

CURRENT AFFAIRS
16TH TO 31ST MARCH 2018

'HISAR GOURAV'

A cloned Assamese buffalo male calf was born for the first time.

In 1996, Dolly the sheep became the first mammal to be cloned by humans in UK, and created history. In India, an Assamese cloned buffalo male calf was born for the first time, the Central Institute for Research on Buffaloes claimed.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The calf was born to a Murrah buffalo.
- Indian Council of Agricultural Research-CIRB is a central institute and it has a mandate to conserve superior animals of all buffalo breeds.
- The Assamese buffaloes were found only in the north-eastern part of the country and they were used mainly for agricultural work.
- This was the second cloned male produced by ICAR-CIRB.
- The genotype of the calf was confirmed by microsatellite analysis (parentage verification) and chromosome analysis.
- Animal cloning can be an excellent reproductive tool for conservation and multiplication of selected superior animals of buffalo breeds.

REGIONAL INTEGRATED MULTI-HAZARD EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

The Odisha government is set to collaborate with the Thailand-based Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES) for strengthening its early warning services and enhancing preparedness for management of hazards in the State.

HIGHLIGHTS

- At present, India is chairing RIMES.
- Under the drought monitoring system, both institutions would work on a system to archive, analyse and visualise data, besides evaluating station performance and validating forecast data.
- Similarly, RIMES is expected to provide a one-stop risk management system for all OSDMA needs. Odisha is particularly concerned about tsunami originating from the Andamans.
- RIMES is already working with the Tamil Nadu State Disaster Management Authority.

RIMES

- The Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia (RIMES) is an international and intergovernmental institution, owned and managed by its Member States, for the generation and application of early warning information.

- RIMES evolved from the efforts of countries in Africa and Asia, in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, to establish a regional early warning system within a multi-hazard framework for the generation and communication of early warning information, and capacity building for preparedness and response to trans-boundary hazards.
- RIMES was established on 30 April 2009 and was registered with the United Nations on 1 July 2009.
- RIMES operates from its regional early warning centre located at the campus of the Asian Institute of Technology in Pathumthani, Thailand.

WATER STRIDER

Scientists from the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI) have discovered a new species of water strider from Nagaland.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The species is named Ptilomera nagalanda Jehamalar and Chandra.
- Water striders are a group of insects adapted to life on the surface of water, using surface tension to their advantage.
- Their presence serves as an indicator water of water quality and they are found on water surface.
- Other than being a good indicator of water quality, water striders also play an important role in the food chain by feeding on mosquito larvae.
- So far, only five species of water striders under the subgenus Ptilomera were known in India.
- With the discovery of Ptilomera nagalanda the number of species of water striders belonging to the subgenus has increased to six.
- Ptilomera is that they are only found in rocky, fast flowing streams and rivers that are not exposed to a lot of sunlight.

NABAKALEBAR FESTIVAL

President released commemorative coins in denominations of ₹10 and ₹1000 on Lord Jagannath's Nabakalebar festival.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Puri was one of the four 'dhams' for Hindus, where the saints and spiritual leaders like Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanuj, Chaitanya and Guru Nanak visited and established their mutts to be in services of Lord Jagannath.
- Puri is also called the 'Kashi' of eastern region in India. Adi Shankaracharya chose Puri to establish his 'peeth'.
- This is the place where Ramanujacharya, Madhvacharya and Nimbarkacharya had visited. It is told that Guru Nanak, Santh Kabir and Chaityanya Mahaprabhu also made their visits to Puri.
- Puri is the integrated place of various thoughts and schools of religion.

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION NETWORK 2018

The Competition Commission of India (CCI) was selected as the host the 2018 International Competition Network (ICN) in New Delhi in March–April 2018.

By virtue of this event, CCI has also been inducted as an ex-officio member of the steering group member of the ICN for a period of 3 years. The 2017 ICN Annual Conference held in Portugal.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ICN is an informal international body consists of 132 members from 120 competition jurisdictions.
- It was established in 2001.
- CCI is a member of the ICN since 2003.
- It is exclusively devoted to international competition enforcement and facilitate cooperation between competition law authorities globally.
- ICN provides competition authorities with a specialised platform (informal) for addressing practical competition concerns, sharing experiences and adopting international best practices.
- Besides, it holds an Annual Conference which is hosted by a member competition agency.
- Its members are national competition authorities and Non-Governmental Advisers (NGA) which include reputed law firms, eminent persons, and think tanks of international repute.

GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATION

The Geographical Indication (GI) Registry has issued a notice to the West Bengal State Food Processing and Horticulture Development Corporation, asking why the GI recognition given to 'Banglar Rosogolla' not be withdrawn.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Geographical Indications of Goods are defined as that aspect of industrial property which refer to the geographical indication referring to a country or to a place situated therein as being the country or place of origin of that product.
- Typically, such a name conveys an assurance of quality and distinctiveness which is essentially attributable to the fact of its origin in that defined geographical locality, region or country.
- Under Articles 1 (2) and 10 of the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property, geographical indications are covered as an element of IPRs.
- They are also covered under Articles 22 to 24 of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, which was part of the Agreements concluding the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations.
- Proponents of GIs regard them as strong tools for protecting their national property rights. Opponents, however, consider GIs as barriers to trade.

KERALA'S STATE FRUIT

Jackfruit is set to be declared as the official fruit of Kerala.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The core objective of the government was to give a fillip to the production and sale of jackfruit and its value-added products.
- Elephant is the state animal of Kerala, while 'great hornbill' is the state bird and 'kanikkonna', the official flower.
- The state had also recently declared pearl spot, popularly known as 'karimeen', as its official fish.

FLOATING LAB ON LOKTAK

A floating laboratory has been introduced to save the Loktak lake. Researchers in a custom motorboat monitor levels of pollution in the 300 sq km water body.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Rising urbanisation and land-use change over the years has seen the Loktak Lake, the largest in the northeast, become a dump-yard for the city's municipal waste, ranging from plastic refuse to chemical runoff from farming. This worsens during years of floods.
- Nitrogen pollution is a major, silent threat,
- Already there are signs of calcium anomalies in some of the mollusc and other aquatic life in the lake
- This is similar to the phenomenon of coral bleaching in oceans, where rising sea surface temperature cause organisms that live on corals to disengage, thereby killing the corals themselves.
- The pH of the lake, as per measurements so far, varies from 6.8-7.2 (ideally the pH of a healthy lake should be slightly below 7).
- However, studies of ocean acidification have shown that even a 0.1 increase in pH can cause (harmful) decalcification.
- The health of the lake also affects the Phumdis or the unique 'floating islands', of the Loktak lake. These islands, made of a mix of vegetation and soil, coalesce to form a thick mat that, for centuries, has hosted huts and fishing settlements.

ABOUT

- Loktak Lake is the largest freshwater lake in Northeast India and is famous for the phumdis (heterogeneous mass of vegetation, soil, and organic matter at various stages of decomposition) floating over it.
- It has first of its kind Loktak floating elementary school.
- Located on this phumdi, Keibul Lamjao National Park is the only floating national park in the world.
- The park is the last natural refuge of the endangered Sangai (state animal).

ADOPT A HERITAGE PROJECT

Letter of Intent has been issued to 24 agencies for the Submission of Vision Bids for 75 sites under the Adopt a Heritage Project.

The private players will undertake gap analysis of the actual requirement of the basic and advanced amenities, within the permissible guidelines of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and prepare a Vision Bid Proposal accordingly for the site opted by them.

Once vision bid is accepted, MoU will be signed with the related party for upkeep of the Monument for overall enhanced tourist experience.

ADOPT A HERITAGE PROJECT

- ***Ministry of Tourism*** in close collaboration with ***Ministry of Culture and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)*** had launched Adopt a Heritage Project.
- Under it, selected public sector companies, private sector companies and individuals will develop tourist amenities at heritage sites.
- They will be called as '***Monument Mitra***' and adopt the sites essentially under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity.

OBJECTIVES: Provide world class tourist facilities at various natural and cultural heritage sites, monuments and other tourist sites & Make these selected sites tourist friendly, enhance their tourist potential and cultural importance in planned and phased manner across the country.

SATH-E

NITI Aayog has released comprehensive roadmaps and detailed timelines for its initiative 'Sustainable Action for Transforming Human Capital in Education (SATH-E)'.

The roadmaps were jointly prepared by ***NITI Aayog, the three States and the knowledge partners of the SATH Initiatives, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and Piramal Foundation For Education Leadership (PFEL).***

HIGHLIGHTS

- NITI Aayog's Project SATH-E will promote data-driven analysis to strengthen academic monitoring across schools in the country.
- These roadmaps, which operate between 2018 to 2020 lay out detailed interventions which will taken up by the three participating States- Jharkand, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha - aiming to become Role Model States' in school education.
- These roadmaps present the first-of-its-kind, customized, action-oriented programmes, outlining interventions at the individual, district and State level.

TRIBAL DIARIES

The Centre has developed an app – Tribal Diaries – to reach out to 10 cr tribals directly and hear their stories.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tribal Diaries would help the tribals living in remote corners of any state to put their stories through videos on the simple mobile app.
- If a beneficiary of Forest Rights Act wants to tell his story, he would be able to take a video clip and then upload it on Tribal Diaries.
- The mobile app is being looked at as an interface between the government and the tribals.
- Apart from success stories, the tribals can easily put up their grievances.
- The ministry officials would be able to see the state of school buildings, provision of drinking water supply and even reach of other government interventions like scholarships in the remote areas.
- Apart from personal experiences of tribals, the ministry is considering the mobile app as a way to check how systems are functioning at the grassroot level.
- Officials inspecting school buildings, primary healthcare centres, bus stops, road or any other inspection would be encouraged to shoot videos on their mobiles and put them up through this mobile app.

VARUNA - 18

The Indo-French joint naval exercise, “Varuna-18”, has commenced in the Arabian Sea off the Goa coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It was aimed to explore measures to facilitate operational-level interactions between their armed forces and increase mutual cooperation, considering the common global threats.
- The joint-exercises are held either in the Indian Ocean or Mediterranean sea.
- The Indian Navy and the French Navy have been conducting naval exercises since 1983.
- These exercises were christened as “Varuna” in 2001.
- The last edition of the exercise was conducted off the French coast in April last year.
- France is Littoral State of the Indian Ocean through the French Overseas region of Réunion, Mayotte & Scattered Islands in the Indian Ocean.

NATIONAL CULTURAL AUDIO-VISUAL ARCHIVES

India’s National Cultural Audio-Visual Archives (NCAA), representing the country’s cultural diversity in audio-visual form, has been certified as the world’s first trusted digital repository as per ISO 16363:2012 standard by the UK-based Primary Trustworthy Digital Repository Authorisation Body Ltd. (PTAB).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Launched in 2014, the NCCA, which is hosted by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), aims to identify and preserve the cultural heritage of India available in audio-visual form through a process of digitisation and making it accessible to the people.

- The NCAA pilot digital repository was developed in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Digital Preservation by C-DAC, Pune.
- This is being done as these materials of historic values are in imminent danger of being lost in the absence of systematic and modern preservation technologies, lack of awareness and proper upkeep, as well as the fragility of the medium they are stored in.
- Plans for the next phase is to integrate about three lakh hours of audio-visuals materials, a corpus estimated based on a scoping survey conducted in 25 cities across the country, on this platform over the next five years.

KRISHI VIGYAN KENDRA

The ministries of agriculture and skill development have signed a pact to conduct programmes for training in farm and allied sectors at 690 Krishi Vigyan Kendras across the country.

KRISHI VIKAS KENDRA

- Krsihi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) are agricultural extension centres created by ICAR (Indian Council for Agricultural Research) and its affiliated institutions at district level to provide various types of farm support to the agricultural sector.
- The first KVK was established during 1974 (Pondichery) and has grown as a largest network in the country.
- KVKs provide several farm support activities like providing technology dissemination to farmers, training, awareness etc.
- To achieve the set objectives KVKs undertake following types of activities in the adopted villages: (1) Farm Advisory Service (2) Training programme for different categories of people. (3) Training programme for the extension functionaries. (4) Front Line Demonstration (Fill) (5) On Farm Testing (OFT).
- They play a vital role in conducting on farm testing to demonstrate location specific agricultural technologies.
- KVKs conducts demonstrations to prove the potential of various crops at farmers' fields. They also conduct need based training programmes for the benefit of farmers and farm women, rural youths. KVKs are creating awareness about improved agricultural technologies through large number of extension programmes.
- Critical and quality inputs like seeds, planting materials, organic products, biofertilizers and livestock, piglet and poultry strains are produced by the KVKs and made available to the farmers.
- As per the mandate of Indian Council of Agricultural Research, K.V.K. will operate under the administrative control of State Agricultural University (SAU) or Central Institute situated in a particular area. Different scientists from different disciplines as per the specific requirement of that particular area are posted in the Krishi Vigyan Kendra as Training Associate.

PLASTIC PARK

Government of India has approved the setting up of a Plastic Park in Deoghar District, Jharkhand.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The project would be set up at a cost of Rs. 120 crores in an area of 150 acres and a range of polymer products including woven sacks, moulded furniture, water tanks, bottles, pipes mosquito nets, etc would be manufactured.
- It has great potential for attracting investment for setting up an ecosystem for plastic industry and generate employment opportunities for the local populace.
- The project is likely to provide direct employment generation to about 6000 people and indirect employment to over 30000 people.

RASHTRIYA UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (RUSA)

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for continuation of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) from April 2017 to March 2020.

The total cost of the scheme, including state share of new proposals, is Rs 9,604 crore.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The scheme aims to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio of the country to 30 per cent by 2020.
- In its second phase, it also aims at creation of 70 new model degree colleges and eight new professional colleges, enhancing quality and excellence in 10 select State universities and 70 autonomous colleges.
- Among its aims is providing infrastructural support to 50 universities and 750 colleges, improving access, equity and accessibility of higher education in states through academic, governance and affiliation and other reforms.
- The scheme seeks to increase spending on higher education by the state governments, improve equity in higher education by providing adequate opportunities of higher education to socially deprived communities, identity and fill up the existing gaps in higher education, by augmenting and supporting efforts of state governments.

NORTH-EAST INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (NEIDS) 2017

The Union Cabinet has approved the North East Industrial Development Scheme (NEIDS), 2017 with financial outlay of Rs.3000 crores up-to March, 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Government will provide necessary allocations for remaining period of scheme after assessment before March 2020.
- NEIDS is a combination of the incentives covered under the earlier two schemes with a much larger outlay.
- In order to promote employment in the North East States, Government is incentivizing primarily the MSME Sector through this scheme.
- Government is also providing specific incentive through the scheme to generate employment.

- All eligible industrial units, which are getting benefits of one or more components of other schemes of the Government of India, will also be considered for benefits of other components of this scheme.
- Under the Scheme, the following incentives shall be provided to new industrial units set up in the North Eastern States including Sikkim:

Employment Incentive (EI)

- The Government shall pay 3.67% of the employer's contribution to the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) in addition to Government bearing 8.33% Employee Pension Scheme (EPS) contribution of the employer in the **Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY)**.
- The overall cap for benefits under all components of incentives will be of Rs. 200 crores per unit.
- The newly introduced scheme shall promote industrialization in the States of the North Eastern Region and will boost employment and income generation.

INDIA DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION OF OVERSEAS INDIANS (IDF-OI)

The Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister has given its approval for closure of the India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The decision was taken to enhance synergies in channelizing the Indian diaspora's contributions to India's flagship programmes such as the National Mission for Clean Ganga and the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- India Development Foundation of Overseas Indians (IDF-OI) was set up by the Government of India in 2008 as a not-for-profit Trust to facilitate Overseas Indian philanthropy into social and development projects in India.
- The Trust is exempt from provisions of the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010 of the Ministry of Home Affairs which enables IDF-OI to receive foreign contributions.
- IDF-OI is administered by a Board of Trustees chaired by Minister of External Affairs.

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) has been signed by 44 African countries at a summit of the African Union in Kigali, Rwanda.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The African Continental Free Trade Area is the result of the African Continental Free Trade Agreement among all 55 members of the African Union.
- If ratified, the agreement would result in the largest free-trade area in terms of participating countries since the formation of the World Trade Organization.
- **African heads of state gathered in Kigali, Rwanda in March 2018 to sign the proposed agreement. Forty-four of the 55 members of the African Union signed it on 21 March 2018.**

- The Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) is a continent-wide free-trade agreement brokered by the African Union (AU) and initially signed on by 44 of its 55 member states in Kigali, Rwanda on March 21, 2018.
- The agreement initially requires members to remove tariffs from 90% of goods, allowing free access to commodities, goods, and services across the continent.
- The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa estimates that the agreement will boost intra-African trade by 52 percent by 2022.
- The proposal will come into force after ratification by 22 of the signatory states.

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF FORESTS

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 21 March the International Day of Forests (IDF) in 2012.

The Day celebrates and raises awareness of the importance of all types of forests. On each International Day of Forests, countries are encouraged to undertake local, national and international efforts to organize activities involving forests and trees, such as tree planting campaigns.

The theme for each International Day of Forests is chosen by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests. The theme for 2018 is Forests and Sustainable Cities.

INDIA STATE OF FOREST REPORT (ISFR) 2017

The India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2017 is published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI), a national organisation under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

- This biennial report, published since 1987, maps the changes in forest cover across the country. More than 70 per cent of India's forest cover qualifies as tropical semi-evergreen, tropical moist deciduous and tropical dry deciduous.
- ISFR uses both satellite and field inventory data to give an estimate of 'growing stock' or the volume of all trees within and outside forests, hilly areas, tribal areas and north-eastern states as also carbon and biomass, bamboo groves and mangroves. This helps measure the growing stock of the forest as well as determine its carbon and biomass levels.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) categorised forests spread out over 14 physiographic zones into three distinct kinds: very dense forest (VDF) with over 70 per cent canopy; moderately dense forest (MDF) with 40-70 per cent canopy; and open forest (OF) with 10-40 per cent canopy.
- ***Reserved forests (RF) and protected forests*** as well as any land designated as 'forest' in revenue records came under the purview of the FSI survey.
- Of the total forest cover of 21.54 per cent, very dense forest was 2.9 per cent, moderately dense was 9.38 and open forest, 9.18.
- The report showed an increase of less than one per cent in forest cover from 701,673 square kilometres in 2015 to 708,273 square kilometres in 2017.

- This estimate included orchards, plantations of bamboo, palm, rubber, tea and coffee, private lands, roads, rail and canal sides, and land with over 10 per cent canopy and an area of one hectare only.
- These were classified as 'forest' regardless of their origin and ownership or legal status.
- Forests with less than 10 per cent cover such as degraded lands, wetlands, riverbeds, glaciers, cold deserts and grasslands were excluded.
- The increase in forest cover could be attributed to the inclusion of the areas mentioned above, the increase in tree cover outside forest areas and conservation efforts.
- **Madhya Pradesh had the largest forest cover. However, as a percentage of total area, Lakshadweep topped with 90.33 per cent followed by Mizoram at 86.27 per cent.**
- In the North East, 65.34 per cent of the geographical area was forest, which was roughly three times the national average. There had been a decrease of 630 square kilometres of forest cover in the region. **Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura** contributed to this deforestation figure.
- The total forest cover in tribal areas was 421,170 square kilometres or 37.43 per cent of the geographical area. That is an increase of 86.89 per cent from 2015.
- **Water bodies** within forests are critical to overall ecological health. **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh** showed a decline in the size of water bodies. In other states, 2,647 square kilometres of water bodies had been recorded in forested areas.
- **Mangroves** occupied 4,921 square kilometres or 0.15 per cent of the geographical area. The net increase of 181 square kilometres of mangroves from 2015 could be attributed to plantation and regeneration.
- **Bamboo** occupied 15.69 million hectares. From 2011, there was a decrease in the size of pure bamboo and dense bamboo groves. However, bamboo had started growing in other areas. So, an increase of 19 million tons of the green weight of bamboo was recorded.
- The **carbon stock** for 2017 was estimated to be 7,083 million tons, an increase of 39 million tons from 2015. **Arunachal Pradesh** had the maximum of 994.5 million tons, but the per hectare stock was highest in **Andaman and Nicobar Islands**.
- India accounts for two per cent of global forest area, and 22 per cent of the country is classified as forest.

WORLD FIRST BRASS FUTURES

- MCX, the country's largest commodity exchange, has launched futures trading in brass for first time in the world.
- With the launch of a transparent brass futures contract, MCX will emerge as the benchmark price as volume picks up in two month time.
- Brass would be first non-ferrous contract with compulsory delivery options – the IS-319 grade brass ingots and billets can be delivered at Jamnagar in Gujarat.
- Brass, an alloy, usually contains 60% zinc and the rest is copper.

- It finds varied industrial use in electrical appliance, switch gears, sanitary ware, automobiles and defence sectors.

1ST INDIAN SCIENCE LANGUAGE DICTIONARY

First Indian Sign Language Dictionary of 3000 words has been launched. As per the census 2011, there are 50, 71,007 Deaf people and 19, 98,535 with speech disability in India.

- The dictionary has been developed by Indian Sign Language Research & Training Centre (ISLR&TC) under Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), M/o Social Justice & Empowerment.
- Its aim is to give Deaf people the constitutional right to speech and opportunity of freedom of expression and also bringing them into the main stream of the society.

FLOURIMETRE

An instrument to measure traces of uranium in water has been developed by a unit of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The instrument, "Fluorimeter", has been developed by the Raja Ramanna Centre for Advanced Technology (RRCAT), an Indore-based unit of the DAE.
- The device, costing Rs 1 lakh, would help in detecting traces of uranium in water.
- The instrument is capable of examining traces of uranium in a sample of water from 0.1 PPB (Parts-per-billion) unit to 100 PPB.
- Uranium is a radioactive element.
- If in any source of water it's quantity is more than the permissible limit, then use of such water may cause thyroid cancer, blood cancer, depression and other serious ailments.
- Notably, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board has fixed the permissible radiological limit to 60 PPB of uranium concentration for drinking water.

COMMONWEALTH BIG LUNCH

Kalinga Institute of Social Sciences (KISS), Bhubaneswar, in partnership with British Council, India, is hosting the 'Commonwealth Big Lunch' on March 23.

HIGHLIGHTS

- British Council is celebrating 70 years of inception in Commonwealth countries.
- On this occasion, it has organised a mega lunch.
- KISS is the only organisation from Asia to be selected by British Council to host the Commonwealth Big Lunch.
- The motto of the programme is to encourage people to get together to celebrate their Commonwealth connections through food.
- The Commonwealth Big Lunch is an international initiative launched by UK PM Theresa May.

COMMONWEALTH OF NATIONS

- The Commonwealth of Nations (formerly the British Commonwealth) also known as simply the Commonwealth, is an intergovernmental organisation of 53 member states that are mostly former territories of the British Empire.
- The Commonwealth operates by intergovernmental consensus of the member states, organised through the Commonwealth Secretariat and non-governmental organisations, organised through the Commonwealth Foundation.
- It was formally constituted by the **London Declaration** in 1949, which established the member states as "free and equal"

COMMONWEALTH GAMES

- The Commonwealth Games are an international multi-sport event involving athletes from the Commonwealth of Nations.
- The event was first held in 1930 and has taken place every four years since then (with the exception of 1942 and 1946, which were cancelled due to the Second World War).
- The most recent Commonwealth Games were held **at Gold Coast** from 4 to 15 April 2018.
- The next Commonwealth Games are to be held in Birmingham from 27 July to 7 August 2022.
- It is the world's first multi-sport event which inducted equal number of women's and men's medal events and was implemented recently in the 2018 Commonwealth Games.

WORLDS LONGEST SANSTONE CAVEE

Meghalaya is now also home to the longest sandstone cave in the world at 24,583m.

- The cave system has fossils of dinosaurs, especially the Mosasaurus, a giant reptile that lived 66-76 million years ago.
- The cave in Meghalaya is 6,000m longer than the current listed sandstone cave in the world, Cueva El Samán, (18,200m) in Venezuela.

WORLD TUBERCULOSIS DAY

Observed on March 24 every year, World Tuberculosis Day is designed to build public awareness about the global epidemic of TB and efforts to eliminate the disease.

HIGHLIGHTS

- World TB Day commemorates the date in 1882 when Dr. Robert Koch announced his discovery of Mycobacterium tuberculosis, the bacteria that causes TB.
- The theme of World TB Day 2018 – "**Wanted: Leaders for a TB-free world**".
- Tuberculosis (TB) is caused by bacteria (Mycobacterium tuberculosis) that most often affect the lungs. Tuberculosis is curable and preventable.
- TB is spread from person to person through the air. When people with lung TB cough, sneeze or spit, they propel the TB germs into the air.

- Ending the TB epidemic by 2030 is among the health targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

MADHAVPUR MELA

The Union Ministry of Culture for the first time had organised Madhavpur Mela in Madhavpur Ghed in Porbandar District of Gujarat under the banner of Ek Bharat Shrestha Bharat (Ministry of Human Resource Development, which has been designated Nodal Ministry for co-ordination of the programme has intimated all States/UTs).

Its purpose is to bring various parts of country especially the North-East, close to each other.

BACKGROUND

Madhavpur Mela of Gujarat shares its connect to Mishmi Tribe of Arunachal Pradesh. The tribe traces its ancestry to legendary King Bhishmak and through him to his daughter Rukmini and Lord Krishna.

Madhavpur Ghed is small but culturally significant village. According to folklore, it is place where, Lord Krishna married Rukmini, the daughter of King Bhishmaka. Madhavpur lies on the seashore, close to Porbandar. 15th century Madhavrai temple marks the site. Madhavpur Mela is commemorated b cultural fair held every year, commencing on Ram Navami.

- The Idu-Mishmi is a major sub-tribe of Mishmi group.
- Their brother tribes are namely the Digaru-Mishmi (TARAONS) and the Miju-Mishmi (KAMANS).
- They inhabit the Lohit district, Dibang Valley district and Lower Dibang Valley district in Arunachal Pradesh.
- They are of mongoloid stock and speak the Tibeto-Burman language.
- Idus are expert in handicraft and weaving

The EK Bharat Shreshtha Bharat Engagement Matrix between States and UTs for the First year would be as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| ▪ Jammu & Kashmir & Tamil Nadu. | ▪ Delhi & Sikkim & Assam. |
| ▪ Punjab & Andhra Pradesh. | ▪ Madhya Pradesh & Manipur & Nagaland. |
| ▪ Himachal Pradesh & Kerala. | ▪ Uttar Pradesh & Arunachal Pradesh & Meghalaya. |
| ▪ Uttarakhand & Karnataka. | ▪ Bihar & Tripura & Mizoram. |
| ▪ Haryana & Telangana. | ▪ Chandigarh & Dadra & Nagar Haveli. |
| ▪ Rajasthan & West Bengal. | ▪ Puducherry & Daman & Diu. |
| ▪ Gujarat & Chhattisgarh. | ▪ Lakshadweep & Andaman & Nicobar. |
| ▪ Maharashtra & Odisha. | |
| ▪ Goa & Jharkhand. | |

PROTECTED AREA PERMIT

Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has relaxed six-decade-old protected area permit (PAP) regime to allow foreign tourists to access border areas of Nagaland, Mizoram

and Manipur for five years with effect from April 1, 2018 with protected area permit (PAP).

The move is being initiated to promote tourism, create job opportunities for the locals and generate revenue for the states. However, citizens from Pakistan, China and Afghanistan, will remain to be banned from all PAP areas, including Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

BACKGROUND

Under Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958, all areas falling between Inner line and International Border of some states have been declared as protected areas. The protected areas currently include whole of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Sikkim, besides parts of Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan and Jammu and Kashmir. Some parts of Sikkim fall under protected area regime while others under restricted area regime. As per MHA's December 2010 circular, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland were excluded from protected area regime initially for a period of one year from January 2011, subject to some conditions.

E-TRIBES

The Tribal Cooperative Marketing Development Federation of India, (TRIFED), under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, is going Digital as per the vision document of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Launch of e-Tribes, TRIFED's websites includes www.tribesindia.com, www.trifed.in and Retail Inventory Software and M-commerce app.
- Besides, the occasion will also mark the launch of 'Tribes India' Banners at Amazon, Snapdeal, Paytm & GeM.
- TRIFED's Handbook for Retail Trade and TRIFED's quarterly magazine 'Tribes Haat' will also be inaugurated.
- TRIFED has developed its own e-commerce (electronic commerce) website i.e., tribesindia.com for sale of all its products and to tap m-commerce (mobile commerce) too.

DOWNS SYNDROME

National Conference on Down Syndrome was recently inaugurated in New Delhi.

The objective of this conference was to provide excellent opportunities to the parents to obtain information about latest development in education and skilling and inclusive living of persons with Down Syndrome.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Down syndrome also known as trisomy 21, is a genetic disorder caused by the presence of all or part of a third copy of chromosome 21.
- It is typically associated with physical growth delays, characteristic facial features and mild to moderate intellectual disability.

- The average IQ of a young adult with Down syndrome is 50, equivalent to the mental ability of an 8- or 9-year-old child, but this can vary widely.
- The parents of the affected individual are typically genetically normal.
- The extra chromosome occurs by chance.
- The possibility increases from less than 0.1% in 20-year-old mothers to 3% in those age 45.
- There is no known behavioural activity or environmental factor that changes the possibility.
- There is no cure for Down syndrome.

WOMEN-IN TECH FORUM

The gender gap in individuals pursuing STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) careers is a sharp and vexing one throughout the world, including in India. The forum was officially launched in Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS), India has started a collaborative industry initiative aimed at addressing the sharp lack of women in STEM careers by launching a new forum called 'WomenInTech,' which will tackle the problem at various levels via a multi-pronged approach.
- According to the World Bank, women make up 40 per cent of the world's workforce.
- Yet, the tech field is male-dominated at all levels and fares considerably worse than non-technology industries, as per the website PayScale.
- Tech industry has been the fifth largest contributor to the nation's GDP, and the Information Technology and IT-enabled Service sector alone is poised to create approximately 2.5-3 million new jobs by 2025.

E-CIGARETTES

WHO has released a report on E- Cigarettes and its effects on health.

HIGHLIGHTS

- An electronic cigarette (or e-cig) is a battery-powered vaporizer that mimics tobacco smoking. It works by heating up a nicotine liquid, called "juice."
- Nicotine juice (or e-juice) comes in various flavors and nicotine levels. e-liquid is composed of five ingredients: vegetable glycerin (a material used in all types of food and personal care products, like toothpaste) and propylene glycol (a solvent most commonly used in fog machines.) propylene glycol is the ingredient that produces thicker clouds of vapor.
- Proponents of e-cigs argue that the practice is healthier than traditional cigarettes because users are only inhaling water vapor and nicotine.

NAIPUNYA RATHAM

NAIPUNYA RATHAM or World on Wheels is a multi-utility vehicle which aims to bring technology to the remote corners.

- It was launched recently in Andhra Pradesh.
- As part of the Smart village Smart Ward Programme, the Naipunya Rathaams will facilitate and look to improve digital literacy, digital skills and create an awareness on various government schemes that are underway in the new state of Andhra Pradesh.

KOMODO DRAGONS

Komodo dragons are the largest, heaviest lizards in the world and one of the few with a venomous bite.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The lizards prey on dogs, pigs, goats and other animals.
- Komodo dragons are limited to a few Indonesian islands of the Lesser Sunda group including Rintja, Padar and Flores, and island of Komodo.
- According to IUCN, the species is in vulnerable category.

PERMANENT INDUS COMMISSION MEET

The two-day meeting of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) began with India and Pakistan expected to discuss various issues under the Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) during the parleys.

ISSUES

Implementation of the water distribution pact and to promote cooperation between India and Pakistan in the development of the Indus water systems.

- Pakistan has been expressing concerns over India's Ratle (850 MW), Pakal Dul (1000 MW) and Lower Kalnai (48 MW) projects -- located in the Chenab basin -- contending they violated the IWT, signed in 1960.
- The IWT covers the water distribution and sharing rights of six rivers Beas, Ravi, Sutlej, Indus, Chenab and Jhelum.
- The treaty specifies that waters from the three western rivers Indus, Jhelum and Chenab are reserved for Pakistan, while waters from eastern rivers Ravi, Sutlej and Beas are reserved for India.
- The PIC had last met in March 2017 in Islamabad.
- The meeting of the PIC is held alternately in India and Pakistan at least once every year as mandated by the treaty.

8TH REGIONAL 3R FORUM IN ASIA & PACIFIC

The 8th Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific, 9-12 April 2018, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, India, is being co-organized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (formerly Ministry of Urban Development) Government of India, the Ministry of the

Environment, Government of Japan, and the United Nations Centre for Regional Development.

Under the theme of "***Achieving Clean Water, Clean Land and Clean Air through 3R and Resource Efficiency- A 21st Century Vision for Asia-Pacific Communities***".

- The Regional 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific was launched in 2009 in Tokyo, Japan with the objective of integrating the 3Rs in policy, planning and development.
- The forum provides a strategic platform for sharing best practices in 3R areas, including new and emerging issues of concern in waste management.
- Established in 1971 the UNCRD is based on an agreement between the Government of Japan and the United Nations.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION

NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) signed a Statement of Intent (SoI) with SAP, a German-based European multinational software company, to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Under the SoI, SAP in 2018 will adopt 100 Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATL) for five years to cultivate the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) learning among secondary school children across India.
- The support to Atal Incubators will catalyse adoption of the innovations to commercial scales and will ensure deployment of the innovations to the domestic and international markets.
- SAP employee volunteers will coach and mentor students in advanced technology topics.
- The design lab of SAP Labs India will provide training and allow students to gain practical experience with technology gadgets.
- The program aims to enable students to learn advanced technology topics relevant to digital transformation and the Internet of Things.

ATAL INNOVATION MISSION

- Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is Union Government's flagship initiative to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship in the country.
- AIM is mandated to create an umbrella structure to oversee innovation ecosystem of the country.
- AIM envisions the creation of a collaborative ecosystem, where students, teachers, mentors and industry partners work to facilitate innovation, foster scientific temper and an entrepreneurial spirit.
- Atal Tinkering Laboratories (ATLs), Atal Incubation Centre and Established Incubation Centre will take the innovations to the market and a network of incubators will help create enterprises around these innovations.
- So far, AIM has already announced selection of 2441 schools across India to establish ATLs covering 93 percent of the total districts in India and 98 percent of the upcoming smart cities.

BASMATI RICE GI TAG

Madhya Pradesh has filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court challenging an order passed by Assistant Registrar of Geographical Indications (GI) here on March 15 excluding the State from being granted the GI tag for basmati rice.

- It claimed that around 80,000 farmers who produce approximately 10 lakh tonnes of “basmati” rice in a single paddy season would be affected if they were not allowed to sell their produce as basmati rice.

JOINED BY BORDERS, DIVIDED BY CULTURES

Having got GI tags for 34 products, Karnataka has the most number of registrations, followed by Maharashtra (26) and Odisha (23)

8 JAMMU AND KASHMIR
(Kashmir pashmina, Kashmir sozani craft)

6 HIMACHAL PRADESH
(Chamba rumal, Kangra painting)

1 DELHI
Basmati rice

2 HARYANA
(Basmati rice)

9 RAJASTHAN
(Blue pottery of Jaipur, kathputlis of Rajasthan, Bikaneri bhujia)

5 MADHYA PRADESH
(Bagh prints of Madhya Pradesh, Chanderi sarees)

10 GUJARAT
(Gir kesar mango, Patan patola, Kutch embroidery)

26 MAHARASHTRA
(Nagpur oranges, Nashik Valley wine, Solapur chaddar)

1 KARNATAKA
(Byadgi Chili, Mysore silk, Mysore sandal oil)

22 KERALA
(Aranmula kannadi, Malabar pepper, brass brodered coconut shell craft of Kerala)

2 PUNJAB
(Basmati rice, phulkari)

2 UTTARAKHAND
(Uttarakhand tejpatta)

17 ANDHRA PRADESH
(Banaganapalle mangoes, Tirupathi Laddu, Andhra Pradesh Leather Puppetry)

21 UTTAR PRADESH
(Banaras Brocades and Sarees, Lucknow Chickan craft, Firozabad Glass work)

1 SIKKIM
(Sikkim large cardamom)

14 WEST BENGAL
(Darjeeling tea, Bangalar rasogolla, Gobindabhog rice)

4 BIHAR
(Sikki grass craft, Bhagalpur silks)

3 CHHATTISGARH
(Bastar Dhokra, Bastar Wooden Craft)

22 TAMIL NADU
(Kancheepuram silk, Thanjavur paintings, Swamimalai bronze icons)

4 ASSAM
(Muga silk of Assam, Assam tea)

3 NAGALAND
(Naga mircha, Naga tree tomato)

4 MANIPUR
Shaphee lanphee

1 MIZORAM
(Mizo chilli)

1 TRIPURA
(Tripura queen pineapple)

2 MEGHALAYA
(Khasi Mandarin, memong narang)

23 ODISHA
(Orissa Ikat, Orissa pattachitra, Pipili applique work)

9 TELENGANA
(Hyderabad haleem, Pochampally Saree)

WHAT IS A GI TAG?

- > A GI tag is a geographical indication of an item which is specific to a particular place
- > GI status can be sought for agricultural products, handicrafts, handloom and food products
- > The RGI (registration of geographical indications) logo given to a particular product can only be used by registered and authorised users
- > When marketed, a GI tagged product must carry a logo showing its place of origin
- > Civil and criminal proceedings can be initiated against those using the logo in unauthorised manner

HOW TO APPLY?

- > An association or collective body can apply to GI Registry
- > Application should be backed by proof of uniqueness, historical records to show proof of origin, quality and special character
- > After rounds of verification, presentation and meetings, if registry is satisfied, application goes to GI Registry journal
- > If application receives no opposition within four months, it gets the GI tag

RE-STRUCTURING OF NSDF & NSDC

The Union Cabinet has given its approval for restructuring of National Skill Development Fund (NSDF) and National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework.

- The restructuring will also ensure better corporate governance, transparency and accountability in operations of NSDC besides strengthening the oversight role of NSDF.
- The approval would lead to restructuring of composition of Board of NSDF and the NSDC to strengthen governance, implementation and monitoring framework.

BACKGROUND

NSDC and NSDF were set up by the **Ministry of Finance** and registered in July, 2008 and January, 2009 respectively for implementing coordinated action for skill development.

NSDF trust was incorporated to act as a receptacle for financial contributions from Governmental sources, bilateral/multilateral and other agencies. Its main objective is to enhance, stimulate and develop the skills of Indian youth force by various sector specific programmes.

NSDF entered into an Investment Management Agreement (IMA) with NSDC for utilization of its corpus to meet the desired objectives of National Skill Development Mission and encourage skill development in the country. Provision of supervisory role of NSDF over NSDC's functions is also included in the IMA between NSDC and NSDF. .

INTEGRATED SCHEME FOR SCHOOL EDUCATION

Government approved an integrated school education scheme that will subsume Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) from 1 April.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The cabinet committee on economic affairs (CCEA) has approved the integrated scheme with an estimated allocation of Rs75,000 crore over the next two years, which is a 20% increase over the current allocation.
- The integrated scheme seeks to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education from nursery to senior secondary stage in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goal for Education”.
- It will help improve the transition rates across the various levels of school education and aid in promoting universal access to children to complete school education.
- It would lead to inclusion of senior secondary levels and pre-school levels in support for school education for the first time, focus on strengthening teacher education institutions, enhance use of digital technology through smart classrooms and digital boards, improve the quality of infrastructure in government schools and support “Khelo India”.

- The CCEA also approved continuation of a credit guarantee fund for education loans, which would also increase the ceiling of eligible loan amounts from the existing Rs4 lakh to Rs7.5 lakh.
- This will provide education loans to 10 lakh students.

ASPIRATIONAL DISTRICT PROGRAMME

Three opposition ruled states West Bengal, Kerala and Odisha have opted out of the Centre's Transformation of Aspirational Districts scheme, thus reducing the total number of districts under the programme to 102 from 115.

HIGHLIGHTS

- NITI Aayog has recently launched the baseline ranking for 115 aspirational districts.
- It aims to quickly and effectively transform some of India's most underdeveloped districts.
- It will identify areas of immediate improvement, measure progress, and rank districts. The broad ideas of the programme include - **convergence of central and state schemes, collaboration of central, state level 'Prabhari' (in-charge) officers and district collectors & competition among districts.**
- The states are the main drivers in the programme.
- The 115 districts were chosen by senior officials of the Union government.
- This was in consultation with State officials on the basis of a composite index.
- The parameters included are - **deprivation enumerated under Socio-Economic Caste Census, key health and education performance indicators & state of basic infrastructure.**
- The present ranking is based on 49 indicators across 5 sectors. These sectors are areas that have been targeted for transformation - **health and nutrition; education; agriculture and water resources; financial inclusion and skill development; basic infrastructure.**
- A minimum of one district was chosen from every State.
- This includes states such as UP and Bihar, or which are afflicted by left-wing extremism such as Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh.

INDIA-SACEP

The Union Cabinet has approved signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between India and South Asian Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP) for cooperation on the response to Oil and Chemical Pollution in the South Asian Seas Region.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The MoU intends to promote closer cooperation between India and other maritime nations comprising the South Asian seas region namely Bangladesh, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka for protection and preservation of marine environment in the region.
- Indian Coast Guard (ICG) will be the Competent National Authority and national operational contact point for implementation of "Regional Oil Spill Contingency

Plan” under the MoU and shall respond to oil and chemical spills on behalf of Government of India.

- Further, ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs) will be the national emergency response centre for marine incidents.

BACKGROUND

In order to promote and support protection, management and enhancement of the environment in the South Asian region, the Governments of ***Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*** established the SACEP in 1982 in Sri Lanka. ***The SACEP jointly with the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) developed a “Regional Oil Spill Contingency Plan”*** to facilitate international co-operation and mutual assistance in preparing and responding to a major oil pollution incident in the seas around the Maritime States of Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The ***Malé Declaration on control and prevention of air pollution*** and its likely transboundary effects for South Asia is another significant effort which encourages intergovernmental cooperation to combat the transboundary air pollution problem.

PRADHAN MANTRI ROJGAR PROTASAHAN YOJANA

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Prime Minister has given its approval for enhancing the scope of Pradhan Mantri Rojgar Protsahan Yojana (PMRPY).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Government of India will now contribute the Employer's full admissible contribution for the first three years from the date of registration of the new employee for all the sectors including existing beneficiaries for their remaining period of three years.
- The informal sector workers would get social safety net and there would be more job creation.
- The scheme has produced quite encouraging results and have added about 31 Lakhs beneficiaries to the formal employment involving an expenditure of more than Rs. 500 crore.
- PMRPY has been in operation since August, 2016.
- Government is paying the 8.33% contribution of Employers to the Employees' Pension Scheme (EPS) in respect of new employees (who have joined on or after 1st April 2016) having a new Universal Account Number (UAN), with salary up to Rs. 15,000/- per month.
- The scheme has a dual benefit i.e. on the one hand the employers are incentivized for increasing the employment base of workers in the establishments, and on the other hand a large number of workers will find jobs in such establishments.
- A direct benefit is that these workers will have access to social security benefits of the organized sector.

JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE

NASA has delayed the launch of its much awaited, \$8 billion James Webb Space Telescope set to be the world's biggest space observatory until at least May 2020.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) is a space telescope developed in collaboration between NASA, the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency.
- It is the formal successor to the Hubble Space Telescope and the Spitzer Space Telescope.
- It has been in planning since 1996 and represents a collaboration of about 17 countries led by NASA, and with significant contributions from the European Space Agency and the Canadian Space Agency.
- It is named after James E. Webb, the second administrator of NASA, who played an integral role in the Apollo program.

PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Public Financial Management System (PFMS) portal has processed record Rs 71,633 crore transactions on a single day. This was a historical record breaking volume of digital transactions achieved by PFMS.

Public Financial Management System (PFMS) initially started as a Plan scheme named CPSMS of the Planning Commission in 2008-09 as a pilot in four States of Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Punjab and Mizoram for four Flagship schemes e.g. MGNREGS, NRHM, SSA and PMGSY.

After the initial phase of establishing a network across Ministries / Departments, it has been decided to undertake National rollout of CPSMS (PFMS) to link the financial networks of Central, State Governments and the agencies of State Governments. The scheme was included in 12th Plan initiative of Planning Commission and Ministry of Finance.

HIGHLIGHTS

- PFMS is an electronic fund tracking mechanism compiles, collates and makes available in real-time, information regarding all government schemes.
- Besides, it will significantly provide government real-time information on resource availability and utilisation across schemes.
- In addition it allow government expenditure to adopt a Just-in- Time (JIT) approach, with payments made only when they are needed.

MEGA FOOD PARK IN AJMER

Union Ministry for Food Processing Industries inaugurated Greentech Mega Food Park Private Ltd- the first mega food park in Rajasthan at Roopangarh Village in Ajmer.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Park has been set up at a cost and will benefit around 25,000 farmers in this as well as neighbouring districts.
- The mega food park, which has been set up in an area of 85.44 acres, would have a central processing centre as well as well as four Primary Processing Centres (PPCs) at Jaipur, Nagaur, Tonk and Churu.
- The park would also have facilities for primary processing and storage near the farms and would not only benefit farmers of Ajmer but also those of nearby districts of Jaipur, Nagaur, Tonk and Churu as well.

GSAT - 6A

The GSAT-6A is a high-power S-band communication satellite. It will be India's second predominantly S-band communications satellite first being the GSAT-6.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It will complement GSAT-6, which has been orbiting Earth since August 2015 at 83 degrees East longitude.
- The purpose of the satellite is provided a platform for developing technologies such as demonstration of 6m S-Band 'Unfurlable Antenna', handheld ground terminals and network management techniques.
- These are useful in satellite-based mobile communication applications. The GSAT-6A launch will be ISRO's last launch for the financial year 2017-18.
- ISRO has stated that the life span of the GSAT-6A mission will be around 10 years. The cost of the 2-tonne satellite is approximately rupees 270 crores.
- The GSAT-6A communication satellite will be launched by ISRO's GSLV-F08 rocket.
- The GSLV-F08 will be the twelfth flight of Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle, and the sixth flight which will have an indigenous Cryogenic Stage.
- The GSAT-6A launch will have three stages (Stage 1, 2, 3) and end with the 'payload fairing'.

'Stage One' will comprise of two propellants - Earth storable liquid propellants and Composite solid propellant. 'Stage Two' will comprise of Earth storable liquid propellants, while 'State Three' will have Cryogenic propellants.

BEIDOU NAVIGATION SATELLITE SYSTEM

China successfully launched two satellites with a single rocket to strengthen its BeiDou Navigation Satellite System (BDS), which will serve countries along the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative by the end of this year.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The BRI, previously known as 'One Belt, One Road', seeks to build rail, maritime and road links from Asia to Europe and Africa in a revival of the ancient Silk Road trading routes.
- Named after the Chinese term for Big Dipper, the BeiDou system started providing independent services over China in 2000.
- It is being projected by Beijing as a rival to the American Global Positioning System (GPS).

- Chinese navigation system will serve countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by the end of 2018.
- By around 2020, when the BDS goes global, it is expected to have more than 30 satellites.
- The Long March-3B rocket, carrying the two satellites.
- The two satellites are coded as the 30th and 31st members in the BDS.
- They entered orbit more than three hours after the launch and will work together with six previously launched BeiDou-3 satellites once they pass a series of tests.

NAITWAR MORI HYDRO ELECTRIC PROJECT

Construction works on 60 MW Naitwar Mori Hydro Electric Project have begun.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Naitwar Mori Project with a generation potential of 60 MW is located on River Tons, a major tributary of River Yamuna on the Ganga basin, in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand state in North India.
- This run-of-the river project was allocated to SJVN Ltd by the Government of Uttarakhand.
- SJVN Ltd is a Mini Ratna PSU under administrative control of the Ministry of Power, Govt. of India.
- Project would be commissioned in record period of 48 months.
- Naitwar Mori Hydro Electric Project is designed as a standalone run of the river project.
- One of the major features of the project is that there is no displacement of population from the project site.
- After commissioning of the project, 12 per cent free electricity will be supplied to Uttarakhand as royalty.
- In addition to this, each project-affected family will be provided with an amount equivalent to cost of 100 units of electricity per month for 10 years.

SAMRAT

It is Russia's most advanced nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile. It was flight-tested recently.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Sarmat is a heavy ICBM intended to replace Russia's aging, Soviet-era missiles that form the basis of its nuclear deterrent.
- The chief innovation of the Sarmat is its ability to carry a large number of guided warheads.
- The missile is believed to be able to fly 16,000 miles and is capable of flying over the South Pole to strike the U.S.
- NATO has named this missile as 'Satan 2'.

ANTIBIOTIC RESISTANCE IN VULTURE

Escherichia coli, a pathogen in over 90% of Egyptian vultures that migrate to northwest India to spend the winter, tend to show significant difference in resistance to antibiotics within a single season reveals a study report.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The findings of the study are significant because migrating wild birds can spread drug-resistant pathogens and cause disease.
- The vultures that use human-dominated landscapes as part of their life cycle were likely to act as “reservoirs and melting pots of bacterial resistance”
- Guidelines to restrict antibiotic use in both humans and animals by one country or region alone will be inadequate when wild birds can spread drug-resistant bacteria
- Global collaboration and coordination is the need of the hour to restrict the usage of antibiotics in both humans and animals to tackle these resistances in vultures.

VULTURE CONSERVATION BREEDING CENTRE

- VCBC is an ex-situ conservation initiative.
- The centres were setup by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS).
- Four such centres exist now at Haryana, Assam, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.
- Except these centres, Central Zoo Authority (CZA) manages five breeding centres.
- A typical VCBC has aviaries of different types for breeding, nursing, looking after sick and injured vultures and colonies for vultures to live in.
- Similar to the ex-situ conservation BNHS also provides in-situ conservation in the name of Vulture safe zones (VSZ).
- A VSZ is a geographical area, the natural habitat of wild vultures, of at least 100 Km radius made free of the presence of the drug diclofenac in animal carcasses, the major food of vultures.

UN COMMISSION ON STATUS OF WOMEN

Rural entrepreneur Sunita Kashyap from India was hailed as a symbol of women's empowerment at inaugural session of 62nd UN's CSW meet, 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Kashyap founded Mahila Umang Producers Co., an organization in Uttarkhand run by women farmers and producers to market their products and it also runs a micro-credit program.
- The priority theme for this year meet is “**challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.**”
- The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women.
- It is a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) established in 1946.

NATIONAL CENTRE FOR DISEASE CONTROL

NCDC is an institute which is under the administrative control of the Director General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

HIGHLIGHTS

- NCDC, formerly National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) had its origin as Central Malaria Bureau, established at Kasauli (Himachal Pradesh) in 1909.
- It functions as the nodal agency in the country for disease surveillance facilitating prevention and control of communicable diseases.
- Some of the health programs under the National Centre for Disease Control are,
 - ✓ Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP).
 - ✓ National Program for Containment of Anti-Microbial Resistance.
 - ✓ National Viral Hepatitis Surveillance Program.
 - ✓ National Rabies control program (NRCP).
 - ✓ Yaws Eradication Program.
 - ✓ Guinea Worm Eradication Program.
- The mandate of the Institute broadly covers three areas viz. services, trained health manpower development and research.

DEFENCE CORRIDOR

An interactive meeting with local industry was held at Tiruchirappalli as to initiate development of the Tamil Nadu Defence Corridor.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is with respect to budget announcement of two Defence Corridors in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.
- The Tamil Nadu Defence Corridor is also called the Tamil Nadu Defence Production Quad.
- It is called as Quad as the nodal cities Chennai, Hosur, Salem and Coimbatore, Tiruchirappalli forms the quadrilateral region.
- These nodal cities have existing defence ecosystem in the form of OFBs, vendors working with Defence PSUs, and other allied industries.
- The Corridor aims to bolster interaction between all industry players in order to create long-term synergy and eventual development of the area into a Defence Production powerhouse.

WORLD GLAUCOMA WEEK

During World Glaucoma Week observed between March 11 and 17, Ripon Buildings in Chennai was lit up in green to raise awareness about the eye disease.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Glaucoma is an irreversible condition, resulting from damaged optic nerves due to pressure in the eye.
- Glaucoma is the second prominent cause of blindness in the world accounting up to 8% of total blindness.

- In India, glaucoma is the third leading cause of irreversible blindness with nearly 12 million people affected and nearly 1.2 million people blind from the disease.

FESTIVAL OF INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP (FINE)

The President of India will soon inaugurate a Festival of Innovation and Entrepreneurship (FINE) at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

He will also present Gandhian Young Technological Innovation awards instituted by Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies and Institutions [SRISTI].

- FINE is an initiative to recognize, respect, showcase, reward innovations and to foster a supportive ecosystem for innovators.
- It is organized by Rashtrapati Bhavan in association with the Department of Science and Technology and the National Innovation Foundation-India.
- It will provide a window to showcase creative and innovative solutions for social development through innovation emerging from grassroots, student ideas and other technologies.

SAAKSHAR BHARAT

Saakshar Bharat is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for Adult Education and Skill Development.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This program was formulated in 2009 with the objective of achieving 80% literacy level at national level, by focusing on adult women literacy.
- It is being implemented in rural areas 26 States and one UT that had adult female literacy rate of 50 per cent and below as per Census 2001.
- It is seeking to reduce the gap between male and female literacy to not more than 10 percentage points.
- It has four broader objectives:
 - ✓ To impart functional literacy and numeracy to non-literates.
 - ✓ To acquire equivalency to formal educational system.
 - ✓ To impart relevant skill development program.
 - ✓ To promote a learning society by providing opportunities for continuing education.
- The principal target of the program is 70 million non-literate adults in the age group of 15 years and beyond.

HAMMER SPACECRAFT

NASA has drawn up plans to build a huge nuclear spacecraft that is capable of shunting or blowing up dangerous space rocks and safeguarding life on Earth.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The spacecraft is named Hammer (Hypervelocity Asteroid Mitigation Mission for Emergency Response), an 8ton spaceship.

- The asteroid that is targeted is Benu which is circling the sun at 63,000 mph.
- NASA's Osiris-Rex mission is en route to Benu to take samples which is been monitored since its discovery in 1999.
- Benu's impact over earth would release three times more energy than all nuclear weapons detonated throughout history.
- OSIRIS-REX is a part of New Frontiers Program.

FINANCIAL STABILITY BOARD

The FSB released its initial assessment of crypto-assets recently which states that they do not pose risk to global financial stability at present time.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is an international body that monitors and makes recommendations about the global financial system.
- In the G20 Leaders Summit of April 2009, the expanded Financial Stability Forum was re-established as the Financial Stability Board (FSB) with a broadened mandate to promote financial stability.
- It coordinates financial regulation for the Group of 20 Economies.
- Its headquarters is at Basel, Switzerland.

SEYCHELLES CORAL REEF RESTORATION

Coral reef restoration program is being carried out to save the coral reefs in Seychelles.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The restoration project involves nurturing fragments of corals in underwater nurseries and then reintroducing them in to their natural habitat.
- Tiny coral fragments, once collected from the sea floor, are nurtured in tanks and then, transferred to an underwater "rope nursery" or improvised skeleton.
- The Seychelles in some areas lost up to 90% of its coral reefs in 1998 in an environmental event known as bleaching.
- In coral bleaching, the corals in warm water expel the colourful algae that live within their skeletons and they starve without their nutrients.
- "Super corals" were chosen for regrowth and transplanting as they were resilient to the recent 2016 coral bleaching.

TOTTEN GLACIER

A recent research by the Australia's Antarctica Program revealed that more of Totten Glacier is floating.

- As the glacier is in direct contact with warming ocean temperatures it could have a significant impact on the rise of global sea levels (about 3 meters if this glacier melts).
- Totten glacier is one of the fastest-flowing and largest glaciers in Antarctica east
- NASA found that between 2002 and 2016, Antarctica lost 125 giga tons of ice annually, causing global sea levels to rise by 0.35mm a year.

- The amount of ice sitting behind the Totten is comparable to that which is contained within the whole West Antarctic ice sheet (WAIS).

SAKSHAM SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME

The scheme was launched in 2014-15, with the objective of encouraging economically weaker differently-able students to pursue technical education at Diploma and Degree levels.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It aims to provide assistance to 1000 specially able children to pursue Technical Education.
- It is implemented by **Ministry of Human Resource and Development**.

Other schemes of similar name:

Project Saksham	Ministry of Finance	Its objective is to develop a New Indirect Tax Network (Systems Integration) of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC).
Project Saksham	Ministry of Railways	It is a comprehensive training program for all employees of Indian Railways to boost productivity & efficiency.
Saksham (Sanrakshan Kshamta Mahotsav)	Ministry of Petroleum and Natural gas	It is an annual flagship event to create focused attention on fuel conservation through people centric activities.
Saksham	Ministry of Rural Development	Capacity Building program - a training module that uses Remote Sensing and GIS tools for project planning and monitoring component.

WORLD WATER DAY

World Water Day, on 22 March every year, is about focusing attention on the importance of water.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The theme for World Water Day 2018 is '**Nature for Water**' – exploring nature-based solutions to the water challenges we face in the 21st century.
- The United Nations General Assembly responded by designating 22 March 1993 as the first World Water Day to a recommendation made in Rio summit 1992.
- On this day, an assessment by Down To Earth sounds alarm bells for many cities across the globe which is fast approaching the 'Day zero'.
- 'Day Zero' is a situation when taps start running dry.
- Cape Town, one of the richest cities of Africa, has been reeling under one of the worst ever water crisis

WORLD WATER DEVELOPMENT REPORT

UN calculated that an estimated 3.6 billion people live in areas where water can be scarce at least one month per year in its World Water Development Report 2018.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The WWDR is an annual and thematic report that focuses on different strategic water issues each year.
- It aims to provide decision-makers with the tools to implement sustainable use of our water resources.
- The WWDR is the UN-Water flagship report on water.
- This year's report 'Nature Based Solutions for Water' report that focuses on nature-based solutions, such as China's rainwater recycling, India's forest regeneration and Ukraine's artificial wetlands to improve the quality and access of clean water.

BIOTECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY RESEARCH ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

*BIRAC celebrated its 6th Foundation Day recently with the theme as '**Sustaining Innovation – A Market Driven Pathway**'.*

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is a not-for-profit Public-Sector Enterprise, set up by Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Ministry of Science and Technology Government of India.
- Its aim is to empower the emerging biotech industry to undertake strategic research and innovation.
- It is a new industry academia interface and implements its mandate through a wide range of impact initiatives.
- BIRAC had launched the National Biopharma Mission.
- In addition, Grand Challenges India (GCI) program is the flagship program managed by the Program Managing Unit at BIRAC for the Department of Biotechnology and Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation partnership.

NATIONAL CULTURAL AUDIOVISUAL ARCHIVES

NCAA has been certified recently, as the world's first Trusted Digital Repository as per ISO standard, granted by Primary Trustworthy Digital Repository Authorization Body Ltd. (PTAB), U.K.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It is a project of the Ministry of Culture, Government of India, implemented by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA).
- NCAA's primary objective is to identify and preserve the cultural heritage of India available in audio-visual form through a process of digitization and making it accessible to the people.
- NCAA digital repository is established with and powered by DIGITALAYA which is developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Pune.
- IGNCA is set up by the Government of India, as a premier research institute dedicated to holistic understanding and expression of Indian arts in their inter and multi-disciplinary nature.

RELIGIOUS MINORITY STATUS TO LINGAYATS

Recently, Karnataka government decided to recommend religious minority status to the Lingayat and Veerashaiva community.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The tradition of Lingayatism has been founded by social reformer and philosopher Basavanna in 12th century Karnataka.
- Basavanna's vision of a societal order was based on human freedom, equality, rationality, and brotherhood.
- Emergence of the Lingayat sect can be located within Bhakti movements that had swept across South India from the 8th century AD onwards.
- Veerashaivism is a Shaiva sect within Hinduism and is predominantly located in Karnataka.
- Veerashaivas claim that Basavanna was not the founder of the Lingayat tradition, but rather a reformer of an already existing religious tradition which they call Veerashaivism.

ANGOR WAT

The Archaeological Survey of India had undertaken major conservation work at the Angkor Wat in Cambodia.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Angkor is situated in Cambodia and consists of several temples, hydraulic structures like basins, dams and reservoirs, and communication routes.
- It is also known as Yashodarapura and was the capital city of the Khmer empire.
- It is one of the most important archaeological sites in Southeast Asia.
- The world-famous Angkor Wat and the Bayon temple at Angkor Thom form a major part of Angkor ruins.

- Angkor was declared as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION

The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the National Health Mission which is a major boost to health infrastructure.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The National Health Mission (NHM) encompasses its two Sub-Missions, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and National Urban Health Mission (NUHM).
- NHM will be the principle vehicle for the UHC (Universal Health Coverage).
- The goals/targets are aligned with National Health Policy, 2017 and SDG-3.
- It will integrate with the proposed National Health Protection Mission under Ayushman Bharat.
- In addition, it will facilitate horizontal integration of all vertical disease program to ensure integrated approach to health and wellness.

RASHTRIYA UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs has given its approval for continuation of Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA).

HIGHLIGHTS

- RUSA was launched in 2013 that aims at providing strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.
- Transformative reforms such as governance, academic, affiliation and accreditation reforms are pre-requisites in the implementation of the scheme in State higher educational institutions.
- The funding would flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions.
- RUSA seeks to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio of the country to 30% by 2020.
- It also seeks to increase the spending on higher education by the State Governments.

COPERNICUS PROGRAM

Recently, India has joined Europe's mega global arrangement of sharing data from Earth observation satellites, called Copernicus.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Under this arrangement, both European Commission and India will mutually share the data from Copernicus Sentinel family and ISRO's land, ocean and atmospheric series of civilian satellites (Oceansat-2, INSAT-3D) respectively.
- Copernicus is the European Union's Earth Observation Program.
- The Program is coordinated and managed by the European Commission.
- It is implemented in partnership with the Member States, the European Space Agency (ESA), and European Organization for the Exploitation of Meteorological

Satellites (EUMETSAT), the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), EU Agencies and Mercator Océan.

- The space-based information will be used for forecasting disasters, providing emergency response, to glean land, ocean data and for issues of security, agriculture, climate change and atmosphere.
- The Copernicus emergency response mapping system was activated on at least two Indian occasions — during the 2014 floods in Andhra Pradesh and after the 2013 storm in Odisha.

KAWAL TIGER RESERVE

- Kawal tiger reserve is situated in Northern Telegana state.
- The wildlife sanctuary in Kawal is the catchment area of river Godavari and Kadam.
- The indicator species of the sanctuary are Tiger and Nilgai.
- The reserve forms the southern end of the central Indian Tiger Reserve Landscape.
- It is also linked to the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra to its north and Indravathi Tiger reserve to its east
- The forest area found here is the southern tropical mixed dry deciduous forest and dry teak forest.

DRAVIDIAN LANGUAGE

A study has found that the Dravidian language family had originated about 4,500 years ago.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The language family consists of 80 varieties spoken by nearly 220 million people across southern and central India.
- The Dravidian language family's four largest languages — Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu — have literary traditions spanning centuries
- The geographical origin of the Dravidian language or its exact dispersal through time is not known with certainty.

INTEGRATED SCHEME FOR DEVELOPMENT OF SILK INDUSTRY

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs had given its approval for Central Sector Scheme "Integrated Scheme for Development of Silk Industry".

HIGHLIGHTS

- The core objective of the scheme is to improve the productivity and quality of silk through R&D intervention.
- It is expected to increase the silk production from the level of 30348 MTs during 2016-17 to 38500 MTs by end of 2019-20
- It will promote Women Empowerment and livelihood opportunities to SC/ST and other weaker sections of the society.
- It will be implemented by the Ministry through Central Silk Board (CSB).
- The Scheme has four components: **Research & Development (R&D), Training, Transfer of Technology and IT Initiatives.**

- Brand Promotion of Indian silk will be encouraged through quality certification by Silk Mark.
- Efforts will be strengthened for collaborating with National Institute of Fashion Technology and National Institute of Design for support on design and product development.

N- TB APP

N-TB is a mobile phone-based nutrition assessment and counseling application, was unveiled in the recently concluded TB summit.

HIGHLIGHTS

- N-TB is endorsed by the RNTCP and the World Health Organization (India).
- The app, that is to be launched on World TB day (March 24), allows healthcare workers to calculate the right Body Mass Index and nutrition levels.
- It is based on the Revised National Tuberculosis Control Program (RNTCP) released Guidance Document on nutritional care and support for patients with tuberculosis in India.
- The Centre for Nutrition Studies, Yenepoya University, Mangalore provided the content for the app and it was developed with technical support from McGill International TB Centre, Montreal.
- The theme for this year World TB day is 'Wanted: Leaders for TB-free world'.

NATIONAL VECTOR BORNE DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAM

As per Global Burden of Disease Study, 2013 Visceral Leishmaniasis (Kala Azar) was the second largest Neglected Tropical Diseases causing mortality.

- NVBDCP, which is a part of the National Health Mission, plays a crucial role in the Kala azar elimination.
- Kala-azar elimination project is being implemented in four endemic States namely Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.
- Directorate of National Vector Borne Disease Control Program (NVBDCP) is the central nodal agency for the prevention and control of following vector borne diseases. SUCH AS: Malaria, Dengue, Filariasis, Kala Azar, Chikungunya & Japanese encephalitis.
- It is one of the Technical Departments of Directorate General of Health Services, Ministry of Health and Family welfare.

CLIMATE REPORT 2017

According to the report, weather and climate disasters cost countries about \$320 billion last year.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The report is released by World Meteorological Organization (WMO).
- It also observed major monsoon floods in the Indian subcontinent and severe droughts in parts of East Africa contributing to making 2017 the most expensive year on record.

- The North Atlantic hurricane season was the costliest ever for the U.S.
- While the hurricanes such as Irma, Harvey eradicated decades of development gains in small islands in the Caribbean, such as Dominica.
- The report also noted that two significant cyclones in North Indian Ocean- Mora and Ockhi- caused potential damage.

UIDAI

The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) is a statutory authority established under the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016.

- It is under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- Prior to its establishment as a statutory authority, UIDAI was functioning as an attached office of the then Planning Commission (now NITI Aayog).
- UIDAI was created with the objective to issue Unique Identification numbers (UID), named as "Aadhaar", to all residents of India.

UIDAI is responsible for:

- Aadhaar enrolment and authentication, including operation and management of all stages of Aadhaar life cycle.
- Developing the policy, procedure and system for issuing Aadhaar numbers to individuals and perform authentication.
- Ensuring the security of identity information and authentication records of individuals.
- Aadhaar number is a 12-digit random number issued by the UIDAI to the residents of India after satisfying the verification process laid down by the Authority.

RESEARCH CENTRE IMARAT

The indigenous seeker technology in the recently tested BrahMos Missile was developed by the RCI.

HIGHLIGHTS

- RCI is situated in Hyderabad in the state of Telangana.
- RCI has been considered as 'Avionics Hub' of DRDO.
- It is one of the three DRDO Labs of 'Missile Complex'
- RCI is a leading laboratory of Defence Research Development Organization (DRDO) which is responsible for development of missile system
- It is also responsible for design, development and participation in production of missile avionics like Inertial Navigation Systems, Control Systems, Imaging Infrared Seeker, Radio Frequency Seeker and Power Supply System.
- Telemetry and Telecommand systems are also developed in RCI to evaluate missile performance during its development phase.
- RCI focus is to design and develop world class, State-of-the-art missile technologies which will produce precise and reliable indigenous weapon systems to strengthen country's Armed Forces.

SAORA PAINTINGS

- Saora paintings are painted by Lanjia Saora tribals in the mud walls of their homes.
- The tribe inhabits the great Bansadhara River in southern Odisha.
- The tribe finds mention in the Hindu epic Ramayana with Savari, Lord Ram's devotee.
- A Saora painting is called Idital and the person who creates it is known as the iditalma.
- Saora paintings are done to appease their presiding deity, Edital, who is invoked during all rituals and celebrations.
- Each painting has a rectangular frame, and features icons of deities, or those drawn from nature.
- Colours: According to convention, only geru (red earth) and white (from rice paste).
- Iconography: Stick figures.
- **Motifs:** People, trees, sun, moon, animals, village activities etc.
- The frequently featured motifs include Labasum (the earth god), Jodisum (the village deity), Manduasum (the sun god) and Jananglosum (the wind deity).

NIKSHAY AUSHADHI PORTAL

On World TB day, the health secretary released the TB INDIA 2018 Report, National Drug Resistance Survey Report, Nikshay Aushadi Portal and shorter regimen for Drug Resistant TB.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Nikshay Aushadhi is a logistics and supply chain management solution portal.
- It will enable real time visibility into stock status at all levels and enable forecasting, quantification & further distribution of TB drugs and diagnostics.
- It is not to be confused with NIKSHAY portal which a web based solution for monitoring of TB patients.
- Also, Nikshay portal is to monitor Revised National Tuberculosis Programme (RNTCP) effectively that was developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC).

e-Asuhadhi

- Health Informatics technologies help to improve quality of healthcare, reduce medical errors, reduce healthcare costs, increase administrative efficiency, and expand access to affordable healthcare.
- e-Aushadhi is one among such health informatics technology developed by Centre for Development of Advanced Computing.
- Each state government has its separate e-asuhadhi portal.
- e-Aushadhi' deals with the management of stock of various drugs, sutures and surgical items required by different district drug warehouses.
- The main aim is that all the required materials/drugs are constantly available to be supplied to the user district drug warehouses without delay.

EARTH HOUR

- Earth hour is a global campaign raising awareness about the impact of climate change
- Earth Hour, which started in Australia in 2007, is set to be observed by millions of supporters in 187 countries.
- People were urged to join Earth Hour's "Give Up to Give Back" campaign by switching off all non-essential lights between 8:30 pm to 9:30 pm.
- This year's theme is the ***impact of warming on biodiversity and wildlife.***
- Some of the species at risk include Australia's green turtles, black-flanked rock wallabies and koalas, as well as the Adelie penguin colonies in Antarctica.

LITHIUM ION CELLS

ISRO has entered into a Technology Transfer Agreement (TTA) with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) to transfer the technology for the manufacture of space grade Li-Ion cells.

HIGHLIGHTS

- ISRO uses Li-Ion batteries as power sources for satellite and launch vehicle applications due to their high energy density, reliability and long cycle life.
- These cells are currently being used for various satellite and launch vehicle applications.
- Lithium ion batteries are more reliable than older technologies such as nickel-cadmium.
- Lithium-ion batteries don't contain cadmium, a toxic, heavy metal.
- It is used in every modern cell phone, laptop, tablet, and most other rechargeable gadgets.
- ISRO has been using the Li-Ion batteries as a power source for satellite and launch vehicle applications due to its significant features.
- The Li-Ion batteries are in the cycle of operation- large duration, high energy density and lower mass, the features which are suitable for the system.
- In one rocket like GSLV or PSLV, 500 to 700 space cells are used. These cells are also used in satellites as well.
- Moreover, the usage of these batteries is not limited to only space system but they can also be used effectively for automobile system.

Li-ION CELLS

- A lithium-ion battery or Li-ion battery (abbreviated as LIB) is a type of rechargeable battery in which lithium ions move from the negative electrode to the positive electrode during discharge and back when charging. Li-ion batteries use an intercalated lithium compound as one electrode material, compared to the metallic lithium used in a non-rechargeable lithium battery. The electrolyte, which allows for ionic movement, and the two electrodes are the constituent components of a lithium-ion battery cell.

RESOURCE EFFICIENCY

NITI aayog initiated implementation of strategy on Resource efficiency.

- Resource efficiency means using the Earth's limited resources in a sustainable manner while minimizing impacts on the environment.
- In 2017, the NITI Aayog along with EU Delegation to India released the Strategy paper on Resource Efficiency (RE).

The **objective of the RE Strategy is**

- To make recommendations for enhancing the resource-use efficiency in the Indian economy and industry.
- To develop indicators for monitoring progress.
- To create an ecosystem for improving the resource security and minimizing environmental impacts.

PALIYAR TRIBES

After a relentless struggle, Paliyar tribals on Kodaikanal and Sirumalai hills have got the legal rights to access reserve forests for their survival and livelihood.

- The aboriginal tribes live in the clad of Western Ghats.
- They live as a scattered and unorganized smaller group in the foothills.
- In older days, these people lived in small cave like structures called Kalazhais and later on constructed a small hut in the forest.
- Paliyar is a contemporary hunting and gathering society once lived in the interior forest.

FEDERATION OF INDIAN EXPORT ORGANISATION

- FEIO is the apex body of export promotion councils, commodity boards and export development authorities.
- It was setup in 1965, under the aegis of Ministry of Commerce. It facilitates the redressal of exporter's problem by taking up them with concerned authority.
- FIEO confers Niryat Bandhu and Niryat Shree awards to its exporters and export facilitators for their outstanding performance in exports.

PRINCIPLE SCIENTIFIC ADVISOR TO GOVERNMENT

K Vijay Raghavan, one of the most distinguished biologists of the country, was appointed Principal Scientific Advisor to the Government of India.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Principal Scientific Advisor (PSA), a post created in 1999, is the topmost advisor to the government on all matters related to scientific policy.
- The office of the PSA is one of the three scientific bodies the government relies on for advice on matters relating to science.
- It acts as the interface between scientific institutions and the government.
- The other two are Science Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (SAC-PM) and Science Advisory Council to the Cabinet (SAC-C).

- Both SAC-PM and SAC-C were not reconstituted under the present government.

BT COTTON

Cotton farmers all over the world were losing much of their cotton to tobacco budworms, cotton bollworms, and pink bollworms

- BT cotton is an insect-resistant transgenic crop designed to combat the bollworm.
- It was created by genetically altering the cotton genome to express a microbial protein from the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis*.
- Traditionally, the cotton bollworm has been combated by the use of pesticides.
- BT cotton was developed with the intention of reducing the amount of pesticides needed for cotton monoculture, thereby reducing the cost of growing cotton and reducing the environmental impact of heavy pesticide use.
- In 2005, Genetic Engineering Approval Committee (GEAC) of India approved only one variety of Bt cotton hybrid out of the 13 listed for commercial cultivation.

INDIAN RAILWAY FINANCE CORPORATION

Ministry of Finance has approved Government guarantee for Indian Railway Finance Corporation (IRFC) bonds to be subscribed by Life Insurance Corporation (LIC).

- IRFC was set up 1986 as the dedicated financing arm of the Indian Railways for mobilizing funds from domestic as well as overseas Capital Markets.
- RFC is a Public-Sector Enterprise under the administrative control of the Ministry of Railways, Govt. of India.
- It is also registered as Systemically Important Non-Deposit taking Non-Banking Financial Company (NBFC – ND-SI) and Infrastructure Finance Company (NBFC-IFC) with Reserve Bank of India (RBI).
- The primary objective of IRFC is to meet the predominant portion of 'Extra Budgetary Resources' (EBR) requirement of the Indian Railways through market borrowings at the most competitive rates and terms.
- IRFC has also been lending to various entities in Railway sector like Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), Railtel, Konkan Railway Corporation Limited (KRCL), Pipavav Railway Corporation Limited (PRCL) etc.

TURTLE FROG

- Turtle frog is unique to Western Australia, and it subsists on termites.
- It is mainly found in the semi-arid region in the southwest and central zones of west Australia.
- It is very small and on average are around 2 inches (5cm) in length.
- It has short and muscular limbs which help them dig into the ground.
- It digs forward like turtles, rather than backwards which is characteristic of frogs.
- The turtle frog species does not have a tadpole stage; instead the frog develops fully inside the egg.

DEAD ZONES

The Gulf of Mexico's annual "dead zone" will likely persist for decades.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Hypoxic zones or Oxygen minimum zones (OMZ) are areas in the ocean of such low oxygen concentration that animal life suffocates and dies, and as a result are sometimes called "dead zones."
- In dead zone area most marine life either dies, or, if they are mobile such as fish, leave the area.
- Habitats that would normally be teeming with life become, essentially, biological deserts.
- One of the largest dead zones forms in the Gulf of Mexico every spring.
- Nutrients such as nitrogen flow from North America's Corn Belt through streams and rivers before ending up in the Gulf.
- The dead zones or Oxygen Minimum Zones (OMZ) in the Arabian Sea have been growing in size.
- It is the thickest and the most intense OMZ among the world's oceans and covers an area of around two million sq km.

INTEGRATED MANAGEMNET OF PDS

IM-PDS is central sector scheme that has been approved for implementation during 2018-19 and 2019-20.

The key objectives of the scheme are

- To integrate PDS system/portals of States/UTs with Central System/portals.
- Introduction of National Portability.
- De-duplication of ration cards/beneficiary.
- It will bring more transparency and efficiency in distribution of food grains.

MEGA FAUNA

At present, there are only 101 species of big, land-dwelling wild animals in the world. Biologists warned that this modest number of species is sure to shrink to double digit and could continue to diminish at an alarming rate.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The word 'mega fauna' means big (mega) animals (fauna).
- Two-thirds of these iconic creatures are listed as threatened with extinction by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN).
- The Saharan Addax antelope, Eastern Gorilla, orangutans of Borneo and Sumatra are some of the species which are in the path of extinction.
- Over the course of the last century, Lions, rhino and cheetah populations have collapsed by more than 90 %, Giraffes are down by 40 % in just three decades, Polar bears are forecast to lose a third of their numbers by mid-century.
- Scientists agree that Earth has entered a so-called "mass extinction event" in which species of all sizes and shapes are disappearing at 100 times the normal rate.

INTERSTITIUM

Scientists have stumbled upon a new “organ” just beneath the skin.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It contains collagen and elastin, proteins that give the skin its durability and elasticity.
- It is found in spaces filled with interstitial fluid, and lines tissues that suffer physical strain.
- The layer is found in tissues lining the gut, lungs, blood vessels, and muscles.
- The organ was found using the technique called probe-based confocal laser endomicroscopy on a living tissue.
- The interstitium layer could help understand how cancer spreads in the body and prove to be a potential diagnostic tool.
- It is the cells in this layer that age and contributes to skin wrinkles, the progression of certain diseases, and stiffening of limbs.
- Research is being carried out to confirm whether the layer is organ or not.

SMART INDIA HACKATHON 2018

- Smart India Hackathon 2018 is a non-stop digital product development competition, where problems are posed to technology students for innovative solutions.
- Smart India Hackathon (SIH) – 2018 is organized by All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) under the aegis of Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD).
- In the finale the teams would build innovative digital solutions for problems on different areas of Official Statistics identified by Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation.
- SIH 2018 will have 2 sub-editions – Software as well as Hardware:
- Software Edition will be 36 hours software product development competition.
- The new Hardware Edition will be a hackathon where teams will be work for 5 straight days and build their hardware solutions.
- SIH 2017 had only software edition and hardware edition is a new addition to this year event, which will be held later.

LONAR CRATER

Around 50,000 years ago, a meteorite about 50 to 60 km in diameter hit the ground in the Lonar region creating a crater.

- Lonar is in Buldana district in Maharashtra.
- The site was discovered by a Britisher, C. J. E. Alexander in 1823.
- Lonar crater is unique because it's the world's only high-velocity meteor crater in hard basalt.
- It is an impact crater or meteorite crater which is a bowl-shaped depression with a raised rim, formed by the impact of a meteoroid.
- Crater can be volcanic in origin too.

- The Lonar Lake formed in this depression is remarkable because its water is both saline and alkaline.

TRANSITING EXOPLANET SURVEY SATELLITE

The Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) is an Explorer-class planet finder by NASA.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The principal goal of the TESS mission is to detect small planets with bright host stars in the solar neighbourhood
- The spacecraft will be launched aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida.
- The spacecraft will be looking for a phenomenon known as a transit, where a planet passes in front of its star, causing a periodic and regular dip in the star's brightness.

NATIONAL ANNUAL RURAL SANITATION SURVEY

The National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS) 2017-18 reveals that 68% of rural households in India use the toilet when required.

The survey was conducted by third party agency Kantar Public, as a requirement by the World Bank to begin payout on its \$1.5 billion loan to the Swacch Bharat Abhiyan-Gramin.

The provisional summary report of the survey found that 77% of all rural households now have access to toilets, and that 93.4% of those who had access to toilets used them regularly.

Interior Exploration using Seismic Investigations, Geodesy and Heat Transport mission (INSIGHT)

NASA is to send the first-ever mission dedicated to exploring the deep interior of Mars, called InSight.

HIGHLIGHTS

- It will be the first NASA mission since the Apollo moon landings to place a seismometer, a device that measures quakes, on the soil of another planet.
- It is Mars Lander designed to give the Red Planet its first thorough check-up since it formed 4.5 billion years ago.
- The lander uses cutting edge instruments to measure the planet's "vital signs": its "pulse" (seismology), "temperature" (heat flow), and "reflexes" (precision tracking).
- It is the first outer space robotic explorer to study in-depth the "inner space" of Mars: its crust, mantle, and core
- Two cubesats named Mars Cube One or MarCO are also launched.
- MarCO will relay back InSight data as it enters the Martian atmosphere and lands.
- It will be a first test of miniaturized CubeSat technology at another planet.

KADAKNATH CHICKEN

Madhya Pradesh has got the Geographical Indication (GI) Tag for Kadaknath Chicken.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Kadaknath is a black-feathered chicken known for its flavorful meat and found mainly in the districts of Madhya Pradesh.
- The breed is native to Jhabua, Alirajpur and parts of Dhar district of eastern Madhya Pradesh.
- The protein-rich meat of Kadaknath, chicks and eggs are sold at a much higher rate than other varieties of chicken.
- The Kadaknath is popular mainly for its adaptability, and the good-tasting black meat, which is believed to have medicinal properties
- In the recent past, the Madhya Pradesh government had launched a mobile app called 'MP Kadaknath'.

LADHAKH LAKES

Ladakh is a part of the Trans-Himalayan range; it is in the northern most area of Jammu and Kashmir.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The natural high-altitude salt water lakes — Tso Kar, Tso Morari and Pangong Tso, are a typical feature of Ladakh.
- They lie in the sweeping valleys of Rupshu and the Changthang Plains.
- The Pangong Tso is a 'high grassland lake' located at an altitude of 14,270 ft on the Sino-Indian Line of Actual Control.
- The lake is endorheic in nature and completely freezes during winter.
- Endorheic regions are considered closed systems as surface waters drain to inland termini whence they evaporate or seep away rather than draining to the sea or ocean.
- The Tso Morari, a pearl shaped 'Mountain Lake' lies on the Ladakhi part of the Changthang plateau.
- It is encircled by mountains and said to be the 'Jewel of the Rupshu Valley' is at an altitude of 14,836 ft.
- Tso Morari Wetlands conservation reserve is situated here which is also a Ramsar Conservation site.
- The Tso Kar or 'white lake' lies in the Rupshu Valley in the Southern part of Ladakh.
- It is called as white lake as the white salt of the water deposits all over the lake shore.
- The Tso-Kar area is inhabited by the Khampas or Rupsa Chang, a nomadic group

IPBES ASSESSMENT REPORT

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) Assessment Report is the world's first comprehensive evidence-based assessment of land degradation and restoration.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Land degradation is defined as the temporary or permanent decline in the productive capacity of the land, and the diminution of the productive potential.
- It says that land degradation has been driving species to extinction and intensifying climate change.
- The degradation is also a major contributor to mass human migration and increased conflict.
- By 2014, more than 1.5 billion hectares of natural ecosystems had been converted into croplands.
- Less than 25 per cent of the earth's land surface has escaped substantial impact of human activity.
- The report estimates that 50 million- 700 million people will be forced to migrate by 2050.

BABUR-3 MISSILE

Pakistan test-fired its first Submarine-Launched Cruise Missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead up to 450km from an undisclosed location in the Indian Ocean, giving the country a "credible" second-strike capability.

- Babur-3, which has a range of 450km, is a sea-based variant of Ground Launched Cruise Missile (GLCM) Babur-2+ , which was successfully tested.
- The Babur-3 SLCM incorporates state-of-the-art technologies including underwater controlled propulsion and advanced guidance and navigation features, duly augmented by Global Navigation, Terrain and Scene Matching Systems.
- Babur-3 SLCM in land-attack mode, is capable of delivering various types of payloads and will provide Pakistan with a "credible second-strike capability, augmenting deterrence+.

NUTRIENT BASED SUBSIDY & CITY COMPOST SCHEME

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the Department of Fertilizers's proposal for continuation of Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) and City Compost Scheme beyond 12th Five Year plan till 2019-20.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The expenditure for the scheme will be on actual basis since national roll out of DBT entails 100 per cent payment of subsidy to fertilizer companies on sale of fertilizers to farmers at subsidised rates.
- The subsidy on the P&K fertilizers and Market Development Assistant (MDA) on City Compost will be provided on the subsidy rates approved by the CCEA on annual basis.
- The continuation of the NBS scheme and City Compost Scheme will ensure that adequate quantity of P&K is made available to the farmers at statutory controlled price.

CREDIT GUARANTEE FUND FOR EDUCATION LOANS SCHEME

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved continuation of the Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Education Loans and continuation and

modification of the Central Sector Interest Subsidy (CSIS) Scheme with a financial outlay of Rs 6,600 crore for the period from 2017-18 to 2019-20.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This will provide education loans to 10 lakh students during this period.
- The Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Education Loans provides guarantee for the education loan disbursed by banks without seeking any collateral security and third-party guarantee, for a maximum loan amount of Rs 7.5 lakh per student.
- Under the CSIS Scheme, which was launch in April 2009, full interest subsidy is provided for education loans taken from scheduled banks for all the professional/technical courses in India.
- Students with annual gross parental income up to Rs 4.5 lakh are eligible for the scheme and the loans are disbursed without any collateral security and third-party guarantee.
- The CCEA also approved a proposal of the Department of School Education and Literacy to formulate an integrated scheme on school education with an estimated allocation of Rs 75,000 crore over a period.

K2-229b

Scientists have discovered a hot, metallic, Earth-sized planet orbiting a dwarf star located 260 million light years away.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Named K2-229b, the planet is almost 20 per cent larger than Earth but has a mass which is over two-and-a-half times greater.
- It reaches a day side temperature of over 2000 degrees Celsius.
- It is located very close to its host star (0.012 AU, around a hundredth of the distance between the Earth and the Sun), which itself is a medium-sized active K dwarf in the Virgo Constellation.
- K2-229b orbits this star every fourteen hours.

STUDY IN PROGRAMMME

The Union Government launched a programme to draw more foreign students to India by projecting 160 premier universities and institutes, including IITs and IIMs, as the ideal destination for higher education.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The 'Study in India' programme — similar to the initiative launched by Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and Canada — aims at boosting the country's share of international students and, subsequently, improve the global reputation and rankings of Indian educational institutions.
- The government, at present, permits a provision of 10 per cent to 15 per cent supernumerary seats for foreign students in higher education.
- This provision remains largely underutilised across universities and colleges.

- 'Study in India', with a sanctioned budget of Rs 150 crore for two years, will promote India as a top destination for higher education and funnel demand in the direction of the supernumerary seats.
- To attract talented foreign students, the government will offer complete fee waiver to top 25 per cent meritorious applicants, 50 per cent fee waiver to the next 25 per cent applicants and 25 per cent waiver to the next 25 per cent foreign students.

ECOWAS

The Export-Import Bank (Exim Bank) will provide a \$500 million credit facility to Ecowas Bank for Investment and Development (EBID) to fund various development projects in the western-south Africa.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The line of credit of \$500 million to EBID will finance various development projects in the Ecowas region.
- With the signing of this line of credit (LoC) agreement, Exim Bank till date has extended four LoCs to EBID, with the support of the government, taking the total value of LOCs to \$1,000 million.
- The LoC of \$500 million to EBID is an umbrella limit for financing developmental projects in 15-member countries of EBID in West African region—Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.
- These projects entitled to get the funding may belong any sector which is of priority of the governments of any of the member states of EBID.
- The Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) has a mandate to promote economic integration in all fields of activity of the constituting countries.

ACCESS TO TOILET REPORT: NARSS 2017-18

Over 93% of people who had access to a toilet use them, according to the government-sponsored National Annual Rural Sanitation Survey (NARSS).

HIGHLIGHTS

- The share of rural households that had access to a toilet has grown to 77% from 40% in 2014.
- The annual survey, conducted by an independent agency under the World Bank, also confirmed the open defecation free (ODF) status of 95% of the villages that had earlier been declared and verified.
- The government, on its part, has been planning to comprehensively re-evaluate the status of every village declared as ODF to ensure sustainability, but that initiative has not yet taken off.
- Due to expanding access to toilets, the number of people defecating in the open has dropped by nearly 300 million. However, an estimated 200 million people still do not have access to a toilet.
- The government release also said more than 65 million toilets have been built since 2014 and around 3.38 lakh villages have been declared as open defecation free.

NATIONAL WATER DIGEST AWARD

Chhattisgarh wins National Water Digest Award.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This is first time that CWRD was given national Award during the past 17 years.
- Chhattisgarh bagged this award for increasing irrigation capacity, water management -water diversion, water conservation, community participation and efforts towards inter-linking of rivers, better techniques utilized in irrigation facilities.
- The Award is presented every year by globally renowned magazine 'Water Digest' which focuses mainly on water resources.
- The award is given in association with Central Water Resources River Development (CWRD) and Ganga Cleaning Ministry, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Central Water Board (CWB), Central Water Commission (CWC) and Ganga Purification National Mission.
- The ***award is recognised by UNESCO.***

ABEL PRIZE 2018

Canadian mathematician Robert Langlands won the prestigious Abel Prize for developing a programme connecting representation theory to number theory.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The so-called Langlands programme dates back to 1967.
- It suggested deep links between two areas, number theory and harmonic analysis, which had previously been considered unrelated.
- Now aged 81, Mr. Langlands will be awarded the 6-million-kroner (\$776,000) Abel Prize by Norway's King Harald in Oslo on May 22.

BACKGROUND

Named after the 19th century Norwegian mathematician Niels Henrik Abel, the prize was established by the Norwegian government in 2002 and first awarded a year later, to honour outstanding scientific work in the field of mathematics, a discipline not included among the Nobel prizes.

Along with the Fields Medal, which is awarded every four years at the Congress of the International Mathematical Union (IMU), it is one of the world's most prestigious maths prizes.

RAJA RAVI VARMA (April 1848- October 1906)

Raja Ravi Varma is considered one of the greatest painter in history of Indian art of 20th century for number of aesthetic and broader social reasons.

HIGHLIGHTS

- He hailed from princely state of Travancore and was patronised by royal family for long time.

- His art works are held to be among best examples of fusion of European techniques with purely Indian sensibility.
- His paintings employed latest European academic art techniques of day and continuing tradition and aesthetics of Indian art.
- He was well-known for using mythological characters and bringing them alive through his pairings.
- He painted beautiful scenes from Nala and Damayanti, Mahabharata, Ramayana etc.
- He was awarded Kaiser i Hind Gold Medal by then British Government.
- His famous works include Shakuntala, Jatayu struck by Ravana.
- He and had made his paintings available to masses in form of lithographs.
- The dissemination of his artworks helped the common man to appreciate art, a hobby generally reserved for upper class during his period.
- His lithographs further helped to spread word about artist's works, making him a household name in the country.

PAYMENT OF GRATUITY (AMENDMENT) BILL

The Indian Parliament passed the Payment of Gratuity (Amendment) Bill that will empower the government to fix the amount of tax-free gratuity and the period of maternity leave with an executive order.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The amendment will benefit workers of private and public-sector companies, as it will provide them with social security after retirement.
- The passing of the bill will enable the government to enhance the maximum limit of tax-free gratuity to Rs 20 lakh from the existing Rs 10 lakh for employees falling under the Payment of Gratuity Act.
- The bill will also allow the increase of cap from time-to-time in the gratuity amount without changing the law.
- It will also allow the government to fix the period of maternity leave for female employees as deemed to be in continuous service in place of the existing 12 weeks.

GRATUITY

- It is a benefit received by an employee for services rendered to an organisation.
- For companies covered under the Gratuity Act, this benefit is paid when an employee completes five or more years of service with the employer.
- The Gratuity Act applies to establishments employing 10 or more persons.
- According to the current rules, the amount of gratuity is determined directly by the tenure of service and also by the last drawn salary.
- The gratuity is given at the rate of 15 days of salary for each year of service.

BACKGROUND

After the implementation of the 7th Pay Commission, the ceiling of gratuity amount for the central government employees has doubled to Rs 20 lakh. The payment of Gratuity bill is in tandem with the new pay commission. The amendment to the payment of

gratuity law comes in the backdrop of Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017 enhancing the maximum maternity leave period to 26 weeks.

GLOBAL CARBON EMISSION

According to International Energy Agency (IEA), global energy-related carbon emissions rose to a historic high of 32.5 gigatons in 2017, after three years of being flat, due to higher energy demand and the slowing of energy efficiency improvements.

The global energy demand rose by 2.1 per cent in 2017 to 14,050 million tonnes of oil equivalent, more than twice the previous year's rate, boosted by strong economic growth.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The global energy demand reportedly rose by 0.9 per cent in 2016 and 0.9 per cent on an average over the previous five years.
- The IEA report stated that over 70 per cent of the global energy demand growth was met by non-renewable sources like oil, natural gas and coal, while renewables accounted for almost all of the rest.
- The report also noted that improvements in energy efficiency slowed in the past year.
- As a result of these trends, global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions increased by 1.4 per cent in 2017 to 32.5 gigatons, a record high.
- Carbon dioxide emissions are the primary cause of the rise in global average temperature, which is resulting in extreme climate change across the globe.
- Most countries are struggling to curb/ stall and stop the global temperature rise, as it would have the most devastating effect on climate in the coming times.

SURROGACY (REGULATION) BILL, 2016

The Union Cabinet gave approval for moving official amendments in the Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill, 2016.

Once the Bill is enacted by the Parliament, the National Surrogacy Board will be constituted. While, the States and Union Territories will constitute the State Surrogacy Board and State Appropriate Authorities within three months of the notification by the Union Government.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The Bill proposes to regulate surrogacy in India by establishing National Surrogacy Board at the central level.
- It proposes to establish State Surrogacy Boards and Appropriate Authorities in the States and Union Territories.
- It ensures effective regulation of surrogacy, prohibits commercial surrogacy and allows altruistic surrogacy to the needy Indian infertile couples.
- The Bill will apply to whole of India, except the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

SIGNIFICANCE

- Once the Bill becomes an Act, it will legalise the surrogacy services in the country and will control the immoral practices in surrogacy.
- It will prevent commercialization of surrogacy including sale and purchase of human embryo and gametes.
- It will prohibit potential exploitation of surrogate mothers and children born through surrogacy.
- It will allow ethical surrogacy to the needy infertile couples upon the fulfilment of certain conditions and for specific purposes.
- It will protect the rights of surrogate mother and children born out of surrogacy.

NEW INDIAN MISSIONS IN AFRICA

The Union Cabinet approved the opening of 18 new Indian missions in Africa with an aim to expand India's footprints in the resource-rich continent where China has been trying to increase its presence.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The new Indian missions will be set up over four years, from 2018 to 2021.
- The new Indian missions will be opened in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Rwanda, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Swaziland and Togo.
- Currently, India has 29 resident missions in Africa.
- The decision will enhance India's diplomatic outreach in the African continent and allow India to engage with Indian diaspora in African countries.

PARIVARA & TALAWARA

The Union Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister approved the inclusion of the communities 'Parivara' and 'Talawara' in the list of Scheduled Tribes (STs) in Karnataka.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This will fulfil the long-term demand of 'Parivara' and 'Talawara' communities for granting Scheduled Tribes status in Karnataka.
- Members of these communities will now be eligible to get the ST certificate from the state and be eligible for all benefits meant for the ST in the state.
- The Karnataka government had recommended the two's inclusion as synonyms of 'Nayaka' appearing in the list of Scheduled Tribes in the state.

ICFRE & TIFAC

The Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE), Dehradun (an Autonomous Council under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change) and Technology Information, Forecasting & Assessment Council (TIFAC), New Delhi (an Autonomous Council under Department of Science and Technology) signed an MoU.

Objective: To provide livelihood opportunities and augment income of the forest-based communities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Through this collaboration, TIFAC shall help ICFRE to refine and up-scale the technologies developed, take technologies to the end users including farmers, State Forest Departments, forest-based industries and forest dependent communities in a more effective manner.
- The MoU valid for a period of 10 years.
- **FOCUSSED AREA:** Prioritization of technologies developed by ICFRE in consultation with stakeholders; Creating patent awareness in the field of forestry and environment including wood science and allied subjects for ICFRE and its institutes; Patent searching and filing in the field of Forestry and allied subjects; Identifying technology gaps and commercialization of technologies; Forest based technologies extension and transfer through stakeholder consultations; and Interaction with stakeholders on regular basis.

ICFRE

- ICFRE through its Institutes and Centres located throughout the country is carrying, promoting and coordinating forestry research, extension, education, and their applications.
- Currently, ICFRE is focusing on contemporary issues of national and international importance particularly in the area of climate change, forest productivity, biodiversity and skill development.

TIFAC

- TIFAC looks ahead in technology domain, assesses the technology trajectories, and supports innovation by networked actions in selected areas of national importance.
- TIFAC continues to strive for technology development in the country by leveraging technology innovation through sustained and concerted programmes in close association with industry and academia.

GULF SHIELD 1

Troops from Oman, Egypt and Kuwait and several other countries have arrived in Saudi Arabia to take part in the largest military exercise in the region, in terms of participating countries and equipment.

HIGHLIGHTS

- At least 20 countries from Arab and Islamic countries are scheduled to participate in the North Thunder war games in the northern region of the kingdom.
- The participating countries are **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Jordan, Senegal, Sudan, Maldives, Morocco, Pakistan, Chad, Tunisia, Comoro Islands, Djibouti, Malaysia, Egypt, Mauritania, and Mauritius.**

- The equipment that reflects the quantitative and qualitative weapons the forces will be using will include fighter jets of different models, a wide range of artillery, tanks, infantry, air defence systems, and naval forces.
- The main objective is to demonstrate the high combat readiness of the participating armed forces and their readiness and ability to function successfully in joint operations.

KRISHI UNNATI MELA

Agriculture Ministry inaugurate a three-day Krishi Unnati Mela for providing information on new farm schemes and technologies that will help farmers double their incomes by 2022.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyay Rashtriya Krishi Vigyan Protsahan Puraskar to recognise contribution of Krishi Vigyan Kendras.
- The fair held at Pusa in the national capital and organised by Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI).
- More than 350 stalls displayed latest advancement in agri-research and technology development among farmers and end users.
- Major attraction of the mela was digitisation in agriculture, organic farming, agribusiness models, precision farming, skill building and entrepreneurship development among others.
- There was live demonstration of agriculture and horticultural crops, animal husbandry, innovative technologies, protected cultivation and farm mechanisation.
- Live demo of water used efficient technologies, recycling of waste water for agriculture and on-spot soil and water testing also held.
- Displayed and sale of various products (farm equipments, quality planting materials, bio-fertilisers, agro-chemicals, innovative farmers' products) and machinery.
- The technical sessions on various themes are planned to educate farmers on various agricultural technologies and government schemes for agricultural development.
- A women empowerment workshop was organised to sensitise farm women on latest agricultural technologies and their rights.

INDIAN SCIENCE CONGRESS

Prime Minister inaugurated 105th session of Indian Science Congress (ISC) at Manipur Central University in Imphal.

The focal theme of 5-day ISC is "Reaching the Unreached Through Science & Technology".

HIGHLIGHTS

- The ISC 2018 was organised by the Indian Science Congress Association (ISCA), a premier scientific organisation of India.
- This is 2nd time the Science Congress is being held in the north east. Earlier it was held at Shillong (Meghalaya) in 2009.

- Approximately, 5,000 delegates from all over country and 2,000 scientists along with four Nobel Laureates are participating in this year mega event.
- Under the mentioned theme, scientists from across world will look at bridging social gaps through innovations.
- Its thrust will be on science disciplines which impact society and sustainable development.

ENERGY TRANSITION INDEX 2018

The World Economic Forum's (WEF) on March 15, 2018 released the report titled 'Fostering Effective Energy Transition', ranking 114 countries on how well they are able to balance energy security and access with environmental sustainability and affordability.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The report's Energy Transition Index ranked India at the 78th position.
- The Energy Transition Index was topped by Sweden, followed by Norway at the second position and Switzerland at the third.
- Rounding out the Top 10 were Finland (4th), Denmark (5th), the Netherlands (6th), the United Kingdom (7th), Austria (8th), France (9th) and Iceland (10th).
- Among India's emerging market peers, Brazil stood at the 38th place, Russia at 70th and China at 76th place.

BACKGROUND

- India's energy needs are mainly met by fossil fuels to ensure environmental sustainability and optimum energy import costs.
- As per the report, India took bold measures to improve energy efficiency and deployment of renewable sources of energy.
- However, energy transition requires large investments, enabling environment and robust regulatory frameworks to support the transition. At present, India is at the turning point in its energy transition journey.
- Between 2013 and 2018, India improved its performance score by 5.6 per cent, mainly with improved energy access, reduced subsidies and reduced import costs. However, the road to continuous access to power for all is long.
- India has also been implementing the largest government-mandated renewable energy programme, with a target of generating 175 GW renewable energy capacity by 2022.

JOINT MILITARY EXERCISES OF INDIA

PARTNER COUNTRY	FORCE	EXERCISE
United States & Japan	Navy	Malabar
United States	Army	Yudh Abhyas
United States	Air force	Red Flag
United States	Air Force	Cope
France	Air Force	Varuna
United Kingdom	Army	Ajeya Warrior
United Kingdom	Air Force	Garuda
United Kingdom	Air Force	Indra Dhanush
Mongolia	Army	Nomadic Elephant
China	Army	Hand In Hand
Sri Lanka	Army	Mitra Shakti
Sri Lanka	Navy	Slinex
Singapore	Navy	Simbex
Thailand	Army	Maitree
Russia	Army	Indra
Australia	Maritime	Ausindex
Kazakhstan	Army	"PRABAL DOSTYK"
UK	Maritime	Konkan

Nepal	Army	Surya Kiran
Maldives	Army	Ex Ekuverin
Japan	Coast Guards	Sahyog Kaijin
South -Africa-Brazil	Navy	IBSAMAR
Seychelles	Army	LAMITYE

IMPORTANT MISSILES

<u>Missile Name</u>	<u>Origin</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Range</u>	<u>Speed</u>
Astra	India	Air-to-Air Missiles	60 – 80 km	Mach 4 +
K-100	Russia & India	Medium Range air-to-air missile	300–400 km	Mach 3.3
MICA	IAF	Air-to-Air Missiles		
Akash	India	Medium-range surface-to-air missile	30-35km	Mach 2.5 to 3.5
Barak 8	Israel /India	Long Range surface to air Missile	100 km	Mach 2
Trishul	India	Short Range surface to air missile	9km	
Prithvi Air Defence (PAD)	India	Exo-atmospheric Anti-ballistic missile	Altitude- 80km	Mach 5+
Advanced Air Defence (AAD)	India	Endo-atmospheric Anti-ballistic missile	Altitude- 30km	Mach 4.5
Prithvi Defence Vehicle (PDV)	India	Exo-atmospheric Anti-ballistic missile	Altitude- 120km	
Nirbhay	India	Subsonic cruise missile (Ship,	1,000 -1500 km	Mach 0.8

		submarine, aircraft and land)		
BrahMos	Russia & India	Supersonic cruise missile (Ship, submarine, aircraft and land)	290 km	Mach 2.8 to 3 Mach
BrahMos II	India	Hypersonic cruise missile (Ship, submarine, aircraft and land)	300km	Mach 7
Agni-I	India	Medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM)	700-1250 km	Mach 7.5
Agni-II	India	Intermediate-range ballistic missile(IRBM)	2,000–3,000 km	Mach 12
Agni-III	India	Intermediate-range ballistic missile(IRBM)	3,500 km – 5,000 km	5–6 km/s
Agni-IV	India	Intermediate-range ballistic missile(IRBM)	3,000 – 4,000 km	Mach 7
Agni-V	India	Intercontinental ballistic missile(ICBM)	5000 – 8000Km	Mach 24
Prithvi I	India	Short Range Ballistic Missile(Tactical)	150 km	
Prithvi II	India	Short Range Ballistic Missile(Tactical)	350 km	
Dhanush	India	Short Range Ballistic Missile(Tactical)	350 – 600 km	
Prahaar (Pragati)	India	Short Range Ballistic Missile(Tactical)	150 km	Mach 2.03
Shaurya	India	Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MRBM)	750 to 1,900 km	Mach 7.5
Sagarika (K-15)	India	Ballistic Missile	700 – 1900Km	Mach 7+
K-4	India	Ballistic Missile	3,500–5,000 km	Mach 7+

K-5	India	Ballistic Missile	6,000 km	
Ashwin	India	Ballistic Missile	150-200km	Mach 4.5
Nag	India	Anti-Tank Guided Missile	4km	230 m/s
Helina (HELICOPTER launched NAG)	India	Anti-Tank Guided Missile	7-8km	
Amogha-1	India	Anti-Tank Guided Missile	2.8 km	

FACTS

- India's first insect museum with the state-of-the-art amenities was recently unveiled in Tamil Nadu.
- Cool EMS service is one-way service from Japan to India which allows customers in India to import Japanese food items for personal use which is allowed under Indian regulations. Initially, Cool EMS Service will be available in Delhi only.
- Surat has become the first district in the country to have 100% solar powered Primary Health Centers (PHC). There are total of 52 PHCs in the district and all of them are now powered by solar system.
- Andhra Pradesh stands at equivalent to 51st rank globally in Multidimensional Poverty Index (2017) according to a recent household survey conducted in the state. Andhra Pradesh becomes the first Indian state to conduct an exclusive household survey at state & district level to estimate the multidimensional poverty of the state
- The world's biggest cruise-liner, Symphony of the Seas, has left the shipyard of Saint-Nazaire in France to embark on its maiden voyage in the Mediterranean. French shipbuilder STX handed over to U.S. giant Royal Caribbean International. The ship, which weighs 228,000 tonnes, is 362 metres long just 20 metres shy of the length of the Empire State Building.
- Tokyo unveiled its long-awaited mascot for the 2020 Olympic Games: a futuristic blue-checked, doe-eyed character with pointy ears & "special powers" that was picked by schoolchildren across mascot-mad Japan. One has an athletic figure & a strong sense of justice. The other is a cherry blossom-inspired superhero. 2
- Madhya Pradesh has the highest number of 55770 fully covered tribal habitations with the safe drinking water in the country followed by Odisha & Jharkhand. Ministry of Drinking Water & Sanitation informed that under the Scheme 'National

Rural Drinking Water Programme (NRDWP), 10% of the total allocation of funds is earmarked to be used for the supply of drinking water to Scheduled Tribe (ST) dominated habitations.

- Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has launched homedelivery of diesel on a pilot basis in Pune & plans to expand doorstep delivery of the fuel to other parts of the country in near future. This is the first company to have started doorstep delivery after receiving clearance from the Petroleum & Explosives Safety Organisation (PESO).
- BHEL has commissioned 1st unit of 110 MW of the Kishanganga hydroelectric project (HEP) of NHPC in Jammu & Kashmir.
- RBI decided to do away with the per borrower loan limits to Micro/Small & Medium Enterprises (Services) for classification under priority sector lending. So far, loans to Micro/Small & Medium Enterprises (Services) up to Rs. 5 crore & Rs10 crore, respectively, were classified as PSL. Now all bank loans to MSMEs engaged in providing or rendering services as defined in terms of investment in equipment under the MSMED Act, 2006, will qualify under priority sector without any credit cap.
- The Supreme Court of India recognised the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right, ruled that passive euthanasia and advance 'living will' are permissible. Passive euthanasia is basically a practice of intentionally ending a patient's life in order to relieve the patient from pain and suffering. The apex court ruled that individuals can draft a 'living will' specifying that they shall not be put on ventilator or an artificial life support system, if they undergo an incurable coma in the future.
- Agreement between India and France on the Prevention of Illicit Consumption and Reduction of Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Chemical Precursors and Related Offences.
- Implementing Arrangement between Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Central National D'Etudes Spatiales (CNES) for pre-formulation studies of a Maritime Awareness Mission
- UP's largest solar plant: The plant has been built at a cost of around Rs. 500 crores by French firm ENGIE. The 100 MW solar plant has come up at Dadar Kalan village on the hilly terrain of the Vindhyas range. The solar plant will generate 15.6 crore units of electricity annually, which is about 1.30 crore units per month.
- The Haryana Assembly unanimously passed Criminal Law (Haryana Amendment) Bill, 2018 providing for death penalty for convicts found guilty of raping girls aged 12 years or less. With this, Haryana became third state, after Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan to have provision of capital punishment for such sexual offenders.

- Chinese scientists have developed an artificial heart using rocket technology and it is currently undergoing testing after thorough experiments on animals.
- As part of our enhanced public diplomacy outreach and commitment to take the objectives of the foreign policy to the people at the grassroot-level, the External Publicity and Public Diplomacy Division of the Ministry of External Affairs launched an initiative titled 'Videsh Aaya Pradesh ke Dwaar' in Hyderabad.
- ***INS Ganga, an indigenously built frigate of the Indian Navy, was decommissioned after over three decades of service.*** Commissioned on December 30, 1985, the ship represented a big step forward in the nation's warship building capability.
- Government is going to launch Swachh Bharat Summer Internship (SBSI) 2018 aimed at engaging college youth with Swachhata work in villages in coming Summer vacation. The initiative will be launched by Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, the convening and coordinating Ministry of Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) in association with Ministry of Human Resource Development.
- To protect the Cuvette Centrale region in the Congo Basin from unregulated land use and prevent its drainage and degradation, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Republic of Congo and Indonesia have jointly signed the Brazzaville declaration that promotes better management and conservation of this globally important carbon store.
- The government appointed senior bureaucrat Vineet Joshi as the Director General of the National Testing Agency (NTA), which will conduct the entrance examinations for higher educational institutions organised by the CBSE, AICTE and other bodies.
- The Ministry of Human Resource Development has nominated former NCERT director JS Rajput as India's representative to Executive Board (EXB) of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).