

**CURRENT AFFAIRS**  
**16<sup>TH</sup> TO 31<sup>ST</sup> JULY 2018**

**BRAHMOS**

***BrahMos, the supersonic cruise missile was successfully test-fired from the Integrated Test Range (ITR) at Balasore, Odisha. The test-firing conducted from a Mobile Autonomous Launcher was part of service life extension programme for Indian Army.***

BrahMos has proved again all-weather capability flying in sea-state 7 with waves as high as 9 meters. BrahMos is a joint venture between DRDO of India and NPOM of Russia.

- BrahMos is the supersonic cruise missile that can be launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air based platforms.
- It is considered one of the world's fastest cruise missile currently in operational use.
- The missile's range is estimated at around 300 to 400 kilometers with speeds of up to Mach 2.8 to 3.
- The land-launched and sea-launched variants of the BrahMos are already in service with the Indian Army and Navy.

*Recently, a new production line for BrahMos transport launch canisters in Vadodara in the western state of Gujarat.*

*DRDO is also working on an indigenous missile booster for the BrahMos.*

**CIC LAUNCHED MOBILE APP**

***The Central Information Commission (CIC) has launched a newly updated version of mobile app in Hindi also, - "CIC App".***

**CENTRAL INFORMATION COMMISSION**

- The Central Information Commission (CIC) set up under the Right to Information Act is the authorised body.
- Established in 2005, under the Government of India to act upon complaints from those individuals who have not been able to submit information requests to a Central Public Information Officer or State Public Information Officer due to either the officer not have been appointed, or because the respective Central Assistant Public Information Officer or State Assistant Public Information Officer refused to receive the application for information under the RTI Act.
- The Commission includes 1 Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) and not more than 10 Information Commissioners (IC) who are appointed by the President of India.

**CARA**

***The Minister of Women and Child Development has directed state governments to ensure that all the child care institutions should be registered and linked to CARA within the next one month.***

**CONCERN**

Taking cognizance of the recent cases of illegal adoptions carried out by Missionaries of Charity in Jharkhand, ministry has instructed the states to get child care homes run by Missionaries of Charity all over the country inspected immediately.

**BACKGROUND**

The mandatory registration of CCIs and linking to Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) has been provided in Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 which came into force more than two years ago but some orphanages had challenged the validity of this clause. The Supreme Court has since dismissed the petitions and has upheld the validity, vide their order of December, 2017. Since then, approximately 2300 child care institutions have been linked to CARA and about 4000 are still pending for linkage.

- Central government has directed state government to ensure that all the child care institutions should be registered and linked to CARA.
- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a statutory body of Ministry of Women & Child Development, Government of India.
- It functions as the nodal body for adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- It is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions in accordance with the provisions of the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993, ratified by Government of India in 2003

**CONTINUATION OF MINORITY SCHOLARSHIP SCHEMES**

*The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the proposal for Continuation of Pre-Matric, Post Matric and Merit-cum-Means based Scholarship Schemes for the students belonging to the six notified Minority Communities at a total cost of Rs. 5338.32 crore for period up to 2019-20.*

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- These Schemes shall be implemented through the **National Scholarship Portal (NSP)** and scholarships are disbursed through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) mode.
- Around 70 lakh scholarships are likely to be disbursed.
- Scholarship is awarded to students who have secured not less than 50% marks in the previous final examination.
- The students should be studying in Government Schools/ Institutes or recognized private schools/ institutes.
- The State/Community-wise target/allocation as per Census 2011.
- Physical targets are fixed only for fresh scholarships.
- Renewal scholarships are also awarded, in addition to the fresh scholarships. Renewal scholarships are for all such students who have been awarded scholarships in the previous years and fulfil the eligibility criteria.

**PRE-MATRIC SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME**

- The objective of the Scheme is to encourage parents from minority communities to send their school going children (from Class I to X) to school, lighten their financial burden on school education and sustain their efforts to support their children to complete school education.
- Annual income of parents/ guardian should not be more than Rs 1.00 Lakh.
- Target-30,00,000 (Thirty lakh) for Fresh applicants.

**POST-MATRIC SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME**

- The objective of the Scheme is to provide financial assistance to the poor and meritorious minority students with better opportunities for higher education, increase their rate of attainment in higher education and enhance their employability in organized sector.
- Annual income of parents/guardians should not be more than Rs. 2.00 Lakh.
- Target- 5,00,000 (Five lakh) for Fresh applicants.

#### **MERIT-CUM-MEANS BASED SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME**

- The objective of the Scheme is to provide financial assistance to the poor and meritorious minority students to enable them to pursue professional and technical courses at under Graduate and post Graduate levels leading to upliftment of the socio-economic conditions of the minority communities.
- Annual income of parents/guardians should not be more than Rs. 2.50 Lakh.
- Target- 60,000 for Fresh applicants.

#### **BACKGROUND**

For all three Scholarship Schemes, the State/Community-wise target/allocation shall be applicable as per Census 2011. Around 70 lakh scholarships are likely to be disbursed to the students belonging to the six notified Minority Communities viz. Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain and Parsi who are from the economically weaker sections of the society.

It is a continuing Scheme from 11th & 12th Five Year Plan and shall be implemented during the next three years i.e. during the balance period of 14th Finance Commission from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

#### **INDIA BASED NEUTRINO OBSERVATORY**

***Environmental clearance for the project has been obtained. Application for Wildlife Clearance and Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) has been submitted. An 85 tonn prototype mini-ICAL detector has been built and is working at IICHEP premises in Madurai.***

#### **India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO)**

- It is a particle physics research project under construction to primarily study atmospheric neutrinos in a 1,300 meters (4,300 ft) deep cave under Ino Peak near Theni, Tamil Nadu, India.
- This project is notable in that it is anticipated to provide a precise measurement of neutrino mixing parameters.
- The project is a multi-institute collaboration and one of the biggest experimental particle physics projects undertaken in India.
- The project was originally to be completed in 2015 at an estimated cost of ₹ 1,500 crores, has been cleared by the Ministry of Environment (India) for construction in the Bodi West Hills Reserved Forest in the Theni district of Tamil Nadu. Although delayed, the project is underway as of 2015.
- When completed, the main magnetised iron calorimeter (ICAL) experiment will include the world's largest magnet, four times larger than the 12,500-tonne magnet in the Compact Muon Solenoid detector at CERN in Geneva, Switzerland.

#### **NEUTRINOS**

Neutrinos are electrically neutral, elementary weakly interacting subatomic particles with half-integer spin. They belong to the lepton family. Neutrinos were first proposed by Swiss scientist

Wolfgang Pauli, are the second most widely occurring particle in the universe, only second to photons, the particle which makes up light.

Neutrinos are similar to the more familiar electron, with one crucial difference: neutrinos do not carry electric charge. Because neutrinos are electrically neutral, they are not affected by the electromagnetic forces which act on electrons.

### **NEUTRINO**

- They are light.
- They have little mass or are nearly massless.
- They are no-charge particles that only interact with weak nuclear force.

### **There are three types of neutrinos:**

- “Electron neutrino” is associated with the electron.
- “Muon neutrino”.
- “Tau neutrino”.

### **OBSERVATORY FOR GRAVITATIONAL WAVES**

***The Government of India has given ‘In-Principle’ approval for Construction and Operation of Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Laboratory – India (LIGO) in India in collaboration with LIGO Laboratory, United States of America.***

This is the third observatory identical to the two LIGO observatories in USA. LIGO-India Observatory is scheduled to be operational in 2024.

The site in Hingoli District of Maharashtra has been selected as the primary site and the process of acquiring land for the project is in advanced stage.

### **GRAVITATIONAL WAVES**

- Gravitational waves are 'ripples' in the fabric of space-time caused by some of the most violent and energetic processes in the Universe.
- Albert Einstein predicted the existence of gravitational waves in 1916 in his general theory of relativity.
- Einstein's mathematics showed that massive accelerating objects (such as neutron stars or black holes orbiting each other) would disrupt space-time in such a way that 'waves' of distorted space would radiate from the source (like the movement of waves away from a stone thrown into a pond).
- Furthermore, these ripples would travel at the speed of light through the Universe, carrying with them information about their cataclysmic origins, as well as invaluable clues to the nature of gravity itself.
- The strongest gravitational waves are produced by catastrophic events such as colliding black holes, the collapse of stellar cores (supernovae), coalescing neutron stars or white dwarf stars, the slightly wobbly rotation of neutron stars that are not perfect spheres, and the remnants of gravitational radiation created by the birth of the Universe itself.

### **PROMOTION OF GI PRODUCTS**

***The Government has undertaken several steps as a part of the campaign for promotion of Indian products registered as Geographical Indications (GIs).***

- These include, participation in events to promote and create awareness on GIs through social media, involving State Governments, Union Territory Administration and other relevant organizations for facilitation of GI producers.
- All State Governments have been requested to appoint nodal officers for promotion of Geographical Indications from their respective states, establish facilitation cells for each GI from the state, undertake steps for GI awareness in consumers, undertake training of GI producers, take effective action against manufacture and sale of counterfeit GI products among others.

### **GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION**

A geographical indication (GI) is a sign used on products that have a specific geographical origin and possess qualities or a reputation that are due to that origin. In order to function as a GI, a sign must identify a product as originating in a given place. In addition, the qualities, characteristics or reputation of the product should be essentially due to the place of origin. Since the qualities depend on the geographical place of production, there is a clear link between the product and its original place of production.

#### **What rights does a geographical indication provide?**

A geographical indication right enables those who have the right to use the indication to prevent its use by a third party whose product does not conform to the applicable standards. For example, in the jurisdictions in which the Darjeeling geographical indication is protected, producers of Darjeeling tea can exclude use of the term “Darjeeling” for tea not grown in their tea gardens or not produced according to the standards set out in the code of practice for the geographical indication.

However, a protected geographical indication does not enable the holder to prevent someone from making a product using the same techniques as those set out in the standards for that indication. Protection for a geographical indication is usually obtained by acquiring a right over the sign that constitutes the indication.

#### **For what type of products can geographical indications be used?**

Geographical indications are typically used for agricultural products, foodstuffs, wine and spirit drinks, handicrafts, and industrial products.

#### **How are geographical indications protected?**

There are three main ways to protect a geographical indication:

- so-called sui generis systems (i.e. special regimes of protection);
- using collective or certification marks; and
- methods focusing on business practices, including administrative product approval schemes.

These approaches involve differences with respect to important questions, such as the conditions for protection or the scope of protection. On the other hand, two of the modes of protection — namely sui generis systems and collective or certification mark systems — share some common features, such as the fact that they set up rights for collective use by those who comply with defined standards.

### **SHRAM SUVIDHA PORTAL**

***Shram Suvidha Portal, launched by the Government, caters to four major Organisations under the Ministry of Labour & Employment, namely Office of Chief Labour Commissioner (Central),***

***Directorate General of Mines Safety, Employees' Provident Fund Organization and Employees' State Insurance Corporation.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Allotment of Unique Identity i.e. Labour Identification Number (LIN) for effective, efficient and real-time governance in Labour Administration.
- To bring transparency and accountability in enforcement of labour laws through Online Inspection System and Filing of Online Inspection Report.
- Common Online Registration and Filing of Self-Certified and Simplified Single Online Annual Return for multiple labour laws to ease the complexity of compliance.
- Unified ECR under EPFO/ESIC to encourage compliance by reducing transaction costs and promoting ease of business.

With these initiatives, the procedures have been simplified; returns and registration forms have been unified to provide an ease of doing business environment through Shram Suvidha Portal. Further, the portal provides a platform for sharing of information among the labour enforcement agencies.

**INTER STATE MIGRANTS**

***In Order to safeguard the interest of the Migrant workers, the Central Government has enacted the Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Services) Act, 1979.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- It inter alia, provides for registration of certain establishments employing Inter State Migrant Workers, licensing of contractors etc. by the appropriate Government.
- Workers employed with such establishment are to be provided payment of minimum wages, journey allowance, displacement allowance, residential accommodation, medical facilities and protective clothing etc.
- Registers and records are to be maintained giving particular of the Inter-State Migrant Workers, the nature of work performed by such workmen, the rates of the wages paid to the workmen etc.
- Every principal employer and every contractor has to keep exhibited within the premises of the establishment where the Inter-State Migrant Workmen is employed, notices in the prescribed form containing the particulars about the hours of work, nature of work etc.

**CHILD LABOUR**

***As per 2011 Census, the number of main workers in the age group of 5-14 years in the country is 43.53 lakh which shows a decline from 57.79 lakh as per 2001 Census.***

***Child Labour is an outcome of various socio-economic problems such as poverty, economic backwardness, illiteracy etc.***

**BACKGROUND**

Under Legislative action plan Government has enacted the ***Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016*** which came into force w.e.f 01.09.2016. The Amendment Act, inter alia, provides for complete prohibition on employment or work of children below 14 years and also prohibits employment of adolescents (14-18 years) in hazardous occupations and processes.

After strengthening the legislative framework through amendment in Child Labour Act, Government has framed the ***Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017*** which inter alia specifies the duties and responsibilities of State Governments and District Authorities to ensure effective enforcement of the provisions of the Act.

### **RECENT DEVELOPMENTS**

- To ensure effective enforcement of the provisions of the Child Labour Act and smooth implementation of the ***National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme*** a separate online portal ***PENCIL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour)*** has been developed.
- The Portal connects Central Government to State Government(s), District(s) and all District Project Societies.
- Further the Ministry has instructed all the concerned States where NCLP Scheme is sanctioned, to form State Resource Centre (SRC) under the chairmanship of State Labour Secretary, which would monitor the enforcement of Child Labour Act, coordinate for the rescue of children and adolescents, child tracking system and supervise all the functions through PENCIL portal.
- SRC would also prepare and implement awareness generation plan to curb the menace of child labour in the State.

### **NATIONAL BAMBOO MISSION**

***The restructured National Bamboo Mission (NBM) has been launched this year with the approval of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) under the National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA).***

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To increase the area under bamboo plantation in non-forest Government and private lands to supplement farm income and contribute towards resilience to climate change as well as availability of quality raw material requirement of industries.
- The bamboo plantations will be promoted predominantly in farmers' fields, homesteads, community lands, arable wastelands, and along irrigation canals, water bodies etc.
- To improve post-harvest management through establishment of innovative primary processing units near the source of production, primary treatment and seasoning plants, preservation technologies and market infrastructure.
- To promote product development keeping in view market demand, by assisting R&D, entrepreneurship & business models at micro, small and medium levels and feed bigger industry.
- To rejuvenate the under developed bamboo industry in India.
- To promote skill development, capacity building, awareness generation for development of bamboo sector from production to market demand.

### **MIDH**

***Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH), a Centrally Sponsored Scheme is implemented to holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root and tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew and cocoa.***

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

Mission subsumes National Horticulture Mission (NHM), Horticulture Mission for North East & Himalayan States (HMNEH), National Horticulture Board (NHB), Coconut Development Board (CDB) and Central Institute for Horticulture (CIH), Nagaland. All States/UTs are covered under MIDH.

- Increasing productivity through introduction of improved varieties, quality seeds and planting materials, protected cultivation, high density plantation, rejuvenation, precision farming and horticultural mechanization.
- Diversification to High Value Horticulture for orchards and Plantation crops, Vineyards, vegetable & flower gardens, Bee keeping, Mushroom cultivation, off season vegetables.
- Promoting Post Harvest Management through Cold Storage (CS), cold chain supply including pack houses, ripening chamber, reefer vehicle, etc.
- Promoting Primary and minimal processing.
- **Market Linkages:** Market infrastructure such as mobile vending cart, retail outlet, primary and wholesale markets. Creating direct market/farmers market.
- Aggregating farmers into Farmer Producers Organisation (FPO)/Farmer Interest Group (FIG) and promoting their tie up with Market Aggregators (MAs) and Financial Institutions (FIs).
- **Skill Development:** Human Resources Development such as awareness programme, farmers training, exposure visit, etc. Providing training on latest technologies on production and post-harvest management to women and youth.
- Increasing Area and Production of horticulture crops with high nutritional value.
- Promotion of Integrated Nutrient Management (INM)/Integrated Pest Management (IPM), organic farming, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP).

#### **PADDY SOWING MACHINES**

***The training and demonstration on paddy sowing machine is provided at Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institute (FMTTI) located at Budni, (M.P.), Hisar (Haryana), Ananatapur (A.P.) and Biswanath Chariali (Assam); and also through ICAR's All India Crop Research Projects (AICRP) located at TNAU, Coimbatore, IIT Kharagpur, OUAT, Bhubaneswar, NERIST Nirjuli and at CIAE, Bhopal.***

The funds under **Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM) scheme** of Department of Agriculture, Cooperation & Farmers Welfare (DAC&FW) are also provided to State Governments for conducting training and demonstrations of various agricultural machinery.

There are about 19 manufactures of Self Propelled Paddy Transplanter machine in the country and the machine is adequately available in the market.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Under Phase-II (2014-17) of the Off-grid and Decentralized Solar PV Applications Scheme of Ministry of New and Renewable (MNRE, Central Financial Assistance up to 30% of the benchmark cost has been provided for installation of solar pumps. Further, due to provision of the scheme mandating procurement only through tender route, prices of solar pumps have reduced which is reflected in the revised benchmark costs issued by MNRE in June, 2018.

#### **WATER CONSERVATION MEASURES**

***CPWD Planting 50,000 Trees in Delhi- Installing Rain Water Harvesting System and Waste Water Recycling Plant in all its Major Projects as a Part of Water Conservation Measure***

***Solar Plants of 13.3 MWP Capacity, Have Been Installed in Central Government Buildings Across the Country by CPWD.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- CPWD is in the fore-front in sustainable development of built environment. All new constructions in CPWD are being undertaken with minimum three-star GRIHA rating.
- CPWD has constructed Jawahar Bhawan, Parayavaran Bhawan, PNB HQ, New Delhi and STPI Mohali as green buildings with highest five star / LEED rating.
- Parayavaran Bhawan is a net zero building, which produces as much power on site from renewable sources as it consumes.
- Towards greening of Delhi, as a special drive, CPWD is ***planting 50,000 trees*** at various residential colonies and office complexes maintained by it during ongoing rainy season.
- CPWD has taken firm initiatives for ***generation of renewable energy*** in government buildings. Solar plants of capacity 13.3 MWp, have been installed in central government buildings across the country. The installed solar plants have generated renewable energy of 25 lakhs Units appx, which resulted in 23281 tons reduction of carbon dioxide emission and overall saving of Rs. 29 crores.
- CPWD has made it mandatory to install ***Rain Water Harvesting system*** and ***Waste Water Recycling plant*** in all its major projects as a part of water conservation measures.
- Under the ***'Sugamya Bharat' Mission***, CPWD has undertaken the massive task of making public buildings under its maintenance in the country, completely accessible.

**JAL MARG VIKAS PROJECT**

***Multi Modal Terminal (MMT) being built at Varanasi by Inland Waterways Authority of India under Jal Marg Vikas project is set to be completed by November this year. This would be a major landmark for the project. The construction of MMT at Sahibganj is to be completed by May, 2019, and the one at Haldia, being constructed is scheduled to be completed by December 2019.***

**BACKGROUND**

- Jal Marg Vikas is a Rs 5369 Crore World Bank aided project on National Waterway 1 (River Ganga), aimed at augmenting the navigational capacity of the Varanasi to Haldia stretch of the river, to enable commercial navigation of at least 1500-2000 tonn vessels.
- The project includes construction/setting up of multi-modal terminals at Varanasi, Sahibganj and Haldia, IMTs, navigational lock, Ro-Ro terminals, jetties, river information system, vessel repair and maintenance facilities, fairway development, channel marking, river training and conservancy works.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- IWAI has also finalized 13 vessel designs suitable for inland water transport. The models have been designed by M/s DST, Germany, with focus on economic efficiency, low transport cost, high safety, low draft and high carrying capacity.
- In a major development, IWAI will also support Nepal in undertaking techno-economic feasibility study of the rivers, upgradation of technology of existing infrastructure, setting up of coordinating authority in Nepal for developing inland waterways
- IWAI is also working to reduce travel distance between Meghalaya between Dhubri to Hatsingimari in Assam.

- While NW-2 (river Brahmaputra ) is already operational, development work on NW-16 (river Barak) has also been initiated.
- To enhance access to NER through waterways, the work for awarding dredging along two identified routes; Sirajganj – Daikhawa and Ashuganj – Zakiganj , has been initiated.
- On **NW-3** (West Coast Canal; Kottapuram – Kollam , Champakkara & Udyogamandal canals) , which is also operational 4 lakh tonnes of cargo that included Over Dimensional Cargo (ODC) was moved in 2017-18.
- IWAI is also developing **NW-4** in a phased wise manner. Phase I - Muktyala to Vijayawada ; Phase II - Vijayawada to Kakinada , Rajahmundry to Polavaram stretch of Godavari and further subsequent phases that include Commamur canal, Buckingham canal and balance stretches of Krishna & Godavari.
- Besides commercial development, IWAI is also working to facilitate pilgrimage movement during the 2019 Kumb Mela on the lines of facilitation it has been providing at Ganga Sagar Mela and Guru Purab at Patna Sahib.

### **SYSTEM OF AIR QUALITY AND WEATHER FORECASTING (SAFAR)**

***Science & Technology, Earth Sciences; Environment, Forest & Climate Change Ministry unveiled a state-of-the-art Air Quality and Weather Forecast System– SAFAR (System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting) at Chandni Chowkin Delhi.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The giant true colour LED display gives out real-time air quality index on 24x7 basis with colour coding along with 72-hour advance forecast.
- The system, first of its kind in the country, was developed indigenously in record time by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune and operationalized by India Meteorological Department (IMD).
- Project SAFAR is implemented in four cities of India – Delhi, Pune, Mumbai and Ahmedabad as an operational service.
- The system will be an integral part of India's first Air Quality Early Warning System operational in Delhi and will strengthen the existing air quality network of SAFAR, Central Pollution Control Board and Delhi Pollution Control Committee.
- SAFAR will accelerate public awareness and preparedness of air pollution and weather extremes. It will also lead to better understanding of linkages among emissions, weather, pollution and climate. It will monitor all weather parameters like temperature, rainfall, humidity, wind speed and wind direction.
- In addition to regular air quality parameters like PM2.5, PM10, Sulfur Dioxide, Ozone, Nitrogen Oxides, Carbon Monoxide, the system will also monitor the existence of Benzene, Toluene and Xylene.
- Besides health, SAFAR system would benefit cost savings to several other sectors like agriculture, aviation, infrastructure, disaster management skill, tourism and many others, which directly or indirectly get affected by air quality and weather.

### **NATIONAL MISSION FOR MANUSCRIPTS**

***The manuscripts documented and digitized by the NMM will be made available to researcher and scholars through a Trusted Digital Repository.***

The ultimate object of the Mission is to establish a ***Digital Manuscripts Repository*** at IGNCA in which researchers and scholars can view and consult the manuscripts to understand our past in its totality.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2003, National Mission for Manuscripts (NMM), a Mission mode Project, was launched by the Ministry of Culture for documentation, conservation, preservation and digitization of manuscripts.

### **SHEKATKAR COMMITTEE**

***The Shekatkar Committee to enhance combat capability and rebalance defence expenditure submitted its report in December 2016. The Report was taken up by the Ministry of Defence to frame key action points and roadmap for implementation.***

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Optimization of Signals Establishments to include Radio Monitoring Companies, Corps Air Support Signal Regiments, Air Formation Signal Regiments, Composite Signal Regiments and merger of Corps Operating and Engineering Signal Regiments.
- Restructuring of repair echelons in the Army to include Base Workshops, Advance Base Workshops and Static / Station Workshops in the field Army.
- Redeployment of Ordnance echelons to include Vehicle Depots, Ordnance Depots and Central Ordnance Depots apart from streamlining inventory control mechanisms.
- Better utilization of Supply and Transportation echelons and Animal Transport Units.
- Closure of Military Farms and Army Postal Establishments in peace locations.
- Enhancement in standards for recruitment of clerical staff and drivers in the Army.
- Improving the efficiency of the National Cadet Corps.

### **UNNAT BHARAT ABHIYAN 2.0**

***The Government has successfully launched Unnat Bharat Abhiyan 2.0. The UBA 2.0 was officially launched on 25th April, 2018 in AICTE, Vasantkunj.***

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is a flagship programme of the Ministry of HRD.
- It aims to link the Higher Education Institutions with set of atleast (5) villages, so that these institutions can contribute to the economic and social betterment of these village communities using their knowledge base.
- It is a significant initiative where all Higher Learning Institutes have been involved for participation in development activities, particularly in rural areas.
- Unnat Bharat Abhiyan is inspired by the vision of transformational change in rural development processes by leveraging knowledge institutions to help build the architecture of an Inclusive India.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To engage the faculty and students of Higher Educational Institutions in understanding rural realities.
- Identify and select existing innovative technologies, enable customization of technologies, or devise implementation methods for innovative solutions, as required by people.
- To allow Higher Educational Institutions to contribute to devising systems for smooth implementation of various Government Programs.

**NATIONAL POLICY FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS*****The salient features of NATIONAL POLICY FOR DOMESTIC WORKERS:***

- Inclusion of Domestic Workers in the existing legislations
- Registration of Domestic workers.
- Right to form their own associations, trade unions
- Right to have minimum wages, access to social security, protection from abuse, harassment, violence
- Right to enhance their professional skills
- Protection of Domestic Workers from abuse and exploitation
- Domestic Workers to have access to courts, tribunals, etc.
- Establishment of a mechanism for regulation of placement agencies.

**INTERLINKING OF RIVERS PROGRAMME**

***The interlinking of rivers (ILR) programme has been taken up on high priority. The Government is pursuing the ILR program in a consultative manner.***

**BACKGROUND**

The National Perspective Plan (NPP) was prepared by the then Ministry of Irrigation, now Ministry of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation (MoWR, RD & GR) in August 1980 for water resources development through inter basin transfer of water, for transferring water from water surplus basins to water-deficit basins. Under the NPP, the National Water Development Agency (NWDA) has identified 30 links (16 under Peninsular Component & 14 under Himalayan Component) for preparation of Feasibility Reports (FRs).

**TRIBAL RESEARCH INSTITUTES**

***Ministry of Tribal Affairs is implementing a Central Sector Scheme 'Support to Tribal Research Institutes (TRIs),' under which financial assistance is provided to TRIs to carry out various activities to preserve and promote tribal culture through research and documentation, maintenance and preservation of art and artefacts, setting up of tribal museum, exchange visits for the tribal to other parts of the State, organizing tribal festivals etc.***

During the current year the budget of TRI Scheme has been enhanced from Rs. 80.00 Crore in 2017-18 to Rs. 100.00 Crore in 2018-19.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Ministry of Tribal Affairs has developed a web-page for use as tribal repository in which documents, folks songs, photos, videos etc. received from the State Government have been uploaded.
- Further, State Governments have been asked to provide database of Tribes of India including their evolution, place of origin, lifestyle, eating habits, architecture, education level, traditional art, folk dances and other anthropological details for uploading on the webpage.
- At present, TRIs are functioning in the States/UTs of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Andaman & Nicobar Island.

### DEVELOPMENT OF PVTGs

*The Ministry is implementing the scheme 'Development of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs)' for the welfare of the PVTGs.*

#### BACKGROUND

PVTGs are the most vulnerable tribal community, and hence it becomes necessary to allocate adequate funds from Central Sector/ Centrally Sponsored and State Plan schemes for the socio-economic development of PVTGs. There are 75 total number of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) identified in the Country. The total population of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Jharkhand is 3.38 % of the total ST population of Jharkhand.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- The scheme covers 75 identified Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups in 18 States and UT of Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- The scheme is flexible as it enables the States to focus on areas that they consider are relevant to PVTGs and their socio-cultural environment.
- Activities under it include education, housing, land distribution, land development, agricultural development, animal husbandry, construction of link roads, and installation of non-conventional sources of energy for lighting purpose, social security including Janashree Bima Yojana or any other innovative activity meant for the comprehensive socio-economic development of PVTGs.
- Funds are not released district wise. Annual Plans of the State Governments are appraised and approved by the PAC.

### POLICY FOR DISPOSAL OF GARBAGE

*The Minister of State for Environment, Forest and Climate Change in supersession of Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000, has notified the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.*

#### BACKGROUND

Under the provision of Environment Protection Act of 1986, issued several notifications to mitigate increasing pollution. Ministry has issued Environmental Impact Assessment Notification 2006 for the management of developmental projects.

The Government has comprehensively revised the waste management rules and has notified **Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016, Plastic Waste Management Rules, 2016, and Bio-Medical Waste Management Rules, 2016 Hazardous and Other Wastes (Management and Transboundary Movement) Rules, 2016, E-waste Management Rules, 2016 and Construction and Demolition Waste Management Rules, 2016 for sound management** of various types of wastes in the country.

#### CHALLENGES OF SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

- Managing the continuous flow of solid waste on a daily basis.
- Dealing with the legacy of neglect which has resulted in garbage hills having been built up at dumpsites that were meant for waste processing and landfills.
- The challenge lies in implementation. The earlier so-called landfills, actually old dumps, are without bottom liners and side liners.
- The sites for landfills were originally located outside of the cities, but as the cities have expanded the dumpsites are now almost inside the cities.

- All open dump sites in cities are much higher than the permissible height limit of up to 20 metres, and way past their capacity for holding the amount of waste for which they were set up.
- It is estimated that more than 10,000 hectares of urban land is locked in these dumpsites in India.
- In the absence of exposure to air, the high-rises of rotting mixed waste on these sites generate ***methane*** (a greenhouse gas) and other landfill gases (Methane is over 20 times more potent as a heat trapping gas than carbon dioxide).
- They also produce ***leachate*** (a black liquid oozing out from the waste as it slowly decomposes over a period of 25 to 30 years, contaminates soil and ground water).
- Frequent outbreaks of fire at the dumpsites lead to air pollution.
- Many municipal authorities across the country are opting for ***“capping”*** as a solution to the legacy of mixed waste. It is important, therefore, to study the environmental and financial implications of choosing capping of a dumpsite as ***opposed to bio-remediation and bio-mining***, particularly since the Solid Waste Management Rules 2016 (the Rules) have clearly indicated that bio-treatment of the legacy waste is the preferred way.

## **SOLUTIONS**

### **BIO-REMEDICATION**

- Low-cost solution of ***bioremediation*** to remove the garbage hills and their lingering ill effects, which permanently achieves near-zero emission of harmful gases (such as methane, hydrogen sulphide, and ammonia) and leachate.
- The first step in the bioremediation process involves rearranging the old waste in long rows (windrows) on the ground, each heap being four feet wide and five feet high, with a three feet gap between any two adjacent rows to allow the vehicles to move.

### **BIO MINING**

- Earlier ***bio-mining*** i.e, loosening of thin surface layers of the garbage hill and formed this into windrows before screening. In this method, the hill is terraced, grooved and then slashed to form high slices to let air into the waste and drain out leachate. Each heap is turned weekly, four times to ensure aeration of all parts of the waste and sprayed with composting microbes to accelerate biological decomposition.
- After four turnings, there is about 40 per cent volume reduction in the waste as the organic fraction of the original waste is degraded biologically by the bioculture.
- Specific microbes are also used for leachate treatment. Once the waste is stabilised, it is ready for bio-mining, and can be separated into different fractions which can then be used for different purposes — for compost, road sub-grade, making RDF (Refuse Derived Fuel) pellets, recycling plastics, etc.

## **SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT RULES, 2016**

### **CHALLENGES**

1. The problem arises because the Rules do not specify any criteria for determining whether bio-remediation and bio-mining are possible or not.
2. An obvious constraint will be imposed by geography: Waste thrown down steep narrow valleys in hill towns, for example, may not be accessible for bio-treatment.
3. Just as the Rules define combustible waste suitable for waste to energy, the Rules could also define the quality of waste suitable for bio-remediation.

4. In the absence of clear technical norms and a lack of clarity on the exemption for geographical constraints, municipal authorities are left with the discretion in dealing with the mounds of legacy waste.
- The result is that capping is being projected in Indian cities as a solution to the challenges posed by our unlined open dumps even where bio-remediation and bio-mining are feasible and desirable. In doing so, municipal authorities often draw a false parallel with the closure of scientifically engineered landfills abroad, which start with underground pits that have good bottom and side liners, and proper piping and gas extraction systems to prevent the escape of leachate and gases.
  - Capping unsegregated waste, which has been lying at the dumpsites for decades with an impermeable layer of gravel, high-density polyethylene and soil, and not exposing it to air, is very different from scientific closure.

### **WATER POLLUTION**

***The water quality monitoring of water bodies at 2500 locations across the country under NWMP indicate that organic pollution is the predominant cause of water pollution which results in increase in Bio-chemical Oxygen Demand (BOD).***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

Based on the BOD concentration criteria, CPCB has identified 302 polluted river stretches in 2015 against 150 polluted river stretches in 2008. The ***river stretches are polluted mainly due to discharge of untreated / partially treated sewage and discharge of industrial wastewater.***

***Major steps taken by the Government to address the issues of water pollution in the country include the following:***

- Action to comply with effluent standards is taken by SPCBs / PCCs to improve the water quality of the rivers.
- Installation of Common Effluent Treatment Plants for cluster of Small Scale Industrial units.
- Issuance of directions for implementation of Zero Liquid Discharge.
- Preparation of action plan for sewage management and restoration of water quality in aquatic resources by State Governments.
- Installation of Online Effluent Monitoring System to check the discharge of effluent directly into the rivers and water bodies.
- Setting up of monitoring network for assessment of ambient water quality.
- Issuance of directions under Section 5 of Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to industries and under Section 18(1)(b) of Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974 and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.

### **NATIONAL VIRAL HEPATITIS PROGRAM**

***Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare has launched the National Viral Hepatitis Control Program to mark the World Hepatitis Day, 2018. With this initiative, Government is strongly committed to work towards elimination of viral hepatitis by 2030.***

#### **BACKGROUND**

- Ministry has already launched a campaign to end TB by 2025, five years ahead of global target.

- The Government now has more than 1100 CBNAAT machines for rapid diagnosis of TB and provides daily regimen with fixed dose combinations.
- The government has also launched the 'Test and Treat Policy for HIV' wherein as soon as a person is tested and found to be positive, he will be provided with ART irrespective of his CD count or clinical stage.
- The government has also launched Rotavirus vaccine, Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine (PCV), and the Measles-Rubella (MR), Pneumonia vaccine.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The aim of the initiative is to reduce morbidity and mortality due to viral hepatitis.
- The key strategies include preventive and promotive interventions with focus on awareness generation, safe injection practices and socio-cultural practices, sanitation and hygiene, safe drinking water supply, infection control and immunization; co-ordination and collaboration with different Ministries and departments.
- Increasing access to testing and management of viral hepatitis; promoting diagnosis and providing treatment support for patients of hepatitis B & C through standardized testing and management protocols with focus on treatment of hepatitis B and C.

### **GLOBAL TIGER DAY**

*In the run-up to Global Tiger Day that is celebrated on July 29 every year, this year, several events had been organised to raise awareness amongst the younger generation.*

The National Tiger Conservation Authority, along with conservation partners held a week-long celebration to mark the Global Tiger Day.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 2010, at St Petersburg, Russia, the heads of Governments of Tiger Range states which inter alia include India, resolved to strive to double the number of wild tigers (T X 2) across their global range by 2022 and signed the **St. Petersburg Declaration on Tiger Conservation**, which decided to celebrate July 29 as Global Tiger Day.

India has significantly contributed to this target and has resolved to safeguard tiger habitat and source populations to foster viable tiger population during the Global Stock Taking meeting held in 2012 at New Delhi to review progress vis-a-vis the St Petersburg Declaration.

India had launched **Project Tiger in 1973** to conserve tigers. Till now, the coverage of "Project Tiger" has increased from 9 reserves to 50 tiger reserves spread across 18 states.

### **MISSION SATYANISHTHA**

Indian Railways organized a programme on Ethics in Public Governance and Launched "Mission Satyanishtha".

"Mission Satyanishtha" aims at sensitizing all railway employees about the need to adhere to good ethics and to maintain high standards of integrity at work.

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To train every employee to understand the need and value of ethics in Personal and Public life.
- To deal with ethical dilemmas in life and Public Governance.

- To help understand the policies of Indian Railways on ethics and integrity and the employee's role in upholding the same.
- To develop inner governance through tapping inner resources.

### **SAMAGRA SHIKSHA**

***The Government of India has launched Samagra Shiksha - An Integrated Scheme for school education, w.e.f. 2018-19, which is an overarching programme for the school education sector extending from pre-school to class XII.***

#### **OBJECTIVES**

Bridging gender and social category gaps at all levels of school education is one of the major objectives of the scheme.

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- It aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education at all levels of school education.
- It envisages the 'school' as a continuum from pre-school, primary, upper primary, secondary to senior secondary levels and subsumes the three erstwhile centrally sponsored schemes i.e. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE).
- The scheme reaches out to girls and children belonging to Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), minority communities and transgender.
- The scheme also gives attention to urban deprived children, children affected by periodic migration and children living in remote and scattered habitations.
- Under the scheme, provision has been made for giving preference to Special Focus Districts (SFDs), Educationally Backward Blocks (EEBs), LWE affected districts, and aspirational districts while planning interventions like setting up of primary schools, upper primary schools, construction of additional classrooms, toilets, Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs).
- The Samagra Shiksha scheme supports States for strengthening of school infrastructure including in rural areas.
- The scheme provides for infrastructural strengthening of existing government schools based on the gaps determined by Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE) and proposals received from respective States/UTs.
- The scheme also provides for annual maintenance and repair of existing school buildings, toilets and other facilities to upkeep the infrastructure in good condition.

#### **OUTCOME FOCUSED**

Samagra Shiksha focuses on improvement in quality of education by providing support for different interventions like in-service training of teachers and school heads, conduct of achievement surveys at state and national level, composite school grant to every school for providing a conducive learning environment, grants for library, sports and physical activities, support for Rashtriya Avishkar Abhiyan, ICT and digital initiatives, School Leadership development programme, remedial teaching for academically weaker students, support for Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat, etc.

### **DIRECT BENEFIT TRANSFER UNDER MGNREGA**

***To streamline the fund flow mechanism and bring down delay in payment of wages, the Ministry of Rural Development has implemented National Electronic Fund Management System (NeFMS) in 24 States and 1 Union Territory.***

**IMPLICATIONS**

- This process reduces the delay in allocation of funds for payment of wages to the States and removes parking of funds at various levels.
- As per NREGASoft, around 99% of the wages are being paid electronically into the Bank/Post Office accounts of MGNREGA workers through Electronic Fund Management System (eFMS).

**ASSISTANCE TO SMALL AND MARGINAL FARMERS**

*Government receives representation from various quarters on issues concerning farmers of different parts of the country including Bundelkhand. Department is implementing various schemes for the welfare of farmers including small and marginal farmers.*

**OBJECTIVES**

The strategy is to improve net returns to the farmers by enabling them to realise higher yields at lower cost and benefit from better market prices. Some important schemes include **Soil Health Card Scheme (SHC), Neem Coated Urea, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY), Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY), National Agriculture Market scheme (e-NAM), Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), etc.**

**GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES**

- The Government provides total interest subvention up to 5% (inclusive of 3 % prompt repayment incentive) on short-term crop loans up to Rs.3.00 lakh. Thus, loan is available to farmers at a reduced rate of 4% per annum on prompt repayment.
- Under the **Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH)** for holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root and tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo, subsidy is provided to the farm size limited to 4 hectare, in majority of its interventions.
- Also, small and marginal farmers are mobilized to form Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs)/ Farmer Interest Group (FIG) for aggregation and economies of scale. FPOs are eligible for financial assistance under MIDH.
- Under **National Food Security Mission (NFSM)**, at least 33% of funds are earmarked for small and marginal farmers.
- Under the **Sub Mission on Agricultural Mechanization (SMAM)** under the main Mission i.e. **National Mission on Agricultural Extension and Technology (NMAET)**, it is proving a suitable platform for converging all activities for inclusive growth of agricultural mechanization by providing a 'single window' approach for implementation with a special focus on small & marginal farmers.
- Under the **Per Drop More Crop (micro irrigation)** at least 50% of the allocation is to be utilized for small & marginal farmers. Further, 10% additional financial assistance is available to small & marginal farmers as compared to other farmers.
- **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)** guidelines also envisage that at least 50% of the allocation is to be utilized for small & marginal farmers i.e. for **Rainfed Area Development (RAD) and Sub Mission on Agro Forestry (SMAF) Schemes.**
- Under the **Soil Health Card Scheme (SHC)** assistance is provided to all State Governments to evaluate soil health in all farm holdings across the country and issue Soil Health Cards to farmers (including small and marginal farmers) regularly in a cycle of two years.

**CONTRACT FARMING**

***The Government has formulated and released a progressive and facilitative Model Act “The State/ UT Agricultural Produce & Livestock Contract Farming and Services (Promotion & Facilitation) Act, 2018” in May, 2018 for its adoption by the states/Union Territories (UTs).***

The aforesaid Model Contract Farming Act covers the entire value and supply chain from pre-production to post harvest marketing including services contract for the agricultural produce and livestock.

Model Act being a facilitative one with wider scope of contracts in the entire agri-value chain starting from pre-production, production to post-production, private players including Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) will be encouraged to engage themselves in the contract farming and services contracts under the Act.

The contract farming under this model, will help in mitigating the price risk and market uncertainties through advance agreements and would encourage entry of private players into the farm sector.

**PRADHAN MANTRI FASAL BIMA YOJANA**

***Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) was introduced from Kharif 2016 season in the country.***

**BACKGROUND**

The scheme is optional for the States/ Union Territories (UTs) and so far, the scheme has been opted for implementation by 27 States/UTs. in one or more season(s) since inception in April, 2016 on the basis of their perception of risk to crops in their States.

**PMFBY**

- The scheme provides comprehensive risk coverage from pre-sowing to post harvest losses due to non-preventable natural risks and since sum insured has been equated with Scale of Finance, the farmers are provided with maximum risk coverage.
- Minimum uniform fixed premium rate payable by them i.e. ***maximum 2% for Kharif crops, 1.5% for Rabi Crop*** and ***5% for annual commercial/horticultural crops***,
- Balance of actuarial/bidder premium to be shared by the Central and State Government ***on 50 : 50 basis.***
- Moreover, under the scheme since unit area of insurance has been lowered to village/village panchayat level for assessment of losses of major crops and to individual farm level for assessment of losses due to localised calamities of hailstorm, landslide and inundation and post-harvest losses.

*Further with the setting up of **National Crop Insurance Portal** for scheme administration not only can the farmer also enrol under the scheme directly but will be able to track the entire process of his claim settlement.*

**NUTRIENT BASED SUBSIDY AND CITY COMPOST SCHEME**

***Government has decided to continue NBS and City Compost Scheme till 2019-20. As per approval of Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), subsidy expenditure for the scheme on actual basis since national rollout of DBT entails 100% payment of subsidy to fertilizer companies on sale of fertilizers to farmers at subsidized rates.***

**OBJECTIVES**

- To promote balanced use of fertilizers.
- To reduce subsidy burden on the Government.
- To improve availability of fertilizers to farmers.
- To encourage competition among fertilizer companies

**SIGNIFICANCE**

- To support SWACHH BHARAT MISSION.
- To provide City Compost at subsidized rates to farmers.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Government has implemented Nutrient Based Subsidy Policy for Phosphatic and Potassic (P&K) Fertilizers.
- Under the policy, a fixed amount of subsidy, decided on annual basis, is provided on subsidised P&K fertilizers depending on their nutrient content.
- Under this policy, MRP is fixed by fertilizer companies as per market dynamics at reasonable level which is monitored by the Government.

**PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM**

***Public Distribution System (PDS) is being implemented under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013 in all States/UTs.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Act provides for coverage of upto 75% of the rural population and upto 50% of the urban population for receiving foodgrains (rice, wheat & coarsegrains) at highly subsidized rates i.e. Rs. 3/2/1 per kg respectively.
- Under the Act eligible families comprise of Priority Households (PHH) and Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) families.
- Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) is operated under the joint responsibility of the central and State/UT Governments.
- As per clause 9 of TPDS (Control) Order, 2015, the license of FPS (FAIR PRICE SHOPS) shall be issued by State Government and preference shall be accorded to public institutions or public bodies such as panchayats, self-help groups, cooperative societies in licensing of FPSs and management of FPSs by women or their collectives.

**STRESSED ASSETS**

***Banks had set-up a Committee on Resolution of Stressed Assets.***

Committee which has given its Report suggesting a five-pronged approach for stressed assets resolution by the banking industry in the areas of **SME resolution (for which banks may put in place a Robust Monitoring Process), Bank-Led Resolution, AMC/AIF-led resolution, resolution through the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, and an asset trading platform.**

**A number of measures have been taken to streamline recovery and introduce innovative methods for recovery of NPAs.**

1. The ***Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016 (IBC)*** has been enacted to create a unified framework for resolving insolvency and bankruptcy matters. Under this, by adopting a creditor-in-saddle approach, with the interim resolution professional taking over management of affairs of corporate debtor at the outset, the incentive to resort to abuse of the legal system has been taken away. This, coupled with debarment of wilful defaulters and persons associated with NPA accounts from the resolution process, has effected a fundamental change in the creditor-debtor relationship.
2. The ***Banking Regulation Act, 1949*** has been amended, to provide for authorisation to RBI to issue directions to banks to initiate the insolvency resolution process under IBC.
3. The ***Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002*** has been amended for faster recovery, with provision for three months imprisonment in case the borrower does not provide asset details and for the lender to get possession of mortgaged property within 30 days. Also, six new ***Debts Recovery Tribunal*** have been established to expedite recovery.

#### **BENAMI TRANSACTION (PROHIBITION) AMENDMENT ACT, 2016**

***Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act 1988 as amended by the Benami Transaction (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016 seeks to prohibit the Benami Transactions irrespective of the method by which the Benami Property is acquired. Such Benami Transactions include transactions in respect of movable as well as immovable properties.***

#### **The Government of India has taken various steps to identify Benami Properties.**

- The Income-tax Department (ITD) has set-up 24 dedicated Benami Prohibition Units (BPUs) across India.
- These BPUs are involved in gathering information and matching the same with the data available for identifying the Benami Properties and taking effective action as per the provisions of Prohibition of Benami Property Transactions Act 1988 as amended by the Benami Transaction (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2016.

#### **RASHTRIYA SWASTHYA BIMA YOJANA**

***The Government is implementing Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana (RSBY), a centrally sponsored health insurance scheme which covers BPL families (a unit of five) and 11 other defined categories are enrolled under RSBY.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- They are entitled for cashless health insurance coverage of Rs. 30,000/- per annum per family.
- Beneficiaries need to pay only Rs. 30/- at the time enrolment.
- Senior Citizen's Health Insurance Scheme (SCHIS) for Senior Citizens of age 60 years and above belonging to above said categories has also been implemented w.e.f. 01.04.2016 as top of RSBY.
- The health coverage is upto Rs. 30,000/- per annum per senior citizen for treatment packages, over and above RSBY entitlement.
- There was no substantial reduction in the central share release under RSBY during the year 2016-17. The reduction in release of central share is due to decrease in number of implementing States

### RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR

*In the year 2016-17, aggregate capacity of around 11,322 MW of renewable energy was installed in the country, and in year 2017-18, aggregate capacity of around 11,887 MW was installed. Thus, renewable energy installations in the country are progressively increasing and do not appear to be facing any major challenges at present.*

### RENEWABLE ENERGY SECTOR

- Solar tariffs in India saw the lowest ever level of Rs.2.44 per unit in reverse auctions carried out by Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) in May 2017, for 200 MW and again in July, 2018, for 600 MW.
- A total of around 69,784 MW of renewable energy capacity has been installed in the country as on 31.03.2018 from all renewable energy sources which includes around 34,145 MW from Wind, around 21,651 MW from solar, around 4,486 MW from Small Hydro Power and around 9,502 MW from Bio-power.
- The Government has set a target of installing **175 GW of renewable energy capacity by the year 2022** which includes **100 GW from solar, 60 GW from wind, 10 GW from biomass and 5 GW from small hydro capacity.**

### DHANGARS DEMANDS ST STATUS

*Dhangars demands for ST status in Maharashtra.*

#### ISSUE

Dhangars are currently on the list of Vimukta Jati and Nomadic Tribes (VJNT) in Maharashtra. However, they have been demanding Scheduled Tribe (ST) status for the past several decades. Leaders of the community claim Dhangars in Maharashtra are the same as those who are called “Dhangad” elsewhere in the country, and are listed as a Scheduled Tribe. A typographical error had led to the community’s name being recorded as “Dhangar”, thereby denying them the benefits available to the ST “Dhangads”

Of the 52% reservation in Maharashtra, SCs and STs have 13% and 7% respectively, OBCs have 19%, and the Vimukta Jati/Denotified Tribes, Special Backward Class, and Nomadic Tribes together have 13%. Dhangars are a ‘Nomadic Tribe’.

#### DHANGARS

The Dhangars are a shepherd community who live mostly in Western Maharashtra and Marathwada, and make up about a crore of Maharashtra’s roughly 11.25 crore population (9%). They play a key role in election outcomes at four (**Baramati, Madha, Solapur, Satara**) of the state’s 48 Lok Sabha seats, and 30-35 of the 288 Assembly seats.

### BLOOD MOON

*“Blood moon” eclipse was the century’s longest total lunar eclipse, it also happened when Mars was at its closest to Earth, and the Red Planet was also visible near the red Moon.*

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- This happens during any total lunar eclipse, because of the nature of sunlight and the positioning of the celestial bodies.

- Sunlight is made of different colours, from violet and blue (low wavelength) to red and orange (high wavelength). When sunlight enters the Earth's atmosphere, these colours get scattered in different directions.
- During a lunar eclipse, the Earth comes between the Sun and the Moon, which means that it blocks light from getting between them. Any sunlight that does reach the Moon, therefore, has to make its way around the Earth.
- The light that manages to do so is that with the higher wavelengths, towards the red end of the spectrum. When this light hits the surface of the Moon, it gives it the reddish-orange glow that characterise a total lunar eclipse.

### GENE EDITED CROPS

***Along with the genetically modified organisms (GMOs), gene-edited crops are considered to play an important role in increasing productivity. However, question marks remain over the efficiency of gene editing and its potential to disrupt the natural order.***

**IN NEWS:** Last week, the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg ruled in favour of tying plants bred using gene editing technology (also called mutagenesis) to the same stringent guidelines as conventionally genetically modified organisms (GMO).

### GENE MODIFICATION AND EDITING

***Genetic modification involves the introduction of foreign DNA into an organism, while gene editing involves editing of the organism's native genome.***

The gene editing technology **CRISPR (Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats)** was in the news last year after it was successfully used in human embryos. This is done by introducing a protein (Cas9) containing the code of a defective gene. The protein then seeks out parts of the defective DNA that match this code, attaches itself to it, cuts it out, and then the DNA is allowed to repair itself by getting rid of the defect.

Gene editing technologies would find wider acceptance than GM — which has faced opposition — considering that gene editing does not involve introducing a foreign element into the plant's genetic code.

### INDIA & THE WORLD

Regulation has traditionally been stricter in Europe than in the US and Canada. In India, as in the EU, GM crops have faced resistance from farmers and environmental groups that have called for proper study and labelling.

India does not have any regulations on CRISPR as it does on GMO crops.

### TRAI DATA PRIVACY BLUEPRINT

***The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) released a set of recommendations regarding privacy, security, and ownership of data in the telecom sector — the first data privacy blueprint by a statutory body.***

Although **not binding**, the recommendations can be seen as inputs to the draft data protection Bill that is led by retired Supreme Court Justice **B N Srikrishna**.

### REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The report lays the foundation for individual ownership of data, making data collectors and data processors “mere custodians” of data who are subject to regulations.

- TRAI favours keeping the existing definition of ***personal data*** under the ***Sensitive Personal Data and Information (SPDI) Rules, 2011***, as information that identifies an individual, whether directly, indirectly, or in combination with other information available to the entity.
- Data collectors often give personal data to data processors, which glean further information from them. The report says both collectors and processors should be accountable for “***unintended harm***” caused to the user.
- The data protection framework should apply equally to the government and to private entities.
- It suggests that existing privacy laws that apply to telecom service providers (TSPs) should also apply to “all entities in the ***digital ecosystem***”. TSPs are the infrastructural pipes through which information travels. The other digital entities, TRAI states, include devices (mobiles and computers), browsers, software operating systems, applications, and over-the-top (OTT) service providers (that distribute media streamed over the Internet).
- An overarching theme is that “***inadequate***” data protection allows digital ecosystem entities an advantage in the use of the data, as compared to the user. According to law firm TRA, 62% of respondents to TRAI argued that current data protection norms should be revisited. All civil society organisations were in this category, while industry associations and TSPs were split.

#### **INDIVIDUAL’S RIGHT**

- TRAI has pushed for the individual’s right to know what data will be collected, how it will be used, who it will be given to, and whether or not a breach has occurred.
- The individual should have the right to choose whether or not to agree to these terms via her consent to “***end user agreements***” that are easy to understand, multilingual, and short. She should have the option to choose the specific terms she consents to; she should be allowed to delete pre-installed applications; have the right of data portability; and the right to be forgotten, so that her information is removed from search engine results.

#### **CONTROLLERS & PROCESSORS**

- They should not use meta-data (higher-level information about data) to identify users, and should not use pre-ticked consent boxes.
- They should build products with privacy in mind, also known as “***privacy by design***”.
- TRAI has suggested that entities collect the bare minimum data needed to provide the service, which is known as “***data minimisation***”.

#### **OVERVIEW**

1. The report addressed three areas where privacy exceptions could potentially be legitimate — ***law enforcement, research, and quality of services*** — but did not make any specific exception recommendations.
2. The report included advantages and disadvantages to data localisation — a much-debated topic regarding storage of data within national borders or a less-restrictive cross-border data flow. Most of the respondents to the TRAI consultation paper did not take a clear stand on this issue.
3. The report suggested a ***hybrid human and technology approach*** to audit compliance with the data protection law, as seen in the ***EU’s GDPR***, but did not make further specific audit recommendations.

4. Finally, the report said ***data sandboxes*** — testing environments that anonymises data to experiment for new products — could be “dangerous” because of re-identification, but did not make concrete recommendations.

### **DATA PROTECTION**

***A committee in the Ministry of Information and Electronics Technology submitted the draft of a Bill on protection of personal and sensitive data, along with a report of analysis. Both introduce some key terms to the data protection debate.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

**DATA PRINCIPAL:** It is the person, company, or entity whose information is being collected. “Data” means information that is represented in a form that is more appropriate for processing. “Processing” refers to the operations done to the data, often forms of organisation, searching, combining, and more to glean further information.

**DATA FIDUCIARY:** This can be a person, state, company, or any entity that decides why data should be processed and how it should be processed. Unlike the Ministry committee, others sometimes refer to this as the “data controller”.

**SIGNIFICANT DATA FIDUCIARIES:** This classification is based on the volume and sensitivity of the data as well as the fiduciary’s revenue, risk of “harm” (see below) to the principal, and type of technology use. Some regulations of the draft apply only to these significant fiduciaries, such as assessments, audits, record keeping, and hiring a data protection officer.

**DATA PROCESSOR:** While the fiduciary controls how and why data is processed, the processing itself may be conducted by a third-party, the “data processor”. This distinction is important to delineate responsibility as data moves from group to group. For example, in the United States, Facebook (the data controller) was hit by controversy over the actions of a third-party data processor, Cambridge Analytica.

**HARM:** The draft aims to protect against “harm” to the individual caused by data processing. It relates harm to mental injury, identity theft, finances, reputation, employment, discrimination, and service denial. Harm also includes any restrictions to individual action because of the fear of surveillance and any surveillance that is not “reasonably expected” by the individual.

**AUTOMATED MEANS:** Data processors work with data either manually or by automated means. While this definitional distinction may blur, in today’s technological landscape “automated means” colloquially connotes processes such as machine-learning algorithms. In these procedures, algorithms sift through vast amounts of data, find patterns, and apply those patterns on new information to get results.

**PERSONAL, SENSITIVE DATA:** “Personal data” can identify the person associated with the data while “sensitive personal data” covers a list of categories such as passwords, finances, health, biometrics, caste, and more. Personal data can be processed if there is consent, if it is for the functions of the state, if it is in compliance with the law, for prompt action such as medical and safety emergencies, for employment, or for reasonable purposes.

**LIMITATIONS:** Two key pillars of the Bill are “***purpose limitation***” and “***collection limitation***”. The draft limits the collection of data to what is needed for “clear, specific, and lawful” purposes or for reasons that the data principal would “reasonably expect.”

**DATA PROTECTION AUTHORITY:** The draft calls for the creation of an independent regulatory body, called the “data protection authority” (DPA). It has four groups of tasks. In adjudication, the DPA receives grievances and handles enforcement. In monitoring, it oversees internal assessments and external audits of the fiduciaries, as well as tracks data security breaches. In policy, the DPA defines sensitive personal data, “reasonable purposes” for processing, forms of consent, and the lawful transfer of data outside of India. Finally, the DPA conducts research and awareness building about data protection.

**REASONABLE PURPOSES:** The DPA can determine these by taking into account the interests of the fiduciary, public interest, individual rights, and the reasonable expectations of the individual.

**DATA TRUST SCORE:** The DPA can assign, register, and manage data auditors, who then may give fiduciaries a “data trust score” after a “data audit”.

**ADJUDICATING OFFICERS:** A wing in the DPA, they will have the power to call people forward for inquiry into fiduciaries, assess compliance, and determine penalties on the fiduciary or compensation to the principal. Adjudication decisions can be appealed against in the appellate tribunal.

**RIGHT TO BE FORGOTTEN:** Among the tasks of an adjudicating officer is to decide on cases of “the right to be forgotten”, a concept born out of the Internet’s so-called extended memory. With historical roots in European Union law, this right allows an individual to remove consent for data collection and disclosure. While in the EU the task for assessing requests for removal falls on the fiduciary, India’s draft asks the adjudicating officer to decide by balancing individual rights with the right to free speech and the right to information.

**DATA PROTECTION OFFICER.** The DPO will be appointed in “significant fiduciaries”, and the DPA will liaise with the officer to facilitate data protection and compliance. The officer is tasked with internal “data protection impact assessments”, grievance redress, record maintenance, and more. For foreign fiduciaries, the DPO must be based in India to represent the fiduciary.

**DATA LOCALISATION:** One of the highly debated topics in the draft, this relates to regulation about the transfer of data outside national borders. The draft Bill suggests mandating every fiduciary to store at least one copy of personal data in India, with exceptions determined by the central government. If the data is “critical personal data” (determined by the central government), then that data can only be stored and processed in India.

Personal data can be transferred out of the country in the case of contracts, with central government and DPA approval, based on adequate level of protection in destination country, or individual consent. Sensitive personal data can be transferred abroad in cases of health emergency and central government approval.

**DE-IDENTIFICATION:** Often the markers of data that make an individual identifiable can be removed, or masked, in a process of “de-identification.” The committee report admits a definitional grey area, weighing terms such as “anonymisation” and “pseudonymisation”. The draft deems “re-identification” — the reverse of the former — an offence.

**PRIVACY BY DESIGN:** This is a concept in which the de-identification process plays a role. The report conveys this to mean organisational practices that avoid harm to individuals and that process data in a transparent manner, including the assurance that business interests are achieved without harming privacy rights.

**DATA PORTABILITY:** The draft grants individuals this right, or the ability to access and transfer one's own data. It specifies that the data should be received in a "structured, commonly used and machine readable format". The committee report tempers this right with the issue of trade secrets and technical feasibility. Fiduciaries may charge fees for this process.

### HYDROGEN CNG

*The Environment Pollution Prevention and Control Authority (EPCA) recently recommended to the Supreme Court that Delhi's buses switch to H-CNG within the next two or three years. Days earlier, the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas had issued a draft notification, following a NITI Aayog proposal, for H-CNG as an automotive fuel.*

### CNG & H-CNG

- CNG is compressed natural gas. With natural gas mainly composed of methane, CNG emits less air pollutants — carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides and particulate matter — than petrol or diesel.
- H-CNG is a blend of hydrogen and CNG, the ideal hydrogen concentration being 18%. Compared to conventional CNG, use of H-CNG can reduce emission of carbon monoxide up to 70%, besides enabling up to 5% savings in fuel.
- H-CNG has not yet gained worldwide currency. Trials have been held in countries such as the US, Canada, Brazil and South Korea.
- Cars and autos would not be able to use H-CNG with the prevailing technology, mainly because hydrogen is "highly volatile" and the possibility of a rise in combustion temperature.
- While recommending the use of ***H-CNG as an alternative fuel***, the ***NITI Aayog-CII Action Plan for Clean Fuel*** notes that physical blending of CNG and hydrogen involves a series of energy-intensive steps that would make H-CNG more expensive than CNG.
- IOCL's research & development wing has developed a technology that does away with the need for physical blending. Its '***Compact Reforming Process***' directly produces a hydrogen-CNG mixture from natural gas, using a single step.

### INDIA – RUSSIA DEAL & US SANCTIONS

*US is set to exempt an Indian defence acquisition from Russia from a law it uses to impose sanctions on Moscow.*

### S-400 TRIUMF

- The Russian-built S-400 Triumph — NATO calls it SA-21 Growler — is the most dangerous operationally deployed modern ***long-range surface-to-air missile (MLR SAM) system*** in the world, considered to be much ahead of the ***Terminal High Altitude Area Defence system (THAAD)*** developed by the United States.
- The mobile S-400 system can engage all types of aerial targets including aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and ballistic and cruise missiles within a range of 400 km, at an altitude up to 30 km.
- It can track 100 airborne targets, including super fighters such as the American built F-35, and engage six of them simultaneously.
- The S-400 system, which can be deployed within five minutes, integrates a multifunction radar, autonomous detection and targeting systems, anti-aircraft missile systems, launchers, and a command & control centre, and is capable of firing three types of missiles to create a layered defence.

- The S-400 is the fourth generation of long-range Russian SAMs, successor to the S-200 and S-300, and is twice as effective as the previous version of the air defence system.

### What is the US sanctions law

The **Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)**, passed by Congress aims at taking punitive measures against Russia, Iran, and North Korea. Title II of the Act primarily deals with **sanctions on the Russian oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions**, in the backdrop of its military intervention in Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 US presidential elections.

### BACKGROUND

Section 231 of the Act empowers the US President to impose at least five of 12 listed sanctions — enumerated in Section 235 — on persons engaged in a "**significant transaction**" with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors.

The State Department has notified **39 Russian entities** — including almost all major Russian defence manufacturing and export companies/entities like Rosoboronexport, Almaz-Antey, Sukhoi Aviation, Russian Aircraft Corporation MiG, and United Shipbuilding Corp — "significant transactions" with which could make third parties liable to sanctions.

### IMPACT ON INDIA

Almaz-Antey Air and Space Defence Corporation JSC, the manufacturers of the S-400 system, are in the list of 39.

- If implemented stringently, CAATSA would impact Indian defence procurement from Russia — not just **S-400s**, but also **Project 1135.6 frigates** and **Ka-226T helicopters** — as well as joint ventures like Indo Russian Aviation Ltd, Multi-Role Transport Aircraft Ltd and Brahmos Aerospace.
- It would also affect purchase of spares, components, raw materials and other assistance.
- The bulk of India's military equipment is of Soviet/Russian origin — including the nuclear submarine INS Chakra, the Kilo-class conventional submarine, the supersonic Brahmos cruise missile, the MiG and Sukhoi fighters, the Il transport aircraft, the T-72 and T-90 tanks, the Mi helicopters, and the Vikramaditya aircraft carrier.

### How did the exemption come about

- CAATSA impacts Indo-US ties, and dents the image of the US as a reliable partner at a time when it is projecting India as a key player in its Indo-Pacific strategy.
- Indeed, the US defence industry sees India as a major market. Over the last decade, deals with India have grown from near zero to \$15 billion.
- Since 2008, the US has bagged more than \$15 billion in arms deals including for the C-17 Globemaster and C-130J transport planes, P-8 (I) maritime reconnaissance aircraft, M777 light-weight howitzer, Harpoon missiles, and Apache and Chinook helicopters.
- The CAATSA exemption also underlines the growing defence and security cooperation that has seen India sign a logistics pact with the US, the US designating India as a Major Defence Partner, and both countries coming together on Indo-Pacific strategy, the newly resurrected Quad.

**BREACH OF PRIVILEGE**

***Congress has given notices for breach of privilege against PM Narendra Modi and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha for “misleading” the House on the Rafale deal.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**Privilege, purpose, limits:** Parliament’s Houses, Committees and Members enjoy certain rights and immunities without which they cannot perform their functions effectively. **These are called privileges.** Parliamentary privileges are intended to protect the freedom, authority and dignity of Parliament. But these privileges do not exempt MPs from their obligations as citizens.

**Committee on Privileges:** A **15-Member Committee** nominated by the **Speaker** examines every issue involving a breach of privilege of the House upon reference by the Speaker, and makes requisite recommendations. The head of the Committee is currently Meenakshi Lekhi of the BJP.

**Procedure:** A Member may, with the **consent of the Speaker**, raise a question involving a breach of privilege either of a Member or of the House. The Member is required to give notice in writing to the Lok Sabha Secretary-General by 10 am on the day the question is proposed to be raised. If the question is based on a document, the notice must be accompanied by it. A notice received after 10 am is deemed to have been received at 10 am the next day. Only one question is allowed to be raised per sitting. It has to be restricted to a specific matter of recent occurrence and warrant an intervention by the House.

If the Speaker holds that the matter proposed to be discussed is in order, she shall call the Member concerned, who, while asking for leave to raise the question of privilege, make a short statement. If an objection to leave being granted is taken, the Speaker shall ask the Members in favour of leave being granted to rise, and if **not less than 25 members** rise, the Speaker shall declare that leave is granted. When a question of privilege is referred to the Committee, the report is presented to the House by the Committee chair.

**Punishment:** The House can let off an offender after a warning, or even send him to prison.

**NO CONFIDENCE MOTION**

***It is now 15 years since a discussion on a motion of no-confidence took place in the Lok Sabha. The last one was in 2003 when Prime Minister Vajpayee defeated a no-confidence motion moved by Sonia Gandhi. The no-confidence motion discussed was the 27th no-confidence motion in our Parliamentary history.***

**NO CONFIDENCE**

- In a parliamentary democracy, a government can be in power only if it commands a majority in the directly elected House.
- **Article 75(3) of our Constitution** embodies this rule by specifying that the **Council of Ministers** are collectively responsible to Lok Sabha.
- The rules of Lok Sabha provide a mechanism for testing this **collective responsibility**.
- They allow any Lok Sabha MP who can garner the **support of 50 colleagues**, to introduce a motion of no-confidence against the Council of Ministers.
- Thereafter, a discussion on the motion takes place.
- MPs who support the motion highlight the government’s shortcomings, and the Treasury Benches respond to the issues they raise.

**BACKGROUND**

- In 1952, the Rules of Lok Sabha provided that a no-confidence motion could be moved with the support of 30 MPs. Even then, not a single no-confidence motion was moved during the term of the first two Lok Sabhas.
- It was during the third Lok Sabha in 1963 that the first one was moved by Acharya J B Kripalani against the government headed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The debate on the motion lasted for 21 hours over four days, with 40 MPs participating.
- The next no-confidence motion was moved roughly a year later in 1964 by N C Chatterjee, an Independent MP, against Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri.
- From 1964-75, Lok Sabha debated 15 no-confidence motions. Three were against Shastri and 12 against Indira Gandhi. Indira went on to face three more no-confidence motions between 1981 and 1982. However, none of these was successful in dislodging a government.

**WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANISATION**

***India has become the Vice-Chair (Regional Head) of the Asia Pacific Region of WCO for a period of two years (2018-2020).***

- WCO established in 1952, is an independent intergovernmental body whose mission is to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations.
- WCO is the only international organization with competence in Customs matters.
- It represents 182 Customs administrations across the globe that collectively process approximately 98% of world trade.
- The organisation has divided its membership into six regions. Each of the regions is represented by an elected vice-chairperson to the WCO council.
- It is considered as the voice of the International Customs community.

**MEERKAT RADIO TELESCOPE**

- MeerKAT telescope is a scientific mega-project in South Africa.
- It will be an array of 64 interlinked receptors to unlock cosmic conundrums from dark energy to detecting extraterrestrial life.
- A receptor is the complete antenna structure, with the main reflector, sub-reflector and all receivers, digitisers and other electronics installed.
- It will be incorporated into the complex Square Kilometre Array (SKA) instrument.
- It is the biggest radio telescope of its kind in the southern hemisphere.

**GOLDEN JACKAL**

***Destruction of mangrove cover in the Bandar Reserve Forest is forcing the golden jackal out of its habitat.***

- The conservation status of the animal is the '***least concern***' and it preys on wild crab and fish.
- The Golden Jackal is widespread in North and north-east Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Eastern Europe and the entire Indian Subcontinent.
- In India, jackal populations achieve high densities in pastoral areas such as Kutch, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Haryana.
- It is present in all protected areas of India except for those in the high elevation regions of the Himalayas.
- The species is included in CITES Appendix III (in India).

- Jackals feature on Schedule III of the Wildlife Protection Act (1972) of India and are afforded the least legal protection (mainly to control trade of pelts and tails).

### HARRIER BIRDS

*Recent reports highlights that the numbers of birds visiting the site are declining.*

### HIGHLIGHTS

- Harrier birds are migratory raptor species that regularly visits vast swathes of India.
- India has one of the largest roosting sites in the world for Pallid Harriers and Montagu's Harriers.
- While a general declining trend was observed in all the monitored sites, researchers noted the most dramatic changes at the **Rollapadu Bustard Sanctuary in Andhra Pradesh's** Kurnool district.
- In Hessarghatta on the outskirts of Bengaluru, Western Marsh Harriers declined significantly, leaving the area nearly deserted.
- The gravest concern is the loss of grasslands, either to urbanisation or to agriculture.
- Excessive use of pesticides in farms in and around the roosting sites could also be a reason for the lowered population counts.

### VIKAS ENGINE

- **Vikas** is a family of liquid fuelled rocket engines that powers India's launch vehicles PSLV and GSLV.
- It is aimed at improving the payload capability of PSLV, GSLV and GSLV Mk-III launch vehicles.
- It is used in second stage of PSLV which consists of four stages in its operation (Solid-Liquid-Solid-Liquid).
- It is used in second stage and four strap-on stages of GSLV.
- GSLV is a three-stage vehicle (**Solid-Liquid-Cryogenic Engine**) with four liquid strap-on boosters.
- ISRO has recently improved the thrust of the Vikas engine which is expected to boost the rocket engine.
- The main beneficiary of the high-thrust Vikas engine is GSLV-Mark III launcher, which is expected to lift 4,000-kg satellites to space.
- GSLV-Mark III uses twin engine core liquid stage (L110).
- GSLV – Mark III with upgraded Vikas engine would be the third Mk-III and the first working one to be designated MkIII Mission-1 or M1.

### WHOLESALE PRICE INDEX

- WPI represents the price of basket of goods at a wholesale stage i.e. goods that are sold in bulk and traded between organizations instead of consumers.
- WPI is calculated by the Office of Economic Advisor, DIPP under Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
- The base year for the index is 2011-12.
- The components of WPI include Primary articles, Manufacturing items, fuel and power with different weightages assigned to them.
- The weightages are **Primary Articles** (Weight 22.62%), **Fuel & Power** (Weight 13.15%), and **Manufactured Products** (Weight 64.23%).
- It basically indicates the rise in profitability of industries.

### CONCERN

- WPI has risen to 5.77% in June, the highest since December 2013.
- It is driven in large part by rising fuel prices.
- The real upward push came from the crude petroleum and natural gas segment, which saw inflation surging to 48.7% in June from 26.9% in the previous month.
- Similarly, the fuel and power segment saw inflation quicken to 16.2% from 11.2% over the same period and inflation in manufacturing accelerated in June to 4.17% from 3.73% in May.

#### **BILL AGAINST WITCH HUNTING**

***President has recently given assent to the Assam government's bill against witch-hunting.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Witch-hunting involves casting a spell on women victims to gain control over them by magic.
- The victim who is branded as a witch is subjected to numerous forms of torture, beatings, burns, paraded naked through the village, forced to eat human excrement and sometimes even raped.
- In India, witch hunting dates back hundreds of years.
- It emanated in the Morigaon district of Assam which is now infamously known as the 'Indian Capital of Black Magic'.
- Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2015 considers the act of witch hunting as cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable offense.
- It prescribes a prison term of up to seven years and up to Rs. 5 lakh in fine for calling a person witch.
- It also has provisions to come with Section 302 of the IPC (punishment for murder) if someone is killed after being branded a witch.

#### **SAGARMALA INITIATIVE**

***Government has recently inaugurated Hi-tech labs in centre of excellence in Maritime & Ship Building (CEMS), Vishakapatnam.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The prime objective of the ***Sagarmala project*** is to promote port-led development and to provide infrastructure to transport goods quickly, efficiently and cost-effectively.
- It intends to enhance the capacity of major and non-major ports.
- It also strives to ensure sustainable development of the population living in the coastal economic zones.
- ***Community Development Fund*** will be created for projects and activities which strive to bring development for coastal communities.

#### **NATIONAL DATABASE OF ARMS LICENSES SYSTEM**

***Union Home Ministry is planning to create National Database of Arms Licenses System.***

- It is to create vigilance on authorised private gun holders and eliminate possibilities of issuing arms license to bogus persons.
- Ministry will amend the Arms Act to create the database.

#### **GLOBAL COMPACT FOR MIGRATION**

***United Nations has created Global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration for the first time.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- It is the first intergovernmental negotiated agreement under the auspices of UN to cover all dimensions of migration.
- The agreement was signed by adopting a non-binding political declaration "**New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants**" in 2016.
- Its objective is to address the challenges of migration, strengthen migrant rights.
- Under the agenda, member States committed to cooperate internationally to safely facilitate migration.

**BANSAGAR CANAL PROJECT**

***Bansagar canal project was recently inaugurated in Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The project is a joint venture between Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.
- It is a multipurpose river valley project on Son River.
- It aims to bring boost to irrigation in the region.

**Son River**

- Son River originates near Amarkantak in Madhya Pradesh.
- It is one of the tributaries of Ganges from Central India.
- It is the second largest of the southern tributaries of Ganga.
- Yamuna is the largest tributary.

**FAIR REMUNERATIVE PRICE**

***Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has approved the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) of sugarcane for sugar season 2018-19.***

- The FRP so approved shall be applicable for purchase of sugarcane from the farmers in the sugar season by the sugar mills.
- The FRP has been determined on the basis of recommendations of **Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP)** and after consultation with State Governments and other stakeholders.
- Recommended FRP has been arrived at by taking into account various factors such as cost of production, overall demand-supply situations.
- FRP also takes domestic and international prices, inter-crop price parity, terms of trade prices of primary by-products, and likely impact of FRP on general price level and resource use efficiency into account.

**AGARTALA – AKHAURA RAIL LINK PROJECT**

- It is a 45-km dual gauge line between Agartala in Tripura and Akhaura, a sub-district of Chittagong in Bangladesh.
- The project is developed as a part of India's \$4.5 billion third line of credit extended to Bangladesh for its infrastructure and social sector development.
- The Agartala-Akhaura rail project will lend full connectivity from east to west of Bangladesh, apart from enabling trade relations between the two neighbours.
- Once completed, the railway link is expected to cut the distance between Agartala and Kolkata by more than 1,000 km, it will also enhance India's access to Chittagong port in Bangladesh.

**PMEGP SCHEME**

Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP) is a credit linked subsidy scheme, for setting up of new micro-enterprises and to generate employment opportunities in rural as well as urban areas of the country.

- It is enabled through KVIC, State Khadi & Village Industries Board (KVIB) and District Industries Centre (DIC).
- Under the PMEGP, general category beneficiaries can avail of margin money subsidy of 25% of the project cost in rural areas and 15% in urban areas.
- For beneficiaries belonging to SC/ST/Women/PH/Minorities/Ex-Servicemen/NER, the margin money subsidy is 35% in rural areas and 25% in urban areas.
- The maximum cost of projects is Rs.25 lakh in the manufacturing sector and Rs.10 lakh in the service sector.

**REGIONAL AVIATION PARTNERSHIP**

***The Union Cabinet has approved the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) amongst BRICS Nations.***

- The Regional Aviation Partnership Cooperation will benefit Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.
- The objective is that BRICS countries would benefit from the establishing of an institutional framework to cooperate in the field of civil aviation.
- The MoU has the potential to spur greater trade, investment, tourism and cultural exchanges amongst the BRICS Nations.

**EXERCISE PITCH BLACK 2018**

***The Indian Air Force for the first time participated with fighter aircraft in Exercise Pitch Black 2018 (PB-18), which held in Australia.***

- Exercise Pitch Black is a biennial multi-national large force employment warfare exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF).
- The exercise will provide unique opportunity for exchange of knowledge and experience with these nations in a dynamic warfare environment.

**NATIONAL CENTRE FOR POLAR AND OCEAN RESEARCH**

***Indian Government has recently renamed National Centre for Antarctic and Ocean Research (NCAOR) as "National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research".***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- NCAOR was formed in 1998 with an objective to conduct expedition to India's base stations in Antarctica.
- NCAOR is under the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- The intent behind the name change is to show that government is refocusing its priorities to Arctic.
- It is because of the opportunities and challenges posed by climate change in Arctic.
- Now, India only has one Arctic observation station near Norway
- India is already an observer at the Arctic Council.

**Arctic Council**

- It is a forum of countries that decides on managing the region's resources and popular livelihood in Arctic region.
- The **Ottawa Declaration** lists the few countries as Members of the Arctic Council.
- They are Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States.
- Observer countries are China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Netherlands, Poland, Singapore, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
- India setup an underground observatory, called IndARC in 2015.
- It is located at the Kongsfjorden fjord, half way between Norway and the North Pole.

**WORKSHOP ON EMPOWEING WOMEN**

***The workshop was jointly organised by Women Entrepreneurship Platform (WEP) and University of Delhi.***

- WEP was launched by NITI Aayog the occasion of International Women's Day, 2018.
- The initiative is aimed at building an ecosystem for women across India to realize their entrepreneurial aspirations, scale-up innovative initiatives and chalk-out sustainable, long-term strategies for their businesses.
- The three pillars on which WEP is built:
  - Ichha Shakti (motivating aspiring entrepreneurs to start their enterprise)
  - Gyaan Shakti (providing knowledge and ecosystem support to women entrepreneurs to help them foster entrepreneurship)
  - Karma Shakti (providing hands-on support to entrepreneurs in setting-up and scaling up businesses).

**GANGA VRIKSHAROPAN ABHIYAN**

***National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) has organised "Ganga Vriksharopan Abhiyan" in Ganga basin states.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The campaign has been initiated as part of the **Forest Interventions in Ganga** (FIG) component of **Namami Gange programme**.
- It aims to bring greater awareness among people and other stakeholders regarding the importance of afforestation for the task of Ganga Rejuvenation.
- Afforestation and augmentation of existing forest along the Ganga strengthen the riparian ecosystem thereby contributing to the overarching cause of Ganga Rejuvenation.
- The five states covered are Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.

**LiDAR**

***LiDAR has been recently deployed at Gulf of Khambat, off the Gujarat Coast by National Institute of Wind Energy (NIWE).***

The **objective** of the installation is to assess offshore wind resource.

- Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) is a remote sensing instrument.
- It is used as a monitoring system for mapping and modelling in -micro-topography, forestry, agriculture, meteorology and environmental pollution.

**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTRES**

***The Government has proposed to set up National Resource Centres (NRCs) to prepare online training material.***

- The resource centres will focus on latest developments in the discipline, new & emerging trends, pedagogical improvements and methodologies for transacting revised curriculum.
- Under this initiative, all in-service teachers, irrespective of their subject and seniority have an enabling opportunity to keep update of the latest developments in their disciplines through the technology based online refresher course, through **SWAYAM platform**.

**EKALAVYA SCHOOLS**

***Ministry of Tribal Affairs recently approves setting up of Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRSs) in States/ UTs.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Ekalavya Residential Schools aims to provide education to tribals in their local environment.
- Target – Ekalavya schools in every block with more than 50% ST population and at least 20,000 tribal persons by 2022.
- Ekalavya schools will be on a par with Navodaya Vidyalayas.
- It will have special facilities for preserving local art and culture, besides providing training in sports and skill development.
- The Ekalavya Residential School Scheme isnt new. It has been around for many years now. However, the government has signaled in Budget 2018 that it wants to expand the scope.

**STUDENT POLICE CADET PROGRAMME**

***Home Ministry is planning to launch the Student Police Cadet (SPC) programme in Gurgaon.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The programme designed for students of Class VIII and IX to start a project on tolerance, moral values, patience and ethics among others.
- The programme is aimed at making them better citizens and seeks to build a bridge between the police and the larger community through school students.
- It will be implemented first in government schools.
- It seeks to cover issues like community policing, fight against social evils, safety of women and children, fight against corruption and disaster management.

**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT AND NETWORKS**

***The government has proposed a new policy "SRIMAN" that plans to hire out to researchers all lab equipment that cost more than Rs. 10 lakh.***

- It is expected to transform scientific instruments in government labs into lucrative assets generating a steady rental income.
- It would also reduce the amount of time such expensive instruments remain idle.
- Currently, the practice of researchers bidding for time-slots to use lab instruments is typically seen more with very expensive equipment, such as radio telescopes and particle-accelerators, which cost crores of rupees.

**DHOLE**

***Wildlife scientists from Wildlife Institute of India (WII) have recently satellite- collared a dhole, the Indian wild dog, for the first time.***

- The satellite transmitter will help to study the habits of the ***endangered species***.
- Dhole is native to Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand.
- It is included in CITES – Appendix II (2013) and are legally protected in the countries where they occur.
- It is listed as "***Endangered***" under IUCN red list of Threatened species.

**ADVANCED SAFAR**

***Union Environment Ministry has recently unveiled the most advanced System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting (SAFAR) in New Delhi.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The system, first of its kind in the country, was developed indigenously in by Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology, Pune and operationalized by IMD.
- It will also measure sun's UV-Index, PM1 and Mercury in addition to monitoring and forecasting regular air quality.
- In addition to regular air quality parameters like PM2.5, PM10, Sulfur Dioxide, Ozone, Nitrogen Oxides, Carbon Monoxide, the system will also monitor the existence of Benzene, Toluene and Xylene.
- Based on UVI, skin advisories will be issued on display.

**GLOBAL SLAVERY INDEX**

- It is published by the Australia-based human rights group ***Walk Free Foundation***.
- It includes data on three key variables:
  1. Prevalence of modern slavery in each country.
  2. Vulnerability.
  3. Government responses to modern slavery.
- Modern slavery refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot leave because of threats, violence, coercion and abuse of power or deception.
- The report estimates most victims of modern slavery live in Asia.
- North Korea has the highest prevalence of modern slavery globally, with one in 10 of the population, or 2.6 million people, victims of modern slavery.
- The 10 countries with the largest number of absolute numbers of people in modern slavery include India, China, Pakistan, North Korea, Nigeria, Iran, Indonesia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Russia and the Philippines.

**10<sup>TH</sup> EDITION OF DELHI DIALOGUE**

***India hosted the 10th edition of the Delhi Dialogue (DD X) under the theme "Strengthening India-ASEAN Maritime Cooperation" in New Delhi.***

- Delhi Dialogue is a premier annual event to discuss politico-security, the economic and socio-cultural engagement between India and ASEAN.
- It was the first major event to be organised after the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit.

- It was organised in partnership with the Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS).
- India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit was held earlier this year, marking 25 years of India-ASEAN ties.
- The Delhi Declaration was released after the summit.

#### **KHELO INDIA TALENT IDENTIFICATION DEVELOPMENT SCHEME**

- Khelo India is a National Programme for Development of Sports, which aims to enable a pathway from schools to Olympics.
- Each athlete selected under the scheme will get a scholarship of Rs. 5 lakh per annum for eight years.
- The government also aims to set up 20 universities across the country as hubs of sporting excellence.
- Following the successful conduct of the Khelo India School Games, Sports Authority of India cleared the proposal of Khelo India Talent Identification Development scheme.
- It is a scholarship programme designed to take care of their expenses including training, development, boarding and lodging and tournament exposure apart from offering them out of pocket expense allowance.

#### **NATIONAL MOTH WEEK**

- National Moth Week was initiated in 2012 by scientist in America.
- Its main aim is to increase awareness on Moths and encourage people to observe and document moths in backyards and neighbourhoods.
- It is observed in the last week of July in more than 40 countries worldwide.
- India is among 40 countries in which enthusiasts and citizen scientists are devoting the week from July 21 to 29 to document the insects

#### **DIGITAL KNOWLEDGE ON BIRD SPECIES**

***Scientists at the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the University of Kansas have recently accessed more than 2 million bird occurrence data points from across India.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- Wildlife scientists tried to use online data to study if bird occurrence has altered across India over time.
- However, with little data before 1980 was found digitally, it is difficult to make comparisons.
- The study was carried out with an intent to evaluate the “digital accessible knowledge” of bird species occurrences.
- They explored two sources - Global Biodiversity Information Facility and eBird.
- **Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF)** is a network funded by the world’s governments focused on making scientific data on biodiversity available online.
- eBird is the world’s largest biodiversity-related citizen science project where users contribute information on bird sightings.

#### **SALICORNIA**

***Recently, Andhra Pradesh government has intensified the efforts to tap commercial benefits from the plant through cultivation as well as extraction.***

- Salicornia is a plant that grows in salty marshes in the mangrove wetlands.
- The plant can be used as a substitute to salt with low sodium content.
- The patients suffering from hypertension, diabetes and gastric related ailments prefer the Salicornia salad and salt.
- The production of the salt substitute has come down drastically in Gujarat with the scarcity of the Salicornia. Thus, India is forced to import it from Israel and Scandinavian countries.
- The government has documented the presence of the Salicornia along the coastline of Krishna district, exploring the possibilities to extract the salt substitute through various methods.

#### **K9 VAJRA-T GUNS**

***India is going to procure this artillery guns and it will be the first induction of heavy artillery since the Swedish Bofors guns imported in the 1980s.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- K9 Vajra-T is an artillery gun produced by South Korea.
- It is a 155-mm, 52-calibre self-propelled artillery gun with a maximum range of 40 km, customised from the original K9 Thunder gun.
- The fire control system has been customised for desert conditions to the requirements of the Indian Army.
- India is also planning to procure M777 ultra-light howitzers from the U.S.
- The M777 is a 155-mm, 39-calibre towed artillery gun and weighs just four tonnes, making it transportable under slung from helicopters.

#### **SOLAR PARK**

- Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan have topped the list of states with maximum solar power generation capacity approved under solar parks in India.
- A solar park is a concentrated zone of development of solar power generation projects.
- It provides developers an area with proper infrastructure and access to amenities and where the risk of the projects can be minimized.
- The solar park scheme also provides for reduced number of statutory approvals to facilitate faster and easier development.

#### **FDI CONFIDENCE INDEX**

- The index is compiled by AT Kearney, an American global management consulting firm.
- It ranks top 10 destinations for FDI in terms of its attractiveness.
- India ranks 11th in 2018 index, down from 8 in 2017 and 9 in 2016. Thus, India has fallen out of top 10 destination.
- The report by AT kearney highlighted that the fall in rank is due to troubles in the implementation of the goods and services tax and the government's demonetisation decision in 2016.
- It also highlighted several of the reforms such as removing the Foreign Investment Promotion Board and liberalising FDI limits in key sector.

#### **PUBLIC AFFAIRS INDEX**

- The index has been developed by Bengaluru-based think tank Public Affairs Centre.
- It ranks States in India based on 10 themes 30 focus subjects and 100 indicators.

- The themes include:
  1. Essential infrastructure.
  2. Support to human development.
  3. Social protection.
  4. Women and children.
  5. Crime.
  6. Law and order.
  7. Delivery of justice.
  8. Environment, transparency and accountability.
  9. Fiscal management.
  10. Economic freedom.
- The current edition 2018 focus on the subject "***The Children of India***".
- The latest index released by PAC shows that Kerala has been ranked as the number one state in terms of governance for the past three years, followed by Tamil Nadu.
- Despite the political instability and the public protests seen in the recent past, Tamil Nadu continues to be ranked second in terms of governance.
- Telangana, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka follow the top two states.
- Telangana, which had an overall ranking of 20 in 2017, has shot up to third place in the new index.
- Among smaller states, Jammu and Kashmir held its position as the best in terms of governance for the second consecutive year, followed by Himachal Pradesh.

#### **SEVA BHOJ YOJANA**

- It is a Central Sector Scheme under the Ministry of Culture.
- Under the Scheme, CGST and Central Government's share of IGST paid by Charitable Religious Institutions on purchase of specific raw food items shall be reimbursed to them as financial assistance by the Government of India.
- The charitable religious institutions include Temples, Gurudwara, Dharmik Ashram, Mosques, Dargah, Church, Matth, Monastries etc.
- As per the scheme guidelines, the institutions applying for financial assistance are required to produce a certificate from District Magistrate indicating that the institution is involved in charitable religious activities.
- These institutions must be distributing free food to public/devotees etc. since last 3 years on daily/monthly basis.
- In case of mis-use of funds, it provides for penalties such as black listing the organisations, recovering the financial assistance with penal interest apart from taking criminal action as per law.

#### **BORDER HAATS**

***Haat means market. Border haats are, specially designed marketplaces along the border of two countries which aim at promoting the well-being of the people dwelling in remote areas across the borders.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The border haats are managed by Haat Management Committees (HMCs).
- In 2010, India and Bangladesh agreed to open haats in remote border areas trade, of locally produced commodities, completely free from duties and taxes.

- Last year, a MoU on Border Haats between India and Bangladesh was signed for establishment of a Joint Committee to review the border haats operation and propose new locations of Border Haats.
- The first meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Committee on Border Haats was recently held in Agartala, Tripura.

### PANGOLIN

***A special unit of the Odisha Police has launched a drive to bust an international syndicate that illegally trades pangolin.***

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Pangolins are nocturnal mammals, often called “scaly anteaters,” are covered in tough, overlapping scales
- These burrowing mammals eat ants and termites using an extraordinarily long tongue, and are able to quickly roll themselves up into a tight ball when threatened.
- There are eight different pangolin species can be found across Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- They are the most trafficked mammal in the world.
- They are listed as “***Endangered***” in IUCN red list of threatened species.
- The scales of the pangolin are sold raw or fried in Asia for as much as \$500 per kilogram for treating asthma and migraines.
- ***Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)*** is an international intergovernmental agreement to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.
- ***TRAFFIC*** is the wildlife trade monitoring network, which is a non-governmental organization working globally on trade in wild animals and plants in the context of both biodiversity conservation and sustainable development.

### INTER CREDITOR AGREEMENT

***More than a dozen of lenders led by State Bank of India recently signed the inter-creditor agreement (ICA).***

#### BACKGROUND

- Over the last few years, stressed assets resolution has been a challenge, despite RBI's consistent direction to banks.
- A panel led by banker Sunil Mehta identified the disagreement among joint lenders as the biggest problem in resolution.
- It recommended the bank-led resolution approach in the form of inter-creditor agreement.
- This is an improvement on the earlier model of solely relying on the joint lenders’ forum to arrive at a consensus.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- The agreement is part of the proposed Project Sashakt.
- “Sashakt” plan is approved by the government to address the problem of resolving bad loans.
- The objective is to use this ICA for faster facilitation of resolution of stressed assets.
- It is aimed at the resolution of loan accounts with a size of Rs. 50 crore and above that are under the control of a group of lenders.

**PROVISIONS**

- If 66% of the lenders agree to a resolution plan it would be binding on all lenders.
- A 'dissenting creditor' is that which votes against or abstains from voting for the resolution plan approved by the committee.
- A dissenting creditor could sell its loan at a discount of 15% of the liquidation value to other lenders.
- Liquidation value is the amount at which a company could sell its assets and settle liabilities.
- Another option is to sell their loans to any person at a price mutually arrived between dissenting lender and the buyer.
- However, it cannot sell it to an asset reconstruction company.
- The agreement has a standstill clause wherein all lenders are barred from enforcing any legal action against the borrower.
- During standstill period, lenders are also barred from transferring or assigning their loan to any other person except a bank or finance company.

**CONCERN**

- The obligation on the lead lender to come up with a time-bound resolution plan can have unintended consequences.
- Banks may be compelled to engage in a rush sale of stressed assets due to arbitrary deadlines.
- This will work against the interests of lenders looking to get the best price for their stressed assets.
- Besides, the biggest challenge to bad loan resolution is the absence of buyers to purchase stressed assets.
- There is also the unwillingness of banks to sell their loans at a deep discount to their face value.

**REGIONAL RURAL BANKS**

***The government approved the extension of the scheme of recapitalization of RRBs for the next 3 years upto 2019-20.***

This was done to help RRBs to maintain the minimum prescribed **Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of 9 per cent.**

- RRBs were set up with the objective to provide credit to the small and marginal farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans and small entrepreneurs in rural areas for development of productive activities.
- RRBs are jointly owned by Government of India, the concerned State Government and Sponsor Banks with the issued capital in the ratio of **50:15:35** respectively.
- Earlier, the Government has sought comments of respective State Governments and Sponsor Banks on a roadmap for consolidation of RRBs within a State.
- In line with the proposal, the roadmap for consolidation of RRB has been prepared in consultation with NABARD.
- It is expected that it will bring better scale-efficiency, higher productivity, robust financial health of RRBs, improved financial inclusion and greater credit flow to rural areas.

## SAFEGUARDING THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AND DIVERSE CULTURAL TRADITION OF INDIA SCHEME

**Ministry of Culture has formulated this scheme for revitalizing various institutions, groups, individuals, NGOs, researchers and scholars to engage in activities for preserving and promoting the rich Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of India.**

- The scheme is being implemented through Sangeet Natak Akademi, an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture.
- It cover all recognized domains of ICH such as:
  - oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage.
  - Performing arts, Social practices, rituals and festive events.
  - Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe.
  - traditional craftsmanship etc.
- Assistance under the scheme will be provided in the form of non-recurring grants, honoraria, infrastructure grants for the survival and propagation of all forms of ICH.
- Assistance will also be provided for short research and referencing work of relevance to ICH.
- It also support initiative of Ministry of HRD in setting up Sector Skill Councils relating to art under **National Vocational Educational Qualifications Framework (NVEQF)**.

### KUMBH MELA

- Kumbh Mela is the largest congregation of pilgrims in the planet, held once in every 12 years in 4 places - Haridwar, Allahabad, Ujjain and Nashik.
- It represents a syncretic set of rituals related to worship and ritual cleansing in holy rivers in India.
- The intergovernmental committee for the safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage under UNESCO has recognised Kumbh Mela as an intangible heritage.
- The **"49 days Kumbh Mela" is going to be held in January, 2019.**
- The government is taking various measures to promote globally to attract foreign tourists.
- Some of the measures are,
  - Launch of 'Chalo Kumbh Chalo' campaign across the country.
  - Development of a designated area for flag hoisting for 192 countries visiting Kumbh Mela
  - Organising the 'Pravasi Bharatiya Divas', 2019 in Varanasi to attract 'Pravasi Bharatiya Delegates' to visit Kumbh, 2019.

### GLOBAL DISABILITY SUMMIT 2018

**The first ever Global Disability Summit was recently held in London. Union Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment represented India in the summit.**

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- It was organised by the UK Department for International Development along with International Disability Alliance and the Government of Kenya.
- The motto of the Conference was to firm up the commitments of the country leaders towards the cause of persons with disabilities.
- The objectives of the summit are:
  - raise global attention and focus on a neglected area.
  - bring in new voices and approaches to broaden engagement.

- mobilise new global and national commitments on disability.
- showcase best practice and evidence from across the world.

### **KALA AZAR**

***An outbreak of kala azar was recently reported from the kozhikode district, after two months of Nipah virus outbreak.***

### **KALA AZAR**

- Visceral leishmaniasis (VL), also known as kala-azar, is caused by the protozoan Leishmania parasites.
- It is transmitted to humans through infected sandflies.
- It is characterized by irregular bouts of fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anaemia.
- The parasite migrates to the internal organs such as the liver, spleen, and bone marrow, and, if left untreated, may result in the death.
- It is endemic to the Indian subcontinent in 119 districts in four countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal).
- India itself accounts for half the global burden of the disease.
- India has missed the 2017 deadline for elimination of Kala Azar.
- Elimination is defined as reducing the annual incidence of Kala Azar to less than 1 case per 10,000 people at the subdistrict level.

### **DEDICATED FREIGHT CORRIDOR**

***Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) project is a broad gauge freight corridor being constructed by the Indian Railways.***

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- It aims to provide an efficient and reliable transportation system through construction of six freight corridors traversing the entire country.
- Dedicated Freight Corridor Corporation of India (DFCCIL) is a special purpose vehicle of the railways which has been entrusted with the job to develop DFCs in the country.
- Ministry of Railways have sanctioned the implementation of Western and Eastern Dedicated freight corridors.
- The commissioning of Western and Eastern DFCs is targeted in phases by 2019/2020.
- Western DFC runs from Dadri near Delhi to Jawahar Lal Nehru Port Trust in Mumbai.
- It covers the States of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra.
- It is funded by World Bank.
- Eastern DFC is from Ludhiana in Punjab to Dankuni in West Bengal.
- It covers the States of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal.
- It is funded by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).
- All the freight traffic that is currently on the rail routes between Delhi and Mumbai and Delhi and Kolkata would be moved to these corridors in parts to decongest the existing lines.
- Other DFC - East-West DFC (Kolkata-Mumbai), North-South DFC (Delhi-Chennai), East Coast DFC (Kharagpur-Vijaywada) and the Southern DFC (Chennai-Goa).

**ETHANOL BIO FUELS**

***Oil PSUs have entered into MoUs with State Governments and Technology Providers for setting up five 2G ethanol bio-refineries.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- Biofuels are fuels produced directly or indirectly from organic material biomass, including plant materials and animal waste.
- Primary biofuels are organic materials used in an unprocessed form, primarily for heating, cooking or electricity production.
- Ethanol is a secondary biofuel which is produced through processing of biomass.
- First generation biofuels are produced directly from food crops.
- Second Generation (2G) biofuels are produced from marginal croplands unsuitable for food production.
- In 2016, the foundation stone of India's first 2G ethanol bio-refinery in Bathinda, Punjab has been laid.
- In the National Policy on Biofuels 2018, Government has allowed B grade heavy molasses, sugarcane juice and damaged food grains as feedstocks to increase availability of ethanol.

**MYANMAR JOINS ISA**

***Myanmar has recently joined the India-initiated International Solar Alliance (ISA), becoming its 68th member.***

**ISA**

- International Solar Alliance was launched by India and France at the Paris climate summit in 2015.
- It is open to all 121 prospective member countries falling between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

**MAHILA SHAKTI KENDRA SCHEME**

- It is a centrally sponsored scheme which aims to empower rural women through community participation.
- Under the scheme, community engagement through student volunteers is envisioned in the backward districts at block level.
- Student volunteers will help in awareness generation regarding various important government programmes as well as social issues.
- It is envisioned in 115 aspirational districts as part of the Block Level initiatives.
- Improving the child sex ratio, survival of new born girl child, girl education and empower them through several initiatives are the main motives.
- It is implemented by the Ministry of Women and Child Development under umbrella mission for "Protection and Empowerment for Women".
- The duration of the scheme is from 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- The cost sharing ratio of 60:40 between centre and states except for North East and Special Category States where the ratio is 90:10.

**BANGANGA RIVER**

***Ministry of Road Transport & Highways has accorded in principle approval for inter-state high level bridge on the Banganga river.***

- Banganga River originates from the Aravalli hills, near Bairath in Jaipur and drains into Yamuna.
- Ramgarh dam has been constructed across the river in Jaipur.
- The main tributaries are Gumti Nalla and Suri River, joining the river on its right bank, and Sanwan and Palasan Rivers, meeting the river on its left bank.
- Its basin extends over parts of Alwar, Jaipur, Dausa, Sawai Madhopur and Bharatpur Districts.
- Its eastern edge borders the Yamuna River Basin in Uttar Pradesh.
- The inter-state high level bridge is proposed on the Sakdi-Dangorali route in Balaghat district of Madhya Pradesh.

**6<sup>TH</sup> INDIA – UK SCIENCE & INNOVATION COUNCIL**

***The 6th India-UK Science & Innovation Council (SIC) meeting was recently held in New Delhi.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The objective is to address challenges, such as water pollution, life-threatening diseases and climate change.
- India also pitched for collaboration between Council of Scientific & Industrial Research, CSIR, and its UK equivalent to expand cooperation.
- India and UK are jointly delivering cutting edge science and Technology solutions to societal challenges through Newton Bhabha partnership.

**Innovate India Platform**

- The platform is a collaboration between the Atal Innovation Mission of NITI Aayog and MyGov, a citizen centric platform of the Government of India.
- It will serve as the common point for all the innovation happening across the nation.
- Through the Innovate India portal, users can view, comment, share, and rate the innovations crowdsourced on the Innovate India platform.
- It provides for registering both grassroots and deep-tech innovators at a national level.

**Atal Innovation Mission**

- The mission aims at creating an Innovation Promotion Platform to foster a culture of innovation, R&D in India.
- It is the brainchild of NITI Aayog.
- Atal Tinkering Labs (ATL) are established in 900 schools under the mission to spur the spark of creativity, and go beyond regular curriculum and text book learning.
- ATLs are play workspaces fitted with state-of-the-art technologies like 3D printers, robotics, sensor technology kits, Internet of things (IoT), miniaturised electronics.

**WORLD HEPATITIS DAY**

***World Hepatitis Day takes place every year on 28 July, with the aim of bringing the world together in order to raise awareness of viral hepatitis.***

The theme for World Hepatitis Day 2018 is ***“Eliminate Hepatitis”***.

**FACTS**

- Hepatitis is an inflammation of the liver caused by blood borne Hepatitis Virus.
- There are 5 main hepatitis viruses, referred to as types A, B, C, D and E.
- The most common modes of infection are through exposure to contaminated blood or blood products and invasive medical procedures using contaminated equipments.
- It can also be transmitted sexually and be passed from an infected mother to her baby.
- Viral hepatitis B and C are root causes of liver cancer, leading to 1.34 million deaths every year.
- Currently, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C; except Hepatitis C, all other hepatitis viruses have safe and effective vaccination to prevent them.
- Hepatitis B is included in India's Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).
- According to the WHO's Global Strategy of Viral Hepatitis, the goal to eliminate Hepatitis B and C should be achieved by 2030.

**SAGITTARIUS A**

- It is believed to be a super massive black hole in the Milky Way Galaxy.
- It is 4 million times heavier than sun.
- The gravity produced by it is so intense that stars many times more massive than our sun orbit around it at incredible speeds.
- One of the stars, called S2, recently passed by the black hole at a speed of nearly 3% of the speed of light.
- The passerbby of the S2 was observed by Very Large Telescope of European Space Agency.
- It proved Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity is correct.
- Einstein predicted that when light (such as the light emitted from S2) passed so close to such a powerful source of gravity, it would lose some of its energy.
- In a way, the light has to struggle to move through the field of intense gravity.
- The light from S2 star has shown that it does lose some of its energy during its passage around the Black Hole.

**VERY LARGE TELESCOPE**

- It is the world's most advanced ground based visible-light astronomical observatory.
- It is operated by European Southern Observatory.
- It is located on the mountain Cerro Paranal in Chile and consisting of four telescopes with mirrors.
- These telescopes can operate individually or together as an interferometer.
- The large telescopes are named Antu, Kueyen, Melipal, and Yepun, which are the names for the Sun, the Moon, the Southern Cross, and Venus in the language of the Mapuche people.

**MODERN FISHING HARBOUR**

***The Andhra Pradesh government has decided to construct a modern fishing harbour at Pudimadaka, about 50 km from Vishakapatnam.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The Central Institute of Coastal Engineering for Fishery (CICEF), Bengaluru, is preparing a detailed project report.
- It is the State government's initiative to encourage organised fishery and improve the livelihood of traditional fishermen.

**INDIA AND WMO**

***India has been designated as a nodal centre for preparing flash-flood forecasts by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO).***

- India will develop a customised model that can issue advance warning of floods in Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand.
- The system is called the Flash Flood Guidance System which aims to provide forecasts six hours in advance.
- The WMO says flash floods account for 85% of flooding incidents across the world, causing some 5,000 deaths each year.

**World Meteorological Organisation**

- WMO was created in 1950 as an intergovernmental organization.
- It became a specialized agency of the United Nations, in 1951, for meteorology (weather and climate), operational hydrology and related geophysical sciences.
- It is the UN system's authoritative voice on weather, climate and water.
- Its secretariat is located in Geneva, Switzerland and is headed by the Secretary-General.
- Through its members, WMO provides forecasts and early warnings to nations, which help prevent and mitigate disasters.
- It WMO monitors and forecast the transport of chemical and oil spills, forest fires, volcanic ash, haze and nuclear isotopes.
- It also draws world attention to the depletion of the ozone layer.

**UNIFIED PAYMENTS INTERFACE (UPI)**

***SEBI has recently proposed allowing investors to use the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) while bidding for shares in initial public offerings.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- UPI is a payment system through which investors can link more than one bank account in their smartphone app and make fund transfers instantly without having to provide IFSC code or account number.
- An investor will only have to use a virtual address, known as a Virtual Payment Address (VPA), which is like email ID, to carry out the transaction.
- VPA is an identifier that is created by the user by linking his bank account to the mobile payment application.
- UPI, which was developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), is regulated by the RBI.
- Some of the UPI apps available are BHIM, PhonePe and Google Tez.

**NATIONAL CULTURE FUND (NCF)**

***Union Culture minister has recently asserted in the parliament that about Rs. 904.80 Lakhs received as part of CSR under NCF for development works at historic Monuments in last 3 yrs.***

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- The fund endeavours to preserve and promote our precious tangible and Intangible heritage in partnership with the community.

- The fund was created as a trust in 1996 by the Ministry of HRD, Department of Culture under the Charitable Endowments Act, 1890.
- It is managed and administered by a council, which is chaired by the Union Minister of Tourism & Culture.
- The council will decide the policies and the executive committee will actualize the policies.
- Funds collected as part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for development works at selected monuments is directed through NCF.

#### **EARTH OVERSHOOT DAY**

- Earth Overshoot Day (EOD) means the day when human consumption exceeds the earth's capacity in that particular year to regenerate natural resources.
- It is the day the world completely consumes all the natural resources produced that year.
- It is calculated by Global Footprint Network.
- World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the world's largest conservation organization, has participated in Earth Overshoot Day since 2007.
- Earth Overshoot Day falls on 1 August this year.
- Since 1987, the EOD has been moving up the calendar, from December 19 in 1987 to August 1, 2018.

#### **Global Footprint Network**

- Global Footprint Network, founded in 2003, is an independent think tank originally based in the United States, Belgium and Switzerland.
- It is headquartered in Oakland, California.
- Its mission is to help end ecological overshoot by making ecological limits central to decision-making.
- Every year, it produces National Footprint Accounts, which calculate Ecological Footprint and bio capacity of more than 200 countries.

#### **DEEP OCEAN MISSION**

- The Central government has drawn up a 5-year plan to explore the deep ocean.
- Ministry of Earth Sciences has been tasked with coordinating the exercise.
- The ministry has recently unveiled the blueprint of "***Deep Ocean Mission***".
- The mission proposes to explore the deep ocean similar to the space exploration started by ISRO about 35 years ago.
- The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) allotted to India (2.2 million sq.km) in the international waters will be covered under this mission.
- The focus will be on technologies for deep-sea mining, underwater vehicles, underwater robotics and ocean climate change advisory services.
- Under this mission, the key deliverables are :
  - Offshore desalination plant that will work with tidal energy.
  - Developing a submersible vehicle that can go to a depth of at least 6,000 metres with three people on board.

#### **India and Central Indian Ocean Basin**

- India has exclusive right to explore deep sea mineral - polymetallic nodules from seabed in Central Indian Ocean Basin.

- A long-term Polymetallic Nodules programme is being implemented by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- This right in the international water is allocated by ***International Seabed Authority (ISA)***.

#### **INTERNATIONAL SEABED AUTHORITY**

- ISA is a UN body set up to regulate the exploration and exploitation of marine non-living resources of oceans in international waters.
- It is headquartered at Kingston, Jamaica.
- In 2016, India was re-elected as a member of Council of ISA.

#### **NATIONAL ADVANCED SURFACE-TO-AIR MISSILE SYSTEM**

***India is planning to procure National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAM - II) from U.S.***

- It is an advanced air defence system.
- It is the state-of-the-art defense system that has ability to quickly identify and destroy enemy aircraft, UAV or emerging cruise missile threats.
- NASAMS-II is an upgraded version of the NASAMS and features new 3D mobile surveillance radars and 12 missile launchers for quicker reaction.
- It is proposed to be deployed to protect national capital region.
- It will help in preventing 9/11-type attacks in Delhi.

#### **Advanced Air Defence systems in India**

India is deploying a multi-tiered air defence network to fully secure its airspace from incoming fighter aircraft, missiles and UAV.

An indigenous two tiered defence shield known as "***Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)***", to destroy enemy ballistic missiles is being developed.

#### **The BMD consists of two interceptor missiles:**

- The Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV) for exo-atmospheric (high) altitudes of 50–80 km and
- The Advanced Area Defence (AAD) missile for endo-atmosphere (low) altitudes of 15-30 kilometers.
- India is also in an advanced stage of talks with Russia for the procurement of very long-range S-400 air defence systems.

#### **TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE (TESS)**

- TESS is NASA's latest satellite to search for planets outside our solar system, known as exoplanets.
- The mission will spend the next two years monitoring the nearest and brightest stars for "Transits".
- Transits are events which denote a periodic dips in light of the star when a planet pass in front of it.
- It was launched in April this year and it has now started its search for planets around nearby stars.
- It is expected to transmit its first series of science data back to Earth in August, and thereafter periodically every 13.5 days.

- It is the next step in the search for planets outside of our solar system, including those that could support life.

### **National Skill Training Institute (NSTI)**

***A permanent campus of National Skill Training Institute (NSTI) for Women is going to be built at Mohali, Punjab.***

- This is the first NSTI Institute for Punjab and only one of its kind in India which is exclusively for women.
- It is launched under "Skill India" Mission.

### **Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Kendra (PMKK)**

- PMKK is established by National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) across India.
- It aims to provide skill training for unemployed youth through its short-term training (STT) module and contribute to the capacity building of municipal employees through Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) program.
- PMKK for differently abled person is going to be launched in Mohali.
- It is also a first of its kind in India.

### **FASTag**

- A FASTag is a reloadable tag that automatically deducts toll charges and allows a vehicle to pass through a toll gate without stopping for the payment.
- It uses radio frequency identification (RFID) technology to make cashless payments through a prepaid account linked to it.
- The tag is fixed to the windscreen of a vehicle and an RFID antenna in the canopy of the toll gate scans the QR code and lifts the barrier to allow a vehicle to pass through.
- The tag is valid for five years.
- It is coded in 7 different colors, each is assigned to a particular category of vehicles.
- It is mandatory for cars and trucks sold after December 1, 2017 to be fitted with a FASTag.
- Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has also proposed to make FASTag compulsory for all commercial vehicles seeking a national permit.
- National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) has a mobile application for FASTag that allows users to buy and recharge these tags as well as seek information on toll rates on different routes.
- It also allows the cab operators to track the movement of their vehicles as they receive SMS alerts.
- Users are refunded 5% of the total toll paid by them in a given month.

### **STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MODEL**

***The Defence Ministry has recently approved key guidelines for implementation of Strategic Partnership model.***

- The guidelines were approved by the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), the ministry's highest decision-making body.
- Under this model, select private firms will be roped in to build military platforms like submarines and fighter jets in India in partnership with foreign entities.
- It aims to create a vibrant defence manufacturing ecosystem in the country through joint ventures between Indian corporates and global defence majors.

- All procurements under the SP Model would be executed by specially constituted Empowered Project Committees (EPC).
- It is to provide focused attention and ensure timely execution.

#### **ADDITIONAL SURVEILLANCE MEASURES**

***Additional Surveillance Measures (ASM) was introduced recently by SEBI.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- It is a surveillance method in which SEBI impose trading curbs on excessively volatile stocks in the Indian market.
- For example, if the "Spread" - Price variation of a stock between the high and low price, in the last three months is 200 per cent or more, then it will be placed under ASM.
- Once a stock is caught in the ASM net, it attracts a bunch of stricter exchange rules on intra-day price movements.
- Such curbs discourage speculators and intra-day traders from taking heavy positions in stocks and will result in stock prices to drop.
- Stocks of PSUs, securities with derivative products and stocks under Graded Surveillance Measure are exempted from ASM net.

#### **GRADED SURVEILLANCE MEASURE**

***Graded Surveillance Measure, designed by SEBI, is to keep a tab on securities that witness an abnormal price rise, which is not commensurate with financial health and fundamentals of the company.***

#### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- The underlying principle is to alert and protect small / retail investors from getting stuck in such stocks inadvertently on some wrong advice.
- Currently, more than 900 companies are monitored under this.
- Once a firm is identified for surveillance it goes through six stages.
- In the first stage the securities are put in the trade-to-trade segment i.e no speculative trading is allowed and delivery of shares and payment of consideration amount are mandatory.
- A maximum of 5% movement in share price is allowed.
- With subsequent stages, corresponding surveillance actions and the restrictions gets higher progressively.
- In the sixth and final stage, there are maximum restrictions.
- Trading is permitted only once a month at this stage, with no upward movement allowed in price. Also, the additional surveillance deposit would be 200%.
- There would a quarterly review of securities.
- Based on criteria, the securities would be moved from a higher stage to a lower stage in a sequential manner.

#### **NEPAL - INDIA THINK TANK SUMMIT**

***The first ever Nepal-India Think Tank Summit held in Kathmandu.***

- It is being jointly organized by the Asian Institute of Diplomacy and International Affairs and Nehru Memorial Museum Library.

- It aims to foster greater collaboration and knowledge-sharing among the think tanks of the two countries.
- The summit is proposed to become an annual feature for the participating organisations and it will be hosted alternatively in Nepal and India.

### **LOMBAK**

- It is a part of Indonesian group of Islands and located to the east of Bali.
- An earthquake of 6.4 magnitude has recently struck the island and triggered landslides in a volcano Mt. Rinjani.
- The volcano, which rises 3,726m (12,224ft) above sea level and is the second-highest one in Indonesia.
- Indonesia is prone to earthquakes because it lies on the "Ring of Fire".
- Ring of Fire is the line of frequent quakes and volcanic eruptions that circles virtually the entire Pacific rim.

### **MSME DEVELOPMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL, 2018**

***The Centre has tabled the MSME Development (Amendment) Bill 2018 in Parliament.***

#### **PROVISION**

- The Bill amends the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006.
- Under the Act, manufacturing units are defined depending on their investments in plant and machinery as:
  - micro enterprises (below Rs.25 lakh)
  - small enterprises (Rs.25 lakh to Rs.5 crore)
  - medium enterprises (Rs.5 crore to Rs.10 crore)
- The thresholds were lower for services units.
- Under the Bill, all MSMEs will be classified on the basis of their annual turnover.
- This is irrespective of whether they are manufacturing or service-providing enterprises.
- Now, the units will be:
  - 'micro' enterprises if their annual sales turnover is less than Rs.5 crore
  - 'small' if they fall in the Rs.5-75 crore range
  - 'medium' if they are in the Rs.75-250 crore band

The central government may change these annual turnover limits through a notification.

#### **BENEFITS**

- MSMEs are offered a range of incentives and tax benefits, to promote them.
- Under the current definition, the newer units often face disadvantages.
- As, their higher investments, as part of the industrial modernisation efforts, keeps them out of MSME definition.
- Hence, the turnover criterion is a more pragmatic way to incentivise industry.
- It facilitates fairer comparisons between older and newer ventures and helps starters in utilising MSME sops.
- Turnover-based sops may be friendlier to technology-intensive sectors.
- These include engineering, auto components or pharmaceuticals.
- Substantial capital investments are needed to ensure even minimal scale in these.

- Here again, turnover, instead of investment criterion, would be more beneficial.
- The annual turnover criteria can be directly verified from the GST Network.
- It thus puts an end to physical inspections necessitated by the investment-based regime.
- Turnover criteria will allow a unit to graduate from its MSME status on reaching a fair size.
- It will discourage the proliferation of inefficient units created mainly with an eye to utilise sops.

*The Centre should consider a sunset clause on MSME benefits to encourage small units to climb up the value chain.*

### **FACTS**

- Turnitin: It is the software to detect plagiarism (Stealing and publication of another author's ideas or expressions) in research. Union Human Resource Development Minister has recently asserted that this software will be provided to all universities free of cost.
- Exercise Maitree 2018 two weeks long platoon level joint military exercise between Indian Army and Royal Thai Army. The Exercise Maitree is an annual event designed to strengthen the partnership between Royal Thai Army and Indian Army and the exercise commenced in Thailand.