

**CURRENT AFFAIRS**

**11<sup>TH</sup> DEC. TO 20<sup>TH</sup> DEC. 2016**

**MANIPUR CRISIS**

**In news:** Manipur, is struggling to cope with an indefinite ‘economic blockade’ imposed by the United Naga Council (UNC) and other Naga organisations.

- There has been no normal movement of trucks on National Highways 2 and 37 - lifelines that pass through Naga villages - or along the 100-km Imphal-Moreh Road on the Trans Asian Highway No 1.
- Cross-border trade with Myanmar at border towns of Moreh in Manipur and Namphalong in Myanmar, legalised since 1995, has also come to a standstill, hit by the double whammy of the blockade and demonetisation.

**Issue: New districts opposed**

- The Manipur government issued a gazette notification creating 7 new districts by bifurcating 7 of the state’s existing 9 districts. This took the number of districts in the state to 16. Of Manipur’s 9 districts, 4 were valley districts; the other 5 were hill districts. Valley districts are smaller — estimated to have only 30% of the state’s land — with a high density of population; hill districts are sparsely populated.
- The govt. says this has been done for administrative convenience, and that to create a district is the prerogative of the government.
- The UNC and other Naga leaders have two main complaints.
  - They say Naga villages have been “appropriated” and merged with non-Naga areas to form the new districts in an attempt to divide the Naga people. And
  - the government did not consult the Hill Area Committees before taking the decision. The Hill Area Committees are formed to protect the rights of hill people, and under Article 371(C) of Constitution, must be consulted on matters relating to tribal people.
- The creation of new districts has been a subject of ethnic strife in Manipur since 1971, when it was first proposed.

**Background:**

- The hill-valley divide has deepened over the past two years as the demand for introducing the Inner Line Permit in Manipur, made by the Meitei community, has gathered momentum. The tribals have remained largely anti-ILP.
- Three other laws passed by the state assembly in 2015 — the Protection of Manipur People Bill, the Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Bill (Seventh Amendment) and the Manipur Shops and Establishments (Second Amendment) Bill were also met with protests. The laws were seen as an attempt to encroach on tribal lands and rights.

It is against this backdrop that the redrawing of district boundaries has taken on the colour of a Native versus Other conflict.

### KOUNOTORI EXPERIMENT

The experiment is part of an international initiative designed to make space safer for astronauts by getting rid of space junk. It is hoped that it will also provide better protection for space stations and weather and communications satellites worth billions of dollars.

**Japan's space agency lauched Kounotori** ("White Stork"), a space capsule that will attempt to clean space debris orbiting around earth, using an unusual approach.

**Orbital debris:** It consists of man-made objects, and is usually the residue of inactive space vehicles. Because these objects move at high speeds and can collide with incoming space vehicles, there's a case for cleaning them out.

### Kounotori Technology

- The Kounotori uses a kind of "electrodynamic tether" forged from thin wires of stainless steel and aluminium.
- One end of the strip will be attached to debris and the electricity generated by the tether as it swings through the earth's magnetic field. It is expected to slow the speed of space junk and pull it into a lower and lower orbits.
- Eventually the detritus will enter the earth's atmosphere, burning up harmlessly long before it has a chance to crash to the planet's surface.

### SITTWE PORT

**In news:** A deep water port built in Myanmar's Sittwe on the Bay of Bengal by India is ready to be commissioned.

### Move to counter China:

- The Indian achievement pips to the post a Chinese endeavour to create a deep-sea berthing infrastructure and an SEZ further down the Rakhine coast at Kyaukphyu.
- The two investments are inevitably being seen as the Asian competitors attempting to expand their spheres of naval influence in the Indian ocean region as in the case of Gwadar in Pakistan and Chabahar in Iran being built by China and India, respectively.

### About the port:

- Sittwe is the capital of Rakhine State in south-western Myanmar.
- It is located at the mouth of the Kaladan river, which flows into Mizoram in north-eastern India.

## **Strategic Advantage of the Port:**

At present, the only route to the north eastern region from the rest of India is a rather circuitous one through a narrow strip of Indian territory nicknamed the Chicken's Neck in West Bengal, sandwiched between Bhutan and Bangladesh.

The strategic advantage would be that it would significantly lower the cost and distance of movement from Kolkata to Mizoram and beyond. Once shipments arrive at Sittwe, they will be transferred to smaller freight carriers which would sail upstream into Mizoram.

## **INDIAN TSUNAMI EARLY WARNING-SYSTEM**

**In news:** As part of a soft-diplomacy effort, India is looking to have South China Sea countries such as Vietnam, Malaysia and Philippines use the tsunami early warning-system developed by India.

## **Establishment of ITEWS:**

- Post December 26, 2004 earthquake and the subsequent tsunami, Indian Tsunami Early Warning System (ITEWS) was established at the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad, **under the Earth System Sciences Organization (ESSO), Govt. of India.**
- The system is designed to send out a series of graded warnings to warn officials of danger. There are also sensors lodged on the ocean floor that will measure actual earthquake signals and based on that we can revise our warnings.
- Acting as one of the Regional Tsunami Advisory service Providers (RTSPs) for the Indian Ocean Region, ITEWS also provide tsunami advisories to the Indian Ocean rim countries along with Australia & Indonesia.
- It has expanded modelling capabilities to include countries in the South China sea and so it can be useful to them too.

## **GOTTHARD BASE TUNNEL (GBT)**

**In news:** Regular rail service through the world's longest tunnel began, carrying passengers deep under the Swiss Alps from Zurich to Lugano.

- It is the 57-kilometre long tunnel which took 17 years to build, at a cost of over 12 billion Swiss francs (\$11.8 billion).
- The ambitious GBT project has won praise across Europe for its pioneering efforts to improve connectivity from Rotterdam to the Adriatic.
- The Swiss funded tunnel was largely made possible by technical advances in tunnel-boring machines, which replaced the costly and dangerous blast-and-drill method.

**In news:** Scientists, including one of Indian origin, have created a nanoceramic material, which may be used in next-generation nuclear reactors that will operate at higher temperatures and radiation fields, producing energy more efficiently and economically.

- The material can not only withstand the harsh effects of radiation, but also becomes tougher under radiation, researchers said.
- Traditionally, water has been used as the primary coolant in reactors, absorbing the heat released from fission reactions.
- Though water poses fewer risks of corrosion damage to materials, there are also limits to the temperatures up to which water-cooled reactors can operate and in advanced reactors, increasing their temperature is the best way to increase energy production.
- New coolants, such as liquid metals like sodium and lead, are effective at much higher temperatures, but also are much more corrosive to the materials from which a nuclear reactor is made.

### **NGT ORDERS TO CANCEL ALLOTMENTS OF SALT PANS IN SAMBHAR SALT LAKE**

**In news:** The central zonal bench of National Green Tribunal (NGT) has directed the Rajasthan government to cancel allotments of salt pans in Sambhar Salt Lake that fall within the wetland and run contrary to the mandate of Wetland Rules, 2010.

Bench has directed the state wetland authority to review the allotments made so far after the submissions of the two expert committees- Vinod Kapoor and the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI) Committee reports and asked it to submit the compliance report within six months.

#### **Background:**

The illegal business of brine extraction at Sambhar Lake was first highlighted in the Vinod Kapoor fact-finding report in 2010.

The report had mentioned that 15-20 borewells were operating in every bigha of land during that period and over exploitation of water resources had lowered the groundwater level by almost 60 metres in the area.

While Sambhar Salts Ltd (SSL), a government venture, which has over 90 square miles at Sambhar and Nawa, produces two lakh tonnes of salt per annum, private companies together make around 20 lakh tonnes a year.

### **ISRO SIGNS DEAL FOR FIRST PRIVATELY BUILT SATELLITE**

- It was signed between ISRO Satellite Centre (ISAC), and the consortium of six companies lead by Alpha Design Technologies P Ltd. to deliver the country's first industry-built spacecraft by late 2017. ISAC assembles the country's satellites for communication, remote sensing and navigation.
- The contract includes assembly, integration and testing (AIT) of two spare navigation satellites consecutively in around 18 months.
- This is the first time that ISRO has outsourced an entire satellite to industry.

## WHO FRAMEWORK CONVENTION ON TOBACCO CONTROL (WHO FCTC)

- The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) is the first international treaty negotiated under the auspices of WHO.
- It was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 2003 and entered into force in 2005. It has since become one of the most rapidly and widely embraced treaties in United Nations history.
- The WHO FCTC was developed in response to the globalization of the tobacco epidemic and is an evidence-based treaty that reaffirms the right of all people to the highest standard of health.
- India is signatory to the Convention

## THE FOOD SAFETY AND STANDARDS AUTHORITY OF INDIA (FSSAI)

- It has been established under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006 which consolidates various acts & orders that have hitherto handled food related issues in various Ministries and Departments.
- Head office: Delhi
- FSSAI has been created for laying down science based standards for articles of food and to regulate their manufacture, storage, distribution, sale and import to ensure availability of safe and wholesome food for human consumption.
- Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Government of India is the Administrative Ministry for the implementation of FSSAI.
- Functions of FSSAI:-
  - Framing of Regulations to lay down the Standards and guidelines in relation to articles of food and specifying appropriate system of enforcing various standards thus notified.
  - Laying down mechanisms and guidelines for accreditation of certification bodies engaged in certification of food safety management system for food businesses.
  - Laying down procedure and guidelines for accreditation of laboratories and notification of the accredited laboratories.
  - To provide scientific advice and technical support to Central Government and State Governments in the matters of framing the policy and rules in areas which have a direct or indirect bearing of food safety and nutrition.

## ANTONIO GUTERRES: 9<sup>TH</sup> U.N. SECURITY GENERAL

- The 193 member states of the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution by acclamation, appointing the former Portugal Prime Minister as the ninth U.N. Secretary-General to take over from Ban Ki-moon.
- Mr. Guterres was Prime Minister of Portugal from 1995 to 2002, and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees from June 2005 to December 2015.
- Appointment Process:
  - Under procedures for appointing the world body's new chief, after the recommendation is transmitted from the Security Council to the Assembly, a draft resolution is issued for the Assembly to take action.

- A vote takes place only if a member state requests it and a simple majority of those voting would be required for the Assembly to adopt the resolution. If a vote is taken, it will be by secret ballot.
- The U.N. Charter, signed in 1945 as the foundation of the organisation, says relatively little about how a Secretary- General is to be selected, aside from Article 97, which notes that the candidate “shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council”.

### **REVIEW OF THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT), ACT**

**In news:** A “closed group”, under IT Secretary Aruna Sundarajan, has been set up to look into various aspects of the Act in line with the changing times to strengthen cyber security infrastructure, following the push for digital payments post-demonetisation.

The IT Act came out in 2000.

#### **Other measures:**

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) has set up a separate ‘digital payments’ division under Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In)- its cyber security arm to monitor and strengthen cashless transactions.
- All digital payments agencies have been asked to report to CERT-In any unusual activity that they see on their platforms. The division was set up after the November 8 announcement withdraw old Rs.500 and Rs.1000 notes from circulation.
- The govt. has decided to audit IT infra of NPCI
- It has also formed crack teams at CERT-In for immediate response.

### **WORLD MALARIA REPORT**

#### **Published by: WHO**

WHO had set a goal of cutting malaria cases to “near zero” by the end of last year. It fell far short, and now is aiming to reduce malaria cases and deaths by at least 90 per cent by 2030.

- The global fight against malaria is in “urgent need” of more funding,
- According to the report, there were 212 million new cases of malaria and 4,29,000 deaths worldwide in 2015.
- Further, nearly 78% of Plasmodium vivax malaria cases in 2015 occurred in just four countries: Ethiopia, India, Indonesia and Pakistan.
- Despite the billions of dollars spent on malaria programmes, the U.N. health agency said too many people are missing out on available resources like medicines and bed nets that protect against mosquitoes that spread the disease.
- In the report, WHO has also expressed concern about the quality of data: the report said surveillance systems catch fewer than 20 percent of cases. The vast majority cases are in Africa. About 70 percent of deaths are in children under the age of five.

- It also noted that new approaches to fighting malaria like giving out medicines to children during high season to prevent infections were proving effective.

### **“KAFALA” SYSTEM**

**In news:** Qatar formally abolishes the controversial “kafala” system, the biggest ever labour reform undertaken by the host of the 2022 football World Cup.

- Under “kafala”, all foreign workers working in Qatar require a local sponsor, in the form of an individual or company, and need their permission to switch jobs or leave the country.
- The system was compared to modern-day slavery and left vulnerable workers with little protection and open to abuse.
- A contract-based system to govern the gas-rich Gulf emirate’s 2.1 million foreign workers would take its place.
- Freedom of movement is guaranteed under the new rules, including giving workers the right to change jobs.

Any workers mistreated will automatically be allowed to change jobs. The exit visa formally needed to leave the country under “kafala” will be abolished, although workers will still need their employers' permission to go home.

### **NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRE FOR TRIBAL LIVELIHOOD-“VANJEEVAN”**

**In news:** Vanjeevan” the National Resource Centre for Tribal Livelihood issues was launched at Bhubaneswar, Odisha. NRC website and e-knowledge platform on tribal livelihood was also unveiled on the occasion.

- **Launched by:** Union Ministry of Tribal Affairs in collaboration with UNDP and National Scheduled Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC).
- Vanjeevan will be a programme to identify the problems in livelihood issues in select districts of six states having low HDI of tribal people in the first phase.
- The states are Assam, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha and Telangana.
- In the second phase the programme will be implemented in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Meghalaya and Tripura.
- The programme will focus on the identification of local resources, keeping in view the existing skill level. The programme will facilitate utilization of funds under various Government programmes for the above purpose.
- The National Resource Centre will serve as a platform for livelihood mapping, skill gap analysis and knowledge hub where consolidation of best livelihood and entrepreneurship models will be accessible for tribal entrepreneurship development.

**INDIA SIGNS GRANT AGREEMENT WITH THE IBRD**

- An agreement for GEF Grant of USD 5.19 Million for “Additional Financing for Financing Energy Efficiency at MSMEs Project- Programmatic Framework for Energy Efficiency” was signed with International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, acting as an Implementing Agency of the Global Environment Facility.
- The proposed additional financing (AF) would be used to help further scale up the initiatives taken up under the parent project.

**The parent project-India: Financing Energy Efficiency at MSME Project (FEEMP)**

- Became effective in 2010 with an original GEF Grant amount of US\$ 11.3 million.
- The Development Objective of the project was to increase demand for energy efficiency investments in select micro, small and medium enterprise clusters and to build their capacity to access commercial finance.
- The parent project currently has a Satisfactory rating towards achievement of Project Development Objective (PDO), and implementation performance.

**EKUVERIN MILITARY EXERCISE**

**In news:** The Seventh edition of EKUVERIN military exercise between India and Maldives was held at Kadhdhoo, Laamu Atoll, Maldives.

- The exercise is a 14 day platoon level joint military exercise between the Indian Army and the Maldives National Defence Force which is conducted on a yearly basis.
- The aim of the exercise is to conduct military training with emphasis on amphibious and counter insurgency operations with a view to enhance interoperability between the two armies.
- The previous edition of the exercise was held in India at Trivandrum, Kerala.

**'INDRA'- NAVY EXERCISE**

**In news:** The ninth edition of 'Indra- Navy exercise, an annual bilateral maritime was conducted between the Indian Navy and the Russian Navy in the Bay of Bengal.

- The primary aim of exercise Indra Navy-2016 is to increase inter-operability amongst the two navies and develop common understanding and procedures for maritime security operations.
- The scope of the exercise includes wide-ranging professional interactions in harbor phase and a diverse canvas of operational activities across a spectrum of maritime operations at sea.
- During exercise, the Indian Navy will be represented by INS Ranvir, a guided missile destroyer, INS Satpura, an indigenous frigate, and INS Kamorta, an indigenous Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) corvette.
- The Indra- Navy exercise would help to further strengthen mutual confidence and inter-operability, and also enable sharing of best practices between both navies.

- Initiated in 2003, the exercise has matured over the years with increase in scope, complexity of operations and level of participation.

### **RESTORE-L MISSION**

- Restore-L is a free-flying mission of NASA projected to launch in 2020.
- It is a robotic spacecraft equipped with the tools and technologies needed to repair or refuel satellites currently in orbit.
- It aims to perform in-orbit satellite servicing in low-Earth orbit.

### **THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES BILL, 2016**

**In news:** Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill - 2016 introduced by Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has been passed by the Parliament.

The Bill will replace the existing Persons with Disabilities (Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation) Act, 1995, which was enacted 21 years back.

- **Fine and Imprisonment:** It provides for imprisonment of at least six months up to two years, along with a fine ranging between Rs 10,000 and Rs 5 lakh for discriminating against differently-abled persons.
- **Definition of disability:** disability has been defined based on an evolving and dynamic concept and the types of disabilities have been increased from existing seven to 21.
  - The types of disabilities now include mental illness, autism spectrum disorder, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, chronic neurological conditions.
  - It recognises that persons with psychosocial and intellectual disabilities like autism and Down's Syndrome also have a right to education and employment
  - It recognises acid attacks and Parkinson's disease too.
  - Speech and Language Disability and Specific Learning Disability have been added for the first time.
  - Dwarfism, muscular dystrophy have has been indicated as separate class of specified disability.
  - The New categories of disabilities also included three blood disorders, Thalassemia, Hemophilia and Sickle Cell disease.
  - In addition, the Government has been authorized to notify any other category of specified disability.
- The **quantum of reservation** increased for certain persons or class of persons with benchmark disability from three per cent to **four per cent in government jobs**. In higher education institutions, the quota has been increased from three per cent to five percent.
- Every child with benchmark disability between the age group of 6 and 18 years shall have the **right to free education**. Government funded educational institutions as well as the government recognized institutions will have to provide inclusive education to the children with disabilities.

- For strengthening the Prime Minister's Accessible India Campaign, stress has been given to ensure accessibility in public buildings (both Government and private) in a prescribed time-frame.
- The Bill provides for grant of guardianship by District Court under which there will be joint decision – making between the guardian and the persons with disabilities.
- It also gives effect to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which India is a signatory. This will fulfill the obligations on the part of India in terms of UNCRD.

### **MAJOR PORT AUTHORITIES BILL, 2016**

**In news:** The Union Cabinet approved the draft Major Port Authorities Bill, 2016 to replace the existing Major Port Trusts Act, 1963 in a bid to empower 12 major ports to perform with greater efficiency on account of full autonomy in decision-making.

- Under the proposed Bill, all PPP operators will be free to fix tariffs based on market conditions.
- The role of Tariff Authority for Major Ports has been redefined. Port Authority has now been given powers to fix tariff which will act as a reference tariff for purposes of bidding for PPP projects.
- The Bill proposes to reduce the size of the board of the Port Authority from 17-19 to 11 members. A compact board with professional independent members is expected to strengthen decision-making and strategic planning.
- The Board will include representatives of respective state governments, Railways Ministry, Defence Ministry and Department of Revenue along with a member representing employees of the Major Ports Authority.
- The Board of the Port Authority has been allowed to fix the scale of rates for other port services and assets including land.
- When the proposed law takes effect, the port authorities will get the power to lease land for port-related use for up to 40 years and for non-port related use up to 20 years; the Centre's approval will be needed only for longer leases.
- The number of sections in the new Bill stand reduced to 65 from 134 in the Major Trusts Act of 1963.
- An independent review Board has been proposed to carry out the residual function of the erstwhile TAMP (Tariff Authority for Major Ports) for major ports, to look into disputes between ports and PPP concessionaires, to review stressed PPP projects and suggest measures to revive such projects.
- It has been proposed to give the Board full powers to enter into contract, over planning and development, fixing of tariff except in national interest, security and emergency arising out of inaction and default. The present law requires the Centre's approval in 22 such cases.
- The move is expected to spur private investments in port projects and infuse professionalism.

**'SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR CLIMATE-RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT IN MAJULI'**  
**(SACRED, MAJULI)**

**Launched by:** Assam's department of Environment and Forest

- The project, part of the French Development Agency-assisted Assam Project on Forest and Biodiversity Conservation, has been initiated to combat climate change and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- It aims to make the Majuli river island district the first-ever carbon-neutral district of the country by 2020.
- The roadmap for the project is being developed by IORA Ecological Solutions, an environmental finance, policy advisory and project development group.
- Mitigation through forestry activities and biodiversity conservation will be the starting points for the carbon-neutral agenda, followed by other interventions over the next three years

**Majuli:**

- It is the biggest river island in the world in the Brahmaputra River, Assam, India and also 1st island district of the country.
- It is the seat of the state's Vaishnavite culture
- The island is formed by the Brahmaputra river in the south and the Kherkutia Xuti, an anabranch of the Brahmaputra, joined by the Subansiri River in the north.
- Mājuli island is accessible by ferries from the city of Jorhat. It was formed due to course changes by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, mainly the Lohit.
- It has been vying for World Heritage Site status. It has been included in the tentative list by UNESCO.

**FIFTH INDIA-ARAB PARTNERSHIP CONFERENCE AT OMAN**

- The conference is being organised by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) in collaboration with Arab League Secretariat, Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), General Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry in the Arab Countries (GUCCIAC) and Federation of the Arab Business (FAB).
- The theme of the Conference is “**Partnership towards Innovation and Information Technology Co-operation.**”
- Topics identified for the conference - technology and innovation, the renewable energy and clean technology, the health and drug industry, the higher education and skill development, food security and safety and tourism.

**RIO ENTERS THE UN'S LIST OF WORLD HERITAGE SITES**

Rio de Janeiro, nicknamed the Marvelous City, officially entered the UN's list of world heritage sites in recognition of its soaring granite cliffs, urban rainforest and beaches.

- The UN cultural body, UNESCO, highlighted the "extraordinary fusion" of man-made and natural beauty in certifying Rio on the world heritage list.
- Rio got a big tourism boost during the 2014 football World Cup and Olympic Games. However, persistent high crime, last year's Zika epidemic, and political instability have hurt the city's image.
- The UNESCO status was announced in 2012, but only became official after the Brazilian authorities were given four years to report on their plans for protecting the likes of Flamengo Park, Sugarloaf Mountain, the Corcovado, Copacabana beach, the Botanical Garden and Tijuca forest.

**BABUR CRUISE MISSILE**

**In news:** Pakistan conducted a successful test of an enhanced version of the indigenously developed Babur cruise missile.

- Called 'Babur' after Mughal invader and founder of the dynasty of same name, the missile is part of Babur Weapon System version- 2 because it is enhanced version of earlier missile.
- The cruise missile incorporates advanced aerodynamics and avionics and can strike targets on both land and sea at a range of 700 kilometres.
- It is a low flying, terrain hugging missile, which carries certain stealth features and is capable of carrying various types of warheads.

**COALITION FOR EPIDEMIC PREPAREDNESS AND INNOVATIONS (CEPI)**

**In news:** Second Meeting of the Interim Board of Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations (CEPI), was held in New Delhi on December 15, 2016

- The Department of Biotechnology (DBT) on behalf of Government of India will be partnering in the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovations (CEPI).
- The meeting focused on identifying disease priorities, future strategy and setting of Permanent Secretariat for CEPI.
- The meeting was attended by Board members from countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, South and North America as well as civil society organizations including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) as well as the World Health Organization.
- India's participation in CEPI would provide the opportunity to leverage vaccine development capacities in India, access to vaccines as and when needed and protection of our population and boost our ability to have a competitive vaccine industry.

## **Background:**

- The CEPI was formally established at a meeting of its stakeholders in London on August 30<sup>th</sup> (2016).
- The CEPI is a new coalition of stakeholders from international organizations, governments, industry, public and philanthropic R&D funders, academia, NGOs and civil society groups who agreed to explore new ways of working to drive vaccine innovation to address public health threats, in alignment with the WHO Blueprint for R&D.
- The CEPI aims to finance and coordinate the development of new vaccines to prevent and contain infectious disease epidemics.
- CEPI is currently being steered by five founding partners. They are: Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science & Technology, GOI; Government of Norway; Wellcome Trust; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; and World Economic Forum.

## **LUCKY GRAHAK YOJANA AND DIGI-DHAN VYAPAR YOJANA**

**In news:** NITI Aayog announced the launch of the schemes - Lucky Grahak Yojana and Digi-Dhan Vyapar Yojana - for incentivising digital payment

- Aim to give cash awards to consumers and merchants who utilize digital payment instruments for personal consumption expenditures.
- It has been decided that National Payment Corporation of India (NPCI) shall be the implementing agency for this scheme. NPCI is a not for profit company which is charged with a responsibility of guiding India towards being a cashless society.

## **Lucky Grahak Yojana [Consumers]:**

- Daily reward of Rs 1000 to be given to 15,000 lucky Consumers for a period of 100 days;
- Weekly prizes worth Rs 1 lakh, Rs 10,000 and Rs. 5000 for Consumers who use the alternate modes of digital Payments
- This will include all forms of transactions viz. UPI, USSD, AEPS and RuPay Cards but will for the time being exclude transactions through Private Credit Cards and Digital Wallets.

## **Digi-धन Vyapar Yojana [Merchants]:**

- Prizes for Merchants for all digital transactions conducted at Merchant establishments
- Weekly prizes worth Rs. 50,000, Rs 5,000 and Rs. 2,500

**'SWASTHYA RAKSHA PROGRAMME'**

**Launched by:** AYUSH Ministry to promote health and health education in villages

**Objectives:**

- To organize Swasthya Rakshan OPDs, Swasthya Parikshan Camps and Health/Hygiene awareness programme
- Awareness about cleanliness of domestic surroundings and environment.
- Provide medical aid/incidental support in the adopted Colonies/villages.
- Documentation of demographic information, food habits, hygiene conditions, seasons, lifestyle etc., incidence/prevalence of disease and their relation to the incidence of disease.
- Assessment of health status and propagation of Ayurvedic concept of pathya-apathya and extension of health care services.

**SEPARATE ENTITY TO REGULATE PAYMENTS AND SETTLEMENTS**

**In news:** The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has opposed a move to establish a separate entity to regulate payments and settlements, a function that is currently under the central bank's purview.

**Background:**

- In September, the Centre had set up a 11-member committee on Digital Payments headed by Finance Secretary Ratan Watal.
- One of the panel's terms of reference was to study and recommend changes in the regulatory mechanism under various acts such as the Payments and Settlement Act, the RBI Act, and the Information Technology Act among others.
- The panel was to have laid out a roadmap for digital payments, which at present stand at 20 per cent of all transactions. A key goal is to halve India's cash-to-GDP ratio to six per cent.

**Recommendation of a separate regulator:**

- The recommendation is that the RBI will be the regulator for SIPS (systemically important payment system) and a separate board PRB (Payments Regulatory Board) for retail payments will be created under RBI
- The committee had suggested that the PRB be an independent body.
- The report comes at a time when the Centre is pushing to boost digital payments in the wake of the withdrawal of high-value currency notes.

**RBI's view:**

- There is no need to create confusion by artificially bifurcating payment systems for bringing them under two sets of regulators

- The global experience, by and large, has been that both the SIPS and retail payment systems are under the central bank for a variety of reasons including issues of inter-connectivity between the systems and the role of the central bank as the lender of last resort (LOLR).
- The idea of segregating retail payments from wholesale/systemically important payments system does not jell with the increasing global recognition of importance of retail payments system.
- The RBI has mooted a monetary-policy-committee-style structure for the PRB, where outcomes are decided independently, but implementation remains with the banking regulator.

### **NEW DELHI DECLARATION**

**In news:** The Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development adopted the New Delhi declaration. It was the culmination of a three-day dialogue by the member nations of the Asia-Pacific region, which together account for more than half of the global urban population.

### **Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development**

- This was the first such meeting held to discuss ways of realising the New Urban Agenda that was finalised during the United Nations-Habitat III conference in Quito in October 2016.
- Theme of the conference was ‘Emerging Urban Forms-Policy Reforms and Governance Structures in the Context of New Urban Agenda
- It is a biennial Conference and will be hosted by Iran two years later.
- Asia Pacific countries voiced concern over unmanageable and unsustainable peripheral urban expansion
- Also resolved to adopt Urban Plus approach to take planning beyond city limits
- Adopted New Delhi Declaration and Implementation Plan urging National Human Settlement Policies

New Urban Agenda: The New Urban Agenda is a global document which aims to make urbanization serve as an engine of growth. The document needs to be localised as per the specific needs of the region and the country.

### **What is included in the New Delhi declaration?**

- The Delhi Declaration stressed on the need to review existing policies and draft new ones that will take forward the aims of the New Urban Agenda. It also looks at integration of land use and transportation planning, community participation in urban planning and service delivery.
- **Urban Plus Approach:** The approach, known as Urban Plus means “to urbanise keeping in mind the urban-rural continuum”. It aims to address ways to make urban expansion sustainable and manageable. This would mean an emphasis on planning for urban and its adjoining peri-urban and rural areas in an integrated manner.
- In the Implementation Plan that was also adopted, the member countries have also strongly recommended formulation of National Human Settlement Policies to promote inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable city and human settlements.

- The Implementation Plan further recommended land regulation policy mechanisms such as land pooling to ensure inclusive and participatory planning, integration of land use and transportation planning across defined boundaries of cities and mixed land use, enforcement and incentivisation of timely execution of infrastructure projects, formulation of comprehensive urban parking policies and community participation in urban planning and service delivery.
- In view of the vulnerability of most of the Asia Pacific countries to natural disasters and other risks, the Implementation Plan has recommended urban resilience as a criteria for investment. Resilience is the ability of cities to withstand and absorb disasters and shocks and maintain normal services and quickly return to normalcy.

### **CHINA'S FIRST FULLY- OWNED OVERSEAS SATELLITE GROUND STATION**

**In news:** China has launched its first fully- owned overseas satellite ground station near the North Pole.

China has previously built ground satellite facilities in numerous foreign countries, mostly in Africa and South America, which are all joint ventures.

However, the fully-owned overseas ground station in Sweden would give China much greater freedom and security to operate its space projects, some of which had military purposes.

- The facility, located in Sweden about 200 kms north of the Arctic Circle, would allow China to collect satellite data anywhere on Earth at speeds that were more than twice as fast as before.
- The new facility would play an important role in China's Gaofen project - a network of observation satellites orbiting the Earth to provide global surveillance capabilities - which was due to be completed in 2020.
- Domestic ground stations have needed up to seven hours to download the data from satellites orbiting the Earth in the past, but with the facility in Sweden, the maximum delay for downloading data would be less than 3.5 hours.
- The shorter time is because the mapping, weather, reconnaissance and military satellites orbiting the North Pole are able to pass around the Earth about 12 times each day, while those flying over China can orbit the Earth only about five times each day.
- The Arctic station would be using the best and most sensitive signal receiving devices China had ever built, including one with higher bandwidth, covering frequencies from 26.5 to 40 GHz, which had a download speed of 6 Gigabits (billions of bits) per second, which was "the fastest in the world".

### **'SAANJHI SAANJH'**

- It is a National Newspaper dedicated to Senior Citizen
- **Released by:** Minister for Social Justice and
- This bilingual newspaper has got 8 pages which will be published from Delhi by Harikrit publishers.
- This newspaper will carry important and useful news pertaining to elderly persons besides inspirational stories. It will serve as a bridge between old and new generations.

**'VASECTOMY FORTNIGHT'**

**In news:** The government observed 'Vasectomy Fortnight' between November 21 and December 4 with the hope to create awareness about male sterilisation and, more importantly, to facilitate district administrations reach sterilisation targets through campaigns.

- Of the 40 lakh sterilisation procedures done in 2014-15, vasectomies accounted for minuscule 1.9 per cent.
- Sterilisation is simpler in men than women — recovery time and surgical risk are smaller, complications are rare and deaths rarer. Yet, men are unwilling to share the burden of birth control on a misplaced sense of masculinity.
- Vigorous campaigning, efficient counselling and post-operative services as well as education are needed to promote vasectomy.
- Tubectomies still the norm: Experts maintain that the gap between vasectomy targets and achievements remain unchanged over the years even as country's fertility and birth rates continue to fall, driven mainly by female sterilisation.
- Lack of gender equality, vulnerability of women and early marriages makes them agreeable to mass sterilisation programmes.

**INDIA- TAJIKISTAN**

**In news:** Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon was on a five-day visit to India

- The Financial Intelligence Unit of India and the Central Asian country signed an agreement to prevent financing of terrorism and money laundering. Both sides also signed agreements on bilateral investment and avoidance of double taxation.
- Tajikistan invited India to invest in four free economic zones that have come up in the country and thanked it for the modernisation of the Varzob-1 Hydropower Station and also sought investment in the upcoming small and medium hydroelectricity projects.
- It appreciated the signing of the trilateral Chahbahar port agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan as the project will provide connectivity to Tajikistan.
- Tajikistan supported India's candidature for Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and India's bid for permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council.

**PERMANENT TRIBUNAL TO ADJUDICATE ALL INTER-STATE****RIVER WATER DISPUTES**

**In news:** The Centre has decided to set up a single, permanent Tribunal with retired Supreme Court judge as its chairperson to adjudicate all inter-State river water disputes

- It is aimed at resolving grievances of States in a speedy manner. This body will subsume existing tribunals.

- Besides the tribunal, the government has also proposed to float some Benches by amending the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, 1956 to look into disputes as and when required. Unlike the tribunal, the Benches will cease to exist once the disputes are resolved.
- The proposed Tribunal is expected to deliver its verdict during a span of three years as opposed to water tribunals which “took ages” to deliver final awards into disputes.
- The amendment also proposes to set up Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC). The DRC, comprising experts and policy-makers, is proposed to handle disputes prior to the tribunal. DRC will set up by centre at request of states.

### **Benefits:**

- A permanent tribunal to adjudicate river water disputes between States will undoubtedly be a vast improvement over the present system of setting up ad hoc tribunals.
- It will provide for speedier adjudication.
- A positive feature of the proposed changes is that there will be an expert agency to collect data on rainfall, irrigation and surface water flows. This acquires importance because party-States have a tendency to fiercely question data provided by the other side.

### **Concerns:**

- But whether this will resolve the problem of protracted proceedings is doubtful. Given the number of ongoing inter-State disputes and those likely to arise in future, it may be difficult for a single institution with a former Supreme Court judge as its chairperson to give its ruling within three years.
- Secondly, its interlocutory orders as well as final award are likely to be challenged in the Supreme Court. Thus, finality and enforcement of a tribunal’s award may remain elusive.
- The idea of a Dispute Resolution Committee, an expert body that will seek to resolve inter-State differences before a tribunal is approached, will prove to be another disincentive for needless litigation.

### **FENGYUN-4**

- It is China’s new-generation meteorological satellite
- It is the country's first quantitative remote-sensing satellite in high orbit.
- Fengyun-4 is capable of monitoring atmosphere continuously, helping to improve the quality of weather forecasts and prevent catastrophic consequences of natural disasters.
- China has sent 14 meteorological satellites into space, of which seven are still active.

### **WORLD’S FIRST CLONED GOAT BEARING SUPERFINE CASHMERE WOOL**

- The world's first cloned goat bearing superfine Cashmere wool was born in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.
- The Cashmere fibre from the goat is less than 13.8 micrometers thick, much finer than the average of 15.8 micrometers grown by the famous Erlang Mountain goats in Inner Mongolia.

**DEAD ZONE IN BAY OF BENGAL**

- Scientists including those from India have found that the Bay of Bengal hosts a dead zone of an estimated 60,000 square kilometers.
- The researchers also discovered that the Bay of Bengal hosts microbial communities that can remove nitrogen, as in other well-known dead zones and even some evidence that they do remove nitrogen, but at really slow rates.
- Removing more nitrogen from the oceans could affect the marine nitrogen balance and rates of marine productivity.
- Globally, warming of the atmosphere through climate change is predicted to lead to an expansion of dead zones in the ocean.
- It is currently unclear whether climate change would lead to the removal of these last traces of oxygen from the Bay of Bengal waters. However, the Bay of Bengal is also surrounded by a heavy population density, and expected increases in fertiliser input to the Bay may increase its productivity, contributing to oxygen depletion at depth.

**Dead Zone:**

- An area that contains little or no oxygen and supports microbial processes that remove vast amounts of nitrogen from the ocean.
- Dead zones are well known off the western coasts of North and South America, off the coast of Namibia and off the west coast of India in the Arabian Sea.

**POLAR BEARS TURN CLIMATE REFUGEES**

While most threatened animals, such as the rhinoceros, are victims of localized threats like poaching or human encroachment, the polar bear is threatened most gravely by global emissions of greenhouse gases.

- They enter land as sea ice they rely on for hunting seals is receding. They have been left stranded on land desperately seeking other things to eat.
- The Arctic is warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet, and the ice cover is retreating at a pace that even the climate scientists who predicted the decline find startling. Much of 2016 was warmer than normal, and the freeze-up came late.
- The continuing loss of sea ice does not bode well for polar bears, whose existence depends on an ice cover that is rapidly thinning and melting as the climate warms.

Nineteen sub-populations of polar bears inhabit five countries that ring the Arctic Circle — Canada, the U.S., Norway, Greenland and Russia. Three populations are falling in number.

But six other populations are stable. One is increasing. And scientists have so little information about the remaining nine that they are unable to gauge their numbers or their health.

**TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE (TESS)**

- Space telescope for NASA's Explorers program, is planned for launch in December 2017.
- TESS is a project of NASA and MIT.
- It will discover thousands of exoplanets in orbit around the brightest stars in the sky using the transit method.
- In a two-year survey of the solar neighborhood, TESS will monitor more than 200,000 stars for temporary drops in brightness caused by planetary transits.
- This first-ever spaceborne all-sky transit survey will identify planets ranging from Earth-sized to gas giants, around a wide range of stellar types and orbital distances. No ground-based survey can achieve this feat.
- By using TESS data, missions like the James Webb Space Telescope can determine specific characteristics of these planets, including whether they could support life.

**EUROPEAN UNION (EU)-CUBA ACCORD**

- The European Union (EU) and Cuba signed a deal to normalise ties that had been blocked for decades by human rights concerns.
- Cuba was the only Latin American country not to have a “dialogue and cooperation” deal with the 28-nation EU covering issues such as trade, human rights and migration.
- But EU dropped a policy in place since 1996 which stated that Cuba first had to improve its human rights record before getting closer links with the bloc.

**INDUS WATERS TREATY**

**In news:** Government has formed an inter-ministerial task force, to be headed by Prime Minister’s Principal Secretary Nripendra Mishra, to look into all the strategic aspects of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) with Pakistan.

**Background:**

- Pakistan had in September approached World Bank, flagging concerns that the design of the Kishenganga project was not in line with the criteria laid down under IWT.
- It had then demanded the international lender to set up a Court of Arbitration to look into the matter.
- Refuting the claims made by Pakistan, India had asserted that the project design is “well within parameters” of the treaty and urged the World Bank to appoint a neutral expert as the issue is a “technical matter” as suggested in the treaty.

**About the Treaty:**

- The Indus Waters Treaty was signed in 1960 by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Pakistan's President Ayub Khan.
- It was brokered by the World Bank.

- According to the treaty, Beas, Ravi and Sutlej are to be governed by India, while, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum are to be taken care by Pakistan.
- However, since Indus flows from India, the country is allowed to use 20 per cent of its water for irrigation, power generation and transport purposes.
- A Permanent Indus Commission was set up as a bilateral commission to implement and manage the Treaty. The Commission solves disputes arising over water sharing.
- The Treaty also provides arbitration mechanism to solve disputes amicably.

### GARV-II App

- **Launched By:** Power Ministry to track Rural Household Electrification
- A platform that will provide real time data of the entire six lakh villages of the country.
- Village-wise and habitation-wise base line data on household electrification for all States, as provided by them, has been incorporated.
- the status of village-wise works sanctioned under the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana (DDUGJY) and release of funds to the States for these projects has also been mapped in 'GARV-II' to monitor progress of works in each village.
- Part of the 'Digital India Initiative' of Government of India

### Other apps by the Power Ministry:

- UJALA: for LED Program
- URJA: for urban electrification
- TARANG: for power transmission projects
- Vidut Pravah: for power availability and price

### CYCLONE GLOBAL NAVIGATION SATELLITE SYSTEM

**In news:** NASA launched eight mini-satellites as a part of Cyclone Global Navigation Satellite System to measure surface wind deep in the heart of hurricanes.

- It is NASA's latest Earth-observing mission (an 8-satellite mission), meant to improve hurricane forecasting.
- The satellites have GPS navigation receivers to frequently measure the surface roughness of oceans, enabling scientists to calculate wind speed and storm intensity.
- Unlike weather satellites already in orbit, these spacecraft can peer through rain swirling in a hurricane, all the way into the eye, or core.
- The Cyclone Global Navigation Satellite System (CYGNSS) mission will use radio signals from the GPS satellites to measure the wind speed near the ground in the tropics, between 35 degrees north and 35 degrees south where most hurricanes are born
- Unlike current weather observation satellites, which pass over an existing hurricane once or twice a day, CYGNSS satellites will provide "new measurements of the winds every 12 minutes" for any given storm in the tropical belt.