

CURRENT AFFAIRS

1ST NOV. TO 10TH NOV. 2016

EXERCISE SURYA KIRAN

IN NEWS: Indo-Nepal Joint Military Exercise Surya Kiran-X commenced at Army Battle School, Saljhandi, Nepal. It is the tenth in the series of such exercise.

- The Surya Kiran series of Exercises are being conducted annually, alternatively in Nepal and India.
- Surya Kiran series with Nepal is the largest in terms of troop's participation.
- The aim of this exercise is to conduct battalion level joint training with emphasis on Counter Terrorism in mountainous terrain.
- Aspects of Disaster Management have also been included in the exercise.
- The Joint Battalion Level Exercise will enhance defence co-operation and relations between the two nations.

GLOBAL YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INDEX 2016

IN NEWS: India ranked 133rd in the index covering 183 nations, below neighbouring countries like Nepal (77), Bhutan (69) and Sri Lanka (31) and trailing behind the South Asian average.

India accounts for nearly 20 per cent of the global youth population, with nearly 345 million young people between the ages of 15 and 30 living in the country.

In India, one in every three children (31 per cent) is not enrolled in secondary schools, against a global score for the same indicator of 19 per cent. In the field of employment opportunities, India trails behind the rest of the world significantly, ranking 152nd.

The top 10 countries on the index are largely from Europe – Germany (1), Denmark (2), Switzerland (4), United Kingdom (5), Netherlands (6), Austria (7), Luxembourg (8), Portugal (9) – with Australia (3) and Japan (10) as the two exceptions.

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.

FAST REACTOR RESEARCH PROJECT

IN NEWS: Russia's nuclear corporation Rosatom has invited India to join in developing nuclear reactors and participate in its fast reactor research project.

- The multipurpose fast research reactor project, also known as MBIR, is coming up at the International Research Center in Dimitrovgrad, located in the Ulyanovsk region.
- The purpose of the programme is the creation of a new technological platform for nuclear energy, which will be based on the closed fuel cycle with fast neutron reactors.
- A fast neutron reactor, also known simply as a fast reactor, is a type in which nuclear fission chain reaction is sustained by fast neutrons. Such a reactor needs no neutron moderator.
- With fast-neutron reactors, it is possible to solve the major ecological problem of reprocessing and deactivation of the accumulated radioactive waste, at the same time providing society with much needed energy.

Fast Neutron Reactor

- Fast neutron reactors have a high power density and are normally cooled by liquid metal such as sodium, lead, or lead-bismuth, with high conductivity and boiling point and no moderating effect.
- They operate at around 500-550°C at or near atmospheric pressure.
- Fast reactors typically use boron carbide control rods.
- Lead or lead-bismuth cooled fast reactors include MYRRHA, ALFRED, BREST and SVBR. Russia's MBIR is to be cooled by lead or lead-bismuth, gas and sodium simultaneously.

BENAMI TRANSACTIONS (PROHIBITION) AMENDMENT ACT

IN NEWS: The Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Amendment Act will come into force. The existing Benami Transactions (Prohibition) Act will be renamed as the Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act (PBPT Act).

FACTS

- The new law amends the 1988 Benami Transactions Act.
- The law provides for up to seven years' imprisonment and fine for those indulging in such transactions.
- The amendments aim to strengthen the Act in terms of legal and administrative procedure.
- The law prohibits recovery of the property held benami from benamdar by the real owner. As per the Act, properties held benami are liable for confiscation by the government, without payment of compensation.
- An appellate mechanism has been provided under the act, in the form of an adjudicating authority and appellate tribunal. According to the government, the four authorities who will conduct inquiries or investigations are the Initiating Officer, Approving Authority, Administrator and Adjudicating Authority.
- Assets of any kind — movable, immovable, tangible, intangible, any right or interest, or legal documents. As such, even gold or financial securities could qualify to be benami property.

BENAMI TRANSACTION

A benami transaction is one where a property is held by one person and the amount for it is paid by another person. Therefore, in a benami transaction, the name of the person who paid the money is not mentioned. Directly or indirectly, the benami transaction is done to benefit the one who pays.

INDIA - PALESTINE

IN NEWS: India and Palestine signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for setting up of Palestine-India Techno Park in Ramallah.

The Government of India has announced grant of US\$ 12 million for setting up the Park with payment of US\$ 3 million each on half-yearly basis for two years.

Techno-park will serve as an IT hub in Palestine with complete IT facilities offering a one-stop solution to all IT-related service requirements, providing state-of-the-art technology, hosting IT companies and foreign companies benefitting local business, universities and other institutions.

The project will help job creation, business and other opportunities for young Palestinians.

SAUR SUJALA YOJANA SCHEME

IN NEWS: Centre has launched Saur Sujala Yojana Scheme in Chhattisgarh that would provide solar powered irrigation pumps to farmers at the subsidized rate.

Objective

- The main objective of the Saur Sujala Yojana is to empower farmers by providing them solar irrigation pumps at subsidized rates. The scheme is also aimed at strengthen the agriculture and rural development in rural Chhattisgarh.
- Under the Saur Sujala Yojana, government would distribute solar powered irrigation pumps of 3HP and 5HP capacity worth Rs 3.5 lakh and Rs 4.5 lakh respectively to the farmers. The pumps will be provided at the subsidized rates to farmers by 31 March 2019.
- Under the Saur Sujala Yojana, about 51000 farmers would be benefited in Chhattisgarh in next two years. The scheme would be implemented on priority basis in the areas where electricity has not reached yet.

Implementation

- The scheme would be implemented by CREDA (Chhattisgarh State Renewable Energy Development Agency) under the Department of Energy, Govt of Chhattisgarh. Under the scheme, about 11000 solar pumps will be distributed to farmers in several zones in the state within the current financial year i.e. 2016-17.
- Selection of the beneficiaries under the Saur Sujala Yojana would be done by the department of agriculture of the state government. The farmers who have already been benefited under the borewell or pump scheme will be eligible for this scheme.

NATIONAL DATA REGISTRY

IN NEWS: The government has initiated to set up a National Data Registry for spatial data.

- The Department of Science and Technology will be the nodal coordinating agency of the NDR, which will be the registry for the NSDI and serve as a source of “authenticated” information.
- Data hosted by the NDR will be verified by the Survey of India for accuracy and also for issues pertaining to national security concerns.
- The registry will only be a repository for metadata and will not actually be a source of geospatial data.
- Registering spatial datasets involves capturing, defining and description of each data item.

National Geospatial Industry

The Indian geospatial industry is roughly worth \$4 billion and according to a latest survey by Geospatial Media and Communications and it is poised to grow up to \$20 billion by 2025.

All GOI flagship programs, be it Smart Cities, Skill Development, Digital India, Make in India, or the push to infrastructure, industrial development, energy or agriculture, have substantial geospatial component.

PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA

IN NEWS: Ministry of Housing & Urban Poverty Alleviation has enabled online submission of applications by the urban poor for affordable houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana(Urban).

- About 60 thousand CSCs located in urban areas will enable online submission of applications at a nominal cost of 25 rupees per application.
- It will enable online submission of applications by the urban poor for affordable houses under PMAY (Urban).
- CSCs will also facilitate printing of the acknowledgement receipt with beneficiary photograph which helps applicants in tracking application status.

ABOUT SCHEME

- Scheme has been started in 2015 and is spread for being implemented by the year 2022.
- A subsidy of around 6.5% can be availed by each individual beneficiary belonging to the economically weaker sections of the society and Lower income group categories through the credit lined subsidy scheme of the government.
- The government of India would be granting around 1,00,000 to each beneficiary under the PM Awas Yojna scheme.
- 1,50,000 will be provided by the government to all the urban poor who are eligible and who would like to construct their own houses in the city areas or who would want to make the necessary improvisations or renovations in their current houses which are existing.
- The central government would assist by giving ` 1,50,000/- to each beneficiary for the promotion of the housing stock and hence around 35% of the total units under the ongoing project will be earmarked for EWS category.

ASIAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION 2016

IN NEWS: Prime Minister inaugurated the Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

- Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) emphasized on working towards risk coverage for all, starting from poor households to small and medium enterprises and multi-national corporations to nation states.
- Investment in risk mapping globally, leveraging of technology to enhance the efficiency of the disaster risk management efforts and utilising the opportunities provided by social media and mobile technologies.
- Fully functional Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System has become operational and along with its Australian and Indonesian counterparts, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services is mandated to issue regional tsunami bulletins.

OBJECTIVES

- Transforming the commitment of governments and stakeholders made in Sendai during the WCDRR into national and local action.
- Setting the direction to accelerate regional implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework

OUTCOMES

- A New Delhi Declaration consolidated the political commitment of governments towards preventing and reducing risk as well as strengthening resilience by accelerating.
- Implementation and monitoring of the Sendai Framework in the region.
- ‘Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework’ a plan endorsed by the countries for the Asian region.
- Stakeholder action statements voluntary statements of action of stakeholder groups towards a ‘shared responsibility’ approach in implementation of the Sendai Framework.

SENDAI FRAMEWORK

The SFDRR (2015-2030) was adopted by at the Third World Conference on DRR at Sendai in Japan in March, 2015. It identifies targets and priority action areas towards reducing disaster risk by ‘reducing the damage caused by natural hazards like earthquakes, floods, droughts and cyclones, through an ethic of prevention’.

NEW DELHI DECLARATION

The ‘New Delhi Declaration’ is a political statement spelling out the commitment of participating governments towards preventing and reducing disaster risk, and strengthening the resilience of communities, nations and the Asian region. Recognising the need to accelerate the implementation of global frameworks, it commits to a people-centred and whole-of-society approach towards DRR. It also emphasises the need to enhance the capacity of communities and ensure participation of all stakeholder groups towards achieving resilience.

ASIAN REGIONAL PLAN

The ‘Asian Regional Plan for Implementation of the Sendai Framework’ focuses on the ‘How to’ reduce disaster risk at national and local levels. It has arrived at a longer term road map of cooperation and

collaboration, spanning the 15-year horizon of the Sendai Framework, as well as a two-year action plan to further disaster risk reduction with specific, actionable activities.

TITANIUM PROJECT

IN NEWS: The first titanium project of India being established by Saraf Group in Ganjam district of Odisha started its test production.

After inception this plant is expected to produce 36,000 tons of titanium slag and 20,000 tons of pig iron per year.

Three hundred and sixty-five families who lost their land for the project have also been provided proper compensation. For this project 200 acres of private land and 34 acres of government land had been acquired.

This export based industry is expected to export around 75 per cent of its produce to countries like China, Japan. Its produce would also be used within country in ship making, aeronautics, automobile and defence products manufacturing industries.

This titanium project of Saraf Group is coming up near Gopalpur port and the proposed SEZ of Tata Steel in the region.

This titanium industry would use ilmenite produced by Odisha Sands Complex (OSCOM) of Indian Rare Earths Ltd (IREL) located in the same area to produce titanium.

JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE

IN NEWS: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) of the United States has successfully completed building the largest space telescope — one that is 100 times powerful than the Hubble Space Telescope and may find the first galaxies that were formed in the early universe.

The James Webb Space Telescope will be the successor of NASA's 26-year-old Hubble.

The Webb telescope's infrared cameras are very sensitive and it needs to be shielded from the rays of the Sun. A five-layer sunshield of the size of a tennis court will prevent the heat from interfering with the telescope's infrared sensors.

The layers work together to reduce the temperatures between the hot and cold sides of the observatory by about 298 degrees Celsius. Each successive layer of the sunshield, made of kapton, that is cooler than the one below.

The space agency has also made the first important optical measurement of James Webb Space Telescope fully assembled primary mirror, called a Center of Curvature test.

This is the only test of the entire mirror where one can use the same equipment during a before and after test. This test will show if there are any changes or damages to the optical system.

The space telescope will provide images of the first galaxies ever formed, and explore planets around distant stars.

It is a joint project of the NASA, the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency.

INDIA - VENEZUELA

IN NEWS: Venezuela signed oil production deals with India and a local corporation totaling nearly \$1.45 billion.

The agreement comes amid a severe economic crisis in Venezuela, and it is seen as a way to boost oil production, pay off debts, obtain funds from other foreign partners, and increase the country's oil income.

The Indo-Venezuelan partnership, created in 2009, is expected to double the San Cristobal field daily oil production from 20,000 to 40,000 barrels of oil.

Local Delta Petroleum also became a partner with PDVSA after buying Houston-based Harvest Natural Resources.

PDVSA plans to increase production at Petrodelta, which is now 40 percent owned by Delta Petroleum, from 40,000 barrels per day to 110,000.

NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY ACT, 2013

IN NEWS: The National Food Security Act (NFSA), which entails supply of subsidised foodgrains, has been implemented across the country.

Implementation of National Food Security law means an annual subsidy of over Rs 1.4 lakh crore. As many as 80 crore people are covered under this law across 36 states and Union Territories.

Under the law, which was passed by Parliament in 2013, the government provides 5 kg of highly subsidized food grains per person, per month at Rs 1-3 per kg.

NFSA 2013

- Up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population is covered under TPDS, with uniform entitlement of 5 kg per person per month. However, since Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) households constitute poorest of the poor, and are presently entitled to 35 kg per household per month, entitlement of existing AAY households will be protected at 35 kg per household per month.
- Food grains under TPDS is available at subsidized prices of Rs. 3/2/1 per kg for rice, wheat and coarse grains for a period of three years from the date of commencement of the Act. Thereafter prices will be suitably linked to Minimum Support Price (MSP).
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers and children in the age group of 6 months to 14 years will be entitled to meals as per prescribed nutritional norms under Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mid-Day Meal (MDM) schemes. Higher nutritional norms have been prescribed for malnourished children upto 6 years of age.
- Pregnant women and lactating mothers are entitled to receive maternity benefit of not less than Rs. 6,000.

GUIDELINES FOR SETTING UP 1000 MW WIND POWER PROJECTS

IN NEWS: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE) issued Guidelines for transparent bidding process for implementation of Scheme for setting up of 1000 MW Wind Power Project connected to inter-state transmission system (ISTS).

Guidelines

- The Wind Power Projects will be selected through open and transparent competitive bidding followed by e-reverse auction and the capacity may go higher than 1000 MW, if there is demand from Buying Entities.
- The implementing agency SECI has already floated RfS document for selection of bidders under the Scheme.
- Discoms of non-windy State and UTs and also the bulk consumers of any State/UTs who intend to buy 10 MW or more can buy wind power under the Scheme.
- Bidder can bid for a minimum capacity of 50 MW and maximum up to 250 MW.
- Bidder is allowed to install 5% of additional rated capacity that will compensate auxiliary consumption and system losses up to interconnection point.
- Provision relating to pass through of GST impact, part commissioning, efficiency in generation, performance monitoring have also been stipulated in the guidelines.
- PTC India Ltd, trading company selected by SECI under the scheme, will sign Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with wind projects at bid tariff and back-to-back Power Sale Agreement (PSA) with Buying Entities at a pooled price of the total bids selected.
- The term of PPA and PSA will be 25 years.

CHINA – LATVIA

IN NEWS: Latvia became the first country in the Baltic Sea to sign a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) to link up with China's OBOR (One Belt and One Road) Initiative.

- Latvia supports China's OBOR and controversial 3 seas initiatives as well.
- Latvia is currently working actively to bring the fields of transit and logistics in line with modern logistics.
- Latvia gives China opportunity to distribute goods to Europe directly from Latvia. Enterprises from China will offer their production at a rate 5-6% cheaper on average bringing competitiveness advantages for both China and Latvia.

China's One Belt and One Road (OBOR) is China's key development strategy that targets to boost its connectivity and trade in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

- It includes two components: Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.
- It was proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013.

PRADHAN MANTRI SURAKSHIT MATRITVA ABHIYAN (PMSMA)

IN NEWS: The Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan (PMSMA) is aimed to reduce maternal and infant mortality rates through safe pregnancies and safe deliveries.

The national programme will provide special free antenatal care to about 3 crore pregnant women across the country in order to detect and prevent high risk pregnancies.

- The nationwide programme will provide fixed day assured, comprehensive and quality antenatal care to pregnant women on the 9th of every month.
- Pregnant women can now avail of a special antenatal check-up in their second or third trimesters at Government health facilities provided by gynaecology specialists/ physicians with support from private sector doctors to supplement the efforts.
- These services including ultrasound, blood and urine tests will be provided in addition to the routine antenatal check-ups at the identified health facility/outreach in both rural and urban areas.
- One of the aims is to identify and follow-up on high risk pregnancies in order to reduce MMR and IMR.
- Women who have not received or dropped out of ANC check-ups and a minimum package of investigations and medicines such as IFA and calcium supplements, would be provided to all pregnant women attending the PMSMA clinics.
- During this campaign, trained service providers and ASHA will focus their efforts to identify and reach out to pregnant women who have not registered for ANC (left out/missed ANC) and also those who have registered but not availed ANC services (dropout) as well as High Risk pregnant women.
- Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM), ASHA and Anganwadi Worker (AWW) would play a pivotal role in mobilization of the community and potential beneficiaries in both rural and urban areas for availing of services during the PMSMA
- Before leaving the facility every pregnant women to be counselled, may be individually or in groups, on nutrition, rest, safe sex, safety, birth preparedness, identification of danger signs, institutional delivery and Post-partum Family Planning (PPFP).
- Filling out the MCP cards at these clinics should be mandatory and a sticker indicating the condition and risk factor of the pregnant women should be added onto MCP card for each visit:
 - o Green Sticker- for women with no risk factor detected
 - o Red Sticker – for women with high risk pregnancy
 - o Blue – for women with Pregnancy Induced Hypertension
 - o Yellow – pregnancy with co-morbid conditions such as diabetes, hypothyroidism, STIs

RELATED SCHEMES

Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY), a demand promotion scheme involves conditional cash transfer of incentives to pregnant women coming into the institutional fold for delivery. It ensures timely Ante Natal Care (ANC), institutional delivery and Post Natal Care (PNC). However, expenses were incurred by the beneficiaries on drugs, diagnostics, transport etc. which was a barrier in accessing quality services.

Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK) that entitles all pregnant women with free treatment, drug, diagnostics, diet and transport was then launched under the platform of NRHM to improve accessibility of care during ANC, PNC and Institutional delivery.

EXERCISE SAMPRITI-2016

IN NEWS: As part of India Bangladesh defence cooperation, a joint military training exercise **SAMPRITI 2016** is being conducted at **Tangail, Dhaka, Bangladesh** from **05 to 18 November 2016**.

Exercise SAMPRITI is an important bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and Bangladesh and will be the sixth edition of the exercise which is hosted alternately by both countries.

- The joint exercise SAMPRITI 2016 will simulate a scenario where both nations are working together in a Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism environment under the UN Charter.
- The training will advance to joint tactical exercises wherein the battle drills of both the armies will be practiced.

JOINT ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY CENTRE

IN NEWS: Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi to establish a 'Joint Advanced Technology Centre' (JATC). JATC will be located in the campus of IIT Delhi.

- The JATC will enable Directed, Basic & Applied Research and will engage with premier research institutes through multi-institutional collaboration.
- DRDO will facilitate towards advanced research to utilize technology outcome in the futuristic applications.
- The objective for creation of JATC is to undertake and facilitate multi-disciplinary directed basic and applied research in the jointly identified research verticals.
- The researchers will get the opportunity to work in advanced areas of research such as Advanced Materials for Ballistic Protection, Advanced Mathematical Modelling and Simulation, Advanced Electromagnetic Devices and Terahertz Technologies, Smart & Intelligent Textile Technologies, Brain Computer Interface & Brain Machine Intelligence besides Photonic Technologies, Plasmonics and Quantum Photonics, etc.
- The focused research efforts at the centre will lead to realization of indigenous technologies in these critical areas, which will be used for speedy self-reliance.

CONSERVATION OF LOKTAK LAKE

IN NEWS: The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has constituted a four-member team for conservation and management of Loktak Lake in Mani.pur

The team will-

- Review the implementation of works carried out with financial assistance provided by the Central and State governments so far for the conservation and management of Loktak Lake and suggest further interventions required for conserving the lake in a holistic manner.
- Enumerate the steps required to be initiated for declaring Loktak Lake as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- Identify the steps and actions to be taken to increase the tourism potential of Loktak Lake.

LOKTAK LAKE

It is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India, and is famous for the phumdis (heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matter at various stages of decomposition) floating over it.

Keibul Lamjao is the only floating national park in the world. It is located near Moirang in Manipur state, India.

The Keibul Lamjao National Park is the last natural refuge of the endangered sangai (state animal).

It serves as a source of water for hydropower generation, irrigation and drinking water supply.

Considering the ecological status and its biodiversity values, the lake was initially designated as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on 23 March 1990.

The Loktak lake and its precincts have faced serious problems due to loss of vegetal cover in the catchment area and construction of Ithai barrage at the outlet of the lake for multipurpose development of water resources.

SCHEME FOR SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURING OF STRESSED ASSETS (S4A): RBI

IN NEWS: Construction major HCC's Rs.5,000-crore debt recast has become the first case to get approval from a high-level panel set up under Reserve Bank of India's new Scheme for Sustainable Structuring of Stressed Assets (S4A).

ABOUT SCHEME

The RBI had launched S4A scheme to help resolve the corporate debt problem and strengthen the lenders' ability to deal with stressed assets.

Under this scheme, a company's debt is bifurcated into two parts sustainable and unsustainable based on the cash flows of the company's project.

The sustainable debt cannot be less than 50% of existing debt and will have to be serviced over the same terms as that of existing facilities.

The unsustainable debt can be converted into equity, Optionally Convertible Debentures or Redeemable Optionally Convertible Preference Share with clearly spelt out terms.

Banks can sell this stake or equity to a new owner who will have the advantage of getting to run the business with a more manageable debt.

Banks or lenders will formulate the resolution plan and implement the same along with necessary internal approvals.

RBI mandated advisory body called Overseeing Committee (OC) will be constituted, which will review the resolution plans submitted by the Banks.

GST FIXED 4-RATE STRUCTURE

IN NEWS: The four bands of tax rates have been fixed at 5 percent, 12 percent, 18 percent and 28 percent.

- Tax between 40 percent and 65 percent will be imposed on luxury goods like high-end cars, pan masala, aerated drinks and tobacco products.
- Food grains will be zero-rated to insulate people from inflationary pressures.
- Most white goods, like washing machines, air conditioners, refrigerators, shampoo, shaving stuff and soap, will be taxed at 28 percent (with riders). The current levy varies between nil to 30-31 percent tax. The rider has been set as there are several items which are used by the lower middle class.
- Demerit goods or sin goods such as luxury cars, pan masala, aerated drinks, and tobacco and tobacco products, will invite a tax of 28 percent plus the cess. The overall incidence with cess, thus, could vary between 40 per cent and 65 per cent.
- There has been no consensus yet on tax rate for gold.
- The GST will subsume the multitude of cesses currently in place, including the Swachh Bharat Cess, Krishi Kalyan Cess and the Education Cess.
- Only the Clean Environment Cess will be retained and revenues from it will also fund the compensations.

INTERNATIONAL AGRO-BIODIVERSITY CONGRESS

IN NEWS: Prime Minister recently inaugurated the first International Agro-biodiversity Congress at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi.

The 4-day event, organized by the Indian Society of Plant Genetic Resources and Biodiversity International, is scheduled to be attended by 900 delegates from 60 countries to discuss conservation of genetic resources.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It will provide a platform for knowledge sharing as well as exchange of germplasm, a collective union of germ cells.
- It will deliberate on the issue of efficient management of gene banks at low cost with the use of new innovative technology.
- The congress will lead to discussion and knowledge sharing on issues for efficient management of science-led innovations in genetic resources, crop diversification, issues relating to quarantine, bio-safety and bio-security, and intellectual property rights.
- In the congress, a road map will be prepared to enhance food, nutrition and health security by optimal utilization of agro-biodiversity while protecting agro-ecosystems.
- The congress is expected to adopt 'Delhi Declaration on Agro-biodiversity management and use'. It seeks to develop a network of partnerships to strengthen biodiversity management system at national, regional and global levels.

Agro-biodiversity

Agro-biodiversity is defined as the variety and variability of animals, plants and micro-organisms that are used directly or indirectly for food and agriculture. It includes all species that are closely inter-woven in an agricultural ecosystem.

India is one of the most diverse countries in the world in agro-biodiversity. It takes up only 2.4 per cent of the world's land area and yet it harbours 7-8 per cent of all recorded species, including over 45,000 species of plants and 91,000 species of animals.

INDIA - SRILANKA

IN NEWS: India and Sri Lanka have agreed to set up a Joint Working Group on Fisheries (JWG) and a hotline between their Coast Guards to address the long-standing issue of fishermen from Tamil Nadu being arrested

HIGHLIGHTS

- It was decided that the JWG would meet every three months while the Ministers of Fisheries on both sides would meet every six months beginning January 2017 along with Coast Guard and Naval representatives to discuss the protracted issue.
- Framing procedures for returning fishermen arrested by both sides.
- Expediting the transition towards ending the practice of bottom trawling at the earliest.
- The issue of the release of detained fishing vessels will be discussed.
- Efforts are also being made to introduce modern technical information to the fishermen and to train them.
- Construction of fishing harbours at Rameshvaram and Ennore in Tamil Nadu.

BACKGROUND

The relationship between India and Sri Lanka is more than 2,500 years old. Both countries have a legacy of intellectual, cultural, religious and linguistic interaction. Trade and investment has grown and there is cooperation in the fields of development, education, culture and defence. Both countries share a broad understanding on major issues of international interest.

Fishermen from India and Sri Lanka have been fishing over centuries in the Palk Bay area located between India and Sri Lanka. [Both the countries have mutually entered into agreement in 1974 and in 1976 to decide the International Maritime Boundary Line (IMBL) in accordance with the international rules).

Given the proximity of the two countries in the sea, the incidents of straying of fishermen and crossing the IMBL are common, especially in the Palk-Strait and Gulf of Mannar. These have often proved to be risky for them. The instances of arrest of fishermen from Tamil Nadu (while fishing in Sri Lankan waters), seizure of their boats and attack by the Sri Lankan Navy are of great concern to the Indian government.

FIRST HYDROGEN POWERED TRAIN

IN NEWS: The world's first hydrogen powered, emission-free train is set to go into service in Germany in 2017 -- a ground-breaking innovation that could signal the phasing out of heavily polluting, diesel-powered trains.

The train named as **Coradia iLint**, developed by French rail transport company Alstom.

The first "hyd rail", or hydrogen-powered train, will begin transporting passengers on the Buxtehude-Bremervörde-Bremerhaven-Cuxhaven line in Lower Saxony, in northern Germany, in December 2017.

The hydrogen, aka "hyd rail," train is powered by a hydrogen fuel cell and emits steam and condensed water, making it a much quieter and eco-friendly.

Energy to power the train is generated by large fuel cells that sits on top of the train. This cell combines hydrogen with oxygen to produce electricity, which is then stored in batteries.

Each two-car train-set requires a fuel cell and a 207 pound (94kg) tank of hydrogen to supply it, while the oxygen is obtained from the local air.

The train claims speeds of up to 87 miles per hour and a hydrogen storage capacity for a 497-mile range. Excess energy is stored with onboard lithium batteries.

The train's fuel source is effectively carbon neutral since the hydrogen used by the train actually came from waste byproducts from the chemical industry and other manufacturers.

'STARTUP MENTORSHIP CIRCLE' PLATFORM

IN NEWS: CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) launched 'Startup Mentorship Circle' platform for connecting start-ups to universal marketplace under the Union Government's vision of entrepreneurship development - Startup India Initiative.

- The 'Startup Mentorship Circle' will provide a common platform for captains of India Inc and startup entrepreneurs to share their experiences and resources.
- CII aims at connecting startups to the global marketplace and their think-tanks to enable firms to scale up and succeed in an exponential way.
- Create a strong eco-system to develop innovation and startups driving sustainable economic growth and large-scale employment opportunities.
- Focus only on startups past the idea stage and have been in setup for 2-5 years –needing support for the next stage.

46TH DEATH ANNIVERSARY OF C.V. RAMAN

IN NEWS: One of India's most revered scientists and the Nobel prize winning Physicist, Sir Chandrasekhara Venkata Raman, more popularly known as C V Raman, was born in 1888 in Tamil Nadu and died in 1970 in Bangalore.

- He discovered the evidence of the quantum nature of light by observing the scattering of light, an effect that came to be known as the Raman Effect. The day is celebrated as National Science Day in India
- Discoverer of atomic nucleus and proton, Dr Ernest Rutherford referred to Raman's spectroscopy in his presidential address to the Royal Society in 1929. Raman was acknowledged by the society and he was also presented with a knighthood
- He bagged the award "for his work on the scattering of light and for the discovery of the Raman Effect".
- Raman was the first Asian and non-white individual to win a Nobel Prize in science
- In 1932, Raman and Suri Bhagavantam discovered the quantum photon spin. This discovery further proved the quantum nature of light.
- Raman was the first person to investigate the harmonic nature of the sound of Indian drums such as tabla and mridangam.
- On his first death anniversary, the Indian Postal Service published a commemorative stamp of Sir C V Raman with the reading of his spectroscopy and a diamond in the background. He was also awarded the Bharat Ratna in 1954.

COP7: WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO

IN NEWS: The seventh session of the Conference of the Parties (COP7), which brought together the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control's (FCTC) 180 Parties includes almost every country in the world held in India.

The anti-tobacco initiative reviewed the protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products, organized by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority (GNIDA) at the India Expo Centre & Mart.

It is for the **first time that India is hosting COP meeting of FCTC**. It is the world's biggest convention on tobacco control policy in which 180 countries are participating.

WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control

- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is the first global evidence-based public health treaty.
- It recognises the right of all people to the highest standard of health.
- The Treaty was developed by countries in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic. There are currently 180 Parties to the Convention.
- India has been the forerunner in ratification of the public health treaty and was the 7th Country to ratify the Convention in 2004. India ratified the treaty on 27th February 2005 and is therefore obligated to comply with the treaty provisions and its guidelines to reduce tobacco consumption globally.
- India provided a leadership role in the negotiations of FCTC and was also the Regional Coordinator for the South-East Asia Region.

Conference of Parties

- The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the Governing Body of the WHO FCTC and is comprised of all Parties to the Convention.
- It keeps under regular review the implementation of the Convention and takes the decisions necessary to promote its effective implementation. It may also adopt protocols, annexes and amendments to the Convention.
- The regular sessions of COP are held at two yearly intervals.

BACKGROUND

Tobacco use kills around 6 million people a year globally and the cost to treat tobacco-related diseases is whopping \$22 billion. In case of India, there are nearly 275 million tobacco users and close to one million deaths every year due to its direct or indirect use.

India is pushing for stricter control on smokeless tobacco. In India, implementation of 85% pictorial warnings on cigarette packets has been mandatory. The new Juvenile Justice Act makes sale of tobacco products to minors punishable offence with 7 years of rigorous imprisonment.

ILLEGAL CONSTRUCTION: HIMALAYAN ECOLOGY

IN NEWS: A PIL plea on illegal constructions and rapid degradation of the Himalayan ecology has made recently. Taking notice of the degradation in the Himalayan ecology and environment, the Uttarakhand High Court directed the government to take steps to preserve the Hill State's glaciers.

BACKGROUND

Uttarakhand has 968 glaciers spread across an area of 2,857 sq.km. In view of the rapidly melting Uttarakhand glaciers, which are a source of major rivers including the Ganga and the Yamuna, the Division Bench took cognisance of the rapid reduction in snow cover due to climate change and the melting of glaciers.

GOVERNMENT MEASURES

- No new permanent constructions must come up within a 25 kilometre radius from the "edges" of all the glaciers across the State.
- Restricting the burning of fossil fuels within a 10 kilometre radius of the "edges of glaciers".
- To provide the Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) and Kerosene Oil, in abundance, to the people living in these areas to mitigate their hardships by involving Oil Companies.
- The Chief Secretary of Uttarakhand must be the authority to issue "limited passes" for persons visiting the glaciers.
- The State government could also impose a cess in the form of "Glacier Tax" on persons visiting places in the vicinity of the glaciers.
- Prohibits the use of plastic, in all forms, within a 20 kilometre radius of glaciers.
- Also, the State administration is directed to put up stations 20 kilometres from each glacier to ensure the enforcement of the Court directions.

- However, the Army and the paramilitary forces shall be permitted to set up infrastructures but they too must consider the environment of the area before undertaking constructions of any kind.

ASTEROID PSYCHE

IN NEWS: Scientists have detected the presence of water on Psyche, the largest metallic asteroid in our solar system and the target of a proposed NASA mission.

Named 16 Psyche, the bolide is one of the most massive in the Asteroid Belt, measuring 186 miles across and consisting of almost pure nickel-iron metal. It is thought to be the remnant core of a planetary embryo that was mostly destroyed by impacts billions of years ago.

- NASA Infrared Telescope Facility show evidence for volatiles such as water or hydroxyl, a free radical consisting of one hydrogen atom bound to one oxygen atom, on Psyche's surface.
- In Earth's atmosphere, hydroxyl is extremely reactive and helps remove many chemical compounds. Hence, it is also known as the "detergent of the atmosphere."
- Asteroids are remaining fragments from the formation of the solar system that today orbit the sun between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter.
- Most of them fall into two broad categories: those rich in silicates, and those rich in carbon and volatiles. Metallic asteroids such as Psyche are extremely rare, making it a laboratory to study how planets formed.

Infrared Telescope Facility

- The IRTF is a 3.0 meter telescope, optimized for infrared observations, and located at the summit of Mauna Kea, Hawai'i.
- It was first built to support the Voyager missions and is now the USA national facility for infrared astronomy, providing continued support to planetary, solar neighborhood, and deep space applications.
- 50% of the IRTF observing time is reserved for studies of solar system objects.
- IRTF supports partial-night proposals and remote observing, enabling temporal monitoring of targets.

CENTRAL REGISTRY OF SECURITISATION ASSET

RECONSTRUCTION AND SECURITY INTEREST OF INDIA (CERSAI)

IN NEWS: The Union Government has appointed Praveen Kumar Sharma as the Central Registrar (CR), Managing Director (MD) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Central Registry of Securitisation Asset Reconstruction and Security Interest of India (CERSAI).

CERSAI

- CERSAI is a central online security interest registry of India.
- It is a Government company licensed under section 25 of the Companies Act, 1956.
- Its headquarters is in New Delhi.
- It was primarily created to check frauds in lending against equitable mortgages, in which people would take multiple loans on the same asset from different banks CERSAI provides the platform for filing registrations of transactions of securitization, asset reconstruction and security interest by the banks and financial institutions.

- Any person can search and inspect the records maintained by the registry on payment of prescribed fees.
- According to the government's directives, financial institutions must register details of security interests created by them with CERSAI within 30 days of its creation.

IGNITE AWARDS

IN NEWS: The President of India presented the Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE Awards to the winning children of IGNITE competition organized by the National Innovation Foundation at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

HIGHLIGHTS

- National Innovation Foundation (NIF) has successfully identified, recognized and nurtured the young talent, including those from the rural, tribal and other far flung areas.
- Department of Science and Technology to partner with NIF in INSPIRE MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspiration and Knowledge) scheme would boost the IGNITE model developed by NIF and Honey Bee Network in the last decade.
- The Atal Innovation Mission is a very important initiative of the government aimed at promoting innovations and start-ups all over the country. The idea of unleashing the creativity of children is a valuable step in that direction.
- Tinkering labs being set up in schools are going to add renewed energy to the young minds.
- Higher educational institutions to set up innovation clubs to search, spread, celebrate innovations and sense the unmet social needs. There are innovation clubs in 86 central institutes of higher learning.

IGNITE AWARD

Dr APJ Abdul Kalam IGNITE competition is an annual national competition to harness the creative and innovative spirit of children (up to Standard XII in school or those up to the age of 17 years out of school). Students are invited to send their original and creative technological ideas and innovations for the same.

The INSPIRE Programme

- The INSPIRE Programme has three components: Inspire Awards for attracting talent at an early age; Scholarships for Higher Education; and Fellowships for opportunities for Research Careers.
- INSPIRE Awards were established to encourage children to think independently and identify solutions for problems in their vicinity.
- Children would exhibit ideas in a science fair and be awarded ₹5000 to turn them into a working model.

MANAK (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspiration and Knowledge)

- The DST was concerned that competitive parents and schools were pushing children to participate in science-fairs and in the process stifling creativity.
- The name change is accompanied by a 'reformulation': refocus on innovative ideas that can be worked on by professionals and developed for commercial use; intellectual property rights would be granted to children.
- This year, the DST aims to select 60 such ideas.

INSPIRE Awards renamed as MANAK

- The INSPIRE Awards (Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research) is a popular outreach program of the Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- Since its inception in 2010, nearly 13.85 lakh students have been funded.
- The INSPIRE scheme is now set to be rechristened as 'MANAK' (Million Minds Augmenting National Aspirations and Knowledge) from 2016.

National Innovation Foundation

- The National Innovation Foundation (NIF), an autonomous body set up under the DST, is tasked with scouting and documenting grassroots technological innovators.
- The DST will rope in the NIF to ascertain that innovative ideas submitted by children are in fact original.
- The NIF will be required to cross-reference these ideas across its database to ensure duplicitous or recycled ones are eliminated.
- Gujarat based NIF started functioning in March 2000. Since then it has built up a database of 200,000 technological ideas, innovations and traditional knowledge practices from 600 districts of the country. It has also recognized 900 grassroots innovators and school students at its award functions.

FIRST LNG BUS

IN NEWS: India's first liquefied natural gas-driven bus was launched in Kerala.

The LNG-driven bus was rolled out as part of the Centre's plans to use LNG, considered to be a cleaner and safer fuel which emits 50 per cent less carbon, for mass transportation.

It has been a joint effort of Petronet LNG Limited (PLL), Indian Oil Corporation Ltd and Tata Motors Ltd to introduce LNG as a fuel in commercial vehicles in the state capital.

LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS

Liquefied Natural gas, the cleanest-burning hydrocarbon, is a major source of energy. LNG is a clear, colourless and non-toxic liquid.

Natural gas cooled after cleaning from admixtures to the condensation temperature (-161.5 °C), turns into liquid called "liquefied natural gas" (LNG). The volume of gas is contracted by 600 times during liquefaction, which is one of the main advantages of this technology.

When LNG reaches its destination, it is turned back into a gas at regasification plants. It is then piped to homes, businesses and industries where it is burnt for heat or to generate electricity. LNG is now also emerging as a cost-competitive and cleaner fuel, especially for shipping heavy-duty road transport.

INDIA - JAPAN

IN NEWS: A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) and the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India has been approved by the Cabinet.

- Prime objective of the MOU is the peace and human welfare.
- The collaboration with JAMSTEC will enhance capability in the field of atmospheric and climate research, ocean technology observation and hazard mitigation and also provide much needed exposure and hands-on experience to Indian scientists.
- The cooperation between parties and under Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) will be pursued primarily through joint survey, cruise and research and development activities, exchange of scientific visits, joint scientific seminars, workshops and meetings or exchange of information and data.

Earlier, a Letter of Intent (LOI) was signed between Ministry of Earth Sciences, Government of India and Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC) in 2014 to encourage collaboration in the areas of mutual interest.

AFSPA IN THREE MORE DISTRICTS OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

IN NEWS: Union Ministry of Home Affairs has extended Armed Forces Special Powers Act or AFSPA in three districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The districts - Tirap, Changlang, and Longding have been specified as 'disturbed areas' under Section 3, AFSPA.

HIGHLIGHTS

- One of the primary reasons cited by the Centre is “extortion and intimidation” by the cadres of National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah), who are “contriving to dominate areas hitherto occupied by NSCN (Khaplang).”
- After decades of violence, the NSCN-IM had entered into a ceasefire agreement with India in 1997. The largest group representing the Nagas has demanded a “Greater Nagalim” or a contiguous land for the Nagas, across the States of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram.
- The ceasefire signed with NSCN-IM is only for Nagaland; it does not include Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur.
- NSCN-K had unilaterally abrogated the ceasefire in March 2015 but NSCN-IM continues to be in a ceasefire pact with the Government of India.

AFSPA

- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Acts allows the Indian Armed Forces to observe a strict vigil in what the acts term as 'disturbed areas'.
- The Indian Armed Forces include the Indian Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, paramilitary forces such as Assam Rifles, Indian Coast Guard and Special Frontier Force and inter-service commands and institutions such as the Strategic Forces Command, the Andaman and Nicobar Command and the Integrated Defence Staff.
- The AFSPA is invoked when a case of militancy or insurgency takes place and the international borders of India are at risk.

- The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act allows the Indian Armed Forces to observe a strict vigil in what the act terms as 'disturbed areas'.
- Currently AFSPA is in the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur (except the Imphal municipal area), Arunachal Pradesh (only the Tirap, Changlang and Longding districts plus a 20-km belt bordering Assam), Meghalaya (confined to a 20-km belt bordering Assam) and Jammu and Kashmir.

HEDGING FOR EXTERNAL COMMERCIAL BORROWING

IN NEWS: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued the Clarifications on hedging for External Commercial Borrowings (ECB). The Clarifications were issued under section 10(4) and 11(1) of the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999.

Highlights

- Wherever hedging is mandated by RBI, the ECB borrower will be required to cover principal as well as coupon through financial hedges. The financial hedge for all exposures on account of ECB should start from the time of each such exposure.
- A minimum tenor of one year of financial hedge will be required with periodic rollover duly ensuring that the exposure on account of ECB is not unhedged at any point during the currency of ECB.
- Natural hedge, in lieu of financial hedge, will be considered only to the extent of offsetting projected cash flows in matching currency, net of all other projected outflows. For this purpose, an ECB may be considered naturally hedged if the offsetting exposure has the maturity within same accounting year.
- The designated bank will have the responsibility of verifying that 100 percent hedging requirement is complied with. All other aspects of the ECB policy shall remain unchanged.

PRADHAN MANTRI YUVA YOJANA

IN NEWS: The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship today announced launch of Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana to scale up an ecosystem of entrepreneurship for youngsters.

- The scheme will run for a period of five years from 2016-17 to 2020-2021.
- The project implementation cost would be Rs. 499.94 Crore.
- The scheme will offer education and training about entrepreneurship to over 7 lakh students in 5 years.
- Training will be provided through 3050 Institutes across India.
- The scheme will also offer easy access to information and mentor network, credit and advocacy to build a way-out for the youngsters.
- Institutes under Pradhan Mantri Yuva Yojana will include 2200 Institutes of Higher Learning (colleges, universities, and premier institutes), 300 schools, 500 ITIs and 50 Entrepreneurship Development Centers.
- The training programs will be carried out by the institutes through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).
- MSDE has plans to disburse around Rs 7,000 crore to states to help align them with the Centre's skill development agenda.

- "The Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) will work closely with the local authorities and industries towards job aggregation.
- MSDE has allocated around Rs 3,000 crore of 25 per cent from the funds earmarked for the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) to the states to achieve its target of training 10 million people over 4 years.

SWASTHA BHARAT – EK PAHAL (MAGAZINE) & NO MORE TENSION APP

IN NEWS: "Healthy India Initiative/Swastha Bharat-ek pehal" magazine and the "No More Tension" Mobile Application had been launched by Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

This launch is part of the Government's Digital India programme which is in line with its commitment to prioritize public health and strengthen citizen-centric health services by leveraging India's expanding mobile phone penetration.

Healthy India Initiative/Swastha Bharat-ek pehal

- A quarterly magazine.
- It will cater to health related information and will raise awareness about healthy living.
- The magazine will cover different aspect of health: women and child health, elderly health, seasonal ailments, daily nutritional needs, safe medication practices, home remedies healthy living and many more.
- The magazine will be made available at all the government facilities up to the sub-centre and will be available free of cost.
- The e-version of this magazine is also available for download. The current issue is in Hindi and English and the next version will be available in 13 other languages.

Stress management mobile application "No More Tension"

- It will help users to manage stress.
- The main objective of 'No More Tension' is to provide information to users regarding stress such as, what is stress, effects, symptoms and its management.
- The application allows the user to measure their stress level and learn various techniques like yoga and meditation to reduce stress from their lives.
- Currently, the application is available for download on Google play store and App store and will be available shortly on Windows.

SC PASSED DIRECTIONS TO CURB FEMALE FEOTICIDE

IN NEWS: The Bench passed 16 directions to ensure immediate and effective implementation of the Pre-conception and Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act and the Rules framed thereunder. The court passed the verdict while disposing of a PIL by NGO Voluntary Health Association of Punjab.

- All the States and the Union Territories in India shall maintain a centralised database of civil registration records from all registration units so that information can be made available from the website regarding the number of boys and girls being born.
- The information that shall be displayed on the website shall contain birth information for each district, municipality, corporation or gram panchayat so that a visual comparison of boys and girls born can be immediately seen.
- It also directed that States and Union Territories, which do not have any incentive schemes for the girl child, shall frame the same

BACKGROUND

- In our country, there has been a tendency to produce children until a male heir is born.
- The misuse of ultrasound for prenatal sex determination gave rise to a flourishing industry worth thousands of crores.
- The technique has also promoted the social discrimination against women. The result was a dwindling Child Sex Ratio.
- In 2011, India's Child Sex Ratio was 919. It was 927 in 2001, 945 in 1991 and 962 in 1981.
- In the advanced societies of the world, there exists a healthy Child Sex Ratio. However, in India, it has declined rapidly and has potential to cause demographic nightmare and societal tensions.
- The PNDT Act 1994 Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act, 1994 (PNDT) was passed in 1994 to stop female foeticides and arrest the declining sex ratio in the country.

PNDT Amendment Act 2003

- The PNDT act was amended and thus the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) Act 2003 came into existence.
- With the enactment of this act, the use of prenatal diagnostic technique for sex selective abortion was made an offensive crime. ”

FEATURES

- The act not only prohibits determination and disclosure of the sex of the foetus but also bans advertisements related to preconception and pre-natal determination of sex.
- All the technologies of sex determination, including the new chromosome separation technique have come under the ambit of the Act.
- It regulates the use of pre-natal diagnostic techniques such as ultrasound and amniocentesis.
- The Act has also made mandatory in all ultra-sonography units, the prominent display of a signboard that clearly indicates that detection/revelation of the sex of the foetus is illegal.
- Further, all ultrasound scanning machines have to be registered and the manufacturers are required to furnish information about the clinics and practitioners to whom the ultrasound machinery has been sold.
- The act empowered the appropriate authorities with the power of civil court for search, seizure and sealing the machines and equipments of the violators.

- The act mentions that no person, including the one who is conducting the procedure as per the law, will communicate the sex of the foetus to the pregnant woman or her relatives by words, signs or any other method.

FOOD TESTING INFRASTRUCTURE

IN NEWS: The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has rolled out a major scheme for strengthening of Food Testing Infrastructure in the country at an estimated cost of Rs. 482-crore, in the light of the recent observations by Mumbai High court regarding the urgent need to upgrade Food Testing Laboratories in India.

The Empowered Committee constituted for implementing this scheme by FSSAI.

Proposals from 7 States/UTs, namely, Goa, Delhi, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Punjab were considered for strengthening their food Testing infrastructure. Two proposals, from Chandigarh (Punjab) and Calicut (Kerala), were approved in principle.

The Committee also approved the proposal for strengthening the Referral Food Laboratory at Central Food Technology Research Institute (CFTRI) through provision of state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. Introduction of these equipment facilities would significantly enhance the testing capability of CFTRI for adulteration of honey and pesticide and antibiotic residues in food samples.

HIGHLIGHTS

- 45 State/UT Food Testing labs (at least one in each State/UT with a provision of two labs in larger states) and 14 Referral Food Testing labs will be upgraded to enable them to obtain NABL accreditation.
- 62 Mobile Testing labs will also be established across all States/UTs.
- There are currently 4 Mobile food Testing labs in Punjab, Gujarat, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which will serve as a model for these Mobile Testing labs.
- Capacity building of the Food Testing labs is also an important component of this scheme.
- In addition, a School Food and Hygiene Programme has been envisaged under which basic Food Testing labs will be set up in 1500 schools/colleges across the country to promote a culture of safe and wholesome food.

RECOVERING MARINE OIL SPILLS

IN NEWS: Simple, efficient and cost-effective compound GELATOR developed by researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) Thiruvananthapuram to remove marine oil spills.

FACTS

- Glucose as a starting material and through several chemical reactions produced compounds (GELATORS) that selectively congeal oil, including crude oil, from an oil-water mixture.
- Unlike other alternatives, the GELATORS, which are in a powder form, can be easily applied over oil-water mixture and do not cause any environmental damage.

- Unlike current methods, GELATORS can recover oil from oil-water mixture and the it can be reused several times.
- The GELATORS molecule is partly hydrophobic and partly hydrophilic. While the hydrophilic part helps in self-assembling to form GELATOR fibres & the hydrophobic part is responsible for its diffusion into the oil layer.
- Since the outer part of the fibre is hydrophobic, oil tends to gets into the spongy network made of fibres.
- Once inside the fibre network, oil loses fluidity and becomes a gel. As the self-assembly is strong, the gel maintains its structure and rigidity even under pressure.
- When the compound applied on a benzene-water mixture and diesel-water mixture, it was able to congeal all the benzene and diesel within a short span of time. The gel was strong enough to be scooped with a spatula.
- In the case of crude oil, it took a longer time for the compound to form a gel that was strong enough to be scooped off. The crude oil is a mixture of several low- and high-boiling and polar and non-polar fractions. So the efficiency to form a gel is less in the case of crude oil.

CONCERN OVER CHINESE MARKET ACCESS: RCEP

IN NEWS: The 15 Asia-Pacific nations including India of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) are concern to give greater market access to Chinese goods without gaining in return.

All these countries in the RCEP grouping are also worried about agreeing to eliminate tariffs altogether, a move that will mainly help China.

These 15 Asia-Pacific nations including India fear that China may dump its excess capacity in several items including steel, as well as highly subsidised items which may harm local industry of importing countries and distort trade.

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership

- RCEP is the proposed mega-regional Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between 16 Asia-Pacific countries.
- It includes India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10-member ASEAN bloc.
- RCEP negotiations were formally launched in November 2012 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia
- The RCEP negotiation process had started in 2013 and is unlikely to be concluded by the end of 2016.
- The proposed FTA aims to open up trade in goods and services as well as liberalise investment policies.
- It will cover a market of over 3 billion people in these 16 countries — whose total combined GDP is more than \$17 trillion and collectively account for 40% of world trade.
- RCEP is viewed as an alternative to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement, which excludes China and India.

AGRICULTURE MARKETING AND FARMER FRIENDLY REFORMS INDEX

IN NEWS: NITI Aayog has prepared ‘Agriculture Marketing and Farmer Friendly Reforms Index’ based on initiatives taken by the states in implementing farm sector reforms.

Maharashtra has been adjudged the most farmer friendly state in the country followed by Gujarat and Rajasthan, according to NITI Aayog’s index on reforms in the farm sector.

Almost 20 out of 29 states, including West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Assam, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and J&K, have done poorly with regard to agri-sector reforms.

ABOUT INDEX

- The Index is aimed at helping the states to identify and address problems in the farm sector, which suffer from low growth, low farm income and agrarian distress.
- The areas identified for action by NITI Aayog with a view to double farm income include agriculture market reforms, land lease reform, and reforms related to forestry on private land.
- The index takes into account several parameters like states’ implementation of the model agricultural marketing Act, joining eNAM, special treatment to fruits and vegetables for marketing and the level of taxes in state-regulated *mandis*(wholesale markets).
- These indicators reveal the ease of doing agribusiness and opportunities for farmers to benefit from modern trade.
- The indicators also reflect the levels of competitiveness, efficiency and transparency in agriculture markets.
- The other parameters included in the index are relaxation in restrictions related to lease of farm land to tenant farmers, and the freedom farmers have to fell and transport trees on their own land, which allows them to diversify their incomes.

REAL ESTATE (REGULATION AND DEVELOPMENT) (GENERAL) RULES, 2016

IN NEWS: Union government notified Real Estate (Regulation and Development) (General) Rules, 2016 which stipulate real estate developers furnish additional information regarding the ongoing projects besides depositing 70 per cent of unused funds in a separate bank account to ensure their completion.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The developers will also be required to refund or pay compensation to the allottees with an interest rate of State Bank of India's highest marginal cost of lending rate plus two per cent within 45 days of the payments becoming due.
- The Rules are applicable to the five Union Territories of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Daman & Diu, Lakshadweep and Chandigarh.
- The Rules also provide for compounding of punishment with imprisonment for violation of the orders of Real Estate Appellate Tribunal against payment of 10 per cent of project cost in case of developers and 10 per cent of the cost of property purchased in case of allottees and agents. Compliance with reasons for punishment shall be complied within 30 days of compounding.
- Real Estate Authorities and Appellate Tribunals shall dispose of complaints within 60 days.
- Real Estate Regulatory Authorities have been mandated to publish on their websites the information relating to profile and track record of promoters, details of litigations, advertisement and prospectus issued about the project, details of apartments, plots and garages, registered agents and consultants, development plan, financial details of the promoters, status of approvals and projects etc.