaration and the Incheon Strategy.

#### About ESCAP:

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is the regional development arm of the United Nations for the Asia-Pacific region.

- Made up of 53 Member States and 9 Associate Members, with a geographical scope that stretches from Turkey in the west to the Pacific island nation of Kiribati in the east, and from the Russian Federation in the north to New Zealand in the south, the region is home to 4.1 billion people, or two thirds of the world's population. This makes ESCAP the most comprehensive of the United Nations five regional commissions, and the largest United Nations body serving the Asia-Pacific region with over 600 staff.
- Established in 1947 with its headquarters in Bangkok, Thailand, ESCAP works to overcome some of the region's greatest challenges by providing results oriented projects, technical assistance and capacity building to member States.

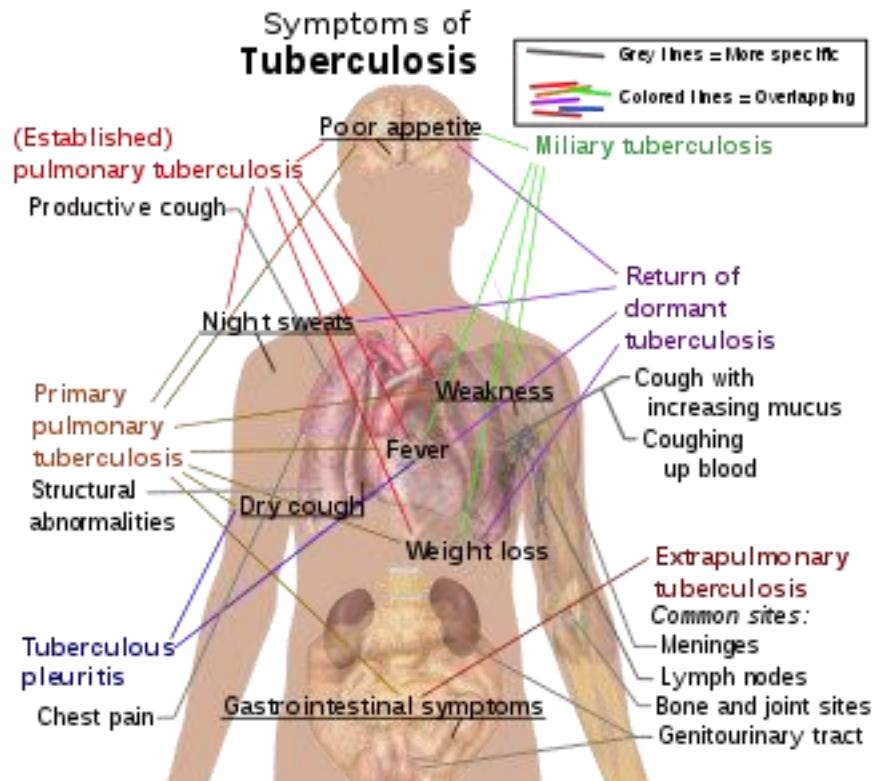
Sources: pib.

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

## Threefold rise in domestic budget for fight against tuberculosis

According to a report from the World Health Organisation (WHO), India's domestic budget for fighting tuberculosis showed a dramatic jump from about ₹700 crore in 2015 to ₹2,500 crore last year.

- Domestic resources accounted for 74% of the \$525 million that was spent in India last year.
- Typically most of India's budget to combat the bacterial infection used to be dominated by international funding. But, for the first time this has flipped.



#### Key facts of WHO report 2017 on India's TB burden

- With 1.7 million new cases in 2016, India still continues to be the largest contributor to the global burden with up to a quarter of the 6.3 million new cases of TB (up from 6.1 million in 2015).
- Funding Source: 74% domestic funding and 26% international funding.
- More men above the age of 15 suffer from TB than women.

#### Why is there increase in budget outlay?

- In 2016, India recorded a 12% dip in the number of TB deaths from the previous year though the incidence dipped marginally by 1%.
- Deployment of better diagnostics due to jump in number of notified cases of drug-resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB) from 79,000 to 84,000 in 2016.

#### Government's intervention

- The government has committed to achieve a '90-90-90 target' by 2035 (90% reductions in incidence, mortality and catastrophic health expenditures due to TB).
- This is premised on improved diagnostics, shorter treatment courses, a better vaccine and comprehensive preventive strategies.

#### Prevailing issue:

- TB is still stigmatized and under-reported.
- Top-line drugs are still inadequate to treat people who suffer from the drug-resistant forms of the disease.

#### MDR-TB

- The bacteria that cause tuberculosis (TB) can develop resistance to the antimicrobial drugs used to cure the disease.
- Multidrug-resistant TB (MDR-TB) is TB that does not respond to at least isoniazid and rifampicin, the 2 most powerful anti-TB drugs.

Source: Hindu

#### **Holistic Learning is the need of hour in our Present Education System**

In a unique initiative to give a boost to the learning of science, technology and mathematics among the youth-especially the school students, Vidyaarthi Vigyan Manthan (VVM) – a nationwide science talent search examination will be held on 26th November.

This programme has been organized by eminent scientists and academicians associated with Vigyan Prasar (VP) – an autonomous organisation under Department of Science and Technology and National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT) of Ministry of Human Resources and Development .

**Significance:**

- The Vidyarthi Vigyan Manthan will provide a platform to the India's generation next to imbibe the values of science and technology for a better future.
- A record number of over 91,000 students from 2078 centres across the country are expected to take the test on the same day.
- One of the unique features of this examination is that the test will be conducted online.
- Students will attend the exam through the various digital devices like, mobile, tablet, laptop or desktop in line with the vision of Digital India Campaign.

**Vijnana Bharati (VIBHA)**

- It is one of the largest science movement in the country led by eminent scientists
- It is to inculcate and generate scientific temper, foster excellence in students and nurture and mentor them for their careers in pure sciences.
- Through VVM programme, India's generation next will be made aware about the India's Rich Contribution to Science from ancient period to modern times.

Source: PIB

**President of India inaugurates Global Clubfoot Conference**

The President of India inaugurated the Global Clubfoot Conference being organised by the CURE India in partnership with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

**Clubfoot**

- Clubfoot is one of the most common orthopaedic birth defects.
- It can cause permanent disability if not treated early.
- Clubfoot is a birth defect where one or both feet are rotated inwards and downwards.
- This affects the child's mobility and confidence. Inevitably, education and schooling suffer – and the child cannot fulfil his or her potential.

Source: PIB

**Cabinet approves National Council for Teacher Education (Amendment) Bill, 2017**

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

**Background:**

The NCTE Act, 1993 enacted by Parliament aims to achieve planned and coordinated development of teacher education system, regulation and ensure proper maintenance of norms and standards in said system. It establishes NCTE to achieve these objectives. It has separate provisions for recognising teacher education courses and to lay down guidelines for compliance by recognized Institutions/Universities

**Key Features:**

- Objective – The amendment will ensure that students studying in these Institutions/Universities, or already passed out from here, find employment as teacher.
- The amendment will grant retrospective recognition to all such Central/State/Universities which were found to be conducting teacher education courses without NCTE permission.
- This retrospective recognition is being given only as a onetime measure so not to jeopardize the future of students who have either passed out or are enrolled in these institutions.
- All institutions running Teacher Education Courses such as B.Ed. and D.El.Ed. have to obtain recognition from the National Council for Teacher Education under section 14 of the NCTE Act. Further, the courses being taught at all such recognised Institutions/Universities have to be permitted under section 15, of the NCTE Act

Source: pib

## President inaugurates 21st World Congress of Mental Health, calls for fighting stigma

**World Congress of Mental Health is taking place in India for the first time.**

Issues:

- Our National Mental Health Survey 2016 found that close to 14 per cent of India's population required active mental health interventions. About two per cent suffered from severe mental disorders.
- Biggest obstacle that mental health patients have to encounter is stigma and denial. This leads to the issue being ignored or simply not discussed.
- A second biggest obstacle is that of human resources. There are only about five thousand psychiatrists and less than two thousand clinical psychologists in our country.

Remedies:

- We need to talk about mental health issues and treat ailments such as depression and stress as diseases that can be cured
- India's National Mental Health Programme is building 22 centres of excellence in the field of mental health. In parallel, the District Mental Health Programme has already covered 517 of the approximately 650 districts in India. It is taking the conversation about mental health to the grassroots of our society.
- To spread awareness, it is important to build partnerships between the public and private sectors and between the government and civil society organisations.
- It would also be valuable to stitch together community support networks.
- The World Congress will also have sessions on yoga, meditation and traditional approaches to mental health. It will tap into our wealth of traditional knowledge and link its learning to modern research on mental health. This will promote a holistic approach to mental health-care and can combine the best of different fields of practice.
- Information Technology and telemedicine are also coming of aid. Such technologies are linking doctors and counsellors in cities to mental health patients in rural areas. As Internet penetration expands in our country, this holds much potential.

Source: pib

## Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana

The government has launched a Pan India scholarship program for school children called Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana to increase the reach of Philately.

About the scheme:

**What is it?** Under the scheme of SPARSH (Scholarship for Promotion of Aptitude & Research in Stamps as a Hobby), it is proposed to award annual scholarships to children of Standard VI to IX having good academic record and also pursuing Philately as a hobby through a competitive selection process in all postal circles.

**Selection:** To avail this scholarship, a child must be a student of a recognized school within India and the concerned school should have a Philately Club and the candidate should be a member of the Club.

- In case the school Philately Club hasn't been established a student having his own Philately Deposit Account will also be considered. Every prospective school, which participates in the competition, would be assigned a Philately mentor to be chosen from amongst the renowned Philatelists.
- The Philately mentor would help in formation of the School level Philately Club, providing guidance to young and aspiring Philatelists on how to pursue the hobby and also helping the aspiring Philatelists on their Philately Projects etc.
- Selections under the scheme would be made based on the evaluation of Project work on Philately & performance in Philately Quiz conducted by the Circles.

### Deen Dayal SPARSH Yojana (Scholarship for Promotion of Aptitude & Research in Stamps as a Hobby)



REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE | CREDITS:INDIAPOST.GOV.IN

Sources: pib.

## India's Second Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC)

The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India, has signed an Institutional agreement with Anna University to establish **India's second Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC)** at the Centre for Intellectual Property Rights (CIPR), Anna University, Chennai, under **the World Intellectual Property Organization's (WIPO) TISC program**.

**India's first Technology and Innovation Support Center (TISC)** will come up at Patent Information Centre, Punjab

### About TISC:

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

These centres will be set up under WIPO's Technology and Innovation Support Centers (TISC) program. 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.

#### **The objective of the TISC –**

Is to stimulate a dynamic, vibrant and balanced Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) system in India to foster creativity and innovation, thereby promoting entrepreneurship and enhancing social, economic and cultural development by establishing a network of TISCs in India.

#### **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.

#### **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.

Sources: pib.

## Project Saksham

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

It is the country's largest time-bound "upskilling" exercise for government employees launched by the Indian Railways.

#### **What it does?**

It aims to upgrade the skillsets of its 13 lakh-strong workforce with a single drive spanning nine months. The nature of the short-duration training will range from refresher courses, with an eye on evolved global practices in the respective areas, to skills in the existing lining of functioning.

#### **Who will be trained?**

Employees from the rank of a peon to the Railway Board Members and everyone in between will undergo the training.

Sources: the hindu.

## Hausala 2017

**What is it?**

It is the Child Rights Week celebrated by the Ministry of Women and Child Development from 16th to 20th November, 2017.

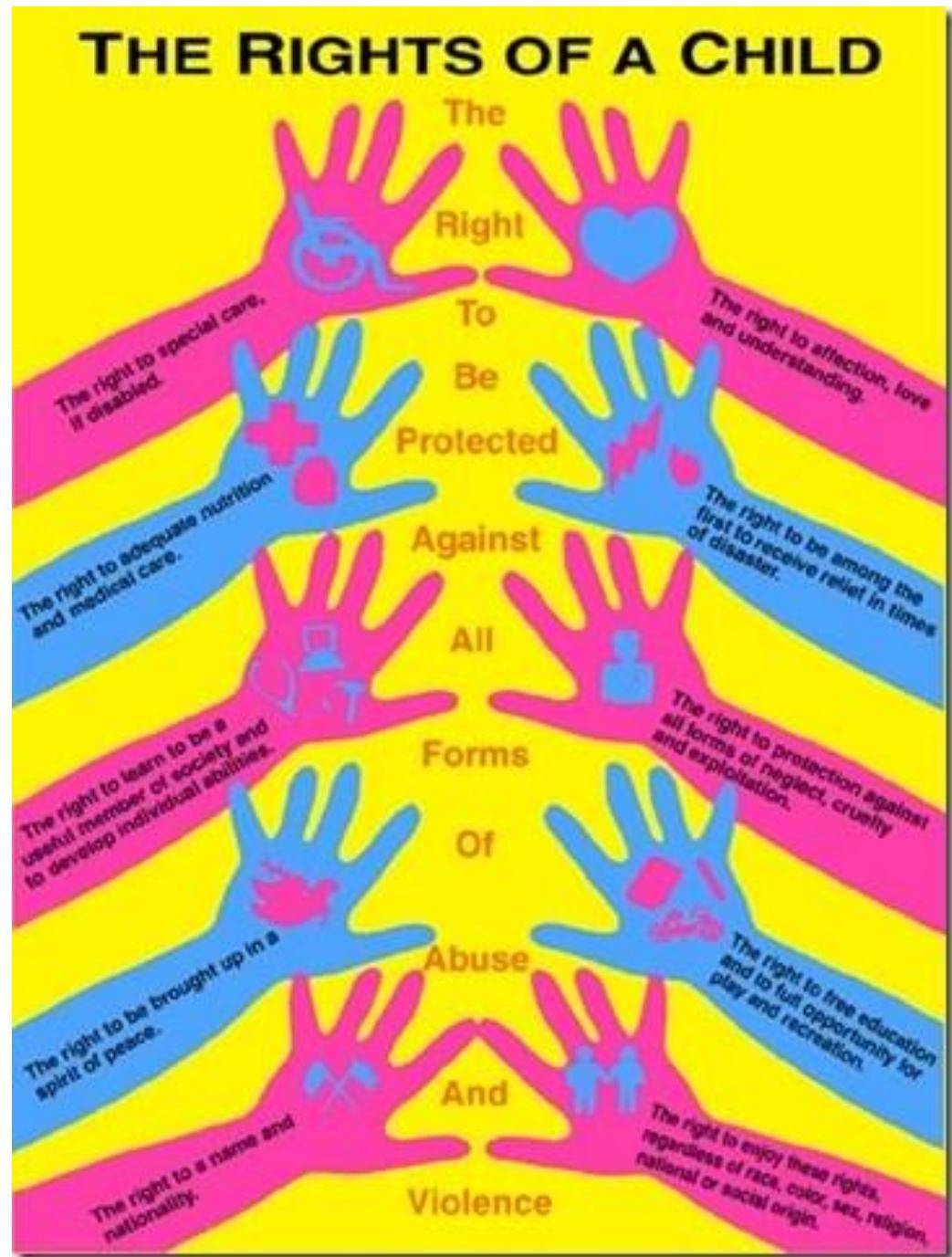
**Background:**

The country celebrates the Children's Day on 14th November and the International Child Rights Day is celebrated on 20th November every year. The period between the two important events will be celebrated as Child Rights Week by WCD Ministry by hosting an Inter CCI Festival for the children who reside in Child Care Institutions (CCIs).

**Significance of this event:**

- The commemoration of the festival "Hausala 2017" will provide an occasion to showcase the talents of children from CCIs from various child care institutions across the country and provide them with a space to express their dreams and aspiration.
- Children will be participating in various events like Bal Sansad, painting competition, athletics meet, football, chess competition and speech writing.

Sources: pib.



## Measles & Rubella

**Context:**

The India Expert Advisory Group on Measles & Rubella (IEAG-MR) has commended India on the progress of the measles and rubella vaccination campaign. The expert member group concluded that 'the country is on the right track'. The group has advised for the MR vaccination campaign to cover the whole country by 2018. Presently, 13 states have been covered by the vaccination campaign.

# Rubella (rubeola)

Contagious? Yes, Airborne

Life Threatening? Potentially, Not Very

Curable? No, but it only last 3-4 days

Vaccine? Yes

Symptoms: Rash, spreading from the face to the rest of the body, fever, swollen glands, joint pains, headache, and conjunctivitis

Treatment: The same as for the flu.

Info: Rubella is confusing, because, in Slovak, Rubella and Rubeola are the same thing, but, in English they aren't. They come from similar viruses. Rubella is caused by the Rubella Virus, and Rubeola (The Measles) is caused by Morbillivirus. Rubella is also called the 3-Day Measles, and Ruženka in Slovak. If a pregnant woman gets Rubella, it can make her baby very sick, and it's incurable for the child.


**About MR campaign:**
**What is it?**

The MR campaign targets around 41 crore children across the country, the largest ever in any campaign. Under the campaign, children will be given a single shot of Measles-Rubella (MR) vaccination irrespective of their previous measles/rubella vaccination status or measles/rubella disease status. MR vaccine will be provided free-of-cost across the states from session sites at schools as well as health facilities and outreach session sites.

**Target group:** All children aged between 9 months and less than 15 years will be covered.

**About Measles and Rubella:**

**Measles** is a deadly disease and one of the important causes of death in children. It is highly contagious and spreads through coughing and sneezing of an infected person. Measles can make a child vulnerable to life threatening complications such as pneumonia, diarrhoea and brain infection. Globally, in 2015, measles killed an estimated 1,34,200 children—mostly under-5 years. In India, it killed an estimated 49,200 children.

**Rubella** is generally a mild infection, but has serious consequences if infection occurs in pregnant women, causing congenital rubella syndrome (CRS), which is a cause of public health concern. CRS is characterized by congenital anomalies in the foetus and newborns affecting the eyes (glaucoma, cataract), ears (hearing loss), brain (microcephaly, mental retardation) and heart defects, causing a huge socio-economic burden on the families in particular and society in general.

**Way ahead:**

Measles kills an estimated 49,000 children in India each year, which is about 37% of the global deaths due to this disease. India has set an ambitious goal to eliminate measles from the country. Measles Rubella vaccine has been introduced in 13 states. It is planned to expand across the country, covering 41 crore children by the end of 2018.

Sources: pib.

## India Youth Development Index and Report 2017

### **Context:**

The Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD), Sripurumbudur, Tamil Nadu, an Institute of National Importance has come out with Youth Development Index and Report 2017. This is a pioneering attempt made by the Institute in 2010 which it followed up with the India Youth Development Index in 2017.

### **About Youth Development Index:**

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

The index tracks the trends in Youth Development across the States. The Index enables recognizing the high and low performing states, identifies the weak domains and informs the policy makers the priority areas of intervention for youth development in the states.

#### **How is this index helpful for policymakers?**

- This report is of immense value to enable comparisons across geographical areas and categories, as human development index has done in comparing the development situation across regions, nations and localities.
- The index also measures the achievements made besides serving as an advocacy tool for youth development and facilitates to identify priority areas for development of Policy and Interventions.
- As an effective decision – support tool, the YDI-2017 will enable the policy makers track the national and the regional progress as well setbacks in youth development policies, planning, priority identification and implementation strategies. Besides providing insights to suggest alternatives and options, it also aids in judicious allocation of resources.

#### **How is India Youth Development Index different from Global YDI?**

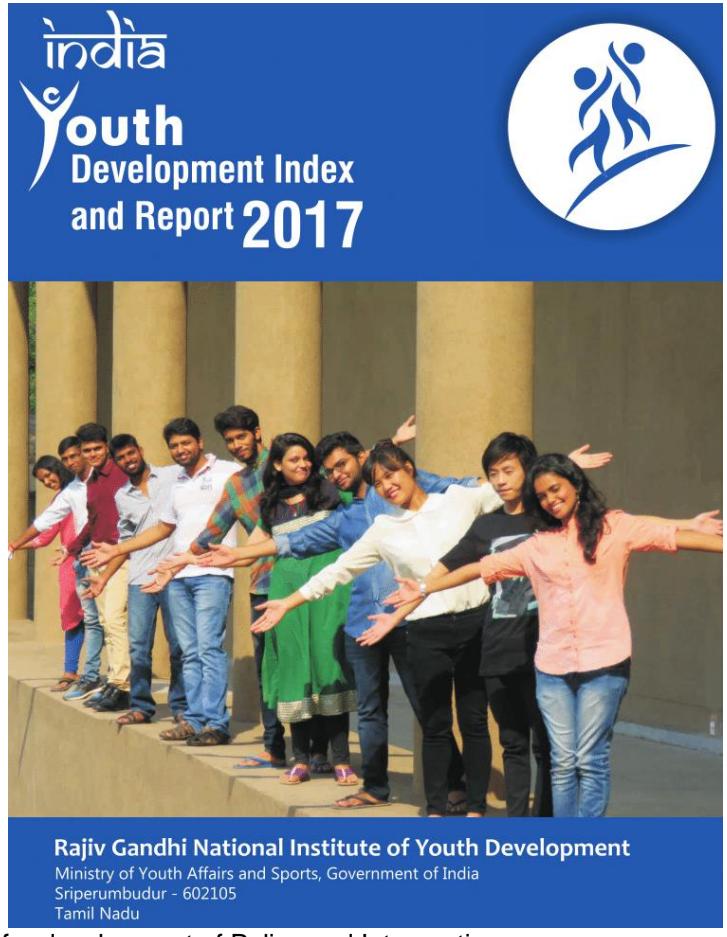
In the India Youth Development Index 2017, the first five dimensions are retained same as that of Global YDI. The indicators and weights have been modified based on the availability of data at sub-national level and the importance of the indicators in explaining Youth Development with the aim of capturing the multidimensional properties that indicate progress in youth development at the sub-national level i.e., state level. Global YDI is different from YDI constructed for India in one unique way; YDI for India adds a new domain, social inclusion, to assess the inclusiveness of societal progress as structural inequalities persist in Indian society. This construction helps to identify the gaps that require intensification of policy intervention.

### **Background:**

Youth are defined as those aged 15 to 29 in the national youth policy (2014). This age-group constitutes 27.5% of India's population.

#### **What is the Youth Development Index?**

The YDI is a composite index of 18 indicators that collectively measure multi-dimensional progress on youth development in 183 countries, including 49 of the 53 Commonwealth countries. It has five domains measuring levels of education, health and well-being, employment and opportunity, political participation and civic participation for young people. The YDI is guided by the Commonwealth definition of youth as people between the ages of 15 and 29, while recognising that some countries and international institutions define youth differently. **India has been ranked 133rd out of 183 countries in the 2016 Global Youth Development Index (YDI).**



Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development  
Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India  
Sripurumbudur - 602105  
Tamil Nadu

## World Diabetes Day 2017

World Diabetes Day is observed on **November 14** every year. The theme for World Diabetes Day 2017 is **Women and Diabetes**. The main objective of this year's campaign is to promote the importance of affordable and equitable access to medical care for all women.

**About Diabetes:****What is it?**

Diabetes is a chronic disease or condition that is caused when the pancreas is no longer able to make insulin, or when the body cannot make good use of the insulin it produces.

**Women and Diabetes:**

According to statics, currently there are over 199 million women living with diabetes and this total is projected to increase to 313 million by 2040. Diabetes is the ninth leading cause of death in women globally, causing 2.1 million deaths each year. Two out of every five women with diabetes are of reproductive age, accounting for over 60 million women worldwide. Women with diabetes have more difficulty conceiving and may have poor pregnancy outcomes. Also, one in seven births is affected by gestational diabetes.

Sources: the hindu.

**WOMEN AND DIABETES**

DIABETES IS THE  
**NINTH LEADING  
CAUSE OF DEATH**  
IN WOMEN GLOBALLY

**OUR RIGHT TO A HEALTHY FUTURE****Context:**

Health ministers, NGOs, and private sector representatives from 120 countries adopted the Moscow Declaration at the recently held first WHO Global Ministerial Conference on Ending Tuberculosis in the Sustainable Development Era. India is among the signatories to the declaration that WHO director-general Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus described in his address as a "milestone in the history of TB".

During the conference, collective commitment was proposed to ramp up action on four fronts:

- Move rapidly to achieve universal health coverage by strengthening health systems and improving access to people-centered TB prevention and care, ensuring no one is left behind.
- Mobilize sufficient and sustainable financing through increased domestic and international investments to close gaps in implementation and research.
- Advance research and development of new tools to diagnose, treat, and prevent TB.
- Build accountability through a framework to track and review progress on ending TB, including multisectoral approaches.



**About Moscow declaration:****What is it?**

The Moscow Declaration to End TB is a promise to increase multi-sectoral action as well as track progress, and build accountability. It will also inform the first UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on TB in 2018, which will seek further commitments from heads of state.

The Moscow declaration emphasised the need for fixing multisectoral responsibility towards ending TB by 2035, the global target. It also said that multi-drug resistant TB would be tackled as a national public health crisis.

**Need for global attention:**

Global efforts to combat TB have saved an estimated 53 million lives since 2000 and reduced the TB mortality rate by 37%. However, progress in many countries has stalled, global targets are off-track, and persistent gaps remain in TB care and prevention.

As a result, TB still kills more people than any other infectious disease. There are major problems associated with antimicrobial resistance, and it is the leading killer of people with HIV. One of the main problems has been a lack of political will and inadequate investment in fighting TB.

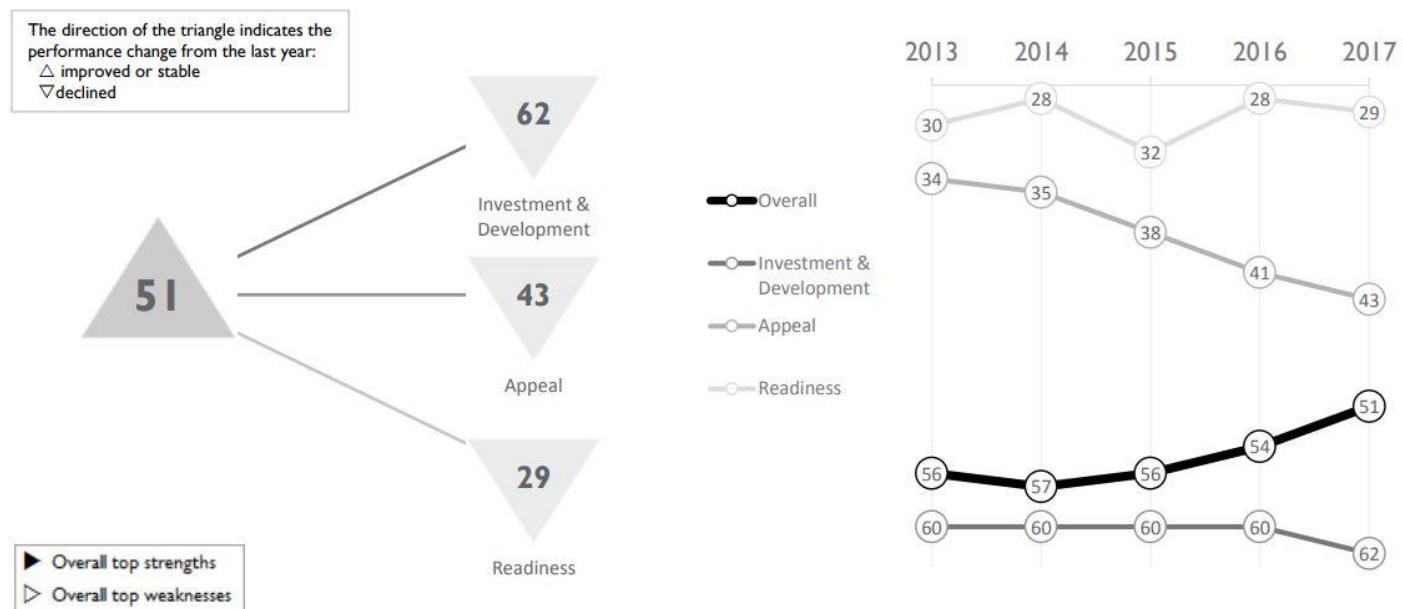
Sources: pib.

## IMD World Talent Rankings

**Context:** IMD World Talent Rankings 2017 have been released.

# INDIA

## OVERALL PERFORMANCE (63 countries)

**About IMD World Talent Rankings:****What is it?**

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

**Assessment:** The IMD World Talent Ranking is based on countries' performance in three main categories – investment and development, appeal and readiness. The three categories assess how countries perform in a wide range of areas. These include education, apprenticeships, workplace training, language skills, cost of living, quality of life, remuneration and tax rates.

**Performance of various countries:**

- India has improved its ranking by three notches to 51 globally.
- Switzerland, Denmark and Belgium remain the most competitive countries.
- Among the BRICS countries, South Africa ranks in the middle position – 48th – performing better than India (51st) and Brazil (52nd) but lagging behind both China (40th) and Russia (43rd).

### World Talent Ranking 2017

	1	Switzerland
	2	Denmark
	3	Belgium

- Among Asian economies, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan took the top positions by attracting and retaining high skilled workers.

#### **Way ahead for India:**

As per the IMD rankings, India has not been successful in terms of investment in education as a percentage of GDP. According to the rank list by IMD, it ranked among the bottom five countries in the world in this aspect. Therefore, India needs to emphasise the education system as a key to prosperity. It also needs to prevent brain drain by providing better opportunities to local talent.

Sources: the hindu.

### WTO: India resolute on food security

**Context:** At the upcoming WTO's Ministerial Conference, India has decided not to agree to severe restrictions on its right to give price subsidies to farmers through the Minimum Support Price (MSP) to procure grains from them for food security purposes. Food security and protection of low-income and resource-poor farmers are top priority items for India at the WTO meet.



#### **Present mechanism:**

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

#### **Why is it difficult to invoke peace clause?**

The 'Peace Clause' is difficult to invoke even in its current form because prior to using it, the country concerned will have to first admit that it 'is breaching' or 'is about to breach' the ceiling entitlement to give product-specific domestic support. Also, the 'Peace Clause' can be used only for public stockholding programmes that have been in existence on the date at which it was agreed upon at the Bali Ministerial Conference in December 2013, and not for new programmes on public stockholding for food security purposes.

#### **Challenges ahead:**

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

### India Hypertension Management Initiative (IHMI)

**Context:** India Hypertension Management Initiative (IHMI) was recently launched.

#### **About IHMI:**

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

The India Hypertension Management Initiative (IHMI) is a collaborative project of Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), State Governments, World Health Organization (WHO), and Resolve to Save Lives initiative of Vital Strategies.

**The IHMI aims** to reduce disability and death related to cardiovascular disease (CVD), the leading cause of death in India, by improving the control of high blood pressure (hypertension), reducing salt consumption and eliminating artificial trans-fats, leading risk factors for CVD.

**The IHMI is focused on five essential components** of scalable treatment of hypertension. It will support the adoption of standardized simplified treatment plans for managing high blood pressure, ensure the regular and uninterrupted supply of quality-assured medications, task sharing so health workers who are accessible to patients can distribute

medications already prescribed by the medical officer, and patient-centered services that reduce the barriers to treatment adherence.

#### **Background:**

Around 200 million adults in India have high blood pressure, yet control rates for the condition remain low. Studies suggest that in rural areas in India, only one quarter of people with hypertension are aware of their condition, and only around 10% have their blood pressure controlled. In urban areas, around 40% of people with hypertension are aware of their condition, and only around 20% have their blood pressure controlled.

#### **Way ahead:**

Creating awareness about NCDs is vital as it is a silent disease. There is urgent need to raise awareness about NCDs amongst families regarding packaged food and processed foods with excessive salt and trans-fat.

Sources: pib.

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

## Transformation of 115 Backward Districts

#### **Context:**

In a significant step towards realisation of the Prime Minister's vision for creation of a New India by 2022, Government has identified 115 backward districts for rapid transformation by 2022. For each of the Districts, a senior official in the rank of Additional secretary and Joint secretary has been nominated as Prabhari officer. The First meeting of the Prabhari Officers was recently held under the chairmanship of Cabinet Secretary. The meeting was attended by Secretaries of the important central Ministries.

#### **Role of Prabhari officers in developing these districts:**

- Prabhari officers would take it up as a challenge and succeed in their mission by making a difference in the lives of millions of citizens in these districts. Prabhari officers would form a team with State representatives and bring convergence in their effort.
- Prabhari officers will assist the District administration in sharing the vision for 2022, to ensure the convergence of the efforts of central and state government and to set up a robust mechanism to monitor the improvements in key outcomes in the district.

#### **Funding:**

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

#### **What is needed?**

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

#### **Significance of this move:**

If these districts are transformed, there would be tremendous improvement in the internal security environment of the country. While 35 Districts have been selected on the basis of reported violence by Left Wing Extremism, 55 districts out of 115 are affected by Left Wing extremism and another 15, including districts in J&K and North East are affected by terrorism. If Prabhari officers can bring convergence in the development efforts of different Ministries and state Governments and the schemes specially launched by Home Ministry in these districts, it would serve as a great opportunity to ensure rapid development in the country.

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.

## Controversial Rajasthan bill sent to Assembly select committee

Facing flak from various quarters, the Rajasthan government has referred a controversial bill that seeks to protect public servants and judges from prosecution without its prior sanction to a select committee of the Assembly.



### Highlights of the Bill:

- **The Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Bill** was recently tabled in the Assembly to replace an ordinance promulgated on September 7.
- The Criminal Laws (Rajasthan Amendment) Ordinance, 2017, seeks to protect serving and former judges, magistrates and public servants in the State from being investigated for on-duty action, without government sanction.
- It also bars the media from reporting on such accusations till the sanction to proceed with the probe is given by the government.

Sources: the hindu.

## Grahak Sadak Koyla Vitaran App

The government has launched '**Grahak Sadak Koyla Vitaran App**' benefitting customers of Coal India Limited (CIL) lifting coal through road mode.



### About the App:

#### What is it?

The app is for the benefit of customers lifting coal through road mode. It is a step towards transparency in the system of loading programme and despatch.

#### Significance of the app:

It helps achieve transparency in despatch operations, as a tool to monitor, whether the despatches are made on the fair principle of 'First in First Out' and keeps track of all the activities from issuance of Sale Order to physical delivery of coal by road.

#### Benefits:

The main benefits of the App for the customers, against the Sale Orders issued, include easy accessibility of the information at the click of the button, apart from transparency in the system of loading programme and despatch. The app also helps in logistics planning for lifting of coal in tune with the loading programmes. It further helps in improved planning of procurement, production and stock management by the customers.

#### Key features of the app:

- It provides date-wise, truck-wise quantity of coal delivered against the Sale Orders and information related to Scheme-wise, Colliery-wise, Grade-wise, customer-wise details of Sale Orders issued during a period.
- In terms of loading it provides allotment versus lifting status in details from different sources truck by truck and summary of the despatch.

Sources: pib.

## An app to get tiger numbers right

### Context:

In the forthcoming All-India Tiger Estimation, to be taken up in December-January, the authorities are planning to use an app named **M-STRiPES (Monitoring System For Tigers-Intensive Protection and Ecological Status)** developed by the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun. Though the app has already been in place in some national parks, its usage and application has been made mandatory only now, for the fourth All-India Tiger Estimation.

### Significance of this move:

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

### Tiger estimates:

The national tiger estimates are conducted once in four years, with the first conducted in 2006. That exercise pegged the tiger count at 1,411, with the statistical lower limit pegged at 1,165 and the upper limit, 1,657. In 2010, the count changed to 1,706, with 1,520 being the lower limit and 1,909 the upper limit.

- The Western Ghats landscape, comprising Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Goa, accounted for 776 tigers in 2014, with the Bandipur-Nagarahole-Mudumalai-Wayanad complex harbouring 570 tigers — reckoned to be the world's single largest tiger population in a landscape.
- The last nationwide assessment, held in 2014, pegged the tiger figures across the country at 2,226. Karnataka alone was home to 400 tigers, a bulk of them in Bandipur and Nagarhole.

Sources: the hindu.



## PRAGATI

### Context:

The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, recently chaired the twenty-third interaction through PRAGATI – the ICT-based, multi-modal platform for Pro-Active Governance and Timely Implementation. The first twenty-two meetings of PRAGATI have seen a cumulative review of 200 projects with a total investment of Rs. 9.31 lakh crore.

In the latest meeting, the Prime Minister reviewed the progress towards handling and resolution of grievances related to consumers and the progress of nine infrastructure projects in the railway, road, power, and renewable energy sectors, spread over several states.

**How will it work?**

- PM to hold a monthly programme on every Fourth Wednesday at 3.30 PM-to be known as PRAGATI Day
- PM to interact with officials through Video-conferencing enabled by data and geo-informatics visuals
- Issues picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, on-going Programmes and pending Projects
- Issues also include various correspondences to PM's office by the common people or from high dignitaries of States and/or developers of public projects
- Issues can be viewed by the Union Government Secretaries and Chief Secretaries after entering into the application
- Union Government Secretaries and Chief Secretaries have to put their comments and updates about the flagged issues within three days
- The design enables the PM to see on his screen the issues as well as the latest updates and visuals regarding the same

**About PRAGATI:****What is it?**

PRAGATI is a unique integrating and interactive platform. The platform is aimed at addressing common man's grievances, and simultaneously monitoring and reviewing important programmes and projects of the Government of India as well as projects flagged by State Governments.

**Unique features:**

- The PRAGATI platform uniquely bundles three latest technologies: Digital data management, video-conferencing and geo-spatial technology.
- It also offers a unique combination in the direction of cooperative federalism since it brings on one stage the Secretaries of Government of India and the Chief Secretaries of the States.
- With this, the Prime Minister is able to discuss the issues with the concerned Central and State officials with full information and latest visuals of the ground level situation. It is also an innovative project in e-governance and good governance.
- It is a three-tier system (PMO, Union Government Secretaries, and Chief Secretaries of the States).
- Issues to be flagged before the PM are picked up from the available database regarding Public Grievances, ongoing Programmes and pending Projects.
- The system will ride on, strengthen and re-engineer the data bases of the CPGRAMS for grievances, Project Monitoring Group (PMG) and the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation. PRAGATI provides an interface and platform for all these three aspects.
- It will also take into consideration various correspondences to PM's office by the common people or from high dignitaries of States and/or developers of public projects.
- It is also a robust system for bringing e-transparency and e-accountability with real-time presence and exchange among the key stakeholders.
- The system has been designed in-house by the PMO team with the help of National Informatics Center (NIC).

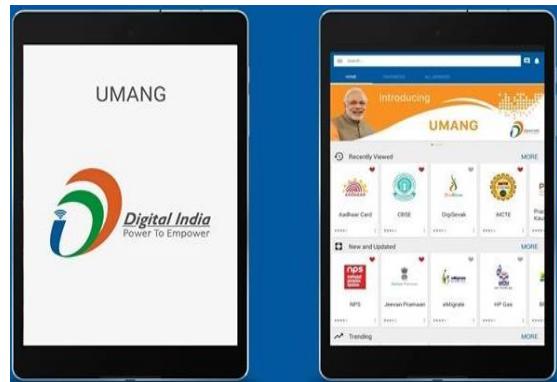
Sources: pib.

## Umang app

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

**About Umang app:****What is it?**

Umang is an initiative to promote Digital India program. The term — Umang stands for Unified Mobile Application for New-age Governance and is envisaged to make e-governance. The application is developed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) and National e-Governance Division (NeGD) in order to drive Mobile Governance in India.



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

Sources: pib.

## YONO

**Context:**

State Bank of India, the country's largest public sector bank, has launched a unified integrated app called YONO (You Need Only One) that would offer all kinds of financial and lifestyle products.

**About YONO platform:**

- The portal has been designed to offer maximum customer convenience and the product has been developed by SBI using artificial intelligence, predictive analysis and machine learning. It can be accessed through both Android and iOS platforms.
- The omni-channel platform will allow customers to meet their lifestyle needs across 14 categories from booking cabs to paying for medical needs — all under one roof.
- For this, the bank has partnered with 60 e-commerce players, including Amazon, Ola, Flipkart, Yatra, Swiggy and BYJU's. Offline players such as Thomas Cook, Shoppers Stop and Cox and Kings are also part of the SBI partnership.

**SBI launched amazing app YONO-one touch point solution for 60 services**



Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic: India and its neighbourhood- relations.**

## Belt and Road Initiative

**Context:**

China recently counselled India to shed its objections to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and take advantage of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which had already drawn wide international support.

India was among a handful of countries that had skipped attendance in Beijing of the Belt and Road Forum in May, objecting to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which passed through Kashmir.

**About BRI:****What is it?**

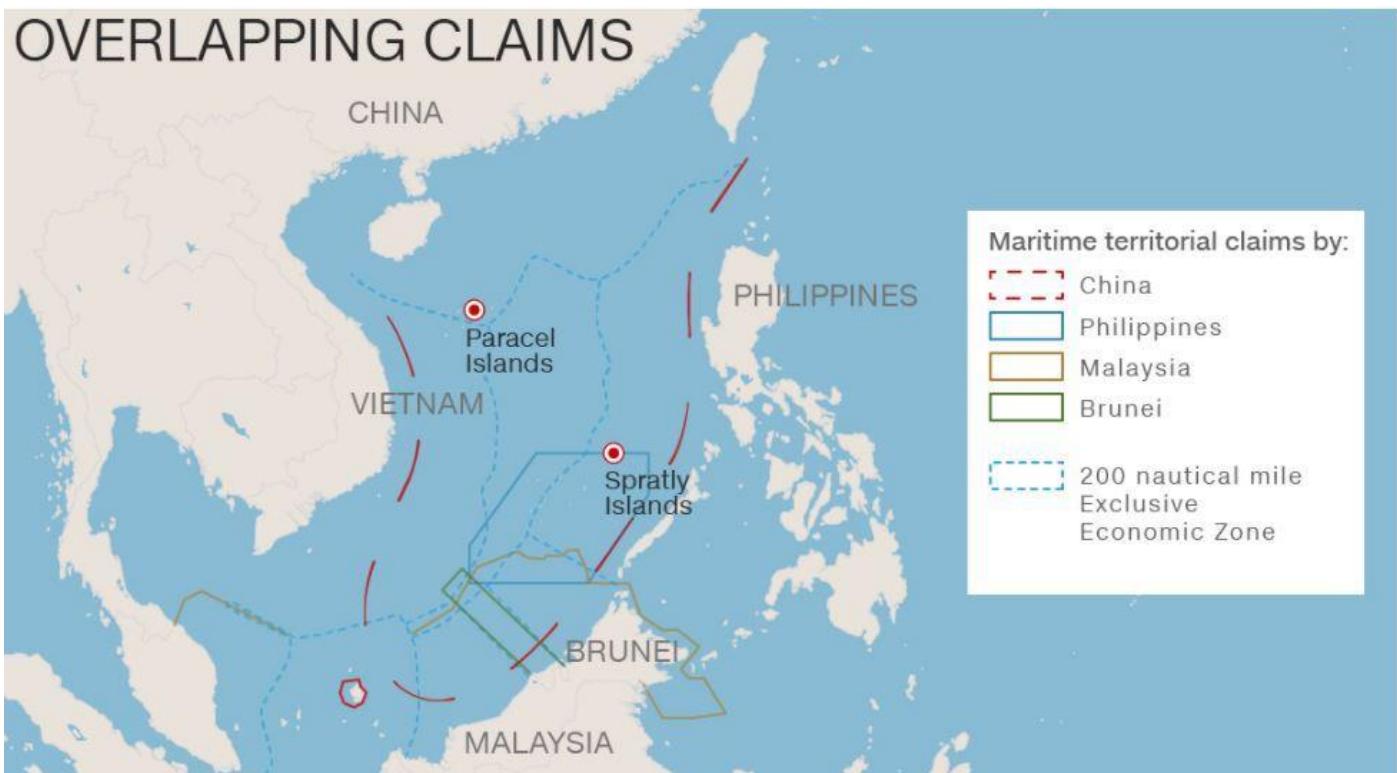
The initiative is the centrepiece of China's foreign policy and domestic economic strategy. It aims to rejuvenate ancient trade routes—Silk Routes—which will open up markets within and beyond the region. Through this initiative, China's plan is to construct roads, railways, ports, and other infrastructure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

**Is the initiative a threat or an opportunity for India?**

The answer undoubtedly ticks both boxes. Chinese political expansion and economic ambitions are two sides of the same coin. To be firm while responding to one facet, while making use of the opportunities that become available from the other, will largely depend on the institutional agency and strategic imagination India is able to bring to the table.

Sources: the hindu.

## South China sea dispute



### **Context:**

Southeast Asian leaders are planning to start negotiations with China on a so-called "Code of Conduct" in the disputed South China Sea in what they regard as a milestone. However, China has been opposed to a legally binding code.

### **About the dispute over south China sea:**

**Where is the South China Sea?** The South China Sea is located at the western edge of the Pacific Ocean, to Asia's southeast. It encompasses an area of about 1.4 million square miles and contains a collection of reefs, islands and atolls, including the Spratly Islands, Paracel Islands and Scarborough Shoal.

### **China's claims:**

Beijing claims 90% of the South China Sea, a maritime region believed to hold a wealth of untapped oil and gas reserves and through which roughly \$4.5tn of ship-borne trade passes every year. Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also contest China's claims to islands and reef systems closer to their territory than Beijing's.

China says it follows a historical precedent set by the "nine-dash line" that Beijing drew in 1947 following the surrender of Japan. The line has been included in subsequent maps issued under Communist rule.

### **Importance of South China Sea:**

- It is a 3.5m sq km waterway.
- One of the world's most strategically vital maritime spaces.
- More oil passes through here than the Suez Canal.
- More than \$5 trillion in trade flows through its waters each year. That is a third of all global maritime commerce.
- The Strait of Malacca that links Indian and Pacific Oceans handles four times as much oil as Suez Canal.

Sources: the hindu.

## Sampriti 2017

### **What is it?**

It is Joint Indo-Bangladesh Training Exercise. The 2017 edition was recently held in Mizoram. It is the seventh such exercise in the SAMPRITI series.

### **Aim of the exercise:**

The exercise has been aimed to strengthen and broaden the aspects of interoperability and cooperation between the Indian and Bangladesh Armies.

Sources: pib.

## IMMSAREX

The 2017 edition of International Multilateral Maritime Search and Rescue Exercise (IMMSAREX) was recently held in Bangladesh under the aegis of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). This is the first ever operational exercise held under the aegis of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in Bangladesh.

The Exercise comprised drills related to fire-fighting, sea accidents and rescue, as well as deep sea searches for missing ships, searches for missing aircraft, and other emergency rescue operations.

### **What you need to know about IONS?**

The IONS is a regional forum of Indian Ocean littoral states, represented by their Navy chiefs, launched by India in February 2008. It presently has 23 members and nine observers.

- It is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant maritime issues and, in the process, endeavors to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly agreements on the way ahead.
- Under the charter of business adopted in 2014, the grouping has working groups on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), Information Security and Interoperability (IS&I) and anti-piracy now renamed as maritime security.

Sources: the hindu.

## Chabahar port

**Context:** Iran is all set to inaugurate the first phase of the Chabahar port development project. The first phase of work on Chabahar port has been completed. The development assumes significance since India's outreach through Iran is taking place at a time the Donald Trump administration is planning to corner Tehran through diplomatic and economic means.

### **Where is Chabahar port?**

Iran's Chabahar port is located on the Gulf of Oman and is the only oceanic port of the country. The port gives access to the energy-rich Persian Gulf nations' southern coast and India can bypass Pakistan with the Chabahar port becoming functional.



### **Why Chabahar port is crucial for India?**

- The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan. Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.
- Chabahar port will be beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.
- With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, Iran also becomes a military ally to India. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.
- With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India. The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West imposed ban on Iran was lifted.
- Chabahar port will ensure in the establishment of a politically sustainable connectivity between India and Afghanistan. This will, in turn, lead to better economic ties between the two countries.
- From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.

### **Way ahead:**

The inauguration of the port will effectively pave the way for India to carry forward the next phase of construction and development of two berths for its use, particularly for trade with Afghanistan. Next, the government, which has committed \$500 million to the port project, will develop a free-trade area around the port, and finally will complete the loop with a \$1.6-billion railway line to Zahedan.

Sources: the hindu.

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

### Cabinet approves agreement on cooperation and mutual assistance between India and Armenia in custom matters

#### Key Points:

- This agreement shall enter into force on the first day of the second month after both parties notify each other in through diplomatic channels, that the necessary national legal requirements for entry into force of this agreement have been fulfilled.
- The agreement will further help in the availability of relevant information for the prevention and investigation of customs offences.
- It is also expected to facilitate trade and ensure efficient clearance of goods traded between both the countries.

#### Background :

The Agreement would provide a legal framework for sharing of information and intelligence between the Customs authorities of the two countries and help in the proper application of Customs laws, prevention and investigation of Customs offences and the facilitation of legitimate trade. The draft text of the Agreement has been finalized with the concurrence of the two Customs Administrations. The draft Agreement takes care of Indian Customs' concerns and requirements, particularly in the area of exchange of information on the correctness of the Customs value declared and authenticity of certificates of origin of the goods traded between the two countries.

Source: pib

### UNESCO launches Strategic Framework for Education in Emergencies in the Arab Region

UNESCO has launched a Strategic Framework for Education in Emergencies in the Arab Region (2018-2021).

Strategic Goal 1	Strategic Goal 2	Strategic Goal 3	Strategic Goal 4
<b>Children and youth affected by crisis access inclusive and quality learning opportunities</b>	<b>Learners affected by crisis are empowered with values, knowledge, and skills for life and work</b>	<b>Education actors provide quality education for better learning outcomes</b>	<b>Education systems are responsive and resilient to crisis</b>

#### About the Strategic framework:

**What is it?** The Strategic Framework for Education in Emergencies in the Arab Region (2018-2021) aims to respond to the Education crisis in the region through supporting Member States in meeting their educational needs, and helping them meet the commitments set out in SDG4 which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all by 2030.

**Why Arab region?** Education has been deeply affected by the scale of crisis in the Arab Region, with over 13 million children and youth not going to school due to conflict.

**Goals:** The Strategic Framework consists of four strategic goals anchored in the three pillars of education: Access, Quality and System Strengthening.

**Significance of the framework:** The Framework aims to increase access to quality learning opportunities for children and youth, to empower them with values, knowledge and skills for life and work, to support teachers and enhance the resilience of education systems.

Sources: pib.

## COP23

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ([UNFCCC](#)) is hosting the 23rd annual conference at **Bonn, Germany**.

**What's in the COP 23?**

The conference named as COP23 is being held to further the provisions of the Paris Agreement, and achieve results in the execution guidelines.



**COP23 FIJI**  
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE  
**BONN 2017**

- While the aim of the event is much larger, nations attending the COP23 are scheduled to **finalise the rulebook of the Paris Agreement**. This process was started in Marrakesh 2016 meet. These rules will dictate how the Agreement would be monitored and executed. It will change the famous 1997 Kyoto Protocol by 2020.
- The rulebook will include new international standards for measuring carbon emissions. These standards will ensure comparison of efforts made by various countries. However, a few negotiators, like the US, deny the impacts of climate change and argue that the efforts cost a huge amount of resources.

**Paris Agreement:**

The Paris Agreement is meant to make sure that the average surface temperature all over the world does not rise above two degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial times. To achieve this goal, countries have promised under the Paris Agreement to take a variety of self-determined actions to restrain the current rate of global warming.

**About UNFCCC:**

The UNFCCC was adopted in 1992 at the Rio Earth Summit, which marked the beginning of the international community's first concerted effort to confront the problem of climate change. Known also as the Rio Convention, the UNFCCC established a framework for action to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere. The UNFCCC entered into force in 1994, and nearly all of the world's nations—a total of 195—have now signed on.

Sources: the hindu.

**India to contribute USD 100 million to UN partnership fund**

India has pledged an additional USD 100 million towards the UN partnership fund, significantly scaling up its support to sustainable development projects across the developing world.

**About the India-UN Development Partnership Fund:**

What is it? The India-UN Development Partnership Fund was set up as a partnership between India and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC).

What is it for? Managed by UNOSSC, the fund will support Southern-owned and led, demand-driven, and transformational sustainable development projects across the developing world. Focusing on Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States, United Nations agencies will implement the Fund's projects in close collaboration with partnering governments.

Focus areas: Reducing poverty and hunger, improving health, education and equality, and expanding access to clean water and energy.

**Facts for Prelims and Mains:**About UNOSSC:

What is it?

The United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation ([UNOSSC](#)) was established to promote, coordinate and support South-South and triangular cooperation globally and within the United Nations system. UNOSSC, hosted by UNDP since 1974, was established by the UN General Assembly with a mandate to advocate for and coordinate South-South and triangular cooperation on a global and UN system-wide basis.

Functions: UNOSSC receives policy directives and guidance from the General Assembly and through its subsidiary body, the High-level Committee on South-South Cooperation. UNOSSC submits its strategic planning frameworks to the UNDP, UNFPA and UNOPS Executive Board for approval and funding.



Sources: the hindu.

## China launches 2 navigation satellites

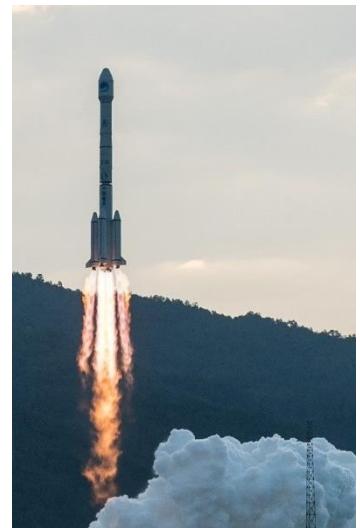
China, which is building its own navigation system to rival United States GPS, has launched two BeiDou-3 satellites into space though a single carrier rocket. The satellites were launched aboard a Long March-3B carrier rocket.

- The two newly-launched satellites represent the third phase of the BeiDou Navigation Satellite System.

### **About BeiDou project:**

#### What is it?

Named after the Chinese term for the plough or the Big Dipper constellation, the BeiDou project was formally initiated in 1994. It began to serve China in 2000 and the Asia-Pacific region at the end of 2012. If everything goes according to the plan, China will become the third country in the world after the US and Russia to operate its own navigation system.



#### Operational area:

BeiDou currently consists of 10 satellites and covers a swath of the Asia-Pacific region from Australia in the south to Russia in the north. The system is accurate to within 82 feet (25 meters) and now serves China and surrounding areas on a pilot basis.

#### Significance:

The emergence of BeiDou should make China far less dependent on the GPS constellation, which is operated by the United States military and is currently the world's dominant satellite navigation network.

### **Facts for Prelims:**

Global navigational systems: Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)- India, GPS (Global Positioning System)- US, Glonass- Russia and Galileo- Europe.

Sources: the hindu.

## Joint Interpretative Declaration between India and Colombia

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for signing the Joint Interpretative Declaration (JID) between India and Colombia regarding the existing Agreement for the Promotion and Protection of Investments between India and Colombia.



#### **Significance of the JID:**

The JID would impart clarity to the interpretation of the existing Agreement as it includes interpretative notes to be jointly adopted for many clauses, including, the definition of investor, definition of investment, Fair and Equitable Treatment (FET), National Treatment (NT) and Most Favoured Nation (MFN) treatment, expropriation, Investor – State Dispute Settlement provision and Denial of Benefits.

#### **Need for JIDs:**

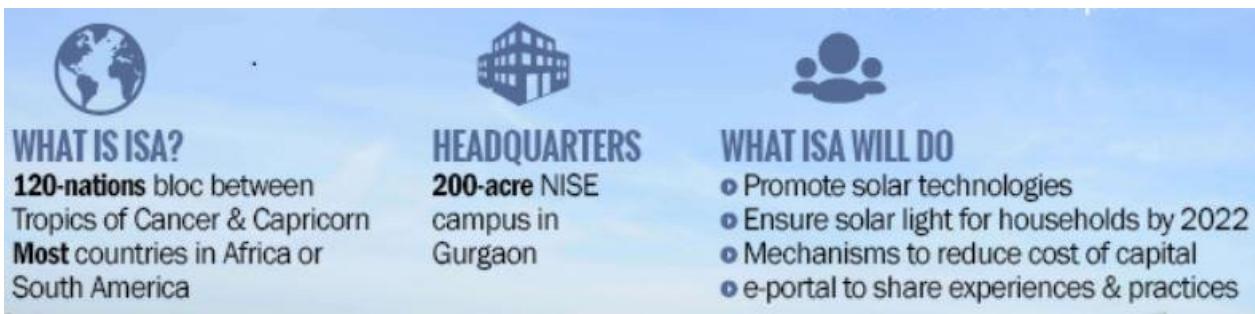
Joint Interpretative Declarations/Statements in general play an important supplementary role in strengthening the investment treaty regime. With increasing Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) disputes, issuance of such statements is likely to have strong persuasive value before arbitration tribunals. Such pro-active approach by partners can foster a more predictable and coherent reading of treaty terms by arbitration tribunals.

### **Facts for Prelims:**

Colombia is a sovereign state largely situated in the northwest of South America, with territories in Central America. Colombia shares a border to the northwest with Panama, to the east with Venezuela and Brazil and to the south with Ecuador and Peru. Ecologically, it is one of the world's 17 megadiverse countries, and the most densely biodiverse of these per square kilometer.

Sources: pib.

## International Solar Alliance



**Context:** A Curtain Raiser Event for the Founding Ceremony of the International Solar Alliance (**ISA**) was recently held at Bonn, Germany.

### **About the International Solar Alliance (ISA):**

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

The ISA is a treaty-based alliance of 121 prospective solar-rich Member Nations situated fully or partially between the Tropics, and aims at accelerating development and deployment of solar energy globally.

#### **When it was launched?**

The ISA was jointly launched on 30 November 2015 by Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, and then-President of France, H.E. François Hollande, on the side lines of the UNFCCC Conference of Parties 21 (CoP21) at Paris, France.

#### **Significance of ISA:**

- More than 120 countries are geographically located in the tropics, between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn, either fully or partially. These places get ample sunlight throughout the year, making solar energy an easily available resources.
- These countries also happen to be ones where maximum growth in energy demand is expected in the coming years, considering that these are areas where current production is woefully short of requirement.
- The ISA is an effort to ensure that as these countries rapidly ramp up their electricity production, they should predominantly use solar energy and avoid fossil fuels.

#### **Way ahead:**

ISA will become a treaty-based international intergovernmental organisation on 6 December 2017. 44 countries have already signed the ISA treaty, and many more are set to join.

Source: pib.

## South Asia Economic Summit

#### **Context:**

Xth South Asia Economic Summit (SAES) has begun at Kathmandu. More than 200 participants including ministers, members of parliaments, ambassadors, government officials, eminent experts and thinkers attending the summit.

**The theme of the summit** is “Deepening Economic Integration for Inclusive and Sustainable Development in South Asia”.

#### **About SAES:**

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

Started in 2008, South Asia Economic Summit is like Davos- World Economic Forum event in South Asia. It is a regional platform for discussing and analyzing economic and development issues and challenges faced by South Asian countries and advancing the cause of regional integration and cooperation.

#### **What it does?**

It brings together stakeholders from the government, private sector, research, academics and civil society to generate innovative and actionable ideas for consideration by the region's policymakers and SAARC.

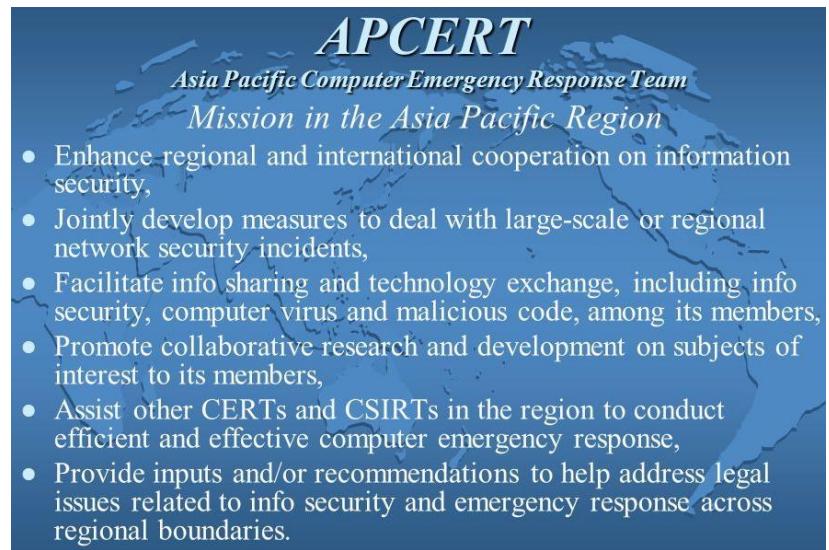
Sources: the hindu.

## Asia Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (Apcert)

### **Context:**

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) under the aegis of Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology organizing the Asia Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team (APCERT) Conference from November 12-15, 2017 in New Delhi. This is the 15th Conference of APCERT and first ever conference in India and South Asia and will be attended by 21 economies.

- This conference would cover contemporary topics around strategies of CERTs, Technology and Instruments for building trust in digitally evolving economies and best practices for handling cyber security in mobile and social media.



**The conference theme** is “Building Trust in the Digital Economy”.

### **About APCERT:**

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

**APCERT** (Asia Pacific Computer Emergency Response Team) is a coalition of CSIRTs (Computer Security Incident Response Teams), from 13 economies across the Asia Pacific region. APCERT organizes an annual meeting called APSIRC conference, and the first conference was held in March 2002, Tokyo, Japan.

**Membership:** Any CSIRT from Asia Pacific Region, who is interested to furthering the objectives of APCERT, will be allowed to join as APCERT members after meeting all member accreditation requirements.

#### **APCERT membership model has 2 levels:**

**Full members:** Full Members are CSIRTs/CERTs in the Asia Pacific region, who have the right to vote on APCERT issues, as well as to stand for election to the APCERT Steering Committee. All Founding Members are Full Members.

**General Members:** Any CSIRTs/CERTs in the Asia Pacific region with an interest in incident response and IT security, can join APCERT as a General Member. General Members are not eligible to vote nor to stand for election to the APCERT Steering Committee. An applicant is required to join APCERT as a General Member first. After applicants obtain a General Member status, they can later apply to upgrade their membership to a Full Member status. General Membership is a pre-requisite to become a Full Member.

### **Facts for Prelims:**

#### About CERT-In:

#### What is it?

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.

Sources: pib.

## Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA)

### **Context:**

Senior officials of India and European Union (EU) recently held discussions on the long-stalled free trade pact, officially dubbed as Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) and expressed willingness to address issues in a time-bound manner.

Launched in June 2007, the negotiations for the proposed BTIA have witnessed many hurdles with both sides having major differences on key issues like intellectual property rights, duty cut in automobile and spirits, and liberal visa regime.

### **Difference between the two countries:**

- The two sides have to iron out differences related to movement of professionals.
- Besides demanding significant duty cuts in automobiles, the EU wants tax reduction in wines, spirits and dairy products, and a strong intellectual property regime.
- On the other hand, India is asking for 'data secure nation' status to be granted by the EU. The country is among the nations not considered data secure by the EU. The matter is crucial as it will have a bearing on Indian IT companies wanting market access.

### **About Broadbased Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA):**

On 28th June 2007, India and the EU began negotiations on a broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in Brussels, Belgium. These negotiations are pursuant to the commitment made by political leaders at the 7th India-EU Summit held in Helsinki in October 2006 to move towards negotiations for a broad-based trade and investment agreement on the basis of the report of India-EU High Level Technical Group.

**Need for a free trade agreement:** India and the EU expect to promote bilateral trade by removing barriers to trade in goods and services and investment across all sectors of the economy. Both parties believe that a comprehensive and ambitious agreement that is consistent with WTO rules and principles would open new markets and would expand opportunities for Indian and EU businesses.

**The negotiations cover** Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, Investment, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Technical Barriers to Trade, Trade Remedies, Rules of Origin, Customs and Trade Facilitation, Competition, Trade Defence, Government Procurement, Dispute Settlement, Intellectual Property Rights & Geographical Indications, Sustainable Development.

Sources: ET.

## UN Convention against Torture

### **Context:**

The Supreme Court recently disposed of a PIL seeking to put in place a statutory framework to curb torture and custodial violence as it said that it can't direct the government to make an anti-torture law or ratify the UN convention against Torture.

### **Background:**

The government is considering an anti-torture law. The Law Commission has recommended that the Centre ratify the United Nations Convention against Torture and frame a standalone anti-torture law, making the state responsible for any injury inflicted by its agents on citizens.

Though India signed the convention in 1997, it is yet to ratify it. Efforts to bring in a standalone law have failed. The National Human Rights Commission has been urging the government to recognise torture as a separate crime and codify the punishment in a separate penal law.

### Convention Against Torture

"United Nations Convention against Torture is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations, that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world".

### **UN convention against torture:**

India has signed the UN Convention against torture way back in 1997. But, it has still not ratified it. The Convention defines torture as a criminal offence. The Convention requires states to take effective measures to prevent torture in

any territory under their jurisdiction, and forbids states to transport people to any country where there is reason to believe they will be tortured.

#### **Efforts in this regard:**

A bill was also proposed in this regard. But, no action has been taken on the Prevention of Torture Bill 2010 even six years after it was passed by the Lok Sabha on May 6, 2010 and recommended by a Select Committee of the Rajya Sabha of which he had been Chairman. The centre contends some States were not in favour of such a law and the Indian Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code were more than sufficient.

#### **What next?**

Considering it a matter of both Article 21 (fundamental right to life and dignity) and of international reputation, the government should consider promulgating a standalone, comprehensive law to define and punish torture as an instrument of "human degradation" by state authorities. Such a law is in the national interest.

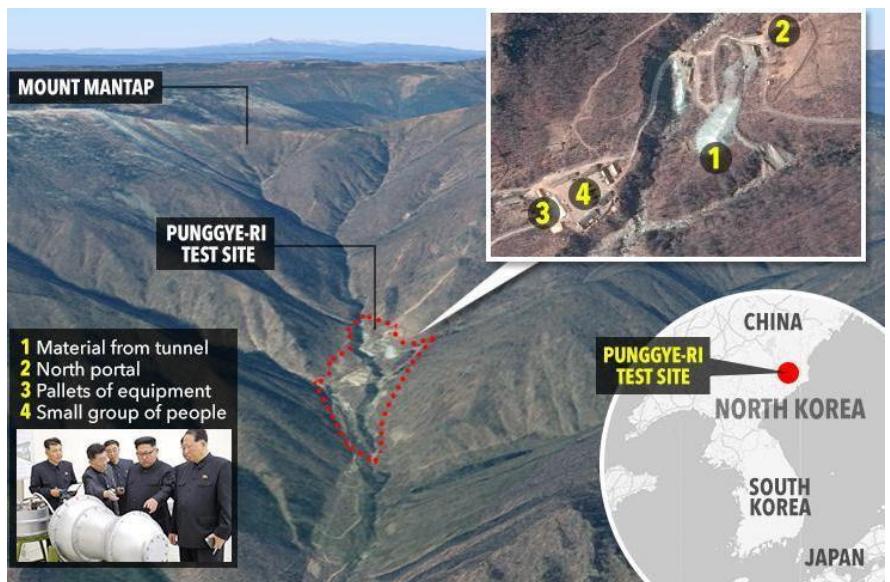
Sources: the hindu.

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

### 200 die at N. Korean n-test site

More than 200 people are feared to have died when a tunnel caved in at North Korea's nuclear test site, triggered by its latest detonation, a Japanese news report said.

- Experts have warned that the underground tests could cause the mountain to collapse and leak radiation into the atmosphere.
- The latest test — the sixth at the site since 2006 — triggered landslides in the detonation area and beyond, according to satellite pictures.
- The blast caused a 3-magnitude earthquake, according to the United States Geological Survey, followed a few minutes later by another with a magnitude of 4.1.



Source: Hindu

### Zimbabwe crisis

#### **Context:**

The military in Zimbabwe has launched a 'coup' on November 15, 2017, calling it a "bloodless correction" to target "criminals" surrounding long-time leader Robert Mugabe.

#### **Who is Robert Mugabe?**

Robert Mugabe is the only leader Zimbabwe had since it won freedom from British colonial rule in 1980. At 93, Mr. Mugabe is the world's oldest head of state. His poor health has fueled a bitter succession battle as potential replacements jockey for position. His lengthy rule has been marked by brutal repression of dissent, mass emigration, vote-rigging and economic collapse since land reforms in 2000.



#### **What triggered the current stand-off between military and the civilian government?**

The current crisis stems from a political shake-up earlier this month, but the roots of it go back much further. On Nov. 6, Mugabe decided to fire Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa. The move caused unrest in the president's ruling ZANU-PF party and the army. Mnangagwa has support among the military and was seen as a potential successor to Mugabe.

#### **What happens next?**

It's unclear. There's still a ton of uncertainty about the military's intentions. There has been no sign of violence so far in the military action, and there have not been public demonstrations either in favor of it or against it.

- Foreign officials and regional leaders have called for calm and the country to avoid conflict, saying they are closely monitoring the situation. Embassies in Zimbabwe have issued statements instructing their citizens in the country to shelter in place and monitor the news for updates.
- Although the situation is still unfolding, there is a strong possibility that this is the beginning of the end for Mugabe's rule and his status as the world's oldest serving president.

Sources: the hindu.

## China to mediate on Rohingyas between Myanmar and Bangladesh

### **Context:**

China is positioning itself as a mediator in the dispute between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the Rohingya refugee crisis and recently announced a three-stage solution to the humanitarian calamity.

### **The three- stage solution is as follows:**

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

### **Background:**

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

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

Sources: ET.

## China forges 'strategic' ties with Djibouti after opening base

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



**Background:**

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

**Base at Djibouti:**

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

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

**About Djibouti:**

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

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 2 Topic: Important International institutions, agencies and fora, their structure, mandate.****7th Asian Energy Ministers' Round Table organised by International Energy Forum (IEF) in Bangkok****India is the current Chair of the IEF****Highlights:**

- How to overcome market and policy hurdles.
- Importance of a flexible, transparent and non-discriminatory global LNG trading regime which would expedite ushering in the golden age of gas.
- Need to move to a gas based economy and the avenues for FDI in building infrastructure for gas including LNG terminals, pipelines, CGD etc.

**SEVENTH ASIAN MINISTERIAL ENERGY ROUNDTABLE**

Global Energy Markets in Transition: From Vision to Action

1 - 3 November 2017 | Bangkok, Thailand

HOSTED BY THAILAND



CO-HOSTED BY UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

SUPPORTED BY IEF

India's unprecedented leap of 30 places in the ease of doing business and also how PM Ujjwala Scheme can be a model to be adopted in developing countries of Asia and Africa was also highlighted in the meet

**International Energy Forum (IEF):**

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

Source: pib

**Odisha Higher Education Programme for Excellence and Equity (OHEPEE) Project**

A Financing Agreement for IBRD loan of US\$ 119 million (equivalent) for the "Odisha Higher Education Programme for Excellence & Equity (OHEPEE) Project" was recently signed between India and the World Bank.

**About OHEPEE project:**

***The Objective of the project*** is to improve the quality of 'students' equitable access to selected institutions and enhance governance of the higher education system in Odisha.



**Project Component:** Result Areas are (I) Improved quality of and students' equitable access to selected institutions of higher education: Institutional Development Plan (IDP) Grants (performance –based Financing (II) Enhanced governance of the higher education system: (i)Improvement of governance in colleges (ii)Improvement of financial and procurement management and accounting in all government and government-aided colleges.

### About IBRD:

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

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) is an international financial institution that offers loans to middle-income developing countries. The IBRD is the first of five member institutions that compose the World Bank Group. It was established in 1944 with the mission of financing the reconstruction of European nations devastated by World War II.

#### **What it does?**

The IBRD provides commercial-grade or concessional financing to sovereign states to fund projects that seek to improve transportation and infrastructure, education, domestic policy, environmental consciousness, energy investments, healthcare, access to food and potable water, and access to improved sanitation.

Sources: pib.

## International Energy Agency (IEA)

#### **Context:**

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

Participants included representatives from the 29 IEA member countries; accession countries Chile and Mexico; association countries China, India, Indonesia, Morocco, Singapore and Thailand; and partner countries Brazil and South Africa. CEOs from 30 top global energy companies also attended the meeting.



### About IEA:

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

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

#### **The four main areas of IEA focus are:**

- Energy Security: Promoting diversity, efficiency, flexibility and reliability for all fuels and energy sources;

- Economic Development: Supporting free markets to foster economic growth and eliminate energy poverty;
- Environmental Awareness: Analysing policy options to offset the impact of energy production and use on the environment, especially for tackling climate change and air pollution; and
- Engagement Worldwide: Working closely with partner countries, especially major emerging economies, to find solutions to shared energy and environmental concerns.

**Functions:**

- The IEA examines the full spectrum of energy issues including oil, gas and coal supply and demand, renewable energy technologies, electricity markets, energy efficiency, access to energy, demand side management and much more.
- Through its work, the IEA advocates policies that will enhance the reliability, affordability and sustainability of energy in its member countries and beyond.

Sources: pib.

### India demands transparency in UN Security Council reform

#### United Nations Security Council



Permanent members, veto rights (5)

■ China, France, Russia, UK, USA

Non-permanent members, two-year terms (10)

■ Africa (3)

■ Asia (2)

■ Latin America (2)

■ Western Europe and others (2)

■ Eastern Europe (1)

- The Security Council has the primary responsibility within the UN of maintaining international peace and security

- It is the only United Nations organ that has the power to make decisions that member states are obligated to implement

India has demanded transparency in the UN Security Council reform process so that the people could know what is preventing the members from translating discussions into a negotiating text for the much-needed revamping of the world body's top organ.

#### About UNSC:

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

The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is one of the organs of the United Nations and is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security. Its powers include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the establishment of international sanctions, and the authorization of military action through Security Council resolutions; it is the only UN body with the authority to issue binding resolutions to member states.

##### **Members:**

- The Security Council consists of fifteen members. Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, and the United States—serve as the body's five permanent members. These permanent members can veto any substantive Security Council resolution, including those on the admission of new member states or candidates for Secretary-General.
- The Security Council also has 10 non-permanent members, elected on a regional basis to serve two-year terms. The body's presidency rotates monthly among its members.

##### **Proposed reforms:**

Reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) encompasses five key issues: categories of membership, the question of the veto held by the five permanent members, regional representation, the size of an enlarged Council and its working methods, and the Security Council-General Assembly relationship. There is also a proposal to admit more permanent members.

### **Why India should be given a permanent seat in the council?**

- India was among the founding members of United Nations.
- It is the second largest and one of the largest constant contributor of troops to United Nations Peacekeeping missions.
- Today, India has over 8,500 peacekeepers in the field, more than twice as many as the UN's five big powers combined.
- India, since long time, has been demanding expansion of UNSC and its inclusion as permanent member in it. It has been a member of UNSC for 7 terms and a member of G-77 and G-4, so permanent membership is a logical extension.

Sources: the hindu.

## **11 Trade ministers reach deal on Pacific trade without US**

In a major breakthrough, trade ministers from 11 Pacific Rim countries have reached a deal to proceed with the free-trade Trans-Pacific Partnership deal that was in doubt after President Donald Trump abandoned it. The TPP member countries are trying to find a way forward without the U.S.

### **Background:**

In January, Mr. Trump pulled out of the deal that was championed by his predecessor Barack Obama. Leaders of the 11 countries remaining in the TPP had been due to meet and endorse a deal worked out in last-minute talks overnight.

### **About TPP:**

#### **What is TPP?**

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

#### **Aim:**

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

#### **Member states include:**

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

#### **Why Trump is against this deal?**

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

Trump says, "The TPP creates a new international commission that makes decisions the American people can't veto, making it easier for our trading competitors to ship cheap subsidised goods into US markets – while allowing foreign countries to continue putting barriers in front of our exports."

Sources: the hindu.

## **Bank of International Settlement (BIS)**

### **Context:**

RBI Governor Urjit Patel has been appointed to the Financial Stability Institute Advisory Board or the Bank of International Settlement (BIS), a global financial organisation owned by major central banks from across the world.

### **About the Financial Stability Institute:**

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

The FSI was jointly created in 1998 by the BIS and the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision. Among other mandates, the FSI seeks to promote cross-sectoral and cross-border supervisory contacts and cooperation.

### **Bank for International Settlement (BIS)**

(<http://www.bis.org/>)

- Established on 17 May 1930 (world's oldest international financial organisation.)
- Head office: Basel with two representative offices in Hong Kong and Mexico City.
- Customers are central banks and international organisations
  - the BIS does not accept deposits from, or provide financial services to, private individuals or corporate entities
- The mission is to serve central banks in
  - their pursuit of monetary and financial stability
  - to foster international cooperation in those areas
  - to act as a bank for central banks

**What it does?**

The Financial Stability Institute (FSI) of the BIS assists financial sector authorities worldwide in strengthening their financial systems.

**FSI advisory board:**

The FSI Advisory Board was originally created in 1998. The Advisory Board will provide strategic advice to help the FSI continue to meet its mandate in a way that is responsive to the changing needs of its key stakeholders around the world. To achieve this objective, the Advisory Board will comprise a small but diverse group of central bank Governors, heads of financial sector supervision and chairs of standard-setting bodies and regional supervisory groups.

**About BIS:****What is it?**

The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) is the world's oldest international financial organization. It was established in May 1930.

**Location:**

It is based in Basel, Switzerland, with representative offices in Hong Kong and Mexico City.

**Members:**

It has 60 member central banks, representing countries from around the world that together make up about 95% of world GDP.

**The mission of the BIS** is to serve central banks in their pursuit of monetary and financial stability, to foster international cooperation in those areas and to act as a bank for central banks.

Sources: ET.

## South Asia Regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (SARTTAC)

**Context:**

An Interim Meeting of the Steering Committee of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)'s South Asia Regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (SARTTAC) was held recently in national capital to assess the Center's activities since its inauguration in February 2017 and to review the Fiscal Year 2018 Work Plan.

Officials from all Six (6) Member countries attended the meeting, together with the Development Partner representatives (the European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, and USAID), and IMF staff.

The image is a composite graphic for the South Asia Regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (SARTTAC). At the top, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) logo is visible. Below it is the SARTTAC logo, which features a stylized tree icon and the text "SARTTAC" in large red letters, with "SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER" in smaller yellow text below. To the right is a red vertical panel containing flags of six member countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Below this panel, text reads "SARTTAC is supported by its member countries and development partners." Logos for "Australian Government The Treasury", "EU", "MINISTRY OF STRATEGY AND FINANCING", and "UKaid from the British people" are shown at the bottom.

**SARTTAC**  
SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL TRAINING & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

Strengthening the institutions in South Asia responsible for economic policies with hands-on technical advice and training

Nepal  
Bhutan  
India  
Bangladesh  
Maldives  
Sri Lanka

SARTTAC is supported by its member countries and development partners.

Australian Government The Treasury  
EU  
MINISTRY OF STRATEGY AND FINANCING  
UKaid from the British people

**About SARTTAC:****What is it?**

SARTTAC, the newest addition to the IMF's global network of fourteen regional centers, is a new kind of capacity development institution, fully integrating customized hands-on training with targeted technical advice in a range of macroeconomic and financial areas, and generating synergies between the two. It was inaugurated at Delhi in February 2017.

**Finance:**

SARTTAC is financed mainly by its six member countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka — with additional support from Australia, the Republic of Korea, the European Union and the United Kingdom.

**Goal:**

SARTTAC's strategic goal is to help its member countries strengthen their institutional and human capacity to design and implement macroeconomic and financial policies that promote growth and reduce poverty.

**What it does?**

SARTTAC will allow the IMF to meet more of the high demand for technical assistance and training from the region. Through its team of international resident experts, SARTTAC is expected to become the focal point for the delivery of IMF capacity development services to South Asia.

Sources: pib.

## Shanghai Cooperation Organization

**Context:**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization Meeting of the Ministers of Member States responsible for Foreign Economic and Foreign Trade was recently held in Russia. This is the first Ministerial Conference on Trade organized by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization after India became a full member of the Organization in June 2017.

**About SCO:****What is it?**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, also known as the Shanghai Pact, is a Eurasian political, economic, and military organisation which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Apart from Uzbekistan, the other five countries have been a part of the Shanghai 5 since 1996. The cooperation was renamed to Shanghai Cooperation Organisation after Uzbekistan joined the organisation in 2001.

**New members:** India and Pakistan joined SCO as full members in June 2017 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

**The SCO's main goals are as follows:** strengthening mutual trust and neighbourliness among the member states; promoting their effective cooperation in politics, trade, the economy, research, technology and culture, as well as in education, energy, transport, tourism, environmental protection, and other areas; making joint efforts to maintain and ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and moving towards the establishment of a democratic, fair and rational new international political and economic order.



Sources: the hindu.

## International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO)

### **Context:**

Under the International Civil Aviation Organization's (ICAO) Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme, a five member audit team recently carried out the audit of India in areas of Personal Licensing, Airworthiness, Operations, Legislation and Organization from 6th to 16th November. The audit involved verification of response provided by DGCA against protocol questions made available by ICAO.

- As per preliminary feedback, the audit team was satisfied with the safety system put in place by the safety regulator. As per procedure laid down by ICAO, the audit team presents its report to the headquarter team and draft report is made available to the state in about 90 days.
- The state is required to provide its comment and draw its action plan on various aspects of the report and make it available to ICAO within 45 days. Thereafter the report will be finalised and made available to member states.



### **About ICAO:**

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

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) is a UN specialized agency, established by States in 1944 to manage the administration and governance of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (Chicago Convention).

#### **What it does?**

- ICAO works with the Convention's 191 Member States and industry groups to reach consensus on international civil aviation Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and policies in support of a safe, efficient, secure, economically sustainable and environmentally responsible civil aviation sector.
- These SARPs and policies are used by ICAO Member States to ensure that their local civil aviation operations and regulations conform to global norms, which in turn permits more than 100,000 daily flights in aviation's global network to operate safely and reliably in every region of the world.
- ICAO also coordinates assistance and capacity building for States in support of numerous aviation development objectives; produces global plans to coordinate multilateral strategic progress for safety and air navigation; monitors and reports on numerous air transport sector performance metrics; and audits States' civil aviation oversight capabilities in the areas of safety and security.

Sources: pib.

## International Committee of Military Medicine (ICMM)

### **Context:**

The 42nd World Congress of the International Committee of Military Medicine (ICMM) was recently organised by the Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) under the aegis of the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The event is being organised for the first time in India, and is the largest medical conference ever organised by the AFMS. Around 350-400 foreign delegates from 80 countries are attending the event.

**The theme of this 42nd World Congress** is "Military Medicine in Transition: Looking Ahead."

### **About ICMM:**

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

The ICMM is an international inter-governmental organisation created in 1921 with its secretariat at Brussels in Belgium and currently has 112 nations as members.

#### **When and why was it established?**

The ICMM was established after World War I had revealed the lack of care provided to victims and the need to strengthen cooperation between the health services of the armed forces worldwide.

**The main objective of the ICMM** is to ensure that our medical services personnel have the means to work together, using similar practices, in operations involving international cooperation. This is a long-term goal, and the ICMM can



work towards achieving this in a number of ways: by encouraging activities at which scientific and technical experience is shared, by developing contacts with the scientific community, by promoting regional events. This will enable us to pool our resources and work experience of military medicine, both in the theatre of operations and in a support role in the case of crisis situations.

Sources: pib.

## International Court of Justice (ICJ)

### **Context:**

India's nominee to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) Dalveer Bhandari has been re-elected to the fifth and the last seat of the world court after Britain withdrew its candidate from the election. This is the first time since the ICJ was established in 1945 that there will be no British judge in the ICJ. Bhandari received 183-193 votes in the General Assembly and secured all the 15 votes in the Security Council.

### **About ICJ:**

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

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is the principal judicial body of the UN. Established in 1946 to replace the Permanent Court of International Justice, the ICJ mainly operates under the statute of its predecessor, which is included in the UN Charter. The seat of Court is at the Peace Palace at The Hague (Netherlands).

**It has two primary functions:** to settle legal disputes submitted by States in accordance with established international laws, and to act as an advisory board on issues submitted to it by authorized international organizations.

#### **Members of the Court:**

The International Court of Justice is composed of 15 judges elected to nine-year terms of office by the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council. These organs vote simultaneously but separately. In order to be elected, a candidate must receive an absolute majority of the votes in both bodies. In order to ensure a measure of continuity, one third of the Court is elected every three years. Judges are eligible for re-election.

#### **Who nominates the candidates?**

Every state government, party to the Charter, designates a group who propose candidates for the office of ICJ judges. This group includes four members/jurists of the Permanent Court of Arbitration (machinery which enables arbitral tribunals to be set up as desired and facilitates their work) also picked by the State. Countries not part of the statute follow the same procedure where a group nominates the candidates.

Each group is limited to nominate four candidates, two of whom could be of their nationality. Within a fixed duration set by the Secretary-General, the names of the candidates have to be sent to him/her.

#### **What are the qualifications of ICJ judges?**

- A judge should have a high moral character.
- A judge should fit to the qualifications of appointment of highest judicial officers as prescribed by their respective states or
- A judge should be a juriconsult of recognized competence in international law.

#### **The 15 judges of the Court are distributed as per the regions:**

- Three from Africa.
- Two from Latin America and Caribbean.
- Three from Asia.
- Five from Western Europe and other states.
- Two from Eastern Europe.

#### **Independence of the Judges:**

Once elected, a Member of the Court is a delegate neither of the government of his own country nor of that of any other State. Unlike most other organs of international organizations, the Court is not composed of representatives of governments. Members of the Court are independent judges whose first task, before taking up their duties, is to make a solemn declaration in open court that they will exercise their powers impartially and conscientiously.

In order to guarantee his or her independence, no Member of the Court can be dismissed unless, in the unanimous opinion of the other Members, he/she no longer fulfills the required conditions. This has in fact never happened.

Sources: the hindu.

## BRICS bank

**Context:** The Shanghai-based BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) has approved two infrastructure and sustainable development projects in India and Russia with loans of \$400 million. The loans will be used to rehabilitate the **Indira Gandhi canal system in India** and to build a toll transport corridor connecting Ufa city centre to the M-5 federal highway in Russia.



### About NDB:

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

- The New Development Bank was agreed to by BRICS leaders at the 5th BRICS summit held in Durban, South Africa in 2013.
- The bank is set up to foster greater financial and development cooperation among the five emerging markets.
- The bank will be headquartered in Shanghai, China.
- Voting: Unlike the World Bank, which assigns votes based on capital share, in the New Development Bank each participant country will be assigned one vote, and none of the countries will have veto power.

### What it does?

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

Sources: ET.

## European Bank for Reconstruction & Development

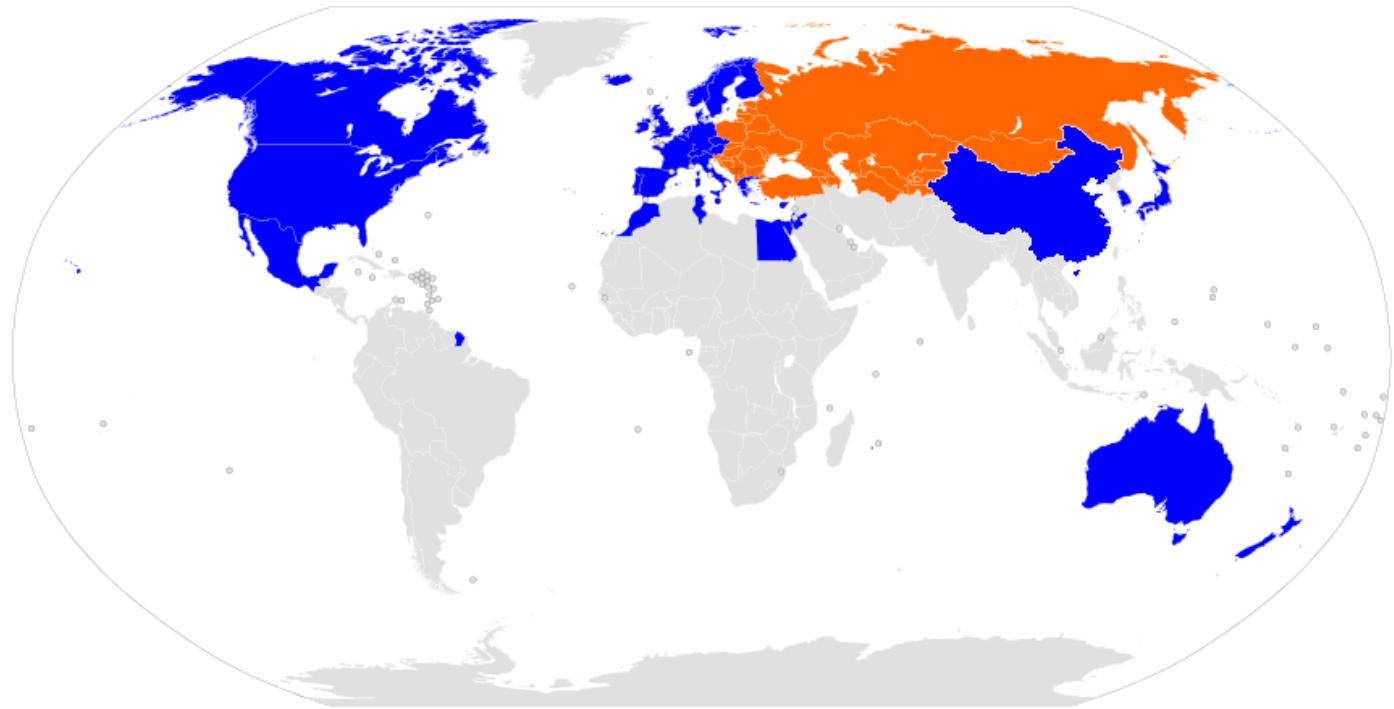
### **Context:**

The Union Cabinet has approved India's Membership for European Bank for Reconstruction & Development (EBRD). Necessary steps will be initiated by the Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Finance to acquire the membership of the EBRD.

### **How will this membership help India?**

- Membership of EBRD would enhance India's international profile and promote its economic interests. It will also give access to EBRD's Countries of Operation and sector knowledge.
- India's investment opportunities would get a boost. It would increase the scope of cooperation between India and EBRD through co-financing opportunities in manufacturing, services, Information Technology, and Energy.
- EBRD's core operations pertain to private sector development in their countries of operation. The membership would help India leverage the technical assistance and sectoral knowledge of the bank for the benefit of development of private sector.
- This would contribute to an improved investment climate in the country. The membership of EBRD would enhance the competitive strength of the Indian firms, and provide an enhanced access to international markets in terms of business opportunities, procurement activities, consultancy assignments etc.
- This would open up new vistas for Indian professionals on the one hand, and give a fillip to Indian exports on the other. Increased economic activities would have the employment generating potential. It would also enable Indian nationals to get the employment opportunity in the Bank.

### **About EBRD:**



### **What is the EBRD?**

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

### **What is the EBRD's mandate?**

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

### **What support does the EBRD provide in the countries where it works?**

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

**Who owns the EBRD?**

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

**How is the EBRD governed?**

The powers of the EBRD are vested in the Board of Governors to which each member appoints a governor, generally the minister of finance. The Board of Governors delegates most powers to the Board of Directors, which is responsible for the EBRD's strategic direction. The President is elected by the Board of Governors and is the legal representative of the EBRD. Under the guidance of the Board of Directors, the President manages the EBRD's work.

Sources: pib.

## International Geological Congress

**Context:**

A high level delegation of the International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) recently visited India to discuss the preparatory aspects of the 36th International Geological Congress (IGC) to be held in Delhi, India in the year 2020.

**Background:**

Described as the Olympics of Geosciences, the IGCs are held quadrennially under the aegis of the IUGS through a process of global bidding. India won the bid in 2012 at Brisbane, Australia to host the Congress in 2020. The win is a remarkable achievement as the event makes a come back to the Indian soil after nearly 6 decades much to the excitement of the entire geoscientific community.

The event is being jointly funded by the Ministry of Mines and Ministry of Earth Sciences with the active support of the Indian National Science Academy (INSA), and the Science Academies of the other neighbouring co-host countries, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

**About the International Geological Congress (IGC):****What is it?**

International Geological Congress (IGC) is the prestigious global platform for advancement of Earth Science. The first session of IGC assembled in 1878 in France with an aim to provide the global geological community with an opportunity to create an organizational frame work for meeting at regular intervals.

**What is it for?**

It envisaged a spirit of fraternal cooperation that transcends boundaries, languages and has the ability to bring together the geo-scientific community across the continents and oceans.

**Management:**

Founded as a non-profit scientific and educational organization in 1878, IGC came under the aegis of International Union of Geological Sciences (IUGS) in 1961. Since then the meetings of IGC are held in collaboration and under scientific sponsorship of IUGS.

**Previous congresses:**

Since the inception of IGC, 33 Congresses have been hosted by 24 countries throughout the world at 3- to 5-year intervals. The 34th Session was held at Brisbane, Australia during August 2012 and the 35th IGC is scheduled to be held at Capetown, South Africa in 2016.

**Facts for Prelims- Key facts on IUGS:**

- The IUGS was founded in 1961 and is a Scientific Union member of the International Council for Science (ICSU), which it recognizes as the coordinating body for the international organization of science.
- Currently geologists from 121 countries (and regions) are represented in IUGS through 121 Adhering Organization. It is an international non-governmental organization devoted to international cooperation in the field of geology.
- IUGS is a joint partner with UNESCO for the International Geoscience Programme (IGCP) and they also participate in the Global Network of National Geoparks (GGN).

Sources: pib.

## G 20 Sherpa

**Context:**

Shri Shaktikanta Das, Former Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, has been appointed as India's G 20 Sherpa till December 31, 2018 for the Development Track of the G20.

**About Sherpa:**
**Who is a Sherpa?**

A Sherpa is a personal representative of the leader of a member country at an international Summit meeting such as the G8, G20 or the Nuclear Security Summit. The term is derived from the Nepalese Sherpa people, who serve as guides for mountaineers in the Himalayas.

**Appointment:**

Sherpas are career diplomats or senior government officials appointed by the leaders of their countries. There is only one Sherpa per Summit for each member country; he/she is assisted by several sous Sherpas.

**What they do?**

The Sherpa engages in planning, negotiation and implementation tasks through the Summit. They coordinate the agenda, seek consensus at the highest political levels, and participate in a series of pre-Summit consultations to help negotiate their leaders' positions.

**Sherpas at G20 summit:**

There are two tracks in G 20- Finance Track and Development Track. Finance Track is managed by the Secretary (Economic Affairs) as India's Deputy to G 20 and the Development Track is coordinated by the Sherpa. The Department of Economic Affairs will provide necessary support to the Sherpa.

Sources: pib.

## International Maritime Organization

**Context:**

Georgia's Permanent Representative to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has been elected as the Vice President of the IMO Assembly. Tamar Beruchashvili, who also is Georgia's Ambassador to the United Kingdom, was elected to the role at the recently held Assembly's 30th session.

**About IMO:**

The International Maritime Organization – is the United Nations specialized agency with responsibility for the safety and security of shipping and the prevention of marine pollution by ships.



- It has 171 Member States and three Associate Members.
- The IMO's primary purpose is to develop and maintain a comprehensive regulatory framework for shipping and its remit today includes safety, environmental concerns, legal matters, technical co-operation, maritime security and the efficiency of shipping.
- IMO is governed by an assembly of members and is financially administered by a council of members elected from the assembly.
- The IMO's structure comprises the Assembly, the Council, the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee, and the secretariat, headed by a Secretary-General.

**IMO council:**

The IMO Council acts as the IMO's Governing Body. It has a crucial role to play in deciding various matters in relation to the global shipping industry, including its work programme strategy and budget.

- Members of the Council consist of 40 member states, elected by its Assembly including 10 members in category A with the largest interest in providing international shipping services; 10 members in category B with the largest interest in international seaborne trade and 20 members in category C with special interests in maritime transport or navigation.
- India has been one of the earliest members of the IMO, having ratified its Convention and joined it as a member-state in the year 1959.

Sources: the hindu.

**GS PAPER - III**

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

### India's rank rises to 100 in World Bank's Doing Business Report, 2018

The World Bank today released the Doing Business (DB) Report, 2018. The Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) is pleased to announce that India ranks 100 among 190 countries assessed by the Doing Business Team.

India has leapt 30 ranks over its rank of 130 in the Doing Business Report 2017.

#### Key facts about DB Report:

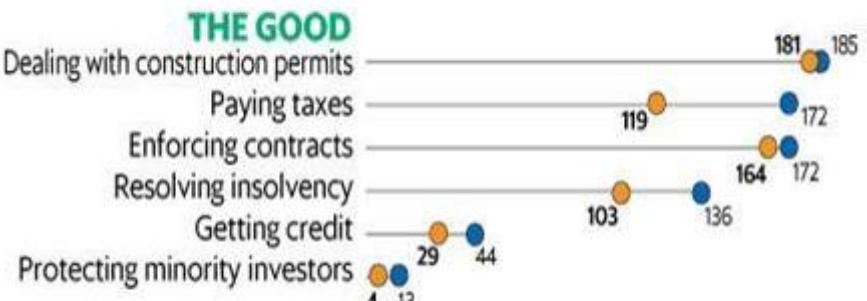
- The DB Report is an assessment of 190 economies and covers 10 indicators which span the lifecycle of a business.
- India has improved its rank in 6 out of 10 indicators and has moved closer to international best practices.
- This edition of the report acknowledges India as a top improver, with an improvement of 30 ranks compared to last year's report, the highest jump in rank of any country in the DB Report, 2018.

#### Reason for improvement:

- The credit for this significant improvement is credited to the mantra of "Reform, Perform, Transform"
- A strong leadership has provided the political will to carry out comprehensive and complex reforms, supported by a bureaucracy committed to perform.
- An extensive exercise is also undertaken to increase awareness among users about reforms to ensure extensive use of newly created systems.
- Historic jump in 'Ease of Doing Business' rankings is the outcome of the all-round & multi-sectoral reform push of Team India

Source: PIB

## HOW INDIA DID IT



Source: World Bank

### Crypto currencies now come under SEBI lens

The rising popularity of crypto currencies and the increasing number of entities looking at raising funds through Initial Coin Offerings (ICO) has caught the attention of the capital market regulator.

- The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) is mulling whether an ICO can be regulated under the existing legal framework or certain amendments would be required.
- Crypto currencies like **bitcoin, ethereum** and such offerings have been under government radar for long and discussions have been held between various bodies, including SEBI and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), on the possible ways in which this segment can be regulated.
- The central bank is of the view that these instruments are securities and so SEBI should be the regulating body.



- Bitcoins are neither ‘commodities derivatives’ nor ‘securities’ under Securities Contracts (Regulation) Act, 1956.

### Initial Coin Offerings (ICO)

- An ICO, like an equity initial public offer (IPO), is an issuance of digital tokens that can be converted into cryptocurrencies and are mostly used to raise funds by start-up firms dealing in block chain technology and virtual currencies like bitcoins and ethereum.
- Unlike an IPO, which is governed by SEBI regulations, there is no regulatory body for ICOs in India.

### Concerns related to ICOs

China recently banned such offerings after its central bank said that ICOs are “illegal public finance” mechanism used for issue of securities and money laundering.

### Players in Bitcoin

Start-ups like Zebpay, Unocoin, Coinsecure, Searchtrade, Belfrics and Bitxoxo are some of the well-known players in the bitcoin and blockchain segment in India.

### Bitcoin

- Bitcoin is a worldwide crypto currency and digital payment system called the first decentralized digital currency, as the system works without a central repository or single administrator.
- The system is peer-to-peer, and transactions take place between users directly, without an intermediary.
- These transactions are verified by network nodes and recorded in a public distributed ledger called a blockchain.

Source: Hindu

## **EESL launches \$454 million ‘Creating and Sustaining Markets for Energy Efficiency’ project in partnership with the GEF**

### Background:

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

### Funding:

Project will receive a composite funding of \$454 million comprised of the GEF grant of \$20 million and co-financing of \$434 million in the form of loans and equity, including a \$200 million loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB). EESL further proposes Energy Efficiency Revolving Fund (EERF) for sustainable funding mechanism of energy efficiency projects in the country.

### Initiatives:

- New technologies of super-efficient ceiling fans, tri-generation technologies & smart grid-applications will be financed for proof testing
- Energy efficiency programmes like street lighting, domestic lighting, five-star rated ceiling fans and agricultural pumps will be undertaken.
- EESL has partnered with UN Environment’s District Energy in Cities Initiative, which has already identified \$600 million of projects across five cities in India.

### Significance:

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

Source: pib

## Composition scheme

**Context:**

The advisory group set up to suggest changes to the GST Act recently deliberated on how to expand the scope of the composition scheme as well as rationalise the reverse charge mechanism process.



- Tax would be paid **not less than 1%**
- Tax would **not be charged** and collected from Customer
- Mr. Y shall not be entitled to claim any input tax credit.

**About the Composition scheme:**
**What is it?**

The composition scheme is an alternative method of levy of tax designed for small taxpayers whose turnover is up to Rs 1 crore — Rs 50 lakh in the case of eight north-eastern states and the hilly state of Himachal Pradesh.

**The objective** behind it is to bring simplicity and reduce the compliance cost for small taxpayers.

**Benefits:**

While a regular taxpayer has to pay taxes on a monthly basis, a composition supplier is required to file only one return and pay taxes on a quarterly basis. Also, a composition taxpayer is not required to keep detailed records that a normal taxpayer is supposed to maintain.

**Key facts:**

- The scheme is optional under which manufacturers other than those of ice cream, pan masala and tobacco products have to pay a 2% tax on their annual turnover. The tax rate is 5% for restaurant services and 1% for traders.
- As per the Central GST Act, businesses are eligible to opt for the composition scheme if a person is not engaged in any inter-state outward supplies of goods and not into making any supply of goods through an electronic commerce operator who is required to collect tax at source.

Sources: the hindu.

## Credit ratings and how are they given

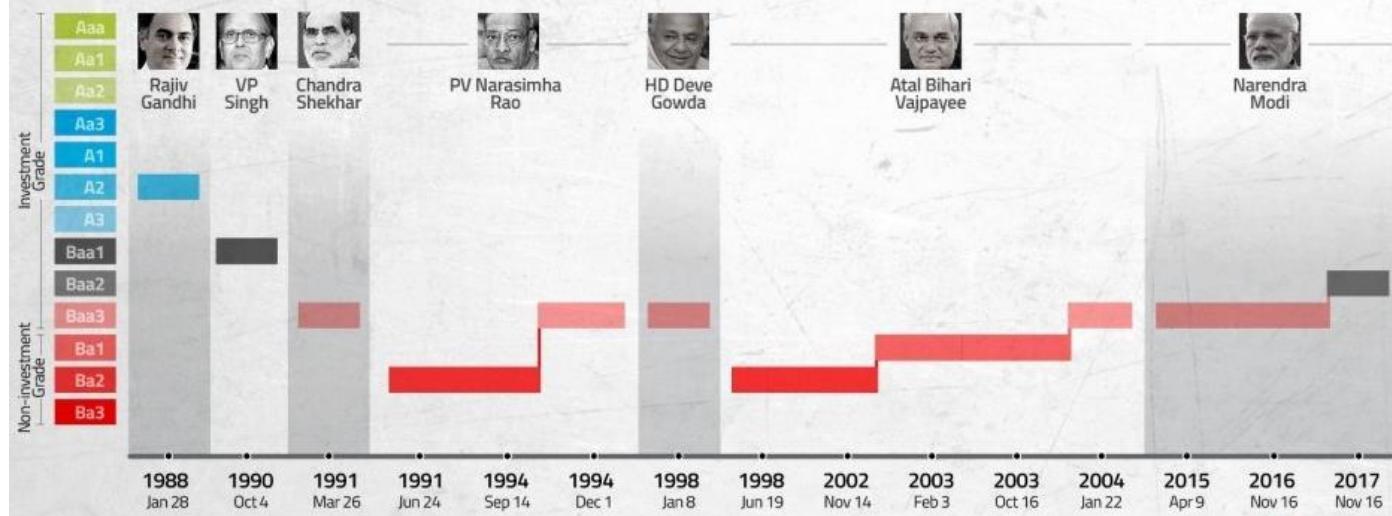
**Context:**

US-based rating agency Moody's has upgraded India's sovereign credit rating by a notch to 'Baa2' from Baa3 and changed the outlook to stable from positive. Moody's has also raised India's long-term foreign-currency bond ceiling to Baa1 from Baa2, and the long-term foreign-currency bank deposit ceiling to Baa2 from Baa3.

The rating upgrade comes after a gap of 13 years – Moody's had last upgraded India's rating to 'Baa3' in 2004. In 2015, the rating outlook was changed to 'positive' from 'stable'.

# INDIA'S MOODY SWINGS

A LOOK AT THE COUNTRY'S RATING HISTORY



### **Reasons for upgrade:**

The decision to upgrade the ratings is underpinned by Moody's expectation that continued progress on economic and institutional reforms will, over time, enhance India's high growth potential and its large and stable financing base for government debt, and will likely contribute to a gradual decline in the general government debt burden over the medium term, the rating agency said in a statement.

Also, while India's high debt burden remains a constraint on the country's credit profile, Moody's believes that the reforms put in place have reduced the risk of a sharp increase in debt, even in potential downside scenarios. Reforms such as Goods and Services Tax (GST), demonetisation, measures to fight bad loans, Aadhaar and labor market reforms etc pushed Moody's to upgrade India rating.

### **What is a credit rating?**

A credit rating is an assessment of the creditworthiness of a borrower. Individuals, corporations and governments are assigned credit ratings — whoever wants to borrow money. Individuals are given 'credit scores,' while corporations and governments receive 'credit ratings.'

### **Why do countries get credit ratings?**

National governments, not countries, are assigned credit ratings by agencies like Standard & Poor, Moody's and Fitch. Governments require ratings to borrow money. They are also given ratings on their worth as investment destinations. A country requests a credit rating agency to evaluate its economic and political environment and arrive at a rating. This is done to position itself as a destination for foreign direct investment.

### **What factors decide these ratings?**

There are several reasons behind rating a government's creditworthiness. One of these is political risk, like taxation, currency value and labour laws. Another is sovereign risk where a country's central bank can change its foreign exchange regulations. These risks are taken into account and ratings assigned accordingly.

Sources: the hindu.

## Bad bank to deal with stressed assets

**Context:**

Asian Bankers Association Chairman Daniel Wu recently said that India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is not the only way to deal with stressed borrowers and the government should look at other options, including the formation of a bad bank.

**How does a bad bank work?**

While the government has not charted out any guidelines on the structure of a bad bank, such an institution would be largely based on the principles of an asset restructuring company (ARC), which buys bad loans from the commercial banks at a discount and tries to recover the money from the defaulter by providing a systematic solution over a period of time. Since a bad bank specialises in loan recovery, it is expected to perform better than commercial banks, whose expertise lies in lending.

**Why a bad bank is likely to succeed in India?**

- A single government entity will be more competent to take decisions rather than 28 individual PSBs.
- Capacity building for a complex workout can be better handled by the government which has regulatory control and has management skillsets in public sector enterprises.
- Foreign investors with both risk capital and risk appetite would be more in a government-led initiative, knowing that regulatory risks would stand considerably mitigated in various stages of resolution, including take outs.

**Things to consider while creating a bad bank:**

- The first is that it should be based on a criterion as any such exercise creates a moral hazard which should be eschewed.
- Second, there have to be strict performance criteria for the banks selling such assets. This can be through a multi-stage approach where these assets are bought piecemeal by the bad bank based on how future incremental assets perform.
- Third, the criteria for buying assets should be transparent and a pecking order must be drawn up where probably the restructured assets get priority.
- Last, a competitive approach should prevail among the banks so that they work hard to qualify for the sale of bad assets to the bad bank. This, in fact, will ensure better governance standards too.

Sources: ET.

## GES 2017 in Hyderabad

**Context:**

The 8th edition of the Global Entrepreneurship summit (GES) was recently held in Hyderabad. It was hosted by NITI Aayog in partnership with US government. The summit was attended by 1,500 entrepreneurs from 170 countries.

**GES 2017 Theme:**

"Women First, Prosperity for All".

**About the summit:**

The summit organised annually since 2010, is the preeminent annual entrepreneurship gathering that convenes over one thousand emerging entrepreneurs, investors, and supporters from around the world.

This year marks the first GES held in South Asia, and the event underscores the broad and enduring partnership with India. The summit will focus on four key industry sectors: Energy and Infrastructure, Healthcare and Life Sciences, Financial Technology and Digital Economy, and Media and Entertainment.



**GLOBAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUMMIT  
INDIA 2017**

Sources: the hindu.

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

## Avoidance of Double Taxation

### Context:

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for entering into an Agreement between India and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) of China for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion with respect to taxes on income.

### Significance of this agreement:

The Agreement will stimulate flow of investment, technology and personnel from India to HKSAR & vice versa, prevent double taxation and provide for exchange of information between the two Contracting Parties. It will improve transparency in tax matters and will help curb tax evasion and tax avoidance.

### About Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement:

#### What is it?

A DTAA is a tax treaty signed between two or more countries. Its key objective is that taxpayers in these countries can avoid being taxed twice for the same income. A DTAA applies in cases where a tax-payer resides in one country and earns income in another. India has DTAAAs with more than eighty countries, of which comprehensive agreements include those with Australia, Canada, Germany, Mauritius, Singapore, UAE, the UK and US.

#### Why is it important?

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

#### Legal provisions in this regard:

In so far as India is concerned, the Central Government is authorized under Section 90 of the Income Tax Act, 1961 to enter into an Agreement with a foreign country or specified territory for avoidance of double taxation of income, for exchange of information for the prevention of evasion or avoidance of income-tax chargeable under the Income-tax Act, 1961.

#### Facts for Prelims:

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

Sources: pib.

## Reservation in private sector

### Context:

As per the Industry body Assocham, at a time when the Indian economy is seeking positive triggers for growth revival, any political narrative on reservation in the private sector would bring in a big blow and will hit India's investment climate.

### Background:

These comments come amid several political leaders advocating job reservations for SC/ST in the private sector. The Lok Janshakti Party, led by Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan, recently demanded job reservations in private firms. Similar demands have been made in the



past by other political outfits as well. Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had made a case last year for extending the reservation policy to the private sector.

#### **Way ahead:**

There is already a dearth of private sector investment with capacity utilisation in several sectors not going beyond 72-75%. Therefore, political parties should focus on creating an environment that helps such an economic pace that millions of jobs are created both in the public and private sectors, and should avoid sending wrong signals to the global and domestic investors.

#### **Why reservation in private sector is not a good move?**

#### **Impacts innovation and performance:**

The private sector is known for its innovation and performance and bringing the quota system in this sector would impede upon the progress of nation which is reliant on this sector for generation of new ideas and building a competitive advantage.

#### **In conflict with international standards:**

Reservation of such kind will create a workforce incapable of meeting international standards resulting in loss in competitiveness of industries and promotion inclusion at the cost of growth.

#### **Existing gaps:**

While there is reservation in government jobs, employment by government has fallen from 18.2 million in 2006 to 17.6 million in 2012. In contrast, private sector jobs have increased more than a third, from 8.77 million to 11.9 million over the period. While there has been 27% reservation for OBCs in government jobs since 1992, only around 12% got jobs. Hence, it is first necessary to fill this gap.

Sources: ET.

## Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS)

#### **Context:**

The government has doubled the incentive for exporters of garments and made-ups under the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS) to support declining textile exports. Incentive rates for the two sectors have been enhanced to 4% of value of exports from 2% with effect from November 1 to June 30, 2018.

#### **Scrips:**

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

#### **About MEIS:**

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

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

**Objective of Merchandise Exports** from India Scheme (MEIS) as per Indian Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20 (FTP 2015-20) is to offset infrastructural inefficiencies and associated costs involved in export of goods/products, which are produced/manufactured in India, especially those having high export intensity, employment potential and thereby enhancing India's export competitiveness.

Sources: the hindu.

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

### RBI release new outsourcing norms for NBFCs

RBI has issued fresh directions on managing risks and code of conduct in outsourcing of financial services by NBFCs. These norms have to be complied with in the next two months.

#### **New directions are as follows:**

- Non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) cannot outsource core management functions like internal audit, strategic and compliance functions for know your customer (KYC) norms, sanction of loans and management of investment portfolio.
- Access to customer information by staff of the service provider shall be on 'need to know' basis i.e., limited to those areas where the information is required in order to perform the outsourced function.

- NBFCs also have been asked to constitute a grievance redressal machinery with the name and contact details of the redressal officer displayed prominently at their branches. It shall be clearly indicated that NBFCs' grievance redressal machinery will also deal with the issue relating to services provided by the outsourced agency.
- NBFCs would also be responsible for making currency transaction reports and suspicious transactions reports to the financial intelligence unit for activities carried out by the service providers.

#### **NBFCs:**

##### **What are they?**

Non-bank financial companies (NBFCs) are financial institutions that provide banking services without meeting the legal definition of a bank, i.e. one that does not hold a banking license.

##### **What they can't do?**

- These institutions typically are restricted from taking deposits from the public depending on the jurisdiction. Nonetheless, operations of these institutions are often still covered under a country's banking regulations.
- NBFC cannot accept demand deposits.
- NBFCs do not form part of the payment and settlement system and cannot issue cheques drawn on itself.
- Deposit insurance facility of Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation is not available to depositors of NBFCs, unlike in case of banks.

##### **Who supervises them?**

The Reserve Bank of India is entrusted with the responsibility of regulating and supervising the Non-Banking Financial Companies by virtue of powers vested under Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.

Sources: ET.

### **Not to pursue Islamic banking: RBI**

The Reserve Bank of India has decided not to pursue a proposal for introduction of Islamic banking in the country. The central bank said the decision was taken after considering "the wider and equal opportunities" available to all citizens to access banking and financial services.

#### **About Islamic banking:**

**What is it?** Islamic or Sharia banking is a finance system based on the principles of not charging interest, which is prohibited under Islam.

#### **What exactly is Sharia/Islamic banking?**

Sharia banking refers to banking activity that conforms to Islamic law or Sharia. The fundamental principle of Islamic finance is the rejection of usury, along with the requirement that there must be no engagement in immoral businesses. Usury is seen as the levying of unreasonably high interest rates while lending money. Interest is Riba, which in its current interpretation, covers all interest — not just excessive interest. Under Islamic law, a Muslim is prohibited from both paying and accepting interest. Thus, Sharia banking means money can only be parked in a bank without interest — and this money cannot be used for speculative trading, gambling, or trading in prohibited commodities such as alcohol or pork.

#### **Need for Islamic Banking:**

Certain faiths prohibit the use of financial instruments that pay interest. The non-availability of interest-free banking products results in some Indians, including those in the economically disadvantaged strata of society, not being able to access banking products and services due to reasons of faith. This non-availability also denies the country access to substantial sources of savings from other countries in the region.

### **NBFC comprises following business organizations**



Therefore, introduction of Sharia or Islamic banking could bring more Muslims into the banking system, and help in the inflow of institutional wealth from entities operating in the Islamic world to the Indian economy. Sharia banking is not restricted to Muslims alone, and other communities who are interested in other forms of banking like ethical banking could be allowed to participate.

### **How does India benefit from Islamic banking?**

Introduction of Islamic Banking was mooted by Raghuram Rajan in his report on the Financial Sector in the year 2008 where he recommended that interest-free banking techniques should be operated on a larger scale so as to give access to those who are unable to access banking services, including those belong to economically disadvantaged section of the society.

- There are many advantages in introducing an Islamic window in the banks. For instance, majority of companies in the Stock Exchange are shariat compliant (this number is more than the shariat compliant companies on the Stock Exchange in Malaysia), thus this would result in attracting huge funds in the domestic market alone.
- An Islamic Banking window will encourage many from the Muslim community to come forward and invest in projects thereby mobilising huge amount of capital which they may not be willing to put in the banks. This also means that India will be able to attract huge investments from West Asia and from those who invest only in shariat compliant projects.

### **Sharia banking globally:**

A 2015 World Bank report estimated Sharia-compliant financial assets to be in the range of US \$ 2 trillion, covering bank and non-bank financial institutions, capital markets, money markets and insurance. The Islamic Finance Industry has been expanding at a rate of 10%-12% annually. According to the World Bank, in many Muslim countries, Islamic banking assets have been growing faster than conventional banking assets. There has also been a surge of interest in Islamic finance in non-Muslim countries such as the UK, Luxembourg, South Africa, and Hong Kong.

Sources: the hindu.

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

### **Part-time jobs could fix India's farming crisis: Analysts**

As farmers in India struggle with dwindling incomes and soaring costs, with huge debts triggering a wave of suicides, experts said one solution may be to only work part-time on the land.

### **Why farming should be taken up as a part- time job?**

- Over the past decade, tens of thousands of farmers have killed themselves across India, with debt or bankruptcy cited as the main reason.
- Problems usually stem from failed monsoon rains or low prices due to a supply glut in produce like lentils and cereals.
- About 60% of people in India make their living from the land, but earnings from agriculture have plunged to one-third of a farm family's income from two-thirds in the 1980s.
- Employment in agriculture shrank by 26 million jobs between 2011 and 2015, according to McKinsey Global Institute, the research arm of the consulting firm.
- Seven out of ten rural households in India are landless or own plots of less than 1 hectare (2.5 acres).

### **Way ahead:**

There is a strong case for part-time farming: when opportunities arise elsewhere, they must go there. And when there are new opportunities on the farm, they can return there. Common alternative sources of income are the government's rural jobs scheme, which is often road-building work, and earning daily wages in cities, such as on construction sites.

Sources: ET.

## World Fisheries Day

**Context:**

Every year 21st November is celebrated all over the world as World Fisheries Day.

**About the World Fisheries Day:**
**Background:**

On 21st November 1997, the working fishermen and women representing World Forum of Fish Harvesters & Fish Workers from 18 countries met at New Delhi and established the World Fisheries Forum (WFF) advocating for a global mandate of sustainable fishing practices and policies. To commemorate this occasion, every year 21st November is celebrated all over the world as World Fisheries Day.


**Significance of this day:**

The World Fisheries Day helps in highlighting the critical importance to human lives, of water and the lives it sustains, both in and out of water. Water forms a continuum, whether contained in rivers, lakes, and ocean. Fish forms an important part of the diets of people around the world, particularly those that live near rivers, coasts and other water bodies. A number of traditional societies and communities are rallied around the occupation of fishing.

**Concerns:**

A majority of human settlements, whether small villages or mega cities, are situated in close proximity to water bodies. Besides the importance of water for survival and as a means of transportation, it is also an important source of fish and aquatic protein.

- But this proximity has also lead to severe ocean and coastal pollution from run-off and from domestic and industrial activities carried out near-by. This has led to the depletion of fish stocks in the immediate vicinity, requiring fishermen to fish farther and farther away from their traditional grounds.
- Besides, overfishing and mechanization has also resulted in a crisis – fish stocks are being depleted through 'factory' vessels, bottom trawling, and other means of unsustainable fishing methods.

**Way ahead:**

A recent United Nations study reported that more than two-thirds of the world's fisheries have been overfished or are fully harvested and more than one third are in a state of decline because of factors such as the loss of essential fish habitats, pollution, and global warming.

Unless we address these issues collectively, the crisis will deepen. The World Fisheries Day helps to highlight these problems, and moves towards finding solutions to the increasingly inter-connected problems we are facing, and in the longer term, to sustainable means of maintaining fish stocks.

Sources: pib.

## 2018 as International Year of Millets

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

**Significance of this move:**

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

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

**Benefits of Millets:**

- An important staple cereal crop for millions of small holder dryland farmers across sub-saharan Africa and Asia, millets offer nutrition, resilience, income and livelihood for farmers even in difficult times. They have multiple untapped uses such as food, feed, fodder, biofuels and brewing. Therefore, millets are Smart Food as they are Good for You, Good for the Farmer and Good for the Planet.
- Nutritionally superior to wheat & rice owing to their higher levels of protein with more balanced amino acid profile, crude fiber & minerals such as Iron, Zinc, and Phosphorous, millets can provide nutritional security and act as a shield against nutritional deficiency, especially among children and women.

- The anaemia (iron deficiency), B-complex vitamin deficiency, pellagra (niacin deficiency) can be effectively tackled with intake of less expensive but nutritionally rich food grains like millets.
- Millets can also help tackle health challenges such as obesity, diabetes and lifestyle problems as they are gluten free, have a low glycemic index and are high in dietary fibre and antioxidants.
- Adapted to low or no purchased inputs and to harsh environment of the semi-arid tropics, they are the backbone for dry land agriculture.
- Photo-insensitive & resilient to climate change, millets are hardy, resilient crops that have a low carbon and water footprint, can withstand high temperatures and grow on poor soils with little or no external inputs. In times of climate change they are often the last crop standing and, thus, are a good risk management strategy for resource-poor marginal farmers.

Sources: the hindu.

## Indian Forest (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017

**Context:** The government has promulgated the Indian Forest (Amendment) Ordinance, 2017 to exempt bamboo grown in non-forest areas from definition of tree, thereby dispensing with the requirement of felling/transit permit for its economic use. However, bamboo grown in the forest areas shall continue to be governed by the provisions of Indian Forest Act, 1927.

**A major objective** of the amendment is to promote cultivation of bamboo in non-forest areas to achieve twin objectives of increasing the income of farmers and also increasing the green cover of the country.

### What necessitated this move?

Bamboo, though, taxonomically a grass, was legally defined as a tree under the Indian Forest Act, 1927. Before this amendment, the felling and transit of bamboo grown on forest as well non-forest land attracted the provisions of the Indian Forest Act, 1927 (IFA, 1927). This was a major impediment for bamboo cultivation by farmers on non-forest land.

### Significance of this move:

- The amendment and the resultant change in classification of bamboo grown in non-forest areas will usher in much needed and far-reaching reforms in the bamboo sector. While on the one hand, the legal and regulatory hardships being faced by farmers and private individuals will be removed and on the other hand, it will create a viable option for cultivation in 12.6 million hectares of cultivable waste land.
- The measure will go a long way in enhancing the agricultural income of farmers and tribals, especially in North-East and Central India. The amendment will encourage farmers and other individuals to take up plantation/ block plantation of suitable bamboo species on degraded land, in addition to plantation on agricultural land and other private lands under agroforestry mission.
- Some of the other benefits of amendment include enhancing supply of raw material to the traditional craftsmen of rural India, bamboo based/ paper & pulp industries, cottage industries, furniture making units, fabric making units, incense stick making units.
- Besides promoting major bamboo applications such as wood substitutes and composites like panels, flooring, furniture and bamboo blind, it will also help industries such as those dealing with food products (bamboo shoots), constructions and housing, bamboo charcoal etc.
- The amendment will greatly aid the success of recently constituted National Bamboo Mission and is in also line with the objective of doubling the income of farmers, besides conservation and sustainable development.

### Benefits of Bamboo:

**In generating employment:** Bamboo grows abundantly in areas outside forests with an estimated growing stock of 10.20 million tonnes. About 20 million people are involved in bamboo related activities. One tonne of bamboo provides 350 man days of employment. An enabling environment for the cultivation of bamboo will help in creation of job opportunities in the country.



**Ecological benefits:** Bamboo has several ecological benefits such as soil-moisture conservation, landslide prevention and rehabilitation, conserving wildlife habitat, enhancing source of bio-mass, besides serving as a substitute for timber.

#### Way ahead:

As per the assessment of United Nation's Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), the bamboo business in the North-East Region alone has a potential of about Rs. 5000 crores in the next ten years. The amendment will therefore, help in harnessing this great potential and enhance the scope to increase the present level of market share and improve the economy of the entire country, particularly the North Eastern region.

Sources: pib.

**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.

### CCEA gives nod to Rs10,000 crore SBA for fertiliser subsidy

Govt gave ex-post facto clearance to implementation of the Special Banking Arrangement (SBA) of Rs10,000 crore for payment of outstanding claims of fertiliser companies towards fertiliser subsidy in 2016-17.

#### Key Points:

- Under the SBA, a total loan of Rs 9,969 crore for settlement of outstanding subsidy bills with SBI was raised by the government. The loan amount, along with interest liability, on the part of the government amounting to Rs 80.9 crore was paid to SBI.
- The government is making available urea and 21 grades of P&K (phosphate and potassium) fertilisers to farmers at subsidised prices through fertiliser manufacturers and importers.

#### Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA):

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

#### Functions:

- The major function of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) is to review economic trends on a continuous basis, as also the problems and prospects, with a view to evolving a consistent and integrated economic policy framework for the country.
- Matters regarding fixation of prices of agricultural products as well as reviewing progress of activities related to rural development including those concerning small and marginal farmers are in CCEA's competence.
- Price controls of industrial raw materials and products, industrial licensing policies including industrial licensing cases for establishment of Joint Sector Undertakings, reviewing performance of Public Sector Undertakings including their structural and financial restructuring are also within the purview of CCEA, as are all matters relating to disinvestment including cases of strategic sale, and pricing of Government shares in Public Sector Undertakings (except to the extent entrusted to an Empowered Group of Ministers).
- CCEA facilitates finalization of factual reports on the accomplishments of the Ministries, Agencies and Public Sector Undertakings involved in implementation of prioritized schemes or projects for evaluation by the Prime Minister. The CCEA also considers cases of increase in the firmed up cost estimates/revised cost estimates for projects etc. in respect of the business allocated to the CCEA.

Source: livemint, arthapedia

### DBT helps states save Rs 1,557 crore till November 2017

A comprehensive review of the delivery of its 461 schemes by the Centre, including NREGS, PDS, pensions and LPG across states, showed that there has been a saving of Rs 1,557 crore due to implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes.

#### Background:

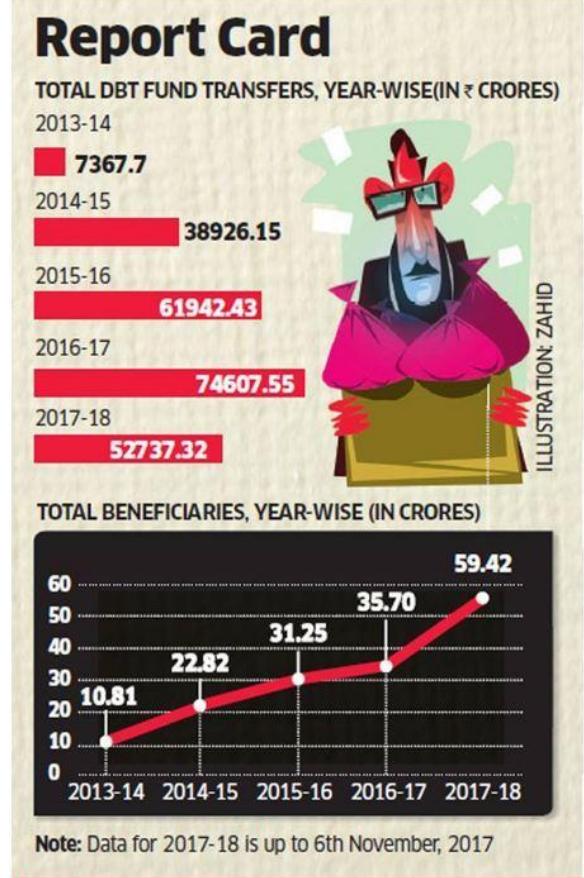
The amount transferred through DBT transactions in 2017-18 registered till November was Rs 52,737.32 crore, reaching around 59.42 crore beneficiaries. In 2016-2017, Rs 74,607.55 crore were transferred to 35.70 crore beneficiaries. This was significant growth, considering the funds transferred in 2013-2014 was only Rs 7,367 crore and number of beneficiaries was only 10.81 crore.

**What is DBT?**

The government's DBT plan involves transferring the subsidy amount directly to the beneficiaries' bank accounts. Here, the government does not have to fiddle around with differential pricing for the underprivileged. This method can effectively address the issue of leakages and go a long way in solving the mis-targeting problem.

**DBT in India:**

Launched in January 2013, DBT in 2015 was brought in to cover all central and state schemes and expanded in March 2016 to include "inkind" transfers to individual beneficiaries and a few Aadhaar-based services and smaller schemes to do with internships and training. DBT now covers major schemes that involve cash transfers such as Pahal, NREGS, pensions, scholarships, as well as in-kind transfers such as food grains and mid-day meals to children.



Sources: ET.

## National Milk Day

**Context:**

November 26 was observed as National Milk across the country Day to mark the birth anniversary of Father of the White Revolution Dr. Verghese Kurien.

**Background:**

The idea of observing National Milk Day was first mooted by Indian Dairy Association in 2014 on the lines of World Milk Day observed on June 1 under the aegis of UN Food and Agriculture Organization. The first NMD was observed on 26 November 2014 by all Indian dairy sector majors including National Dairy Development Board, Indian Dairy Association along with state level milk federations.

**About Verghese Kurien:**

- Verghese Kurien had dedicated his entire life for a cooperative movement which boosted the production of milk in India. Dr Kurien was an Indian social entrepreneur known as the 'Father of the White Revolution' for launching Operation flood — the world's largest agricultural development programme.
- Known as the 'milkman of India', Dr Kurien was the founder-Chairman of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) from 1965 to 1998, Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation Ltd (GCMMF) from 1973 to 2006 and the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA) from 1979 to 2006, which are owned and managed by farmers and run by professionals.

**Milk production in India:**

India ranks first in milk production, accounting for 18.5 % of world production, achieving an annual output of 146.3 million tonnes during 2014-15 as compared to 137.69 million tonnes during 2013-14 recording a growth of 6.26 %. Whereas, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has reported a 3.1 % increase in world milk production in 2014. The per

capita availability of milk in India has increased from 176 grams per day in 1990-91 to 322 grams per day by 2014-15. It is more than the world average of 294 grams per day during 2013.

Sources: pib.

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

## World Food India 2017

### Highlights:

- It is a three-day event, which is organised by the Food Processing Industries Ministry, will see investors, manufacturers, producers, food processors, policy makers and organisations from all over the world.
- The event aims to facilitate participation between domestic and international businesses
- This is the first time that India is hosting such an event for the food processing sector.
- Over 800 kg khichdi will be prepared live on November 4 at the World Food India event in a bid to create world record and popularise it as brand India food globally.



3 - 5 November • New Delhi

### World Food India:

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

### Significance:

- India has geared up for a revolution in the food processing sector and it was clear that the global companies were eagerly looking towards India for collaboration.
- World Food India platform will strengthen India's position as a global food factory and is a positive step towards making the country food secure.
- India is expected to attract an investment of \$10 billion in food processing sector and generate one million jobs in the next three years.

### Various schemes and programs initiated by the Government to achieve the target of Doubling of Farmers' Income by 2022:

1. Special focus on irrigation with sufficient budget, with the aim of "Per Drop More Crop".
2. Provision of quality seeds and nutrients based on soil health of each field.
3. Large investments in Warehousing and Cold Chains to prevent post-harvest crop losses.
4. Promotion of value addition through food processing.
5. Creation of a National Farm Market, removing distortions and e-platform across 585 Stations.
6. Introduction of a New Crop Insurance Scheme to mitigate risks at an affordable cost.
7. Promotion of ancillary activities like poultry, beekeeping, and fisheries.

Source: times now, pib

## Fish tourism circuit

**West Bengal** government is firming up plans to set up a fish tourism circuit to attract country's fish-loving communities. The State Fisheries Development Corporation (SFDC) is preparing the blueprint for the tourism circuit.

### About the Fish Tourism circuit:

#### What is it?

A typical tour will consist of a two days-one night package, with fish as the focal theme – be it food or sightseeing. And fish dishes to be served will comprise the traditional favourites of Bengalis as well as newly-introduced varieties in the state. The circuit will centre around the hotels run by SFDC in places like Digha, Udaypur, Henry Island, Bishnupur, Jamunadighi and Siliguri.

Sources: ET.

**Paper 3 Topic: Infrastructure: Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc.****PowerGrid completes extending grid connectivity to Leh-Ladakh region****Highlights:**

- This is the first time in the country that any 220kV voltage level substation is built at such a high altitude of over 11,500 feet.
- It is a prestigious project of Indian government to extend grid connectivity to difficult geographical areas of Leh- Ladakh Region in Jammu and Kashmir.
- Implementation of Srinagar-Leh Transmission System has been entrusted to Power Grid Corporation of India Limited.
- The commissioning of these elements will facilitate delivery of power from the Nimmo Bazgo Hydro-electric power stations in Leh/Ladakh Region, with reliability.

**POWERGRID:**

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

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

Source: pib

**INDIA SET TO BECOME AN AVIATION HUB: VICE PRESIDENT**

India will soon emerge as an aviation hub not only in terms of increased air connectivity but also in terms of Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facilities and setting up of ancillary units.

**Positive trends seen:**

- India is witnessing a high-growth trajectory and set to become the third-largest aviation market in the world in terms of passengers by 2026
- With increasing disposable incomes and a burgeoning middle class, air travel will witness further spurt in the years ahead.
- Government's Udan scheme seeks in promoting regional connectivity by serving the un-served and under-served airports.
- Connecting Tier-II cities, pilgrim towns and historic places with the wider air routes is important for boosting tourism and business travel.

Source: pib

**Coastal Berth Scheme**

The Ministry of Shipping has extended the period of the Coastal Berth scheme of the flagship Sagarmala Programme for three years, upto 31st March, 2020 and expanded its scope to cover capital dredging at Major Ports and preparation of DPR for coastal berth project, in Oct 2017.

**About the Coastal Berth Scheme:**

- **What is it?** The Coastal Berth Scheme aims to provide financial support to



ports or state governments for creation of infrastructure for movement of cargo and passenger by sea or national waterways.

- **Implementation:** The projects under the Scheme are distributed over eight states with the highest number of projects in Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh & Goa.
- **Financial assistance:** The admissible financial assistance from Central Government is 50% of the total cost of the project. The financial assistance will also be provided for the preparation of DPRs for the projects to be considered under this scheme. The balance expenditure has to be incurred by the respective Ports/ concerned State Governments (including State Maritime Boards) from their own resources.
- **Significance of the scheme:** The scheme aims to promote coastal shipping and increase its share in domestic cargo movement in India. Better infrastructure for coastal shipping will decongest rail and road network besides ensuring cost competitive and effective multi-modal transportation solution. The country has high potential to use coastal shipping for its internal cargo movement given its 7500 kms long coastline.

#### **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.

Sources: pib.

### **Postmen to collate data on homes still without electricity**

The power ministry has engaged postmen for door-to-door survey to expedite **the Saubhagya scheme** launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for complete household electrification by December 2018.

#### **Key facts:**

- India Post through its network 1.73 lakh outlets has begun collecting data on un-electrified households spread over three states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. Similar initiatives are being launched in Assam and Jharkhand.
- The data for a total 1.75 lakh villages in the five states is likely to be submitted in a month. The data is being uploaded online through a web portal and a mobile application by the postmen called 'Gram Dak Sewaks' by the postal department.
- The web portal and the application have been created and are being monitored by state-run Rural Electrification Corp.

#### **Why postmen have been chosen for this task?**

India Post is the only organisation, which has permanent link with each and every household in the country. It has arrangements in place for delivery of mails to each of about 5.94 lakh inhabited villages in the country from the nearest post offices.

The data will help the Central government in speedy assessment of project reports that will be submitted by states seeking grant under the Saubhagya Scheme.

#### **About Saubhagya Scheme:**

The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana -Saubhagya- launched in September with over Rs 16,000 crore outlay for universal household electrification, will cover a total of 300 lakh households—250 lakh households in rural areas and 50 lakh in urban areas.

- As per scheme, the states will have to submit detailed project reports to the Centre. Projects would be sanctioned based on the detailed project reports to be submitted by the states.

Sources: ET.

### **Prime Minister's Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative**

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

- The plant will power the Drass town in Kargil, which is one of the coldest places in India. Power from Biaras SHP would be sufficient to meet normal power requirement of about 1000 families, which would make them comfortable in the extreme winter season.
- The project has been developed by Kargil Renewable Energy Development Agency (KREDA) under Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council.

### About Prime Minister's Ladakh Renewable Energy Initiative:

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

The Ministry of New and Renewable Energy is implementing the project. It aims to minimize dependence on diesel in the Ladakh region and meet power requirement through local renewable sources.

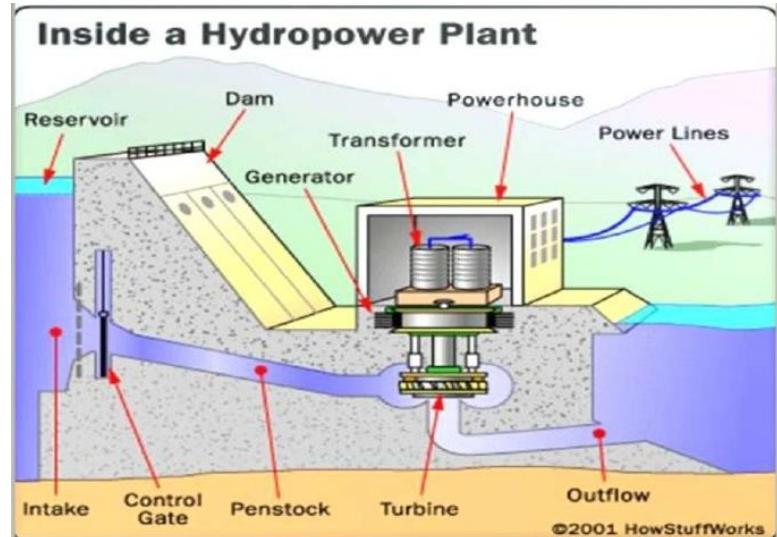
#### **Implementation:**

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

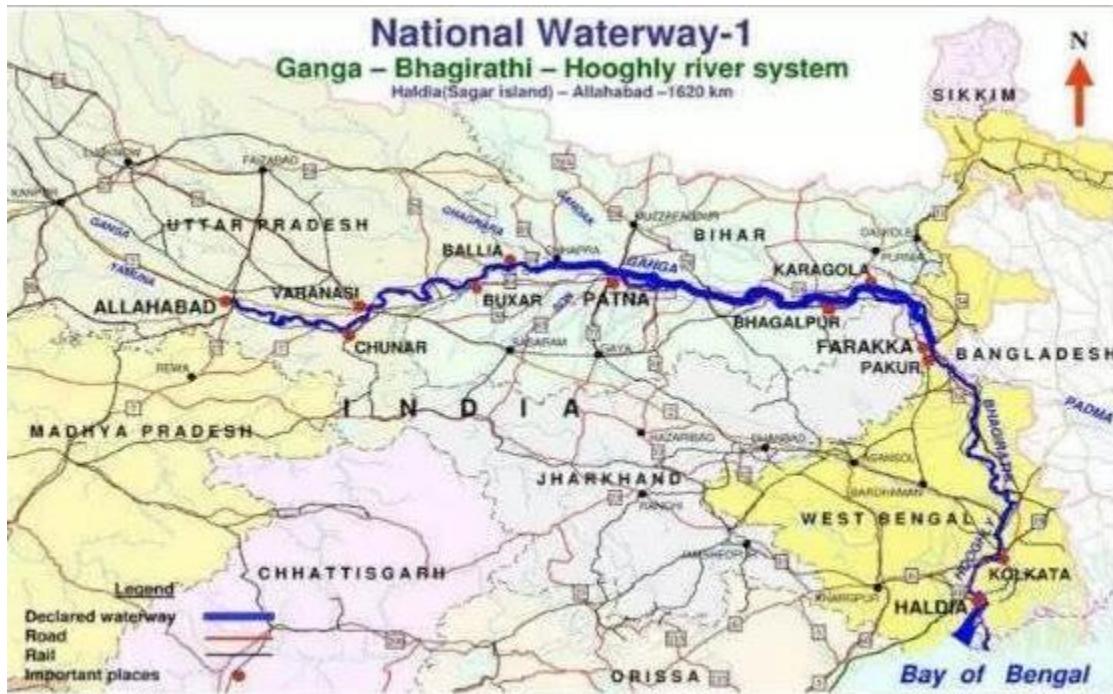
#### **Benefits:**

Such projects would be able to replace use of diesel to a great extent, at least for about 8 months in a year and reduce green house emissions in the region.

Sources: pib.



### Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP)



#### **Context:**

The Inland Waterways Authority of India (IWAI) has awarded a contract to a reputed consultant for technical support services for the Multi-Modal Terminal at Haldia and new Navigation Lock at Farakka. These projects are part of the JMVP on National Waterway -I (River Ganga), being implemented with technical and financial assistance of the World Bank at an estimated cost of Rs 5,369 crore.

The objective of this is to ensure adherence to timelines and budgeted costs of the project and full compliance with the other stated guidelines.

#### **About Jal Marg Vikas Project:**

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

The Jal Marg Vikas Project seeks to facilitate plying of vessels with capacity of 1,500-2,000 tonnes in the Haldia-Varanasi stretch of the River Ganga. The major works being taken up under JMVP are development of fairway, Multi-Modal Terminals, strengthening of river navigation system, conservancy works, modern River Information System (RIS), Digital Global Positioning System (DGPS), night navigation facilities, modern methods of channel marking etc.

**NW 1:**

Ganga-Bhagirathi-Hooghly river system from Allahabad to Haldia was declared as National Waterway No.1. The NW-1 passes through Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal and serves major cities and their industrial hinterlands.

Sources: the hindu.

## Ram Setu

**Context:**

The Supreme Court has asked the Centre to clarify if it wants to remove the Ram Setu – the chain of limestone shoals connecting Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka – or protect it. The court gave the government six weeks' time to file an affidavit on their stance.

**What is Ram Setu?**

The Ram Setu bridge – also known as the Adam's Bridge – is a 50-km stretch from Rameswaram Island in Tamil Nadu to Mannar Island in Sri Lanka. According to Indian mythology, it was built by an army of monkeys for Hindu god Ram and his warriors to cross over to Lanka to rescue Sita.

**What's the controversy now?**

The bridge between the coasts of Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka has been at the centre of controversy since the Sethusamudram shipping canal project was planned, requiring dredging in the area.

The matter reached Supreme Court with petitions challenging the government's decision to construct the Sethusamudram Canal by dredging a portion of the Ram Setu. The project is being commissioned under the marine technology training programme of ICHR dealing with under-water archeology and research scholars will be given training for this purpose.

Sources: ET.



Underwater Coral Bridge (Adam's Bridge Or Ram Setu)

## National Power Portal (NPP)

**Context:** National Power Portal (NPP) - a Centralized Platform for Collation and Dissemination of Indian Power Sector Information, has been launched by the government.

**About NPP:**

**What is it?** NPP is a centralised system for Indian Power Sector which facilitates online data capture/ input (daily, monthly, annually) from generation, transmission and distribution utilities in the country and disseminate Power Sector

Information (operational, capacity, demand, supply, consumption etc.) through various analysed reports, graphs, statistics for generation, transmission and distribution at all India, region, state level for central, state and private sector.

### Key facts:

- The NPP Dashboard has been designed and developed to disseminate analyzed information about the sector through GIS enabled navigation and visualization chart windows on capacity, generation, transmission, distribution at national, state, DISCOM, town, feeder level and scheme based funding to states.
- The system also facilitates various types of statutory reports required to be published regularly.
- The Dashboard would also act as the single point interface for all Power Sector Apps launched previously by the Ministry, like TARANG, UJALA, VIDYUT PRAVAH, GARV, URJA, MERIT.
- NPP is integrated with associated systems of Central Electricity Authority (CEA), Power Finance Corporation (PFC), Rural Electrification Corporation (REC) and other major utilities and would serve as single authentic source of power sector information to apex bodies, utilities for the purpose of analysis, planning, monitoring as well as for public users.
- The Nodal Agency for implementation of NPP and its operational control is CEA. The system has been conceptualized, designed and developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC).

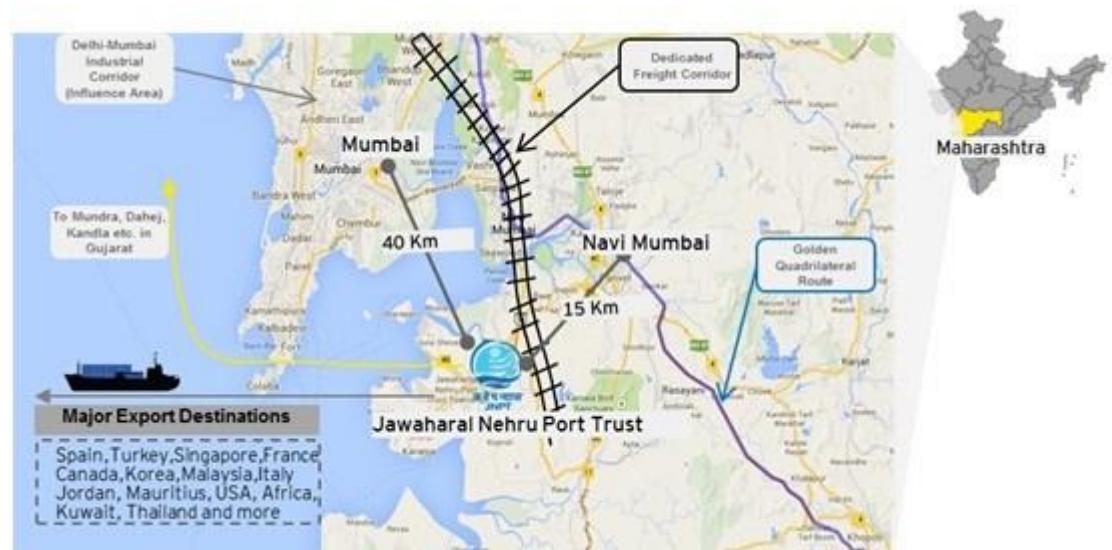
Sources: pib.

## India's first mega coastal economic zone (CEZ)

### Context:

The government has given the go-ahead for setting up India's first mega coastal economic zone (CEZ) at the Jawaharlal Nehru Port in Maharashtra as part of a plan to develop 14 such industrial clusters to spur manufacturing and generate jobs.

The plan envisages a total investment of Rs 15,000 crore in the first phase and creation of more than 1.5 lakh jobs. The idea is to attract large firms interested in serving the export markets as they would bring with them technology, capital, good management and links to the world markets. This in turn would help create an ecosystem around them in which productive small and medium firms would emerge and flourish.



### Background:

The Union Cabinet had last year approved setting up of 14 mega CEZs under the National Perspective Plan of the Sagarmala Programme, with an aim to promote development of industrial clusters around ports, encourage port-led development, reduce logistics cost and time for movement of cargo, enhance global competitiveness of India's manufacturing sector and create hubs of job creation.

### About CEZs:

#### What are they?

CEZs are spatial economic regions comprising a group of coastal districts or districts with a strong linkage to ports in that region to tap into synergies with the planned industrial corridor projects.



**Significance of CEZs:**

These zones are expected to provide business-friendly ecosystem including ease of doing business, ease of exporting and importing, swift decisions on applications for environmental clearances, and speedy water and electricity connections.

Sources: ET.

### ‘Saubhagya’ Web-Portal

The government has launched the Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana – ‘Saubhagya’ Web Portal.

**About Saubhagya Portal:****What is it?**

The Saubhagya Dashboard is a platform for monitoring household electrification progress, which would disseminate information on Household Electrification Status (State, District, village-wise), Household Progress on live basis, State-wise Target vs Achievement, Monthly Electrification Progress, etc.

**Key features of the portal:**

- Through this online platform every State would feed in the current status of progress of electrification works, hence enabling the creation of a system of accountability for the State utility/ DISCOM and help in increasing their viability.
- The portal also has a feature on village electrification camps and in line with that, DISCOMs will organize camps in villages/cluster of villages for facilitating on-the-spot filling up of application forms and to complete requisite documentation to expedite release of electricity connections to households.

**About the Saubhagya scheme:****What is it?**

Under the ‘Saubhagya’ scheme, launched in September, 2017, all willing households in rural areas and poor families in urban areas are given free electricity connections. There are around 4 Crore un-electrified households in the country and they are targeted for providing electricity connections by December 2018.

**Implementation:**

Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) is the Nodal Agency for the operationalization of the scheme throughout the country.

**The expected outcome of the Scheme is as follows:**

- Environmental upgradation by substitution of Kerosene for lighting purposes.
- Improvement education services.
- Better health services.
- Enhanced connectivity through radio, television, mobiles, etc.
- Increased economic activities and jobs.
- Improved quality of life especially for women.

Sources: pib.

### Logistics Sector granted Infrastructure Status

**Context:**

The Logistics Sector has been granted Infrastructure status.

**Definition:**

The government has defined “logistics infrastructure” to include a multimodal logistics Park comprising an Inland Container Depot (ICD) with a minimum investment of Rs50 crore and minimum area of 10 acre, a cold chain facility with a minimum investment of Rs15 crore and minimum area of 20,000 sq. ft and a warehousing facility with a minimum investment of Rs25 crore and a minimum area of 100,000 sq ft.

**Need for Infrastructure status:**

Development of logistics would give a boost to both domestic and external demand thereby encouraging manufacturing and ‘job creation’. This will in turn be instrumental in improving country’s GDP. Therefore, the need for integrated Logistics sector development has been felt for quite some time in view of the fact that the logistics cost in India is very high compared to developed countries. High logistics cost reduces the competitiveness of Indian goods both in domestic as well as export market.

**Benefits:**

Infrastructure status will enable the Logistics Sector to avail infrastructure lending at easier terms with enhanced limits, access to larger amounts of funds as External Commercial Borrowings (ECB), access to longer tenor funds from insurance companies and pension funds and be eligible to borrow from India Infrastructure Financing Company Limited (IIFCL). Infrastructure status for cold chains and warehousing facilities will provide a big boost to attracting private investment in this sector.

**Background:**

In 2017, India's logistics performance improved from 54 to 35 under World Bank Logistics Performance Index (LPI). The government expects the Indian logistics sector to grow to \$360 billion by 2032 from the current \$115 billion.

Sources: pib.

## Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY)

**Context:**

The Government of India has signed four Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) under the UDAY Scheme with the State of Nagaland and with Union Territories (UTs) of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli & Daman & Diu for operational improvements. These State/UTs have joined only for operational improvement and shall not undergo financial restructuring/issue of bonds under the scheme. With the above, UDAY club has now grown to 27 states and 4 UTs.

**Significance of these MoUs:**

- An overall net benefit of approximately Rs. 551 crores, Rs. 18 crores, Rs. 13 crores and Rs. 10 crores respectively would accrue to the State of Nagaland & UTs of Andaman & Nicobar, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu by opting to participate in UDAY, by way of cheaper funds for capex, reduction in AT&C and Transmission losses, interventions in energy efficiency, etc. during the period of turnaround.
- The MoU paves way for improving operational efficiency of the Electricity Departments/DISCOM of the State/Union Territory. Through compulsory distribution transformer metering, consumer indexing & GIS mapping of losses, upgrade/change transformers, meters etc., smart metering of high-end consumers, feeder audit etc. AT&C losses and transmission losses would be brought down, besides eliminating the gap between cost of supply of power and realisation.
- While efforts will be made by the States/UTs to improve their operational efficiency, and thereby reduce the cost of supply of power, the Central Government would also provide incentives to the State/UTs for improving power infrastructure and for further lowering the cost of power.

**About UDAY:**

### Scheme objectives

Ministry of Power, GoI launched Ujwal DISCOM Assurance Yojana (UDAY) which was approved by Union Cabinet on 5th November, 2015.

#### The scheme envisages:

- Financial Turnaround
- Operational improvement
- Reduction of cost of generation of power
- Development of Renewable Energy
- Energy efficiency & conservation

**What is it?**

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

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

**UDAY envisages a permanent resolution** of past as well as potential future issues of the sector. The scheme seeks to achieve this through several simultaneous steps including reducing the interest burden on the discoms by allowing

the states to take over the bulk of their debt, reducing the cost of power, and increasing the operational efficiencies of the discoms by providing capital and infrastructure like coal linkages.

Sources: pib.

## Sagarmala Programme

### **Context:**

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

### **About CEMS:**

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

CEMS will provide industry-relevant skill development, equip students with employable engineering and technical skills in the port and maritime sector and contribute to the Government of India's ambitious Sagarmala programme. CEMS is being set up to meet the domestic skill requirement in ship design, manufacturing, operating and maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO).

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



### **About Sagarmala:**

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

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.

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

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

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

Sources: pib.

## SAUBHAGYA Scheme

### **Context:**

The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (SAUBHAGYA) has been launched in Manipur. A total of approximately 1.75 lakh households (1.62 lakh rural households and 0.13 lakh urban households) of Manipur are proposed to be included under the Scheme.

### **About Saubhagya Scheme:**

The scheme called Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana –“Saubhagya” was launched in September 2017 to ensure electrification of all willing households in the country in rural as well as urban areas.

### **Key facts:**

- The total outlay of the project is Rs. 16, 320 crore while the Gross Budgetary Support (GBS) is Rs. 12,320 crore.

- The States and Union Territories are required to complete the works of household electrification by the 31st of December 2018.
- The beneficiaries for free electricity connections would be identified using Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) 2011 data. However, un-electrified households not covered under the SECC data would also be provided electricity connections under the scheme on payment of Rs. 500 which shall be recovered by DISCOMs in 10 instalments through electricity bill.
- The Rural Electrification Corporation Limited (REC) will remain the nodal agency for the operationalisation of the scheme throughout the country.

The expected outcome of the Scheme is as follows:

- Environmental upgradation by substitution of Kerosene for lighting purposes.
- Improvement education services.
- Better health services.
- Enhanced connectivity through radio, television, mobiles, etc.
- Increased economic activities and jobs.
- Improved quality of life especially for women.

Sources: pib.



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

### Carnivorous plants use CO<sub>2</sub> to lure prey

Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Gardens and Research Institute here have come up with evidence that some carnivorous plants use carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) to attract insects and ants to their prey traps.

- Carnivorous plants have been known to employ a variety of techniques like nectar, smell, colour and ultraviolet fluorescence to lure and capture prey.
- The Indian pitcher plant (*Nepenthes khasiana*) uses the gas, both to attract prey and to aid the digestive process. The open *Nepenthes* pitchers were found to emit CO<sub>2</sub> constantly. CO<sub>2</sub> inside the pitchers was produced by the respiration of tissues within the cavity.
- CO<sub>2</sub> is found to trigger the release of antifungal compounds into the pitcher fluid, preventing infections from incoming prey. It might also act as a tranquilliser for the trapped prey
- Unopened pitchers of the plant are carbon dioxide-enriched, with a gas concentration of 2,500 to 5,000 ppm, approximately 10 times that in the earth's atmosphere.
- Nepenthes* pitchers have the potential to be used as natural models mimicking an anticipated elevated CO<sub>2</sub> scenario on earth.



Source: the hindu

### Holy sites 'may offer clues to antibiotic resistance'

Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR) Study Report says Mass-bathing in the Ganga during pilgrimages may be contributing to anti-microbial resistance.

Travel can be pointed to as one of the reasons for the rise of antibiotic resistance. How large gatherings of people could become hotspots for the spread of the genes that cause resistance.

Context:

- Antibiotic resistance in bacteria is controlled by naturally occurring genes. These genes are found on plasmids, small rings of DNA that are separate from chromosomes.
- Plasmids can move easily between bacteria, allowing them to acquire traits, such as antibiotic resistance, very quickly.
- Many people have some organisms in their gut that contain these genes. Generally, these do not affect a person until they take certain antibiotics.

Summary:

- When the amount of human waste entering the river rises, the resistant organisms in people's guts can be washed into the river in faeces.
- The faecal organisms tend not to live very long, but the plasmids that carry antibiotic resistance genes can be quickly transferred to other organisms in the river.
- This increases the probability that people will ingest bacteria with antibiotic resistant genes when they drink or bathe in the water.
- Once they are exposed, they can then carry them back to their own towns and cities in their gut – carrying antibiotic resistance genes to the wider world.

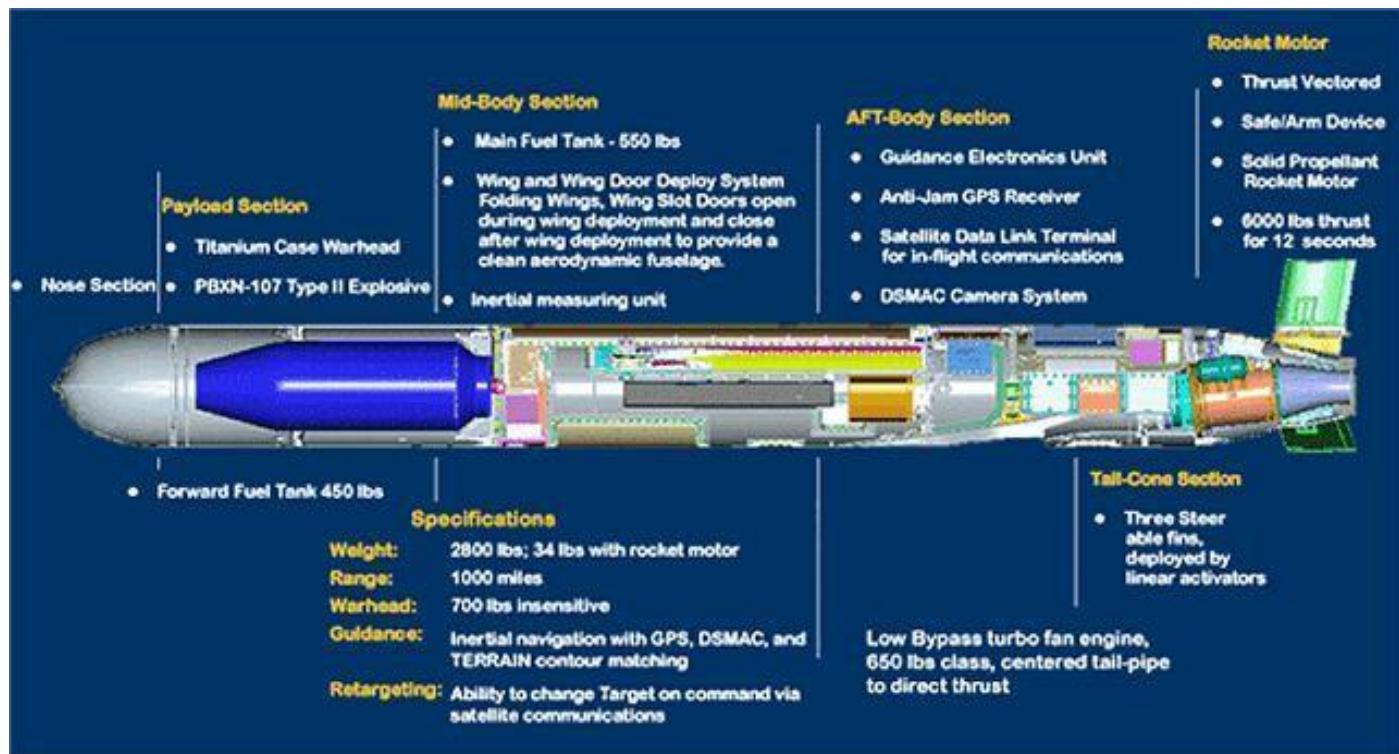
Significance:

- The spread of the antibiotic resistance genes adds to existing health concerns. This study is important in tackling the spread of antibiotic resistance. They could provide clues to the mechanisms behind its spread.
- Research helps in understanding the importance of the environment in evolution of antimicrobial resistance.

Source: the hindu, bbc.

### ‘NIRBHAY’ Sub-Sonic Cruise Missile

The successful test flight of ‘NIRBHAY’ missile was recently conducted by the DRDO. It was successfully test fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, Odisha.

About NIRBHAY missile:

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

Key features:

- Nirbhay is an all-weather low-cost long-range cruise missile with stealth and high accuracy. The missile has a range of more than 1000 km.

- The missile has the capability to loiter and cruise at 0.7 Mach, at altitudes as low as 100 m.
- Its relatively slow flight speed allows it to navigate its way precisely to the target.
- The Nirbhay cruise missile is an Indian version of the American Tomahawk.
- The missile is capable of being launched from multiple platforms on land, sea and air.

Sources: pib.

## BrahMos

### Context:

In a major milestone, the Brahmos supersonic cruise missile has been successfully test fired for the first time from the Indian Air Force's frontline Sukhoi-30 MKI combat jet against a sea-based target in the Bay of Bengal, significantly bolstering the country's aerial prowess.

### About BrahMos missile:

- Weighing 2.5 ton, BrahMos ALCM is the heaviest weapon to be deployed on India's Su-30 fighter aircraft. It has been modified by HAL to carry weapons.
- It is a world-class weapon with multi-platform, multi-mission role and is capable of being launched from land, sea and air.
- BrahMos is a joint venture between the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) of India and NPOM of Russia.
- The name Brahmos has been taken from two rivers – Brahmaputra and Moskva.
- The heavyweight missile, integrated with the long-range fighter, is seen as a force multiplier for the IAF.
- The Brahmos cruise missiles have an effective strike range of around 290-300 km.
- The land and warship versions have already been inducted by the armed forces.

# BrahMos-A

The air-launched version of BrahMos

**Will arm Su-30MKI of IAF as a standoff weapon**

**25 June 2016:**  
Successful demonstration flight carried out at HAL Nashik

**22 November 2017**

**Specially modified Su-30 MKI of IAF test fired the Brahmos A missile on a ship stationed 280 km away in the Bay of Bengal**

India became a part of elite group of nations who have capability to launch air launched cruise missile

PTI GRAPHICS Source: Wikipedia

Specifications	
Missiles per aircraft	One
Length	8550 mm
Diameter	648 mm
Weight	2550 kg
Range	up to 290 km
Velocity	up to 2.8 Mach
Ground Clearance	-1000 mm
Release Height	500 m-9000 m
Release Speed	0.55-0.8 Mach
Free fall	100-150 m
Altitude-	up to 14000 m
cruise phase	

Sources: pib.

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

### Banaganapalle mangoes get GI tag

The famous **Banaganapalle mangoes of Andhra Pradesh and Tulaipanji rice of West Bengal** are among the seven commodities that have been granted Geographical Indication (GI) this fiscal year by the Indian patent office.

The other **five products** which have received the GI tag this year include Pochampally Ikat of Telangana; Gobindobhog rice of West Bengal; Durgi stone carvings and Etikoppaka toys of Andhra Pradesh; and Chakshesang shawl of Nagaland.



#### About GI tag:

- **What is it?** A GI is primarily an agricultural, natural or a manufactured product (handicrafts and industrial goods) originating from a definite geographical territory.
- **Significance of a GI tag:** Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness, which is essentially attributable to the place of its origin.
- **Security:** Once the GI protection is granted, no other producer can misuse the name to market similar products. It also provides comfort to customers about the authenticity of that product.
- **Examples:** Darjeeling tea, Tirupati laddu, Kangra paintings, Nagpur orange and Kashmir pashmina are among the registered GIs in India.

Sources: the hindu.

### Proxima Centauri may host planetary system

Scientists have detected dust belts around Proxima Centauri, a finding that indicates the presence of an elaborate planetary system hosted by the closest star to the solar system.

#### Key facts:

- These new observations were made by the Atacama Large Millimeter Array (ALMA) observatory in Chile. The new ALMA observations reveal emission from clouds of cold cosmic dust surrounding the star.
- ALMA observatory revealed the glow coming from cold dust in a region between one to four times as far from Proxima Centauri as the Earth is from the Sun.
- The data also hints at the presence of an even cooler outer dust belt and may indicate the presence of a system of planets. These structures are similar to the much larger belts in the solar system and are also expected to be made from particles of rock and ice that failed to form planets.



#### About Proxima Centauri:

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

#### IS PROXIMA B HABITABLE?

Proxima b orbits its star at a distance of 0.05 astronomical units, which is well within the habitable zone.

- In a recent study, researchers calculated different possible radii and compositions for the planet. They say Proxima b may be an 'ocean planet' with water similar to the subsurface oceans seen on icy moons around Jupiter and Saturn.
- According to this theory, the planet would have a radius of 5,543 miles (8,920km) and made up of 50% rock and 50% water that forms a massive ocean. Along with this, it would have a thin, gas atmosphere like Earth's.
- In another scenario, they say Proxima b could be 'very dense planet,' with a metal core that accounts for 65% of its mass, while the rest is a rocky, silicate mantle. This would occur at a radius of just 3,722 miles (5,990km), giving it a make-up similar to Mercury's.

**Facts for Prelims:**About ALMA telescope:

What is it?

ALMA -the largest astronomical project in existence- is a single telescope of revolutionary design, composed of 66 high precision antennas located on the Chajnantor plateau, 5000 meters altitude in northern Chile.

Who has built it?

The Atacama Large Millimeter/submillimeter Array (ALMA) is an international partnership of the European Southern Observatory (ESO), the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institutes of Natural Sciences (NINS) of Japan, together with NRC (Canada), NSC and ASIAA (Taiwan), and KASI (Republic of Korea), in cooperation with the Republic of Chile.

What is it for?

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

Sources: the hindu.

## Cobots

Small, collaborative robots, or cobots, are gaining currency across the world, as also in India. Several firms, be it Bajaj Auto or Aurolab, have benefited from the adoption of cobots and are planning to add more to their shop floors.

**About Cobots:****What is a cobot?**

A cobot is intended to work hand-in-hand with humans in a shared workspace. This is in contrast with full-fledged robots that are designed to operate autonomously or with limited guidance. They support and relieve the human operator of his excess work.

**How they operate? examples**

In an auto factory, while the cobot tightens the bolts, the human worker places the tools in front of the cobot. In a biscuit factory, the cobot would package the biscuits while the worker segregates burnt ones not fit for consumption. In a small-scale industry, the cobot is placed on the drilling job while the worker performs a quality check.

**Benefits of Cobots:**

Cobots are easy to use, flexible and safe. Unlike industrial robots, cobots don't need fencing for the protection of workers in the shop floor.

Sources: the hindu.

## Rasogolla hits sweet spot, gets GI tag

The Geographical Indication (GI) Registry and Intellectual Property India has presented the Geographical Indication Tag status to Banglar Rasogolla of West Bengal and Mamallapuram stone sculptures of Tamil Nadu.



**The sculptures from Mamallapuram** were known to be carved in stone with characteristics of intricate designing chiselled finely, keeping with the spirit of the surrounding Pallava art and architecture. The description includes cave architecture, rock architecture, structural temples, open sculptures, relief sculptures and painting/portrait sculptures.

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

**About GI tag:****What is it?**

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

**Significance of a GI tag:**

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

**Security:**

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

Sources: the hindu.

## NOAA's JPSS-1 satellite

**Context:**

The Joint Polar Satellite System-1, an advanced U.S. weather satellite designed to improve the accuracy of extended forecasts has been launched into polar orbit from California.

**About the Joint Polar Satellite System-1:****What is it?**

The satellite is the first of four next-generation spacecraft for NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

**What is it for?**

Circling the Earth from pole to pole 14 times a day, JPSS-1 carries a suite of five instruments intended to make global observations that will improve forecasts of severe weather events three to seven days beforehand. The satellite also will contribute to near-term weather forecasts, climate and ocean dynamics research, among many other uses.

**Significance:**

The satellite will improve weather forecasting, such as predicting a hurricane's track, and will help agencies involved with post-storm recovery by visualizing storm damage and the geographic extent of power outages. JPSS-1 data will also improve recognition of climate patterns that influence the weather, such as El Nino and La Nina.

Sources: the hindu.

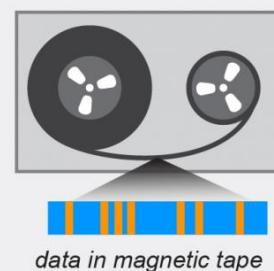
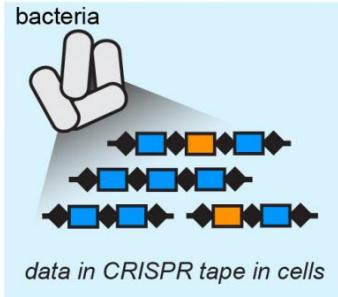
## World's smallest data recorder made of bacteria

**Context:** The researchers at the Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC) in the U.S. have modified an ordinary laboratory strain of the ubiquitous human gut microbe Escherichia coli into the world's smallest data recorder. Researchers have converted this natural bacterial immune system enabling the bacteria to not only record their interactions with the environment but also time-stamp the events.

**How was it created?**

Researchers created the microscopic data recorder by taking advantage of CRISPR-Cas, an immune system in many species of bacteria. CRISPR-Cas copies snippets of DNA from invading viruses so that subsequent generations of bacteria can repel these pathogens more effectively.

As a result, the CRISPR locus of the bacterial genome accumulates a chronological record of the bacterial viruses that it and its ancestors have survived. When those same viruses try to infect again, the CRISPR-Cas system can recognise and eliminate them.

**audio tape****CRISPR tape****Potential applications:**

This discovery has formed the groundwork for a new class of technologies that use bacterial cells for everything from disease diagnosis to environmental monitoring. Such bacteria, swallowed by a patient, might be able to record the changes they experience through the whole digestive tract, yielding an unprecedented view of previously inaccessible phenomena.

Other applications could include environmental sensing and basic studies in ecology and microbiology, where bacteria could monitor otherwise invisible changes without disrupting their surroundings.

**What is CRISPR?**

CRISPR technology is a simple yet powerful tool for editing genomes. It allows researchers to easily alter DNA sequences and modify gene function. Its many potential applications include correcting genetic defects, treating and preventing the spread of diseases and improving crops. However, its promise also raises ethical concerns.

CRISPR technology was adapted from the natural defense mechanisms of bacteria and archaea (the domain of single-celled microorganisms). These organisms use CRISPR-derived RNA and various Cas proteins, including Cas9, to foil attacks by viruses and other foreign bodies. They do so primarily by chopping up and destroying the DNA of a foreign invader. When these components are transferred into other, more complex, organisms, it allows for the manipulation of genes, or “editing.”

Sources: the hindu.

## Aditya-L1

### **Context:**

ISRO is planning to launch Aditya-L1, India's maiden mission to the Sun, in 2019.

### **About Aditya- L1 mission:**

**What is it?** It is India's first solar mission. It will study the sun's outer most layers, the corona and the chromospheres and collect data about coronal mass ejection, which will also yield information for space weather prediction.



**Significance of the mission:** The data from Aditya mission will be immensely helpful in discriminating between different models for the origin of solar storms and also for constraining how the storms evolve and what path they take through the interplanetary space from the Sun to the Earth.

**Position of the satellite:** In order to get the best science from the sun, continuous viewing of the sun is preferred without any occultation/ eclipses and hence, Aditya- L1 satellite will be placed in the halo orbit around the Lagrangian point 1 (L1) of the sun-earth system.

### **What are Lagrangian points and halo orbit?**

**Lagrangian points are the locations in space where the combined gravitational pull of two large masses roughly balance each other.** Any small mass placed at that location will remain at constant distances relative to the large masses. There are five such points in Sun-Earth system and they are denoted as L1, L2, L3, L4 and L5. A halo orbit is a periodic three-dimensional orbit near the L1, L2 or L3.

Sources: the hindu.

## Net neutrality

### **Context:**

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has come out in strong support of Net neutrality in a series of recommendations following a long process of consultations on the issue.

The recommendations assume international significance in the heated globe-spanning debate, with the United States' Federal Communications Commission expected to remove existing guidelines ensuring net neutrality come December.

### **Highlights of the recommendations made by the TRAI:**

- Amplify licensing terms” to provide “explicit restrictions on any sort of discrimination in Internet access based on the content being accessed, the protocols being used or the user equipment being deployed”.
- Internet service providers (ISP) should be restricted “from entering into any agreement, arrangement or contract” that would have the effect of discriminatory treatment — in this case, any form of restriction or interference in the treatment of content, including practices like blocking, degrading, slowing down or granting preferential speeds or treatment to any content.
- Internet access services should be governed by a principle that restricts any form of discrimination or interference in the treatment of content. However, the scope of the provisions only applies “specifically to Internet Access Services, which are generally available to the public.”
- Specialised services — which are “optimized for specific content, protocols or user equipment where optimization is necessary to meet the quality of service requirements” should be exempt from the principles of discriminatory treatment.
- Trai has also brought in Internet of Things (IoT) enabled services also under the ambit of these restrictions, with a caveat that critical IoT services, identified by Department of Telecom (DoT) and coming under specialised services, will be automatically exempt.
- If a telecom operator is implementing any traffic management practice — whenever it happens — TRAI has recommended these instances to be openly declared and even intimated to users directly getting impacted by such restrictions, whatever their cause.

- A multi-stakeholder body to monitor and investigate violations should be formed, comprising members from different categories of service or videos, content providers, research and academia, civil society organisations and consumer representatives.

Argument	Proponents of net neutrality	Opponents of net neutrality
Past/future argument	New Internet companies developed thanks to the Internet's open architecture, and end users are benefiting from innovation and diversity of services thanks to net neutrality. Net neutrality will preserve the Internet architecture that has enabled the fast and innovative development of the Internet so far.	Traffic management is inevitable, and neutrality has never existed. Besides, there are already non-neutral leased services like VPNs (virtual private networks).  Without net neutrality restrictions, Internet companies can develop new services for customers, with guaranteed QoS.
Economic argument	Without net neutrality, the Internet will look like cable TV: a handful of big companies will control access and distribution of content, deciding what users get to see and how much it costs them to see it. New entrants and small businesses will not have a chance to develop, especially those in developing countries.  OTT service providers already pay a lot to telecoms for their Internet connections, and invest in infrastructure like caching servers.	Without net neutrality restrictions in commercial agreements with content and service providers, telecom operators will be able to raise funds which would make them more interested in investing in better infrastructure. Better infrastructure will encourage new services and innovations, more tailored to customers' needs, bringing more revenue to all. OTT service providers will also find value in possible innovative services with QoS, enabled by the operators if not restricted by net neutrality provisions.
Ethical argument	The Internet is the result of developments by many volunteers over decades. They invested time and creativity into everything from technical protocols to content. The Internet is more than a business – it has become a global heritage of mankind. It is not justifiable to have such a huge investment of time and creativity harvested by only a few companies who will lock the Internet in constrained business models by breaching net neutrality, and turn the creativity of many into the profit of a few.	Net neutrality is ethically questionable because operators have to invest in maintaining and expanding the Internet's infrastructure to support new services, while most benefits are reaped by Internet 'content' companies such as Google, Facebook, and Amazon.
Regulation argument	Net neutrality must be imposed by government to preserve the public interest. Any form of self-regulation will leave it open for operators to breach the principle of net neutrality. The open market is not a sufficient mechanism since major global telecoms are at the core of the Internet infrastructure. Even if there is a possibility to choose, this is not always realised since users need technical and legal literacy and awareness of the consequences of the various choices available.	The Internet has developed because of very light or no regulation. Heavy government regulation could stifle creativity and the future development of the Internet.  The open market is based on choice, and users can always change their Internet provider if not satisfied with the offer. The users' choice and the market will kill bad offers and sustain good ones.

### So, what is Net neutrality?

Net neutrality is an interpretive concept. The term was coined by Tim Wu — an American lawyer and presently a professor at the Columbia University. He views the notion of Net neutrality as signifying an Internet that does not favour any one application over another. In other words, the idea is to ensure that Internet service providers do not discriminate content by either charging a fee for acting as its carrier or by incorporating any technical qualifications.

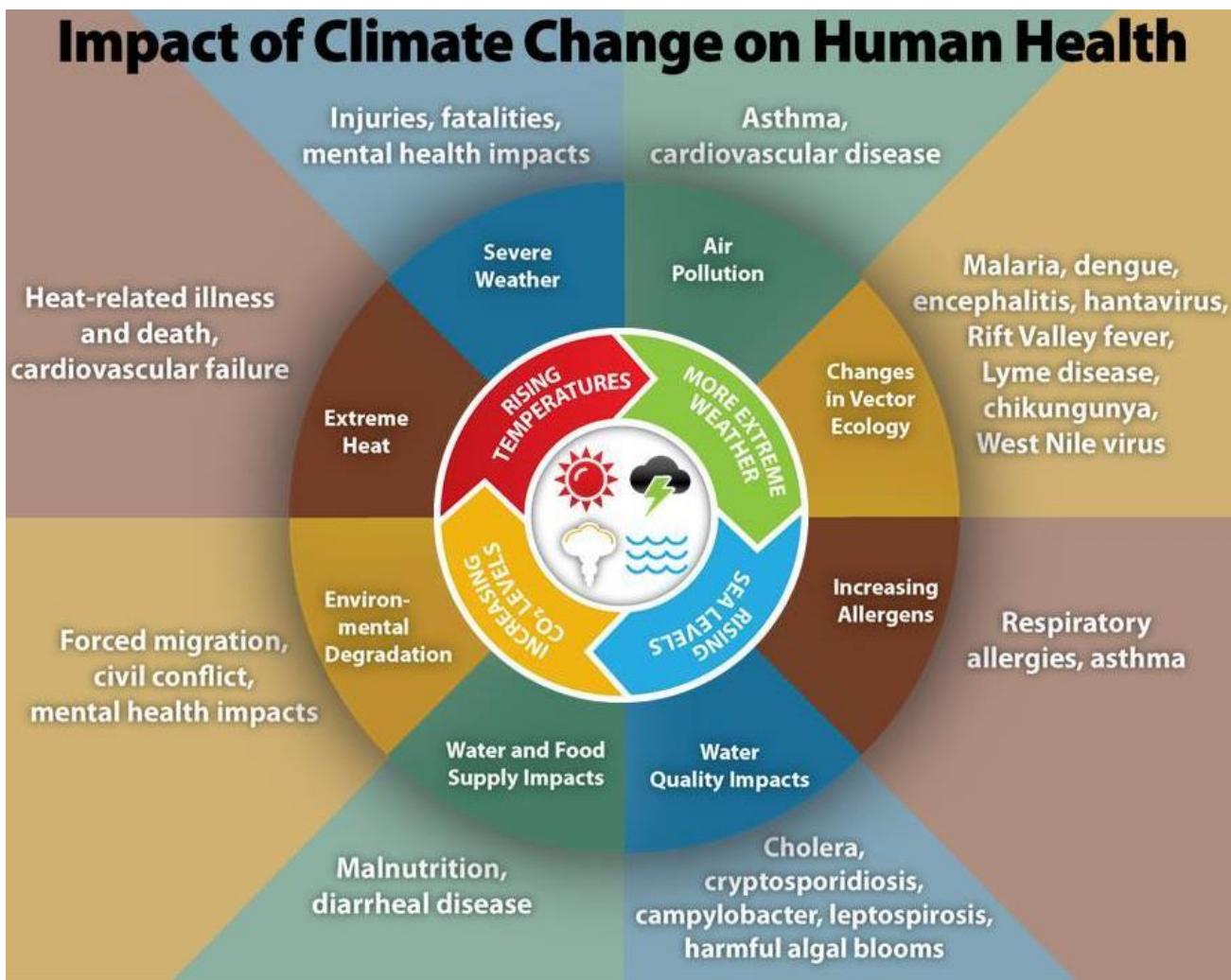
Proponents of the principle of net neutrality hold that all traffic on the Internet should be treated equally or in other words, service providers such as Airtel should allow access to all content without favouring any particular product or website.

Sources: the hindu.

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

### Climate change and ill-health

A new research published by *The Lancet* medical journal talks of the various ways in which *climate change has started affecting the health of people across the planet*.



**Report name:** 'The Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change'

Report says China, Bangladesh, India, and Indonesia are the countries that have registered the highest number of deaths linked to air pollution.

#### Key facts of Report

- 46 — the global increase percentage in weather-related disasters since 2000.
- 50 — Number of years of gain in public health undermined due to anthropogenic climate change.
- 87 — The percentage of global cities that are in breach of WHO air pollution
- 129 —Total economic loss in billion dollars due to weather events in 2016.
- 3 — The average fall in productivity (in %) for rural labour globally since 2000, due to rising temperatures.
- 9,20,000 — Number of people globally out of the workforce in 2016 due to rising temperatures.
- 4,18,000 — Number of Indian workforce out of jobs in 2016 due to rising temperatures.
- 1,00,00,000,000 — Number of people likely to migrate within 90 years, due to a rise in sea level caused by ice shelf collapse.

Source: Hindu

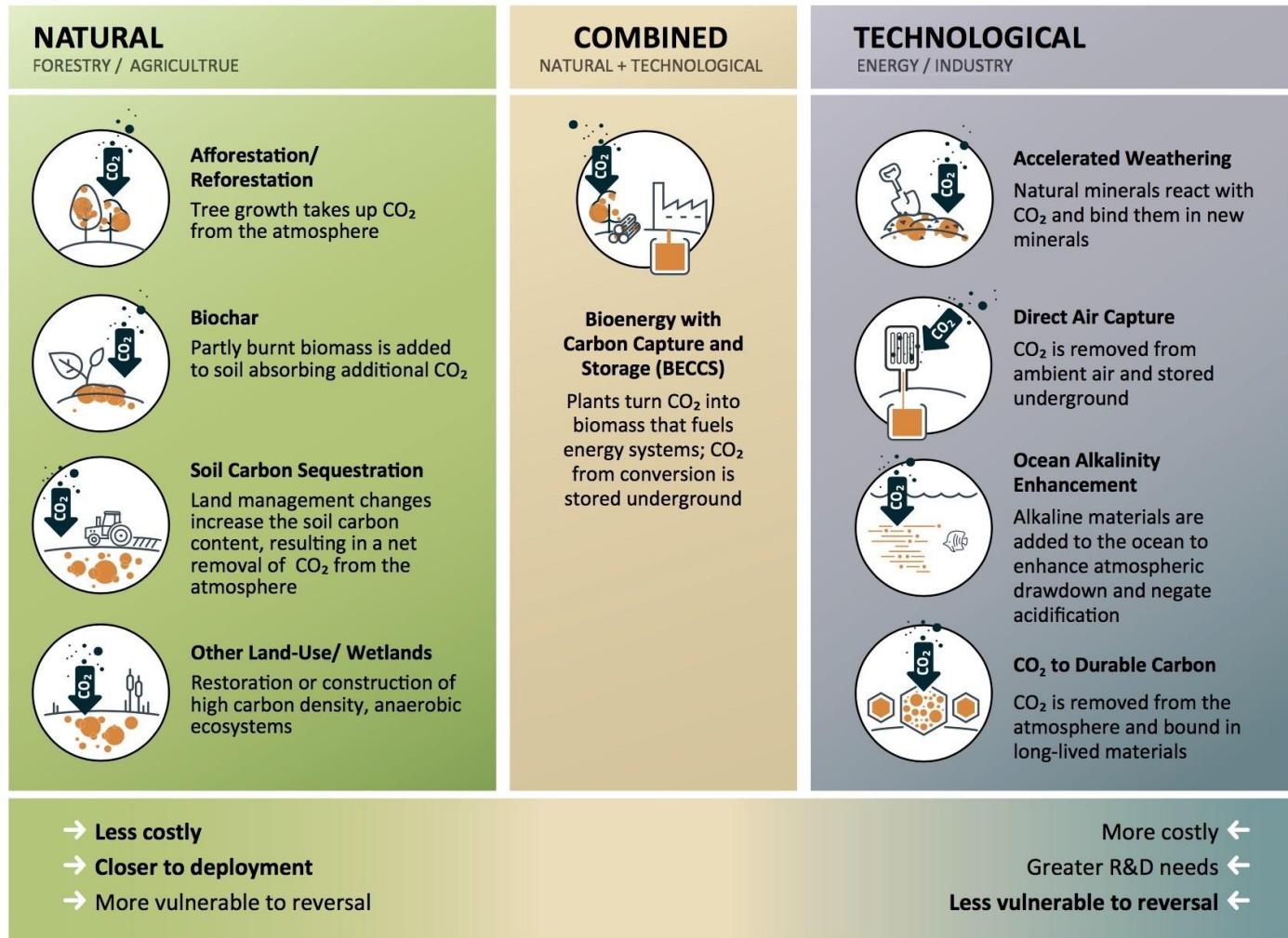
## There's a huge gap between the Paris climate change goals and reality

### Background:

In 2015 in Paris, the countries of the world agreed to hold the rise in global average temperatures to "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Industry-related carbon emissions plateaued, mainly due to the remarkable slowdown in Chinese coal consumption and reductions in carbon intensity across the world. But it's a relatively mild and short-lived trend.

**Figure ES.3: Major strategies for negative emission technologies.**



Note: This figure includes the major strategies that have been discussed in the literature so far (Minx et al., 2017).

### Reasons:

- New economic growth bring in more burden
- Massive, ongoing investment in fossil-fuel technologies and reserves implies emissions far in excess of our global carbon budget.
- Overall greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise due to the growing contribution of land use, land-use change and forestry, or LULUCF, emissions.

Collectively, the carbon reductions pledged by the world's countries in Paris are woefully inadequate. Even assuming all countries fulfill their pledges, it would account for only about a third of the needed emission reductions to get to 2 degrees.

Source: the hindu

## Blackbuck conservation reserve to come up in U.P.

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

### Context:



- The State cabinet has approved a Blackbuck Conservation Reserve in the Meja forest division that is known for its rocky, undulating and arid terrain.
- The area has more than 200 species of birds and herbivores like blackbucks and bluebull, and carnivores like jackals and striped hyena.
- There are a few national parks and sanctuaries inhabited by blackbuck in the country, like the Velavadar Wildlife Sanctuary in Gujarat and the Ranibennur Blackbuck Sanctuary in Karnataka. However, there are not many conservation reserves exclusively dedicated to the antelope.

### Blackbuck:

- Blackbucks, known for their majestic spiral horns and coat colour contrasts, are found in grasslands and open forests.
- They once ruled the open savannahs of north and central India, but are now restricted to just a few patches and habitats, primarily due to human population growth, ecosystem degradation and hunting.

### Significance:

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

Source: the hindu

## How much can India learn to fight pollution from China?

### Context:

Smog in Delhi shows that India has failed to control the pollution levels in the National Capital. However, China has been more successful than India in fighting pollution. According to a Greenpeace analysis of NASA's satellite data on particulate matter in India and China, the levels of fine particulate matter rose across India by 13% between 2010 and 2015 while they fell by 17% in China in the same period. Delhi's average annual PM 2.5 concentrations are more than double than those in Beijing.

### What did China do?

China moved early to control pollution, especially after the 2008 Beijing Olympics which put a spotlight on smog.

- China cracked down on polluting vehicles and factories to improve the air for the games.
- China revised its laws to impose severe restrictions on polluting factories. The local authorities can even detain owners of factories that fail to comply with the laws. They can also impose heavy fines on such factories.
- China has also cracked down on coal-fired power plants. The Chinese government shut down nearly 100 such plants a few months ago. It has cut steel production capacity by 50 million tons. New plants have to meet strict emission criteria.
- China's huge investment in alternative and renewable energy such as wind and solar is also targeted at decreasing pollution.
- Not only has China produced automobile fuel that complies with the Euro V standards, it has restricted car ownership too. In Beijing, one person cannot buy the second car in his own name. It is also an early mover in electric mobility while India has just set an ambitious target to have only electric cars by 2030.
- More awareness of pollution among the masses coupled with extensive monitoring by the government also helps fight pollution in China. China has a network of 1500 air-quality monitoring stations across more than 900 cities. India has only 39 such stations across 23 cities.

### Where India has failed?

- Today, India has yet to provide jobs to millions of its youths and 24x7 electricity to every household. These two aims can discourage a crackdown on coal-based power plants and polluting factories.

- While India's aim to have only electric cars by 2030 is laudable, little has been done on restricting ownership and use of polluting vehicles in big cities except for the order by the National Green Tribunal to ban old diesel vehicles.
- Unlike the authoritarian China, where law-making as well enforcement can be quick, a democratic India is slow on these counts. Composite solutions such as the need for Delhi, Punjab and Haryana to work jointly on smog get mired in raucous politics.

#### **Way ahead:**

Air pollution has become a common challenge for both China and India. Beijing has its own way to cope with it. India must find solutions that suit its own circumstances.

Sources: ET.

## BS -VI Norms

#### **Context:**

Taking into account the serious pollution levels in Delhi and adjoining areas, Petroleum Ministry in consultation with Public Oil Marketing Companies has decided for preponement of BS-VI grade auto fuels in NCT of Delhi w.e.f 01.04.2018 instead of 01.04.2020. This measure is expected to help mitigate the problem of air pollution in NCT of Delhi and surrounding areas.

#### **About BS Norms:**

##### **What are they?**

Introduced in the year 2000, the Bharat norms are emission control standards put in place by the government to keep a check on air pollution. Based on the European regulations (Euro norms), these standards set specifications/limits for the release of air pollutants from equipment using internal combustion engines, including vehicles. Typically, the higher the stage, the more stringent the norms.

#### **BS-VI Norms:**

- The particulate matter emission in BS-V and BS-VI is same for diesel cars though it is 80% less than BS IV.
- The nitrogen oxide (NOx) level is, however, 55% less in BS-VI over BS-V which in itself is 28% lower than BS IV.
- The sulphur content in fuel norms for diesel and petrol under both BS-V and -VI standards does not change at 10 ppm, though it is substantially less than 50 mandated for both the fuels under BS-IV.

#### **Way ahead:**

Rolling out the BS VI standard nationally, skipping BS V, has significant cost implications for fuel producers and the auto-mobile industry, but its positive impact on public health would more than compensate for the investment.

Sources: pib.

## Furnace oil and pet coke

#### **Context:**

The Supreme Court has requested all States and Union Territories to move forward towards a nationwide ban on the use of pet coke and furnace oil to power up industries, in a bid to fight pollution.

#### **Background:**

The Environment Bench of the Supreme Court had already ordered a ban on the industrial use of pet coke and furnace oil in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan on October 24. This ban specifically came after an Environment Pollution Control Authority Report recommended the ban on sale, distribution and use of furnace oil and pet coke in the National Capital Region (NCR).

#### What is PET-COKE

- \* Petroleum coke is a by-product / undesirable product of oil refining cracking process.
- \* The most attractive thing for use of Pet-coke is the high calorific value having lower cost as well as lower handling cost per unit of heat content.

#### **Need for ban:**

Automobile fuel — petrol and diesel — has 50 parts per million (PPM) of the highly dangerous sulphur. Comparatively, furnace oil has 15,000- 23,000 ppm sulphur and petcoke 69,000-74,000 ppm sulphur. They emit sulphur oxide and nitrogen oxide, which form particulate matter, tiny particles that can penetrate deep into the lungs.

- Although the DPCC had declared them as “unacceptable fuel” way back in 1996, but they are not banned outside Delhi borders and are being increasingly used by industries in the NCR, aggravating the pollution problem.
- Furnace oil being the last grade produced by refineries is extremely polluting and pet coke is even more polluting.

Sources: the hindu.

## Chilika Lake

### Context:

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

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

### About Chilika Lagoon:

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

## CHILIIKA LAKE

- Asia's largest **brackish water** lagoon i.e. It is Asia's largest salt-water lagoon and is separated from the Bay of Bengal by a sandy ridge.
- Covers an area more than 1100 sq km along the east coast of India in the state of **Odisha**.
- The water spread area of the Lagoon varies between 1165 to 906 sq.km during the monsoon and summer respectively.
- A 32 km long, narrow, outer channel connects the lagoon to the Bay of Bengal

Sources: the hindu.

## INSPIRE 2017

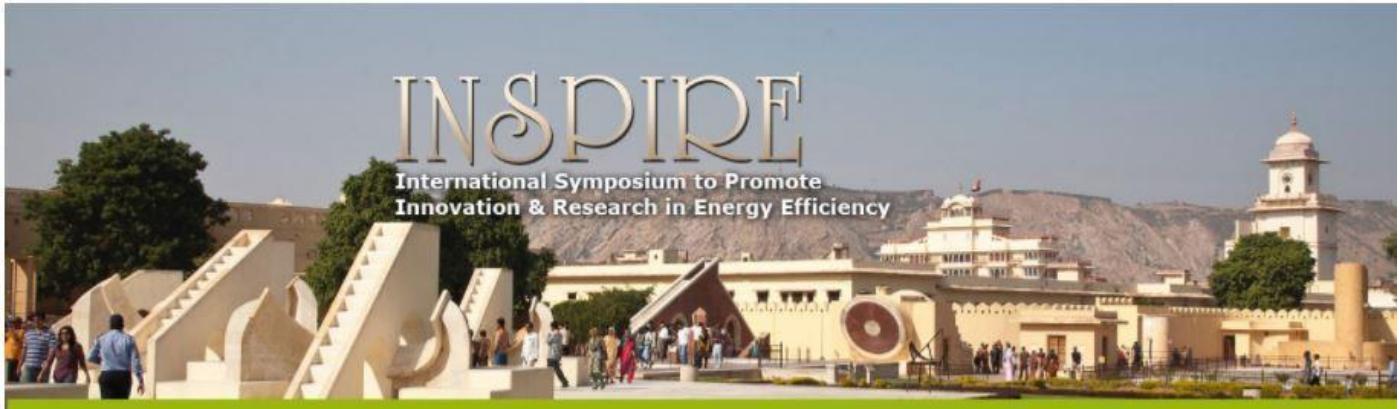
### Context:

The first edition of the International Symposium to Promote Innovation & Research in Energy Efficiency (INSPIRE 2017) was kicked off in Jaipur recently. The five-day symposium is being organized by Energy Efficiency Services Limited (EESL) in partnership with The World Bank, and Alliance for an Energy Efficient Economy (AEEE).

### About INSPIRE 2017:

What is it? INSPIRE 2017 is an International Conference that brings together various stakeholders such as policy makers, innovators, financiers, influencers to showcase best practices in the sector.

What it does? It provides a platform for energy efficiency community to discuss energy efficiency policies, market transformation strategies, emerging technologies, delivery and business-model driven transformations. The event is further designed to provide global and national thought-leaders and implementers to expand perspectives on energy efficiency and spur ideas and solutions that will help leverage the full potential of energy efficiency and bring its multiple co-benefits to the fore.



# INSPIRE

International Symposium to Promote  
Innovation & Research in Energy Efficiency

**Participants:** Policy makers and experts from Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE), The World Bank Group, The Energy Institute (TERI), International Energy Agency (IEA), Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI), USA and representatives of the Clean Energy Ministerial (CEM) will take part in the event. Several global organizations like the Asian Development Bank, African Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, International Finance Corporation, International Energy Agency will also share their perspectives at INSPIRE.

### Way ahead:

Energy efficiency is the winning strategy to simultaneously address a variety of policy objectives, including security of supply, climate change, competitiveness, balance of trade, reduced investment need and environmental protection.

Sources: pib.

## Clean Ganga mission

**Context:** UK-based Indian-origin businessmen have committed to projects worth nearly Rs 500 crore associated with the Clean Ganga mission. Riverfront regeneration and development of ghats in the towns of Patna, Kanpur, Haridwar and Kolkata have been taken on by four leading industrialists from the UK.

The businessmen will take on the projects as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR) agenda and work with the Indian government on finalising the plans for each of the cities.



Link: [Infographic](#)

### **Namami Gange Programme:**

The Union government approved “Namami Gange” Program in May 2015. It integrates the efforts to clean and protect the Ganga River in a comprehensive manner.

#### **Focus of the programme:**

Among other things, the programme will focus on pollution abatement interventions namely Interception, diversion & treatment of wastewater flowing through the open drains through bio-remediation / appropriate in-situ treatment / use of innovative technologies.

#### **Implementation:**

- The program would be implemented by the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), and its state counterpart organizations i.e., State Program Management Groups (SPMGs).
- In order to improve implementation, a three-tier mechanism has been proposed for project monitoring comprising of a) High level task force chaired by Cabinet Secretary assisted by NMCG at national level, b) State level committee chaired by Chief Secretary assisted by SPMG at state level and c) District level committee chaired by the District Magistrate.
- The program emphasizes on improved coordination mechanisms between various Ministries/Agencies of Central and State governments.

Sources: ET.

### **Arunachal's Siang river turns black**

The waters of the Siang river, considered the lifeline of northern Arunachal Pradesh for centuries, has suddenly turned dark black triggering panic in the frontier state. The water from the river is no longer considered fit for consumption.

- China is being blamed for these changes. China has been planning to dig the world's longest tunnel to change the course of Yarlung Tsangpo from Tibet towards Taklimakan desert in Xinjiang but has been denying the same at public platforms.



#### **About Siang river:**

Siang originates in China and then enters India through Arunachal Pradesh, it is then joined by two other rivers—Dibang and Lohit—as it enters Assam where it is called the Brahmaputra.

Sources: the hindu.

### **Paper 3 Topic: Disaster and disaster management.**

#### **Unsafe boilers**

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



#### **Regulation of Boilers:**

High pressure boilers are hazardous pieces of equipment, which are strictly regulated with special laws. In fact, the basic objective of the Indian Boilers Act, 1923 is to ensure the safety of life and protection of property by mandating uniform standards in the quality and upkeep of these units.

#### **Reasons for the accident at Rae Bareli:**

- First of all, the state government failed miserably in meeting the objective of ensuring the safety of life and protection of property by mandating uniform standards in the quality and upkeep of these units is evident from the accident at the public sector facility.
- To enhance the ease of doing business in India, the government has relaxed crucial safety checks. Self-certification and third-party certification of facilities has received support from policymakers even in the case of boilers.

#### **What needs to be done?**

- **Regulatory mechanism:** The Unchahar accident shows it is in everyone's interest to have a transparent regulatory mechanism for hazardous industrial activity.

- **Reporting:** The safety and welfare of workers and the public at large cannot be compromised. A rigorous approach to accident reporting must become part of the process if the weak spots in regulation are to be addressed.
- The loss suffered by families of workers due to an accident that could have been averted cannot be compensated just financially. It must be the Centre's endeavour to see that measures taken to make it easy to do business do not translate into lack of regulation, and putting lives at risk.
- **Administrative reform** can eliminate the corruption of inspector raj and achieve transparent regulation, while keeping the workplace safe.

#### Way ahead:

The accident was entirely preventable because boilers are designed to provide warnings as soon as dangerous pressure builds up and trigger automatic safety devices at a critical point. They should undergo periodic inspections to ensure that all these features are working and intact. The incident calls for an inquiry into the quality of the equipment and the fuel used. Ideally, these aspects should be investigated by an external agency and not the NTPC.

Sources: the hindu.

## Facebook brings in disaster response tools to India

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

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

#### **How will this help in disaster management?**

The intention of introducing these initiatives is to help improve response efforts to natural disasters in India. It is because during and after these crises, response organisations need accurate information to help communities respond, recover and rebuild. Traditional communication channels are often offline and it can take significant time and resources to understand where help is desperately needed. In case there is an area which has a high concentration of Facebook users that suddenly goes offline, even that data insight can be used to rush services to the area.

#### **Disaster maps:**

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

#### **Other initiatives by Facebook:**

- Facebook already has a safety check feature that allows users to notify their friends and family that they are safe.
- Facebook is also holding its first annual Disaster Response Summit in India with NDMA, which will bring together many humanitarian organisations to help train and discuss how technology can be used to devise better responses to natural disasters and subsequent recovery.
- It is also supporting the pilot of the Aapda Samachar Karyakarta-Disaster Information Volunteers (ASK-DIV) scheme where a network of trained volunteers provide supplementary information to inform government relief efforts through the Facebook Workplace platform.

Sources: the hindu.

## Second warning to humanity

#### **Context:**

More than 120 Indian scientists are among the 15,364 scientists from 184 countries to endorse the second warning that the world's scientists have issued to humanity: not mending currently unsustainable ways of living could augur "widespread misery" and "catastrophic biodiversity loss". This is the first time that so many scientists are signatory to such a letter.

#### **Background:**

The first warning, issued in 1992 and signed by 1,575 scientists, urged governments to take immediate action to prevent environmental degradation. Following up on nine environmental issues identified by these scientists, a team led by Oregon State University's William Ripple compiled current data on them.

#### **The report notes that in the past 25 years:**

- The amount of fresh water available per head of population worldwide has reduced by 26%.
- The number of ocean "dead zones" – places where little can live because of pollution and oxygen starvation – has increased by 75%.

- Nearly 300 million acres of forest have been lost, mostly to make way for agricultural land.
- Global carbon emissions and average temperatures have shown continued significant increases.
- Human population has risen by 35%.
- Collectively the number of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds and fish in the world has fallen by 29%.
- However, there is also good news: ozone depleters such as chlorofluorocarbons in the atmosphere have declined, proving that change is possible.

## Natural heritage sites threatened by climate change

62 sites threatened in 2017, up from 35 in 2014



### What needs to be done now?

Expert recommendations to “transition to sustainability” include halting conversion of natural habitats such as forests and grasslands, reducing food waste through education and better infrastructure, promoting new green technologies, and revising economies to reduce inequalities in wealth.

In a country like India, there is a need for both immediate and long-term solutions. In the short term, it's critical to limit further habitat loss and the expansion of new roads, mines and mega-projects into the last wild places, and to enlist the help and engagement of local communities wherever possible.

Sources: the hindu.

**Paper 3 Topic:** Security challenges and their management in border areas; linkages of organized crime with terrorism.

### For year-round border security, India plans tunnels on China border

For year-round border security and ensure better connectivity along the entire Line of Actual Control, India is planning to construct tunnels on China border.

#### Benefits of tunnels:

- Land acquisition and forest clearance are relatively easier for tunnels.
- Tunnels reduce the operational cost of vehicles and reduce the need for deploying troops for security duties in sensitive areas.
- They help avoid situations where military posts remain cut off for six months due to snowfall or rain.
- Furthermore, the Himalayan ranges with its fragile geology has a history of earthquakes, landslides and avalanches.



Sources: ET.

## Sagar Kavach

**What is it?** It is a joint security exercise organized jointly by the governments of Odisha and neighbouring West Bengal.

**Aim:** It aims to further tighten the existing coastal security mechanism along the 630 km long coastline.

**What it does?** "Sagar Kavach security exercise is a realistic drill to check the efficacy of the security parameters and preparedness of various security forces like the Indian Navy, Marine police force, Indian Coast Guard (ICG), Forest Department, Fisheries and district administration.



Sources: ET.

## Navy gets access to Singapore's Changi naval base

In a strategic move that is likely to irk China, India and Singapore have signed a bilateral agreement that will allow Indian Navy ships logistical support, including refuelling, at Singapore's Changi naval base located near the disputed South China Sea.



### What does this mean for India?

This means that Indian Navy ships sailing through the disputed South China Sea or in the eastern waters of the Andaman Sea will be able to refuel, restock and, if needed, rearm at Singapore's latest naval base before continuing their mission.

This means the Indian Navy will be able to directly engage Singaporean authorities when they need to use their facilities unlike the present structure where a request has to be sourced from the Indian Navy to the government of Singapore through the Defence Ministry and then the External Affairs Ministry, a process that can take weeks if political clearances need to be obtained in Singapore.

### Significance of this move:

The naval logistics agreement is the first for India with a country located east of Malacca. The nearest Indian base is in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The Changi base will therefore enhance the navy's operational reach. The naval base also plays a prominent role in the protection of naval vessels, repair facilities, supplies, administration and logistics support.

### Strategic significance of Singapore:

Singapore is strategically situated on the major international sea routes – the Straits of Singapore and Malacca – and connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans making it economically important.

The country acts as the centre for international communications, transportations and trade to southeast Asia. It works with neighbouring littoral states for safety, stability, regional peace and navigational freedom.

Sources: the hindu.

## Paper 3 Topic: Various Security forces and agencies and their mandate.

### Nod for buying 111 Navy copters

In a major move, the Defence Ministry approved procurement of 111 utility helicopters for the Navy at a cost of ₹21,738 crore.



- The long-pending proposal was cleared at a meeting of the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister.
- They said 16 helicopters would be procured at a fly away condition while 95 would be manufactured in India.
- The procurement of the helicopters would be the first major acquisition made under the strategic partnership model.

### Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)

- To counter corruption and speed up decision-making in military procurement, the government of India in 2001 decided to set up an integrated DAC.
- It is headed by the Defence Minister.
- The DAC is responsible to give policy guidelines to acquisitions, based on long-term procurement plans.

- It also clears all acquisitions, which includes both imported and those produced indigenously or under a foreign license.
- The objective of the DAC is to ensure expeditious procurement of the approved requirements of the Armed Forces, in terms of capabilities sought, and time frame prescribed, by optimally utilizing the allocated budgetary resources.

Source: Hindu

## The security of India and Bhutan is “indivisible and mutual”

President thanked the King for his “personal involvement” in addressing the Doklam crisis, the first time a reference has been made to his role during the tensions between India and China.

### Background:

The face-off between India and China took place after Bhutanese troops registered a protest against Chinese military building a road on the plateau. Indian troops—stationed in the area under a special security pact between India and Bhutan—intervened after the Chinese troops ignored the Bhutanese warnings. The Chinese road construction plans also had India worried that Beijing could cut off the Indian mainland’s access to its northeastern states.

### India- Bhutan:

- India and Bhutan enjoy unique ties of friendship, which are characterized by deep understanding and mutual trust.
- The visit would provide an opportunity to both the sides for reviewing the entire gamut of bilateral cooperation, including plans for befitting celebrations of golden jubilee of establishment of diplomatic relations between two countries in the year 2018 and to advance the special bilateral ties of friendship and cooperation.
- Bhutan is also key for India’s plans to push subregional cooperation. It will help accelerate regional integration within BIMSTEC
- A transport agreement among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal was mooted in 2014 but is yet to take shape given Bhutan’s worries about the impact of pollution and loss of businesses if trucks and cars from India, Bangladesh and Nepal roll into the country.
- The Himalayan country has a hydel power potential of 30,000 megawatt (MW) of which 23,000MW can be tapped. India is involved in developing a number of hydel power projects in Bhutan already and is keen to deepen the cooperation.

### Significance:

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

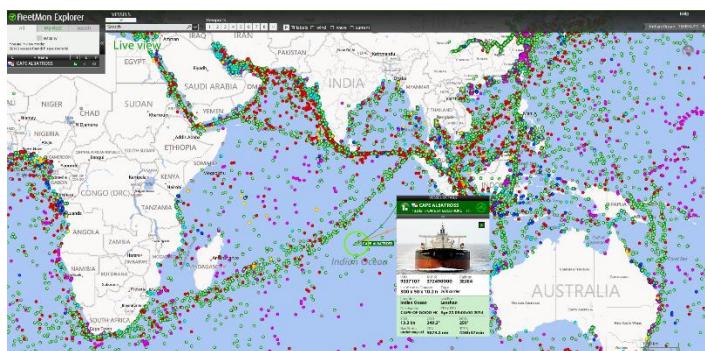
Source: the hindu, livemint.

## India offers to share real-time maritime data

India has made an offer to share intelligence of maritime movements in the Indian Ocean in real-time with 10 Indian Ocean littoral States.

### Key points:

- 10 Indian Ocean littoral States to benefit from initiative
- The information to be shared includes movement of commercial traffic as well as intelligence.
- The information sharing is not so much for conventional military purposes but to deal with non-traditional threats arising at sea
- This comes even as India gears up to counter China’s increased presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).



### Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC):

The Goa Maritime Conclave (GMC) was inaugurated at the **Tarang Auditorium of INS Mandovi, Goa**. The conclave was aimed at **“Addressing Regional Maritime Challenges”** wherein the deliberations were focused on emerging maritime threats and force structuring, maritime domain awareness, maritime security architecture, and maritime security challenges in the Indian Ocean Region(IOR).

**Significance of GMC:**

- GMC aims to bring together like minded nations to evolve and formulate collective responses to emerging challenges in the maritime domain.
- It would also provide an opportunity to communicate our viewpoints in a forthright manner and collectively shape a favourable maritime environment for all countries in the region.
- Political and economic interactions between the stake holders in the IOR has great impact on regional dynamics in international geo-politics.

Source: the hindu

## PAN Indian Army Release of Integrated Quarter Master Package (IQMP) Software Application

**Integrated Quarter Master Package (IQMP):**

- IQMP is web based software developed by Army Software Development Centre in association with M/s TCS Ltd.
- The application automates various logistics related functions of an Army Unit. The application will replace numerous legacy applications such as 'Vastra' and 'Quarter Master Package'.
- The application can be dynamically configured to meet the specific requirements of various types of Army units and is capable of sharing information and data with other software applications in the domain of logistics management.

**Significance:**

- The software has been developed with the aim of bringing speed, accuracy and transparency in handling logistics aspects in the unit.
- It will also play an important role in achieving automation of Indian Army and prove to be a significant milestone towards 'Digital Army' in consonance with the 'Digital India initiative' of the government.

Source: pib

## Narcotics Control Bureau

**Context:**

A Joint Action Plan was recently signed between the Narcotics Control Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs of India and the Ministry of Interior of the Russian Federation for the period 2018-20.

**About NCB:****What is it?**

The Narcotics Control Bureau is the apex coordinating agency. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 which came into effect from the 14th November, 1985 made an express provision for constituting a Central Authority for the purpose of exercising the powers and functions of the Central Government under the Act. In presence of this provision, the Government of India constituted the NARCOTICS CONTROL BUREAU on the 17th of March, 1986.

The Bureau, subject to the supervision and control of the Central Government, is to exercise the powers and functions of the Central Government for taking measures with respect to:

- Co-ordination of actions by various offices, State Governments and other authorities under the N.D.P.S. Act, Customs Act, Drugs and Cosmetics Act and any other law for the time being in force in connection with the enforcement provisions of the NDPS Act, 1985.
- Implementation of the obligation in respect of counter measures against illicit traffic under the various international conventions and protocols that are in force at present or which may be ratified or acceded to by India in future.
- Assistance to concerned authorities in foreign countries and concerned international organisations to facilitate coordination and universal action for prevention and suppression of illicit traffic in these drugs and substances.
- Coordination of actions taken by the other concerned Ministries, Departments and Organizations in respect of matters relating to drug abuse.

**Background:**

The National Policy on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances is based on the Directive Principles, contained in Article 47 of the Indian Constitution, which direct the State to endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drugs injurious to health. The government's policy on the subject which flows from this constitutional provision is also guided by the international conventions on the subject. India is a signatory

to the single Convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the Conventions on Psychotropic Substances, 1971 and the United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, 1988.

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.

### Global watchdog FATF puts Pakistan on notice

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global anti-money laundering watchdog has put Pakistan on notice for terror financing.

- FATF has sought from Pakistan, notwithstanding opposition from China, a compliance report by February 2018 on action taken against terror groups such as LeT and JuD.
- FATF has asked Pakistan to do more to freeze assets of terror outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jamaat-ud-Dawa.

#### Background:

The decision was taken at the recently held Buenos Aires plenary of the FATF, where India raised the issue of Pakistan's support for terror group at the International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG) meet. Terror financing was a key theme at the FATF meet in the Argentine capital.

#### About FATF:

#### What is it?

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

#### Objectives:

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

#### What it does?

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

Sources: ET.

### Global Conference on Cyber Space 2017

#### Context:

India, for the first time ever, is all set to host the Global Conference on Cyber Space (GCCS), one of the world's largest conferences in the field of Cyber Space and related issues.

#### GCCS- 2017- key facts:

- **The theme for the GCCS 2017** is 'Cyber4All: An Inclusive, Sustainable, Developmental, Safe and Secure Cyberspace'.
- This is **the fifth edition of GCCS** wherein international leaders, policymakers, industry experts, think tanks and cyber experts will gather to deliberate on issues and challenges for optimally using cyber space.
- The overall goals of GCCS 2017 are to promote the importance of inclusiveness and human rights in global cyber policy, to defend the status quo of an open, interoperable and unregulated cyberspace and to create political commitment for capacity building initiatives to address the digital divide and assist countries.

#### About GCCS:

#### What is it?

GCCS is a prestigious international conference that aims at encouraging dialogue among stakeholders of cyberspace, which has been taking place since 2011. Incepted in 2011 in London, GCCS witnessed a participation of 700 global

delegates. Global Forum on Cyber Expertise (GFCE) for capacity building in cyber space was launched in the fourth edition of the conference held in The Hague, Netherlands.

## GCCS 2017 : Global Conference on CyberSpace

**Theme - A Connected, Sustainable and Secure Cyberspace**

### 2011: LONDON

Focused on a developing a set of principles 'for governing behavior in cyberspace'

### 2012: BUDAPEST

Discussing the relationship between 'Internet Freedom' and 'Internet Security'

### 2013: SEOUL

Outlined the commitment to Open and Secure CyberSpace with Focus on international laws

### 2015: THE HAGUE

Highlight Developments in the cyber domain in the area of Freedom, Security and Growth

### 5<sup>th</sup> version of GCCS

is being hosted in India by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology

## Key highlights

2000+ delegates

50+ Ministerial Delegates

Representation from 100+ countries

20+ Sessions on Cyber Space

Panel Discussions | Keynotes | Networking Knowledge Exchange | Breakout Discussions



### Previous conferences:

Incepted in 2011 in London, second GCCS was held in 2012 in Budapest with focus on relationship between internet rights and internet security, which was attended by 700 delegates from nearly 60 countries. The third edition of GCCS was held in 2013 in Seoul with commitment to Open and Secure Cyberspace. The fourth version GCCS 2015 was held on April 16-17, 2015 in The Hague, Netherlands which saw participation from 97 countries.

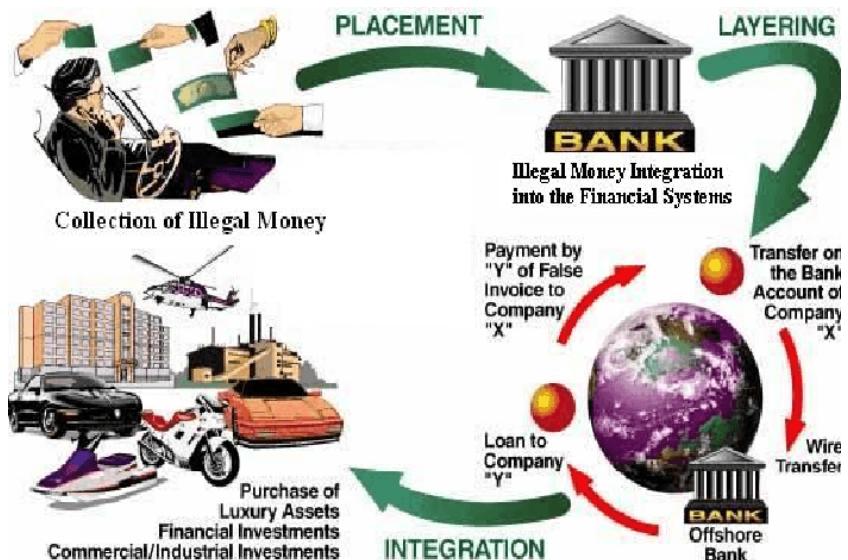
Sources: pib.

## Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)

### Context:

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

**Section 45(1)** imposed two conditions for grant of bail in offences punishable with a jail term of more than three years under Part A of the Schedule to the Act. It requires that the public prosecutor must be given an opportunity to oppose any application for release on bail and in cases where the public



prosecutor opposes the bail plea, the court must be satisfied that there were reasonable grounds to believe that the accused was not guilty and was unlikely to commit an offence if granted bail.

#### **About PMLA 2002:**

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

## Defence of A&N Islands Exercise

#### **Context:**

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

#### **About DANX:**

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

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

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

Sources: the hindu.

## Facts for Prelims

### Competition Commission of India (CCI)

- After the Competition Act,2002 came into existence a Competition Commission of India (CCI) and Competition Appellate Tribunal (CAT) was established. This commission was preceded by Monopolies and Restrictive Trade Practices Commission (MRTPC).

#### **Objectives CCI**

- Remove negative competitive practices
- Promote sustainable market competition
- Protect the rights of the consumer
- Protect the freedom of trade in Indian markets
- Protect the rights of small traders from the large traders to ensure their survival
- Advice and give suggestions to Competition Appellate Tribunal
- Run informative campaigns and create public awareness about fair competitive practices.

### 'Ex Blue Flag-17'

- A 45 member contingent of the Indian Air Force left for Israel to participate in exercise 'Blue Flag-17'.
- Blue Flag is a bi-annual multilateral exercise which aims to strengthen military cooperation amongst participating nations.
- Indian Air Force is participating with the C-130J special operations aircraft along with Garud commandos.
- The exercise would provide a platform for sharing of knowledge, combat experience and in improving operational capability of the participating nations.
- This is the first time the Indian Air Force is operating with Israeli AF in a multilateral exercise setting.

### 7th Asia Ministerial Energy Roundtable (AMER) in Bangkok, Thailand

- India is the current chair of International Energy Forum (IEF) which is promoting the AMER – a biennial event bringing together Energy Ministers and experts from Asian countries.

## BadRabbit ransomware

- On October 24th notifications of mass attacks with ransomware called Bad Rabbit was observed.
- The BadRabbit attack mainly affected Russia but also caused flight delays at Odessa airport in southern Ukraine and disrupted electronic payments in the Kiev metro.

## “Quadrilateral” grouping

Context: India has accepted an invitation to join the Japan-proposed, U.S.-endorsed plan for a “Quadrilateral” grouping including Australia.

What is it for? The quadrilateral arrangement, including US, Japan, Australia and India, aims to be a grouping of countries all looking to balance China, using an international rules-based order to counter China’s aggressive power play. The grouping also aims to provide alternative debt financing for countries in the Indo-Pacific.

## National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA)

Context: Corporate Affairs Ministry (MCA) is taking steps to set up National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA).

What is it? It is an independent body to test check financial statements, prescribe accounting standards and take disciplinary action against errant professionals. The Companies Act 2013 provides for setting up a National Financial Reporting Authority (NFRA).

## Paradise papers

### What are they?

They are a trove of 13.4 million corporate records, primarily from Bermuda firm Appleby, as well as from Singapore-based Asiaciti Trust and corporate registries maintained by governments in 19 secrecy jurisdictions, often referred to as “tax paradises”. They reveal tracks of veiled offshore financial activities.

## Women's Asia Cup hockey title

India has won the women's Asia Cup hockey title defeating China. With this, India also qualified for next year's World Cup as Continental champion.

## ICIJ

### Context:

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists today releases The Paradise Papers, a global investigation that reveals the offshore activities of some of the world's most powerful people and companies.

### What is ICIJ?

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists is a global network of more than 200 investigative journalists in 70 countries who collaborate on in-depth investigative stories. Founded in 1997 by the respected American journalist Chuck Lewis, ICIJ was launched as a project of the Center for Public Integrity, focusing on issues that do not stop at national frontiers: cross-border crime, corruption, and the accountability of power.

## New ant species discovered in the Western Ghats

Researchers have discovered a new species of ant in the Western Ghats, recognised as one of the world's 'hottest hotspots' of biological diversity.

Key facts:

1. ***The new species is named Tyrannomyrmex alii (or T. alii)***. The ant is named after eminent myrmecologist Musthak Ali, who is regarded as the country's 'ant man'.
2. The new species was found in the Periyar Tiger Reserve. It belongs to *Tyrannomyrmex*, a rare tropical genus of ants.
3. *Tyrannomyrmex* is a rare myrmicine (subfamily of ants) ant genus that is distributed in the Indomalayan bio-region that extends from southern India and Sri Lanka to southeast Asia.
4. *alli* is the fourth species of the rare genus and the second one from India.

## Musa paramjitiana

**What is it?**

It is a species of wild banana discovered recently in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

**Key facts:**

- The plant grows to a height of nine metres and bears an edible, sweet-and-sour tasting fruit that is boat-shaped and has numerous bulb-shaped seeds.
- Its conservation status has been declared as '**Critically Endangered**' as it has so far been spotted in only two locations on the islands, each with 6 to 18 plants in a clump.
- The fruits and seeds have ethno-medicinal importance. Pseudo-stem and leaves of these species are also used during religious and cultural ceremonies.

## Asian Boxing Championships

Mary Kom has won the gold medal in the Asian Boxing Championships in the Light Flyweight category, defeating DPR Korea's Kim Hyang Mi. This is Mary Kom's sixth medal in the Asian Women's Boxing Championships and fifth gold medal, having won four gold medals and one silver medal in previous editions of the tournament.

## Blue Flag aerial training exercise

Blue Flag is a bi-annual multilateral exercise which aims to strengthen military cooperation amongst participating nations. The exercise is designed to strengthen Israel's military cooperation internationally. This is the first time India is participating in the drill, along with the US, France, Germany, Italy, Greece and Poland.

## Olive ridley turtles

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

**About Olive Ridley turtles:**

- Also known as the Pacific ridley sea turtle, Olive turtles are a medium-sized species of sea turtle found in warm and tropical waters, primarily in the Pacific and Indian Oceans.
- They are best known for their behavior of synchronized nesting in mass numbers.
- The olive ridley is classified as Vulnerable according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), and is listed in Appendix I of CITES.
- The Convention on Migratory Species and the Inter-American Convention for the Protection and Conservation of Sea Turtles have also provided olive ridleys with protection, leading to increased conservation and management for this marine turtle.

## Urdu as second official language of Telangana

**Context:**

Telangana government has declared Urdu as the state's second official language. The state government will appoint Urdu officers in all the offices over the next 60 days to receive petitions from public and reply them in Urdu.

**What the constitution says?**

The Indian constitution does not specify the official languages to be used by the states for the conduct of their official functions, and leaves each state free to, through its legislature, adopt Hindi or any language used in its territory as its official language or languages. The language need not be one of those listed in the Eighth Schedule, and several states have adopted official languages which are not so listed.

## Cornelia Sorabji

**Context:**

Google Doodle on November 15<sup>th</sup> paid tribute to Cornelia Sorabji, the first woman to practice law in the country, on the occasion of her 151st birth anniversary.

**Who was Cornelia Sorabji?**

Cornelia Sorabji was the first woman advocate of India. She created history by becoming first woman lawyer in 1924. She was the first woman permitted to attend Bombay University, where she excelled. She then went on to become the first Indian woman to study law at Oxford University in 1892.

### China launches world's first fully electric cargo ship

China has launched the world's first all-electric ship, which can travel up to 80km with 2000-tonnes cargo after a two-hour charge.

**Key facts:**

- The ship is 70.5-metre-long and weighs about 600 tonnes.
- The vessel is powered by a 26-tonne lithium battery. It can cruise at the top speed of 12.8 km per hour.
- As the ship do not use fossil fuels, it has zero emission, including carbon, sulphur and PM2.5 and it could be used as a passenger liner or a working ship.

### IndiaRAP programme

**What is it?** It is an India Road Assessment Programme (IndiaRAP) that will rate highways' safety levels, and seek to eliminate the most unsafe roads.

**Implementation:** The IndiaRAP programme is being supported by FedEx Express and will be hosted by the Asian Institute of Transport Development, and will work with government agencies as well as investors, researchers and NGOs to assess existing highways and promote the use of better design to make roads safer.

**The ratings are assigned** on the basis of the level of safety which is 'built-in' to a road for vehicle occupants, motorcyclists, bicyclists and pedestrians. Five-star roads are the safest while one-star roads are the least safe.

### Aadi Mahotsav

**What is it?**

It is a fortnight long tribal festival on the theme of 'A Celebration of the Spirit of Tribal Culture, Cuisine and Commerce'. It is being held at Delhi.

**Features:**

More than 750 tribal artisans and artisans from over 25 states are taking part in the festival. The Mahotsav will feature exhibition-cum-sale of tribal handicrafts, art, paintings, fabric, jewellery and much more. A special feature of the festival is tribal India cuisine, recreated and presented in delectable forms to suit urban tastes by special tribal chefs.

### Namami Barak festival

**Context:**

The first ever Namami Barak festival was celebrated on November 18<sup>th</sup> at Barak Valley in Assam.

**What is it?**

Namami Barak is an attempt to pay tribute to the River Barak and to showcase of Barak's potential and possibilities to emerge as a hub of trade and commerce. The cultural heritage of the valley together with its cuisine, fauna and flora, socio-economic and civic splendor were showcased before the global audience during the festival.

**About Barak river:**

The Barak River is one of the major rivers of South Assam and is a part of the Surma-Meghna River System. It rises in Manipur State, where it is the biggest and the most important of the hill country rivers. After Manipur it flows through Mizoram and into Assam, ending after 564 kilometres just after it enters Bangladesh where it forks into the Surma and Kushiyara rivers.

### Indira Gandhi Prize

**Context:**

Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will be the recipient of this year's Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament and Development.

**About the award:**

The award is given annually to individuals and organisations in recognition of creative efforts toward promoting international peace, development and a new international economic order, ensuring that scientific discoveries are used for the larger good of humanity, and enlarging the scope of freedom. The award, comprising a cash prize of ₹25 lakh and a citation, was instituted by the Indira Gandhi Memorial trust in 1986.

### Gleadovia konyakianorum

**Context:**

Scientists have discovered a new species of parasitic flowering plant. The species is named Gleadovia konyakianorum, in honour of the Konyak tribe of Nagas.

**Key facts:**

- The plant is a holoparasite [complete parasite] that derives its entire nutritional requirement from the host plant, which is a Strobilanthes species.
- Though it has no chlorophyll, the plant has a vascular system and extracts its nutrition from the host plant with the help of a haustorium. *A haustorium is a specialised structure with which plant parasites attach themselves to the tissue of host plants and derive nutrition.*
- The new plant species is a root parasite that grows up to 10 cm in height, and bears white, tubular flowers. Interestingly, this is only the fourth species from the genus Gleadovia to be found in the world. *The other three are Gleadovia banerjiana (discovered in Manipur), Gleadovia mupinense (found in China) and Gleadovia ruborum (discovered in Uttarakhand and also reported from China).*

### World's biggest toilet pot model unveiled at 'Trump village'

World's biggest toilet pot model was recently unveiled at Marora, popularly known as the "Trump village", in Haryana on the World Toilet Day in a bid to create awareness towards sanitation and use of toilets.

### IMBAX

**Context:**

A six-day India-Myanmar Bilateral Army Exercise (IMBAX) between the armies of India and Myanmar recently began at the Joint Training Node at Umroi in Meghalaya.

**What is it?**

Conceived with an aim to build and promote closer relations, while exchanging skills and experiences between the two armies, IMBAX is the first India-Myanmar exercise to be held on Indian soil. The training exercise aims to train the officers of Myanmar Army in various United Nations Peacekeeping roles and tasks. The training curriculum will enable the participants of Myanmar Army with the requisite knowledge and skills to meet the evolving challenges of peacekeeping operations in accordance with principles, policies and guidelines of the United Nations.

### World Conference on Access to Medical Products and International Laws for Trade and Health

**Context:** 1st World Conference on Access to Medical Products and International Laws for Trade and Health in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is being held in New Delhi, India.

**The Conference is being organized** by the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare with the support of WHO Country Office for India and in partnership with Indian Society of International Law.

**The objective of the Conference** is to exchange knowledge and expand understanding on contemporary issues in international trade laws and research and innovation for access to medical products to achieve SDG 2030 agenda.

### New species of gecko

- A new species of gecko was recently found in the Eastern Ghats in northern Andhra Pradesh. The reptile, which is endemic to the area, was identified as a different species after a five-year study.
- Named after eminent herpetologist Sushil Kumar Dutta from Odisha, Hemidactylus sushilduttai or Dutta's Mahendragiri gecko is the 32nd species of house geckos (Hemidactylus) from India, and among the largest in its genus. The genus has around 90 species across the world.

- This is the second gecko endemic to this hilly range and the third vertebrate as other endemics in the region are — Jeypore Indian gecko (*Cyrtodactylus jeyporensis*) and *Gegeneophis orientalis* — caecilian amphibian.
- Dutta's Mahendragiri gecko grows up to 225mm in length with its tail half its size. It is nocturnal and lives on rocks, large trees and coffee plantations at altitudes between 250-1,100 m above sea level.

### World's first Artificial Intelligence politician developed

Scientists have developed the world's first artificial intelligence politician, called SAM. The virtual politician, called SAM, was created by Nick Gerritsen, a 49-year-old entrepreneur in New Zealand.

**Unique features:** SAM can answer a person's queries regarding local issues such as policies around housing, education and immigration. The AI politician is constantly learning to respond to people through Facebook Messenger as well as a survey on its homepage.

### Mount Agung

Context: Indonesian and regional authorities have heightened flight warnings around Bali's Mount Agung as the volcano's eruptions sent a plume of volcanic ash and steam more than 6,000 metres into the skies above the island.

Where is Mt Agung located? Mount Agung or Gunung Agung is a volcano in Bali, Indonesia, southeast of Mt Batur volcano, also in Bali. Gunung Agung stratovolcano is the highest point on Bali. It is an active volcano.

### Hwasong-15

Context: North Korea has launched its most powerful weapon yet- Called the Hwasong-15, after nearly two months of relative quiet.

What is the Hwasong-15? It is the 'greatest ICBM' that could be armed with a 'super-large heavy nuclear warhead' capable of striking the 'whole mainland' of the United States of America. Pyongyang claimed the missile reached a height of 4,475 km (2,780 miles) and traveled 950 km (590 miles) before it accurately hitting a sea target.

### Karnataka first state where women head police, bureaucracy

Karnataka has become the first state in the country where administration, both civil and police, is headed by women. IAS officer K Ratna Prabha is the chief secretary and IPS officer Neelamani N Raju is the director general and inspector general of police (DG&IGP).

### India donates 500 tonnes of rice to Lesotho

Context: India has donated 500 metric tonnes of rice to the Kingdom of Lesotho, in Southern Africa, which is facing acute food shortage due to famine.

Location: Lesotho is an enclaved, landlocked country in southern Africa completely surrounded by South Africa. Resources are scarce – a consequence of the harsh environment of the highland plateau and limited agricultural space in the lowlands.

## Miscellaneous Points

- A **FASTag** is a device that employs radio frequency identification (RFID) technology for making toll payments directly from the prepaid or savings account linked to it. It will be mandatory from December 01 for all new four-wheelers to have FASTag devices fixed on the front windscreens by automobile manufacturers or authorised dealers.
- The Border Roads Organisation has constructed the **world's highest motorable road** in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir. The 86-km-long road passing through Umlingla Top is at a height of over 19,300 feet.
- A 14 days joint training exercise '**PRABAL DOSTYK 2017**' between the Indian Army and the Kazakhstan Army commenced at **Bakloh**, Himachal Pradesh.
- Former French Culture Minister **Audrey Azoulay** was appointed as Director General of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

### UNESCO:

UNESCO is UN organization that helps preserve historical and cultural sites worldwide. It is special multi-country agency, formed in 1945 and based in France.

UNESCO pursues its objectives through five major programs: education, natural sciences, social/human sciences, culture and communication/information. It is also known for recognizing world heritage sites and work to preserve cultural and heritage sites such as ancient ruins, villages and temples, and historic sites.